



Proceedings of the Conference on the Workaló RTD project

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Research that lays the bases to contribute overcoming social exclusion

Scientific officer Angelos Agalianos opened the Workaló Conference. In his introductory speech, Agalianos placed the Workaló project in the tendency in social sciences research within the Framework programs (IV, V and VI) to be aimed at studying aspects related to social exclusion, education, employment and European citizenship participation. The scientific officer also pointed out the need for more research that have as an objective to identify mechanisms and scientific bases that contribute to overcome the social exclusion, like the Workaló project focus on the Romani case.

Research that creates spaces for the exchange and creation of knowledge among the plurality of voices

Julio Vargas emphasised the historical importance of the conference for the Romani history. Vargas also emphasized the need to create spaces for the exchange of knowledge and debate with a plurality of voices.

From objectivity to intersubjectivity: The inclusion of Romani voices in the research allows for more rigorous and excellent findings

The *Workaló* RTD project represents a shift in the way traditional research has dealt with Romani issues. The *Workaló* project coordinator Ramón Flecha introduced the research and the communicative methodology. Flecha highlighted the need to overcome exclusory investigations that have ignored the voices and experiences of the Romà, developing a discourse on exclusion that excludes the excluded from this analysis.

Workaló has counted on the participation of many Romà from all around Europe. This project has brought together Romà and non-Romà researchers and members of the Romani community from around Europe with the aim of identifying why Romà across Europe are excluded from work and concrete ways of overcoming this problem. It analyses the skills that Romà have developed as a social group and identifies how these skills can contribute to the enrichment of the labour market and social cohesion. Furthermore, exclusionary investigations do not propose strategies for the social inclusion of the Romani community and/or of other cultural minorities.

The dialogue between Romà and non-Romà people enriches the research process and its results. The inclusion of the Romà has been crucial for arriving at rigorous and more scientific results. An example of this occurred at the seminar of the project

which was held at the EHESS (École de Hautes Études in Social Sciences) in Paris where Michel Wieviorka rethought his theory, thanks to the contributions from the Romà present at the seminar.

Additionally, the Workaló advisory council comprised of Romà and non-Romà representatives from different organisations has supervised the research process and the conclusions reached in each stage of the project. To undertake the fieldwork and the different state-level workshops, the participation and collaboration of Romani associations from different countries that have been carrying out the research were also counted on. Flecha also observed that this research project has been recognised by the Harvard Educational Review in which Julio Vargas and Jesús Gómez, researchers for the Workaló project, published an article about some of the results of the project and the methodology used.



Julio Vargas, Ramón Flecha, and Angelos Agalianos during the presentation of the project.



Jesús Gómez, researcher and Theodius Lennon, director of the Directorate K: Social Sciences and Humanities, attending at the conference.

Discriminatory practices, together with the lack of qualifications, are the main obstacles to accessing and retaining employment

Montse Sánchez, director of the study on the Romà in Catalonia commanded by the Catalan Parliament, chaired the first roundtable of the conference. Nicholas Walters, researcher at the University of Surrey (UK) highlighted the barriers that Romà encounter in accessing the labour market.



Montse Sánchez

Walters pointed out that ethnic discrimination is one of the main barriers that the Romani community encounters combined with the lack of qualifications. Discriminatory practices do not only appear in daily life relations between businesses and workers, but also in the norms and guidelines of the contracting systems. Ethnic discrimination has many effects on the Romà. It plays an important part in their prospects of finding a job, of improving their work situation or of coexistence between colleagues in the workplace.

The responsibility of the labour inclusion of the Romani community falls onto not only the Romà people but onto non-Romà as well. The Romani community has remained excluded from the formal labour market, although many Romà have the skills that the Knowledge Society demands. Presently, the Information society is asking for more and more flexibility, self-employment, outsourcing; aspects that Romà know all about but that the majority society as well as European and state politics have not taken into consideration up until now.

Social exclusion can be overcome by establishing access programs for the labour market largely based on social inclusion and the participation of Romà. Walters stated that; “Romà identity and Romani Associations are questioning the European policy established from the states and under their responsibility. When there is a problem, it is demanded to be approached from a trans-national perspective.”

