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INCLUD-ED

Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe from education

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WORKING PAPER:

THE GENDER DIMENSION IN THE PROCESSES OF SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL EXCLUSION AND INCLUSION AMONG VULNERABLE GROUPS

Project 4 Work package 17

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report is part of the **Project 4**, which has the following objective: *To investigate how educational exclusion affects diverse sectors of society, particularly the most vulnerable groups (i.e. women, youth, migrants, cultural groups and people with disabilities), and what kind of educational provision contributes to overcome their respective discrimination* (Annex I, p.5).

As it was stated in the Draft planning document for the months 37-54 in this report we *will identify the influence the gender dimension has on the situation of vulnerable groups and we will also investigate the differences based on gender in terms of educational and social exclusion. Based on the discussions carried out in the workshops we will propose some practices and strategies that can overcome the exclusion of women.* (Draft planning document, p. 32).

In order to achieve this objective the gender dimension has been one of the special focuses in the Project 4. Women are established as one of the five vulnerable groups in the INCLUD-ED project and additionally the intersectional dimension of gender inequalities is taken into account.¹ Thus the contributions presented here are based on the twofold perspective: analyzing women as a specific vulnerable group and as members of other vulnerable groups (immigrant women, women from cultural minorities, young women, and women with disabilities).

This report integrates the main contributions on gender dimension obtained alongside the different stages carried out in Project 4: the revision of scientific literature, the survey of NGOs working with the established vulnerable groups, the daily life stories and communicative focus groups with people from all the vulnerable groups, and the country workshops, where preliminary results were presented and discussed with other researchers, NGO representatives, policy makers, as well as people belonging to the vulnerable groups.

The findings on gender are presented here in two main sections. The first deals with barriers as experienced by women (and especially women belonging to the vulnerable groups). The second part aims to indicate transformative strategies to overcome women's social exclusion.

¹ Annex 1, p. 154.

The research activities of the Project 4 were carried out by six members of the INCLUD-ED Consortium: UNIFI (Italy), BISS (Latvia), UB (Spain), UVT (Romania), UCY (Cyprus), and ELTE BGGYFK (Hungary).

2. METHODOLOGY

This report draws on preliminary reports and working papers prepared throughout the various work packages of the Project 4. In all these reports there was a section on women as they are one of the vulnerable groups of the INCLUD-ED project. In addition, sections on gender dimension were included to focus specifically on the women who are belonging to another of the vulnerable groups of the INCLUD-ED project. Therefore, special attention is given to immigrant women, women from cultural minorities, young women, and women with disabilities.

The **work package 14** consisted in reviewing the literature on vulnerable groups and educational and social exclusion in Europe. Each partner involved in this work package (from Italy, Spain, Romania, Cyprus, and Hungary) reviewed the academic literature focused on analysing the processes of educational and social exclusion of one of the vulnerable groups by consulting the relevant databases in the field of education and social sciences. The search covered aspects like school failure, absenteeism, low expectations, educational exclusion, educational inclusion, educational success, family involvement, community involvement, successful educational actions, successful social actions, and social exclusion. Based on the preliminary reports the integrated working paper *Literature review on processes of Educational and Social Exclusion amongst vulnerable groups* was written. A separate section on gender was included in this report.

In the **work package 15** a survey of NGOs working with the established vulnerable groups was carried out. There was a common questionnaire that was adapted for each of the five vulnerable groups. The main areas covered in the questionnaires were:

1. Educational actions leading to social inclusion/ exclusion,
2. Groups affected most by the financial crisis
3. Involvement of the vulnerable groups in the NGOs
4. Successful inclusionary practices in various social areas (education, employment, health, housing, social and political participation)
5. Gender dimension.

In the questionnaires for NGOs working mainly with immigrants, cultural minorities, young people and people with disabilities two sort of questions were asked: first, questions about the situation of a specific vulnerable group and second, questions about women belonging to this vulnerable group. This allowed comparing the situation of these women to the situation of the respective vulnerable group in general. Each partner involved in this work package wrote a working paper *Social and educational exclusion from the actors' perspective* analyzing the obtained data in his country (Cyprus, Spain, Italy, Latvia, Romania, Hungary).

In the **work package 16** daily life stories and communicative focus groups with people belonging to the established vulnerable groups were carried out. In each participating country (Italy, Spain, Romania, Hungary, Cyprus) 5 interviews and 2 focus groups were organized with people from each of the vulnerable groups. An additional criterion for selecting the participants of interviews and focus groups was having a life trajectory of overcoming educational exclusion. The interviews and focus groups had three main parts: 1) covering the life course, 2) educational experiences, and 3) the impact of these experiences on other areas of life (like employment, health, housing, and social and political participation). The goal was to promote a reflection about the strategies, conditions and factors that have helped them to be able to create a pathway to overcoming social exclusion.

