

MINUTES

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ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF ROMA

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The conference 'Economic Empowerment of Roma' gathered more than 100 representatives of governments, international and civil society organisations. This was the last Decade conference under the Montenegrin presidency. The structure was divided in 7 sessions, namely: 1) Opening Session; 2) Best Practices from International Organisations, Donors and Programs; 3) Best Practices from National Programs; 4) Empowering Roma Youth, Tackling Youth Employment; 5) Local Level Projects: Agricultural Cooperatives; 6) Local Level Projects: Social Enterprises and Corporate Social Responsibility and 7) Concluding Remarks.

Opening session

The conference was opened by the Minister for Human and Minority Rights of the Republic of Montenegro, **Mr Suad Numanovic**, who reminded that 'the joint improvement of the situation of the Roma communities all over the world and their full participation in social, economic, cultural and political life, must be guided by systemic solutions that will enable them to more efficiently access the most vulnerable areas'. Minister spoke of the progress made in the fields of legal status, education and employment of Roma population in Montenegro which makes 1.01% of the total population of this country. The representative of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, General Director for Social Welfare and Protection of Children, **Mr Goran Kusevija**, who particularly focused on the existing legal framework for the social integration of Roma in Montenegro. The session was moderated by **Ms Sanja Zugic**, Public Relations Manager and Head of Cabinet of the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights of Montenegro.

I session: Best Practices from International Organisations, Donors and Programs

The first session was focused on setting the stage for the workshop through clarifying certain definitions, explaining the preconditions for economic empowerment of Roma and common and best practices implemented so far. The session was moderated by **Ms Jasmina Papa**, Social Integration Advisor at UNDP Regional Centre.

The first presentation was delivered by **Ms Celine Ferre** from the World Bank who spoke about the *Economic Empowerment as a key step towards Roma Inclusion*. Ms Ferre presented the key findings of the research conducted for Eastern European countries which tackled the issues of difficulties Roma face

in the labour market, barriers to the employment and challenges of Public Employment Services (PES) and (A)LMPs: (AcGve) Labour Market Programs. Main conclusion: Education is the most important determinant of being employed for the new generations invest in quality education from early on. Recommendations: For those who have been already through schooling, adjust ALMPs to provide additional/ adequate services for the most in need: a) Establish special units dealing with priority groups; b) Outsourcing and subcontracting to specialized institutions can represent efficient solutions; and c) Reinforce entrepreneurship programs.

Mr Adam Kullmann, OSF officer, was the second speaker whose main argument is that in order to achieve the economic empowerment of Roma, *multiple roads are* needed. Mr Kullmann particularly emphasized the need for: a) reinforcing commitment for employment in *primary labour market*: targeting in either mainstream or specific program; b) increasing *demand* for low educated labour force: decreasing costs of employment, supporting SMEs, launching projects with demonstration effect, etc; c) increasing *mobility* of labour force: let's search for and award Europe's best mobility program; d) '*Whitening*' informal employment: Let's search for and award Europe's best 'whitening' program!

Mr Petrica Dulgheru, Advisory Board member at Roma Programs Open Society Foundations, presented the proposal for setting up the Roma Economic Development Fund, which aims to bridge the gap which prevents mainstream financial institutions to work with Roma communities, and to enable Roma entrepreneurs to work with financial institutions in order to develop their businesses and create more local employment opportunities.

II session: Best Practices from National Programs

The objective of this session was to discuss certain economic empowerment cases implemented on national level, through answering questions such as: difficulties and challenges faced; lessons learnt, conditions and applicability of the projects in other countries. The moderator was **Mr Adam Kullmann**.

The first speaker in this panel was **Ms Jasmina Papa**, Social Integration Advisor at UNDP UNDP Regional Centre, who offered an overview of the Roma employability and employment Decade region-wide. Main conclusions: Significant and persistent disadvantage of Roma and in particular women's access to labour markets; Significant and increasing youth unemployment (in the context of impact of crisis?) – Despite some improvements in educational attainment – potential risk- reversing modest educational gains; Quantitative and qualitative manifestations of Roma disadvantage in labour market. Recommendations: Interplay between educational levels, prejudice, socio-economic determinants of health; Links between labour and social policies need to be addressed: does work pay and when?; Need to address simultaneously both: individual characteristics that can put a person at risk of exclusion from labour market; and set of 'drivers of exclusion' (structural, behavioural or policy-oriented); Need to examine direct and indirect losses from large section of population excluded from labour market.

