



Old traditions, new destinies

in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district

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Contents

Peter Michalko, Ambassador, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova 2	Support for local entrepreneurship initiatives and SME development 16	Infrastructure refurbishment and inter-municipal cooperation 60
Dafina Gercheva, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in the Republic of Moldova 3	With EU support, a family from ATU Gagauzia produces honey- and-nuts 18	Old school, new hat 62
Support for Agriculture and Rural Development in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district (SARD) Programme 4	A treasure out of waste: green energy in Comrat. 22	A country road that's like a road in a city, in ATU Gagauzia 66
Programme Overview 5	Caskets full of European dreams: a family business 26	A string of cleaner villages 70
Enhanced dialogue and community Empowerment 8	The only 'Made in Moldova' tractors are assembled in Tomai 30	Festival of Lights reaches remote Gagauzia village 74
Dorin Andros, State Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment 10	'Iron' dreams with European money 34	With tap water, we are now in heaven ~ 78
Irina Vlah, Bashkan of ATU Gagauzia: 'Together with the EU we have changed people's mentality' ... 11	Supported by the EU, the first development centre for children was opened in Ceadir-Lunga town 38	Reducing river flooding in Vulcanesti ... 82
Kiril Tatarli, Head of the Taraclia District Council 13	With EU support, for the first time ever a classical music concert took place in a sheep yard 42	SARD LEADER for community driven rural development initiatives 86
Tatiana Turcan, Mayor of Vinogradovca village, Taraclia District ... 14	Traditional Clothes sewn by modern machines 44	The Ostrich menagerie: a business supported by European money 88
Ilia Chioseva, mayor of Gaidar village, Ceadir-Lunga district 15	In "the biggest village in Europe": the first tourist complex with Gagauzian specific from Republic of Moldova was launched 48	Vegetables and spices: business recipes 92
	The secret of a successful career is to be found in Syslab Centre in Comrat 52	A dream embroidered with the help of European investment 96
	Bryndza cheese 'as in the south': made with love and European support - 56	The pattern of a carpet: how does the future look? 100
		In Musaitu village, a local market was established with the support of the EU 104





Peter Michalko, Ambassador, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Moldova

The European Union, through the Support for Agriculture and Rural Development in the Autonomous Territorial Unit (ATU) of Gagauzia and Taraclia District (SARD) Programme, aimed to facilitate the social-economic cohesion and improve the confidence among the regions of the Republic of Moldova.

The SARD Programme has been the widest and the most complex development initiative targeting the ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia District. Its interventions have focused on a multidimensional approach and have contributed to developing small business, creating new

jobs, rehabilitating social infrastructure, building local authorities' capacities, and mobilizing communities for ensuring favorable and attractive life conditions in their localities.

We, at the EU Delegation to Moldova, believe that the pathway towards a prosperous and inclusive Moldova starts at the local level. We are fully confident that the successful projects carried out within the SARD Programme will be sustainable in time and the assistance provided by the European Union for this region will contribute to the overall development of the Republic of Moldova.



Dafina Gercheva, UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in the Republic of Moldova

The SARD Programme is a flagship and strategic initiative implemented in close cooperation with national, regional and local authorities from the ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district. The programme has brought a change on the ground through expanding access to social services, promoting inclusive and green growth and sustainable agriculture, enhancing social cohesion and reducing inequalities.

The SARD programme has heavily invested in strengthening the capacity of regional and local public authorities for human centered and inclusive policy development and implementation. Concerted efforts were also made towards building a vibrant civil society,

which is actively engaged in shaping up the presence and the future of the communities. The chosen pathways have led to the achievement of the desired impactful outcomes such as: creation of decent employment; provision of new business opportunities, strengthen social fabric and social cohesion, increased trust in public institutions, establishment of a culture of tolerance, acceptance and collaboration, etc. Building peaceful, just and prosperous societies is a long journey and UNDP stands ready to continue supporting national counterparts for fulfilling the aspirations of the people of Moldova, advancing national priorities and achieving the SDGs.

Support for Agriculture and Rural Development in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district (SARD) Programme

Duration: 2016–2018 Budget: 6.5 Million euros

Project Summary:

The SARD Programme has contributed to boosting the collaboration between local authorities, as well as among the regional organizations in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district, so as to foster the socio-economic development of the region and of the Republic of Moldova as a whole. The main programme components, implemented in a synergic and comprehensive way, contributed to the development of the agro-food sector, the promotion of local entrepreneurship, the creation of jobs, and increasing the income of the population living in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district.

The SARD Programme was funded by the EU and implemented by UNDP.

Objectives:

- Enhanced dialogue and community empowerment;
- Support for local entrepreneurship initiatives and development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs);
- Infrastructure refurbishment and promotion of inter-municipal cooperation;
- Implementation of the LEADER and community-led local development (CLLD) approach.



Programme Overview

Three years ago we at SARD Programme embarked on a journey to revitalize ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district. This was a challenge, considering the socio-economic realities of the region.

We committed to an ambitious goal: to help the people of ATU Gagauzia, Taraclia district and neighbouring communities to benefit from improved development opportunities in their localities.

The question we sought to answer was: how to meet people's aspirations in a short period of time and how to ensure



the sustainability of the investments made?

Given this complex set of challenges, we started by involving people in 41 different

communities, from ordinary citizens to business representatives and mayors, in the development of socio-economic development strategies. Women and men's

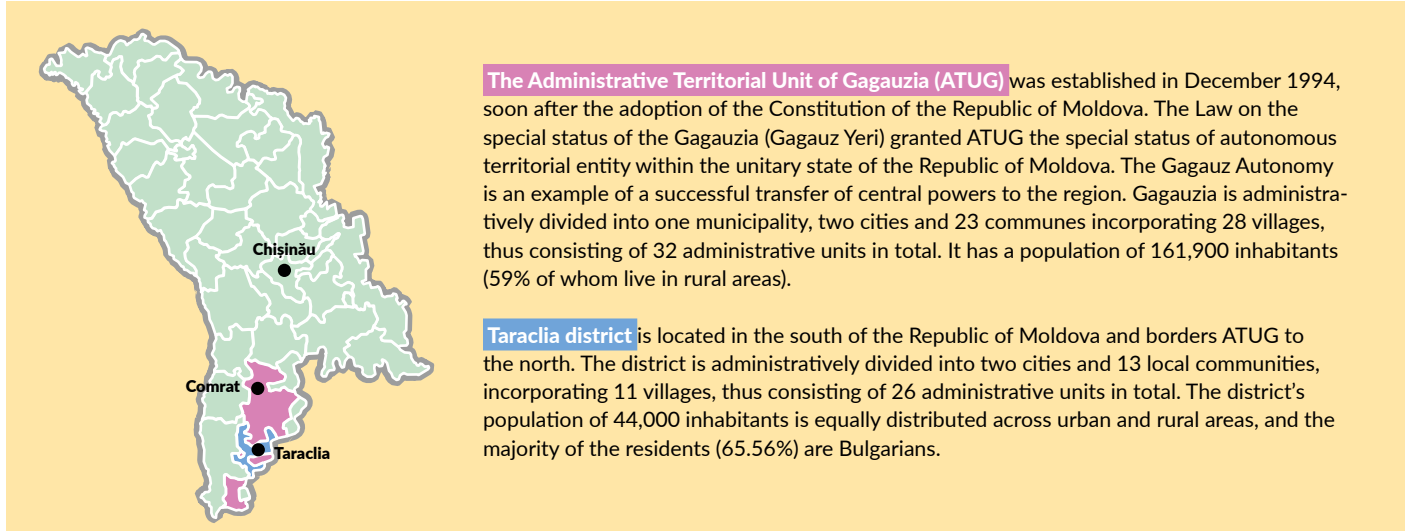




voices were heard and their opinion were taken into consideration when selecting the funding priorities: for example, deciding which was more important to ensure community development. Initially it was planned to implement 20 small scale infrastructure projects, however

local and regional authorities while preparing their local development strategies understood immediately the high impact they could achieve. With their commitment and financial contribution, 41 small scale infrastructure projects were implemented in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district.

“This intervention has awakened Gagauzia” was what ATU Gagauzia Bashkan Irina Vlah said during one public event. The Chair of Taraclia district, Kiril Tatarli told us: “This Programme has been a much-needed breath of fresh air for all of us and we feel that the south



of the country can breathe easier now”. At the beginning of our cooperation in the region, the private and public sector and civil society **were isolated one from one another**. Therefore, we proposed an innovative solution – the LEADER approach, piloted for the first time in the country.

All stakeholders, from 44 localities, were mobilized in eight Local Action Groups (LAGs), which benefited from necessary support to be able to draft their own development strategies. In addition, LAGs were assisted to identify social, economic, cultural and environmental projects by accessing EU and other development partners' funds. The most feasible 105 project proposals have already been implemented in 2018 with EU support through the SARD Programme.

The empowered LAGs, via the LEADER

approach, will play a leading role in the local development process, ensuring the sustainability of the projects implemented jointly by the EU, UNDP and other development partners in the region. Of utmost importance is also the fact that our

experience will be useful for replicating the LEADER approach in the country. In addition, all 30 entrepreneurs who were selected based on an open contest result – start-ups or those with a lot of experience benefited from mentorship for business development and promotion. With our support, at least 180 jobs have been created in the region, and new products and services have appeared on local markets. On top of this, 298 women and men from Gagauzia benefited from qualified support for starting and developing a business or for employing people. Seeing that people get involved, harness the experience that they obtained until now and come up with new resources and projects, the development of the localities is ensured.



Enhanced dialogue and community Empowerment



Local public authorities (LPAs) from 41 localities have received the support for capacity building, community mobilization and institutional development.



Targeted support was provided in writing project proposals and identification of potential financial sources: LPAs in the targeted region managed to substantially upgrade their fundraising capacities.



31 local socio-economic development strategies for 2017-2022 were developed and 10 strategies were updated. The Socio-Economic Development Strategy of ATU Gagauzia was developed and the one for Taraclia district was updated.



308 public servants from targeted communities learned from best LPA and IMC experiences through nine local study visits.





Dorin Andros,
State Secretary,
Ministry of
Agriculture,
Regional
Development and
Environment

The SARD Programme was an initiative that had tangible results for both the target region and the Republic of Moldova.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Regional Development and Environment (MARDE), as a key partner of the Programme, has expressed its gratitude for the fruitful partnership and results achieved following the implementation of the Programme. This Programme contributed to intensification of the socio-economic development of ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district by encouraging local partnership, creating new businesses and job opportunities for the population, and supporting rural projects in order to implement the rural development strategy. The guidelines and methodology from implementing the LEADER initiative, which were developed under the SARD Programme, contribute to implementation of the European LEADER methodology at the national level by the MARDE. The experience of the SARD Programme represents a model for national non-governmental organizations piloting this methodology in other regions of the country, thus contributing to the socio-economic development of rural areas. SARD is an active participant in, and one of

the initiators of, the 'LEADER Coordination Committee' activity, under the auspices of MARDE. Knowledge products regarding the LEADER approach piloting and methodological guidelines for adaption of LEADER/ CLLD approach were prepared and shared with all national and regional actors. The services and living conditions at the local level were improved by modernizing the capacities of local public administrations and supporting infrastructure projects. Guidance and technical assistance provided by the SARD Programme at each stage, as well as by study visits to European countries and inter-community visits for central, regional and local authorities, helped to tap into the local potential and resources and develop projects for rural development, development of agriculture and rural tourism that are important sectors for a sustainable economic development. The EU support for the rural development of the Republic of Moldova is very important, both in the form of financial support for local initiatives and the transfer of experience existing in the EU countries. Implementation of the 2014-2020 National Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy is our priority and through the SARD Programme, two important objectives were achieved in the ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district: increasing the competitiveness of the agri-food sector and improving the living and working standards in rural areas. All these results achieved in the region will be replicated at the national level so that rural communities are able to prosper and develop economically and socially.

Irina Vlah, Bashkan of ATU Gagauzia: 'Together with the EU we have changed people's mentality'

The SARD Programme was revolutionary in regard to Gagauz autonomy. It was a very extensive, important programme supporting local authorities and implementing very important infrastructure projects in each community of the autonomy. The most important thing is that together with the EU we have changed our people's mentality and their attitude towards the life of their communities. We



have managed to create initiative groups and convince our people that they must think about, define and highlight important aspects of their locality, the priorities for their locality and things that must be done step by step so that life in these communities is active. This programme

helped representatives of various communities identify common problems for several neighboring villages, develop projects and become involved in decision making. In addition, the programme enabled new business entities to start and to





maintain their businesses. I am certain that the management of local communities and inhabitants of the communities themselves will positively assess the implementation of the SARD Programme.

The beginning of the implementation of a new project supporting local authorities (funded by the EU as well) shows, first of all, the EU's confidence in the leadership and inhabitants of Gagauzia. If the SARD Programme had faced problems, I don't think that EU would come with a new programme. If in a short period the EU allocate a new programme, only for ATU Gagauzia, that means they trust us.

The EU and UNDP, through the SARD

Programme, allowed us significant breakthrough in the development of Gagauz autonomy. Today's Gagauzia provides an excellent example of successful development for other regions of the Republic of

Moldova. We will continue to use the experience and results achieved within the SARD Programme to improve the lives of the people in Gagauzia and throughout the Republic of Moldova.



Kiril Tatarli, Head of the Taraclia District Council

When the SARD Programme started three years ago, residents of 41 mayoralties in the south of Moldova could not have imagined what this programme, which began its work along four directions at once, would bring them. Today we can see that the amount of grants provided in the area is half the annual budget of the Taraclia district. 2017–2022 strategies for socio-economic development were developed for 15 mayoralties of Taraclia district within the first component, with the support of consulting companies and individual consultants. This gave small settlements in Taraclia district with a high concentration of Bulgarian people a unique opportunity to develop such important documents. The communities were jointly mobilized to identify their local priorities and plan their activities for the next five years. This resulted in more empowered local communities that were able to actively participate in the decision-making process and development of their localities. Local businesses received support under the second component. Start-ups and existing companies obtained grants to create new jobs and investments in new manufacturing technologies and services.



Five companies in Taraclia district obtained EU funding. Such business ideas as making national-style clothes, metal ware, manufacturing of dairy products following Bulgarian traditions, organic mushroom cultivation and Ile-de-France sheep breeding were implemented. Under the third component 15 small-scale infrastructure projects were implemented in Taraclia district with the help of the EU supplemented by the community and the regional authorities. Kindergartens in Taraclia town, Cealic, Balabanu, Albota de Sus and Novoselovca villages were repaired. Part of the roof of the House of Culture in Cairaclia village, the sports gym of Musaitu village

secondary school, and the House of Culture in Valea Perjei were repaired as well. Street lighting in Aluatu and Albota de Jos villages was modernized, sewage treatment facilities were constructed in Budai and water supply works were carried out in Ciumai village. Special-purpose machinery for garbage removal was purchased for Tvardita town. Public drinking water distribution stations were constructed in Corten and Salchia villages. Seven inter-municipal cooperation projects were implemented as well. Under institutional projects, all 15 mayoralties of the district obtained grants to upgrade their physical facilities. Taraclia district was among those where the first steps were taken to introduce the LEADER pilot programme in the Republic of Moldova, through the SARD Programme. The executed work, and numerous meetings and study visits to the EU countries resulted in the creation of the eight local development partnerships covering rural areas of Taraclia district and neighbouring communities. Local action groups (LAGs) developed their own strategic action plans for the next five years in the economic, social and cultural areas. With all this in mind, today we can definitely say that the SARD Programme significantly contributed to the social and economic development of Taraclia district. For our region this Programme arrived like an oxygen mask: now we can breathe easier.

