

„Roma women’s and men’s access to decent work. Everyday life, policies and projects”

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The volume **„Roma women’s and men’s access to decent work. Everyday life, policies and projects”** is a product of the complex and multi-disciplinary research conducted within **the project “Equality through Difference. Roma Women’ Access on the Labor Market”** between 2008 and 2011.¹ The research was conceived, coordinated and predominantly accomplished by experts of Foundation Desire from Cluj,² excepting the study on good practices in employment carried on by the Roma Women’s Association “For Our Children” from Timișoara and Foundation Autonomía from Budapest.³

In addition to its specific and immediate goals, our set of investigations aimed at contributing both to Romani studies and to the domain of action research. We designed its major objective in the spirit of those inquiries that define scientific practice as asocial-public endeavor, and position the analyst as a public intellectual and not as a producer of big scientific theories. Our analysis is informed on the one hand by theories of the socially constructed nature of differences, by feminist approaches towards intersectionality and the relation between patriarchy and capitalism, and as well as by those perspectives of economic anthropology that address the role of material and symbolic power in the production of social inequalities and interpret people’s economic performances and agency in the context of broader institutional frameworks. Consequently, we address the issue of the access to decent work of disadvantaged Roma women and men related to the phenomenon of social exclusion. On the other hand, our complex analysis involves the use of the perspective of human rights on work and economy, and demonstrates the validity of the conception according to which what is called as the “Roma issue” (in employment) reveals the larger problems of a political economy that creates and uses precarious work both on the labor market and in the domestic sphere of households.

¹ The project “Equality through difference: Roma women’s access on labor market” (www.femrom.ro) was implemented between November 2008 and October 2011 by the Roma Women’s Association ‘For Our Children’ from Timișoara in partnership with Desire Foundation from Cluj, Parudimos Association from Timișoara, National Agency for Roma, Mayor’s Office in Timișoara, and Autonomía Foundation from Budapest. The project was co-financed through the Operational program for the development of human resources 2007-2013 “Invest in people!” European Social Fund. It also enjoyed the complementary support from the Open Society Foundations „Roma Initiative” Program, and the Open Society Foundations LGI Program „Making the Most of EU Funds for the Roma”.

² The research team was composed of Enikő Vincze (principal researcher), Hajnalka Harbula, Iuliu Kozák, Nándor Magyari, Noémi Magyari and Camelia Moraru, and of a group of fieldworkers.

³ This study was completed by Loreni Baciú and György Lukács.

Our investigations on the social-economic status of (self) identified Roma women and men that mark their destiny and shape their lived work experiences contribute to the following:

- (1) critique of the Romanian post-socialist regime (by describing the material conditions and socio-economic system in which they live their everyday life, characterized by structural inequalities and injustices underlied by negative prejudices about Roma);
- (2) empowerment of Roma women and men to express their views on opportunities and lack of opportunities on the labor market, and/ or on the prejudices they encounter in their efforts to integrate into the majority society;
- (3) recommendations on social inclusion activities undertaken within the project, but also on employment policies for vulnerable groups and Roma in Romania.

Research carried out as one of the activities of the project “Equality through Difference. Roma Women’ Access on the Labor Market” describes critically, from their point of view, the injustices faced by Roma women and men, and makes recommendations to eliminate them. Along with other project activities, it contributes to the recognition of the fact that equal opportunities (beyond providing legal frameworks to support it through legislative measures) can be achieved through effectively equalizing opportunities, i.e. through changing the way society is built and operates, and as well as the ways we think about equality and difference between women and men, between Roma and non-Roma and/ or about the need and possibility of affirmative action.