Each partner participating in this work package wrote a working paper *Social and educational exclusion and inclusion processes among vulnerable groups* analyzing the obtained data along exclusionary and transformative dimensions. The working papers contained a section on women as one of the five vulnerable groups and a separate section on gender dimension where the focus was on women belonging to the other vulnerable groups.

The main activities in the **work package 17** were dissemination and integration of the results obtained in the previous work packages in the Project 4, and specifically – writing the Report 6 and organising workshops in each country involved in this project. In the workshops the results of the Project 4 were presented and discussed with a wide range of target groups, like people belonging to the vulnerable groups, representatives of NGOs, researchers, and others. In order to put more emphasis on the gender dimension, round tables focused on gender issues were organized. Afterwards, each partner wrote workshop proceedings to capture the presentations and discussions. A separate section was devoted to contributions on the gender dimension. The Report 6 entitled *Overcoming*

the social and educational exclusion of vulnerable groups integrates the results obtained in the previous work packages of the Project 4.

All research activities are based on the Critical Communicative Methodology (CCM) which according to Annex I is the methodological perspective to be followed throughout the whole research process.

3. CONTRIBUTIONS PROJECT 4 FROM GENDER PERSPECTIVE

3.1. Barriers that reproduce women's social and educational exclusion

Gender refers to the differences and commonalities between women and men which are set by convention and other social, economic, political and cultural forces. In the project we are particularly concerned with roles, relations, power dynamics and inequalities leading to exclusion. Gender discrimination is the systematic, unfavourable treatment of individuals on the basis of their gender, which denies those rights, opportunities or resources. Gender roles, relations and inequalities affect processes of exclusion.

3.1.1. The multiple discrimination of women

Women are often suffering from a situation of multiple discriminations: due to being women and for being from another vulnerable groups. Added to these two aspects, when a lack of education exists, their risk of social exclusion increases.

For women, having or not opportunities to participate in educational, training or cultural activities is driving them to trajectories connected to social exclusion or inclusion. Additionally, **when women have a disadvantaged background, it impacts on their academic expectations and performance.** This background is making difficult the women's continuation in educational system, and consequently they are facing more barriers in other areas of society, like employment or political participation.

Some evidences about these barriers have been identified in the field work carried out in WP16. Women from all the vulnerable groups (people with disabilities, migrants, cultural groups and young) have found some barriers in the labour market as a consequence of the discrimination they suffer: for being women, for being member of a vulnerable group and for having low levels of education. **Many of them have found barriers just for being women** because enterprises or companies favour men over women when they have to be hired. In the case of **being an immigrant or member from a cultural minority, women find some racist prejudices and difficulties to access the labour market.**

This exclusion is similar to the situation that women with any disability are living. In addition, young women who have not obtained secondary education credentials also have problems to find a job. In conclusion, the discrimination suffered by women in the labour market is increasing in the cases in which they are from another vulnerable group (migrants, cultural groups, disabilities, youth) and when they do not have any academic background. In the Italian workshop a woman who is involved in a Trade Union corroborates the discriminatory situations which are facing some women in their workplaces, when their maternity rights are not respected.

Racist and xenophobic attitudes also affect migrant and Roma women in other fields, such as political and social participation, housing and health. Some Muslim women, for example, explained how they were discriminated against due to the fact of wearing a headscarf in different contexts: they feel mistreated by teachers in the school, they are not hired by employers and they cannot access to certain public spaces.

Another evidence of this discrimination is identified in housing issues. **The racism from the landowners and neighbours are an aspect that women usually find in this area**, making more difficult the overcoming of housing problems. In the area of health, some migrant women or women without academic background are in a more difficult situation than other women. In the case of migrant women they sometimes feel **uncomfortable in health services due to the racist prejudices that professionals from hospitals or health services are transmitting to them**. Some health professionals treat migrant and Roma women as women without culture, without education, and they do not inform them properly about the health issue for which they are being treated. In addition, many women without an academic background find some barriers from health professionals to receive all the information concerned their health or relatives' health. The health professionals consider that they will not be able to understand it and they do not worry about explaining it or they do it with a highly technical vocabulary that the women do not understand, and puts them in a position of vulnerability.

3.1.2 Segregation educational actions, racism and low expectations have a specific impact on women.

Exclusionary actions are a common issue that we have identified as a barrier that women from different vulnerable groups are finding in education. As it was highlighted in the literature review and identified in WP16 findings as well, there are several **actions like streaming and tracking which are making more difficult women's success in the educational system**. Another negative aspect is connected with discriminatory attitudes: **migrant and Roma women find a lot of racist prejudices in the schools for being from non hegemonic cultures**. A young migrant woman, born in Romania, who participated in the women's round table of the Spanish Workshop stated the effects of the implementation of these actions in her high school in Spain. She argued that these actions generate exclusion of the immigrant children and do not stimulate them to continue their learning process.

Therefore, some women belonging to vulnerable groups highlight that when they were younger **they felt discriminated in school**. There were lower expectations for girls than boys and this is an aspect that has had a relevant impact on women's educational trajectories. As a consequence, in some cases they left school or finished the regular courses without having acquired in many cases a basic education.

