

Dear Chair, Dear organisers,

Thank you for inviting me to participate in this workshop today, in particular on behalf of the CoE Committee of Experts on Roma & Travellers (MG-S-ROM).

I'm here today to talk of the CoE CM Rec.(2001)17 on improving the economic & employment situation of Roma, Gypsies & Travellers in Europe and also to give out some examples of the implementation of this Rec. through the experience & practice of the CoE m-s, some of which are here with us today, having joined the Decade for the Roma Inclusion.

It goes without saying that the grounds of this Rec. are to be found within the founding concept of the CoE for achieving greater unity among its m-s. Recognising that the employment and thus the economic situation of the Roma population in Europe is further burdened by all social components of exclusion and discrimination (in particular) in the field of education & vocational training, the CM mandated MGSROM to draft the basic guidelines for the support, indeed, of Roma employability in the CoE m-s. Following from the wide but principal acknowledgement that large groups of Roma in Europe suffer the effects of long-term unemployment and consequently poverty, the Rec. since its adoption in 2001, almost a decade now, has formulated a comprehensive tool for m-s while drafting and implementing employment related policies for the combat of all forms of social exclusion and discrimination faced by the Roma population while accessing the labour market.

Proactive measures for the protection after all of the right to **equally access** the labour market, whether in the public or the private sector, is a basic principle of Rec(2001)17 within the scope of which the floor is established for the **embark of local initiatives esteeming from nationwide mainstream policies, tailored to the needs of the local communities in terms of existing human resources and markets' needs.** The "individualised approach" based on the example of the Irish model on the lifecycle approach, tailored on local needs and Travellers' potentials and thus placing in a concrete manner the individual in the centre of policy development and delivery, as well as the "employment zones" in the United Kingdom, offer some challenging practices in the field. In Bulgaria, the "**Job Opportunities through Business Support**" Project component, engaging several differentiated projects for the creation of employment opportunities in either disadvantaged Roma communities or for Roma communities with particular market needs and potentials such as alternative agriculture and cultivation and earlier the implementation of the **grassroots "profiling of clients"** approach in Finland, some regions of the Netherlands, or the "**coaching tracks**" operating in various stages of the process of matching clients with the labour market resulting in job opportunities, enterprises, vocational training and apprenticeships, consist some more good examples in terms of individualised employment models esteeming most of the time from nationwide, mainstream employment policies.

Similarly, the establishment and training of "**Roma employment mediators**" in Bulgaria and the Czech Republic, "**personal work integration assistance**" and "**post employment on-going counselling**" in Spain, "**expert counselling activity projects**" in Slovakia but also the establishment of Municipal social enterprises, "**full time reintegration councillors**" in the Netherlands, "**Socio-Medical Centres**" in Greece

and some more, provide Roma inter alia with vocational counselling for accessing substantially the labour market and maintain their posts.

Likewise, the establishment of “**Job Fairs**” in Bulgaria, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and in Romania enable for the creation of job opportunities for the Roma population at the local level. It is in that context that within this Recommendation the **establishment of comprehensive, mainstream employment policies is foreseen as a priority-policy** for all member states while creating equal opportunities for enabling Roma access to the market economy and overcoming social poverty existing in most European states. To this extent, given of the intense **cultural diversity witnessed amongst all Roma communities** which may lead to the development of a wide number of differentiated potential skills amongst local communities depending on the particular circumstances existing at the local level or faced by the Roma communities in each particular community, the undertaking of **employment initiatives at the local level bears the burden for the successful implementation of, however, mainstream, long-term committed employment policies**. Going further, depending on the variety and the level of decentralisation met among the Council of Europe member states, the adoption of comprehensive national employment programmes and their implementation at the local level in close cooperation with or upon the institutionalised initiative of the local authorities, arises as the future component of focus-centred employment policies towards the Roma population. The Gypsy Development Programme launched in Spain since the late 80’s, providing for technical and financial support for all groups of the Roma population in terms of comprehensive social intervention and assistance offers a useful example in this regard. In other words, **flexible top-down structures** that will allow **for bottom-up projects, adjusted to the needs of the local Roma communities and the local markets and adapting the skills** existing in each one of the local societies.