The research had several components, using specific instruments. With the sociological survey we wanted to capture, describe and compare the socio-economic, educational, familydemographic and occupational situation of categories of persons composing our sample (employees, day laborers, unemployed, household workers/ housewives). Thus, this survey cannot deliver a representative diagnosis of the Roma population of the country, so does not allow us to make statements about the percentage of employed or unemployed Roma etc. The investigation was conducted in the cities of Cluj, Timisoara, Iasi, Bucharest and some neighboring villages on a sample consisting of 1003 self-identified Roma. Our group interviews aimed at bringing to light ideas, feelings and experiences of work and discrimination experienced by women and young Roma. But we also invited to the focus groups people belonging to the majority population, who work in fields having contact with ethnic Roma (such as media, public authorities, NGOs, private companies). Focus groups were held in Cluj and Timisoara in June and July 2009, and they resumed in the third project year (between March-May 2011) involving a total number of 160 participants. Qualitative case studies – aimed at identifying and understanding people’s experiences in their immediate personal and wider context – were conducted in Roma “communities” from the cities of Cluj, Timisoara, Orastie, Lugoj and from two villages in Timis county, among them in Roma colonies in which people live in deep poverty (e.g. Cantonului ghetto of Cluj and a Roma community from the village Satchinez from Timis county) and in locations where families live in better conditions. In the Western region the research team also contacted people who benefitted from the services of our project. In total, we recorded 57 semi-structured interviews, and in addition, during the visits and observations in these communities or workplaces of the respondents, we conducted 200 informal/ unstructured interviews with formally interviewed person or with their family members or others from their immediate vicinity. The study of the workforce market aimed to describe the labor market accessible for Roma in five cities in Transylvania (Arad, Cluj-Napoca, Deva, Resita and

Timisoara), which were chosen according to the interest area of the project “Equality through Difference. Roma Women’ Access on the Labor Market”. The research data of this study came from several sources. On the one hand, we used statistics on companies and workforce published by the National Institute for Statistics. On the other hand, for learning about the dynamics of employment by ethnicity we used census data from 1992 and 2002. In addition to these data we used statistics resulted from our sociological survey conducted in 2009. But the main source of our data came from a survey conducted between December 2010 and January 2011 on a sample of 432 firms from the mentioned localities. The form and content of the questionnaire addressed the economic, social and cultural dimension of the companies. The Study on best practices in employment aimed at discussing the transnational and national policies for the integration of vulnerable groups on the labor market, and it presented in more details the features of Roma policies in Romania and the impact of Eufunded projects for Roma in Hungary.

Our investigations produced several research reports with or without recommendations, available on the project website (www.femrom.ro) as follows:

Iuliu Kozák: Report on the analysis of public policies for Roma (August 2009)

Nándor L. Magyari: "Working Roma." Sociological survey Report (August 2009)

Enikő Vincze, Hajnalka Harbula, Camelia Moraru: Work experience and discrimination against Roma. Report on focus group research (August 2009)

Enikő Vincze: Report on research projects in the first year, with recommendations for inclusion activities in the project and public policies for Roma (November 2009)

Enikő Vincze, Hajnalka Harbula, Noémi Magyari: Final report on qualitative research "Work experiences" with recommendations on policies and projects for Roma (July 2010)

Enikő Vincze: The access of Roma to decent work and the need for economic empowerment. Researches conducted within the project “Equality through difference. Roma women’s access on the labor market” and recommendations regarding programs and policies for the employment of disadvantaged ethnic Roma (November 2010)

Iuliu Kozák: Report on the workforce market study conducted in five cities in Transylvania (February 2011)

Enikő Vincze: Position towards the implementation of equal opportunities policies in Romania (February 2011)

Enikő Vincze, Iuliu Kozák: Possibilities and limits of projects on the domain of employment. Report on the focus group research with recommendations (June 2011)

Loreni Baciu, György Lukács: “Prepared for the future”. Transnational and national policies for the integration of vulnerable groups on the labor market (June 2011).

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The main **conclusions** of the research conducted within the project “Equality through Difference. Roma Women’ Access on the Labor Market” are the following:

