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GUVERNUL ROMÂNIEI
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Newsletter

NO. 13

The project "Equality through Difference. Roma Women's Access on the Labor Market" promotes social inclusion of Roma women and young individuals by acknowledging their particular needs and interests. It is funded by the European Social Fund, Operational Program for Human Resources Development 2007 -2013. "Invest in people!" Priority axis and domain field "Equal opportunities and respect."

The project runs for three years, starting in November 2008. The following partner organizations contribute to its implementation: Roma Women's Association "For Our Children" from Timisoara, Desire Foundation from Cluj, Parudimos Association from Timisoara, National Agency for Roma,

the Municipality of Timisoara, Autonomy Foundation (Budapest).

Project activities take place on local, multiregional, national and transnational levels.

Some activities are informative (provide information for Roma communities, or sensitize public awareness on problems encountered by Roma in the domain of labor). Other activities formative (aiming to have a direct impact on target groups we work with, and on the degree our society knows and acknowledges the reality of ethnic and gender discrimination, and the importance of eliminating it. Research and social intervention mutually supports each other.

The 13th Newsletter presents information about the visit of Joost van Egmond at the headquarters of the of the Roma Women's Association 'For Our Children' and recommendation regarding the economic empowerment of Roma based on research conducted within the project



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**Visit at the headquarters of the Roma
Women's Association 'For Our Children'
Joost van Egmond**

Fighting segregation in Romanian schools

The Romanian government is at a dead end. President Basescu recently admitted that he's open to new ideas to get Romani children to attend school. Youth workers in the city of Timisoara can give him a few tips.

Mirela and Ramona form a mobile brigade of sorts. They run all day between parents, children and teachers with the goal of keeping the children in school. „It's tough work“, says Ramona, „but it's the only way. We are trying to change a mentality of centuries.“

Roma are Europe's largest underprivileged ethnicity. Nowhere is the problem as visible as in Romania, which has at least half a million Roma by conservative estimates. Unemployment, illiteracy and poverty go hand in hand and create a vicious cycle.

„Parents often don't see the value in education, teachers are not motivated and

the children are crushed in between“, says Ramona. „In some conservative communities we are already happy if children attend school until the age of ten.“

In the past years a lot of money has been thrown at the problem, but still the effort of volunteers like Mirela and Ramona are necessary. They are themselves a good example of what is possible. Both were born in poor Roma communities, and both now study at the university in Timisoara. „Nobody in my family ever came this far“, says Mirela. „I'm the talk of the town.“

They thank their success to a large extent to Letitia Mark, a teacher and the manager of the organization Roma Women For Our Children. Her recipe sounds simple: Spread the children over a large number of schools and make sure there is enough individual support. She provides a student room for Ramona and Mirela. In turn they support schoolchildren. With their homework and in the relation with parents and teachers.

Especially spreading the children is very important. The number of Roma children in school is growing, but many end

up in segregated schools, with a substandard quality. Ramona daily sees this at the school she works with. „Twelve year old get a diploma without being able to read. Some children have moved abroad but still get their marks. All C's."

How different is the climate at the Roma Women's Association For Our Children center. 9-year old Loredana is concentrated on her homework. With the aid of the organization she attends an inclusive school at the other side of town and she only gets straight A's. Her mother Adriana (27) is watching proudly. She herself belongs to the many 'lost' generations. „I left school at age 10 to help in the household", she explains. „But I want Loredana to do something good with her life." It's already hard for her to help her daughter with her homework, so she is happy with the support she gets from the students at Roma Women's Association For Our Children.

„We need to give children a stimulating environment", says Mark. She is skeptical about president Basescu's proposal to fine parents who keep their children at home. „Let him first try to find those parents",

she replies with a wry smile. To her, the situation is much like the back segregation in South America. „They don't work on the mentality. The government prefers to invest in big projects like infrastructure. Schools get a fresh brush of paint and a nice sports terrain, but I never see a Roma child there. They forget to give the children attention."

**Access of Roma people to decent work
and the need for economic empowerment
Recommendations on employment policies
and programs dedicated to disadvantaged
groups of Roma**

A. General Recommendations

These programs and policies - integrated into government policies - must translate into practice the social and economic rights of disadvantaged groups of Roma, to equalize their chances to access decent work. They must:

1. Rely on a holistic approach in at least three meanings:

- be designed to act on multiple causes that generate and support the disadvantaged position of Roma on the labor market (ex, schooling, housing and possibly residential segregation, access to health services, negative prejudices against Roma, lack of self-confidence);
- policies for Roma in the field of employment to integrate into general policies dedicated to improving the

employability of citizens, but as long as the structural inequalities persist, the overall effort to improve access to decent work must be completed by affirmative action dedicated to disadvantaged groups, among them Roma people who in addition to the socio-economic conditions that they share with other vulnerable groups, are also confronting unequal treatment based on their ethnicity and cultural stigma;

- all employment policies must be analyzed in terms of their impact on disadvantaged groups, and their decision on the definition and implementation must take into account this analysis too.

