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Office for the promotion of equal treatment
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2012 HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

WORKING SESSIONS 6

ROMA/SINTI AND, IN PARTICULAR, EMPOWERMENT OF ROMA WOMEN

Italy, Department of Equal Opportunities, UNAR

1. Indira Bajramovic, defender of Roma women's rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, one year ago said that "Many women, especially in Roma communities, suffer from several forms of violence without even recognizing it. As women and as members of an ethnic group that endures discrimination throughout Europe, they face double barriers in accessing their rights".

She added that "We are working to make violence against women recognized in all its forms and to support survivors in claiming their rights and seeking the protection they are entitled to."

RSC women, in Italy, but in many other countries too, are exposed at more vulnerability to social exclusion and poverty than women of the native population or Roma men: they are more likely to suffer from multiple discrimination due to prejudice on the part of the host society and to discrimination as women in a male-dominated ethnic community. So, they face double barriers in accessing their rights. We think that Roma women in Italy are likely to face discrimination and to be excluded for more reasons than men, not only due to social prejudice, (caused by social and cultural differences) but to gender discrimination too.

This situation prevents them to achieve full integration in society and moreover creates multiple barriers to the inclusion of their children and their access to education, healthcare and social protection.

We are aware of the importance, according to the Communications of the European Commission and the Recommendations of the Council of Europe, to adopt a **gender mainstreaming approach** in building policies targeting the social inclusion of disadvantaged ethnic minorities as the Roma.

Effective implementation of the principle of equality, realization of constitutional rights, prevention of marginalization and discrimination, and adoption of measures for the promotion of social inclusion are closely linked.

The gender-based approach entails the following activities: gender based disaggregated data; identification of discriminatory factors between man and women; the analysis of such disparities; the formulation of specific objectives to overcome disparities; the definition of indicators to measure the reduction of disparities; identification of necessary resource; development of specific strategies; updating the strategies in force.

It is also consequently crucial to consider, while enhancing the level of gender-sensitive policies, the main role Roma women have as mothers and the positive influence of their empowerment on the future roma generations.

An evident result of tailoring these gender-oriented social policies would be the improvement of women's interaction with welfare institutions, local civil society stakeholders and authorities and the consequent rise of their capacity building.

Furthermore this process would surely lead to long-term inclusion effects.

Referring to the access to health and social services and the labor market, Roma women face great difficulties due to lack of language skills often caused by their low and approximate level of schooling.

Especially in the labor market, if they succeed in achieving a labor position, it is often very low-paid or irregular, deriving from different factors, as discrimination, lack of education or language skills, lack of recognition of qualification or of a legal status (resident permit or identification paper).

As far as housing conditions are concerned Roma women, with their large families, often live in inadequate housing conditions, or in settlements with substandard infrastructures or in residential homes in socially poor areas, with difficulties to access to public transportation and social services, in caravan sites or in irregular settlements, lacking electricity and running water.

These extreme living conditions are even more difficult to Roma women, who spend a lot of their time in the role of care-givers, and consequently in non-safe accommodations, which has negative effects on their health conditions and psychological wellbeing.

In response to these complex problems the Italian government has embarked on a path "joining the forces" of all the Administrations concerned at national and local level through a new transverse, inter-institutional alliance, spreading from active cooperation with the Roma and Sinti communities, and their associations' networks.

In this context Italy has adopted its "National Strategy for the inclusion of Roma Sinti and Caminanti Communities" so that it can guide, in the coming years, a concrete program for the inclusion of the Roma communities, avoiding to continue the so-called "emergency phase".

The **general aim** of the National Strategy is to promote equal treatment and social and economic inclusion of the RSC communities, while ensuring a lasting and sustainable improvement of their living conditions, making their accountability effective and permanent, as well as their participation in their own social development, besides ensuring the enjoyment of citizenship-related rights, as envisaged in the Italian Constitution and by international standards.