1. Prejudices that Roma do not want to work and that instead of working they resort to other ways to get income is refuted by our research findings. Leaving aside the active persons of our sample (who were working for income during the sociological survey), 44% of inactive people surveyed said they would like to find a job. 40% of inactive respondents affirmed they would like to enroll on a vocational training. 18% of them would return to continue their school, 30% would try their luck abroad, and 22% would like to learn a foreign language to find a job.
2. Households that have employed members have greater income than those without employed members. However, in their case, too income is very low, which means it is gained from unskilled and/ or poorly paid work.
3. Roma in rural areas and Roma living in compact communities have the lowest income.
4. In the case of 50% of the surveyed households, income per person is below the absolute poverty line (including cases where income per person is less than 270 RON, cc. 65 Euro/month), this percentage is 40% for households with employed members, but it is 70% for households without employed members. While nationally 21% of families with children live in poverty, in our sample this percentage is 60%, and while nationally 15% of families without children live in poverty, this percentage for Roma in our sample is 40%.
5. 50% have no health insurance, which is a serious reason for concern, especially since in our sample we included a Roma population belonging to the active age groups (between 16-60 years). Even among active (those who work for income) the percentage of uninsured is high (28%, but even 39% if we add the 11% who did not answer this question).
6. Although some of the Roma work for income, they do not necessarily benefit from the advantages of being employed. The reason is that in many cases these jobs are provided in the informal economy. Their presence in the informal economy is supported by employers, who take advantage of them.
7. Often, even if Roma are employed in different areas of the formal economy, this is mostly about temporary employment, and they are employed mainly in low paid jobs that do not require skilled labor.
8. In many cases Roma have occasional or seasonal jobs, performed in Romania or abroad. This type of work involves sustained economic migration in search of sources of income.
9. According to their lower educational level (due to the material constraints of families) some Roma have no profession, meaning that they have not learned any trade at school.
10. Among those who have not learned a trade in school we find people who acquired a craft in the family. But these craft are not in demand anymore. Others acquire the skills necessary for jobs while working occasionally and/ or in the informal economy (e.g. construction). Most times these people do not have professional qualifications, or their skills are not recognized by certificates/ diplomas. Thus, at best they are employed as unskilled workers.
11. Paradoxically, for the Roma who have graduated from vocational schools, high schools or higher education, with qualifications and jobs, diplomas and certificates it is more difficult to get an adequate job according to their skills and expertise, which might be explained by the existing negative stereotypes about Roma among employers (many employers think that low level, unskilled and poorly paid jobs are suitable for Roma).

12. At the same educational level, women are rather inactive than men (they are at a higher risk to ending up not being able to work for income). Also, if they lose their job, they do not perceive themselves as unemployed, but as housekeepers. Furthermore, women with high educational level are more likely to do housework or become unemployed than men having the same level of education, while among those with less education, men are more at risk of becoming unemployed or household workers than women.

13. No matter if they bring income into the household's budget or not, housework is largely done by women, who are subjected in this way to the double burden of addressing both the need for provision of jobs that bring income (or productive work) and the obligation to take care of the home and family members (or reproducing the workforce on a daily basis).

14. Among those who lost their jobs, many are unrecorded unemployed.

15. If we compare the statistics resulted from our survey and the statements of the participants in focus groups regarding discrimination against Roma, we see a huge discrepancy between the two (in the sense that throughout our sample only about 17% of respondents affirmed they ever have been treated unjustly at work, while in the group interviews discrimination was considered as one of the strongest obstacle of their access to decent work). Statistical data and data drawn from interviews are similar regarding people's poor awareness of gender-based discrimination; ethnic discrimination is seen predominantly relevant if unfair treatment is observed. Trying to interpret the low percentage of those who believe they have been treated unjustly at work, we may note three things:

- many Roma have unskilled and poorly paid low level jobs, context in which (if they do not wonder why they have access only to these jobs) they do not feel discriminated against by their colleagues working in similar positions especially if the majority of workers from their labor place are ethnic Roma (e.g. sanitation);
- people with low self-esteem and self-confidence, who internalize the negative image that the majority population spreads through various institutions and media, cannot feel injustice when treated unfairly for they have no great expectations from life, and they can even consider that what happens to them is normal, natural for someone in their position;
- when asked about unfair treatment at work, people were certainly thought to what happens in their interpersonal relations, so they evaluated the way they were treated in these relations, and not referred to structural or institutional discrimination to which they might have been subjected (e.g. that their material circumstances and living conditions reduced the chances of their children to have access to an education that would ensure their access to decent work, or that the manner in which their ethnicity has been perceived by the majority over time has had an impact on their current material condition).

16. Talking about access to employment, participants in focus groups identified a number of problems faced not only by the Roma, and not just by women, and not only by Roma women, but by our society as a whole, such as the collapse of socialist economy, and unemployment; competition operating in the market economy and the "rush for money"; economic crisis, poverty and lack of jobs; exploitation of black labor and work without contracts; inconsistencies and shortcomings of public policies which should support vulnerable groups; lack of solidarity and mutual respect between people; structural discrimination faced by disadvantaged groups and "aggravation of the situation in which low level work is done by the Roma."