Mr Georgi Georgiev from the Land – Source of Income Foundation, presented Roma Income and Generation Project. This project is a stage in the Development of Land Based Income Generation Programme, with the aim to help poor landless Roma families obtain their own land and earn sustainable living through agriculture. Main lessons learnt: Fighting poverty through economic empowerment of

people requires long-lasting and continuous efforts. The short term projects cannot bring sustainable results. Financial inclusion of Roma is a complex issue and requires a complex approach: a) resource acquisition and 2) development of capacity for effective and efficient use of the resources.

The third speaker was **Ms Marijeta Gaspersic** from Development and Education Centre – RIC Novo Mesto. The focus of her presentation was at the project *Finally* – Financial Literacy for Roma. This project was co-funded by the Life-long Learning Programme of the EU with the aim to raise the level of financial literacy for the Roma adults. Main results of the project will be the Finally training course and Finally Toolbox for Learners and Trainers.

III session: Empowering Roma Youth, Tackling Youth Employment

The session moderated by **Mr Orhan Usein**, Program Manager at Decade Secretariat Foundation, reflected on the youth guarantee program and youth employment funds within the EU, discussed success stories on national and local level tackling youth employment.

Mr Roman Boitard, Program Manager at the EU Delegation to Montenegro, presented the Youth Guarantee Program of the European Union. The Youth Guarantee is a new approach to tackling youth unemployment which ensures that all young people under 25, whether registered with employment services or no, get a good-quality, concrete offer within 4 months of them leaving formal education or becoming unemployed. The good-quality offer should be for a job, apprenticeship, traineeship, or continued education and be adapted to each individual need and situation. EU countries endorsed the principle of the Youth Guarantee in April 2013. Youth unemployment has put the future of an entire generation at risk. That is why the European Commission has put this challenge at the top of the EU agenda. 'The employment situation and labour market of Montenegro are similar to some member states and in a few years, Montenegro will be part of the European labour demand and supply. This is why it is essential that Montenegrin decision makers learn from the youth guarantee and propose similar solutions locally', concluded **Mr Boitard**.

The second speaker, **Mr Elvis Berisa** presented his newly established Montenegrin Roma youth organisation: Phiren Amenca (Walk with us). He spoke about the challenges to the employment of Roma youth in Montenegro and opportunities for the increase of their employability. After presented the overall situation, Mr Berisa gave certain recommendation in this regard, namely: a) the state should implement and encourage affirmative action in the employment of Roma and Egyptian communities, especially Roma and Egyptian women; b) monitoring and evaluation of the situation, the activity rate, the records of all active and passive measures must be ensured; c) creation of new training intended for Roma and adapted to their educational opportunities is needed; prevention and sanctioning of child labour must be ensured; combining training and consulting services, support services to newly employed persons, services to support the Roma and Egyptian entrepreneurs etc; and ensure the participation of Roma and Egyptians in the implementation and monitoring of grant schemes operating programs for IPA Component IV.

Ms Sofia Amaral de Oliveira, Conditions of Work and Employment / Gender Equality Specialist at International Labour Organisation, DWT/CO Budapest, was the third speaker. She offered an insight into

the ILO policy responses and good practices on youth employment. Her main argument was that “*access to productive and decent work is the best way young people can realize their aspirations, improve their living conditions and actively participate in society*”. The ILO offers five key recommendations in increasing the employability of the youth, i.e. 1) Stimulate demand and create jobs for youth through pro-employment macroeconomic policies; 2) Invest in education and training to enhance employability and facilitate the school-to-work transition; 3) Improve labour market integration of young people through targeted labour market policies; 4) Provide career options to young people by supporting entrepreneurship and self-employment and 5) Ensure that young people receive equal treatment and are afforded rights at work.

Ms Agnes Kelleman presented the *Integrom* project implemented by Autonomia Foundation – Hungary and Boston Consulting Group, which deals with job offers for youngsters in this country. The project targeted young unemployed Roma with high or secondary education. Given that many young Roma fail to find good-quality job, this project offered a new model to facilitate Roma employment in private sector, trying to find white-collar and non-physical jobs for Roma youngsters, thus strengthening the Roma middle class. The main outcomes of this project are: 5 partner companies, 4 trainings, 60 participants, 15-20 young people employed, methodology tested and refined, model distilled.

