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REPORT //

Delivery of Essential Services in Lagging Regions (DESIRE)

Case study: Hungary

Final report: social services // September 2024

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Coordination:

Zintis Hermansons, ESPON EGTC
Mar Ortega-Reig, Universitat Politècnica de València, Spain

Authors

Judit Keller; Gábor Velkey; Tünde Virág (HUN-REN CERS, Budapest)

Advisory group

Zsuzsanna Drahos, Andrea Iván, Csilla Szalóky-Hoffmann, László Gere (Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development/ Hungarian Presidency team on territorial cohesion, Hungary)
Wiktor Szydarowski, ESPON EGTC

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Table of contents

List of maps	6
1 Challenges of Hungarian territorial development	7
1.1 Policy responses to territorial disparities.....	7
2 The emergence of the Catching-Up Settlement Programme.....	10
2.1 The methodology and the governance of the FeTe programme	11
3 How the FeTe Programme Works: the Jesuit Order in Arló.....	15
3.1 The launch of the FeTe programme in Arló	15
3.1.1 Steps to embedding regular cooperation with local institutions and organisations	16
3.2 Key local programme elements, their characteristics and impacts	17
3.2.1 Active presence - how the Presence House works	17
3.2.2 Focus on the Children	18
3.2.3 Education.....	19
3.2.4 Housing.....	20
4 General conclusions	21
References	22

List of maps

Map 1. The beneficiary districts in Hungary

Map 2: The beneficiary settlements and the Catching up Settlement (FeTe) Programme

1 Challenges of Hungarian territorial development

For Hungary, the main territorial challenge is to address the lagging regions outside the central region and high-level territorial disparities within the country. Spatial disparities have been linked to major shifts in policies and practices, stemming from external power relations and changing social relations within the country over the past three decades (Tímár and Nagy 2019).

Economic transformations linked to the formation of market economy triggered a new spatial development structure that has been characterised by the sharpening and increased perceptibility of spatial inequalities, particularly reflected in the further decline of rural areas (Németh 2023). In addition to the historical East-West divide of the country and the long-standing division by size categories of settlements (Kovács and Bihari 2006) increasing socio-spatial polarisation between settlements located near dynamic centres and peripheral villages has taken place (Kabai et al. 2012, Németh 2023). The developed zone of Hungary's spatial structure has become Budapest, the central region surrounding the capital, and Northern Transdanubia. Lagging settlements have been mostly concentrated in Southern Transdanubia, Northern and Eastern Hungary, as well as in other internal peripheral areas of Transdanubia and the Great Plain (Németh 2023). Lagging rural areas are characterized by economic decline, selective out-migration, and a concentration of poverty and have demographically polarized societies with very high unemployment rates and low level of educational attainment (Virág 2010, Jelinek et al. 2019).

The roots of these processes are due to the gradual loss of settlement functions and historically recurring events of centralization. In the 1970s, centralized settlement policies induced imbalances in socio-economic and infrastructural development and in the accessibility of services among settlements. Disparities were further aggravated by the economic crisis of transition years in the 1990s, when administrative and political decentralisation was not accompanied by financial decentralisation. It resulted in a fragmented local government system with over 3000 local municipalities, in which smaller settlements struggled with low efficiency in functional performance. Due to the economic crisis, outmigration trends changed as large numbers of families unable to maintain former standards of living began to move from urban centres to small villages. A significant number of these families represented low-skilled Roma who lost their jobs with the economic transformation. As the fertility rates of these families also changed, the social and ethnic composition of settlements significantly transformed: the rate of those under the age of 14 within the population became considerably higher, sometimes double than the national average. Two types of exclusion have been identified in relation to these trends: one is linked to spatial inequalities that affect families living in economically depressed areas and isolated small villages, while the other is linked to ethnic origin, afflicting the poor who account for the majority of the Roma. The complex interplay of spatial, social and ethnic exclusion produces a special socio-spatial formation in the rural peripheries: the ghettoized rural villages (Koós and Virág, 2010, Virág 2010, Nagy et al. 2015). These settlements struggle to provide basic social and healthcare services, educational prospects for the increasing number of children living in multiply deprived households that are overwhelming due to the lack of job opportunities in the vicinity, and the scarcity of infrastructure for commuting.

