



# FRAGILE COMMUNITIES' SITUATION AND SELECTION IN BULGARIA

## ***NATIONAL REPORT***



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## **PREFACE**

The first step in the implementation of the INTERFACE project comprises the selection of the fragile communities, most suitable to be covered by project activities, in order to achieve a substantial and long-lasting effect for these communities in partner countries. This National Report presents the results of the fragile communities’ selection process in Bulgaria and includes an overview of the situation of the selected fragile communities, together with a description of the final fragile communities’ selection process and its outputs. The Report follows the generic structure, proposed by the IO1 ‘Competence Gap Analysis’ leader – Tora Consult, in order to allow for comparability of reported information and outcomes across INTERFACE partner countries, and includes the following chapters:

- Chapter 1: Fragile communities’ situation;
- Chapter 2: Final selection of the INTERFACE fragile communities – the selection process and its results.

In preparing this material, a variety of sources have been used, incl. statistical data, reports and reviews, together with the results obtained during the fragile communities’ selection process and the own insights/experiences of the author – Dr Todor Todorov. Tora Consult’s team would like to acknowledge the contribution of all individuals and organisations in the considered fragile communities, who kindly cooperated in the selection process.

*Tora Consult Ltd.*

*February 2018*

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

A total of 3 (three) fragile communities were selected for participation in the INTERFACE project: town of Roman, village of Dolna Beshovitsa and town of Knezha, all located in the North-Western NUTS 2 region in Bulgaria. The first two of them are situated in the Municipality of Roman, Vratsa District, while the third is located in the Municipality of Knezha, Pleven District. Their geographic location is quite favourable in terms of relative proximity to both the respective district centres and the capital – Sofia, as well as the availability of road connections to international routes to Romania, Serbia, Greece and Turkey. All three fragile communities have relatively well developed public services infrastructure, with a number of schools, kindergartens and healthcare facilities operating on the territories of their municipalities. In terms of social services delivered to the population, the community social patronage is an important service in all the selected communities. The regional infrastructure facilities are undeveloped, esp. in terms of sewage systems, the gasification being a positive feature of the town of Knezha. Natural resources favour the development of tourism, which however in the case of Knezha is underutilised.

Population in the selected fragile communities is characterised with ageing structure and relatively unfavourable educational level, both of which, together with skill mismatches and labour demand fluctuations, are among the major factors, underlying the low levels of economic activity and employment and high rates of unemployment. Agriculture, food processing, trade and services are among the most well-developed sectors in all the three communities. As part of the North-Western region, the communities fall within the economic and social development priorities, outlined in strategic documents at national level. Municipal administrations are supporting the population by providing various services to citizens and the business, whereas a number of project, funded by EU and national sources have been implemented on the territories of the municipalities of Roman and Knezha, targeted mainly at improving the water supply, sewage and road infrastructure, education facilities and the provision of social services.

The selection of the above three fragile communities for participation in the INTERFACE project was based on a number of predefined criteria, whereas the key factors, which most influenced their selection over the remaining seven provisionally selected communities include: the underutilisation of natural resources’ potentials for the betterment of the communities and, to a lesser extent, the strategic location of the community, the unused growth potentials in specific economic sectors and the supportiveness of local administration to local development initiatives. Finally, a mini-survey was undertaken in the three fragile communities, selected for participation in the INTERFACE activities in Bulgaria, in order to obtain information from fragile community members and appropriately selected regional organisations with regards to the perceived community problems and ways to address them, incl. through making use of the anticipated project interventions.

## **РЕЗЮМЕ**

За участие в проект INTERFACE са избрани общо три уязвими общности: гр. Роман, с. Долна Бешовица и гр. Кнежа, разположени в Северозападния район на България. Първите две от тях се намират в община Роман, област Враца, а третата – в община Кнежа, област Плевен. Географското им положение е благоприятно от гледна точка на относителната близост до съответните областни центрове и столицата – София, както и на наличието на пътни връзки с Румъния, Сърбия, Гърция и Турция. И трите уязвими общности имат сравнително добре развита публична инфраструктура, като в тях функционират училища, детски градини и здравни заведения. От гледна точка на социалните услуги, предоставяни на населението, домашният социален патронаж е важна услуга, налична във всички избрани общности. Регионалната инфраструктура не е добре развита, особено по отношение на канализационните системи, като газификацията е положителна характеристика на град Кнежа. Природните ресурси благоприятстват развитието на туризма, който обаче в случая на Кнежа е недостатъчно използван.

Населението в избраните уязвими общности се характеризира със застаряваща структура и относително неблагоприятно образователно равнище, които, заедно с несъответствията в трудовите умения и колебанията в търсенето на труд, са сред основните фактори, които водят до ниски равнища на икономическа активност и заетост и високи нива на безработица. Селското стопанство, хранителната промишленост, търговията и услугите са сред най-добре развитите сектори във всичките три общности. Като част от Северозападния регион, общностите попадат в приоритетите за икономическо и социално развитие, очертани в стратегическите документи на национално ниво. Общинските администрации подпомагат населението чрез предоставяне на разнообразни услуги на гражданите и бизнеса, докато редица проекти, финансирани от европейски и национални източници, са реализирани на територията на общините Роман и Кнежа, насочени основно към подобряване на водоснабдяването, канализацията и пътната инфраструктура, образователните институции и предоставянето на социални услуги.

Изборът на горните три уязвими общности за участие в проект INTERFACE се основава на редица предварително дефинирани критерии, докато ключовите фактори, които най-много повлияха на избора им спрямо останалите седем предварително подбрани общности, бяха: недостатъчно използване на потенциала на природните ресурси за подобряването на общностите и, в по-малка степен, стратегическото разположение на общността, неизползваният потенциал за растеж в конкретни икономически сектори и подкрепата на местната администрация за инициативите за местно развитие. И накрая, в трите уязвими общности, избрани за участие в дейностите по проект INTERFACE в България, се проведе мини-проучване, с оглед получаване на информация от членове на общността и от подходящо подбрани регионални организации по отношение на вижданията относно проблемите на общността и начините за тяхното разрешаване, вкл. с помощта на предстоящите дейности по проекта.

