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REGARD - REMEMBERING GENOCIDE AGAINST ROMA DISCRIMINATION

The current report is part of the REGARD project and of the participatory processes foreseen within the project.

The report is composed of three parts: a brief overview of the project included in chapter 1; the description of the methodological approach included in chapter 2; and the results of the interviews with local and regional stakeholders conducted in Craiova between the end of April and beginning of May 2023.

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1 Introduction to the REGARD project

REGARD is a European project funded by the CERV Programme, dedicated to the remembrance of Samudaripen and the fight against Roma discrimination. The project takes place in three countries (Croatia, Italy and Romania) between February 2023 and April 2024.

The coordinator of the project is the Italian National Centre of Research (**CNR-IRPPS**) and the local partners of the three countries are: **Croatian Romani Union "Kali Sara"** (Croatia); **Associazione Thèm Romano Onlus** (Italy); and **Asociatia Centrul de Cultura al Romilor Dolj** (Romania).

Following the anniversaries of the Roma calendar, REGARD aims at preserving and transmitting the memory of Roma genocide and resistance by considering its root causes and consequences, and the implications for today. As an integrated action model, the project plans to implement in Croatia, Romania and Italy a set of activities:

1. Surveys on the knowledge of Roma genocide and Roma culture and on anti-gypsyism;
2. Training modules for schools on Roma genocide, Roma resistance and Roma history and culture for students and teachers supporting the remembrance of Samudaripen in textbooks;
3. **Participatory processes with institutions and civil society to foster a common culture of remembrance and mutual understanding between Roma and non-Roma, men and women, and develop shared intervention strategies for fighting anti gypsyism;**
4. Cultural Events and on the artistic expressions of Roma created during and after Samudaripen, remembering the Holocaust including three international conferences attended by Romani scholars of Roma culture scholars to sustain the EU goal of integrating the historical narrative of the Roma into the national and European one for both target groups, but open to the public.

The interviews focused on the following issues:

1. Situation of Roma communities in Craiova and Dolj
2. Knowledge of the genocide to which Roma communities were subject to in Craiova and Dolj among Roma communities and the wider society and its impact social rights
3. Effectiveness of the measures implemented and suggestions for improvement
4. Ways of making the Future Search Conference useful for the community
5. Actors to be invited to the conference

2 Methodological approach

The participatory process foresees two phases:

- The conduction of an initial desk review and subsequent individual and anonymous semi-structured interviews with local strategic stakeholders representing a wide and diversified range of points of view and resources on the topic of the project. The results will be used to design a participatory event, which will take place in the second phase of the process, capable of responding to local needs and expectations.
- The realization of a participatory event, which will adopt the Future Search Conference (FSC) method, which is a planning tool aimed at involving the main players of a territory in the construction of a shared vision of change. This event will take place on the 26th of May and will involve circa 50 representatives of the civil society, academia, and institutions. Further detail about the event will be provided later.

As previously mentioned, the current report focuses on the first phase of the participatory process.

The interviews foreseen by this phase have been conducted both online and offline. In this phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted. This means that they followed a common track of questions, but at

the same time they were flexible enough to welcome any spontaneous input that the interviewees deemed relevant to share.

Overall, 18 interviews have been conducted between the end of April and beginning of May 2023:

- Dragulescu Vlad, director of Shakespeare festival and Philharmonic of Craiova
- Marga Bulugean, chief editor, Cuvântul Libertății
- Constantinescu Cristian, chief editor, Oltenia
- Anonymous interviewee, Agency for child protection
- Anonymous interviewee, Agency for child protection
- Anonymous interviewee, Social Assistance Agency
- Preda Florin, representative on minorities issues, Regional Council Dolj
- Cicea Albano Robert, representative of Roma Youth
- Cristea Radu Ana-Maria, school inspectorate on minorities issues, School Inspectorate
- Amelia Etegan, Regional Centre for the Protection, Preservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture Dolj
- Ilie Petrica, seller Craiova market
- Ilie Patricia, Roma youth
- Izabela Tiberiade, Association Partida Romilor
- Romeo Tiberiade, Association Partida Romilor
- Tudor Laurentiu, Cultural house
- Ungureanu Mirela, Micu Cristina, Stoica – School no. 13 (school manager, school counsellor, school Roma mediator) Craiova

The main findings of the interviews are detailed in the next chapter.