IV session: Commerce & Agricultural Cooperatives

This session provided an overview on agricultural employment possibilities for projects implemented at local level. The objective of this panel was to map out possible practices for replication and analyse under what conditions economic empowerment initiatives can have sustainable positive outcomes. The session was moderated by **Mr Petrica Dulgheru**, OSF.

Mr Fabian Sanchez from NGO Presentia Gitana, presented Social Trade Peddling Project. The project is managed by the Social Trade Riojana Association, a non-profit organization founded in 2005, and it contributed to establishing of **Sunday hawking market**. The Sunday Market contributes to the improvement of living conditions and the employment situation of people in this area that are at risk of social exclusion. There are established rules that all vendors are required to comply (prohibited and authorized goods for sale, the posts are to be serviced by authorized persons or close relatives, all sellers must be currently on compliance with licensing, taxes, fees and relevant permits to carry out the activity). Main project achievements: a) obtained support of local and regional administrations; b) an employment insertion project that helps to resolve the economic needs of a portion of the population, and also contributes to achieve social cohesion; and c) the Association expects to develop complementary education programs and vocational training for the traders involved in the market.

Representative of Hungarian Government, **Mr Ivan Soros**, presented Social Land Program, which was launched - as an **ACTIVE** social-politic tool - in 1992, with the aim to have a role in managing the local unemployment situation, to promote local employment concerning the disadvantaged social groups and to combat local back market. This program targets settlements with low level of employment and is composed of three subprograms: 1) public employment related sub program; 2) tool development and purchase of equipment subprogram and 3) gardening and stock raising culture subprogram. Number of supported projects under this program is between 100 and 170. Expected results: Greater financial

stability and stronger self sufficiency in the given settlement for the disadvantaged and uneducated people, mostly Roma; Stronger social integration of disadvantaged people, especially Roma among them; The local resources are utilized, and the domestic marketable quality bio products become more dominant; The settlement can keep the population, reduced migration pressure; The need for social benefits of the beneficial families are reduced, and their need for self sufficiency are improved.

Session V: Social Enterprises and Corporate Social Responsibility

Ms Violeta Naydenova, Policy Analyst for Open Society Foundations was moderator of the session where speakers presented projects with the aim to incite the representatives of attending NGOs to learn from their practices and eventually see how they can be transferred in their respective countries.

Mr Osman Balic, The League of Roma – Serbia, presented the case of Roma collectors of secondary raw materials. The project is being implemented in the Southern Serbia, the poorest part of this country, since 2012. The aim of the project is to raise the employment of Roma and reduce the level of their poverty through the promotion of the work of the collectors of secondary raw materials as a branch of industry, as it is highly profitable.

Ms Gabriela Verbovska from the Slovak Government presented the project in the field of social work in Eastern Slovakia “Production of the bio-seeds: A key to sustainable green economy”. Project is implemented by the organisation Svatobor. The priority aim of this project is to reduce poverty and social exclusion and inequality, and it targets rural, socially excluded people at the risk of poverty. The project provided for employment of 13 gardeners, 10 people in the water management and 37 Roma volunteers.

Mr Mate Kertesz, representative of Bagazs Public Benefit Association from Hungary presented unique project in the field of housing rehabilitation and community development, which was implemented in cooperation with Prezi.com. This project included variety of activities from children camps, peer and non-peer mentoring for Roma youth living in Roma settlement in Bag, Hungary. Cooperation with Prezi.com provided for 120 employees through this project and long-term outcome in sense of adult mentoring, after-school mentoring, new projects “Wi-fi village”, a kitchen garden project, etc.

Concluding remarks

Mr Marton Rovid, Research and Policy Officer at Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation provided summary of the two-day conference. He praised the variety of presented case studies in the field of employment and the overview of the labour market situation, barriers to Roma employment and future perspectives. His main conclusion was that governments were not able to effectively tackle the discrimination in this area, and the stronger measures and institutions are needed in order to mitigate this issue. In his opinion, short-term projects have shown to be expensive and unsustainable, therefore long-term activities and programs must be implemented in order to build trust and have sustainable results. Mr Rovid invited all interested stakeholders to use this opportunity to learn from the presented projects and provide support for new projects.

Ms Sanja Zujic from the Government of Montenegro closed the conference by reminding once again that Montenegro is committed to reaching the state of full integration of the Roma community through providing systemic solutions which will enable them to more efficiently access the society.