## **1. FRAGILE COMMUNITIES’ SITUATION IN BULGARIA**

This chapter contains information about the location, infrastructure, demographic characteristics, local economy and labour market for the three fragile communities in Bulgaria, selected for participation in the INTAERFACE project activities, as well as about recent support initiatives these communities were involved in. The selected fragile communities in Bulgaria are, as follows (more details about the above fragile communities’ selection process are provided in the next section of the Report):

- Town of Roman, Municipality of Roman, Vratsa District, North-West Region, urban type of community;
- Village of Dolna Beshovitsa, Municipality of Roman, Vratsa District, North-West Region, rural type of community;
- Town of Knezha, Municipality of Knezha, Pleven District, North-West Region, urban type of community.

The sub-sections below focus on issues, which determine the respective communities’ ‘fragility’ status and at the same time, demonstrate these communities’ potential to mitigate their state of ‘fragility’ with the help of the foreseen INTERFACE activities. It should be noted, that the content below is related to data availability for each of the selected fragile communities in Bulgaria. Whenever statistical information is not available at individual communities’ level, the content relates to a higher level of administrative division, i.e. municipality, as found in the respective Municipal Development Plan.<sup>1</sup> Finally, due to the fact that the communities of Roman and Dolna Beshovitsa are both located in the Municipality of Roman, the information for them in the description below is combined, whereas specific circumstances are outlined for each of them.

### **1.1. Location and infrastructure**

#### **Roman and Dolna Beshovitsa (Municipality of Roman)**

##### *Connectivity and access to markets*

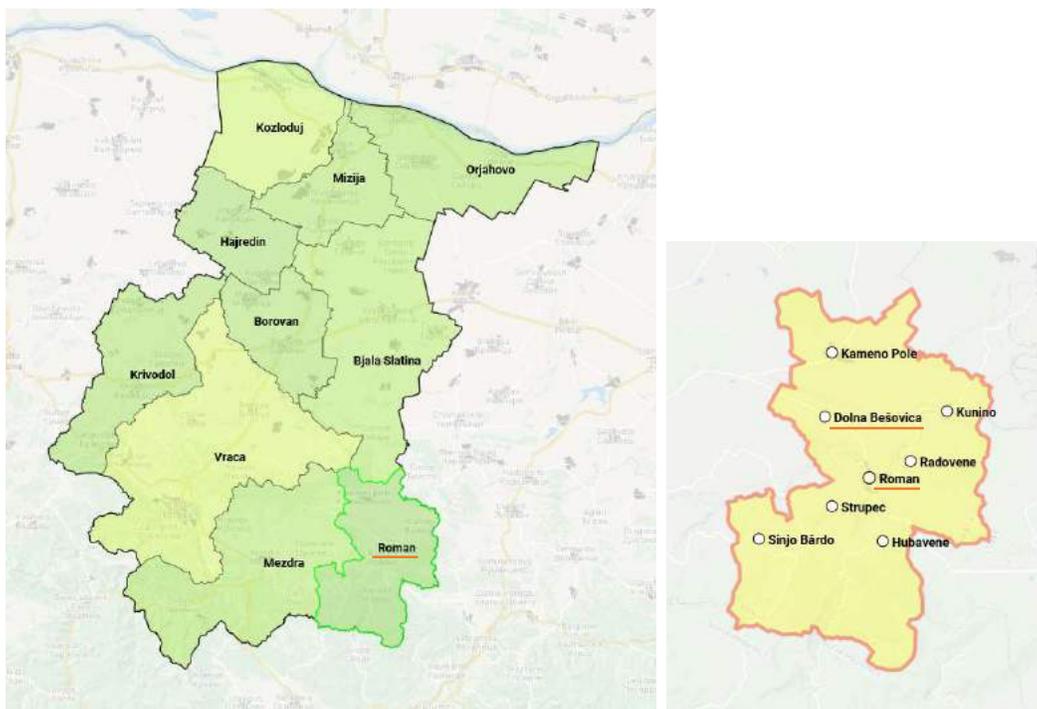
Roman Municipality is situated in North-Western Bulgaria and occupies 302 sq.km in the South-

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<sup>1</sup> In 2013, in accordance with the regulations of the Regional Development Act, all municipalities in Bulgaria were required to develop their Municipal Development Plans for the period 2014-2020, as basic mid-term strategic and programming documents, outlining the objectives and priorities for sustainable and integrated local development, taking into account the specific characteristics, opportunities and resources of the respective municipality.

Eastern part of Vratsa District. The average population density in the Municipality is 18.59 inhabitants/sq.km (2017). The town of Roman and the village of Dolna Beshovitsa are separated by only 6.7 km and are both at the relatively short distance of about 40 km to the East of the District Centre of Vratsa, and 120 km to the Northeast of the Bulgaria’s capital – Sofia. The Municipality of Roman has road connections to international routes, through which the transport connections to Macedonia, Serbia and Greece are realised.

Roman town is a railway station along the central Northern railway line Sofia – Varna, which traverses the territory of the Municipality from the West to the East along the Iskar River valley. The geographic location is favourable for the development of tourism owing both to the environmentally clean and fascinating nature, and to the presence of unique historic cultural sites.



**Map: Municipality of Roman, town of Roman and village of Dolna Beshovitsa**

### Availability and quality of public services

At present, 3 schools (1 general secondary, 1 primary and 1 special school) are functioning on the territory of Roman municipality. The 9 previously separately operating kindergartens are merged into 2, with subsidiaries in 7 villages on the territory of the Municipality.

Two public healthcare facilities are operating in Roman Municipality: an Emergency Medical Assistance Center and a Specialized Hospital for Long-term Treatment of Lung Diseases. The hospital has 80 beds and is the only one of its kind on the territory of North-Western Bulgaria.

An important social service in Roman Municipality is the community social patronage. As a result of its delivery, the demand for community-provided social services connected with the supply of food has increased considerably. As of December 2017, the number of the beneficiaries of this type of social service is more than 100 persons. There are two social complexes on the territory of the Municipality, which provide social services to the population: Complex for Social Services for Children and Families and Complex for Social Services for Children with Disabilities.

#### Regional infrastructure facilities

The water supply network in the Municipality is obsolete and depreciated, no potable water treatment plant has been built on its territory. The coverage of the sewerage system in the Municipality of Roman is only 25%, there are no intra-settlement external collectors and purification facilities. The main problems of the energy transmission infrastructure include inefficiency of part of the electric stations, necessity of building up and renovating the already existing electric transformer stations.