3 Findings of the interviews with local and regional stakeholders

3.1 Situation of Roma communities in Craiova and Dolj

When it comes to the situation of Roma communities, the following difficulties have been pointed out during the interviews:

i. Emigration of Roma people

Emigration is nowadays a phenomenon affecting both Roma communities and the Romanian society in general. However, some interviewees underline that Roma communities are more subject to emigration as they generally have lower levels of education and face higher difficulties in finding a job that allows a decent living. Some interviewees point out that in Romania one needs to have graduated at least the first years of upper education in order to find a job, whereas Roma people often do not go beyond primary/lower education. Interviews reveal that, while emigration affects both urban and rural areas, it is higher in higher areas or in peripheric urban areas where the poverty level is higher.

Emigration of Roma has a strong negative impact on children and, in particular, on their level of education. In some cases, parents leave their children behind and this affects their level of motivation as well as the existence of a family network that can support them in the educational process. In other cases, parents take their children with them, which interrupts their educational process. In other cases, parents leave temporarily abroad taking their children with them, which creates a discontinuity in their educational process. Furthermore, according to an interviewee, some of the children undergo trauma and this impacts on their psychological well-being when they return back home and in the schools that they have abandoned.

Interviewees emphasise that Roma people would not emigrate, should they be supported in finding a job that guarantees a decent living.

Emigration of skilled youth is another phenomenon that interests the Roma community. Causes beneath emigration of skilled Roma youth do not seem to be related to the wage level, but rather to the social tendency in the Romanian society. One of the interviewees has, in fact, revealed that the decision to emigrate was taken following non-Roma colleagues who are used to apply for universities abroad. However, in traditional communities this may trigger marginalization within the Roma community, especially in women's case.

ii. Limited access to qualitative education and discrimination in schools/universities

Limited access to qualitative education was acknowledged as one of the main problems that Roma communities are facing in Craiova and Dolj. Interviewees have identified several causes that jointly cause a limited access of Roma children/youth to education:

- Emigration of their families (see previous paragraph);
- High poverty level. For instance, if children/youth do not have proper clothes, this may trigger absence from school; absence from school may be triggered also by the limited access of Roma children/youth to school materials (books, etc.). Moreover, poor Roma families may be more preoccupied of ensuring children's/youths' access to food rather than to their level of education, pushing them to work rather than to study. In addition, due to the low economic level, often Roma children/youth do not have access to private teaching (a diffused phenomenon in the Romanian society).
- Limited relevance of education among Roma families with a low level of education. Some of the interviewees underline that parents' and grandparents' low levels of education results in a limited understanding of the benefits of education. In turn, this may discourage children/youth from

completing their educational path or from undertaking upper and tertiary education. Furthermore, it also triggers the lack of a support network that may sustain children/youth during their educational path, resulting in school leaving or in non-completion of upper/tertiary education.

