



## EUROPEAN POLITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS ON PREVENTING AND TACKLING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN WITHIN ROMA COMMUNITIES

### INTRODUCTION

The Political Recommendations presented below have been elaborated in the framework of the project Empow-Air: Empowering Women Against Intimate partnership violence in Roma communities. Empow-Air is a two year European project co-financed by the European Commission under the Daphne III programme to combat violence against children, young people and women<sup>1</sup>.

The stand point of the EMPOW-AIR project is that violence against women (VAW) is the most widespread violation of human rights. Several analysis of the phenomenon of VAW have concluded that no class, race or nationality were exempt from it. This statement was an attempt to emphasise commonality in women's experience of gender-based violence. However, transnational feminism has increasingly questioned this assumption of commonality and emphasised the need to also recognise the diversity in women's experience of violence, in the State's responses to this violence and in women's ability to access to help and support services<sup>2</sup>.

Male violence against Roma women remains a largely invisible phenomenon in research, policies and programmes within the EU. Following the 2004 and 2007 enlargements of the EU, the Roma became the largest ethnic minority group in the EU (estimate 10M). This new framework brought about a further political recognition of the Roma within the EU, which led to the incorporation of Roma issues in the EU political agenda. During this period, some studies have been carried out on the situation of Roma women in Europe. However, there are almost no studies or policies tackling issues of human rights of Roma women within their community, affected by practices such as violence against women. Even though there are no statistics available on the prevalence of violence against women in the EU Romani

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<sup>1</sup> The Empow-Air project is coordinated by SURT. Fundació de dones. Fundació privada, based in Barcelona, and counted with the following partnership: International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations (Bulgaria), Giacomo Brodolini Foundation (Italy), Gypsy Women Association for Our Children (Romania) and Fundación Secretariado Gitano (Spain). For more information about the project, please visit the following website: [www.surt.org/empow-air](http://www.surt.org/empow-air)

<sup>2</sup> Mama, A. (1990) *The Hidden Struggle*, London: Routledge.



communities, some studies and policy documents<sup>3</sup> and the professionals working with Roma issues claim that Roma women are especially vulnerable to gender-based violence.

## AIMS OF THE POLITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

With this set of Political Recommendations the Empow-Air project seeks to place the issue of male violence against Romani women in the EU political agenda. In doing so, the aims of the Recommendations are, on the one hand, to achieve European political engagement to work towards the prevention and eradication of violence against women. And, on the other hand, to raise awareness about the need to question the notion of commonality in women's experience of gender-based violence, as well as the need to recognise the diversity in women's experience of violence, in the State's responses to this violence and in women's ability to access to help and support services.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Towards an EU Directive to combat violence against all women

Over the last 10 years, the EU has established a significant legislative framework on gender equality, mostly in the field of employment. However, less activity has been taken place regarding the creation of binding-legislation on issues related to violence against women. In this sense, and following the European Parliament Resolution on combating violence against women approved in April 2011, it has become extremely urgent to take action and to set up a legislative EU common framework to combat this type of violence. In this sense, **we call upon the European Union to deliver legal instruments, including a European Directive on all forms of male violence against women.**

It is extremely needed for any legislative action, political programme or other EU initiatives tackling violence against women to do consider diversity among women. That means that protection of women from male violence should take into account the diversity of women's needs and identities. In this sense, an intersectional approach is required in order to ensure that all women are taken into account when developing political and policy measures to combat violence against women.

We also call on the EU Member States to ratify the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. Moreover, we

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<sup>3</sup> Among others, the European Parliament Resolution on the situation of Roma women in the European Union, June 2006; the European Parliament Resolution on the social situation of the Roma and their improved access to the labour market, March 2009.



encourage Member States to achieve a clear follow up on this Convention and, in particular, to ensure that the provisions of this Convention are implemented without discrimination on any ground and taking into account the diversity among women.

Finally, we call upon the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament and the Member States to put into effect and monitor the implementation of the measures and actions foreseen in the **Victims Package**.

## **2. Towards EU gendered anti-discrimination legislation and/or framework**

Over the past years, the EU has played an active role both at legislative and political levels to foster and guarantee equality within EU societies. In this sense, the EU has developed important anti-discrimination legislation which is legally binding for all EU Member States.

For many years the focus of EU action in the field of non-discrimination has been on preventing discrimination on the grounds of nationality and gender. A few years ago, however, EU Member States unanimously approved new powers to combat discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. New legislation thus has been enacted in the area of anti-discrimination; the Racial Equality Directive<sup>4</sup> (implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin in many areas of social life) and the Employment Equality Directive<sup>5</sup> (establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation).

With the 2004 and 2007 EU enlargements, the Roma became the largest ethnic minority group in the EU (estimate 10 million). This fact progressively put Roma issues in the EU political agenda. In this sense, over the last few years, European institutions and agencies have increasingly addressed the human rights situation of Romani people in Europe and the situation of Roma has increasingly become the centre of political attention for Europe<sup>6</sup>.

