

Project Title: Marry when you are ready, starting 12 January 2016 ending 12 July 2017 (18 months) Partners: SPES Italy – leading organization, Romni Onlus and Romano Drom Italy, Romsko Srce Croatia, Lider Bulgaria, Forum of Roma Women Romania and Papsza Austria.

### Objectives

The project addresses the problem of early marriage involving girls, aged between 9 and 15 years, in Roma communities in Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Austria, Italy. These are countries both of origin and where Roma live today, carrying on this patriarchal tradition of violence. Combined child marriage is a cultural tradition, aggravated by economic difficulties and social segregation. It prevents normal growth in a large number of girls who are deprived of the right to education, work, choice of partner and personal development. The psychological, physical and economic consequences are far reaching.

### Activities

The project lasts 18 months and has two workstreams: *Community work*, for awareness raising, and *Recommendations and dissemination*, to impact on policies.

*Community work* – Common working method will be established through an exchange with Associate Partners with expertise on the issue. The operators will organize meetings to raise awareness and provide information on the physical and psychological risks and economic impact arising from early marriage. Both adults and community leaders are targeted, and children and youth, encouraging them to continue schooling. It is the start of a long path that aims to trigger a change of cultural attitudes. The work is based on informal meetings, theatrical performances, movies and progressive role models. Experiences, materials and documents form the basis of evaluation and discussion among partners.

*Recommendations and dissemination* - Analyses and methods from *Community Work* will be processed into the *Red Notebook*, with practical and policy recommendations on European, national and local level. It is a call to action for eradication of child marriage, so far inexistent as issue in policies and strategies for Roma integration. *Red Notebook* with indications on how to frame legislation, policies and support, will be presented to policy makers and stakeholders in a conference in Bruxelles and in 5 national conferences.

### Beneficiaries

The direct beneficiaries are Roma girls and their families and communities, 30 in 5 countries. At least 7.200 individuals will be engaged through direct contact. The other main target group are policy makers on European and national level of 5 countries. Indirect beneficiaries are stakeholders working with and for Roma communities' inclusion: public institutions on local level, school and health authorities and workers, social services and mediators, NGOs working on Roma inclusion, media and general public, with focus on youth.

### Results

- Obtain a new awareness in institutions and civil society organization at EU and national level, about the dimension and severity of the problem and the need to insert it as a transversal priority in Roma inclusion strategies.

- Initiate a cultural change in the attitude towards the forced child marriage, mainly within the Roma communities but also in general public.
- Forge a strong partnership of Roma women organizations with capacity to pursue this work as priority.
- Formulate practical and policy recommendations to address the problem.

The main objective of the project is to increase the effectiveness of the forced child marriages contrast capacity by:

- Obtaining a new awareness in institutions and civil society organizations, both at EU and national level, about the dimension and severity of the problem and the need to insert it as a transversal priority issue in European and national Roma inclusion strategies.
- Working for a cultural change in the attitude towards the forced child marriage, mainly within the Roma communities but, through dissemination, also in all the stakeholders, at EU as well as national and local level.

Project target groups are: Roma girls aged 9–15 living in communities of the countries involved in the project, chosen because they are the victims of this tradition; Roma communities as a whole, being the social environment where the tradition of forced marriages is rooted, with a special focus on communities living in rural areas; the responsible institutions, because an effective contrast to the phenomenon passes through their capacity to contrast it.

The project **expected results** are:

1. An increased awareness in institutions and civil society organizations, both at EU and national level, about the dimension and severity of the problem and the need to insert it as a problem within national and European Roma inclusion strategies.
2. An improved knowledge on how to more effectively push for a cultural change in the attitude towards the forced child marriage, mainly in the Roma communities but also in all the stakeholders, at EU as well as at national level.

Project in Austria: raising of awareness and information about the consequences of the early marriage for the young girls, carried out through: A - testimonials and experts in Roma communities in Vienna, B – theatre performances involving the audience. Social theatre as awareness raising and empowerment activity; final performance for the general public and media attention.