Tatiana Turcan, Mayor of Vinogradovca village, Taraclia District

The SARD Programme, implemented in Gagauzia and in Taraclia district, enabled communities to take advantage of opportunities for the local development of their villages. Under this programme, communities developed social and economic development strategies for 2017–2022, which will allow them to participate in other projects, because one of the conditions for participation is having such a plan. Institutional grants for all mayoralties allowed them to improve their infrastructure and raise the quality of the services provided to the population.

Some businesses were able to start their activities thanks to the support provided to initiatives on local entrepreneurship and SME development (e.g. a tailor's shop for folk costumes and other garments). Infrastructure projects aimed at reconstruction and repairs of social objects were implemented with the financial support of the programme (e.g. construction of water supply networks, renovation of kindergartens, reconstruction and renovation of a treatment facilities in a



kindergarten). New inter-community municipal enterprises were also created and equipment was purchased in order to collect and dispose of household waste. Applying the LEADER approach made it possible to use territorial partnerships at the local level in order to address issues related to the development of rural communities. LAGs were established under the same approach, which developed a strategic development plan for the territory covered by the LAG. The plan included actions meant to develop the economic, social, cultural and environmental

activities of the micro-region. Projects that were implemented included 'Honey Kaleidoscope', 'Living Memory in the Ancestors' Temple', and 'Rural Market'. In addition, the premises of Albasadorf children's camp were improved, and folk costumes were sewn for cultural events inside and outside the LAG. I have tried to highlight above the investments made at a local level under the SARD Programme, but I don't think that investment is what mattered most. The greatest success is that people from our communities learned to identify the needs and problems related

to local development, but also to prioritize them, to perceive the landscape of primary issues. During the information, thematic seminars and trainings for various groups of population, people succeeded to communicate with each other; make joint decisions; develop goals, tasks, and action plans; and fill out project proposals. Thus, they became actors in local development planning. We look forward to further cooperation in the area of rural development, because all towns have their own potential and opportunities for development.

Ilia Chiosea, mayor of Gaidar village, Ceadir- Lunga district

We are glad to see our village changing with the improvement of infrastructure, but the most important thing is that the European Union, through the SARD Programme, managed to mobilize us, inspire us for new projects, make us believe in our own forces and act together to improve our living conditions at home.



Support for local entrepreneurship initiatives and SME development



30 startups and experienced entrepreneurs from ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district received EU grants worth from EUR 8,600 to 18,500 each and consultancy/coaching support within the SARD Programme to set up or develop their businesses.



2 Cross-sectoral Business associations were established in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district, and support was provided: these were the Association of Business People of Gagauzia – NEXT, and the Taraclia Business Association.



180 new jobs were created with EU assistance within SARD Programme in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district.



191 persons benefited from training and individual consultancy in the Comrat Syslab Centre, of whom 180 were successfully employed.

107 persons were trained in entrepreneurship in the Comrat Syslab Centre, of whom 33 benefited from EU grants worth up to 2,450 Euro each and have launched their own business.





With EU support, a family from ATU Gagauzia produces honey-and-nuts

A couple from southern of Moldova has spent a life working abroad but decided to return home. To earn their living, the Civirjic family started a bee farm, and the European Union's support enabled them to produce honey-and-nuts.



Three years ago, Gheorghe and Tatiana Civirjic decided to return home to Cazaclia village in Ceadir-Lunga district to stay close to their children and friends. They could not find a decent job, so they decided to start a business: they bought a small bee farm from a friend. Now they own 100 bee-hives. Moldova produces about 4,000 tons of honey. Companies buy this 'liquid gold' and sell it abroad. Over 85% of Moldovan honey is exported to EU countries. Thanks to the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement between the EU and the Republic of Moldova, the number of bee farmers and the production of honey have been growing lately. In Cazaclia alone there are over 30 bee farms.

Unlike other bee-keepers in the region, who sell their honey production wholesale to companies, the Civirjic family chose a different approach. They registered their own company and developed a retail channel for honey in Moldova. They positioned their brand based on an unusual package. They sell their 'liquid gold' in amphora-shaped glass bottles, decorated with canvas. Other producers across the country have followed suit.

The company is selling the products under the brand 'Sweet Honey', to emphasize that the southern honey is sweeter compared to honey collected in other regions of the country. Meteorologists register 230 sunny days on average in the south, whilst other regions of Moldova register only about 200.

“
We hope that our honey
with walnuts will become
emblematic of the Republic of
Moldova.
”





To increase their sales, the Civirjic family launched production of honey-based sweets: honey with dried fruit and nuts – walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, dry apricots and figs.

“Nuts, dry fruits and honey are very healthy on their own, but if you combine these ingredients, you get a delicious, nutritious, fantastic product to strengthen your immune system,” notes Tatiana Civirjic, the founder of the family business.

With the help of the EU grant and their own contribution, Civirjic family purchased a mini production line to bottle honey, which allows them to produce over 1,000 bottles of honey per day, as well as a honey-creamer. “This will allow us to make honey paste, creamed honey and other sweets in the future,” explains Tatiana Civirjic.

With the European grant they also bought a trailer with a platform, customized and assembled to their special requirements, which will be used to transport the beehives.

Thus, the EU support enabled this local business to multiply its production and create jobs. “We hope that our honey with walnuts will become emblematic of the Republic of Moldova and will sooner or later reach EU customers as well,” Tatiana Civirjic explains.



“

Nuts, dry fruits and honey are very healthy on their own, but if you combine these ingredients, you get a delicious and nutritious product.

”





A treasure out of waste: green energy in Comrat.

When autumn comes, the plains, the hills, the air and the land are engulfed in smoke. People of Comrat are cleaning up. But why throw away leftovers if they can be repurposed? Grigorii Kissa is 26 years old and besides being a beneficiary of EU grants, he is also one of the few promoters of renewable energy in Gagauz-Yeri autonomy. He couldn't get shake off the idea of setting up a business to process agricultural waste. Even more so when he saw that farmers were burning their plant litter

after the harvesting season, destroying the humus layer that the soil needs and at the same time polluting the environment. So Grigorii promised himself that he would turn two bad things into something good: he would use the branches and the plant litter to produce biomass. All he needed to do so was money – too much money for a young man from Comrat. The equipment for processing and turning waste into biomass costs about 18,420 Euro, so the chances of Grigorii



“ Without this programme, I wouldn't have had my own business. ”



I received a grant from the EU. I added my own savings to be able to buy high-quality equipment.

Kissa being able to set up his own business were very small. Grigorii explains: *"I received a grant from the EU. I added my own savings to be able to buy high-quality equipment. After much searching I chose a company from Lithuania and I didn't fail. I was consulted by experts from Lithuania by phone and they gave me all the information I needed. Without this programme, I wouldn't have had my own business."*

Grigorii used the money received through the SARD Programme to buy advanced equipment for waste processing, which allows him to use any type of raw material – beginning with grapewood branches, branches and straw, and ending with cut sunflowers. During the autumn, there is a lot of post-harvest waste. Grigorii has a lot of work to do and his satisfaction is twofold because farmers from the region are ready to give him the plant litter for free and everyone has stopped burning it. After receiving the grant from the EU this young entrepreneur from Comrat continuously consulted with the economists employed by the SARD Programme. The most useful piece of advice Grigorii received related to the quality certifications for the briquettes produced.

Golden mean

The post-harvest waste processing enterprise in Comrat has four full-time employees, and five seasonal workers. Ivan Gaidarji is one of the employees, but everyone calls him Ivan Nicolaevici, as is the habit in Gagauz Autonomy. Until recently, he was working abroad. Because the Gagauzian language resembles Turkish, he chose to work in Turkey. Now he is sure he can earn enough money at home. He explains: *"I have two children. I love seeing them every evening and to be with them, not via Skype or phone. Here I am respected, I get*



paid for my work and I work fixed hours. If I was given the choice to leave, I would refuse."

This is the first winter in which Grigorii Kissa will sell the briquettes he produces on the market. He's not nervous at all. So far, the young man has tried to find the optimal solution for the plant litter to deliver enough heat and be cost-effective.

After six months of testing he has found the "golden mean" – a combination of sunflowers stalks and tree branches. Grigorii believes that his business will become profitable because people will begin to understand that they pay a lot of money for gas or imported coal but at the same time they trample over the energy, wasting a priceless fortune.





Caskets full of European dreams: a family business

Anyone who travels in Moldova's south, to ATU Gagauzia, knows that people there know how to cast a spell on guests: their kind of placinta literally melts in your mouth, brynza is smooth and buttery in taste, and aromatic wines call out to be drunk.

If you visit Ceadir-Lunga, you will find beautiful boxes lined with silk or velvet: for here you can see one of the few workshops in Moldova producing exclusive hand-made jewelry boxes.

Anastasia Chiosea is about 30 years old. Having majored in tourism and hospitality services, she spent 11 years working in this sphere, with passion for this job and for people, as confirmed by various diplomas she has collected through these years of experience. Should she wish to, she could easily run her own travel agency. But two years ago, her younger sister Natalia wanted to find a small box for jewelry and cosmetics. Because her husband and brother are fond of wood-carving and have a wood shop of their own, it took just one step to implement her idea: both Anastasia and Natalia had their first wooden box executed here according to their own design. Ever since, their hearts have been set on these wooden boxes.



It takes two weeks to execute one box. And it takes a few long days for the successive layers of paint to dry properly.



Anastasia explains enthusiastically: “It takes two weeks to execute one box. And it takes a few long days for the successive layers of paint to dry properly. It requires patience and determination, and each model is exclusive. We are planning to produce customized boxes, on which

we will be able to print any photo the customer requests.” Through the grapevine, people learnt about Anastasia and Natalia’s boxes and thus they gained their first customers, including from the capital city. That was when the sisters realized that just like soulless wood can



be transformed into something fabulous, their passion could develop into desired business. Finding the necessary financial resources for the procurement of fine wood-processing equipment, however, was a challenge. When the EU SARD Programme was launched, they saw their chance. Anastasia applied to the call for proposals and won a grant that helped them buy several wood-working, cutting and polishing tools. Anastasia explains: “In addition to the financial support to procure equipment, we were trained on how to develop our business in the correct way, especially in terms of creating three new jobs. For instance, in November we attended a training on marketing. They taught us how to procure the best equipment. We appealed to the experts’ help several times a week, because everything was new to me and sometimes I didn’t know how to proceed.”

“It requires patience and dedication, and each model is exclusive.”

Today, each family member knows their role in this business. Anastasia’s brother and husband work wood and pre-model boxes. Their mother paints them applying the *découpage* technique. Anastasia mounts handles, and her younger sister does the promotion, including via social networks. Each one is an indispensable element in their family business mechanism. Precious as they are, individually and all together, the family of boxes is growing fabulously.

Anastasia’s dreams and plans go far beyond this. She wishes to see her products abroad one day and hopes that *Made in Ceadir-Lunga* jewelry boxes will reach EU countries. In this way, she says, she will be able – indirectly – to refund some of the support offered to her family by European taxpayers. She has already proved that she is able to make jewelry boxes full of European dreams.





The only 'Made in Moldova' tractors are assembled in Tomai

The only local enterprise that assembles 'Made in Moldova' tractors is located in the southern part of the country, in Tomai village, ATU Gagauzia.

Ivan Nedov is the head of the company and admits that he has been passionate about agricultural machinery since childhood: "At that time, being allowed to drive one of the tractors in the kolkhoz was the best reward." Now, Ivan is proud to have successfully assembled dozens of tractors from scratch, some of them being sold abroad:

"We can assemble up to 30 large tractors in one year, and twice as many small ones. We are the only ones dealing with this type of agricultural equipment".

In time, Ivan became better and better, but he was doing everything by himself: "I was relying just on myself. You know, I have never expected for someone to help me without getting anything back. When I was first encouraged to apply, I hesitated. I said then: so many made promises, but did nothing. So I just gave up. Luckily, my

I have created 20 decent jobs for my peers.



colleagues insisted that I do not miss this opportunity."

He applied for a grant under the SARD Programme. Ivan was skeptical, and the success of his proposal took him by surprise.

Ivan received a grant from the EU to buy modern equipment that will boost his business. He has created 20 decent jobs for his peers. If he worked at full capacity, he could hire 10 more persons, from day labourers to high-skilled specialists. Many



of his employees are above the retirement age, like Vladimir Topciu, who explains: "I did a bit of everything in my life. I was a driver, I worked in construction, and now I am a farm technician. There are very few people in the Republic of Moldova who can assemble tractors. We work with the entire country. We go to Drochia, Ocnita, Calarasi! I am very satisfied. Before I used to work abroad, now I am working at home. I finally feel good about myself." Realizing the need to invest in the professional development of his staff,

Ivan Nedov established a partnership with the Crafts School in Ceadir-Lunga. For the second year, he trains school students to repair, assemble and check the technical equipment. Most skilled students have the chance to get a job at the company. "This work is difficult, it's not like taking a spade and working the land. Our trainees work with us from 9 am to 1 pm. Year-two students already know how to assemble tractors," says Ivan, proudly.



We can assemble up to 30 large tractors in one year, and twice as many small ones. We are the only ones dealing with this type of agricultural equipment.





'Iron' dreams with European money

Very soon, beautiful iron objects will appear on the streets of Comrat – dozens of elegant benches made of wrought iron and wood. It is not difficult to find out who the artist is: Serghei Ormanji is one of the few entrepreneurs in the south of the country who has modern equipment for iron processing – more exactly, a machine for “embroidering” iron, which is able to shape any figure.

The procurement of this machine was possible thanks to a grant provided under the SARD Programme.

Serghei Ormanji is 28 years old and inherited the profession of blacksmith from his family. As a child, he worked together with his father, processing iron at high temperatures; his father was one of the best-known blacksmiths in the southern part of the country. It was Serghei's dream to continue his father's business, and his dream came true – first, thanks to the education he got at the Management Faculty, where he found out how to manage a business according to modern standards. Even if working with iron seems to be mainly technical work, in reality this vocation needs a lot of passion: *“It is important for the iron ‘to listen to you’. Being a blacksmith is a vocation full of imagination, because no piece of work gets repeated. Every item you*



The grant from the European Union allowed the entrepreneur from Ceadir-Lunga not only upgrading his business, but also covering a wider range of products.





make is different. After a number of years of experience, I can tell you that not all are able to cope with this work”, says the entrepreneur.

After finishing his studies, Serghei decided to launch his own business, independently from that of his father. The young man

says that here and there he has exceeded his master’s work, especially after buying modern plasma-based cutting equipment with money provided by the EU.

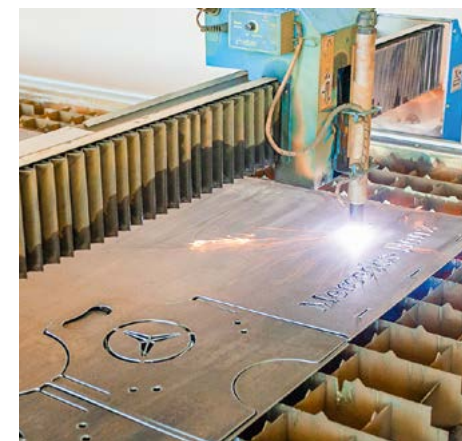
What is the secret? The image the client has in mind is first executed using design software. The codified information is sent

“
Blacksmith’s a vocation full of
imagination, because no piece of
work gets repeated.
”

to a device with an electric limb which, after receiving the order, immediately starts ‘embroidering’ in iron. The grant from the EU allowed the entrepreneur from Ceadir-Lunga not only to upgrade his business, but also to produce a wider range of products.

