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## Report from the Regional Workshop for Political Participation of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Women

Skopje, 22-23 November 2013

The project “Best Practices for Roma Integration” brought together 28 Roma women from the Western Balkans region for a two-day workshop to support the exchange of experience about political participation. The meeting also included participants from the UN Women in Skopje, Council of Europe’s Joint Programme on Minority Protection, Delegation of Finland to the OSCE Secretariat in Vienna, OSCE Mission to Skopje and other stakeholders.

The regional workshop was based on a preparatory meeting of Roma women held during the OSCE Human Dimension Meeting (HDIM) last September in Warsaw, Poland. The BPRI project supported the participation of 12 Roma women from the Western Balkans at the HDIM. BPRI used the opportunity to discuss the topics of interest for follow up activities. The Roma women expressed interest in political participation, especially networking, mentoring and decision making. These specific topics were used as the basis for the regional workshop.

Roma Women Networks have been established in several Western Balkan countries, including Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>1</sup>, Montenegro<sup>2</sup>, Serbia and Kosovo\*. The aim of the regional workshop was to strengthen the capacities of these networks and enable them to exchange experiences among themselves and other Roma women’s NGOs at the regional level.

BPRI is a regional project funded by the European Union, supported by OSCE participating States and implemented by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. The project promotes greater Roma participation in political and public life and decision-making, greater access to legal aid and improved living conditions.

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<sup>1</sup> Still not legally registered.

<sup>2</sup> In Montenegro, the Roma Women’s Network was formed by *activists* from initially seven cities, while in the other countries networks consist of Roma Women’s *organizations*.

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/99 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

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Best Practices for Roma Integration  
Supported by OSCE participating States



Project funded by the EU

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### Welcome Note

H.E. Ralf Breth, Head of the OSCE Mission to Skopje expressed his satisfaction that the BPRI project is implementing the Regional Workshop in the host country. He also reiterated that despite the country's adoption of the Action Plan for the Improvement of the Status of Roma Women, there is unfortunately not much visible progress in terms of enhanced Roma women's participation in public and political life. Ambassador Breth further expressed his confidence that the BPRI project will promote innovative programmes and facilitate co-operation between local and national governments, independent institutions and civil society.

Ms. Mabera Kamberi, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, underlined the importance of the Women's Lobby that successfully raised gender equality issues to the national political agenda. Roma women's rights were included in the National Strategy Action Plans adopted by the government in 2011 and the Law on Secondary Education helped to increase the education levels by making secondary education mandatory. Ms. Kamberi expressed hope that Roma women will run at the upcoming elections in 2013, but also warned about the risk of false promises.



*Ms. Kamberi spoke about her personal experience as a Roma woman working for the government in her opening remarks*

Ms. Milena Isakovic, BPRI Regional Co-ordinator, explained the importance of Roma women's participation for the success of (any) project and encouraged the more experienced activists to support their younger colleagues at the workshop and in follow up activities.

### Investing in Networks as an Advocacy Tool

The regional workshop included presentations from women's networks in Bulgaria, Hungary and the host country. Ms. Daniela Kolarova, Executive Director of Partners Bulgaria Foundation, described their activities on co-operative planning in Roma communities, advocacy with local authorities and a leadership programme in 13 cities. Ms. Eva Deak, Executive Director of Partners Hungary, discussed with the participants the ability of field-based organizations to influence policy making at the national level. They also discussed the benefits and sustainability of Roma Health Mediator programmes where Roma women played a crucial role.

Participants also had an opportunity to learn about the establishment of the National Network to end Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in the host country. Ms. Elena Dimushevska, Executive Director of this network, described the framework established thanks to support from UN Women, including rules of procedure, communication policies and legal registration of the network. This network does not

provide direct services to victims of violence but provides training to member organizations to strengthen the quality of their services. They also conducted a mapping of capacities of member organizations and identified regions in the country where there are no NGOs working on combating domestic violence. The Network will work to fill these gaps and participates in policy making at the national level, including the development of the National Strategy for Combating Domestic Violence 2012-2015.

In discussion groups, the Roma women underlined that mutual trust, transparent activities, clear rules, joint objectives and values are the foundation of a successful network. The importance of successful fundraising and a (group of) leading / co-ordinating organizations should also not be neglected. Some networks are able to afford professional facilitation while others use a less formal structure.