#### Natural resources

The territory of the Roman Municipality is abundant in non-ore natural resources – high-quality and climate-resistant rock materials for stone (pavement) slabs and blocks of two decorative types: grey and tan sandstone rocks. The water resources of the Municipality of Roman come from surface and underground waters. The water areas are about 2800 decars, formed mainly by rivers – 86.3% and dams – 9.7%. The area of the Municipality of Roman is characterised by a great biodiversity, with more than 500 species of plants, more than 100 species of birds and more than 30 species of mammals, whereas in the rivers different river fish species can be found – bramble, barbel, maple, chanterelle, etc.

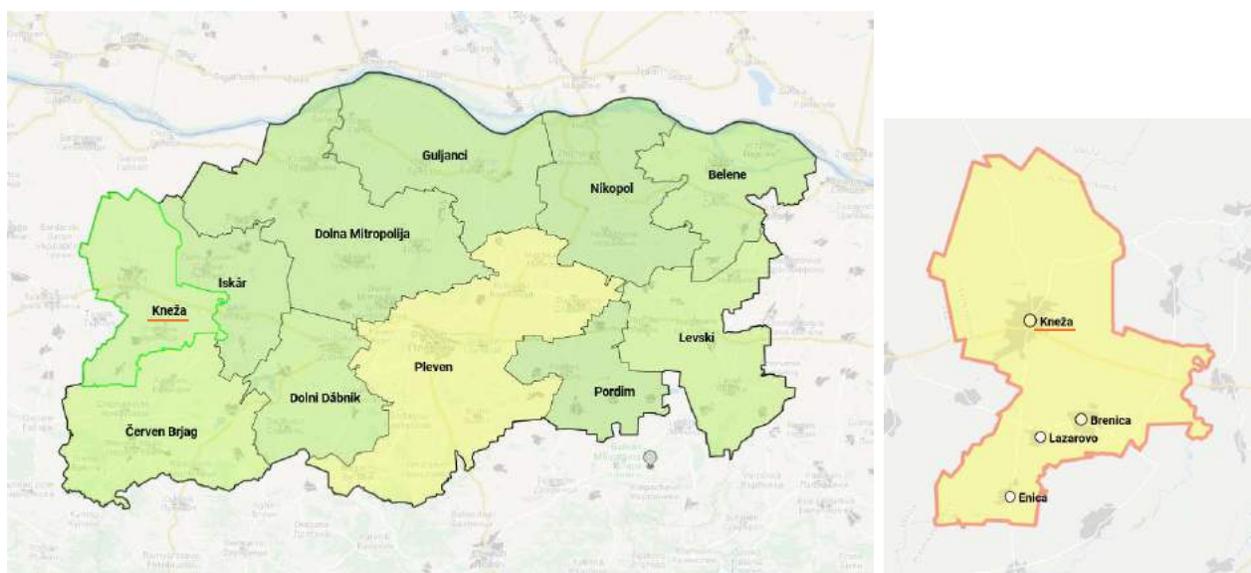
### **Knezha (Municipality of Knezha)**

#### Connectivity and access to markets

The Municipality of Knezha is also located in the North-Western part of Bulgaria, and similarly in the North-Western part of Pleven District and occupies a territory of 318 sq.km. The average population density in the Municipality is 38.90 inhabitants/sq.km (2017). The municipal centre is

the town of Knezha, which is located 50 km to the West of the District Centre of Pleven and 150 km Northeast of Sofia. Rather favourable, but still unutilised conditions exist for rural and hunting tourism development, due among other things, to the Municipality’s clean and preserved nature.

Regarding transport infrastructure, the connections between the settlements on the territory of Knezha Municipality are maintained by road transport alone. The transport services to the population are provided by four local companies. The Municipality falls within a 30-km strip of free economic zone. Its proximity to the Danube River and the Oryahovo-Becket ferry connection creates opportunities for economic revival and development of commercial, transport and service activities. The territory is also a major transport corridor for the traffic going through Turkey to Western Europe, using the Oryahovo-Becket ferry connection.



**Map: Municipality of Knezha, town of Knezha**

### Availability and quality of public services

Two vocational secondary schools (1 in agriculture and 1 in mechanoelectrotechnics), 1 general secondary school, 2 lower secondary schools, 1 primary school, 3 kindergartens and 1 nursery are functioning on the territory of the town of Knezha.

One multi-profile municipal hospital with a capacity of 70 beds operates on the territory of Knezha Municipality – Multi-profile hospital for active treatment (MHAT) Knezha Ltd.

The social assistance on the territory of Knezha Municipality is carried out by two units: Social Assistance Directorate (SAD) and community social patronage. SAD – Knezha regulates the public relations on the territory of the Municipality, connected to the social support of the population.

SAD – Knezha aims to help the residents of the Municipality who cannot satisfy their basic vital needs without the help of others, as well as to strengthen and develop social solidarity in difficult life situations. The community social patronage service, provided on the territory of the municipality of Knezha, is to the benefit of people over the age of 60 and persons with permanent disabilities with a degree of reduced working capacity of 50 and over 50%.

### Regional infrastructure facilities

There are 4 own water resources operated by the Water Supply Company in the town of Knezha. The town is supplied with a separate water supply system. Problems with the quality of water for drinking and household purposes are almost unobserved. Due to the lack of a sewage treatment plant, the quality of waste water is poor. There is a sewer system in Knezha, which however covers a very small part of the town with a total length of about 12 km. All existing waste-water canals are discharged directly into the Gostilja River bed, as are those of a number of manufacturing enterprises. This leads to swamping and unfavourable sanitary and hygienic conditions, which are dangerous to human health.

There are 57 electric transformer stations in Knezha Municipality, of which 36 are in the town of Knezha and 21 are in 3 of the villages on the territory of the Municipality.

In the municipality of Knezha, the gas supply network is serviced by Knezha Gas Ltd. 26 public buildings, 15 production facilities, 97 households, 4 kindergartens, 5 schools, as well as MHAT – Knezha are supplied with gas.