- Higher relevance of traditional values than of education within some traditional Roma communities. Despite many Roma families have started to pay increasing attention to the relevance of education for ensuring their children's well-being and decent living, there are still some conservative communities that maintain their past habits of marrying boys and girls since early ages. In these communities, girls often leave school from early ages to get married. These are very closed communities (even for Roma people) that preserve their traditional way of living. According to some interviewees, in some cases girls leave school because their families fear that they may be "stolen" (they may run away with their boyfriends).
- Lack of support services (counselling, psychological support, etc.) for Roma students. As noted previously, in very traditional Roma communities, Roma youth deciding to complete their educational path instead of going to work and marrying may face discrimination within the community. This coupled to the absence of support services may result in Roma students' leaving universities or not undertaking tertiary education at all.
- Segregation in schools with low educational performance. Interviews point out that segregation is mostly explained by the high territorial concentration of Roma people in some neighbourhoods. In some cases, it may be also due to the fact that Roma children are not admitted to "good" schools in the city and end up in Roma segregated schools. While many of the interviewees agree on the fact that these schools have often a low level of educational performance if compared to other schools in the city of Craiova, others point out that in schools that have a high percentage of Roma children achieving a high level of educational performance is very difficult as the educational performance baseline of children in these schools is often lower than that of children in other schools in the city and frequent interruptions of the education path further reduces their educational performance. The type of school and its image and overall performance in the city impacts on the educational trajectory of Roma children/youth.
- Discrimination in schools by teachers and other children. While all interviewees underline that Roma children/youth may face during their educational path, not all of them agree on the intensity level of discrimination faced by Roma students in schools. Some of them consider that Roma students are subject to discrimination by both teachers and non-Roma students, other interviewees underline that the level of discrimination is much lower than in the past and it does not exist in all schools. According to the former, teachers discriminate Roma people by not offering them the same attention as to the other children or by making them feel less clever than non-Roma children. According to the latter, discrimination has decreased a lot also consequently to a series of projects/initiatives implemented in schools to foster tolerance and respect for diversity, including Roma culture, and to fight discrimination and bullying. Nevertheless, actors reveal that discrimination in schools is more intense in schools where the majority of students are non-Roma students, whereas in "segregated" schools the discrimination level is more limited. Furthermore, discrimination occurs more often in primary and secondary education than in upper and tertiary education. This may be also due to the fact that the number of Roma students in upper and tertiary education is still rather limited.
- Limited access to certain faculties. In order to promote the access of Roma people to universities, the Romanian government has implemented a positive discrimination policy, reserving specific places in public universities to Roma students. In the admission tests, Roma youth compete among themselves for these specific places. Interviewed actors point out that the number of reserved places

is very low and, furthermore, in certain faculties (e.g. journalism, general medicine) there are no specific places reserved to Roma people. According to the interviewees, the medicine faculty represents a peculiar case as, in some of the medical faculties (surgery, etc.) Roma have access to reserved places, while in the general medicine faculty no specific place has been reserved to Roma youth, despite the requests of Roma associations.

- iii. **Limited access to the labour market.** All interviews agree on the fact that the limited access of Roma people to the labour market is a crucial aspect, as lack of a legal and continuous income ensuring a decent living impacts negatively on the criminality level of Roma people, on their well-being and migration as well as on the access to education of their children. Limited access to the labour market is a consequence of the limited education level of Roma people as well as of the discrimination faced by Roma people in this area. Interviewees reveal, in fact, that often Roma people pass the CV selection phase, but not the interview one as often employers dismiss them as soon as they see that they are Roma.
- iv. **Segregation on the labour market.** Some of the interviews point out that besides being discriminated on the labour market, Roma people are often also segregated in low quality jobs. Some of the interviewees note also that Roma people face difficulties in finding jobs that imply an interaction with the wide public, as employees are afraid of losing their customers. Therefore, they are often employed in backoffice jobs. Interviewees point out that there are jobs to which Roma employees hardly have access to, such as for instance, journalism. Even though the number of Roma journalist employees is not known precisely, one of the interviewed journalists declared that in her newspaper there has been only one Roma employee. However, the interviewed journalist reports that this situation is not due to discrimination, but rather to the lack of Roma people that graduate from the journalism faculty. The journalism faculty is also one of the faculties that has no dedicated places for Roma students.
- v. **Lack of property documents on their houses.** The lack of property documents represents a relevant issue for getting access to identity documents (ID), as they are mandatory for requesting them. Therefore, many Roma people do not manage to have an ID or have only temporary IDs, which limits their access to social rights.
- vi. **Limited access to medical care.** Roma people face discrimination in access to and within hospitals. Furthermore, in a general context of doctors' and nurses' unofficial payment, poor Roma people have limited access to qualitative care. Limited access to family doctors is also a significant problem. This is mainly due to discrimination of Roma people, as generally family doctors continue to keep a certain distance in the relation and communication with Roma people. Furthermore, in rural communities the lack of family doctors or the high distance to reach them adds to the discrimination issue. Nevertheless, this is not a specific problem of Roma communities, but of all people living in rural areas, especially if remote. Moreover, some of the Roma people have a low level of health education. According to one of the interviewed actors, there are (few) cases when dead Roma people have not been registered as dead for over 7 years as doctors have not registered the death people.
- vii. **Difficulties in emerging on the cultural scene.** Opinions among the various interviewed actors on difficulties faced by Roma artists on the Romanian cultural scene are rather different: some of the interviewed actors point out that Roma artists are extremely valued and that they face no additional difficulties compared to the non-Roma artists, others sustain that Roma people face difficulties in areas not traditionally associated with Roma (poetry, painting, etc.), while others sustain that Roma people are discriminated on the cultural scene in all areas and that only a limited number of them are allowed to step in the public cultural scene of Craiova. While there are divergent opinions