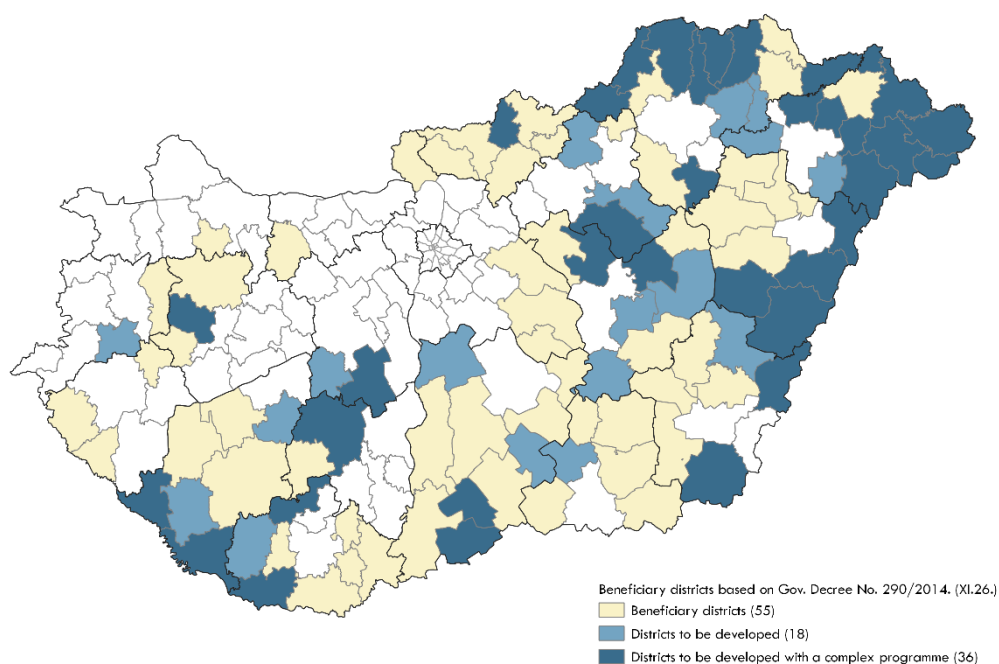
1.1 Policy responses to territorial disparities

In the 2000s as part of larger government efforts to trigger the development of lagging areas, 33 micro-regions were classified as 'most disadvantaged' on the basis of economic, social and infrastructural indicators. The Most Disadvantaged Micro-Regions programme (2007) targeted the development of the most deprived micro-regions, with the purpose of expanding local employment

capacities and improve local living conditions through earmarked support of EU funded complex programmes (Kabai et al. 2012, ESPON 2017). The most important innovations of the implementation of the programme were decentralised, place-based planning and the co-ordinated spending of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF) funding. The original policy goals of the measure, however, were not met as due to the short time frame of the programme it failed to create equitable chances for marginalized social groups, implement de-segregation measures and dialogue-based cooperation among diverse local actors (Kabai et al. 2012). The latter was often related to the weakness of local actors and the absence of local civil society.

For the 2014-2021 planning period the government classified beneficiary districts (introduced at LAU1 level, replacing micro-regions) based on a complex indicator. 109 districts of a total of 197 in the country qualify as beneficiary districts as their average development level fails to reach the national average. Beneficiary districts fall into 3 different categories; out of the 109 beneficiary districts, 36 require development through complex programmes due to their poor socio-economic and infrastructural conditions. These districts, which are mostly located in the peripheral parts of the country and have a high proportion of border districts, are characterized by a large number of small villages. These are demographically polarised villages with high unemployment rates and low levels of education that have been challenged by territorial disparities for decades. The substantial overlap between the two classifications in 2007 and in 2014 is an indication of the severity and long-term embeddedness of the socio-spatial problems.

Map 1: The beneficiary districts in Hungary



Source of map: Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development

In the aftermath of the global economic crisis in 2008 large-scale domestic policy changes took place and most of the complex programs came to a halt (Ferge 2017, Szikra 2014, Jelinek et al. 2019). Local governments lost their administrative capacities over local education with the re-

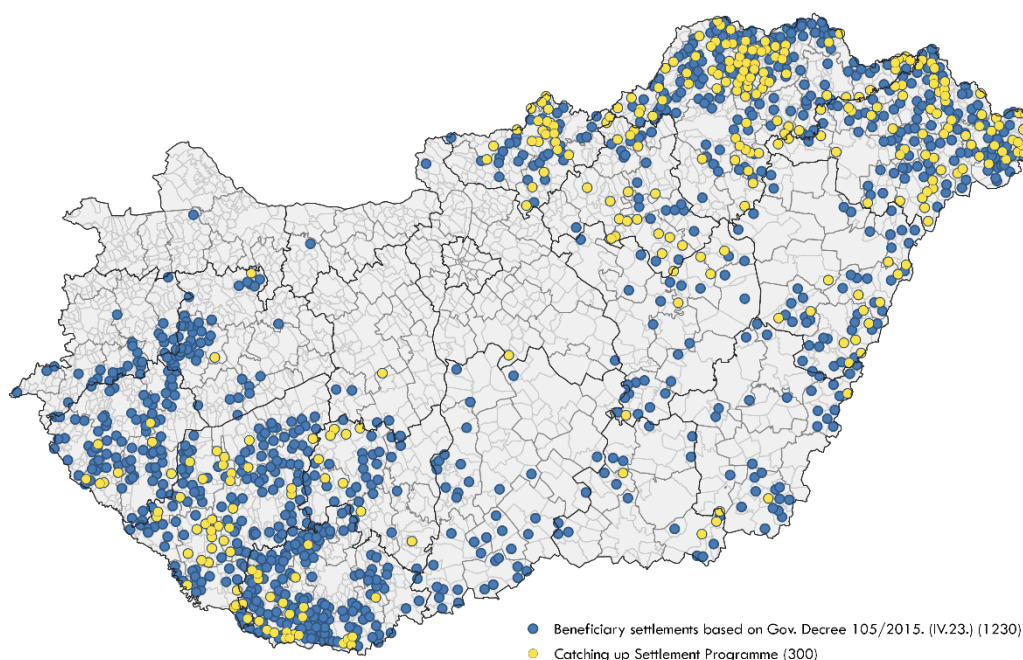
centralisation of public education while targeted central funding was re-introduced to support local service provisions for kindergartens, crèches, family and child welfare services. Austerity measures in welfare policy eroded allowances and support for low-income families while the new family tax allowance scheme and means-tested parental leave allowance benefited families with higher income (Ferge 2017, Szikra 2014). These measures reinforced existing socio-spatial inequalities in accessing basic public services as the provision of child welfare services further declined with settlement size: services that could alleviate children's socio-economic disadvantages were concentrated in district centres, leaving the most disadvantaged in small villages with sporadic and poor services (Keller and Virág 2019).

