

ARGE Donauländer-CoDCR

Programme for the Working Group on Civil Society, Social Policy, Women and Youth

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The topics of this Working Group are very widespread, thus being at the same time a huge challenge and – being transversal themes – an opportunity to impact on and cooperate with a great number of excellent thematically relevant institutions, organizations and projects active in the EUSDR, as well as bringing to the fore topics which in our view have not received enough attention in both our organizations until now.

We would therefore like to propose the following common activities for our cooperation:

1. Working Group “Civil Society and Local Actors”

In regional and cohesion politics, especially in the new macro-regional frameworks of the European Union, success increasingly depends on multi-level governance, implementing the participation of Civil Society and Local Actors.

Civil society, other non-state actors from the local and regional level (cultural institutions, youth organizations, social organizations, academia) as well as local authorities share a common role as executive elements of the multi-level approach of macro-regional strategies, a close position to the citizens in the Danube Region as well the overall grass-root character of civil society and local authorities. Endowed with competence, experience and direct access to the citizens, participation of civil society and local actors can lead to better, place based project development and implementation, and in consequence to better spending, as well as assisting the countries of the Danube Region to reach the Goals of Europe 2020.

Proposal for a Roadmap 2015-2017 for the Working Group:

Action 1: Implementing National and Regional Hearings for Civil Society and Local Actors in the Danube Region:

In order to reflect the local, regional and national conditions, requirements, and demands, national and regional hearings between national and regional authorities and administrations and Local Actors should be introduced and held regularly. This programme is a major point on the road map of the Danube Local Actors Platform, created by Priority Area 10 “Institutional Capacity and Cooperation” of the EUSDR. CoDCR as well as ARGE Donauländer are already members of the Platform and participated in the Austrian National Hearing of the EUSDR on 13 May 2015 in Vienna. The results of the hearings will be regularly documented and reported at the Annual Forum of the EUSDR, ultimately leading to a common framework for the implementation of civil society and local actors in the structures of the EUSDR governance.

The working group will join forces with the EUSDR-Priority Area 10 Danube Local Actors Platform and other relevant Civil Society Organizations to implement these hearings in their respective countries and reinforce the activities of the Danube Local Actors Platform and the Danube Civil Society Forum through their support and the endorsement of the hearings by CoDCR and ARGE Donauländer.

Action 2: Furthering Roma Inclusion Policies in the Danube Region

80% of European Roma live in the 14 countries of the Danube Region, though the population percentage of Roma varies greatly from country to county – with the strongest concentrations in poor and peripheral regions.

According to a recent study of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency in 11 member states, about 90 % of Roma in the survey have an income below the national poverty threshold; about 40 % of the children live in households struggling with malnutrition or hunger. Life expectancy is significantly shorter, which is one reason for the high proportion of young people amongst the Roma population. More than half of the Roma in the survey live in segregated areas, in housing that falls far below minimum housing standards. Persistent prejudice and discrimination undermine Roma employment prospects and all other areas of their lives. Roma generally have much lower levels of education than the general population, sometimes caused by school segregation, which consequently leads to fewer employment opportunities. Only about a third of those surveyed has paid work, which is often precarious and informal.

Recent EU assessments of National Roma Integration Strategies concluded that a good set of policy recommendations to fight Roma exclusion exists, however, successful and effective implementation is dependent on ‘strong action’ by Member States which is often lacking, both in terms of political commitment and allocation of adequate resources.

Studies and projects have shown that local actors are closest to the actual needs and requirements of local Roma populations, which are very heterogeneous and diverse in terms of culture, language and traditions and socioeconomic situations. They are best equipped to address the main challenge of breaking down national Roma Integration strategies to a local level of action and impact. Given the multitude of national strategy papers and local/cross-border projects, a transnational strategy approach of the Danube cities towards Roma inclusion should avoid copying or repeating general statements, but rather have a “special focus” on those aspects where local actors and the macro-regional level of policy making can make a considerable contribution:

Local actors as those who are closest to the actual requirements of local Roma communities and who often have a considerable pool of experience from projects and local action; the macro-regional level because specific challenges (like migration and human trafficking) are per se of transnational character and require transnational approaches. The strategy should work to enhance direct involvement and dialogue with Roma, not about them, actively mobilising Roma representatives at a local level.

Europaforum Wien, in a policy paper on transregional cooperation in the EUSDR for Roma integration proposed the following actions to further capacity building and better spending of EU funds through transfer of good practice:

- There is much expertise and many concepts, local projects and subsequent documentation available on (transregional) platforms. Yet, not every “good practice” proves suitable for every local context, and local actors often lack capacities and know-how to implement models that have been successful elsewhere. Efforts should focus on practical consulting and knowledge transfer across regions and organizations.

- A strategy of the local partners (Regional and City Authorities, Civil Society) in the Danube area would offer the opportunity to set up consulting mechanisms of those who have already achieved experiences and know-how from successfully implemented projects, and those who are in need of solutions for their local context.

The Working Group will join forces with EUSDR Priority Area 9 and 10 as well as other organizations active in this field in organizing an exchange and consulting mechanism in the Danube Area between Regions, Cities and Civil Society (including Roma organizations), cooperating with European institutions and leading to place based seminars and conferences on specific topics furthering Roma inclusion and integration through exchange, cooperation, capacity building, project development and better spending of EU funds.

Action 3: Combatting human trafficking in the Danube Region

This project proposal is closely linked to the activities of the Regional Implementation Initiative; The Regional Implementation Initiative aims at reinforcing the political commitments and legal obligations both to prevent and combat all forms of trafficking in human beings, including trafficking for labour exploitation and domestic servitude – thus supporting and complementing the implementation efforts of the larger European anti-trafficking framework as led down in the Lisbon Treaty and the Action Oriented Paper (AOP). It will foster cooperation and coordination among all relevant stakeholders including government authorities, international and non-governmental organizations, taking existing good practices and lessons learned into account. It focuses on a human-rights-based, victim-centered and age-sensitive approach, taking the gender perspective into account. The Regional Implementation Initiative is supported by the Austrian Federal Ministers for Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection, for Women and Education, and of Health, and hosted by the Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe (IDM).

Participation of the medical field in the fight against human trafficking is limited to and dependent on those actively engaged in NGOs or government. Information centres (national Focal Points) where health professionals can seek out information and help when dealing with victims of human trafficking shall help raise awareness throughout the medical field. By way of setting up specialised national Health Focal Points, health workers shall be enabled to recognise the signs of human trafficking, take an active part in the victim identification process and offer the necessary assistance to trafficked patients. The task of the future Health Focal Points will be to support medical personnel, offer advice and facilitate the cooperation with law enforcement and other governmental authorities as well as specialised NGOs that provide services for trafficked victims.

The EU Guidelines for the Establishment and Functioning of national Health Focal Points are the result of a project, funded by the EU within the ISEC Programme, and developed by the Belgium NGO PAYOKE in cooperation with representatives, academia and practitioners from 15 countries, using a scientific, consensus-based method known as a Delphi Survey. The Health Focal Point will help health practitioners to identify, refer and support victims of human trafficking. Eventually, the establishment of national Health Focal Points will also enhance cooperation between health care professionals, law enforcement and NGOs in the fight against trafficking in human beings.

The Working Group are invited to join forces with EUSDR Priority Areas 10 and 11 as well as the Regional Implementation Initiative and their respective national or regional authorities /Capital Cities in order to further the setting up of specialized Health Focal Points and cooperate in the fight against human trafficking in the Danube Region