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Conclusions of the
International Conference
“Romani Women for Equal Opportunities”

Organized within the project
“Equality through Difference. Roma Women’s Access on the Labor Market”
Timișoara, June 30-July 2, 2011

To the attention of
General Secretariat of the Romanian Government
Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection
National Agency for Roma
DG Employment of the European Commission
Sectorial Operational Program for Human Resources Development

Timișoara and Cluj, 06.07.2011

Roma Women's Association “For Our Children” had the honor to host in Timișoara, between the 30th of June and the 2nd of July 2011 the International Conference **“Romani Women for Equal Opportunities”**. The conference was organized within the project “Equality through Difference. Roma Women’s Access on the Labor Market”, implemented by 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 is co-financed by the Sectorial Operational Program for Human Resources Development 2007 - 2013 “Invest in people,” European Social Fund (<http://www.femrom.ro>).

On the one hand, the conference “Romani Women for Equal Opportunities” aimed at promoting the results of the project “Equality through Difference. Roma Women’s Access on the Labor Market”. On the other hand it provided a space for interregional, transnational and interdisciplinary dialogue about the situation of Roma women in the contemporary society, and about Roma women’s activism on the behalf of equal opportunities for all, and first of all of persons disadvantaged on the base of their ethnicity, gender and/ or their age.



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The guests of honor from the DG Employment of the European Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Open Society Institute and Central European University from Budapest, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women from Bratislava, the Directorate for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men from the Ministry of Labor, Family and Social Protection, the ERSTE Foundation from Romania, and the Western Regional Intermediate Body of the Sectorial Operational Program for Human Resources Development highlighted the importance and difficulty of programs regarding employment. Eventually, they appreciated the results of the project “Equality through Difference. Roma Women’s Access on the Labor Market”, which, due its complex approach, was able to act on local, regional and transnational level on several factors that act as barriers in assuring equal employment opportunities for women and youth belonging to marginalized Roma communities.

Representatives of partner organizations, the Roma Women's Association “For Our Children”, Desire Foundation, Parudimos Association, the National Agency for Roma and the Autonomy Foundation stressed the importance of mutual trust and solidarity that characterized the multiethnic team of the project and made it possible to overcome the administrative difficulties encountered throughout its implementation. They revealed the results of activities for social inclusion, which provided information services, counseling, mediation, accompanying children and placement in training courses for more than 3,000 persons and thus has improved the chances of finding a job or launching their own business; they recalled the importance of formative and informative actions aimed at changing anti-Gypsy attitudes, institutional discrimination and unequal treatment, being directly addressed to several hundred representatives of public authorities, employers, NGOs and mass media; they presented the research conducted within the project that resulted in the critical analysis of the social-economic system that produces structural inequalities at the expense of marginalized groups, in a detailed knowledge about the experiences of the latter in terms of paid and unpaid work, and in recommendations on policies and programs for Roma regarding the need to ensure access to decent work and economic empowerment; they discussed the importance of exchanging experiences between the national teams and the transnational partner; and last, but not least brought to the attention of the public the three issues of the international magazine “Nevi Sara Kali. Roma Women's Journal”, and the films produced in the first two years of the project (“A project for social justice”, and “Striving for dignity”).

We had the honor to host representatives of non-governmental organizations from Romania and from abroad, such as Romani Criss from Bucharest, Center Amalipe from Veliko Turnovo Bulgaria, the Civic Alliance of Roma in Romania, MONA - Foundation for Women from Hungary, the Colorful Pearls Association from Pecs Hungary, Drom Kotar Mestipen from Barcelona, Spain, the Agency for Community Development “Together” from Bucharest, and the National Roma Centrum from Kumanovo Republic of Macedonia. The roundtable discussions about the activism of Romani women revealed that they work in local organizations, meeting the specific needs of Roma women and advocating for combating



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multiple discriminations they are faced with locally, but as well as it highlighted their efforts and achievements in organizing at a European level. The conference “Romani Women for Equal Opportunities” gave the occasion for presenting the new European network “Romnia. Romani Women United.” Preceded by several earlier international initiatives, this network has been recently established in response to the need to ensure the participation of Roma women at all levels of decision-making and to the necessity to create a platform for cooperation between Roma and non-Roma activists working for the empowerment of Roma women in all areas of life. Attending the conference, the international board members and editors of the journal “Nevi Sara Kali” expressed their decision to continue publishing the journal after the completion of the project, and to keep providing a space in which these efforts find worthy representation at European level and beyond.

Debates about research findings regarding disadvantaged ethnic Roma's access to employment, about public policies promoted in Romania, in the European Union and by the United Nations to ensure equal opportunities and combating multiple and intersectional discrimination, and about possibilities and limits of civic activism were completed by artistic programs. We want to highlight here the contribution brought to the conference by Romani Design from Budapest, which, through its unconventional program, not only gave participants a moment of relaxation, but raised awareness about the social and political relevance of fashion in terms of human and cultural recognition.