The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 calls on Members States to ensure that Roma are not discriminated against but treated like all other persons with equal access to all fundamental rights as enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental

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<sup>4</sup> Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin

<sup>5</sup> Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation

<sup>6</sup> EC Communication on National Roma Integration Strategies: a first step in the implementation of the EU Framework, May 2012.



Rights<sup>7</sup>. Yet many Roma are still victims of prejudice and deep-rooted social exclusion, discrimination and violence. Moreover, Romani women are exposed to multiple and intersectional discrimination on grounds of gender and ethnic origin and are at a higher risk than non-Romani women of being exposed to violence against women<sup>8</sup>.

Having stated that, **we call upon the European Union to ensure that fundamental rights of Romani women are respected across the EU** and that all EU measures and political action fighting against discrimination do take into account gender perspective.

Moreover, **we call upon the Council of the EU to achieve an agreement on the EU Equal Treatment Directive** on implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The aim of the Directive is to ensure that all the grounds of discrimination, as well as multiple discrimination, are protected under the law in all spheres of life. Romani women are particularly exposed to multiple discriminations. In this sense, **we call on the Council to ensure that intersectional discrimination** is included in the Directive.

### **3. Towards a gendered EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies**

The adoption of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies on 5 April 2011 marks an unprecedented commitment by EU Member States to promote the inclusion of their Roma communities. The EU Framework provides a new approach to address the problem of deep social and economic exclusion experienced by Roma people living in Europe. The EU Framework requested all EU Member States to produce a comprehensive strategy for Roma inclusion by the end of 2011, which could be either an adaptation of an existing strategy or the preparation of a new one. In order to guarantee that, once in place, national strategies are effective, the European Commission committed to regularly assess the progress being made by Member States. Monitoring is supposed to be done by gathering data from Member States in cooperation with bodies including the European Fundamental Rights Agency, the World Bank and the United Nations. These findings need to be annually reported to the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union. The first assessment was carried out by the EC and its results were presented through the EC Communication on National Roma Integration Strategies: a first step in the implementation of the EU Framework in May 2012.

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<sup>7</sup> EC Communication on An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, April 2011.

<sup>8</sup> European Women's Lobby (2012) Position Paper on Tackling multiple discrimination of Romani and Traveller women: a crucial factor for the successful implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies



As stated by the EWL<sup>9</sup>, the EC Communication on an EU Framework represents an important milestone towards Roma inclusion in Europe. However, unfortunately, the EU framework falls on the integration of gender perspective. A gender-blind approach has also been reflected in the majority of National Roma Integration Strategies until now<sup>10</sup>.

Taking into account all that, **we call upon the European Commission to monitor and evaluate that National Roma Integration Strategies taking into account gender perspective and the situation of multiple and intersectional discrimination faced by Romani women in the 4 priority areas being set up (employment, health, housing and education) and, specifically, regarding anti-discrimination and the protection of fundamental rights actions.**

#### **4. Ensuring EU funding**

The Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 approved by the European Council in February 2013 presents significant cuts compared to the original Commission's proposal. Recently, the EU long-term budget was discussed with the EP and a Resolution was adopted on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2013 rejecting the MFF in its current form. The negotiations will continue in order to reach an agreement on the future Union's seven-year budget.

**We call upon the EU to ensure that the Multiannual Financial Framework 2014-2020 establish EU funding and financial mechanisms for supporting political actions and programmes to both combat violence against women and foster Romani inclusion.** In this sense, on the one hand, it is extremely important **the preservation of the Daphne Programme** to prevent and combat violence against children, young people and women and to protect victims and groups at risk in the future. And, on the other hand, we call upon **the inclusion of VAW and the integration of the perspective of Romani ethnic minority in the regional and cohesion funds** as well as other relevant programmes (**Progress programme, Education and training, Youth, etc.**).

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<sup>9</sup> Idem

<sup>10</sup> EC Communication on National Roma Integration Strategies: a first step in the implementation of the EU Framework, May 2012 and Commission Staff Working Document accompanying the document National Roma Integration Strategies: a first step in the implementation of the EU Framework, May 2012.



## **5. Fostering research on Roma communities and Roma women**

Male violence against Roma women remains a largely invisible phenomenon in social research. Some studies have been carried out on the situation of Roma and Roma women in Europe. Most of them have focused on anti-discrimination issues and, especially, on issues regarding social integration of Roma. However, there are almost no studies tackling issues of human rights of Roma women's in their communities, as affected by practices such as violence against women. On the other hand, most of the studies on gender issues, for instance on male violence against women, rarely take into account Roma women reality.

In this sense, in order to increase and promote knowledge of Romani communities across the EU, we call upon the EC to foster research on Romani communities and doing so taking into account gender perspective. Studies should put special emphasis on the configuration of gender roles and relations within the Roma communities, the links between social exclusion and gender inequality, as well as on the existence of practices such as violence against women.