The establishment of **synergies and partnerships at intra-national (local, regional) and international level** may as well offer to the effective, **goals’ and personnel’s centred drafting and implementation of tailored employment programmes** and are therefore considered inter alia as key elements for the successful lift of the social barriers faced by the Roma population in the contemporary market economy. The Irish model, comprising both the legal and the operational-institutional framework managed to set up the preconditions for the successful cooperation of the local and the national authorities. Among these, worth mentioned are the National Training and Employment Authority’s (FAS) launch of Special Employment Initiatives for the Travellers during 2005-2006 within the Dublin, Cork, Galway and Clare County Councils for the provision of training, employment and enterprise job opportunities and the establishment of the “**Traveller Interagency Groups**” for the promotion of local coordination of competent agencies and Traveller representatives. Equally important and innovative is the introduction of an “**ethnic friendly employer**” **model** in the private sector in the Czech Republic encouraging the creation of job posts for members belonging to ethnic groups. Likewise, the multi-regional operational programme under the ACCEDER programme in Spain for the combat of discrimination and the investigation of integration opportunities for those at risk among which the Roma communities too, with the cooperation of the National Gypsy Foundation (FSG) offers another vivid example of multiplier effects based on subsidiarity of projects, funds and partnerships. Another interesting initiative

undertaken on the transnational level is a **“cultural sensitive working method”** in cooperation with social workers and reintegration councillors operating in municipalities with Sinti communities in The Netherlands and in Belgium (under the INTEREG IV) and is considered a project of multiplier effects and long term prospects. Roma Training or Internship projects in cooperation with IO's are also equally important for the development of skills, such as for instance the Roma internship programme within the CoE.

Life-long vocational training based on capacity building and adequate training in generic skills taking into consideration existing or objective barriers born by the Roma population due, not only to long-term unemployment but also due to cultural diversity and lifestyle are deemed crucial for the **curtail of the long-term abstain from the regular labour market**. Validation of skills based on existing certified experience by field-experts following the example of France (validation des acquis de l'experience) offers a great opportunity for the improvement and best use of potential or even existing, however, unofficial skills. Equally important is hence, the **gradual lift of the employability gap** among the generations by developing and implementing **employment related policies in the field of education and culture** so that all Roma oriented training projects result into sustainable outcomes. “Pre-training workshops” in Spain offering different employment opportunities or “vocational training courses” for the expertise in some of the most popular fields of economic activity, “Parents’ Schools” in Greece and a wide number of “Vocational Pre-Training and Training” courses in Hungary, Greece, Germany, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Czeck Republic, Slovakia, also the “HERON” Program on New Technologies Training in Greece, the Irish “Traveller Internship Programme” (in the civil service) are some of the training programmes operating in various member states.

On the other hand, the promotion and support of **income generating activities** based on the provision of incentives for the encouragement of individuals’ economic activity (e.g. entrepreneurship) is deemed of principal importance for the wise investment in existing Roma human resources. Closely related to their abstain on an almost permanent basis from most types of regular employment, the provision of micro-credits for the establishment of small-medium enterprises or even for legalising existing family enterprises, or for the creation of new entrepreneurs as in France, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Ireland, Romania and Spain, may but facilitate the smooth transmission of the Roma economic activity into regular market economy with multiplying effects for the labour market itself.

Short term but also long term assessment and dissemination of information on the projects and measures undertaken, the personnel concerned-engaged, and the goals set, are consequently fundamental for the establishment of **flexible and focus-centred mainstreaming employment policies**. A number of relevant surveys and studies have been conducted following the implementation of Integrated Action Plans for the social inclusion of Roma in various member states either as a result of cooperation between governmental and non-governmental bodies or solemnly by NGO's operating in the field. **The message is clear; the losses from Roma exclusion from the labour market are halting into permanent poverty not only the Roma but also trigger any chance of the labour market for future stability and development.**

Doubtless, effective employment policies necessitate the establishment of adequate **information dissemination mechanisms** so that awareness' raising is promoted as regards the **rights and the duties for and while accessing the labour market**. Equality Authorities established in several CoE member states could be of use to this end. Anti-discrimination campaigns such as the CoE Dosta! Campaign are deemed crucial for the removal also of prejudices vis a vis the Roma. However culturally diverse Roma are, diversity should be valued, encouraged and promoted at national and local level.

Finally, noting the "circle-point" between poverty and discrimination, in which the lack of access to regular or permanent employment - due to the discrimination or social exclusion faced by a large number of Roma communities in most European states - results to even bigger poverty and social exclusion, it comes evident that the conditions must be set for **concrete measures** to be undertaken, so that **the labour market creates equal job opportunities and maintain these in the long-run for the most vulnerable groups of the population, amongst which the Roma**.

I would also like to apologise in advance for those state practices that were not mentioned today in my effort to give a brief as possible presentation of the Recommendation and of its implementation in the CoE m-s. However, all these will be further incorporated and developed in the context of the implementation report on Rec. (2001)17 in the CoE m-s, which is currently drafted by the MGSROM and me personally and we would be glad to hand it out to the Decade Secretariat upon its final adoption by the Committee members.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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