The Minister for International Cooperation and Integration has been thus entrusted to establish a political control room for the relevant policies of the coming years, jointly with the Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Health, the Minister of Education, University and Research, and the Minister of Justice, in which he has also convoked and involved representatives of regional and local Authorities, including Mayors of large urban areas, as well as representatives of the Roma and Sinti communities living in Italy. The immediate outcome was a thorough examination of methods, priorities and resources to be allocated.

The above control room will thus guide the integration/inclusion process over time, periodically monitoring and assessing the state of play, including the results achieved and the consistency of the national choices and projects with the EU recommendations.

In this process, **the control room avails itself of UNAR (National Office Against Racial Discrimination), Equality Body established to implement directive 2000/43/EC and now also designated as National Contact Point**, which coordinates and monitors the Roma Strategy, on a regular basis over time, taking into consideration policies and interventions, particularly with regard to “housing”, access to employment, access to healthcare, cultural mediation services, information, awareness-raising and countering of school dropping-out;

UNAR is working in partnership with a new Forum of **Roma and Sinti Communities, organized on a territorial and regional basis**, through which the Roma and Sinti Communities will be able to concretely evaluate the implementation of Strategy principles and objectives at local level. Further, there will be also set up some Working Groups which shall ensure: the constant update of relevant data – an essential element to steer the political choices –, the juridical recognition, in particular, of some communities without ID documents who fled from the Balkan conflict; the constant monitoring of the EU and national funding allocated to this end, including the correct use and the consistency of the resources, and the objectives to be achieved.

In this context, within the Strategy framework, and according to the systemic actions and the relevant objectives relating to the four axes of intervention given by Communication N° 173/11, were set up four technical Tables on the following specific issues: **housing, education, labor and health**.

1 a. Housing solutions and access to house

The first aim is to promote, where possible, the realization of micro-centers, which meet the specific needs of sedentary RSC families or requesting such;

It's very important to provide non-discriminatory access to housing, including access to public housing; UNAR manages a special “contact center” to report every discriminatory action.

The action has to ensure an integrated approach to housing policy, together with economic, social, educational and socio-sanitary measures through local inter-institutional cooperation;

Giving adequate information to RSC without dwelling on the tools and opportunities for housing undertaken by regional authorities and/or local private market ;

promotion of greater use of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), in synergy with the European Social Fund (ESF) and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) for the preparation of local housing programs specifically but not exclusively aimed at RSC.

1 b. Training and promotion of access to employment

Identifying of training needs, with particular reference to the female world and increase training opportunities and the effective participation of RSC women through certified paths of learning and training ;

promoting female access to the labor market both training professional cultural female mediators and through the accompaniment of women to the employment centers;

promoting greater access to the labor market through the accompaniment to the employment centers and public services and private employment, with particular reference to women and most vulnerable communities;

providing means and forms of assistance and tutoring on the job for young people and adults, men and women, RSC, who undertake work experience first, even with individualized coaching courses;

promoting the knowledge and the removal of prejudice in access to employment and the workplace by developing a more favorable climate for the inclusion of RSC people;

promoting the development of individualized skills to access to management, administrative and business opportunities designed to use self-employment, business creation and entrepreneurial growth;

improving information on how to use micro-credit facilities, access to public funds and community and business financing;

supporting the regularization and the strengthening of professional background;
encouraging a stronger, more effective and efficient use of Structural Funds, and in particular the European Social Fund, for the promotion and development of local career guidance, training and employment placement of RSC, particularly women, at greater risk of social exclusion.

1 c. *education:*

Prevention of any discrimination in access to day nurseries and nursery schools and promote the enrolment and attendance of RSC children;

promoting enrollment, attendance and academic achievement at primary and secondary schools in minor RSC, ensuring sustainable access to quality education;

reducing the number of school drop-outs by RSC students, with particular reference to young mothers;

monitoring statistically any change in access, frequency and academic success of RSC students;

supporting, learning and promoting the acquisition of academic skills for all RSC children;

encouraging and supporting the RSC accompanying students at all stages of transition from one school to another ;

promoting the active participation of RSC students in school life and extra-school activities;

promoting the active participation of the RSC in their children's education and cooperation between schools, families and RSC communities;

increasing the use of innovative training approaches and providing access to information technology.