### Natural resources

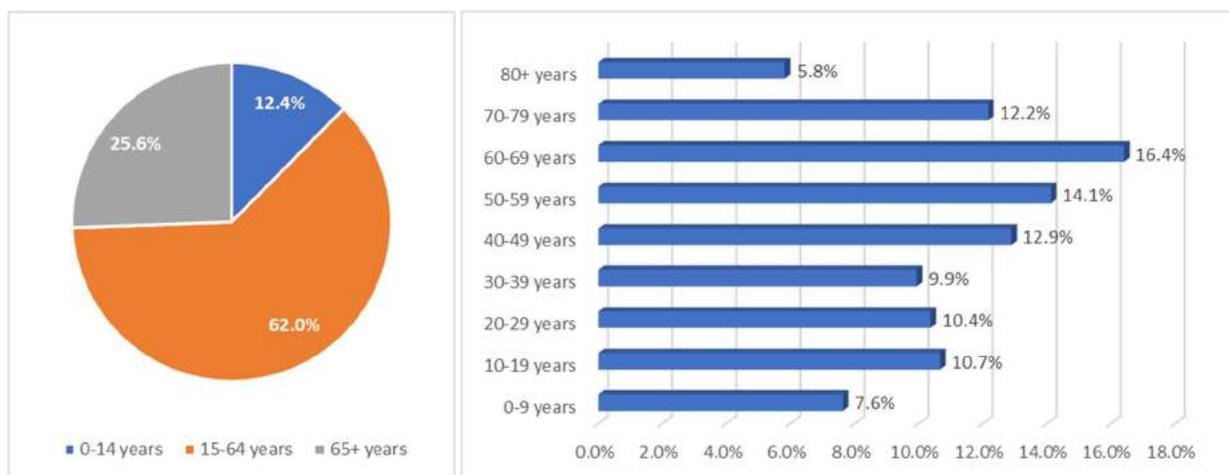
The overall assessment of the physical and geographic features of the Knezha Municipality reveals excellent conditions for agricultural activities and potential for diversification to organic farming. Non-ore resources are abundant, incl. building materials, ballast (found near the village of Brenitsa – Iskar River bed), sands, clay for bricks and tiles (near the town of Knezha). They all have industrial significance. There are two protected areas on the territory of Knezha Municipality, as per the regulations of the Biodiversity Act: the Protected Iskar River Habitat Zone with identification code BG0000613, near the village of Brenitsa and the Protected Habitat Zone with identification code BG0000627 Konunsky dol, which is found on the territory of the town of Knezha.

## 1.2. Demographic characteristics

### **Roman and Dolna Beshovitsa (Municipality of Roman)**

#### Age structure

As a whole, the age structure on the territory of Roman Municipality is quite unfavourable. According to the National Statistical Institute (NSI) last census data from 2011, the total population of the Municipality was 6 223 inhabitants (falling down to 5 606 in 2017), of whom the share of population below working age was 12.4%, the share of population within working age was 62.0% and the share of population above working age was 25.6% (see Figure 1 below). If considered by decile groups however, the share of the age group 60-69 years is highest with 16.4%, followed by the age groups 50-59 and 40-49 with 14.1% and 12.9% respectively. As the data in Table 1 below indicate, the age structure in the town of Roman is more favourable than the average for the Municipality, while the opposite is true for the village of Dolna Beshovitsa.



**Figure 1. Age structure of population on the territory of Roman Municipality**

Source: National Statistical Institute, Census data 2011

#### Educational structure

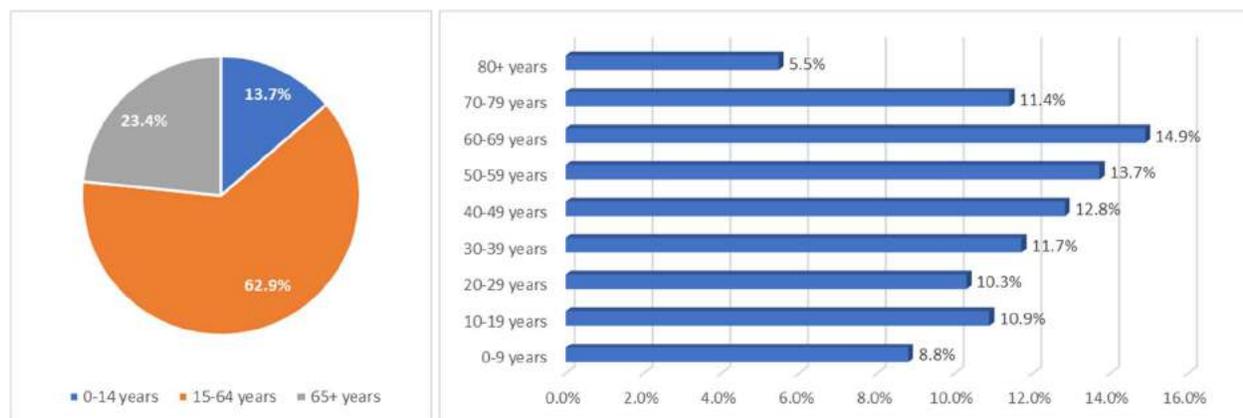
The educational structure of the population in Roman Municipality, as per the NSI 2011 census data is unfavourable and is characterised by a low share of the population with higher education and a relatively high share of the population with lower secondary and lower education. Highest is the share of the population with secondary education – 47.4%, followed by that of the population with lower secondary education – 28.8%. The share of people possessing higher

education degree is only 10.2%, 7.7% have primary education, 4.5% have not completed primary education, and nearly 1% of the population has never attended school. The educational structure of the population in the 2 fragile communities, selected for participation in the INTERFACE project – town of Roma and village of Dolna Beshovitsa is similar to that of the whole Municipality, whereas the situation in the municipal centre – town of Roma is more favourable with share of people with higher and secondary education above the Municipality’s average (see Table 2 below).

### **Knezha (Municipality of Knezha)**

#### **Age structure**

The age structure on the territory of Knezha Municipality is characterised by a low share of population below working age and high share of that above working age. As per NSI last census data, the total population of the Municipality was 13 803 inhabitants in 2011 (markedly decreasing to 12 362 in 2017). The share of population below working age was 13.7%, the share of population within working age was 62.9% and the share of population above working age was 23.4% (see Figure 2 below). Looking at the decile groups, the share of the 60-69 age group was highest with 14.9%, followed by the age groups 50-59 and 40-49 with 13.7% and 12.8% respectively.