17. As far as job opportunities from rural environments are concerned, participants on the focus groups mentioned the following: the eradication of agricultural cooperatives that offered a chance to work even for the unskilled labor force; regaining the property on lands, forests and pastures by some, on which those lacking properties could work as day laborers until when, due to mechanization of agriculture there was no need for their physical labor force; the legislative gaps and the confusions around the application of the law according to which, after 1990, members of the socialist agricultural cooperatives gained a piece of land that was taken back in 2010 by local councils; the annihilation of factories from the nearby cities where they used to commute during socialist times and for a while after 1990; the small foreign private companies that used their cheap unskilled labor force and bankrupted without assuring the rights of former employees; the lack of private enterprises in these settlements, the shortages of governmental policies for developing and sustaining agriculture, and generally the lack of jobs in rural areas; the deficiencies of local authorities in terms of implementing European projects on the domain of agriculture and rural development; and the lack of economic, social and human capital among the rural population that would be necessary for launching small private agricultural enterprises.

18. Confronted with these problems, people are looking for individual or group solutions, such as enrolling into available vocational training courses offered by non-governmental organizations. But the mostly “favored” solution of Roma women and men from rural areas is economic emigration, even if they state that they would not leave if they would have opportunities at home, and even if they are aware that this solution is full of risks and insecurities.

19. Courses of vocational training, due to the way in which they are organized by non-governmental organizations using European funds, are a source of income for a limited period of time in the present, but as well as ways to catch up on the gaps of their past school education, and a promise for improving their future. They also have a social function: the courses are occasions of socialization, and/ or of escaping from the daily routine of unemployment, of boring domestic work and of unsatisfying jobs. They might increase people’s self-esteem, and might generate motivation for making future plans. Or simply they might sustain a sense of hope under conditions in which people lost their trust in making a change in their life.

20. The ideal society is seen by most participants on the focus groups as the society that provides access to education, safe workplace, a society where there is no discrimination, and values are respected. People put emphasis on material as well as spiritual and social values, which they considered elements of a more human individual and community life.

21. Job opportunities depend on the companies’ intention to co-opt labor. The intention to hire is dominated, if not exclusively, but largely by an economic calculation related to the company’s position in the local economy. Medium-sized companies that have experienced growth in recent years and expect future growth, or firms located in sectors that are growing are those that provide more jobs. The services sector is one that offers the greatest opportunities in this regard.

22. In recent years the development of human resources employed by firms show a decreasing trend for workers and an increasing trend for persons employed in administrative functions, office personnel and employees with intellectual occupation. We can expect this trend to continue, according to the intentions declared by the directors of companies. Decrease in the number of workers (skilled and unskilled) and lack of intention to hire them in future put extremely high pressure on them, since there is fierce competition between fired workers for the

few jobs open to competition. In the near future, in the localities studied, workers, regardless of qualification, are the most vulnerable group in the labor market.

23. In light of the above, in principle, the employability of Roma is equal to the people with other ethnic backgrounds. But developments in occupational status of the working population in the past show that employment dislocation due to restructuring of the economy has greater negative impact on Roma than on non-Roma. One explanation is increased competition for employment, considered a rare commodity given that unemployment in Romania has increased over the past 20 years and especially during the economic crisis. Another complementary explanation is given by the recruitment practices of companies and the lack of socially informed employment policies within firms.

24. Companies recruit labor through informal methods, through informal networks and current employees. Consequently, social capital is the determining factor in entering competition for a job. Without it, ethnic Roma do not have information about a vacancy, and if they get into a situation of competition they are evaluated in terms of categories, i.e. in terms of group belonging, which decreases their chances of being employed.

25. According to firm managers the main trait of Roma workers is their willingness to work for low income, so they are a cheap labor force. From the perspective of economic efficiency, work for “little money” can be a comparative advantage of Roma. But this advantage is lost if the competition for low-paid jobs is high, as in situations of economic decline.

26. Albeit our study does not deny the importance of qualifications in accessing jobs, it observes on the one hand that the level of schooling and qualifications do not automatically result in the increase of opportunities on the labor market, and on the other hand formal qualifications are not necessarily requested by the employers. The professional experience, social competencies and elements of a disciplined work ethic are more appreciated by them. Furthermore, the human capital is rarely evaluated at the moment of employment, and getting a job depends on the competition around it. In such situations the social capital of applicants is the one that mostly counts.