regarding discrimination of Roma artists in Craiova, the interviews point out a limited involvement of Roma artists in the cultural events organised in Craiova. Roma artists have not been involved in two of the major festivals held in Craiova (Shakespeare festival and medieval festival) and there seems to be no exhibitions of Roma painters (at least in the public funded art galleries). Roma artisans also face several difficulties in exhibiting and selling their products, but some of the interviewed actors point out that this difficulty regards all artisans in Romania in the context of excessive regulation of the handicraft sector and limited promotion by the Ministry of culture.

- viii. **Discrimination in all areas of the Romanian society**, including in public institutions. All interviewees agree with the fact that Roma people, whatever the age and gender, face relevant discrimination in all areas of the Romanian society. However, there are divergent opinions regarding the intensity level of the discrimination faced by Roma communities: some of the interviewees point out that there is a wide discrimination of Roma people, while others sustain that the level of discrimination is rather limited. When it comes to the causes of discrimination, these are deeply rooted in the Romanian society and are related to the negative image of Roma communities portrayed along time as well as to their slavery history. Some of the interviews sustain that nowadays, the media plays a relevant role in portraying Roma people negatively, through publishing stories of illegality and criminality rather than positive stories about Roma culture and traditions. However, not all interviewed journalists agree with this aspect. One of them sustains that the same happens in the case of non-Roma people, as negative stories sell better than the positive ones. Interviewed actors sustain that the lack of knowledge of the general population of the Roma culture and traditions is one of the major causes beneath Roma discrimination. While almost all interviews agree with it, some of them sustain that limited knowledge of the Roma culture is due to the closure of the Roma communities and to its limited efforts to promote its own culture and traditions and their added value for the Romanian society.

When it comes to institutional discrimination, all interviews agree with the fact that discrimination of Roma people in public institutions persists. Discrimination against Roma people is shown also in the continuous use of the word gypsy. Even though it has a negative meaning, Romanian authorities and citizens continue to use it. It is worth noting that sometimes the word gypsy is used by Roma people themselves, revealing the historically rooted discrimination against Roma people in the Romanian society.

- ix. **Gender discrimination within and outside Roma community of Roma women**. While, limited participation of women in decision-making in the public life is a general problem in the Romanian society, it is even higher among Roma women. According to some of the interviewees, many of the promotional measures taken in this area are mainly implemented “on paper”, without having any real impact on Roma women. This is due also to the fact that Roma women are discriminated within their own communities as well, especially in the traditional ones. Some of the conservative Roma communities consider that women’s role has to be limited to family care and economic support to the family, without having a say in the family decisions. These are also the communities where generally Roma women have low levels of education, often being illiterate. According to some of the interviewees, in these communities women themselves do not perceive a different role for themselves and this is also transmitted from one generation to another. When it comes to the wide Romanian society, Roma women face higher discrimination than Roma men.
- x. **Difficulties in the communication with and relation with nomad Roma communities**. These are Roma communities living often in the outskirts of cities or rural areas and are characterised by extreme poverty. Despite the various attempts that Roma communities themselves have made to integrate these people in the wider society, some of the interviewees point out that these attempts

have often failed due on the one hand to a limited understanding of their real problems even by Roma representatives from other Roma communities and on the other hand to the proposal of unsuitable solutions. For instance, one of the interviewees pointed out that they tried to locate some of these Roma people within houses, but they stayed there for three months and afterwards they returned to being nomads. This shows that the proposed housing solution was not what those Roma communities needed. While these people are not directly discriminated by the other Roma communities, interviews point out that they seem to be ignored by members of the other communities.