**Figure 2. Age structure of population on the territory of Knezha Municipality**

Source: National Statistical Institute, Census data 2011

#### **Educational structure**

Data indicate that 43.9% of the population of Knezha Municipality aged 7 years and over has

secondary education and 28.2% has lower secondary education. 9% of the inhabitants of the Municipality possess primary education. 6% is the population with unfinished primary education, and 1% of the population has never attended school and is completely illiterate. The number of higher education graduates in the Municipality is about 10.5% of the population. Table 2 shows that the education structure of the population in the 3<sup>rd</sup> INTERFACE fragile community – the town of Knezha is somewhat more favourable than that for the whole Municipality, with higher share of people with secondary and especially higher education.

**Table 1. Age structure of population in the selected fragile communities in Bulgaria**

<b>Fragile community</b>	<b>Age structure of population</b>	<b>Share of population below working age (&lt; 15 years)</b>	<b>Share of population within working age (15-64 years)</b>	<b>Share of population above working age (65+ years)</b>
Town of Roman		15%	71%	14%
Village of Dolna Beshovitsa		7%	48%	45%
Town of Knezha		14%	65%	21%

*Source: National Statistical Institute, Census data 2011*

**Table 2. Educational structure of population in the selected fragile communities in Bulgaria**

<b>Fragile community</b>	<b>Educational structure of population</b>	<b>Share of population possessing higher education</b>	<b>Share of population possessing secondary education</b>	<b>Share of population possessing lower secondary and lower education</b>
Roman		13%	51%	36%
Dolna Beshovitsa		7%	52%	41%
Knezha		12%	44%	44%

*Source: National Statistical Institute, Census data 2011*

### 1.3. Local economy and labour market

#### **Roman and Dolna Beshovitsa (Municipality of Roman)**

##### Structure of the local economy

On the territory of the Municipality of Roman, the existing enterprises are mainly operating in the following sectors: agriculture and processing industry, trade; transport; hotels and restaurants. About 40% of the active companies work in the trade and services sector. These are mostly shops and restaurants. Several warehouses for wholesale trade have been established on the territory of the Municipality.

### *Growth potentials in specific economic sectors and business support infrastructure*

The Municipality of Roman has a very good potential for the development of various forms of tourism. The geographical location and the natural and climatic resources favour the development of recreation and tourism – due to both the ecologically pure and picturesque nature and the presence of significant cultural and historical sites with tourism potential.

Roman municipal administration actively cooperates with and supports the development of small and medium-sized businesses, providing various administrative services to the enterprises. Most of the well-operating companies on the territory of the municipality are mostly private (small and medium-sized).

### *Labour market situation*

The rates of economic activity, employment and unemployment in the town of Roman according to the 2011 NSI census data were 57%, 42% and 25% respectively, which only in the case of unemployment was significantly more unfavourable than the country’s averages (52%, 44%, 15% respectively). Far worse however was the situation in the village of Dolna Beshovitsa, where these rates were quite more unfavourable: 25%, 19% and 21% respectively.

Among the main factors behind the high unemployment rate in Roman municipality is the unfavourable structure of the local economy, which is dominated by several industrial sub-sectors and several small and medium-sized enterprises. Due to their unstable financial situation, these enterprises occasionally optimise their employment structure by minimising salary costs and reducing their staff. Another unfavourable factor is the mismatch between the educational, qualification and vocational structure of the labour force and skill needs of the local economy.

## **Knezha (Municipality of Knezha)**

### *Structure of the local economy*

Knezha Municipality is a typical agricultural area with potential for further development of agriculture and modernisation of the adjacent infrastructure, with the food processing industry remaining the most developed industrial sub-sector. Trade is the fastest growth sector in the local economy of Knezha Municipality. Tourism on the other hand is highly underdeveloped, although in view of the geostrategic location of the territory to important transport corridors it has serious development potentials.

*Growth potentials in specific economic sectors and business support infrastructure*

An opportunity to rehabilitate the growth potential of the industrial sector is the fact that a large part of the industrial zone of the Municipality is gasified – during the last years, the gas distribution company Knezha Gas Ltd. has built about 20 km. new gas distribution pipelines.

Another circumstance, which has a favourable influence on the economic initiatives within the Municipality, stems from its very geographical location. As already mentioned, besides the proximity of the Danube River and the Oryahovo border checkpoint, the territory is a major transport corridor for the transit traffic from Turkey to Western Europe, using the Oryahovo-Becket ferry connection. However, this potential has not yet been fully utilised.

Knezha Municipality is a key regional producer of agricultural products and the ongoing modernisation of a number of farms categorises the agriculture sector as one of the key branches for the local economy.

*Labour market situation*

According to 2011 last census NSI data, the economic activity rate in Knezha Municipality was 39%, the employment rate was 31%, while the unemployment rate was 21% – quite more unfavourable than the country’s averages. For the town of Knezha, these indicators were somewhat better – 42%, 35% and 18% respectively. The main problems of Knezha Municipality in the field of labour market developments are associated mainly with the unstable employment due to the varying labour demand, high unemployment rate, high share of long-term unemployed and people with low education and qualification level. Other unfavourable factors include the demographic crisis and the skills mismatch, caused by the restructuring of the economy. As a result, skills deficits can be observed in some territories, remote from industrial and administrative centres and for some professions in the manufacturing and information technologies sectors.

1.4. Community support initiatives and grant funding

***The coverage of these and similar communities by the priorities of Development policies at regional and national level***

The 3 fragile communities, selected for participation in the INTERFACE project in Bulgaria, are all located in the North-West Region in Bulgaria, which has been the most underdeveloped NUTS 2 region in the European Union ever since Bulgaria’s EU accession in 2007. As such, the economic

and social development of the whole North-West region is a priority, outlined in strategic documents at national level, such as the National Development Programme: Bulgaria 2020. The support to the region is provided, among other things, through prioritised grant subsidy funding of project implemented on its territory, under the EU Structural and Investment Funds, operating in Bulgaria.