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As an outcome of the conference “Romani Women for Equal Opportunities” we want to bring to the attention of decision-makers and of a wide audience from Romania, but not only the following conclusions:

- disadvantaged Roma women are not only victims of multiple and intersectional discrimination, but are also agents of social change towards promoting equal opportunities, ensuring social justice and human dignity, eliminating prejudices and unequal treatment, increasing self-esteem, and affirming economic independence, cultural recognition and civic and political representation;
- in the light of the above statement there is a need that EU institutions, and national and local decision-makers assure the chance to Roma women activists to participate on decision-making processes and to have access to decision-making positions;
- Roma women, together with women with other ethnic backgrounds – based on their expressed solidarity around ensuring fundamental human rights and their activism against manifestations of racism and sexism in both mainstream society and minority communities –, advocate for the creation of socio-economic conditions in which everybody has equal access to goods and services provided by the modern European societies;



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- projects implemented by NGOs in the domain of employment may provide services that improve the chances of disadvantaged people to access decent paid work, but cannot generate sustainable changes in a labor market shaped by the market economy;
- structural funds made available to Member States of the European Union will become instruments of structural change only to the extent to which central and local governmental institutions assume their related responsibilities and improve the management system of these funds, and to the extent to which they and other stakeholders (such as private and public companies) support civic organizations in their efforts to provide services for local communities in need;
- NGOs efforts will not have sustainable impact if they are not supported and backed by the implementation of an adequate system of social protection that ensures decent living, and above all by a legislation of labor, which should acknowledge that social and economic inequalities are due to structural factors, which defend employees' rights, and which consistently requires the assurance of equal opportunities and the elimination of discrimination in hiring and promotion at the workplace through active measures targeting disadvantaged groups;
- the Government should provide legal and institutional mechanisms in terms of ensuring equal opportunities in all areas of life; in this respect, the Romanian Government is responsible to reorganize the central and local institutions that are meant to elaborate, implement and monitor public policies for equalizing opportunities in education, employment, housing and public health services;
- the research conducted within the project "Equality through Difference. Roma Women's Access on the Labor Market" and the experiences accumulated by other project activities show that gender disadvantages and inequalities faced by a person may intersect with other social inequalities due to his/ her status, age or stigma related to his/ her ethnicity; therefore we emphasize:
 - public policies for equalizing opportunities and combating discrimination should consider intersectionality of these factors, so that approaching equality should not be limited to equality between women and men, or between Roma and non-Roma, but must consider how various social inequalities intersect and overlap;
 - the development, implementation and monitoring public policies that take into account intersectionality require setting up an institutional body, which has authority in decision-making, coordination capacity, financial standing and professional expertise in the field of equal opportunities and policies addressing disadvantaged groups, such as a Ministry for Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities, or an Inter-Ministerial Directorate for Social Inclusion and Equal Opportunities;



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- public policies and projects regarding employment for disadvantaged groups, among them marginalized Roma communities, should be based on an integrated approach at least in three senses:
 - be designed so as to act on multiple causes that generate and reproduce the disadvantaged position of Roma in the labor market (e.g. poor school education and school segregation, sub-standard living conditions and residential segregation, unequal access to health care, negative prejudices towards Roma, lack of self-confidence, and fear of assuming identity);
 - Roma employment policies have to be integrated into the general policies aimed at improving the employment rate of all citizens, but as long as structural inequalities will persist, the overall effort to improve access to decent work must be strengthened with affirmative measures for disadvantaged groups, among them Roma, whom, in addition to the socio-economic conditions shared with other vulnerable groups, are also faced with unequal treatment based on their ethnicity and their cultural stigmatization;
 - all employment policies need to be analyzed in terms of their impact on disadvantaged groups, so that their elaboration, implementation and monitoring need to take into account this analysis;
- the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion to be developed and implemented in Romania in this year, should organically integrate the gender and intersectional perspective, so that interventions regarding the improvement of living conditions, ensuring fundamental human rights and cultural recognition take into account the specific needs of multiple disadvantaged Roma women;
- due to the interdependence of the factors that structure the everyday life conditions of Roma living in poverty, policies and projects for Roma need to be integrated, multi-sectorial projects; interventions in local communities have to treat all the problems they are faced with in order to generate sustainable changes;
- programs that aim at the social inclusion of Roma must act not only on Roma communities, but also on the majority population, so that on the one hand to strengthen self-esteem and confidence among ethnic Roma, and on the other hand to eliminate discriminatory cultural concepts and practices existing among the majority.



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The organizers of the international conference “Roma Women for Equal Opportunities” reaffirm the key messages of the project “Equality through Difference. Roma Women’s Access on the Labor Market” (Jiekhipea andar’ i diferinca. O akceso le romneango p’o foro la butiako): dignity (ortaimos), social justice (pakiaimos ande peste), decent work (sukar butyi), self-esteem (lumiako ciacipe), and elimination of stereotypes (o ankalavimos le anglune-krisange). Expressing their gratitude towards all the funding agencies of the project (European Social Funds, Soros Foundation and Open Society Institute), they transmit to decision-makers the synthetic conclusion of the conference and of the project: the imperatives of the European framework strategy regarding the objectives of the National Strategies for Roma Inclusion up to 2020, assumed also by Romania as a member state of the European Union, might be accomplished only by putting into practice at national and local levels of an integrated and intersectional approach, in which the perspective of mainstreaming is completed with that of targeting; in which all social actors assume the principle of shared responsibility for the sake of ensuring social inclusion, cultural recognition and Roma political empowerment; and which aims at the assurance of fundamental human rights by creating socio-economic conditions favorable for equalizing the opportunities of the multiple disadvantaged social categories. Through our conference and project Roma women expressed again their desire and force to participate on this endeavor.

Letiția Mark, president of the Roma Women’s Association “For Our Children”, Timișoara
Enikő Vincze, president of Desire Foundation, Cluj



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