**Two motors for social inclusion:
 the Romani associations movement and the inclusion of the Romi (Romani women) in education and the labour market.**



*Inês Amaro and Manuela Marinho
 (Researchers)*

Amaro and Marinho emphasized the existence of transformatory components which could be vital in the labour inclusion of Romà. In the Workaló project, it was analysed the important role Romani associations play a very important role in the organisation of the Romà. Training courses are being undertaken in which a profession is learnt increasing labor opportunities. Romani associations are also demanding a better education for Romani children with the objective that in the future they will be able to access jobs which they have traditionally been excluded from.

Romi (Romani women) are the motor of social transformation of their community. Many Romi are committing themselves to a better education for their children as well as accessing, more and more frequently, higher education. Amaro and Marinho affirm that this process could be on the increase or could be curbed, depending on if

the majority society bears in mind or not the needs of Romà, and in particular the Romí. They are leading the most important advances that are originated within the Romaní community.

Towards a major social inclusion: A high level of education and the institutional recognition of the Romaní community.

Ignasi Guardans (MEP) presided the second roundtable of the conference. in which Marta Soler (Researcher, University of Barcelona, Spain) and Teodor M. Alexui, professor at the University West Timisoara (Romania), presented other findings of the Workaló project.

Marta Soler emphasized the need for a high quality education for Romà children and the institutional recognition in the European Parliament of the Romaní Community as two major steps towards social inclusion.



Marta Soler (Researcher) and Ignasi Guardans (MEP).

In reference to education, what was emphasised was that it has to be about maximum learning, promoting access to higher education whilst still respecting diversity. Soler pointed out that specific experiences of success exist in Europe and in other countries that have these objectives, in which “all children are treated equally, respecting the cultures of their origin“, *Learning Communities, Success for All* or *Accelerated School* form part of these projects in which the community participates in the decision-making at the school. The European educational policies need to consider these approaches to offer an education towards a successful process for all.

Soler also emphasized another specific aspect that is derived from the results of the project: the recognition of the Romà by the European Parliament. Institutional recognition opens the door to the elaboration of specific policies for overcoming the situation in which the Romaní Community lives. Marta Soler showed a particular example of this being the recognition of the Romaní Community in the Catalonia Parliament. From this acknowledgement, it has been possible to carry out an Integrated political action plan from the Catalonian Government, which has as its main objective the social inclusion of the Romà.

Teodor M. Alexui presented some of the findings of the Workaló project regarding the abilities developed by the Romà.

- a) It was highlighted that Romà have developed a series of skills that are required in the present Knowledge Society and that they are very often not been recognised.
- b) Also highlighted was the need to create inclusory paths and methods to higher education as it is this education that opens doors in the labour market of the Knowledge Society.

Towards the recognition of the Romà by the Spanish Parliament

Josep Andreu, member of the Congress of Deputies of Spain, chaired the roundtable of Romà representatives. Andreu committed to work towards the recognition of the Romà in Spain within the present legislature. Taking as a model the Catalan case, the MP noted that the recognition would be the start of a new focus, a serious political program and of a real coming together of cultures.

At the roundtable of future prospects for the Romà, Emilia Clavería, president of the Romaní Association of women *Drom Kotar Mestipen*; Miranda Vuolasranta, specialist advisor for Romaní issues at the Council of Europe, and Florina Zoltan, Romí researcher from the University of Surrey, spoke about the need to carry out specific policies to eradicate the situation of social exclusion.

Quality education from the Romaní culture



Emilia Clavería, President of the Association of Romaní women *DROM KOTAR MESTIPEN* and, **Josep Andreu**, member of the Spanish Parliament.

Emilia Clavería emphasised that one of the basic needs of the Romaní community in present-day society is education. Clavería indicated that if Romà do not receive a quality education, the situation of exclusion in which many Romà find themselves will continue. Clavería also put emphasis on the need to consider the social transformation of the Romí (Romaní women) and of guaranteeing that the women gain admittance to education and employment in conditions of equality.