The Give Kids a Chance programme was the single complex intervention that continued beyond 2010 with the aim to tackle these socio-spatial inequalities. Designed for 23 of the most disadvantaged micro-regions, the central goal of Give Kids a Chance programme was to combat child poverty and reduce regional disadvantages by filling gaps in child welfare provisions and improving the quality and accessibility of existing ones to better alleviate children's disadvantages. The program identified its long-term objectives in improving the situation of families with children in terms of income, employment and housing and aimed to trigger institutional changes that modernize child welfare services and empower marginalized groups to have better access to services. (Bauer et al. 2015). Embedded in the *National Strategy to Combat Child Poverty* and incorporated into Hungary's *National Development Plan* in 2011 funding for extensions of the programme was provided by the European Social Fund. The coordination of the programme was facilitated by a consortium of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, central state ministries and the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta (hereinafter Málta). Overall, several extensions of the programme have triggered some policy changes (e.g.: the institutionalisation of Sure Start Houses, see further details later on) and implemented innovative coordination mechanisms at the local level but have come short of enhancing local capacities for institution-building to end segregation and its consequences in rural neighbourhoods across the country, especially in the South-West, North-East and Central Tisza Valley regions (Keller and Virág 2019, 2022, Keller 2022).

2 The emergence of the Catching-Up Settlement Programme

Continued efforts to overcome challenges of territorial disparities manifested in government decree 105/2015 that enlisted 1230 of the most disadvantaged settlements – in terms of socio-economic and infrastructural development and/or with significant unemployment rate - as beneficiary settlements based on a set of complex indicators developed by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office Hungarian Central Statistical Office (hereinafter referred to as HCSO).

Map 2: The beneficiary settlements and the Catching up Settlement (FeTe) Programme



Source of map: Ministry of Public Administration and Regional Development

From the list of beneficiary settlements, the respective government decree selected 300 settlements for a long-term development programme (see map 2). The result was the Catching-up Settlements Programme (Felzárkózó Települések Program, hereinafter referred to as FeTe programme), which is a large-scale programme to address social issues in marginalized rural settlements and communities situated in lagging regions of the country. The FeTe programme was launched progressively in the 300 most marginalised and deprived settlements that were selected on the basis of a complex set of indicators of socio-economic development, fertility rates and settlement size developed by the HCSO (Németh 2023, Vecsei 2023). Complex indicators aimed at the selection of localities where extreme poverty is highly represented included:

- the share of young (0-14) people in the total population between 2017-2019,
- birth rate between 2017-2019,
- taxable income per working-age resident (15-62 years), HUF million between 2017-2019 (inverse valuation),

- rate of persistent jobseekers (registered for more than 180 days) between 2017-2019,
- rate of persons in receipt of regular child protection benefits in the permanent population aged 0-24, 2017-2019,
- rate of unoccupied, emergency and other dwellings in occupied dwellings 2011,
- number of registered offences per 1000 inhabitants (by place of residence), 2017-2019, rate of primary school drop-out rate of population aged 15+, 2011 (Németh 2023, Vecsei 2023).

The governance of FeTe programme is in motion and responsive to the evolving funding environment, the expansion of settlements and activities, and the implementing organisations. Nevertheless, some fundamental elements of the programme remain constant, such as the concerted effort to foster horizontal and vertical linkages between state and non-state actors within and beyond the programme and to ensure professional standards based on a methodological approach developed by Málta. The following section provides a detailed overview of the FeTe programme based on expert interviews and document analysis.

2.1 The methodology and the governance of the FeTe programme

Motivated to remedy shortcomings and build on the strengths of previous attempts to reduce poverty through enhancing services, especially that of the Give Kids a Chance programme, the leadership of Málta initiated the FeTe programme in 2019. The programme was embraced by the central government aiming to address mounting social crisis in the most disadvantaged rural settlements. The FeTe programme was designed to provide special social services to disadvantaged communities where social, economic and spatial issues are intertwined and mutually reinforcing. It particularly focuses on early childhood development and supporting families with children and largely builds on Málta's experiences and expertise in intensive social work it had accumulated in previous programmes, and the experimental complex programme in Tiszabó and Tiszabura, where a government decree transferred maintenance rights of two village schools to Málta in 2016.