- xi. **Lack of trust of Roma communities in the wider society and in themselves.** Lack of trust in the general society, but also in themselves, is a feature of Roma communities that is deeply rooted and related to the slavery of Roma people in the past. Some Roma still think that they should maintain a low profile in order not to “disturb the Romanians” (interviewed actor). This represents an obstacle not only in the personal development of Roma people, but also in the advancement of their social and political rights. Some of the interviewed actors point out that the lack of trust is also related to the fact that in the recent past several associations/politicians made a lot of promises to Roma people which were not kept.
- xii. **Shame of recognising one’s Roma identity.** The limited public recognition of one’s Roma identity seems to be a diffused problem among the Roma community in Craiova. For instance, in the primary and secondary schools of Craiova there are 1,600 children declared Roma, while unofficially the exact number of Roma children is estimated at 3,000 people. According to some of the interviewees, being ashamed of one’s Roma identity is an obstacle to fighting against discrimination in the Romanian society, as it risks to perpetuate a negative image of the Roma community. Other interviewees consider that the feeling of shame is perfectly understood considering the discrimination level to which Roma people are subject to in the Romanian society.

3.2 Knowledge of the Roma genocide

Opinions on the knowledge level of the genocide to which Roma people have been subject to are divergent among the interviewed actors. Some of the actors point out that overall Romania society is aware of the genocide to which Roma people were subject to in the Romanian history, while others sustain that there is limited knowledge of the genocide against Roma, as history books in Romania focus only on the holocaust against Jewish without making any reference to Roma people. Moreover, some of the interviewees consider that even when Romanian people are aware of the genocide against Roma people, they associate it only to the deportation to Auschwitz and are not aware about the fact that many Roma people from Craiova and Dolj were deported in Transnistria. Opinions among the interviewed actors about knowledge of the genocide within the Roma community are also divergent. Some of the interviewees consider that more or less half of Roma people are aware of the genocide to which they were subject to in the past, while others consider that knowledge about the genocide is very limited, especially among youngsters.

When it comes to the impact of knowledge about the genocide on social rights, opinions among the interviews are again divergent. Some of them sustain that Roma people have started to ask for and benefit of their social rights irrespective of their knowledge of the genocide, while others consider that a better knowledge of the Roma history would support them in claiming for the respect of their human and social rights. Former interviewees consider that access to social rights is more dependent on the existence of and the role of mediators between Roma communities and public institutions in Romania (school mediators, sanitary mediators, Roma representatives in public institutions, etc.), while the latter point out that knowledge of one’s history it is important not only for accessing to social right, but most of all for asking for them and for claiming their respect. In their opinion a better knowledge of one’s history would improve self-consciousness and recognition of one’s identity.

3.3 Effectiveness of the measures implemented and suggestions for improvement

The Romanian government has taken various measures to improve the living conditions of Roma people and to fight discrimination against them:

- Introduction of health mediation since 2001 and their institutionalisation through the official introduction in the Classification of Occupations in Romania. Health mediators are tasked with: improving communication between Roma communities and medical staff; facilitating the access to medical services for the Roma community members; contributing to public health interventions by mobilizing Roma communities to take part in health campaigns or by identifying and informing medical staff about occurrence of transmittable diseases, intoxications, etc.; informing Roma community on rights and responsibilities of the State towards citizens; providing information on the functioning mode of the health and health insurance systems, as well as basic health information; helping Roma people without identification papers in the process of obtaining them.
- Introduction of school mediators who have the role to promote school participation of Roma children and to fight discrimination against them as well as to facilitate the relation between Roma children and their families and the school.
- Reserving specific places for Roma youth in some of the faculties.
- Creation of the National Agency for Roma
- Definition of the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma 2022-2027.

Despite the various measures adopted by the Romanian authorities, all interviewees agree that they have not been yet fully effective. Nevertheless, some interviewees point out that the situation has improved considerably compared to the past. However, not all interviewees agree with this view. While an improvement is noted also by the latter, this seems to be considered rather limited. Both views seem to be confirmed by the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion 2022-2027.

However, interviews point out that some of the measures implemented at local level have displayed a certain level of effectiveness. This is, for instance, the case of the Craiova market (fair). This is a market existing since the Communism, but its functioning was stopped immediately after the revolution for a couple of years. The market has started to function again once with Roma's return from abroad and their entrepreneurship activity related to selling second hand clothes at a low price. The market has been moved several times due to administrative issues and has also been closed for a year, due to a fire that has destroyed it, whose causes are still not identified. The market is open from Monday to Monday and it hosts around 840 fixed places and other 300 during the weekends. Around 50,000 people visit the market during the weekends. The market is one of the main income sources of Roma people, especially with a low level of education, in Craiova. While the market is not reserved to the Roma community around 80%-90% of the sellers come from the Roma community. Interviewed actors explain that this is due to the higher difficulties of Roma people of having access to the labour market for the reasons described previously. The market is in the process of being transferred again due to administrative issues.