Today, three people in the company launched by Serghei Ormanji – all of them young people: a programmer, accountant and a maser who is good in everything. Serghei acknowledges that without the financial support provided by the EU, he would not have been able to buy the equipment for iron processing, and the idea of having his own business would have remained just a dream.

To ensure the money provided by the European taxpayers was invested wisely, the SARD Programme experts have consulted Serghei almost daily over the last year. It is possible to embroider iron dreams with a lot of hard work and European support.



Supported by the EU, the first development centre for children was opened in Ceadir-Lunga town

After working for 40 years as a teacher at a kindergarten, Natalia Petis now manages her own successful business. Natalia, from Ceadir-Lunga, has opened the first development and recreation centre for children in her home town. Until two months ago, there was no indoor playground for children in Ceadir-Lunga, a town with a population of about 23,000. There was no place where children could spend their leisure time, especially during the cold time of the year. "I have been thinking about this for a long time, but just did not dare to put it into practice because I had no money to invest," says Natalia. Her idea materialized only last year, after she won a grant from the European Union. "How lucky I was that this grant came as a 'package' along with the help of a several specialists in entrepreneurship, who have been guiding us at each stage," she explained.



Helped by these mentors, Natalia built her business-plan, purchased the necessary toys and equipment, arranged playgrounds by thematic zones and launched a promotion campaign. The Smeshariki Center, with its modular labyrinth, a ball pit, fairy-tale houses and numerous educational toys has already become so popular that it cannot house all the children who want to visit it, aged one to seven. Very often the centre is booked as an venue to host children's birthdays.

"By opening this centre, I feel I have become more energetic, more confident of my own forces and more optimistic about the future. I have no time to waste. We are trying to build here a world of fairy tales for our children, where they will want to come back for more knowledge, positive emotions and new friends," says the Director of the Centre, enthusiastically, that no one dares to interrupt her. Her happiness is shared by the three employees of the centre, who now have a



By opening this centre, I feel as if I have become more energetic, more confident of my own forces and more optimistic about the future.



permanent job in their home town, as well as by the local parents. "We come here every day we have off, because our little girl likes this centre. She learns many new things while playing and can socialize with other children. And we have no worries about her, because we know we have left her in a safe place," says Andrei Caraman, father of a two-year-old girl. Natalia's plans, however, go far beyond this. She already works from the early



“
We want to stimulate children’s
interests towards science and
the arts, but we want to do it
as a game, so they learn step
by step but solidly.
”

hours of the morning to try to organ-
ize development courses for the early
education of children, as well as learning
English, and undertaking plastic arts and
decoration courses. “We want to stimu-
late children’s interests towards science
and the arts, but we want to do it as a
game, so they learn step by step but solid-
ly,” Natalia explains.
She also told us that starting this busi-
ness was a challenge, and that she
accepted this challenge thanks to her

family: they support and encourage her.
“My daughters and three grandchildren
really loved my business idea. They give
me the necessary courage to move for-
ward. The business world implies much
effort, dedication and involvement, but
it also gives you satisfaction in return,”
says Natalia.
She believes anyone can be a success-
ful entrepreneur: what you need is a
good idea and a strong will to fulfil your
dream. At the same time, she thinks

that EU grants are contributing to a
more active participation of women
in the labour market. Why? “Because
the EU-funded projects respond to
the main challenges faced by women.
I think some women do not start their
own business not because they have
no money to invest, but because they
do not trust their own abilities. Some
women are afraid of a possible failure
or the bureaucracy. The EU, through its
programmes, encourages women and

supports them to overcome these ob-
stacles,” Natalia explains.
Although she has a modest experience
in business, Natalia learned some useful
lessons: “To be successful in business, you
need to be careful about the customer’s
wishes and respond promptly to them.
Generally, it’s good to build friendship
and trust with your customers. Equally
important is to promote the business and
have a long-term strategic plan for its
development.”





With EU support, for the first time ever a classical music concert took place in a sheep yard

The music of Bach and Mozart was played at the Sabia family's sheep yard in Corten village, Taraclia district.

The concert was performed by Moldova's National Youth Orchestra. An hour of live music, fresh cheese, and a pastoral sunset, accompanied by 560 sheep, of which 61 are a French breed, imported for the first time to the Republic of Moldova thanks to a grant offered by the EU. All these were enjoyed by the villagers of Corten and neighbouring localities,

who attended the the performance one evening in August 2018. The event was supported by the EU under the SARD Programme. The organizers' aim was to use the concert to promote small entrepreneurs in rural areas. The Sabia family is just one example that shows that rural areas may be favourable for developing businesses, and that the EU supports beneficial initiatives of people in Moldova, regardless of the area they reside in.



“Our dream has come true and this makes us even more confident for developing the business further on and for conquering new sale markets.”

Efimia Sabia, the owner of the sheep farm, is one of 30 entrepreneurs in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district who benefited from grants and technical assistance from the EU through the SARD Programme for startups and business development. With the support of a grant, the Sabia family was able to buy 61 Ile de France sheep – a new breed for the Republic of Moldova. They also created four new jobs. “We were so much impressed with the Sabia family,

who are growing nicely their child and their business here, at home. Although they work hard, they are so enthusiastic, hospitable, and full of life. Breeding sheep is one of the oldest vocation in Moldova, nevertheless there were left a few sheep owners in the country. That's why we wanted to come here and promote small entrepreneurs from rural areas through the Sabia family's example,” said Andriano Marian, the leader of Moldova's National Youth Orchestra.

“We are glad that the EU trusted our business idea and helped us to get specialized in producing meat so as to be able to provide Moldovan consumers with quality products. The French breed Ile de France is one of the most well-known breeds of sheep in Europe, valued for its meat. Our dream has come true and this makes us even more confident about developing the business further and about conquering new sales markets,” Efimia Sabia explains.



Traditional Clothes sewn by modern machines

Ludmila Bisir, from Taraclia town, dreamt of becoming the owner of a tailor's shop since she was a child. But life had other plans for her. After graduation she chose to wear the 'robe' of civil servant. Her dream came true a few years later, however, when she wasn't expecting it: shortly after she realized she was going to become a mother for the third time. The news gave her new impetus. At 35 years old, she decided to start up a business – her own tailor's shop.

From the very beginning Ludmila was aware that she would not be able to compete with big companies in the south of the country, where, due to the cheap labour force, many companies with foreign capital have opened up tailoring factories. However, Ludmila received support from the EU to buy two embroidery machines that allow her to sew the most sophisticated embroidery. This equipment has given Ludmila the chance to be one of the few female



I can offer the customers cloth with national embroidery, specific to Bulgarian, Gagauz, Ukrainian and other ethnicities.



entrepreneurs in Taraclia who can offer customers the finest embroidery. "I can offer the customers cloth with national embroidery, specific to Bulgarian, Gagauz, Ukrainian and other ethnicities". This is the strength of my business and I think it is successful. Today, I am not short of orders – the Culture Halls in the region, mayors' offices or national folklore groups are among my regular clients', Ludmila says proudly.



When she applied under the SARD Programme, Ludmila knew that she wanted two modern machineries for producing sophisticated embroidery. That's because she didn't dream only of sewing clothes, she also wanted to bring to the world, through her works, the specificity of this place. Today, Ludmila has five employees – actually, five and a half, as she

half-jokingly states, because last year in December Mihail was born – Ludmila's younger son. Since January she has been working alongside other employees. Among them is Ana Useva, who is 35 years old. Ana worked abroad before she got a job in the tailor's shop in Taraclia. If somebody proposed again to her to go abroad, she would think twice:

“At first sight, you make more money, but when you realise that you are a long way from home, you cannot see your family and children for months, the money you make is equal to zero. There should be more tailoring ateliers like this in our town, where the value is placed on your work, the salary is given on time and you don't work overtime.” Besides the non-reimbursable financial support Ludmila Bisir received, she benefited from a year of consultation by a specialist in business management, so that she could avoid financial losses and mistakes that can be expensive for a business. When asked how much time she would have needed to raise money to buy the modern equipment necessary for the tailor's shop, Ludmila laughed – because it was an unreal amount of money for an entrepreneur from Taraclia (a town with 12,000 inhabitants, most of whom work abroad) to obtain.

“The equipment gave Ludmila the chance to be one of the few female entrepreneurs in Taraclia who can offer customers the finest embroidery.”





In “the biggest village in Europe”: the first tourist complex with Gagauzian specific from Republic of Moldova was launched

Ana Statova has recently become a local celebrity in the Gagauzia region of Moldova. News about the ethno-tourist complex “Gagauz Sofrasi” built in the village of Congaz has traveled fast. Ambitiously named “The biggest village in Europe”, Congaz is proud of the complex reproduces the setting and charm of traditional peasant houses: stoves with heated beds, small wooden windows, small wall-rugs and traditional carpets made of natural wool.

During construction, Ana insisted on using ecological materials. The four houses are made of clay and straw walls, with reed roofs that make them warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Ana wanted the world to know more about the beauty of local Gagauz traditions: *“I was always passionate about history and dreamed about helping preserve local traditions and culture, like the dowry I inherited from my mother, and the many traditional Gagauzian*



I was always passionate about history and dreamed about helping preserve local traditions and culture.



food recipes I collected over the years,” she says.

Traditional Gagauz dishes, like shorpa, a spicy lamp soup, or bulgur cooked as pilaf in lamb stock with tomatoes, carrots, onions and red peppers, have been a hit with local and international tourists.

“Tourism is a high potential niche, which was not yet explored in our region. With the assistance provided by the European Union we succeeded to





A business is like weaving a carpet: to get a beautiful image, you always have to count the fabric wefts and order them carefully one by one.



create not only a perfect place for local people and foreigners to rest, but also an innovative tourist attraction for the ATU Gagauzia. The visitors may get here the flavor of our region's traditions and history, may enjoy the traditional Gagauzian dishes and the best wines in the area, having also the opportunity to participate in gastronomic workshops," mentions the owner of the complex, Ana Statova. Now this complex also became a perfect working place for 14 villagers. To develop and promote this complex, the owner benefited from mentoring and a grant from the European Union, through the SARD Programme.

Besides four traditional peasants' houses with walls made of clay and roofs made of reed, the ethno-tourist complex "Gagauz Sofrasi" hosts a museum, cellar, national style restaurant with terrace, as well as a mini-hotel and an events' hall.

Ana has further plans to keep growing. *"A business is like weaving a carpet: to get a beautiful image, you always have to count the fabric wefts and order them carefully one by one,"* she says.

Ana's success is also a good omen, an inspiration for many other women from the region. *"It is never too late to follow your dreams and it is always possible to change your life in a better way,"* she says with confidence.





The secret of a successful career is to be found in Syslab Centre in Comrat

One out of 10 young people in the Republic of Moldova is unemployed, as Olga Dudoglo, a 25-years-old woman from Comrat, explains: "This is what official statistics show. In reality, I think their number is much higher. Even the young people who have found a job feel unemployed in a way, as they have to work for a ridiculously low salary and in precarious conditions. I wanted to overcome this and so with the assistance of the Syslab Centre in Comrat, financed by the EU, I succeeded in finding a decent job at home."

In summer 2016, Olga was looking for a job. With a master's degree in civil law and nine months of experience within a law company in Comrat, she thought she would easily find a job in her native town. But a number of months of fruitless searching followed. "I was ready to pack my things and leave for work abroad, as half of my faculty colleagues did. But I just could not leave my father and grandfather alone, especially taking into account that



they needed me. I was lucky to hear at that time on the radio that the Syslab Centre in Comrat, financed by the EU, provides free-of-charge assistance with obtaining a job", Olga told us. She came to the Centre with big hopes and things changed very quickly. "In those four weeks of training, I rediscovered myself: I acquired more confidence in my own abilities, I developed my communication skills and team work abilities. The practical lessons were of great use to me, giving me the possibility to exercise presentation techniques during interviews with employers. Thus, by the end of the training course, I knew exactly what I wanted and what I had to do to get the job I was after. I was ready to conquer Everest," Olga explains, smiling. In November 2016, with the assistance of the Syslab Centre, she took a job in a notary office in Comrat. "I have a decent salary, good working conditions and professional



I was lucky to hear at that time on the radio that the Syslab Centre in Comrat, financed by the EU, provides free-of-charge assistance with obtaining a job.





perspectives. But most important, I like what I do, I have found the niche for self-achievement. And this is a big success, taking into account the fact that women, especially young graduates, face more difficulties in finding a job than men.” Olga’s observations are supported by the data of the National Bureau of Statistics, which show that pronounced gender differences exist in the labour market. The employment rate is lower among women, even though they have a

higher training level than men. Moreover, women receive worse remuneration than to men. Olga Dudoglo says that in addition to boosting her chances of finding a job, the Syslab Centre has provided her the possibility to network with people and to grow professionally. “Nine of the 10 colleagues in my group found a job. All of us are a part of the Syslab Alumni Network, a community of friends, where we exchange employment information

and announcements, and we help each other.” The Syslab Career Development Centre was launched in Comrat in April 2015 to train and help (free of charge) unemployed people, skilled graduates and returned migrants to get a job or to launch and promote a business. Starting in 2016, the Syslab Centre in Comrat has been financed by the EU within the SARD Programme, implemented by UNDP.

Alexandru Pusca has opened a workshop for artistic wood processing in Comrat.

For Alexandru Pusca from Comrat the Syslab Centre meant a chance to start a business at home. After benefiting from training and individual consultancy, he won a grant, which allowed him to open a workshop for artistic wood processing. By the end of 2016, Alexandru had assembled a wooden turning machine and found the necessary design software.



“Without the assistance of the EU and the Syslab Centre, I would not have had the chance to open the workshop.”



He uses his imagination to create icons, toys, and décor items from wood. He already has a list of clients. The items that are most in demand are the wooden icons made like by the hand of a gem. Only several months have passed since he launched his business, but Alexandru has already succeeded in creating five new jobs: “I always wanted a business which would provide me with financial independence. Without the assistance of the EU and the Syslab Centre, I would not have had the chance to open the workshop.” Alexandru considers that every business implies a lot of work and intellectual investment, but the reward matches the effort undertaken.





Bryndza cheese 'as in the south': made with love and European support

Evghenii Tanov, 34 years old, is the owner of a cheese-making enterprise located in the south of the country, in Taraclia town. He is one of the beneficiaries of the SARD Programme.

He started his business a year ago. He recognizes he did it mostly out of curiosity. He bought an abandoned building on the edge of town with his life savings. In May 2017 he began to renovate the building and one year later, in April 2018, he prepared the first batch of cheese. He calls it 'as in the

south', half-jokingly, half-seriously. This is because it is made according to the traditions specific to this area – the cheese has a softer and less salty consistency than the kind in the north of the country. Each day, Evghenii's mini-factory can process between two and three tons of goat and sheep milk, which he buys from 17 households in Taraclia. Evghenii has been interested in manufacturing cheese according to international standards for a long time. What does this involve? First,

milk pasteurization. To buy new pasteurization equipment, Evghenii needed funds that a simple farmer could not afford. A lifeline was offered by the EU, which provided him with a grant to purchase modern pasteurization equipment. He received training and specialized consultations on purchasing the equipment. "Our cheese is 100% natural. I buy milk from local people and I am sure they feed the goats and sheep only with good quality forage. I visited several farms abroad and I saw how such a factory works in Bulgaria, so I know how good quality cheese is made," Evghenii explains. Evghenii told us that in the near future he intends to receive his milk supply from households that work with a milking machine because a good cheese can only be made from good milk. On the one hand, this will facilitate other people's work, and, on the other hand, it will make the

whole process much cleaner and safer for the end-consumers.