These two settlements had been afflicted by the complex interplay of spatial, social, infrastructural, and ethnic exclusion, due to decades-long scarcity of workplaces, social and educational facilities, and the subsequent outmigration of educated and better-off families (Koós and Virág, 2010; Nagy et al., 2015). The government also provided funds for Málta to establish a Presence House (see further details later on) and finance the costs of crisis management in the two settlements. Tiszabura and Tiszabó, thus became a methodological laboratory, where methods were tested at a larger scale.

Overall, these methods are based on the intensive presence of social workers, immediate reactions to arising problems (crisis management) and safeguarding a more enabling local environment through entering into negotiations with local leaders and stakeholders (Lantos 2023, Németh 2023, Vecsei 2023).

Elicitation of local needs, activation of capacities and knowledge available for place-based solutions represent central elements of the FeTe approach (Lantos 2023, Németh 2023, Vecsei 2023). In this vein, the organisation first conducts a local survey with local social groups and organisations, followed by immediate crisis management through the provision of assistance services, the establishment of a Presence House and the stationing of social workers in the locality (Lantos 2023). The permanent and long-term presence and involvement of social workers in local problem-solving ensures that the programme is embedded, adapted to the different local contexts and developed further through practical solutions to each problem that arises (Lantos 2023, Németh 2023). The Presence House serves as a central hub for the implementation of community programme elements and low threshold social services takes place in the building (Lantos 2023).

Moreover, approaching the non-Roma stakeholders and thus creating an “enabling” local environment with less prejudices and more tolerance is also a key element of the programme. These key elements of the approach have been compiled into an encompassing methodology, called the Diagnose-based Presence Methodology (‘Presence Programme’) that became the hallmark of Málta.

Based on the local diagnosis, in addition to the establishment of the Presence House as a mandatory component of the FeTe programme, a series of supplementary programme elements are introduced in the beneficiary settlements. These settlements have the option of participating in the following programmes:

1. Focus on the children: increasing opportunities for children by improving services in disadvantaged communities.
2. Economic development: helping families who have been out of work for generations to find work, and giving the unemployed self-sufficiency, self-esteem and a predictable future.
3. Housing: building or renovating homes over ten years, clarifying property ownership and ultimately improving the appearance of the villages - all with the involvement of local dwellers.
4. Energetics: increasing the community's renewable energy production capacity.
5. Education: providing complementary educational activities and services and social assistance in the Presence Houses to prevent drop-outs from the school.
6. Health: providing access to a range of essential services that are not available locally through mobile clinics.
7. Sport: supporting various activities and providing the experience of togetherness.
8. Music-symphony programme: helping children with educational disadvantages and problems to integrate into society by learning to play music.
9. Mobile playground: providing events for children and their parents in order to build trust within the community and identify local problems.
10. Responsible pet ownership: Providing assistance to stray dogs which, with the consent of their owners, will be neutered, de-wormed, vaccinated and micro-chipped free of charge and their details will be recorded in a central register.
11. Crime control and drug prevention

FeTe programme commenced in thirty-one settlements, implemented by a network of faith-based charity organisations (hereinafter referred to as FBOs) that had been partners of Málta as participants in a project funded by European Social Fund (ESF). This project could be seen as a pilot before FeTe, initiated and coordinated by Málta in the five most disadvantaged districts between 2017 and 2022, where the opportunities and constraints of adapting the ‘Presence Programme’ could be tested and the staff could be introduced and trained in the implementation of the programme. Since 2019, the FeTe programme has expanded annually to 178 participating settlements by 2023, with a parallel increase in the number of organisations implementing it. The initial network of four FBOs has extended to twenty-nine organisations, mainly FBOs and some NGOs.

Since most members of the FeTe programme settlement network can be considered as ethnically segregated localities, the FeTe programme has become a key element of the New Roma Strategy (2019-2030), incorporated into the Hungarian National Catching up Strategy 2030.

Between 2019 and 2022 the funding of the FeTe programme was primarily secured by domestic funds provided by the central government through the Interior Ministry, where the programme has become institutionally embedded. In addition to domestic funding, ESF funds became available for co-financing the FeTe programme in 2021 and 2022. Since 2023 it has been entirely financed by European funds; between 2022 and 2023 by Resilience and Recovery Facility (RRF) funds and

since January 2024 by ESF+ (Németh 2023). The latter is envisioned to provide funding for the FeTe programme until 2029.

The growing network of implementing organisations and the increasing number of settlements participating in the FeTe programme, encouraged Málta as a coordinator of the programme to standardize the methodology. This has been addressed through the publication of a methodological guide detailing the Diagnosis-based Presence approach and phases of social work involved.

In addition to standing as implementing organisation in some settlements, Málta provides methodological trainings, professional guidance and coordination of the entire FeTe programme. In this vein, it established a complex institutional system for horizontal and vertical coordination that aims to guarantee transparency, bottom-up feedback loops and knowledge exchange.