27. Experiences from Romania and Hungary regarding Roma social inclusion demonstrate that there are only a few programs, which consider the multidimensional nature of the situation of disadvantaged ethnic Roma (extreme poverty, low educational level, unemployment, residential and school segregation, housing in polluted areas, precariousness of accessible services), and the projects targeting singular objectives do not really help Roma in living in precarious conditions.

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On the base of the conclusions from above we may formulate a **diagnosis about the access of ethnic Roma to decent work** and moreover, to define our recommendations regarding employment policies and projects for Roma. Access to and choice for particular jobs are determined by macro-structural factors, among them the economic and political regime of a country; the governmental employment policies and the employment practices of public and private companies; the residential milieu, living conditions and socio-economic situation of families people belong to, and the opportunities given by the national educational system. The transition from the socialist industry and collectivized agriculture to a market economy and a

post-industrial society has left many social groups (among them many Roma) in long-term structural unemployment, which is why they cannot be the winners of the altogether uneven capitalist competition. The socialist policy towards Roma fueled by the desire of cultural assimilation and by the need to use them as poorly qualified workforce, and the current trends that exclude Roma from the few employment opportunities and remind them that they remain “unwanted Gypsies” even if they opt for integration, situated them into a discrepancy between structural semi-integration and cultural non-acceptance. This is a phenomenon that definitely affects their chances on the labor market. Furthermore, regional and local (economic) disparities, and the development plans that exclude people living in poverty, deepen social differences and conflicts.

Labor market is marked by economic and social processes that determine the potential, and the exact form of hiring intentions, which in turn articulates the chances of Roma participation in the labor market. But nor the human capital of employees or of those looking for a job, or the structural economic processes are not describing sufficiently the dynamics of the labor force market. For the social capital of the former, and the culturally shaped perceptions and recruitment practices of the employers play a major role in determining employment opportunities. This is also so because within similar economic contexts the dynamics of labor force might be different, and because all these processes are structured in a particular way by the context of local economy.

With regard to employment policies for Roma we stressed that their highest value is that they exist. Although they appeared relatively late, they signal the public institutions’ interest in “Roma issues”. It is true that this interest was aroused by external pressure and was conditional to Romania’s EU accession. However, the commitments made by the Government, the elaboration and adoption of public policies are welcomed results, although the lack of funds ensuring their implementation raised big problems. Other positive aspects include the formal administrative preparation, implementation and evaluation of programs for Roma. All these steps in public policies were designed to include representatives of Roma communities and took place in a decentralized system. But the evaluation of the substantive measures can only be mixed. Measures have both positive and negative or irrelevant characteristics. A positive aspect is given by the fact that policies cover all dimensions of the labor market (employment, professional and occupational structure and the phenomena of anti-discrimination and social exclusion). The measures are consistent with the results of research conducted to date. That suggests that there is a relationship between social research and policy development, which is welcomed. Yet here we should note that previous research focused on describing the structural factors and neglected mechanisms leading to the described situations. Issues of substance measures appear unclear. But even if they were developed with the best intentions, have numerous shortcomings. Several policy measures exist only on paper. These measures are formal, contrary to regulations, are difficult to implement, and some measures are only in a planning phase or require many activities prior to reaching the stage of implementation. Another feature of these policies is that they do not have an evaluation methodology, or if they have, it is only partial, which results in lack of control over their development. Similar tendencies are observed in Hungary where, as well, there exist only estimations regarding the volume, the efficiency and the effects of the use of national and EU funds dedicated to the Roma population. In both countries, their absorption is limited by the rigid administration of structural funds, and by the inertia of local public institutions and the reduced mobilization of employers in this sense.

Besides the macro-structural factors described above, individuals' micro-economic, social and cultural capital (the instruments by which they cope with life) structure their choices on the domain of labor. The family budget, their informal and formal relations, and educational carrier are elements that prescribe frameworks in which Roma move as social persons, and have access to particular jobs and not others. In turn the latter reproduce their available capital, and influence their and their children's destinies. Poor living conditions, in which one must cope when it seems there is no chance for living, but also many Roma's ability to learn languages of other ethnic groups with which they live, strengthens their ability to adapt creatively, which is certainly a very important element of their social and cultural capital – an important asset to be invested, in all areas of life, including labor.