*Ms. Harapi spoke about Roma women's efforts in Albania*

In addition, participants pointed out that conflict resolution mechanisms are essential for the long-term survival of the network. A code of ethics could be a useful instrument for resolving conflict situations and restoring solidarity. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, network members established a working group that mediated a solution and then communicated it to all members.

Addressing inactive members is also a hurdle faced by the Roma Women's networks. The above-mentioned Network to end Violence against Women and Domestic Violence suspends members who do not respond to messages for six months. This rule helped to encourage participation and buy-in from members.

The legal framework in the Western Balkans is not very conducive for establishment of networks. In particular, if one of the member organization's bank account is blocked, the entire network is blocked financially. Nevertheless, several participants saw value in giving a legal form to their network so that joint activities can be implemented more effectively.

### *Mentoring*

Several mentoring programmes exist in the Western Balkans region (see resources section below). Key aspects of successful mentoring programmes include technical knowledge in the given field, a sensitivity, skill and experience in mentoring programmes, as well as good communication. Problems occur if the beneficiary feels their mentor is not experienced enough.

The Mentoring Walk organized in the main walking zone in Belgrade, Serbia, and other cities in the region is one of the ways to raise awareness about the importance of mentoring programmes.

### Using Social Media to Promote Gender Equality and Empower Roma Women

Ms. Jelena Savic, young activist from Serbia, discussed with the participants how their organizations use social media. Most activists use Facebook while a few organizations also showed their results on websites. Twitter and Youtube are less popular. Social media are easier to access and influence than traditional media, but even more established organizations face challenges in communicating their achievements, especially in English or other languages.

There are also risks of using social media since this can open the organization to negative comments and insults. It is labour-intensive to maintain a public domain (whether it is a website comments section or Facebook page).

Two videos were presented at the workshop – one produced by the BPRI project to show the Roma women who ran for local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although the Roma women were not successful in these elections, they are already preparing for those coming up in four years.

The second video was produced by the Centre for Roma Initiatives from Montenegro, which included a moving story of a Roma woman who was forced into an arranged marriage at a very young age. After organizing the caravan of Roma women who agreed to speak



*Ms. Delija presented the Centre for Roma Initiatives' advocacy against early and forced marriages in Montenegro*

publically about their experience in a forced marriage, this organization is now looking for partners and ideas for follow-up activities in 2013.

On the second day of the workshop, participants had an opportunity to practice recording their personal presentation with guidance from Mr. Dusko Arsovski, Macedonian RTV and former Chief of Office for BBC World Service in Skopje. They focused on how to present the work of their organization and their advocacy activities in the media.

### Decision Making and Political Participation

Working groups on decision making and political participation were facilitated by Mr. Vladimir Lazovski and Mr. Aleksandar Krzalovski of the Macedonian Centre for International Co-operation (MCIC).

There are different types of power that can be utilized in the process of political participation. The trainers focused on the different instruments that are available to NGOs for communicating priorities. After illustrating some examples of successful and failed

attempts of political participation of women and Roma women specifically, participants discussed the following issues (i) How to achieve greater participation of Roma women in politics and in decision-making?; (ii) What are the participants' personal and organizational experiences in this field?; (iii) Which factors influenced the success (or failure) of the participants' efforts on local or national level? and (iv) What recommendations can we identify for the future?

Participants focused on identifying factors that contributed towards the success and failure of political participation efforts in their countries and tried to summarize them into several major categories. The success factors included:

- Existence of strategic co-operation and finding alliances with relevant partners;
- Collaboration of Roma women with mainstream NGOs and political parties (Roma and non-Roma);
- Existence of capacity building systems that would provide continuous training and mentoring;  
Existence of programs that would develop gender sensitivity among political leaders;
- Availability of political science scholarships for Roma women; and
- Government support.

Mechanisms that enable the participation of Roma women in decision making include public hearings in Parliaments or municipal assemblies, open days at the government or Parliament, citizen's platforms, public discussion of draft laws, Roma National Minority Councils, Shadow reports about the implementation of the CEDOW and other conventions, revision of National Action Plans for Roma, etc. However, Roma women often lack information about these opportunities or their comments are not taken seriously by the policy makers.