Evghenii has not yet begun to sell his cheese in local shops. Only people from his inner circle enjoy its taste. Before the cheese is distributed in shops, it must be ripened in an appropriately equipped refrigerating chamber. In addition to the financial support from the EU, like other SARD Programme beneficiaries, Evghenii was assisted by specialists for one year to ensure his enterprise



Each day, Evghenii's mini-factory can process between two and three tons of goat and sheep milk, which he buys from 17 households in Taraclia.





will remain sustainable and profitable. Currently, six employees work at Evghenii's mini cheese factory in Taraclia. Serghei Liutkanov, aged 43, is one of them. He has done everything over the years – he tended sheep, worked in construction, was a freight mover, and has also earned a crust abroad – a common reality for the Gagauz autonomy. In recent years, however, he decided to come back home, and the enterprise set up by Evghenii helped him to see his dream come true. “Currently I have some stability and I have the opportunity to support my family. I worked outside the country – in the Russian Federation – but there I was not in my element. I am against going abroad, I prefer to earn my living at home”, Sergei says. Evghenii's plans don't end here... He has benefited from several visits outside the country under the SARD Programme. In Bulgaria, for example, he was impressed by modern farms, where goats and sheep milk all the year round. As he says, there is no such farm in the Republic of Moldova. And he also has a dream... to unite milk producers from the south of the country into an association. He came up with this idea after he visited the Czech Republic and saw the benefits enjoyed by farmers from there. Evghenii Tanov finds that if farmers are late to associate, they not only lose the chance to get more advantageous contracts, including on the foreign market, but also limit their ability to access external funds for agricultural projects.



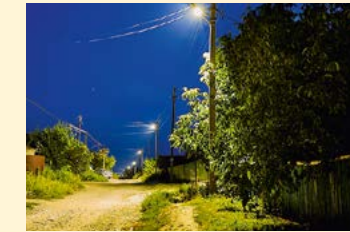
“
I am against going abroad,
I prefer to earn my living at
home.”



Infrastructure refurbishment and inter-municipal cooperation



More than
27,500 people
from **10**
communities
have got
access to safe
sources of
water.



Over **22,210 residents of the villages** of Congazcicul de Sus, Congaz, Aluatu, Albota de Jos and Dezghingea feel safer due to the street lighting systems installed

41 **projects have been implemented** to renovate local roads, schools, kindergartens, sports facilities, cultural and social centres, street lighting, waste management, and water supply and sanitation systems.



51 **localities were involved** so that together they could dispose of the waste; through joint efforts they developed seven intermunicipal waste management services.

Some **38,816 people** can use the roads and access ways renovated with EU support in Cioc-Maidan, Cazaclia, Baurci, Ferapontievca, Tomai villages and Comrat town.



Over **12,730 children** in Cealic, Balabanu, Budai, Albota de Sus, Besalma, Avdarma villages and Taraclia town now attend renovated kindergartens.

4315 **pupils benefit** from better education conditions due to the renovation of the schools in Besghioz, Avdarma and Cotovscoe villages.



Local and regional authorities contributed over **MDL 47 million** to support the infrastructure and inter-community cooperation projects.





Old school, new hat

Olea is in the ninth grade – her last year in Besghioz village high school. She wears a light white blouse and a dark-coloured mini skirt. The adolescent admits that she is dressed unusually lightly. During the autumn and winter it can be very difficult for her to match her warm clothes, which she must wear to avoid freezing due to the cold. But until recently the problem was not only the cold.

She used to be bothered most by the constant heavy odour of mold in her school. Olea explains: *“We were always joking about the ceiling that absorbed water like a sponge. We were looking at it, waiting for the drops to fall on our school books any second.”*

In the classroom, among books and rain

During the rainy season or at the end of the winter, when the snow was melting off the roof, the walls started to get damp. The story had been the same for years: along the hall on the third floor there were buckets under the cracks on the ceiling from which the water dripped; the walls were covered in condensation and they turned mouldy; the air was so bad it was impossible to breathe; during the lessons pupils used

to wear coats and hats – sometimes even gloves. Until recently, 250 children in Besghioz village, in Comrat district, went to school in these conditions. This year, the roof of the school was replaced and the land around the school was developed. The pupils were able to take off their coats. This change was possible due to the support provided by the EU under the SARD Programme, implemented by UNDP.

The roof – the weak link

“Children don’t wrap themselves in layers of clothes any more. Of course, it’s warmer here than in many of their houses,” says Ecaterina Bratan, the Deputy Director of the high school. She explains: *“At the same time, the gas consumption has stayed at the same level and we have saved at least 50% on heating the classrooms.”*

The school building in Besghioz was put into use 45 years ago. From the beginning, the roof was designed to be plane and this has always been the Achilles heel – the weak link that caused problems for the management. Every year they painted it, they whitewashed it, they mended it where it was possible, but no funds were allocated for major repairs.

Nicolai Gotisan, the village’s mayor, has worked as a teacher most of his life. he remembers that after the 1990s all the teachers collected money and built a sloping slate roof, which did its job for several years.



Children don’t wrap themselves in layers of clothes any more. Of course, it’s warmer here than in many of their houses.



Without the help of SARD there was a real risk of losing what we had.

“After the renovation the school is like a giant thermos”

“To repair the roof we need much more money than we would need to paint the walls or make some small repairs here and there from our own resources. We needed specialists with experience. We couldn’t repair the roof like we did in the old times, guided by our imagination. There are modern technologies and materials nowadays. The local budget couldn’t cover such expenses. We knew we needed a professional

approach and when the help from the European Union came, we said this is our chance,’ explains Mayor Nicolai Gotisan. With the help of the EU supplemented by the community and the regional authorities, the old roof was replaced and a new one was built over the portions of the building that had had previously had no roof. The sports hall, the assembly hall, as well as the cafeteria now have a roof with thermal insulation. The land around the high school was landscaped and the access ways to the institution were paved. “After the renovation the school is like a giant thermos – cool during the summer and warm during the winter”, the mayor explains, with pride. Now he is speaking with a smile on his face, but his heart receives a pang when he remembers how the water leaked down the walls of the kitchen, assembly hall and sports hall: the walls were always repaired by the book, but the roof didn’t do its job. The lockers and the cloakrooms were useless as pupils preferred to keep their clothes on in order to withstand the cold.

Transparency has become a tradition

Mayor Gotisan says that due to the European projects transparency has become a tradition in management issues, and not only as regards the way the money is spent, but also regarding the arguments for choosing one project over another. The SARD Programme seemed



to be tailor-made just for the school, as the lack of a functional roof could have compromised all of the previous efforts to renovate the school. Nevertheless, the decision regarding which project to undertake are made after public consultations conducted in the community, which this year were held according to other principles: workers from kindergartens, schools, the house of culture or representatives of all the non-governmental organisations were invited to come up with proposals and suggestions. People spoke about building sidewalks from the centre of the

settlement to the suburbs and about repairing the roads. Five years ago the roof of the school was not the number-one priority issue because the community had no access to water. Now the water is not an issue any more, also thanks to the European funds.

The make-up and the hat: efficient and professional

The local government was glad to have benefitted from a unique detail under this project. Mayor Nicolai Gotisan concludes: “We, as the local government, were not just

exempted from a big headache, but in this way we ensured that the quality of works was in line with the European standards as SARD didn’t offer just money and works, but also expertise and consultancy. Thus, SARD helped us to bring to a successful close eight years of ongoing hard work. Every year we used to build or repair something. Without the help of SARD there was a real risk of losing what we had. We had practically everything except for the make-up and the hat – that is, the roof, which we couldn’t afford because we didn’t have the money, but which was indispensable.”





A country road that's like a road in a city, in ATU Gagauzia

Sewn by people's gardens, with a sidewalk for a border, including flowers, the road looks like a hem for a celebration dress. *"It used to be like the mother-in-law got angry, who broke the plates, and made her daughter-in-law walk on them"*, says Elena Minciuna, resident of Cioc-Maidan village, about the new main road in their settlement. The heart of the village is on Lenin Street, where the most important buildings of the village

are located: the school, the kindergarten, the post office, the health clinic, the Mayor's office. But the street has undergone a radical transformation from May to October 2018: the old asphalt was removed entirely, new sidewalk borders were laid, and in some areas rainwater drainage systems were installed, as well as a new pavement. A wide pavement of over one metre, accessible to everyone, including



The one-kilometre road segment is being constructed now and will look like a true European road.



people with disabilities, was also built. All of this was done with the help of the EU, supplemented by the community and the regional authorities. The one-kilometre road segment is being constructed now and will look like a true European road.

Accessible for people with disabilities

For Elena Minciuna, who has a daughter with a disability, this street is



very important because it leads to the Rehabilitation Centre for Children with Disabilities. She used to have to negotiate the pits and bumps every day: *"I once walked to the centre through a heavy rain. The road was covered with water, to keep walking was a true nightmare. Now I see that a water drainage system has been built, so hopefully there will be no more problems."*

Whether in summer or winter, people and cars used to share the same road, leading to fears regarding accidents. However, a new modern and accessible pavement has now been built along the road. Elena



Minciuna says that parents with children in wheelchairs were the most eager to benefit from the construction of this sidewalk. *"Imagine how a mother would walk on the old road with a child in the wheelchair and another one in her arms. Now children can even walk home by themselves. Previously, a little boy from the centre, who has a walking impairment, would arrive to school covered in sweat. If there was ice, he had no other option but to walk in the middle of the road. It would scare us to death. When it rained, the boy was splashed by cars. Now the sidewalk is a pleasure for the children."*

The street has bloomed

Walking with a cane, like on a Holy Friday, Svetlana Carainioglu goes to the Post Office: *"You cannot imagine how it looked like during the rainy days: all the sludge from the hill used to pour down to the main street. I didn't even dare to leave the house. Now it is good from anyone and everyone. I can walk unhurriedly on the pavement."* The neighbours living on the main street are happy for another reason. Vera Ghimisli's house is right at the end of the road, which is now very colourful. *"The Gagauzi have a good habit of passing from one to another everything that is beautiful. I saw that the neighbour planted beautiful flowers, and I also planted some, by the street, in front of the fence. I know neighbours who struggled to plant flowers every year, but when the weather was bad,*



people used to walk under the fence and trampled all the flowers. Now the street has bloomed."

Asphalt dating back to 1970

Cioc-Maidan village, like the other 39 settlements of Gagauzia and Taraclia, was first helped to prepare a development strategy and concrete action plan. Among the many problems they faced, the inhabitants prioritized the rehabilitation of the main street, which has not been asphalted since 1970. *"The road rehabilitation had been discussed in public and in the local council for a long time. There have never been such large investments in the history of our village,"* explains the mayor of the village, Gheorghe Cîrboba.

A country road that is like a road in a city.

The inhabitants of Tomai village in Gagauzia are already very proud of their European road, passing through the centre of their village. People can enjoy a road that has been rehabilitated using technology that is unique for Moldovan villages. The 600-metre road connects the main public institutions of the settlement and was completely rehabilitated using vibro-pressed paving slabs. The road has a modern rainwater drainage system, a power-efficient lighting network, new road signs and road markings. In several months only, the 5,000 inhabitants saw their village change for the better. Instead of pits and mud, the road stretches out smooth as glass.

"Neither walking, nor driving through the village was pleasant due to the broken and permanently muddy road. Now we can walk and drive like in a European city. For the people, the new road means getting to the school, Mayor's Office, Culture House, health centre and church in a civilized manner. It is accessible to people with special needs and has improved road safety," says Fiodor Topciu, Mayor of Tomai village. The technology used for the road rehabilitation has a low impact on the environment, the road being more durable than the asphalted road. And the maintenance and repair costs will be much lower over time. If until recently people had to think twice before leaving the



house, now they find any excuse to go somewhere just to have a chance to walk on the well-arranged street. According to Petru Cutarov, inhabitant of Tomai village: *"Here is a small square for cultural and sports activities. The place was rebuilt from scratch. That's what the villagers wanted: to have a place where they could spend time together."* The street rehabilitation works lasted for five months and were carried out with the support of the EU under the SARD Programme.

“
Now we can walk and drive like
in an European city.
”



A string of cleaner villages

On Monday, the waste is collected in Congaz village, on Tuesday it is collected in Chioselia Mare and Frumusica villages, and on Wednesday it is collected in Cotovscoe. On Friday the garbage truck reaches Svetlii ('light') street in Congaz village, leaving behind a string of cleaner villages.

Congaz is not only the largest village in

the Republic of Moldova, but also a community with a unique model of public utility services management: the settlement has an intercommunal public utility enterprise that provides services to eight villages in the region.

Feodora Savor lives in Congaz village. She gathers waste from her garden and house, stores it in large bags, buckets

or containers and puts it outside, near the gate. She knows that employees of Congaz Sulari stop every Monday in front of her gate. The waste disappears, as if by magic.

This company's workers dispose of and store waste, and maintain the roads and the lighting networks. This was possible thanks to the assistance of the EU and the contribution of local and regional public authorities, under the SARD Programme. Feodora explains: "It's fine now, it's clean

both in the yard and in the garden. We used to burn the waste, but now this is no longer allowed and we put the waste in bags, we take it to the gate and the truck takes it to the landfill." For this service, the family of Feodora Savor, as well as over 1,600 households with which the company has a contract, pay MDL 20 a month. "It is not much money for a family. We pay MDL 20 per household, not per one person, like in towns."

With the help of the SARD Programme the company bought two modern vehicles for waste disposal. It also has a multifunctional tractor equipped with a tower ladder, which is useful for the maintenance of street lighting. People observe, making a play on the name of the street: "The Light street has been lit up!"

Cleaner village, lower expenses, more education

Chirichia Stoianova is positive that the newly created waste collection service helps her family save money: "We used to gather the waste and hire a car or a tractor to take it to the landfill. We used to spend about MDL 200 some months. But not all the people living on our street used to collect their waste, and there was dirt and rubbish everywhere. Now it is a genuine pleasure to go for a walk through the village." The streets are indeed cleaner, confirms the head of Congaz Sulari Municipal Enterprise, Ivan Buzadji: "Most of the inhabitants used to dispose of their waste



“We used to burn the waste, but now this is no longer allowed and we put the waste in bags, we take it to the gate and the truck takes it to the landfill.”



in improvised pits or on the roadside. The purpose of this project is to educate people to collect the waste and store it in specially arranged places. That's why we charge a small fee."

Congaz has had a waste collection service for about four years. Previously, the institution had only one truck that did not manage to collect all the waste. Now the two hydraulic pressing garbage trucks are more efficient and the work

of the employees has become easier. "The old vehicle was taller and it was difficult for us to pick up the garbage. Now it's easy to work – it presses the waste by itself, we no longer have to push. In addition, the new truck can accommodate three times more waste than the old one," says Zinaida Ileva, who has been working for the company for four years. In addition, the intercommunity project created four jobs.

Now it is a genuine pleasure to go for a walk through the village.



Many hands make light work

Congaz's neighbouring village, Chioselia Mare, is also brighter. According to the Mayor of the commune, Svetlana Cealicu, inter-communal cooperation is a cost-effective solution which enables the inhabitants of the village to benefit from public services: "Our commune consists of two villages: Chioselia Mare and Frumusica. There are 1,500 inhabitants overall – the commune is too small to set up and maintain a profitable sanitation service. Cooperation with other settlements is truly a saviour for us."

