

STATEMENT ON EMPLOYMENT POLICIES AND PROJECTS FOR DISADVANTAGED ROMA

Experiences from Romania and Hungary revealed by the project “Equality through difference. Roma women’s access on the labor market”,¹ demonstrate that there are only a few programs, which consider the multidimensional nature of Roma social exclusion (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 living in precarious conditions. On the base of our project we affirm that (on the domain of employment) ethnic Roma are multiple 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;
- 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.

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.

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

¹ The project 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, the National Agency for Roma, the Timișoara City Hall, and Autonomia Foundation from Hungary. The project was co-financed by the Sectorial Operational Pro-gram for Human Resources Development 2007 - 2013 “Invest in people,” European Social Fund (<http://www.femrom.ro>).

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 national political and economic actors. 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.

The experiences gained during our activities for social inclusion² and as well as the results of our researches³ entitle us to formulate the need for sustaining the following principles on the domain of employment policies and projects: integrative and intersectional approach; access to decent work; and economic empowerment. Even if we recognize that immediate and direct help, especially during 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. Altogether, we sustain that employment policies and programs dedicated to disadvantaged Roma groups must put into practice their social and economic rights and must equalize their chances for really accessing decent work. As such, they should:

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

- 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

² See in *Egalitate prin diferență. Albumul proiectului* (Equality through difference. The Project's Album). Cluj: Desire, 2011.

³ See in *Accesul femeilor și bărbaților de etnie romă la muncă decentă. Viață cotidiană, politici și proiecte* (Roma women's and men's access on the labor market. Everyday life, policies and projects). Editor Eniko Vincze. Cluj: Desire, 2011.

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 vocational 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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