Another positive example comes from the school n. 13 where teachers adopt an inclusive strategy to foster the participation of Roma children in education (they do not use discriminatory language; they use informal teaching for improving health education; they do not register children as absent when they participate in national/family festivities; they accept back children who interrupt their school career and put in place remedial learning programmes; they implement a secondary chance programme; they teach Roma history even though it is not foreseen in text books; there is a school mediator and Romani language is taught in school). However, interviewed school staff admits that the measures adopted by the school are an exception in Craiova schools. Furthermore, that it is easier to adopt them in a school where the majority of children are Roma compared to schools where the majority of children are non-Roma.

As to measures that should be undertaken, almost all interviewees agree on the fact that positive examples of Roma people that succeeded in life are needed both within and outside the Roma communities. Furthermore, some interviewees underline that Roma communities should open themselves to the general population so that the others could know them better and should push more for promoting their culture and traditions as well as for claiming the respect of their social and human rights. However, not all interviewees agree with the fact that this should be done by Roma people themselves. Some of the interviewees point out that this should be the role of public institutions, considering their mission, and not of or at least not only of Roma associations and citizens. When it comes to public institutions, some interviews consider that Roma authorities should promote a higher participation of Roma people in public administrations both in decision-making positions and in lower level positions. However, they consider that this should not be done through affirmative discrimination but rather to eliminating obstacles in their access to public positions.

In general, when it comes to positive discrimination, interviewees have divergent opinions about its effectiveness in improving the situation of Roma people. Some of them consider it useful, while others consider that it is discriminatory and that it risks to further increase discrimination rather than to fight it.

3.4 Ways of making the Future Search Conference useful for the community

Interviewees consider that the Future Search Conference can be very useful to the Roma community from Craiova, as it potentially contributes to the improvement of the level of knowledge on the history of Roma people and on the Roma genocide. Moreover, it can also allow Roma people to participate to an original event not experienced before by Roma people. It can also foster dialogue between Roma and non-Roma on specific actions to be taken for improving living conditions of Roma people. However, some of the interviews consider that this latter point may be limited by the risk that relevant public authorities do not participate in the event. Some of the Roma interviewees also underline that they do not expect the event to contribute to the improvement of their living condition, but rather to a better knowledge of their culture and history. Interviewees also underline that it would be useful to work on concrete and feasible outputs during the event, such as, for instance, a guide for the media on how to promote Roma culture and history in the media and on how to relate with Roma communities.

3.5 Actors to be invited to the conference

Interviewees pointed out the following actor categories to be invited to the event:

- Youth students Roma and non-Roma from the Law faculty in Craiova
- Youth Roma and non-Roma law professionals
- Roma and non Roma university teachers
- President of the university/faculty (law and others)
- Policemen (Roma and non Roma)
- Successful Roma youth and non-youth
- Roma representative in the Parliament
- School Roma mediators
- School teachers
- Roma agency
- NGOs dealing with Roma issues besides Partida Romilor, e.g. European Centre for the promotion and inclusion of Roma people (Centrul european pentru promovarea si integrarea romilor)
- A.C.C.E.S. Oltenia (local NGO)
- Local/regional/national decision-making actors (even though it seems that they are not confident about their participation): Ministry of Culture (Ministerul Culturii); Prefecture Dolj; Regional Council (Consiliul judetean); Craiova City Hall;

- Cultural public institutions: Dolj Regional Department for Culture under the coordination of the Ministry of Culture (Direcția Județeană pentru Cultură Dolj); Cultural House Traian Demetrescu (Casa de Cultură „Traian Demetrescu”); Oltenia Museum (Muzeul Olteniei)
- ARTA Gallery (Galeria ARTA), National Union of Artists
- Constantin Lătărețu, Roma folk singer
- Mass-media (newspapers, radio, TV) from Craiova and bloggers