Another project partner, Ion Capita, Mayor of Borceag village, which has over 1,500 inhabitants, says with joy that his village is also part of the inter-community project: "For years we have been trying to persuade people not to throw away waste in forbidden places. Currently, there are about five unauthorized landfills in the



village. Of the 350 households, over 100 have signed contracts with the enterprise. Starting in October the truck will come to pick up the waste and transport it to the landfill. Hopefully we'll educate people not to throw away their waste in public spaces."

Seven settlements neighbouring Congaz also benefit from this inter-community

project. Waste collection trucks travel to Chioselia Mare, Frumusica, Cotovscoe, Borceag, Chioselia Rusa, Dimitrova and Cliet. After the truck leaves, the villages are cleaner and the people are much happier. Through the SARD Programme, over 18,000 inhabitants benefited of improved public service.



Festival of Lights reaches remote Gagauzia village

It is evening in Moldova, around 8 p.m. The sun has hesitated to set: probably, it decided to stick around to enjoy more of the murmur of Dezghingea village. Parents and children walk around holding hands, grandparents watch them, leaning on their canes, and the young ones cannot wait to hang out on the streets. The village's roads are lit up and the future looks bright. Until recently, dark was the word for

describing Dezghingea at night: there was only a small light spot in the centre of the village, but the old lighting system was often non-functional. Women and men were reluctant to walk in the dark. Now, the people of Dezghingea, a village in the Gagauzia region, are no longer afraid to leave their houses in the dark, as 80% of the local streets are well-lit, thanks to a project funded by the EU through the SARD Programme. People say



“
What I do remember is
feeling bad and calling for the
ambulance, and then asking
neighbours to go out to meet
the doctors, to guide them in
the darkness.
”

they feel much safer and their village is full of life until much later in the evening.

People are no longer afraid

Dora Sarbu, 69, has spent most of her life in the village, but cannot remember ever having lighted streets. “What I do remember is feeling bad and calling for the ambulance, and then asking neighbours to go out to meet the doctors, to guide them in the darkness.”





We met Olga and Valeria when they were cycling: “Before, our parents would never allow us to go out late. Now we are not afraid anymore to return home in the evening from our volleyball training.” Parents with small children can also stay out late now. Olga Sirbu explains: “Winters were especially difficult, because it becomes dark much earlier. It was

usually pitch dark when we went to kindergarten for our children. Now, it is like daytime forever. We can’t wait for our first winter with street lighting to come.” Some villagers were no longer willing to wait for a solution and installed their own outdoor lighting systems. Nadejda Nedu and her family keep a few greenhouses with vegetables. To keep the thieves out,

they decided to invest their own resources in outdoor lighting: “We were the first ones to invest, then other neighbours joined in to share the cost. We pay our monthly bills. Now, with this newly installed public street lighting in the village, the local administration will include our street in the grid as well, so we will not pay for the light on our own.”

Building Europe at home

Having worked in Spain for 11 years, the mayor of the village, Piotr Tomaili, came back home with the dream of making Dezghingea a European locality. He is confident that savings on electricity bills during the cold season could cover the extension of the public lighting system. Piotr initiated a “Festivals of Lights” in Dezghingea, like the popular festivals in

Spain: “We put a long table in the middle of the street. Everybody contributed with something – food, wine. It was a good opportunity to socialize with neighbours.”

Four other localities in the south of Moldova (Congazcicul de Sus, Aluatu, Congaz and Albota de Jos) also enjoy street lights, having also benefitted from EU support.



Winters were especially difficult, because it becomes dark much earlier.





With tap water, we are now in heaven

What would you prefer: to buy a barrel of water, sometimes seven times as expensive as tap water, or borrow a few buckets of water from your neighbours? For years this was a dilemma for Etulia village in Vulcanesti district. A deficit of water, and the poor water quality, were a challenge for this small community, situated at the southern boundary of the Republic of Moldova. From the summer of 2018, this dilemma has disappeared forever and tap water has become available in the village thanks to EU assistance provided through the SARD Programme.”

People still can't believe they have running water

Elvira Caranfil, a cook's assistant at the local kindergarten, still can't believe her eyes and still panics: “What if it stops? What if I must again bear in mind how many buckets of water I owe to my neighbours? I still did not pay all my debts back...”

Elvira still stores reserves of water, to be on the safe side. Every evening she diligently fills four aluminum canisters in the kitchen: “They are 40 litres each. We need them for the next day, just in case.”

Elvira remembers that summers were particularly tough. She would carry water every single day in buckets or even big canisters. Now, she just opens the water



tap ... and crosses herself, in gratitude:

“Indeed, we must be in heaven. Water is life,” she says joyfully.

Even when the tap water was not available around the clock, but for only two-three hours a day, Elvira preferred water with airlocks and to pay the bills rather than water mixed with sand, coming from the water well.

Half joking, she says that this might explain the “quarry” of stones in her kidneys and gall bladder. Elvira Caranfil believes that access to safe water is a matter of public health.

More than 27,500 people from ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district benefit from quality water thanks to European Union's assistance.





Three artesian wells were renovated, two water towers were installed, and a waterpipe and a sewerage network were built.

Safe water is about hygiene and health

Access to safe water has thus become a reality for Etulia village, thanks to the support of the EU, offered though the SARD Programme.

Three artesian wells were renovated, two water towers were installed, and a waterpipe and a sewerage network were built. Currently, only the local kindergarten in Etulia is connected to the waste water

treatment plant. Savings from this waste system are reaching about 6,000 MDL per month – this was the amount that in the past was spent just for waste water management, with the help of a special vehicle.

But the access to safe water in Etulia is about much more than money: “What matters is the hygiene and health of children. Children can use the toilets and sinks, which were before just decorative

elements. Winters were the worst and breached all sanitary norms”, remembers Svetlana Zabun, director of the kindergarten. In cold weather, children would not use the outdoor toilets, but would queue up to use improvised toilets made of buckets.

Safe water – both a luxury and a necessity

Svetlana Zabun still can’t believe they made it. After many failures to mobilize resources, she was not hopeful even about the SARD Programme. But her pessimism

proved to be wrong this time. The community was coached on drafting the application, they got a commitment for co-financing from the regional and local authorities and... it was a success.

Thanks to EU assistance, three artesian fountains were rehabilitated

Mayor Grigorii Cula admits that “without the EU support, the local public administration would never be able to afford to offer to its constituents such a luxury – tap water.” As the newly procured

equipment is modern and efficient, it will be cheaper to maintain it. The savings can then be allocated to solving other pending issues in the community.

Thanks to the EU assistance provided through the SARD Programme, 10 communities in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district have now got access to running water.



Reducing river flooding in Vulcanesti

Each heavy rainfall used to bring disaster to the houses and gardens of Vulcanesti town: the Cahul River, which crosses the town, would overflow, pouring water and silt into people's basements and cellars. The river itself was full of silt, having not been cleaned for years and years. From February to September 2018, about three kilometers of the riverbed were deepened and cleaned.

Now the Cahul River looks quieter, and its waters are crystal clear. All these investments were possible with the support of the EU, through the SARD Programme. Ion Presenti, an inhabitant of Vulcanesti,



is used to keeping both high and short rubber boots next to the door of his basement, which would always be flooded with water, starting in December and

continuing till May: "The first wave would come in abundance, one could not enter inside, even in high boots. Then it would drop 20 cm, then 10 cm, yet these rubber boots would always be here on guard at the basement door, day and night. The water would drop until the next rainfall, then it would come back." Year by year, he tirelessly fought the floodwaters. Ion raised his storage shelves to 30 cm above the floor. After 20 years of struggle to keep his home intact, he still can't believe his family's nightmare is over: "July was very rainy. I was away in Chisinau for a week, and when I came back home and went to the cellar, there was no water in it," he explains. Lidia Cavalji had to move away from the river's bank 10 years ago: "It was in 1991, when waters reached our



windows. I cannot remember a year without floods." The house's walls look like maps, covered with the marks of floods, while the door, destroyed by humidity, had to be replaced. After each flood, Lidia had to evacuate water from the basement with a bucket, or she had to ask for help from the emergency services. Now, finally, the basement of her house is dry. "Before, I would take a flashlight and would check every hour whether water was there or not. But now, everything is dry!" she says joyfully. Dimitri Pasmac has cans in his cellar that are almost entirely plastered with dry silt, as in the other 60 households near the Cahul River. He says he is tired of cleaning up after each flood. Luckily, the waters of the last rainfall did not come



inside: "The foundation of the house was destroyed by water, and the walls were damp. We've seen floods that drowned or swept away all our poultry, and a dog of mine drowned after one of the floods."

"The majority of the town's problems are environment-related"

Floods caused annual losses over 2 million MDL, or about 15% of the local budget, as noted by the mayor of Vulcanesti, Victor Petrioglo: "With the riverbed cleaning project we will be able to solve the problem of floods, mud and infections generated by all the waste thrown on the river shore." The waste left on the riverbanks has caused health issues for local



people, but also for animals and birds. "Because of ignorance, unfortunately people jeopardize their own health. People dispose of their waste on the river banks, and yet they feed their animals and birds with grass from the same river shores. The dumping



About three kilometers of the riverbed were deepened and cleaned. Now the Cahul River looks quieter, and its waters are crystal clear.





site brings a lot of rats and we end up with sick animals and dead birds,” explains Ivan Poidolov, Head of the Animal Health and Wellbeing Service of Vulcanesti. The shores were cleaned, the riverbed was deepened and the access roads to the river were paved. The next step will be to establish recreation areas on the shores of the Cahul River.

The fight against mud, downstream

The local administration is now determined to put an end to waste disposal on the shores of the river. With the help of the SARD programme, they plan to establish an inter-municipal waste management system. The service would be available to three other localities near Vulcanesti: Alexandru



Ioan-Cuza, Etulia and Cismichioi villages. “We gathered local people and explained to them the advantages of a centralized waste management system. Tariffs will not be high, and people are highly motivated. We need to bring the neighbouring villages on board, otherwise the driver will bring the disposed waste back to us,” says Victor Petrioglo, mayor of Vulcanesti.

“
Before, I would take a flashlight
and would check every hour
whether water was there or not.
But now, everything is dry!”



SARD LEADER for community driven rural development initiatives



8 The first 8 Local Action Groups (LAGs) from Moldova were established and formalized; they brought together 44 communities from ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district, as well as some villages from Cahul, Cantemir and Basarabasca districts and they implement jointly rural development projects on the basis of LEADER European initiative.

105 projects were implemented by 8 LAGs with EU support, aimed at improving the quality of life, involving people from villages and making use of local resources.



18 projects implemented by LAGs contribute to the protection of cultural heritage



30 projects are being implemented to create better local services.



42 projects contribute to the development of local business

15 projects contribute to the development of rural tourism.

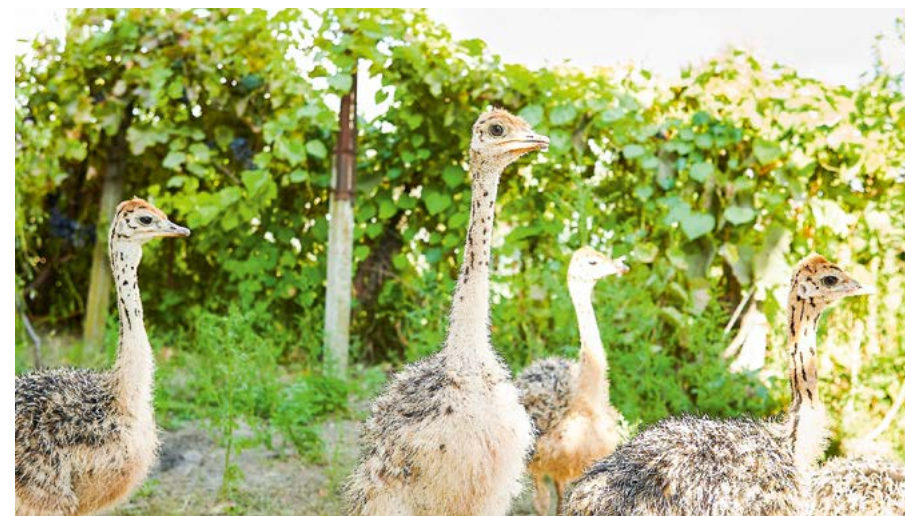




The Ostrich menagerie: a business supported by European money

What would make a tourist who visits Gagauzia travel kilometers of bad road to get almost to the country's southernmost point? A mini-menagerie of ostriches, Dmitrii Ianul from Cismichioi thought. He even got funding from the EU to make this idea come true. The project was carried out through LAG Cismeaua Sudului (the 'southern spring'), which is one of the eight LAGs established in 44 settlements in the area, within the SARD Programme.

Dmitrii is part of the LAG management, which consists of representatives of the local government, the business and of the civil society from the three-member villages: Etulia, Alexandru Ioan Cuza and Cismichioi. After many meetings and discussions, the key issues and priorities of the three communities were identified. Thus, for next five years they aim to jointly promote local economic growth, development of tourism and territorial cohesion in the region.



Exotic and profitable

One of the projects which falls within the LAG's objectives is that of Dmitrii Ianul. Three years ago, he came back to his native village because he wanted to contribute to its development. But where did the idea of an ostrich business come from? "They are exotic and easy to take care of," he explains, simply. When the LAG analyzed how they could tap into the touristic potential, they realized that they needed to provide a strong reason for someone to venture to their village despite the tough journey there. An exotic attraction seemed to be the winning argument. The ostriches were the first thing Dmitrii thought about. Many years ago, he read that this idea could turn into a profitable business: it requires neither special facilities, nor special feed: ostriches grow fast, live long, hardly get sick and they can be sold for a high

price. The meat and eggs are sold, and their feathers and skin are regarded as luxury products.

The LAG agreed to support his idea and EU contributed to the realization of the touristic route in the area. The small ostrich menagerie was laid out in the garden of his parents' home. He removed a grapevine and trees to give some space for the giant birds, which need a lot of open space – at least 40 metres – to run, to be in a good shape and to present a good silhouette to delight visitors. Dmitrii had never seen ostriches, neither had he eaten ostrich meat or eggs, until he bought the six female ostriches. His family and his neighbours still find it hard to believe that the ostrich chicks running around in the backyard are the biggest and fastest birds on Earth. In a year they will weigh over 100 kilograms and they will be taller than most adults.

Local well-being through rural tourism

Dmitrii attended several study visits through SARD. He saw how Romanian and Bulgarian LAGs work and the impact they have had in community development. In Poland, he looked particularly into tourism development as a source of income. He was impressed with the way tourism assets can be developed even where it seems that there's nothing to see or do.

He came back home with ideas that have come true and that are on the LAG's touristic route, to which his village belongs – a route rich in local adventures and experiences: this is the region that the mammoth skeleton, which is now in the Museum of Ethnography of Chisinau, was discovered; an observatory tower was built at the outskirts of the village – the only place in Moldova from where you can see the Dobrogea Mountains in Romania. Here, tourists can take part in a range of

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In a year they will weigh over 100 kilograms and they will be taller than most adults.

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His family and his neighbours still find it hard to believe that the ostrich chicks running around in the backyard are the biggest and fastest birds on Earth.

traditional activities, such as milking sheep and producing cheese at the sheepcote, harvesting and smashing grapes, gathering corn from the field and preparing mamaliga.