### **Roman and Dolna Beshovitsa (Municipality of Roman)**

#### **The role of local/regional administration for community development and implementation of project/initiatives, funded by national and EU grants**

Roman municipal administration provides administrative services to the natural and legal persons in compliance with the principles of lawfulness, accessibility and economy and in accordance with the requirements for high quality and convenient services for the citizens.

In the years since 2007, Roman municipal administration has gained considerable experience in the preparation and implementation of projects funded by the EU and national sources. The projects implemented during the period are financed by the Rural Development Programme and the Operational Programmes “Regional Development”, “Human Resources Development” and “Administrative Capacity”, the national employment promotion programmes, etc.

### **Knezha (Municipality of Knezha)**

#### **The role of local/regional administration for community development and implementation of project/initiatives, funded by national and EU grants**

A very efficient organisation has been established within Knezha municipal administration for carrying out the Municipal development plan for the period 2014-2020, regarding the planning, implementation, monitoring and control and attracting funding under the EU and other grant programmes. During the last 7 years, more than 50 municipal projects were carried out, funded by the EU Operational Programmes and Rural Development Programme.

The most significant of these projects are in the field of water supply, sewage and road infrastructure. In addition, several schools on the territory of the municipality have been renovated, introducing energy efficiency measures. A number of social project have also been initiated, related to the provision of the community social patronage service, integrated social services to children and parents from disadvantaged groups, etc.

## 2. FINAL SELECTION OF THE INTERFACE FRAGILE COMMUNITIES IN BULGARIA – THE SELECTION PROCESS AND ITS RESULTS

This chapter of the Report presents the two stages of the final selection procedure, as it was implemented in Bulgaria, as well as the final list of fragile communities to take part in the project. Ten fragile communities were pre-selected by the INTERFACE partner in Bulgaria – Tora Consult Ltd., all located in the NUTS 2 North-West Region (NWR) in Bulgaria. Eurostat data indicate that NWR has persistently been the most underdeveloped NUTS 2 region in EU-28, with acute negative trends in terms of demography, economic development and social conditions. The indicators used in the pre-selection process used statistical information, supplied by the National Statistical Institute in Bulgaria and were, as follows: rate of population decrease (2001-2011); employment rate (2011); share of population with tertiary and upper secondary education (2011).

The provisional list of communities and the values of the above indicators for each of them are given in the table below.

**Table 3. Provisionally selected INTERFACE fragile communities in Bulgaria**

Fragile communities					Indicators				
No	District	Municipality	Fragile community	Type	Population 2001	Population 2011	Population decrease 2001-2011 (%)	Employment rate 2011 (%)	Share of population with tertiary and upper secondary education 2011 (%)
1	Vratsa	Miziya	Miziya	urban	4 069	3 252	-20.1	41.5	59.5
2	Vratsa	Miziya	Sofronievo	rural	1 956	1 561	-20.2	30.1	51.2
3	Vratsa	Roman	Roman	urban	3 553	2 838	-20.1	42.2	61.8
4	Vratsa	Roman	Dolna Beshovitsa	rural	352	266	-24.4	19.4	56.8
5	Vratsa	Hayredin	Hayredin	rural	2 125	1 547	-27.2	26.5	54.0
6	Vratsa	Hayredin	Mihaylovo	rural	1 378	1 048	-23.9	18.4	43.3
7	Montana	Berkovitsa	Berkovitsa	urban	15 533	13 463	-13.3	37.6	57.3
8	Montana	Berkovitsa	Barziya	rural	1 798	1 513	-15.9	40.7	55.8
9	Pleven	Knezha	Knezha	urban	12 808	10 500	-18.0	34.7	56.2
10	Pleven	Knezha	Brenitsa	rural	2 383	1 886	-20.9	20.9	49.8
<b>Country's average</b>					<b>7 928 901</b>	<b>7 364 570</b>	<b>-7.1</b>	<b>44.4</b>	<b>63.0</b>

Source: NSI Census data 2001, 2011

## 2.1. Communities’ fragility mitigating factors assessment

From the list above, the three communities in Bulgaria, selected for participation in the INTAERFACE project activities using the assessment methodology, previously developed in the course of implementation of the INTERFACE project are:

- Town of Roman, Municipality of Roman, Vratsa District, North-West Region, urban type of community (total score: 37/50);
- Village of Dolna Beshovitsa, Municipality of Roman, Vratsa District, North-West Region, rural type of community (total score: 35/50);
- Town of Knezha, Municipality of Knezha, Pleven District, North-West Region, urban type of community (total score: 36/50).

The scores under the separate assessment criteria for all provisionally selected fragile communities are given in Annex A. ‘Fragile communities’ mitigating factors assessment grid’ below. These were ascribed based on the publicly available information found in strategic, programming and reporting documents, presenting the situation of all 10 pre-selected fragile communities, as well as on the expertise and experience of the Bulgarian INTERFACE partner’s team in working with these and similar communities. The key factors, which most influenced the selection of the three communities above over the remaining provisionally selected fragile communities include: a) the underutilisation of natural resources’ potentials for the betterment of the communities and, to a lesser extent, b) the strategic location of the community, c) the unused growth potentials in specific economic sectors and d) the supportiveness of local administration to local development initiatives.

## 2.2. Personal characteristics of attitudes assessment survey respondents

A mini-survey was undertaken in the fragile communities, selected for participation in the INTERFACE activities in Bulgaria in order to obtain information from fragile community members and appropriately selected regional organisations with regards to the perceived community problems and ways to address them, incl. through making use of the anticipated project interventions.

A total of nine community members from the selected fragile communities in Bulgaria took part in the mini-survey, whereas the intention of the Bulgarian partner’s team was to have a balanced group of respondents in terms of gender, age and education, representing organisations, whose role is relevant to the project’s objectives. A summary of the personal characteristics of respondents is presented in the table below.