Romaní Political representation: The European Romà Forum

Miranda Vuolasranta specified the different activities promoted from the Council of Europe regarding the Romà. These activities are centred on the fight against ethnic discrimination and in the carrying out of policy recommendations for education and access to employment. “These projects and recommendations are being undertaken jointly with the European Union and they are becoming more and more related to its expansion.” Vuolasranta also highlighted that these policies are the product of growth in the Romaní movement and from their trans-national and/or European demands from the beginning of the 1990’s. Since then, the trans-national Romaní movement have increased finding now itself in a transitory stage.



Miranda Vuolasranta

Political Recommendations



José Albino Pineda Silva (MEP) chaired the roundtable dedicated to present the policy recommendations arisen from the Workaló project. Jesús Gómez and Julio Vargas presented some of the policies that are derived from the results of the investigation.

From left to right, José Albino Silva, MEP and the researcher Jesús Gómez.



- **Involving the Romà in the policy making process**

The inclusion of Romaní voices becomes a necessary condition to guarantee that political efforts respond to the people's real needs. Nowadays, it is unacceptable to create a committee for gender equity composed by only men. It is also urged to reject political plans for the Romà that have been designated without the Romà. Some advancements need to be highlighted. For instance, the Integrated political action plan is being carried out jointly with Romà people and Romaní associations, and the European Romà Forum has been also created by Romaní representatives.

- **Accreditation for Prior Learning Policies**

Accreditation of prior experience policies have been carried out in different countries of the European Union such as France, England, Finland or Scotland. Gómez pointed out the need for APL policies (Accreditation for Prior Learning) from a European perspective, which bear in mind the specific situation of the Romaní community and that provide the possibility of accessing higher education.

- **Romaní franchises**

Romaní franchises would favour access to the labour market improving the social image of the Romaní Community without renouncing the Romà identity. An example was offered: the *Romà City* project, in process of being developed in Barcelona. A part of this project consists in the construction of franchises with a registered Romà trademark.

- **Inclusion in the ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) sector**

Gómez pointed out that for a full inclusion in the Knowledge Society it was necessary that Romà access qualified jobs from the ICT sector. The researcher also remarked that it is not only training oriented to access better jobs but also it should favour access to a higher education.

- **Affirmative Action Policies**

Julio Vargas highlighted the need for affirmative action policies as much in the educational system as in the labour market. Vargas pointed out the importance of these sorts of measures, one of the main political recommendations arisen from Workaló.

- a) Vargas also pointed out the need that European institutions take proactive role in the inclusion of ethnic minorities in general, and the Romà in particular.



Affirmative actions in education have been developed in other contexts, such as the North American or Romanian, where students from socially excluded groups access higher education. Vargas stated that “Affirmative actions, in the case of the Romà, have to start from the first stages at school, given the low presence of Romà students in secondary education.”

- b) In reference to the labour market, the need for carrying out measures that promote employment was emphasised, as well as the developing of positions in the public sector for Romà or tax reductions for private companies that hire members of this group. Other affirmative action policies can be taken in the labour market. For example, governments can encourage private companies to develop and implement their own affirmative action plans.

The need for policies based on scientific evidence

Bernat Joan (MEP), Julio Vargas and Emilia Clavería closed the Conference. All emphasised the success of the Conference in presenting political recommendations based on scientific evidence. Julio Vargas pointed out the most important results of the research project:

- Analysis of the transition from the Industrial to the Knowledge Society has not taken into account the Romaní experience. At that time, access to the labour market was limited to travelling sales, scrap metal or cardboard dealers. However, since 1995 these jobs have been in decline and Romaní youngsters accessed mostly to precarious jobs.
- Romà have developed specific skills and competences in their traditional jobs and some of which coincide with new emerging occupational profiles. However, different barriers that impede the Romaní labour market inclusion have been identified. Some of these barriers are different ethnic discrimination practices in the access to employment, promotion, low-levels of schooling and the lack of academic qualifications.
- The equality of differences principle helps to overcome the tension between equality and difference. The Romaní people participants claim their right to have their lifestyle and cultural traditions respected, and at the same time that they receive equal treatment and access to the same opportunities like the rest of society.