### Resources

- OSCE Human Dimension Meeting (HDIM), [http://www.osce.org/hdim\\_2012](http://www.osce.org/hdim_2012)
- Centre for Roma Initiatives, Montenegro, <http://www.crink.me/>
- Council of Europe's Joint Programme on Minority Protection, <http://www.jp.coe.int/CEAD/JP/Default.asp?TransID=209>
- National Network to end Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, <http://www.glasprotivnasilstvo.org.mk/>
- Roma Women's Network, <http://www.romawomeninfo.com/?lang=en>
- Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo, <http://www.balkansunflowers.org/>
- Roma Women's Association "Better Future", Tuzla, Bosnia and Herzegovina, [http://www.bolja-buducnost.com.ba/infusions/fusion\\_tube/view.php?cat\\_id=2&video\\_id=3](http://www.bolja-buducnost.com.ba/infusions/fusion_tube/view.php?cat_id=2&video_id=3)
- Roma Active Albania: <http://romayouth.com/albania-roma-active-albania>
- Partners Bulgaria Foundation, <http://www.partnersbg.org/>
- Partners Hungary, <http://www.partnershungary.hu/en/>
- Roma Versitas Mentoring Programme, <http://www.osi.hu/exhibition/macedonia.html>
- Women's Lobby in Skopje, <http://www.rwsee.org/index.html>

- Roma Education Fund’s Mentoring Programme for Healthcare Workers (Media Centre website), <http://www.mc.rs/stipendije-za-ucenikeice-i-studentkinje-romske-nacionalnosti-za-obrazovanje-u-oblasti-medicinskih-nauka.3137.html>
- <http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/scholarship-apply-serbian>
- OSCE Mission to Serbia’s programme “Share Your Knowledge, Become a Mentor” (in co-operation with the European Movement in Serbia), [http://www.emins.org/emins\\_english/content/02\\_activities/projects/share\\_your\\_knowledge/index.html](http://www.emins.org/emins_english/content/02_activities/projects/share_your_knowledge/index.html)
- Network of Roma Women Students at the University of Novi Sad, Serbia – please contact Ms. Marina Simeunovic at [marina\\_simeunovic@yahoo.com](mailto:marina_simeunovic@yahoo.com)
- European Roma and Travelers Forum, <http://www.ertf.org/>
- Macedonian Centre for International Co-operation, <http://www.mcms.org.mk/en.html>

### Social Media Examples and Networks

- Roma women’s NGO “Roma Heart” from Croatia:
  - Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Udruga-%C5%BEena-Romkinja-Romsko-srce/296671939813>
  - Video presentation on Youtube: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAH9Eenzz\\_k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAH9Eenzz_k)
- Roma Girl / Romani Cej Association page on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/romskadjevojka.romanicej>
- How social media is aiding the hurricane Sandy recovery
- <http://www.buzzfeed.com/annanorth/how-social-media-is-aiding-the-hurricane-sandy-rec>
- CNN freedom project, <http://thecnnfreedomproject.blogs.cnn.com/>
- Rate Your Doctor, <http://kakavjedoktor.srbijaupokretu.org/>
- Wikileaks, <http://wikileaks.org/>
- Anonimus Occupy Wall Street, <http://occupywallst.org/>
- <http://romawoman.org/?page=mission>
- Mailing list for the Roma Virtual Network, <http://www.valery-novoselsky.org/romavirtualnetwork.html>
- 33 electronic mailing lists in 20 languages (including Romani) with a total membership over 12,100 e-mail addresses: [romano\\_liloro@googlegroups.com](mailto:romano_liloro@googlegroups.com)
- Planning committee for 4th International Roma Women’s Conference, <http://www.facebook.com/groups/romnialution/>
- Blogs:
  - Roma feminist, <http://usernameka.wordpress.com/>
  - 25days, <http://twentyfivedays.wordpress.com/>
- Comics:
  - Affirmative measures, <http://www.pixton.com/comic/qijel527>
  - Leftist exclusion, <http://stripgenerator.com/strip/639368/lots-make-a-difference/>

- Philosopher, <http://stripgenerator.com/strip/564064/serbian-philosopher-making-a-point/view/all/>
- Feminist, <http://stripgenerator.com/strip/494040/feminist-view/>