2. To define and sustain forms of employment leading to economic empowerment (economic empowerment) of disadvantaged people, with this aim we need:

- to support these people in their effort to access the training courses that give them opportunities for (re) qualification;
- to facilitate their access to information about jobs available and how to apply for a job;
- their entrepreneurial training;
- empowering them as freelancers;

- support some form of self-employment, including access to micro-loans that make these possible.

3. To contribute to the recognition of Roma culture by strengthening self-esteem and eliminating negative stereotypes about Roma who claim discrimination and social exclusion recognizing that the two, economic empowerment and cultural condition are mutually conditioning and reinforcing one another.

Specific recommendations

1. Public actors, responsibilities and the need of coordination

-the problems faced by many Roma people (among them access to decent work), due to the complex factors that create them, require sustained involvement of the state, both from an institutional perspective and from a financial point of view;

-the Romanian state needs to clarify and consistently support and reinforce positions created in the central and local structures, that are designed to support the

Roma communities in their efforts to social inclusion, so that they acquire the authority and power required to raise efficiency of the work they do;

- the Romanian state needs to consistently implement non-discrimination legislation and equal opportunities between women and men and between people of different ethnicities and also in the field of employment, but also in the audio-visual field, creating levels (motivational and criminal) in which to enforce these laws in both state enterprises and the private ones;

- also regarding employment issues, the state must put into motion all of its legal tools to motivate people to work legally (by increasing wages), and to take initiatives in areas from which the state can offer products for their dissolution and / or may subsidize them, but also to motivate state and private employers to hire disadvantaged individuals, to contribute to their training and to provide various services (ex. access to child day care for people who are working);

- decentralized public institutions involved in the employment field must

strengthen the position of Roma employees (primarily the employment of occupational agents, but also of social workers and mediators, health mediators etc.) to have contacts that may have actual impact on Roma communities in terms of information and mediation to find jobs;

- local authorities should be more open, and not just rhetorically, but in fact to work with Roma civil organizations, benefiting from their support for their actions undertaken in Roma communities, and secondly by providing financial and logistical support so they can act as attracting agents of European funds;

- non-governmental and governmental organizations from the field of equal opportunities, non-discrimination and social inclusion, to act among the majority, men, as well as Roma communities, namely women, to increase social solidarity and mutual accountability, and to eliminate ethnic and gender stereotypes;

- governmental and non-governmental structures need to work to develop and implement social development programs operating in local communities in all areas of

life, and all their problematic aspects, taking into account their interdependence;

- employers and unions need to contribute to the implementation of all national and international socio-economic rights and the right to decent work for all citizens, regardless of their ethnicity and gender, while recognizing the benefits of cultural diversity at the workplace;

- schools need to put into practice the requirements in intercultural education, so as to contribute to this growing knowledge and mutual respect, to remove negative stereotypes, and to promoting cultural diversity in any area of life;

- the need to create a governmental structure such as a Social Inclusion Ministry or a Inter-Ministerial Department for Social Inclusion, with authority, budget, expertise and coordination in the field of equal opportunities and policies dedicated to the disadvantaged groups.

2. Policies for Roma (employment)

- due to the interdependence of factors that structure the everyday life of Roma,

policies for Roma, but also Roma projects, devoted to policies and projects must be integrated, multi-sectoral, the interventions in one community or another have to deal with all the problems they face, to implement sustainable solutions (to create conditions that contribute to solving a problem and addressing other issues);

- the efforts to eliminate the abandon of school, at least among children with adequate age for compulsory school, but for those who must continue their education at higher level, must go hand in hand with the financial support of the programs which improve school preparation and training for adults;

- the programs for Roma must act not only in the Roma communities but also the majority population, so that, on the one hand to strengthen self-esteem and confidence among Roma people, and secondly to eliminate the cultural concepts and discriminatory practices among the majority;

- people who practice traditional crafts, or practice certain professions in the formal or informal economy, but without the skills and,

consequently, without being recognized as such, must be supported to acquire skills with the help of which they get access to better jobs, and / or, where appropriate, acquire operating licenses that would allow them to become independent producers and service providers;

- to create the possibility for people from disadvantaged groups (Roma) who want to start a business to have access to micro-credit with special status, for disadvantaged groups;

- further work is needed in the training offered to employers and public authorities on equal opportunities and discrimination law, but also about social inequality, anti-Gypsy prejudice and multiple discrimination and exclusion of Roma.

3. Supporting public policies for Roma through research

- government strategies should be based on empirical research (quantitative and qualitative) disaggregated by ethnicity and gender, undertaken in a systematic way to identify specific needs that have to respond with solutions;

- identifying the needs has to start with the needs of Roma communities, and not the needs of the views of the majority;
- qualitative research on discrimination must be designed to find mechanisms that maintain not only to signal their presence;
- given the decentralized implementation of employment policies, community studies are needed to adjust exactly how to implement specific measures at local level;
- government policies (employment) to be analyzed in terms of their impact on disadvantaged groups (Roma); measures included both general employment policies and policies for Roma, must be brought within the meaning of their adaptation to the particular situation of Roma;
- Public policies need to include a more nuanced self-assessment, with relevant quantitative indicators, qualitative indicators and introduced where appropriate.

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