



Making Miskolc a place for everyone

AEIDL is playing an active role as a consortium member in an EU-funded pilot in Miskolc, Hungary.

Last November, the *Initiative for Innovative Integrated Interventions in Miskolc (4IM)* project was launched at a first consortium meeting held by the City of Miskolc in north-eastern Hungary. The 30-month project aims to create change in the city's social and employment services and subsidy structures, and to test an innovative integrated service package in two disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Its aim is to make public services more efficient to meet the needs of the most vulnerable neighbourhoods in this post-heavy industrial city, where more than 10,000 of the 160,000 citizens – the majority Roma – live in segregated neighbourhoods. The process envisaged is participatory, makes the target group active in local development and creates an all-stakeholder partnership in the city for social innovation.

Addressing segregation

It is not by chance that this initiative has now flourished in such a structured manner. The current city council has been actively promoting social innovation initiatives to answer complex social issues since it was elected in October 2019. Nonetheless, the funding of 4IM will mean a critical push to examine the problem in its complexity and to bring in partners and stakeholders to work in a coordinated manner. They will learn from each other, test and readjust and, finally, co-design an integrated service that has been consciously developed and whose efficiency is proved by putting the inhabitants of Miskolc in need at the core of the process.

The action, funded by the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation (EaSI) is led by the City of Miskolc and involves another five partners: the local NGOs Abaujrakezdes Public Association and HARFA Foundation in Miskolc, which are deeply involved in inclusive development initiatives and long-term development partners of the city; the University of Miskolc, which is responsible for action research and local surveys related to the pilot's goals; the city of Košice in Slovakia, which will participate in the exchange of experiences and multiplication of results, as the cross-border 'twin-city' of Miskolc with many shared activities and development problems including inclusion; and, at EU level, AEIDL, the European Association for Information on Local Development, with the role of linking the Miskolc initiative to the relevant European context and networks.

4IM has the difficult but critical mission of addressing a long-lasting issue which is shaped by many factors and therefore, highly complex. Miskolc is a former heavy industrial centre that went through a deep economic crisis in the 1990s. The shutting down of large industrial plants led to high unemployment and the severe impoverishment of the area, whose consequences remain to this day. Roma and other lower-educated citizens were particularly hard-hit.

Various political decisions taken in the past have exacerbated the critical situation, especially the demolition of houses in various disadvantaged neighbourhoods without rehousing their residents, generating migration waves of the most vulnerable from destroyed streets to the city's periphery and remaining disadvantaged parts of the city, and ultimately, increasing the number of those who are not registered and thus cannot access local services.

Today's main social challenge in Miskolc is the high number of people living in vulnerable situations in 16 densely-populated disadvantaged neighbourhoods in different parts of the city, who for various reasons, have dropped out from or have never been involved in the city's registration and social system. About 60% of them are Roma.

The segregated areas in Miskolc selected for the pilot action are Tetemvár and Bábonyibérc. 80% of the 808 inhabitants of Tetemvár belong to the Roma minority, and 70% are suffering from disadvantaged circumstances or housing poverty. The population of Bábonyibérc involves 80% Roma and 20% non-Roma elderly people. 90% of the Roma families belong to disadvantaged groups.

The project is in line with the EU active inclusion approach, set out in **Principle 14 of the European Pillar of Social Rights**, which states that *everyone lacking sufficient resources has the right to adequate minimum income benefits ensuring a life in dignity at all stages of life, and effective access to enabling goods and services. For those who can work, minimum income benefits shall be combined with incentives to (re)integrate into the labour market.* Therefore, it is not just a matter of providing immediate support to those in need but, equally importantly, of guaranteeing that they have the skills and the access to the information and resources needed to empower them to be self-supporting.

Currently, the city provides plenty of different small-scale financial benefits to vulnerable people, with different, complicated eligibility criteria, application procedures and administrative systems. The 4IM project will test how these fragmented aids can be better combined and channelled to reach those currently falling outside the system's reach, and be supplemented by active inclusion measures, closely linking them to an integrated service model.

Democratic governance

The 4IM project brings renewed hope for continuing the policy path that the current city council has started to delineate, including the goal of improving governance at the city level. Building on the council's previous work, the pilot project aims to increase the accessibility of various services for the target group by making services more integrated and efficient; develop more effective institutional structures and cooperation mechanisms, and create a permanent dialogue with the people living in the disadvantaged neighbourhoods as the basis for making the process sustainable.

The pilot will analyse the city-level service system and assess the situation in the pilot neighbourhoods at household level, jointly formulate an integrated service package for better life in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and in general, create a broad-based local governance system for inclusion, setting commonly agreed goals and carrying out joint actions.

In the words of the Miskolc mayor Pál Veres: *"The greatness of Miskolc is rooted in its people, and especially in the real community of its people. The true strength of local society inheres in its capability to take up and integrate its indigent members."*

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