The rabbit lover

Another tourist attraction is a household that breeds rabbits. The LAG decided to fund through SARD the Iujnii crolic farm [the 'Southern Rabbit Farm'], which belongs to Alexandru Moldovan. He intended to make new cages for rabbits and to repair the old ones. The purchase of 15 female rabbits was his own contribution. Alexandru is 17 years old and he's in his last year in high school. He doesn't like to speak about himself and said he didn't consider that activity a business, but rather a hobby that can turn into a small business. He bought the first two rabbits four years ago with money that he saved from Christmas and on his birthday. His

mother, Natalia, told us that one day he came home from school with the strong idea that he wanted rabbits, because he was the only one among his classmates who didn't have any. She smiled and remembered what she told him: "But other children don't have sheep as we do, all we need now is rabbits...". Alexandru didn't give up easily and promised that he himself would take care of the rabbits. His parents agreed, convinced that this was just a phase that their son would get over soon. Now, of all his classmates, Alexandru is the only one who still keeps breeding rabbits. He started with two rabbits, but now, he has several dozens. Because he's superstitious, he doesn't count them, but he kept his promise and takes care of them by himself. He feeds them at six in the morning, then he goes to school. He keeps them vaccinated on



time and makes sure that there's enough food for the winter. Additionally, he has developed a network of buyers. Natalia admits: "His excitement disappears when the rabbits die, but he works up his courage when he has big orders. We encourage him to keep up his spirits, even if sometimes our family budget suffers.



Sometimes, my husband tells me: 'Do you even realise how much money the rabbits ate?' — But we don't tell our son anything about it. He gives some pocket money to his younger brother who helps him'. Alexandru explains: "I plan to develop this project, but it depends on what I will decide to do after graduating high school." He believes that whatever happens, his passion for rabbits won't disappear.

Projects for people

Upon learning about the passion of his young fellow countryman, Alexandru, Dmitrii Ianul explains that he is sure that projects like SARD are very necessary, especially in small and remote villages, where there are few jobs and development resources. "Such projects may be the only chance to modernize villages, such as ours, to improve

the business environment, infrastructure and all the other things', Dmitrii states. He is convinced that although a year ago Cismichioi citizens were not so open-minded about EU-funded projects and were skeptical about potential changes, now they look at it differently. They have understood that such projects are there to help them have a better life at home, in their own region.



Vegetables and spices: business recipes

Selling cucumbers and tomatoes by phone: who would have thought of that? Piotr Ratcov is not merely a farmer or entrepreneur, he is more of a pathfinder. He is an informal leader amongst his peers: as soon as he comes up with a new idea, the others copy it. Since he built his greenhouse, one of the few in Congaz, he struggled with various improvised heating solutions to keep it warm during the cold season. He couldn't afford to buy a special boiler until this year. Now he has one thanks to a European grant. Piotr is convinced that his experience will encourage other entrepreneurs to invest in new equipment using European funds. Piotr received European support as an active member of the LAG ECO Düz Yalpugel, to which the Congaz region belongs, along with five other neighbouring communities.

A man of talent, with European money

Dora, Piotr's wife and his main supporter, remembers that the greenhouse was a solution to prevent their kids going somewhere abroad for work. Although both of them had jobs, they couldn't make the ends meet only with their salaries. "Praise the Lord we made it, but I think we also owe



The new boiler will save us from sad events because it is modern, autonomous and cost-efficient.

it to the fact that my husband is a continuous learner and a man of talent", confesses Dora. "I've got the spirit of an experimenter, always seeking new solutions as much as I can," explains Piotr, smiling at the praise of his life partner. On the one hand, he convinced himself of the importance of relevant knowledge, being no dilettante and not trusting in luck, especially in agriculture (he is a trained and experienced agronomist). On the other hand, he knows that knowledge in the absence of tools does not suffice, especially in the absence

of a greenhouse heating system. "It's so hard to run a greenhouse without a safe heating system. The last years showed that a single cold night in April or May can destroy all the crops. The new boiler will save us from sad events because it is modern, autonomous and cost-efficient", explains Piotr. "One winter my husband went to a sanatorium, the kids were little and it was bone splitting cold outside, -26 degrees. I had to get up every two to three hours and put wood on the fire in order to maintain heat in the greenhouse, and in the morning



I had to go to work. We could have lost everything in one night”, Dora remembers. Piotr calls himself lucky because he’s got three lads. They would split the night in four, with each of them being responsible of waking up and heating the greenhouse at a certain hour. Their pains will become history with the new automated boiler. Moreover, pellet heating is much cheaper than heating with wood or with any other type of fuel.

Vegetables sold by phone

The Ratcovs admit that even if their greenhouse was 10 times bigger, they would still not be able to cope with the demand. Though Congaz has the ambition of being the biggest village in Europe, there are only a handful of vegetable

producers with greenhouses. Most buyers of the Ratcov family’s products are villagers from Congaz. They sell their produce both from home and at the local market, where people from other 20 neighbouring communities come. People know them and come knocking at their gates without waiting for market day. *“Our cucumbers are sold only by phone. Many tomatoes are also sold by phone, people call and ask if we have ripe tomatoes and if we do, they come and buy”,* explains Piotr. Due to the fact that up until now they could not ensure a constant amount of output, Piotr prefers to work with individuals, but he also gets orders from the local restaurants, such as the touristic complex Gagauz Sofrasi, owned by Ana Statova, also a beneficiary of the SARD Programme.

Magic ingredients for a business

At the touristic complex Gagauz Sofrasi in Congaz, the food is also prepared with products produced by Elena Smarandi, who is also a beneficiary of European support, through the same LAG. She grows, dries and supplies special plants used in the Gagauzian kitchen. ‘Miurdea’ has existed in Gagauzian homes for generations: it is a magical mixture made of flavoured ingredients like mint, basil, parsley, dill or lovage.

Elena Smarandi has been a social worker for 30 years. She works at the first care facility for kids and youth with special needs in Congaz, which she founded five years ago. *“Together with the kids from the centre we are invited to various sales exhibitions. Three years ago we went to Chisinau and took some Miurdea packages with us: they vanished right away. That’s something I could do with kids, I told myself. Up until then, I used to do them for*

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”

me and give them as a gift to relatives, colleagues. This year, we started to sell them piece by piece, not much and not expensive, 15 lei per package. I don’t even know how much one weighs, I’m measuring with a glass,” she explains, while taking out a fresh bread loaf from the oven. She cuts a slice, oils it and sprinkles on some miurdea. *“This is a delicacy from my childhood”,* she smiles. Each housewife mixes the plants according to her own recipe’s secrecy. When spread on the bread, the delicacy is served as an appetizer, but the spices can also be added to any meal.

“As much as we can carry”

Elena received a grant with which to purchase equipment for packaging the spices, for the kids who attend the centre. When they make more money, they want to be able to heat the greenhouse in the



centre’s garden and improve the packaging process in order to have an attractive package, along with attractive content. Elena embarked on this mission because she wants to pass on to others the secrets of this culinary tradition, and because she wants to teach the kids something useful. *“Tell me, please, what else could we do*

with these kids? The activity matches our possibilities. It is as much as we can carry . We won’t become wealthy, but the kids will learn to cherish work and will have some pocket money,” explains Elena. Daily lives can be transformed through the alchemy of good ideas and the right assistance.





A dream embroidered with the help of European investment

After 15 years of working in a room a few square metres in size, Galina Minceva, a seamstress from Corten village, Taraclia has seen her dream come true. She has a new, spacious tailor's shop equipped with efficient sewing machines – all thanks to a grant provided by the LEADER initiative for rural development, which is being piloted in the Republic of Moldova for the first time as part of the SARD Programme. Through this initiative, the EU aims to support the revival of villages in south of

Moldova by using local resources and creating new businesses and job opportunities for the population. Until recently, Galina Minceva's tailor's shop was her living room: 'I worked, then I had to gather everything, do the vacuum cleaning and prepare the place for dinner or sleeping. Now I get the keys, lock the tailor's shop and go home.' With the help of a grant from the the EU Galina restored two rooms in the old house in the courtyard, bought two modern fur and leather

I became more self-confident. I want to expand my tailor shop. I want to develop the business, I know I can do more.

sewing machines, one iron and one steam generator. Housewife and businesswoman, at her home.

Furs like to be walked and groomed

Without an academic background in the field, but very skillful and creative, Galina Minceva always had a passion for tailoring. She imagined a blouse from a piece of cloth. She cut it out, tacked it, tried it on many times until she liked the outcome. At first, she began with clothes for puppets, but a friend taught her how to work with furs. She whispers as if sharing a secret: *'Furs like to be groomed, walked, to be air-dried, cleaned and not squashed. When someone brings me an old fur, we clean it, leave it in the air, and then make the necessary changes.'* Furs are Galina's passion, but without efficient equipment she did almost all the work manually. Altering a piece of clothing could take more than a month. *"Stitches on the furs*

are large and long, I did all of them manually. I had to stitch with the needle twice in the same hole. It is simple with a sewing machine – you stitch once and that is all. A special sewing machine for fur was the thing I wanted the most. Currently, I have a very good one, it has many functions and can sew through thick layers." With a smile on her lips and joy in her eyes, Galina remembers that her first clothes were for her children. Seeing how beautiful and warm they were, family friends asked her to make clothes for them too. *"I still have my daughter's first*

fur coat. I made it out of my old fur coat. It does not fit her any more, but I keep it, I do not sell it," she smiles.

You can do important things after retirement

Galina Minceva also made socks out of her old fur clothes for her grandchild. Subsequently, she transformed them into fur footwear that could be worn in the courtyard. With the coming of the cold season, Galina gets daily orders for fur footwear. *"Mothers want coloured Ugg boots for*



“
Supporting small entrepreneurs
is a priority. We hope that
migration will stop in this way,
at least partially.
”

children. Footwear for seniors must be as warm and comfortable as possible.”
Surrounded by sewing machines, Galina says she is happy that she can support herself, covering the expenses. “I’m retired, but the old-age pension is not enough for me. Heating is expensive in winter. I like tailoring and it helps me make ends meet,” Galina explains.



New jobs in the village
Sofia Petco lives in the same village as Galina and she is the first seamstress hired at the tailor shop. She had worked for five years at a factory in the Comrat town, but she refused to commute since she has children. She learned to work with

the leather and fur at Galina and says she is lucky she can work in the village, close to her family. ‘Children are small, I work for four hours at the tailor’s shop. I manage to do something at home. I learned a lot and I like this job. It is wonderful. We begin to make a cloth from nothing and finish with a fully-manufactured item.’
Articles made in the Galina’s tailor shop can be admired and bought at fairs and exhibitions. Usually, she makes clothes or repairs old clothing at her clients’ request.

105 projects to foster rural development
Galina Minceva’s tailor shop is one of the 105 projects that will foster rural development in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia district. In addition to the EU grants received, beneficiaries contributed with at least 20% of the project value. At the

same time, they were trained how to apply LEADER initiative successfully. ‘I became more self-confident. I want to expand my tailor shop. Currently I have one more trainee, maybe we will hire her. I want to develop the business, I know I can do more’, Galina Minceva tells with confidence.
It is one of objectives of the rural development projects to which Maria Anghelceva, project manager, also refers: ‘Supporting small entrepreneurs is a priority. We hope that migration will stop in this way, at least partially. It means that inhabitants will choose to stay and work at home and will not go to other countries any more’.





The pattern of a carpet: how does the future look?

The life of an entire community is woven into the pattern of a carpet. The future of people is also woven in between its colours and threads. An endangered tradition can nevertheless contribute to the development of a locality in ATU Gagauzia. The villagers of Gaidar have decided that traditional carpet weaving is the most valuable asset of the community they are a part of. Irina Balcani remembers a time when all the households in the village wove

carpets. More than 50 years have passed since she learned this craft practised for a number of generations in her family: "Our village was well-known for the carpet weaving tradition. Until the '90s people were weaving, selling and earning from this", she remembers. During the Soviet times, when a subsidiary of the carpet plant in Ciadir-Lunga was opened in Gaidar, nobody wove carpets at home anymore. Nobody bought them, people did not have money

“

Our village was well-known for the carpets' weaving tradition. Until the '90s people were weaving, selling and earning from this.

”



and they were not "in fashion" anymore. Irina Balcani donated her weaving machine to the village museum. Several years ago started to teach the young people the craft of weaving traditional carpets within a workshop organized in the community hall in the locality.

A carpet is given life

Valentina Capsomun is in the seventh grade and is one of the few adolescents in Gaidar who knows how to weave a carpet. She has been attending the sewing workshop for the last three years, not because of lack of other things to do, but

because it gives her pleasure and feeds her curiosity, as she explains. Valentina has crafted only carpets of small sizes, used as souvenirs, but she fell in love with the carpet exhibited in the museum, where a girl is picking flowers. Maybe one day an identical carpet will get life on





the weaving machine from the workshop. Valentina explains “We have old carpets at home only in my grandmother’s room; she made them. In the rest of the house we have modern carpets. My grandmother’s weaving machine is not used and is dismantled. She is very proud of the fact that I am learning to weave and she wants to see a carpet made by my hands. I really wish for her to see that day.”

When weaving brings money

The villagers are convinced that the renewed weaving tradition may be an income source. This is one of the priorities of LAG Gagauz Koraflari, which was created last year to cover Gaidar village and another four neighbouring localities. LAGs



Carpets, wines, embroidery, and tourists

Galina Capsomun lives in Gaidar and is one of the members of Gagauz Koraflari LAG, which seeks to become one of the biggest cultural centres in the region, by reinventing traditional activities and developing rural tourism. The representatives of the six villages established a joint strategy, discussed the future of the communities they are part of and came to the conclusion that the best development option would be a common touristic route harnessing local traditions. Galina explains: “Thanks to the project we re-discovered the treasures of our villages, which we were treating as something trivial. Actually, our traditions are like a passport in front of the world; in this way we can become known in the world and earn money. For instance, Gaidar has carpets, Tomai has wines, Baurci has embroidery, Feropontevca has traditional costumes of different ethnical groups.”

Money and European practices inspire the small communities of Gagauzia

Gaidar village obtained a grant from the EU for organizing a carpet museum, extending the festival to promote this tradition and developing a touristic route in the area. The European money was used to buy 25 old carpets from the villagers, which will be part of the museum’s patrimony. A new wooden weaving machine was bought, according to the model of the old ones from the past, as well as all the necessary materials for weaving. The young people from the locality and the guests will be able to weave not only small and decorative items, but complex carpets, like the ones in the museum. The SARD Programme provided the LAG members with an opportunity to undertake a fact-finding visit to Poland so as to see and find out the secrets of rural tourism development. They came back



with development ideas. For instance, they started to arrange traditional houses in each locality in the LAG, so as to be able to accommodate tourists, to serve them with traditional food and to involve them in household works or workshop crafts. The first group of guests tested the

touristic route at the end of this summer. Galina Capsomun explains that this experience was a success, which proves that the idea of initiating the LAGs and developing rural tourism is a real opportunity that can be used by all interested communities.



Thanks to the project we were faced with the situation of discovering the treasures of our villages which we were treating as something trivial.





In Musaitu village, a local market was established with the support of the EU

Every Thursday, people of Musaitu village in Taraclia district, which is populated mostly by Ukrainians ethnics, have a new meeting point, right in the heart of their small community – the agricultural market, which was recently inaugurated. This was possible thanks to EU support, offered in the framework of the SARD Programme. Alexandru Tatu is a senior citizen and a regular trader at the local market. He

notes that the villagers mostly socialize on Memorial Day, at the cemetery, once a year, and weekly at the market: “I make brooms and weave baskets from osier cans and sell them. I can see now people coming with more confidence, as the new setup encourages buyers to stay longer and purchase more”. “Vacuum cleaners are good for cities, but in villages we still use brooms,” he explains.