**Table 4. Personal characteristics of INTERFACE attitudes assessment survey respondents in Bulgaria**

<i>Fragile community</i>		Roman	Dolna Beshovitsa	Knezha	Total
<b>Criterion</b>					
<b>Gender</b>	Male	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	<b>33.3%</b>
	Female	66.7%	66.7%	66.7%	<b>66.7%</b>
<b>Age</b>	20-29	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	<b>0.0%</b>
	30-39	33.3%	33.3%	66.7%	<b>44.4%</b>
	40-49	33.3%	66.7%	0.0%	<b>33.3%</b>
	50-59	33.3%	0.0%	33.3%	<b>22.2%</b>
	60+	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	<b>0.0%</b>
<b>Education</b>	Secondary School	0.0%	100.0%	66.7%	<b>55.6%</b>
	Vocational Education and Training	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	<b>0.0%</b>
	University Level	100.0%	0.0%	33.3%	<b>44.4%</b>
	Post-Graduate	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	<b>0.0%</b>
<b>Affiliation</b>	Local administration	33.3%	66.7%	33.3%	<b>44.4%</b>
	Business organisation	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	<b>33.3%</b>
	Business support organisation	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	<b>0.0%</b>
	Regional development organisation	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	<b>0.0%</b>
	Training organisation	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	<b>11.1%</b>
	Social enterprise	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	<b>11.1%</b>
	Voluntary organisation	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	<b>0.0%</b>
	Civil society organisation	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	<b>0.0%</b>
	Individual community member	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	<b>0.0%</b>

### 2.3. Perceived community problems and ways to address them

This part of the mini-survey reveals the respondents’ awareness of community problematic areas, initiatives which have addressed these problems in the past, respondents’ interest in being involved in such initiatives, as well as the expected community support to activities, aimed at enhancing community members’ potential to responsibly and autonomously employ innovation, creativity, analytical thinking, resourcefulness, leadership and resilience for the betterment of their communities. Based on the distribution of responses, presented in detail in Annex B ‘Fragile community members’ attitudes assessment – summary of responses’, the following trends can be identified:

- Most respondents were not satisfied with the overall situation in their communities and considered the level of pro-activity with regards to issues of community importance to be (rather) low (Questions II.1 & II.2).
- Asked to identify the most problematic areas for their communities (Question II.3), respondents identified most often ‘Human resources’ (89%), followed by ‘Infrastructure facilities’ (78%), ‘Business sector, jobs and labour productivity’ (78%) and ‘Access to financial support’ (56%).
- More than half of the survey respondents were aware of community initiatives, implemented to address any of the problematic areas above, whereas these initiatives were mostly implemented to improve infrastructure facilities and were initiated by the local administration (Questions II.4, II.5, II.6).
- Although only one of the respondents was previously involved in such an initiative, they all expressed their willingness to participate in similar interventions, if they are given the opportunity to do so (Questions II.7 & II.8).
- All of the skills, mentioned in Question II.9 were identified as beneficial for the respondents’ communities, whereas ‘Resourcefulness’, ‘Innovation’ and ‘Resilience’ were more often indicated by respondents than ‘Creativity’, ‘Analytical thinking’ and ‘Leadership’.
- All respondents would be interested in participating in initiatives, directed towards boosting the level of the above skills within their communities, neither of them have already done so however (Questions II.10 & II.11).
- Finally, according to respondents, if undertaken, such an initiative would be likely to receive high interest and support in their communities (Question II.12).

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

The fragile communities’ selection methodology, used in the process of selecting the communities to be included in the INTERFACE project activities in Bulgaria, is based on assessment of quantifiable and non-quantitative criteria, or, in other words, factors which, to some extent, reflect the prevailing “fragility” status of certain regions, but may also suggest regions’ potentials to conditionally mitigate the communities’ “fragility”. Hence, the overall logframe of the INTERFACE fragile communities’ final selection process was carried out with the help of desk research and a small-scale survey and included the following main phases: Stage 1 – Communities’ “fragility” mitigating factors overview and Stage 2 – “Fragile” community members’ attitudes assessment.

The selection approach allowed for the Bulgarian INTERFACE partner – Tora Consult, to use country-specific approach, in order to make best use of the methodology and select the most suitable fragile communities for the project. The described approach has ensured that the project is focused on communities in Bulgaria, whose members, despite the fact that their “environment” has been deteriorating and has reached a situation characterised as “fragile”, still possess the potential to responsibly and autonomously employ relevant skills and competences for “reversing the trend” and work towards the betterment of their communities.

Employing the above fragile communities’ selection procedure, of the 10 fragile communities, all located in the NUTS 2 North-West Region in Bulgaria, which were provisionally selected as potential participants in the INTERFACE project activities, Tora Consult has selected three communities, namely: town of Roman and village of Dolna Beshovitsa (Vratsa District) and town of Knezha (Pleven District). Compared to the rest of the provisionally selected communities, these communities best satisfied the communities’ fragility mitigating factors assessment conditions, expressed in the pre-defined evaluation criteria. The results of the final selection were reaffirmed by the findings of the mini-survey, carried out by Tora Consult in the three fragile communities, which identified a number of trends and attitudes, which will serve to guide the INTRFACE partnership in the next stage of project implementation, related to selected fragile communities’ competence gap analysis in the fields of innovation, creativity, analytical thinking, resourcefulness, leadership and resilience.

## ANNEXES

### Annex A. Fragile communities’ mitigating factors assessment grid

<i>Partner country:</i>		<i>Bulgaria</i>									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Community No.		Criterion scoring (on a 1-5 scale)									
Criterion											
1.	The community has a strategic location in terms of connectivity and access to big markets and high-quality public services	3	3	4	4	2	2	4	4	4	4
2.	The community has access to high-quality public services and regional infrastructure facilities are favourable for the development of the local/regional economy	2	1	3	2	2	1	3	2	3	2
3.	Although in place, the natural resources’ potentials are not being sufficiently utilised for the betterment of the community	2	2	4	4	2	2	3	3	4	3
4.	The age and educational structure of the human resources in the community are relatively favourable, yet the local economy cannot fully utilise them	3	2	5	2	3	2	4	2	4	3
5.	So far, the grant funding, received by the community has been limited, mainly due to the lack of initiative coming from within the community itself	2	3	2	4	3	4	2	3	2	3
6.	The community has growth potentials in specific economic sectors, e.g. agriculture, tourism, etc., which so far have not been sufficiently utilised	3	4	4	4	4	3	3	2	4	2
7.	The business support infrastructure at local level (if any) does not seem to operate effectively to the benefit of local businesses	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	4
8.	The improvement of the socioeconomic situation in this and similar underdeveloped communities is among the priorities of Development policies at regional and national level	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
9.	The local/regional administration is apt to supporting activities, initiated by third parties or by community members themselves in support of local development	4	2	4	3	4	2	4	3	4	2
10.	The community’s situation is affected by external factors, such as economic crisis, geopolitical situation, etc., with little effort at local level to mitigate their adverse effects	3	2	4	4	3	3	4	2	4	2
<b>Total score:</b>		<b>29</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>29</b>