While the FeTe programme itself is a top-down programme in the sense that the methodology and targeting are defined from above at the central state level, local implementers are mobilized from below. The implementation of the Diagnosis-based Presence programme, with its professional standards and content requirements, is the responsibility of the organisation appointed to the locality. These are typically FBOs with a strong organisational background and some smaller NGOs that have been embedded in their settlements prior to the FeTe programme.

Settlements participating in the FeTe programme that are geographically close to each other are organised into groups of ten. Each settlement group meets once a month in one of the group's settlements, on a rotating basis, to broaden the horizons of local implementers by looking at experiences beyond their locality (Lantos 2023, Németh 2023). Settlement group meetings are facilitated by a local coordinator employed by Málta. At these meetings, local representatives discuss and vote on each other's pilot proposals and exchange experiences about implementation (Lantos 2023, Németh 2023). Regular meetings of representatives from the localities thus provide opportunities for horizontal knowledge sharing and consensus-based decisions on developmental visions for the extended locality and ultimately generate democratic control of developmental decision-making.

The local coordinators of the FeTe programme keep contact with local implementers, provide professional mentoring for employees working in Presence Houses, and guarantee quality control of local implementation (Lantos 2023, Németh 2023). In addition, Málta also holds regular meetings for implementing organizations at regional level to share experiences and discuss how to further develop and refine the programme. Currently, settlements participating in the FeTe programme are organised into five 'FeTe regions', four of which are organised along geographical proximity, while the fifth one is a so-called 'mosaic region' which includes settlements that do not meet the proximity criteria of the existing four. The regional leaders of the FeTe programme provide administrative back office for the daily work of the coordinators and act as a "vessel of communication" between the local and the central levels of management, as they are also aware of the wider policy landscape (Lantos 2023).

Horizontal coordination is also ensured at the higher governance level of the programme through the Thematic Committee of the FeTe Programme. The goal of the committee is to create a professional forum that provides an opportunity for monitoring and for formulating proposals and conclusions. Additionally, the committee aims to examine the methods and results of the programme in a broader context, within the framework of other similar social inclusion programmes and in terms of their alignment with those programmes. The committee comprises academic partners, policy-makers, representatives of local communities as well as practitioners of community development. These institutional arrangements open up the space for the horizontal distribution of

knowledge and learning among participating organisations and channelling information, feedback and experience from the bottom up.

3 How the FeTe Programme Works: the Jesuit Order in Arló

Arló, a key settlement in the former industrial region of Borsod, is located 8 km from Ózd, one of the centres of socialist heavy industry. The population in the area used to work in heavy industry, and since its collapse decades ago there has been no significant job-creating investment or business. Like other municipalities in the region, Arló is constantly struggling with the consequences of the social and economic crisis, exacerbated by ethnic tensions in the municipality. The population of the municipality is 3 573 by the recent census (HCSO 2022), and according to official statistics, 9.26 % of the population belonged to the Roma ethnic group in 2022. However, local interviewees estimated the proportion of Roma to be around 65-70%.

The local society of Arló is "*burdened by internal disputes and divisions*". Non-Roma families carry fear and strong prejudice towards Roma families, while perceptible tensions exist within the Roma community as well between individuals and families occupying different social and spatial positions within the municipality. Roma families living in two segregated areas at opposite ends of the settlement still regard each other with reservations, and refrain from closer relations and mixed marriages. Roma families living in better conditions on the main street distance themselves from those living in the segregated areas. The local Roma minority self-government comprises and represents mainly this group. According to the mayor, "*with the exception of the main road, all other parts of the settlement can be considered essentially segregated.*" According to national statistics, the average proportion of inhabitants under the age of 18 who are entitled to regular child protection benefits has ranged from 67% to 77% over the last three years. 36% of homes are not connected to the public water supply. This affects almost all dwellings in the larger slum at the edge of the municipality, with most families on a stretch of road about a kilometre deep into a valley using the three public wells.

Local perceptions on and status of Roma is reflected by the fact that none of the local institutions (school, municipality, kindergarten, library, social services, health care) employ Roma. Roma typically work in the public employment programme as cleaners, kitchen assistants, nannies, while the primary school employs a Roma PE teacher without qualifications. The mayor explains this situation not by prejudice against Roma but by the lack of expertise and qualifications. In Arló few people manage to graduate from high school "*and 99% of those who go on to secondary schools further than Ózd, not to mention to university and college, stay there.*"

3.1 The launch of the FeTe programme in Arló

Working in the nearby town of Ózd, Málta has tried in previous years to launch various programmes in the village, including a Sure Start House (where mothers can bring their children aged 0-3 for early development counselling and training; as well as they can receive advice on health care and child care), mobile playground and mobile health services. However, the organisation could not establish a proper cooperation either with the local public services or with the local Roma communities, hence these programme initiatives came to a halt after a while.

As the Hungarian Order of Jesus (hereinafter referred to as Jesuit Order) has been carrying out pastoral work in various disadvantaged Roma communities for decades, running schools and joining the Roma College Network, the vice-president of Málta, the government commissioner of Roma catching-up and the FeTe Programme, initiated their involvement in the FeTe Programme. Based on their previous experience, the head of the Jesuit Order organised a series of introductory

presentations with the help of the mayor of Arló prior to the launch of the local FeTe programme. These events aimed to start a dialogue between the programme actors and the local elite (municipal representatives, civil servants, managers and employees of local institutions, the minority self-government and some local entrepreneurs and intellectuals) and the Roma communities.