“
I can see now people coming with more confidence, as the new setup encourages buyers to stay longer and purchase more.
”

Natalia Dimova, Alexandru’s neighbour at the market, sells milk, cheese and cream and seems content: “Europe has finally arrived at our home,” she declares.

No market, but a lot of headaches and complaints
Before, the villagers often complained about the lack of a local market. In its absence, people improvised by setting up booths next to the cultural facility. On sunny days, the products were displayed along the alley around a historical heroes’ monument, as well as on the fence around it, up to the bronze soldier’s nose. On rainy days, everyone would race to the stairs of the Culture House, under the roof, where they would always jostle for space. “Every Thursday we felt like sinking into the ground with shame for the way the village centre looked,” remembers the village’s mayor, Raisa Tasnicenco. Formerly, for 10 years, Raisa held the position of secretary at the Mayor’s Office.





The 'Pearl of the South'

The mayor of Musaitu admits that they wouldn't have managed to build and arrange the local market in such a short time without the EU's support. She thinks that the greatest value of the project was bringing people closer under one umbrella – the LAG.

Musaitu is one of the 44 communities in Gagauzia region and Taraclia district that is piloting the EU's LEADER approach, which aims to boost rural development through citizens' participation. So, Musaitu joined efforts with another 19 neighbouring rural communities, and formed the Zhemchuzhina Yuga LAG (translated as 'the Pearl of the South').

"Our LAG is so diverse and concentrated, as we cover many ethnicities in just 14,000 inhabitants," notes Ruslan Liteanschi, the leader of the group.

140 dreams translated into project ideas

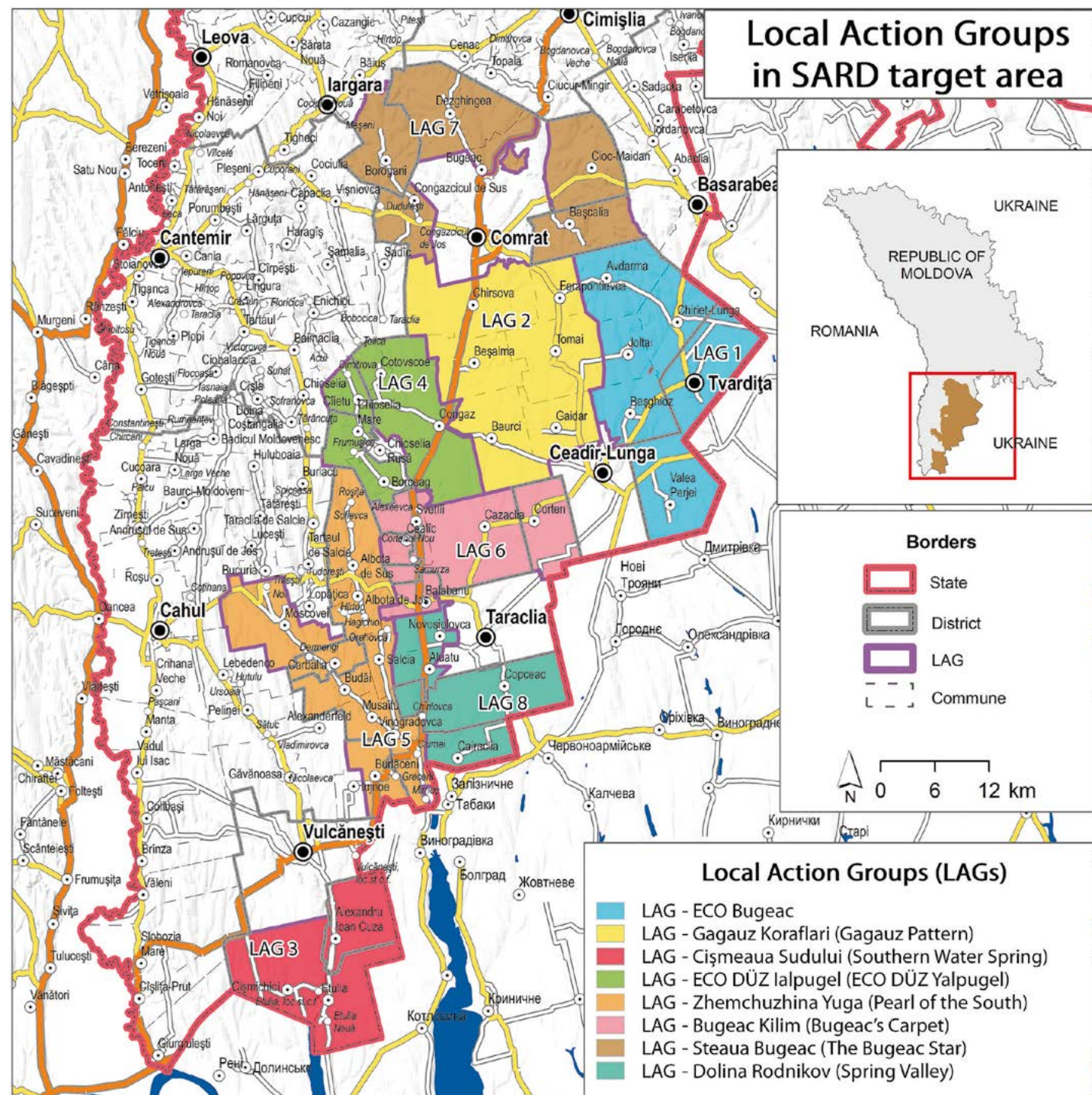
The LAG members visited all communities and discussed with people from all walks of life. Regardless of the language spoken, they realized that they share the same burdens and concerns and they could team up to find a common solution. "In this thick folder we have gathered 140 dreams translated into project ideas of all kinds, from infrastructure to culture," says Ruslan Liteanschi.

"We used to be only neighbours, now we are friends"

During discussions, people agreed that all roads lead to ... Musaitu, as it is in the centre of the LAG. So, everybody agreed that one of the first projects to come to life would be the local market. So, European Union, within SARD Programme, allocated a grant for the construction and arrangement of the local market in Musaitu. The funds were used for the procurement of building materials, the works being carried out by villagers on a voluntary basis. The next step will be to organize market days on week-ends. The municipality has other ambitious plans: to arrange parking places, to install garbage containers and to extend the water pipe to the market site.

The journey of Pearl of the South LAG is just beginning, as mentioned by the the LAG manager, Ruslan Liteanschi, Ruslan Liteanschi: "We were helped to make the first steps, and soon we will be ready to run our first marathon. We realized that only together we are strong enough to improve our livelihoods and enjoy a better life. We used to be only neighbours, now we are friends with the other members of the LAG. We consult and help each other."





The publication “*Old Traditions, New Destinies in ATU Gagauzia and Taraclia District*” presents the main results of the SARD Programme for the 2016–2018 period, illustrated with success stories, facts, figures and pictures.

The SARD Programme was funded by the EU and implemented by UNDP.

More information about the SARD Programme activities can be found at www.sard.md and www.leadermoldova.eu

Author: Natalia Costas, communication specialist, SARD Programme.

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SARD EU Grants beneficiaries



Kardashlic SRL
Dried fruit manufacture



Cissa Grigorii II
Production of biomass briquettes



Nicolagio O. II
Diesel systems diagnostics and repair services of agricultural machinery

Paradislemn SRL
Wooden crates manufacture



LegSud SRL
Growing fresh products in greenhouses



Chiosia Anastasia
Production of wooden dressers-organizers



Balaur Vladimir
Designer's wooden craftwork



Melanj SRL
Bakery products manufacture



Moroi SRL
Ethno-tourist Complex "Gagauz Sofrasi"



Duloglo Victor II
Metal ware manufacture

SC Major-Auto SRL
Dairy production using traditional Bulgarian technologies



Slavianca SRL
National style clothing manufacture

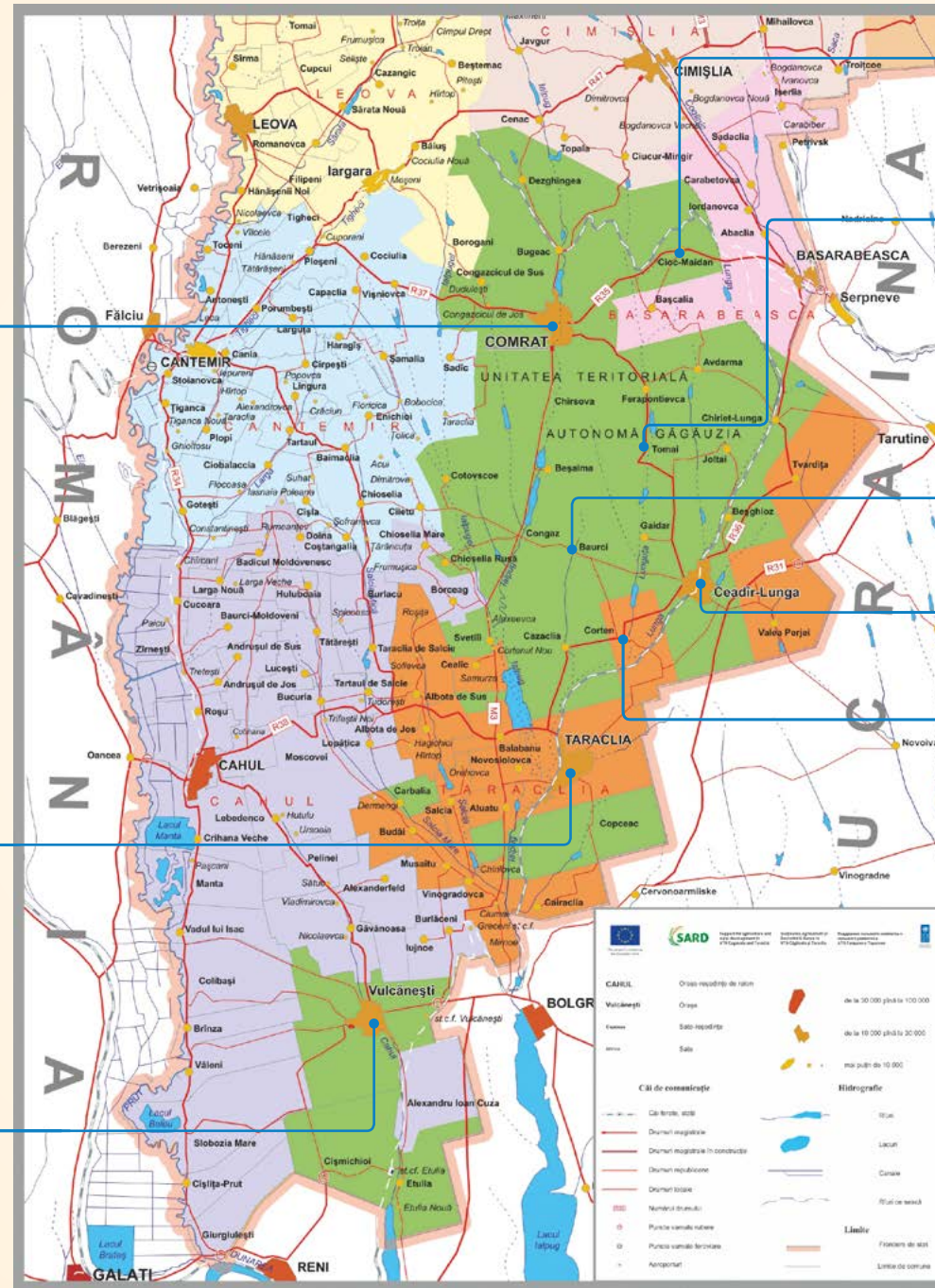


Igor Jito
Cultivation of mushrooms on the basis of home-made compost

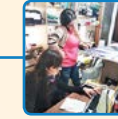
ConsumCoop Vulcanesti
Bakery products manufacture



CGL Prim SRL
Alternative energy technologies at "KaraGani" mini vinery



A&V Poligraf SRL
Wide-format print advertising services



Batstractor SRL
Tractor assembly



Gargalic Mihail GT
Goat cheese manufacture



Kolfigress SRL
Tourist complex in national Gagauz style



Azamet Pro SRL
Processing of essential oil plants seeds



UniversalCoop
Bakery products manufacture



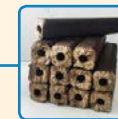
Petish Natalia
Child Development Centre

FaraFum SRL
Manufacture of dry fruits and grain crops with chocolate and cheese glaze



Fedor Petrov GT
Rabbit breeding and selling dietary meat.