Further on, life of the Roma is structured by a multitude of vicious circles, being channeled by them in directions reproduced inter-generationally. Among them there are the interdependent factors that could bring a change (the relationship between access to education, access to decent jobs, access to acceptable living conditions and poverty), and as well as the reciprocal influence that socio-economic statute (or social exclusion) and cultural concepts about Roma informed by racism (or their cultural stigmatization) are having on each other. The former does not affect people's behavior and way of thinking only as a set of objective conditions, but as well as an identity configuration generated by lived experiences and the reflections on these conditions. Interiorizing the perception of such conditions sustained by others (such as the majority population and Roma living in better conditions), but as well as the experience of being rejected by the majority (by those who embody „normality“) despite of your will to make yourself accepted, are mechanisms of subjective poverty and social exclusion that may create the inability to make a change or even to imagine that one may make a change in their life.

We may conclude that employment options are formed under the impact of several interacting factors. Intersectionality of the socio-economic status, gender, age, and ethnicity of a person, and the way in which these factors are (self) perceived – all these going on in a specific socio-economic and political context – on the one hand, as a whole, determine the chances and options for people in all areas of life, and on the other hand generate differences between them, even if they belong to the same communities. Of course, this intersectionality does not work in an abstract way, but through the individual actions of people belonging to particular groups who develop strategies to adapt to or to change the conditions imposed by the system.

“Work culture” practiced by poor people living in market economy without property and without any family inheritance cannot be other than that characterized by multiple and frequent changes of jobs, the alternation between periods in which they work for income and unemployment, by accepting “shameful” and poorly paid work, by accepting the demands of the informal economy (or “black market” jobs), or by intra-and transnational migration motivated by the search for sources of income. Unfortunately, majority population and institutions think that this is specific Roma culture, and thus it is an obstacle to their social integration and “modernization”. But in fact it characterizes large masses of people, as a reaction / adaptation to situations where they get against their will. Ethnicity plays a role in building this culture (of work) to the extent that negative stereotypes refer to it, so it becomes an explaining factor, maintaining the exclusion of those labeled as ethnic Roma.

Thus, socio-economic conditions and cultural prejudices are mutually reinforcing each other when people search for jobs, and are refused by employers on the grounds of the assumption that “you cannot trust the Roma” or when – for example at job fairs – employers

seek Roma people to deliver unskilled, poorly paid work. Repulsive attitudes of the majority can generate resignation among subaltern groups (i.e. respectively seeing themselves through what they lack). Most people we talked to fully understand the conditions in which they live, and many accept them because they do not see the way out, they silently accept what happens to them. But these attitudes also motivate various practices of resistance (school dropout, refusing to walk without any chance to obtain employment or social benefits in the labyrinths of repulsive bureaucracy may have such meanings). The rejection from the majority can feed attitude of resistance to manifestations of exclusionary power and discrimination, attitudes that express accumulated discontent in various forms (verbal reactions and/ or physical violence, and individual complaints to the authorities, group protests, etc.).

Due to large waves of economic migrants motivated by subsistence travel from Romania to other countries (mainly Italy, France, Spain, England and Germany), the European Union is confronted with what we might call the new export of poverty from the “new member states” to the old ones. This happens while citizens of Romania are European citizens and they have the right related to freedom of movement, and in the context, in which the welfare states of the former western countries reduce their funds for social benefits to vulnerable groups, far right xenophobic attitudes are spreading and elections can be won using anti-migrant discourses and practices. Under these circumstances, stigmatization of the Roma from Romania (together with Roma from Bulgaria) as criminals turn “Roma” into the radical others of Europe coming from the less desired states of EU that are unable to implement policies for Roma and to create jobs, which might offer them the chance to live a decent life in their home country.

Besides, or completing economic emigration as a solution to the problems of finding a job, many ethnic Roma from rural and urban areas enroll into vocational training courses offered by non-governmental organizations enjoying European funds. They integrate this opportunity into their everyday life, and make use of it based on the work-related problems that they are confronted with, which at their turn are depending on their general life circumstances. People’s expectations towards these courses are structured by their material condition, gender and age, but as well as their residence. These are the factors that eventually determinate the degree to which they manage to transform the capital acquired by these courses into effective results that might bring sustainable changes in their life. The efficiency of such initiatives is limited by the structural problems of the Romanian economy.