Arló was chosen because in previous years several disadvantaged Roma students from this municipality had been attending the Fényi Gyula Jesuit High School in Miskolc. Working with young people from Arló had highlighted the fact that keeping children from severely disadvantaged families in the school system strongly depends on the environment to which they return after school. For pupils from Arló, the Franciscan monastic sisters, who have also played an important role in the municipality since 1994, represented a *"bulwark that helped to overcome tensions deriving from the duality of living between the modern elite secondary school providing excellent conditions, and the family (values, attitudes and physical) conditions at home."*

The mayor of the municipality welcomed the launch of the programme from the very beginning and has continued to support it by all possible means. In Arló, the FeTe programme was launched on 1 June 2020.

The local leaders of the FeTe programme were appointed based on the network of the Jesuit Order and the Jesuit high school in Miskolc. The local staff included a young Jesuit monk, a former student of the Jesuit high school and his wife, who is now the current head of the programme. They were assisted by a local Roma social worker with a university degree, a social worker with a church affiliation, and a computer scientist with a university degree. This IT specialist worked as a volunteer for the first three months, then as a paid deputy manager for a year and a half until he returned to his former job in Budapest. The duality of commitment and staff shortages in the programme is highlighted by the fact that he has been a volunteer since then, regularly visiting and providing services in Arló. This staff was complemented by family mentors recruited under the Focus on the Children programme element (see later), a local Roma maintenance chef, a local administrator and a cleaner employed as a public worker by the Hungarian Catholic Bishop's Conference.

An Action Plan was prepared in Arló based on the methodology of the Diagnose-based Presence programme compiled by Málta. In addition to contacts with local actors and public services and a detailed questionnaire survey, regular discussions to facilitate the widest possible cooperation were an important part of the plan. The preparation of the Action Plan also involved mentors from Málta and an external expert manager on organisational development employed by the Jesuit Provincial Superior, who organised and moderated the process of developing the Action Plan. The approach he conveyed has been an important feature of local programme operation ever since and *"one of the most important milestones in the development process"*. The Presence House, as the central element of the FeTe programme, opened in October 2021.

3.1.1 Steps to embedding regular cooperation with local institutions and organisations

From the outset, the local programme has sought the broadest and most intensive possible cooperation with local public services, communities, NGOs and authorities. The openness, interest and willingness to be informed, which was deliberately stressed from the very beginning, quickly resolved reservations towards the programme in the local community. The active, supportive attitude of the mayor and the series of introductory talks organised by the Jesuits were an important help in this respect.

Each of the specific programme elements require formal cooperation, an organised flow of information and regular consultations, which has evolved into daily working relationships over the past few years. Initially, social workers of the family support service, district nurses and the Franciscan sisters were concerned about producing parallel services in the FeTe programme, which they perceived as competition interfering with their competencies. However, services organised by different service providers side by side developed over time into closely coordinated activities based on daily contact.

Reservations and fear of partner organisations were linked to the distribution of donations within the FeTe programme. The conflict was resolved through a learning process that established a practice, whereby information and assistance are sought from local actors to help families in need in a coordinated way. For example, regular donations from the food bank are distributed based on suggestions of the family support service that can also reach older people with whom the Presence House staff has no contact. The Franciscan Sisters are always consulted regarding the distribution of gifts for major holidays. A second-hand clothes "market" in the Presence House is available to all locals, as are seed donations that take place in the spring.

In addition to daily cooperation, a monthly consultation forum has been set up at the initiative of the Jesuit monk who works at the Presence House. The agenda is always discussed in person between the mayor and the initiator of the forum, with the participation of local councillors, senior staff of the mayor's office, heads of public services, representatives of local authorities, GPs, paediatricians, the head of the Roma minority self-government and the main local NGOs (in total about 25 persons). The forum is essentially a regular round table, where all current issues can be discussed in addition to the topics listed in the invitation.

This open, collaborative approach helped to overcome initial prejudices and reservations about the programme and in particular about its Roma staff. A good example of this is one head of the public services initially hardly noticed the Roma staff member who came along to meetings with the programme manager. Later, when the manager and Roma staff member went together, he shook hands with both of them. And after a year and a half, if only the Roma staff member came to a meeting, he would shake hands with him. As a result of the programme, divisions began to dissolve in personal relations, between institutions and Roma families, but also in non-Roma-Roma and Roma-Roma relations.

3.2 Key local programme elements, their characteristics and impacts

Of the 11 elements of the national FeTe programme, four significant programme elements emerged in Arló besides the activities of the Presence House, which is the core and mandatory element of the FeTe programme. (1.) The development of the family mentor network and focusing on the well-being of families with small children (Focus in Children), (2) programmes to support and complement education, (3.) Symphony Programme and (4) housing programme.