Civirdjic Tatiana GT
Apiculture products



Gagauz Plazma SRL
Metal products manufacture



Tehnogazmontaj SRL
Production of pellets



AgroExpert SRL
Fresh fruits and vegetables storage and packing services

Sabia Efimia GT
Sheep farm



SARD Small Grants beneficiaries



S. R. L. Fitland LIFE
Pilates studio



S. R. L. LISTOGIB
Metal structures
for roofs and facing
panels



S. R. L. CELIK-AGRO
Grow and sell currant



II Marin Oleg
Make and sell
corn-dogs



S. R. L. RIGORED
IT services



S. R. L. 'EVELKI SALKIM'
Make wooden products



S. R. L. 'VITA FLORA'
Grow and sell flowers



S. R. L. 'LadyFit'
Pilates and fly-yoga
Centre



S. R. L. 'FITO & PROF'
Phyto-barrel services



S. R. L. 'G. V. G. M.'
Wooden products



S. R. L. 'CAR-TRUC-DIAGNOS'
Auto service/computer-
aided diagnostics of cars



S. R. L. 'ALTAANA-VIP'
Pancake shop (Congaz)



II 'CURTEVA TATIANA'
Eyebrows micro-blading
services



II 'Chiosea Gheorghe'
Cleaning company



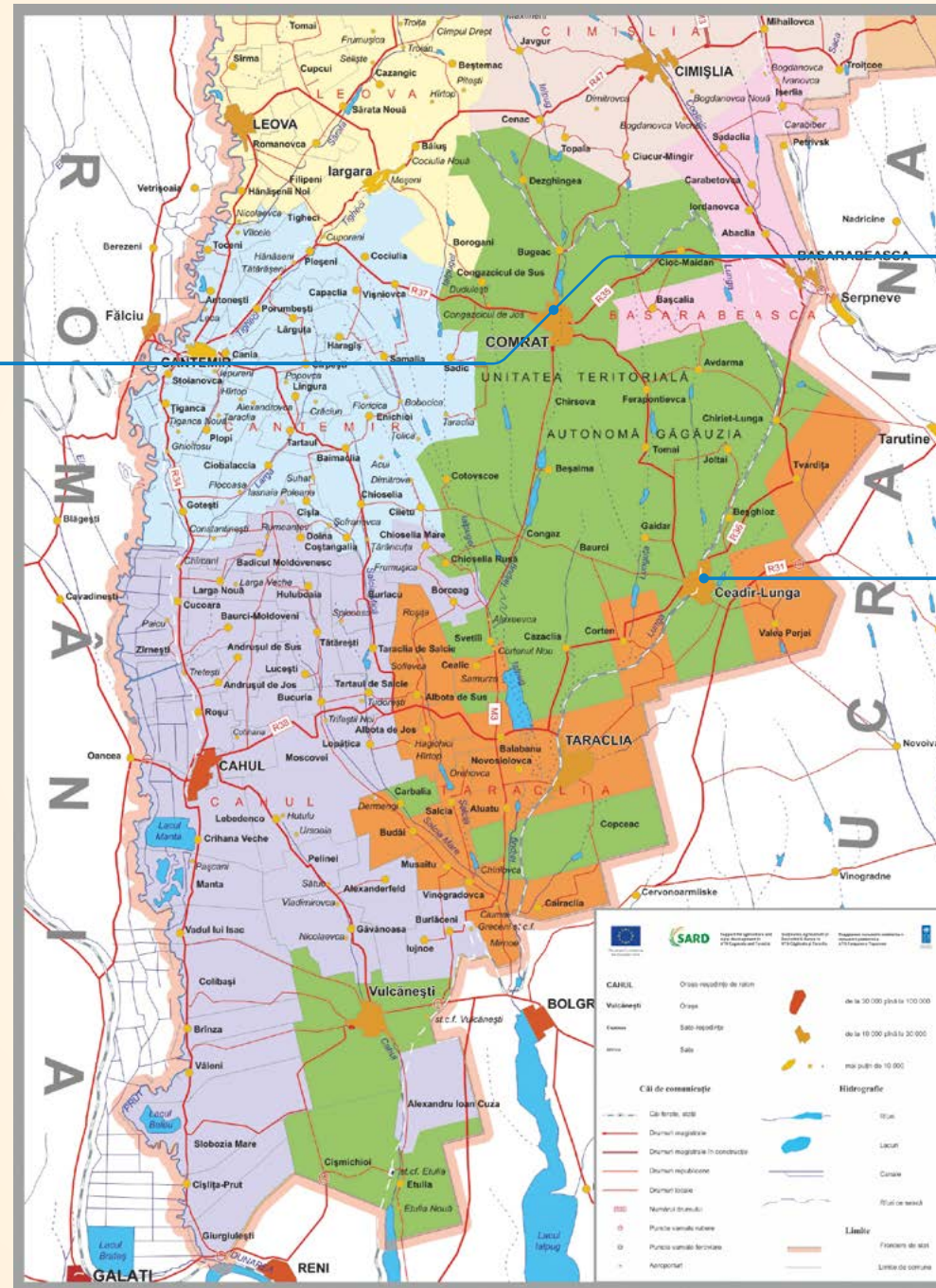
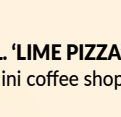
S. R. L. 'MUSAAFIR GLD'
Create and sell national
souvenirs and clothes



S. R. L. 'KAZARBARBER'
Barber shop



S. R. L. 'LIME PIZZA'
Mini coffee shop



S. R. L. 'SD-VITRAU'
Engraving services



S. R. L. 'OLLIS ABC'
Language learning
centre



S. R. L. 'RUSANDLER'
Grow and sell
strawberries



'Gunes Cancaazi' SRL
Vocal school



'CARA PRODUS' SRL
Grow and sell fresh and
dry spices



'ULTRAMARINCOM' SRL
Therapeutic cosmetology
office



'NT SAA OLUNUZ' SRL
Physical rehabilitation
office



'TERZILIK USTASI' SRL
Services of car cover
custom tailoring



'Helengrup' SRL
Make and sell
confectionery products



'SENNIK USAKLARA' SRL
Children's playground



'PLP MAKARA' SRL
Production of specialized
uniform



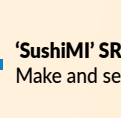
'USTA AND COMPANI' SRL
Decorative figures for
landscape design



'METLEMGLAS' SRL
Wooden souvenirs



'SushiMI' SRL
Make and sell sushi



S. R. L. 'ANVER-TEXTIL'
Production of the bed
linen



**S. R. L. 'CELEBRARI
CREATIVE'**
Event Agency



SARD Infrastructure and Inter-municipal cooperation projects



Acest proiect este finanțat de Uniunea Europeană



Sustineră agriculturii și dezvoltării rurale în UTA Găgăuzia și Taraclia



Підприємство на підтримку розвитку України

Dezghinja, Comrat district
Modernization of the street lighting system



Budjac, Comrat district, ATU Gagauzia
Rehabilitation of the water supply system



Comrat town, ATU Gagauzia
Arrangement of territories of the six kindergartens



Congaz, Comrat district
Modernization of the street lighting system



Cealic, Taraclia district
Kindergarten Capital Repair



Albota de Jos, Taraclia district
Modernization of the street lighting system



Salcia, Taraclia district
Construction of the public drinking water distribution station



Musait, Taraclia district
Capital repair of the sport hall



Budai, Taraclia district
Rehabilitation of the sewage system for social institutions



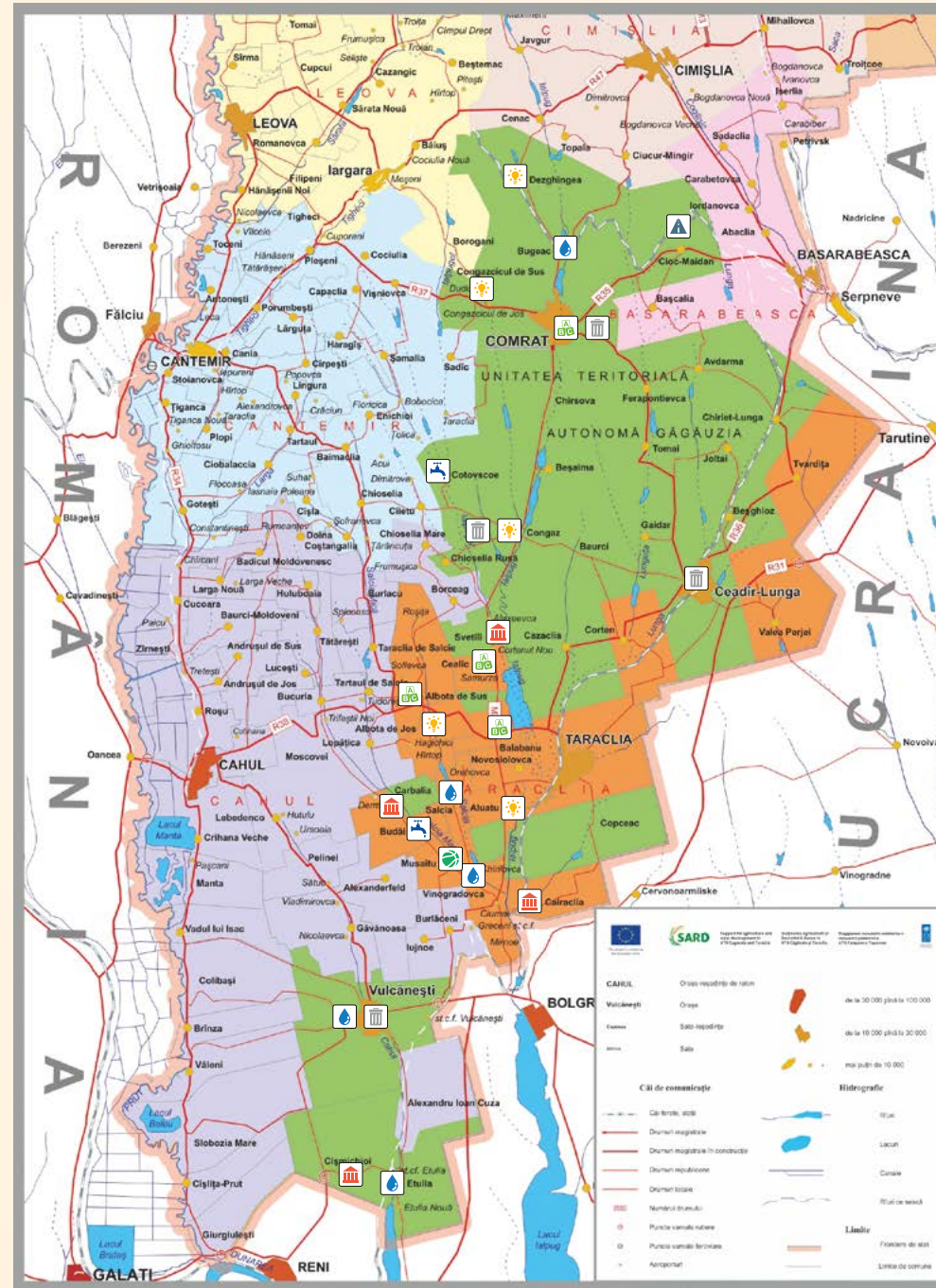
Etulia, Vulcanesti district
Rehabilitation of the water supply system



Legends

- Rehabilitation of the water supply system
- Modernization of the street lighting system
- Rehabilitation of the sewage system
- Sport centres construction/reconstruction and equipment
- Kindergarten construction/reconstruction and equipment
- School construction/reconstruction and equipment
- Solid waste management
- Culture centre renovation

Congaz IMC Cluster
Solid waste management



Cotovscoe, Comrat district, ATU Gagauzia
Rehabilitation of the sewage system for social institution



Congazcicul de Sus, Comrat district, ATU Gagauzia
Modernization of the street lighting system



Vinogradovca, Taraclia district
Rehabilitation of the water supply system



Cairaclia, Taraclia district
Culture House capital renovation



Balabanu, Taraclia district
Kindergarten Capital Repair



Vulcanesti town, ATU Gagauzia
Cleaning the basin of Cahul River



Vulcanesti IMC Cluster
Solid waste management



Ceadir Lunga IMC Cluster
Solid waste management



Cismichioi, Vulcanesti district
Culture Center capital renovation

SARD Infrastructure and Inter-municipal cooperation projects



Cioc Maidan, Comrat district, ATU Gagauzia
Central Street Repair



Chiriet Lunga, Ceadir-Lunga district
Rehabilitation of the water supply system



Besalma, Comrat district, ATU Gagauzia
Kindergarten Capital Repair



Chirsova, Comrat district, ATU Gagauzia
Rehabilitation of the water supply system



Valea Perjei, Taraclia district
Culture House capital renovation



Besghioz, Ceadir Lunga district
Repairing the roof of Lyceum



Djoltai, Ceadir-Lunga district, ATU Gagauzia
Rehabilitation of the water supply system



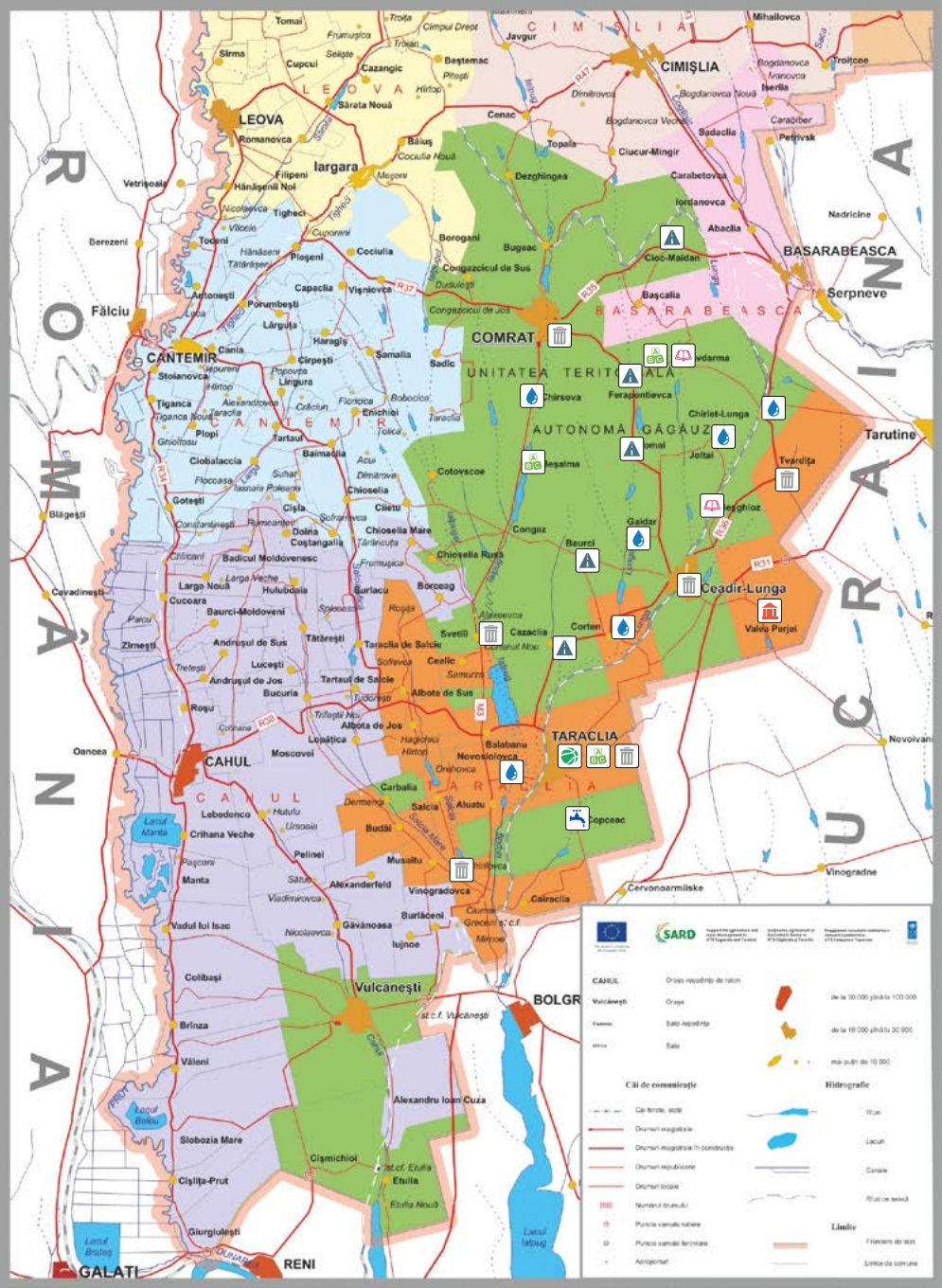
Corten, Taraclia district
Construction of the public drinking water distribution station



Baurci, Ceadir Lunga district, ATU Gagauzia
Central Street Repair



Copceac, Ceadir-Lunga district, ATU Gagauzia
Rehabilitation of the sewage system



Comrat IMC Cluster
Solid waste management

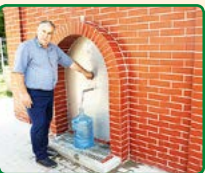


Legends

- Rehabilitation of the water supply system
- Modernization of the street lighting system
- Rehabilitation of the sewage system
- Sport centres construction/reconstruction and equipment
- Road infrastructure
- Kindergarten construction/reconstruction and equipment
- School construction/reconstruction and equipment
- Solid waste management
- Culture centre renovation



Avdarma, Comrat district, ATU Gagauzia
Energy efficiency measures for kindergarten and lyceum



Tvardita town, Taraclia district
Solid waste management

Gaidar, Ceadir Lunga district, ATU Gagauzia
Construction of the public drinking water distribution station



Novoselovca, Taraclia district
Rehabilitation of the water supply system



Tomai, Ceadir Lunga district, ATU Gagauzia
Central Street Repair



Taraclia town, Taraclia district
Regional sport hall rehabilitation



Taraclia town
Reconstruction of the kindergarten №4



Ferapontievca, Comrat district
Road drainage and sidewalk reconstruction



Ceadir Lunga town, ATU Gagauzia
Solid waste management



Cazaclia, Ceadir Lunga district, ATU Gagauzia
Central Street Repair



Vinogradovca IMC Cluster
Solid waste management



Svetlii IMC Cluster
Solid waste management



Taraclia IMC Cluster
Solid waste management