**List of communities:**

<b>№</b>	<b>Fragile community</b>	<b>Municipality</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Score</b>
1	Miziya	Miziya	Vratsa	urban	29
2	Sofronievo	Miziya	Vratsa	rural	27
<b>3</b>	<b>Roman</b>	<b>Roman</b>	<b>Vratsa</b>	<b>urban</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Dolna Beshovitsa</b>	<b>Roman</b>	<b>Vratsa</b>	<b>rural</b>	<b>35</b>
5	Hayredin	Hayredin	Vratsa	rural	30
6	Mihaylovo	Hayredin	Vratsa	rural	27
7	Berkovitsa	Berkovitsa	Montana	urban	34
8	Barziya	Berkovitsa	Montana	rural	29
<b>9</b>	<b>Knezha</b>	<b>Knezha</b>	<b>Pleven</b>	<b>urban</b>	<b>36</b>
10	Brenitsa	Knezha	Pleven	rural	29

Annex B. Fragile community members’ attitudes assessment – summary of responses

<b>Partner country:</b> Bulgaria									
<b>Community:</b>	<b>Roman</b>			<b>Dolna Beshovitsa</b>			<b>Knezha</b>		
	<i>Respondent 1</i>	<i>Respondent 2</i>	<i>Respondent 3</i>	<i>Respondent 1</i>	<i>Respondent 2</i>	<i>Respondent 3</i>	<i>Respondent 1</i>	<i>Respondent 2</i>	<i>Respondent 3</i>
<b>Survey question:</b>									
<b>SECTION I. PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS</b>									
I.2. Gender	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
I.3. Age	30-39	50-59	40-49	40-49	40-49	30-39	50-59	30-39	30-39
I.4. Education	University level	University level	University level	Secondary School	Secondary School	Secondary School	Secondary School	University level	Secondary School
I.5. Affiliation	Social enterprise	Training organisation	Local administration	Business organisation	Local administration	Local administration	Business organisation	Local administration	Business organisation
<b>SECTION II. COMMUNITY PROBLEMS AND WAYS TO ADDRESS THEM</b>									
II.1. Are you and those around you satisfied with the overall situation in your community?	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
II.2. How would you rate the general level of pro-activity in your community with regards to issues of community importance?	Rather low	Rather high	Rather low	Rather low	Rather low	Rather low	Rather low	Rather low	Low
II.3. Which of the categories below do you consider most problematic for your community? (select all that apply)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Infrastructure facilities</li> <li>▪ Human resources</li> <li>▪ Regional and local development policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Human resources</li> <li>▪ Business sector, jobs and labour productivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Infrastructure facilities</li> <li>▪ Human resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Infrastructure facilities</li> <li>▪ Human resources</li> <li>▪ Business sector, jobs and labour productivity</li> <li>▪ Regional and local development policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Infrastructure facilities</li> <li>▪ Human resources</li> <li>▪ Access to financial support</li> <li>▪ Business sector, jobs and labour productivity</li> <li>▪ Regional and local</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Infrastructure facilities</li> <li>▪ Human resources</li> <li>▪ Access to financial support</li> <li>▪ Business sector, jobs and labour productivity</li> <li>▪ External factors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Infrastructure facilities</li> <li>▪ Human resources</li> <li>▪ Access to financial support</li> <li>▪ Business sector, jobs and labour productivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Human resources</li> <li>▪ Access to financial support</li> <li>▪ Business sector, jobs and labour productivity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Infrastructure facilities</li> <li>▪ Access to financial support</li> <li>▪ Business sector, jobs and labour productivity</li> </ul>

					development policy ▪ External factors				
II.4. Are you aware of any initiative(s), which has been undertaken in your community to address one or more of the problematic fields identified above?	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
II.5. If the answer to the previous question was affirmative, what problematic area(s) did the initiative(s) address?	N/A	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Infrastructure facilities</li> <li>▪ Human resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Infrastructure facilities</li> <li>▪ Regional and local development policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Infrastructure facilities</li> <li>▪ Human resources</li> <li>▪ Access to financial support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Infrastructure facilities</li> <li>▪ Human resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access to financial support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access to financial support</li> <li>▪ Regional and local development policy</li> </ul>	N/A
II.6. Was the action(s) initiated by actors from within the specific region or outside it and who was/were the main actor/s? (select all that apply)	N/A	N/A	<u>Internal:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Local administration</li> </ul> <u>External:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Regional/ National Government</li> </ul>	<u>Internal:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Local administration</li> </ul>	<u>Internal:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Local administration</li> </ul> <u>External:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Business organisation</li> </ul>	<u>Internal:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Local administration</li> <li>▪ Business organisation</li> </ul>	<u>External:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Regional/ National Government</li> </ul>	<u>Internal:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Local administration</li> </ul>	N/A
II.7. Have you already been involved in any such initiative?	No	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
II.8. If you had the opportunity to participate in an initiative, which would potentially serve to address one or more of the problematic fields	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

identified above, would you take it?									
II.9. Raising the potential for responsibly and autonomously employing which of the following skills do you believe would be beneficial for your community? (select all that apply)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Innovation</li> <li>▪ Resourcefulness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Analytical thinking</li> <li>▪ Resourcefulness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Innovation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Resourcefulness</li> <li>▪ Resilience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Resilience</li> <li>▪ Leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Resourcefulness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Creativity</li> <li>▪ Analytical thinking</li> <li>▪ Resourcefulness</li> <li>▪ Resilience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Innovation</li> <li>▪ Resourcefulness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Innovation</li> <li>▪ Creativity</li> <li>▪ Resilience</li> </ul>
II.10. Would you or anyone you know be interested in actively participating in an initiative, directed towards boosting the level of the above skills within your community?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
II.11. Have any initiatives of such type already been implemented in your community?	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
II.12. If such an initiative is undertaken in the future, how would you rate the interest and support it is likely to receive in your community?	High	High	High	Rather high	Rather high	Rather high	High	High	Very high

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