3.2.1 Active presence - how the Presence House works

The Presence House is a symbol and a place of active presence, community building, individual and group support. The significance of the buildings and the enclosed courtyards is enhanced by the fact that it is currently the only open and public community space in the municipality, accessible to all dwellers. The House operates according to a weekly schedule, but is always open to visitors with any question, concern or problem. Continuity is ensured by the laundry and the office being open all the time, while the clubs fill the buildings regularly.

The most popular of the clubs is the weekly Baby and Mama Club, which runs three types of pre-planned activities: cooking together, craft activities, and learning children's tales and songs and playing with the children. Thematic discussions are embedded in these activities and can be initiated by the participants themselves. The number of mothers attending the club varies, altogether around 30 mothers attend the club and at least 15 of them attend it regularly. The pregnant women's club currently has 15 mothers on its list, but no more than six can be present at any one time. The topics of discussion here are childbearing, pregnancy, childbirth, baby care and other related issues. The women's club is a grassroots initiative, providing a programme for mothers whose children are older but who would like to get involved in the activities of the House. Accordingly, it is an active, proactive community where the topics of discussion are mostly related to house-keeping, money management, and other home practices.

Another new initiative, the youth cooking club, aims to engage some of the more difficult 'street kids'. At each session, about 5-6 teenagers already in secondary school drop by. The organisers plan to expand this club in the future with thematic programmes, joint sports activities and excursions, opening a wider door to the secondary school age group.

One of the first and most popular programmes of the Presence House has been the "Symphony Programme" and the "Courtyard Festival". When the "Symphony Programme" was launched, music teaching took place in the school building and was supplemented by tutoring and the organisation of joint activities. However, due to bureaucratic constraints in the public education system, this could not be integrated into the official school timetable. Therefore, the programme moved to the Presence House. Now, several times a week, groups are taught music together, complemented not only by the "Courtyard Festival" but also by travelling concerts. The programme currently involves around twenty young people, who now form a cooperative and cohesive community. The move of the programme to the welcoming environment of the Presence House also facilitated a broader outreach to different age groups and allowed those young people "who were reluctant to go to school" to excel in music.

Alongside the music lessons, a similar logic was followed in the organisation of the dance group. The group was organised by a local Roma man working in the Presence House, who expanded the group's activities by learning Roma dances and learning about Roma culture. Unfortunately, after the departure of this staff member, the group's activities ceased, and programme managers would like to ask one of the talented and ambitious girls in the progressive group to continue the work.

3.2.2 Focus on the Children

In line with the central programme proposals of FeTe, the main focus of the local programme in Arló has been the support of families with young children. To this end, a family mentoring system was set up as a first step. With the involvement of the Franciscan Sisters the local staff of the Presence House started to work with 8-10 local Roma mothers with older children. The first family mentors were selected by the recommendation of various local institutions. Selection criteria were an open and inclusive attitude, reliability, a sense of responsibility and determination, in addition to identification with the programme's overall goals. The primary tasks of the mentors are regular family visits, as well as active participation in the organisation and running of the clubs and programmes at the Presence House.

During the start-up phase, all families in the municipality with children under the age of three were contacted with the help of the district nurses. Given the demographic composition of the settlement, this meant only Roma families. The municipality was divided into six and then four districts,

where family mentors work in pairs. The lead social worker of the Presence House was also involved in the work initially by mentoring ten families to gain experience. Family mentors keep a diary for each family they visit and record the most important events, changes, suggestions and comments. Regular meetings are held to discuss cases and exchange experiences, with the involvement of the social workers from the family support service and other social professionals working in the municipality. Working together, and teaching each other, the family mentors have acquired the practice and knowledge that is essential for helping families with young children on a daily basis. The initiative has been received positively by most of the people concerned, who typically welcome the visits. It is very rare to find a family where there has been a complete breakdown of contact due to a clear refusal.

The "*regular visits of 60-70 families are of great importance in terms of shaping attitudes and values*", and in learning and mastering daily life management, childcare and education practices. Another important role of regular family visits is to help expand relationships and cooperation, the activities of the baby-mama club, the club for pregnant women and the women's club in the Presence House are closely linked to the mentored families. The local family mentors provide a role models for other families, as they are chosen from among them and the opportunity made available to others.

3.2.3 Education

Education is a priority issue in all the expert interviews conducted in Arló. The renovated and well-equipped (IT tools, computers) primary school is located in the centre of the municipality. The most serious problems are the continuing and increasing shortage of teachers and the lack of a gym within the school. However, the start of the local FeTe programme has provided for employing three staff members as lecturers in the school and alleviated this problem temporarily.

The shortage of teachers, the large number of pupils in classes, and the lack of grouping, all combine to make effective teaching impossible. In such circumstances, the school is unable to offer mobility paths even for children whose parents support their education. These cumulative problems are also reflected in high rates of absenteeism, drop-outs and failures. Absenteeism figures show that at least 60-70 children out of the total of 350 do not attend school regularly.

The local kindergarten operates in three buildings with 168 available places. In 2022, the number of children enrolled in the kindergarten was 175. Although kindergarten is compulsory and parents are obliged to enrol their children from the age of three, the proportion of children attending regularly is much lower, barely exceeding 50%, according to catering data. A modern kindergarten building with a capacity for four groups is under construction in the municipality. Once completed, it will be maintained by the Jesuit Order.