Without private and public enterprises on agriculture and manufacturing that might create secure jobs also for social categories lacking any properties and of an age at which they cannot catch up on their cumulated disadvantages; without the change of anti-Gypsy attitudes among the majority population (among them employers); without the equalization of opportunities between women and men; without the improvement of access to school education and to public health services – the efforts of non-governmental organizations that offer these courses and of people enrolling into them will not materialize into acceding decent work and incomes. Under these conditions, transnational emigration, even if marked by several risks and insecurities, remains the first option for those people, too who cannot survive at home. If this is the case, usually it happens that the informal ways of obtaining jobs are supplied by networks and informal modes of organizing that might look to function as protective kinship relations, but for many times create situations of dependency and abuse.

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In the context of re-launching the national strategy for the social inclusion of Roma we address our **recommendations** particularly to the National Agency for Roma, the Direction for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men at the Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection, and the Agency for Governmental Strategies, but to other political factors as well, as we express the need to constitute central and local governmental structures, for example a Ministry of Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities, or an Inter-Ministry Department for Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities. This should have decision-making authority, coordination skills, financial capacity and professional expertise in the field of equal opportunities and policies designed for the social inclusion of disadvantaged groups. Our message to all policy makers is that Romania needs an economic policy that integrates policies for Roma, and translates into practice the assurance of social and economic rights provided by national and international laws and regulations (of labor).

The keywords of our recommendations are: integrative and intersectional approach, access to decent work and economic empowerment. Even if we recognize that immediate and direct help, especially in times of economic crisis, is crucial for the survival of those living in acute poverty, we believe that the main aim of interventions in the field of employment should be to create conditions in which disadvantaged groups (of ethnic Roma) acquire the ability to transform from an assisted group into an enterprising one, and into one that have access to decent work thus enjoying their fundamental human rights on the domain of employment. Efforts of non-governmental organizations working on the behalf of disadvantaged Roma communities (with or without EU funding) are not enough to induce such structural changes, but require systematic and coordinated involvement of factors and actors of the Romanian state and of various international structures. We need new ideas/ public policies and funds to implement them, which admit that access to decent work requires recognition of at least two things:

- access to employment is not only a socio-economic right in its procedural and legalistic sense, but must be ensured in people's daily life by equalizing opportunities, so that social inequalities related to market economy do not keep large masses of people on the fringes of society;
- access to employment of people is necessary but not sufficient to eradicate poverty; given that many workers live in poverty and insecurity due to the fact that they perform precarious work, both state laws and policies, and companies should ensure people's access to decent work, meaning work that ensures a decent living.

Employment policies and programs dedicated to disadvantaged Roma groups – mainstreamed into general governmental policies – must put into practice the social and economic rights of disadvantaged groups of Roma and must equalize their chances in real access to decent work. As such, they should:

1. Be based on an integrated approach in at least three senses:

- to to be designed to act on multiple causes that generate and support the disadvantaged position of Roma in the labor market (e.g. poor schooling and school segregation, inadequate housing and residential segregation, reduced access to healthcare services, negative prejudices against Roma, lack of self-confidence among ethnic Roma);

- employment policies for Roma need to be mainstreamed into general policies aimed at improving the employability of citizens; but as long as structural inequalities will persist, the overall effort to improve access to decent work must be completed by affirmative action measures for disadvantaged groups, among them Roma, who in addition to the socio-economic conditions they share with other vulnerable groups, face unequal treatment based on their ethnicity and cultural stigmatization informed by racism;
- all employment policies need to be analyzed in terms of their impact on disadvantaged groups starting from their elaboration, through implementation to monitoring, and as well as they must be informed by the perspective of human rights.

2. Define and support forms of employment leading to economic empowerment of disadvantaged people. For this purpose it is needed:

- an effort to support these people in their access to training courses that give them opportunities for (re) qualification;
- facilitating their access to information about available jobs and how to apply for a job;
- entrepreneurial training;
- empowering them as freelancers;
- supporting forms of self-employment, including access to supportive micro-loans.

3. Contribute to the cultural recognition of ethnic Roma by strengthening their self-esteem and by eliminating negative stereotypes about Roma, which maintain discrimination and social exclusion (this idea is based on the recognition of the fact that economic and cultural empowerment reinforce each other).