1 d. health and social services

Monitoring the living conditions, factors and levels of morbidity and risky behaviors for the health of RSC communities;

promoting access to quality health and social services for RSC, with particular emphasis on women, children, elderly and disabled;

promoting better access to social and preventive medicine, with particular reference to sexual health, reproductive and maternal-child-health;

promoting the active participation of the RSC female population to local social services in view of a use of figures of intercultural mediation specially trained.

2. The priority commitments, for the biennium 2012-2013:

The Strategy provides:

- **the establishment**, within the political control room of a **technical committee to study the legal status of the Roma, Sinti and Caminanti** (RSC) communities (citizenship, regularization, de facto statelessness) and the **elaboration of an *ad hoc/omnibus* Bill** concerning the recognition of these communities as a **national minority** (besides envisaging a specific study on the legal status of the RSC minors and on the Roma-related issues within the systemic collection of data, specifically those referring to human rights);

- **the launch**, by re-programming the not yet allocated resources from the past emergency phase concerning the Roma communities settlements within the Regions of Campania, Lombardia, Lazio, Piemonte and Veneto, of specific **“Local Plans for the Roma social Inclusion”**, which will indicate new inclusion measures to be realized on an experimental basis, in order to contribute to the achievement of relevant objectives and the implementation of contents, models and instruments relating to governance and capacity-building.;

- **the establishment within the NCP (UNAR)** of an ad-hoc **working group, aimed at closing the information and statistical gaps**, by involving the central Administrations concerned, including ISTAT (The National Statistics Institute), ANCI (the National Association of Italian Municipalities) and the Roma communities’ representatives, besides adopting specific set of indicators, using the existing NCP resources (such as CERIDER – the Research Centre against ethnic and racial discrimination) and reviewing the indicators and models in use at the **UNAR Contact Centre**. This working group will draft by December 31st, 2013, the first survey on the situation of the Roma and Sinti communities in Italy, in collaboration with the FRA (*Fundamental Rights Agency*), to be periodically updated;

- **the establishment within the NCP (UNAR)** of an ad-hoc **joint working group**, involving the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Office of the Minister of International Cooperation and Integration, UNHCR, the representatives of the Roma communities and the human rights NGOs, in order to deal with all the issues relating to the **legal recognition of the**

Roma people from the Former Yugoslavia, besides defining possible pathways and solutions of a diplomatic and administrative nature, to overcome the "de facto statelessness";

- **the establishment within the NCP (UNAR)** of a **joint working group** with the Department of Development and Economic Cohesion, the Ministry of Economic Development and the main central Administrations managing the National Operational Programs, in order to both re-purpose, within the programming cycle 2007-2013, by specific consistent projects, the residual resources, or those not yet allocated, and to elaborate new proposals for the introduction of **a specific objective dedicated to the inclusion of the Roma and Sinti communities**, within each new National operational Plan (PON) 2014-2020;

- **the effective launch, within UNAR**, of:

- 1) the **National Network of territorial Anti-discrimination Observatories and Centers**, at least in 50% of the regions, reaching the entire population living therein;
- 2) **a database and a computer-based monitoring system of discrimination phenomena in mass media**, including newspapers, TV and Radio programs, and the new media. Within this framework, it will be envisaged a new specific thematic area dedicated to discriminations, stereotypes and prejudices **against the RSC communities**;

- **the realization by UNAR**, in cooperation with the Council of Europe and through the involvement of the Associations representing the Roma and Sinti communities, of the **second edition of the Dosta Campaign of the Council of Europe**, and of a specific thematic event on the occasion of "The Memorial Day" to commemorate and disseminate knowledge on "Porrajmos";

- **the testing of the Forum of Roma and Sinti Communities**, a participatory model for the involvement of the Roma and Sinti communities in the relevant decision-making processes.