The FeTe programme in close collaboration with Franciscan Sisters working with school-age children, delivers complementary education services in five areas:

1. The Franciscan Sisters regularly organise afternoon classes (joint learning, tutoring, homework preparation) in the building provided by the Church. The Presence House also offers music and dance classes, as well as tutoring and regular afternoon activities. This replaces the primary school's study room and afternoon sessions.
2. Staff members of the Presence House are lecturers in the local primary school.
3. The FeTe programme provides a school psychologist once a week.
4. With the involvement of students from the Jesuit High School in Miskolc, methodically grounded regular school preparation sessions are held for kindergarten children in the Presence House.

5. Staff members of the Presence House organise monthly excursions as well as summer camps in cooperation with the primary school.

According to the interviewees, about 80-90 children participate in these events regularly, together with the occasional participants, the number of participants is close to 150. The growing number of children reached one way or another is very important because experience shows that participation in programmes can only be achieved through a gradual approach and patience.

3.2.4 Housing

Critical physical conditions and the overcrowding of dwellings are particularly prevalent in the segregated streets of Arló. To improve housing conditions, the programme staff have assisted families eligible for the 'Village CSOK' (abbreviation of Családok Otthonteremtési Kedvezménye, which is a family housing allowance provided by the government under certain conditions) to prepare their applications. As a result, several houses have been renovated not only on the main street but also in other areas of the settlement.

However, most of the families living in the worst housing conditions are not eligible for 'Village CSOK' because they have no regular income. For them, a joint application by the Jesuit Order and the Franciscan Sisters provided the opportunity to renovate their houses. Families who joined the programme, with the help of experts, acquired the skills, knowledge and practice to renovate their own houses (without formal qualifications). The programme covered the cost of materials and men renovated their own and each other's properties under the supervision of a specialist. An important outcome of the programme is the establishment of patterns of cooperation. This programme complements the national FeTe programme's 'roof commando', where the central programme provides the materials and the specialists, and the stakeholders and some local volunteers provide the support. This programme aims to make houses that are in danger of collapsing habitable. In the settlements of the FeTe programme, Presence House staff assess eligibility, prioritise needs and schedule the construction. In the last two years, 13 houses in the settlement have been renovated within this component of the national programme.

4 General conclusions

The FeTe programme aimed at the social development of those most disadvantaged settlements with demographically polarised societies, very high unemployment rates and low levels of education located in lagging rural areas that have been challenged by the territorial disparities for decades. Although the FeTe programme is an ongoing intervention in progress, it has successfully reframed narratives and coordinates within the field of social development in Hungary. The programme has raised the problem of rural social deprivation to the level of domestic policy agenda and emphasised its importance by underlining a shared national interest in the social development of the rural poor, the majority of whom are Roma, for economic purposes and the developmental perspectives of the country.

The Diagnose-based Presence programme in FeTe introduced a place-sensitive approach to target settlements in most dire socio-economic conditions. It has provided a flexible baseline methodology of intensive social care and immediate crisis management based on encompassing needs assessment that can be adjusted to local needs by the implementing organisation, hence is adaptable to different local contexts. This methodological approach reconstructs lessons learnt from previous experiences in social development programmes and initiatives and combines them into an overall approach for the social development of marginalised communities in peripheral rural areas. Although it is a top-down programme, given the targeting of settlements based on the definition of developmental indicators by the central state, the methodological approach greatly relies on a bottom-up elicitation of local knowledge and horizontal coordination in sharing intelligence and the provision of feedback. As a result, at the local level, the FeTe programme by generating dialogue among settlement, organisations and public service providers, has strengthened democratic control of developmental decision-making and local organisations' capacities in service provision (e.g. the Franciscan Sisters and local public service providers). At the same time, by accentuating the role of the middle level in programme management (regional coordinators), the FeTe programme displays relatively high degrees of reflexivity through a learning by doing approach for programme development.

The FeTe programme was called forth by the complex interplay of spatial, social, infrastructural, and ethnic exclusion of peripheral rural communities and spatial inequalities in the availability and accessibility of social and educational public services linked to these processes. The case study of Arló exemplifies the way the FeTe programme has succeeded in filling gaps in public service provisions in settlements that were most afflicted by structural deficiencies in welfare service provisions. Yet, despite successful local and meso-level institutional innovations, structural deficiencies of the problem-ridden welfare system FeTe have been unable to address.

One important implication of this is that given their institutional architecture, place-based interventions are highly vulnerable to macro-level institutional frameworks. For long-term effects and transformative changes, policy systems should pay sufficient attention to eliminating structural inequalities in public service provisions and to aligning sectoral policies with the goals of equitable territorial development of marginalized communities. An enabling institutional backbone and policy environment with multi-year planning for financial and institutional sustainability is a necessary condition for achieving long-term societal impact.

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ESPON 2030

ESPON EGTC
11 Avenue John F. Kennedy
L-1855 Luxembourg
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg
Phone: +352 20 600 280
Email: info@espon.eu
www.espon.eu

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