4. With the aim to sustain equal opportunities in its larger sense, (employment) policies should adopt the perspective of intersectionality; because the disadvantages and inequalities to which a person is subjected result from the interaction and overlapping of several injustices suffered on the base of their social statute, and due to the racist and sexist stigmatization of their ethnicity and gender.

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However, we are aware that policies (even if well developed and efficiently implemented) cannot eliminate on their own the social inequalities resulted from economic disparities and underlying cultural conceptions, our recommendations aimed at responding to the complexity of the issue of access of disadvantaged Roma women and men to decent work. Again and again it is important to note that **the situation of ethnic Roma produced by social exclusion is structured by multiple and intersectional inequalities sustained by racist, sexist and classist convictions (the latter being constitutive factors of social inequalities as they play an important role in their naturalization and justification). Their stigmatization and unjust treatment as persons with Roma background by authorities, companies/ employers and the majority population subjects them to a disadvantage that exacerbates the vulnerabilities that affect ethnic Romanians and Hungarians living in similar precarious economic conditions. Furthermore, the problems of impoverished Romani women are not only rooted in their insecure material situation and ethnic-based discrimination, but also in**

the arrangements of the patriarchal gender order of their families and of the society at large and the feminine life trajectories prescribed by such a sex/ gender regime.

Ethnic Roma are disadvantaged by:

- the post-1990 changes of the economic system (which for them means not only the loss of their jobs, but as well as an existential insecurity resulted from the fact that they do not own properties and mostly have access only to precarious work);
- the recruitment practices of public and private companies, and their organizational culture insensitive to human rights;
- the inability of post-socialist state to create jobs and to sustain financially public policies that could assure an adequate social protection and/ or could equalize the chances of individuals unequally positioned in the current power hierarchies;
- an anti-Gypsy racism that tries to justify the inequalities produced by the socio-economic system (and implicitly to sustain meritocratic convictions), or aims at fueling the sense of superiority of the privileged or of the disadvantaged with a majority background, while it produces scapegoats imagined as an “inferior race” that threatens the “authentic” ethno-national body.

Coping with this situation, disadvantaged ethnic Roma resort to survival strategies that generate behaviors and ways of thinking characteristic to a sort of living in the present. Living in the present (even if it has elements linked to a romanticized past, or to a desirable future projected on the horizon of future generations) is a reaction to the precarious living conditions that beats them, but it is also a practice of resistance towards the norms of a system that excludes them from the chance to participate in the societal life considered as adequate. Another way of coping with social exclusion and to balance the disadvantages of not participating by formal ways in the hegemonic social, economic, political and cultural life, is to comply with their desires through informal means (for example by making a living through the sources of informal economy). The cultural logic of these strategies (that also govern peoples’ “option” for particular jobs, formed at its turn under systemic constraints) is one defined in the terms of an oppositional differentiation from the “others” perceived as the privileged ones belonging to and benefiting from the protection of the system.

The projects implemented by non-governmental organizations on employment may assure services to disadvantaged persons that might improve their chance of acceding jobs, but they cannot generate sustainable changes on the labor market. The structural funds available to the member states of the European Union will become instruments of structural change only to the degree to which central and local governmental institutions will improve their system of administering these funds, and to which the non-governmental organizations offering employment-related services are going to be supported by public authorities and other social actors (like private and public companies). NGO initiatives will not have a sustainable impact if they are not sustained by an adequate public system of social protection that might assure a decent living, and by a labor legislation, which recognizes that socio-economic inequalities are due to structural factors, protects the employees’ rights, and consequently enforces the assurance of equal opportunities and non-discrimination in economic enterprises among others by affirmative measures for disadvantaged groups.

In our days, on a global and European level, the idea of equal opportunities is sustained by two sets of arguments that should mobilize the political and economic actors of Romania in the direction of adopting it in practical terms, too. One of them is articulated within the sphere of fundamental human rights, social justice and solidarity, and the other one in the logic of economic interests regarding the reduction of the costs of social exclusion and the financial benefits of the (professional) integration of disadvantaged groups. Most importantly, both arguments should be based on the recognition of the fact that **inclusion is a public good** and does not only serve the interests of the later, but it improves societal life as a whole.

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