3.1.3 Women's qualifications and skills not recognized in the host countries.

One of the barriers affecting migrant women is the lack of recognition of their skills and formal qualifications obtained in their country of origin. **Deskilling is a major problem for migrant women, who are employed in segregated labour markets**. In the Italian workshop a migrant woman from Albania, who worked as teacher in their origin country, explained how her university degree was not recognised in Italy. The investment she did in her professional profile was not recognised. The lack of mechanisms for addressing this in host societies is seriously hindering migrant women's possibilities.

3.2. Actions and strategies that overcome women's exclusion in areas of society

Successful actions in education, employment, health, housing, political and social participation that were analysed in Project 4 are often the same for men and women from vulnerable groups. However, **specific actions targeted to women have been identified and share common elements across the different vulnerable groups.**

3.2.1 Dialogic learning and democratic adult education

When women participate in **educational activities which are based on equalitarian dialogue and democratic decision-making processes, they become empowered and gain self-confidence and communication skills. This process of empowerment accomplished through this dialogic approach in adult education** has many impacts. Participants reported that this education developed their sensitivity to social issues and equipped them with the knowledge to face cultural stereotypes and gender inequality and discrimination.

Therefore, this type of adult education (**Democratic Adult Education**) is based on the involvement of adult students in the decision making processes of adult schools. The academic literature reviewed and many women interviewed confirmed that the involvement in democratic adult schools are changing their lives: they are acquiring new skills, accessing to relevant information and improving their self-esteem. In addition, democratic adult education is contributing to overcome social exclusion affecting women in other aspects as well. Women participating in it **gets later involved in NGOs and in the reivindications of their neighbourhoods.** In the area of health, there are some women interviewed who **argue that their mental and physical wellbeing have improved thanks to their participation in democratic adult schools.**

At the same time, **this involvement in democratic education activities has empowered them to face the difficulties related to health, like talking to doctors about relevant illness of their relatives or partners.** Referring to housing issues, women interviewed who started literacy processes or migrant women who are learning the local language in democratic adult schools **are empowering their skills to understand and face problems connected to housing.** Some of the skills they gain are related to the prevention of fraud in invoices, to the correct reading of renting

contracts, and to communication abilities for establishing fluent relationships with the landowners or with the bank. In the Spanish workshop a Muslim women involved in the gender round table argued that their participation in a democratic adult school is empowering her, as she is involved in other NGOs and she is also thinking in becoming entrepreneur and start her own business.

3.2.2. Actions for the preventive socialisation of gender violence

Another successful action underlined was the **education for the prevention of gender violence** for students, teachers and other personnel, promoting values like equality and non-violence. These actions addressed at the preventive socialization of gender violence respond to the findings of studies that indicate the prevalence of experienced sexual harassment by peers at school and the relevance of the hegemonic models of masculinity that young people learn in their socialization processes. The prevention of gender violence from education is oriented to reduce women's vulnerability.

Through the debates established between end-users, social agents and researchers in the context of the project, other actions that promote preventive socialization of gender violence emerged. These actions came from the exclusionary situations that young women faced in the educational field, such as sexual harassment or sexist comments about women appearance. In many occasions, these situations drive women to leave educational system (high school or university). In order to prevent this problem, the **creation of women spaces where they could explain their cases is needed**. These spaces should be comfortable for women and make feel themselves more self-confident about their coming back to education. **The involvement of the community (mainly women with different social backgrounds) in the design of these spaces** is a guarantee of their success.

3.2.3 Specific types of training and successful actions which promote women's labour insertion

When women participate in educational activities which are based on equalitarian dialogue it constitutes a process of empowerment which gives them more self-confidence and communication skills. In that sense, **adult women who are coming back to education, for example in adult education schools or through lifelong learning programmes, are changing their work expectations**. At the same time, women are becoming more aware about their rights and equal position in the society and workplace

and, most importantly, claiming these rights whenever they feel they are being mistreated.

Evidences from qualitative field work and NGOs questionnaires emphasised different training actions which are contributing to women labour insertion: **career guidance, help with writing a CV, learning about different job search methods, vocational training and practical training for employment.** Other elements highlighted were: a) the need to promote being educated about areas with good job prospects, not limiting women to traditionally female employment areas and responding, at the same time, to the demands of labour market, and 2) to promote programmes for women who have been working at home for many years.

Finally, another successful action in the realm of employment is fostering **self-employment and entrepreneurship among women**, such as cooperatives providing domestic services in rural areas, in order to bring female entrepreneurs together.

3.2.4. Support actions that help women to face difficult situations

There are some support actions which are helping women to overcome exclusionary situations they are living. Learning to use a computer and Internet constitutes a transformative action providing access to information on a wide range of issues. **Women who participate in adult education**, for example, have acquired computer skills and they are now **able to search additional information on illnesses and medications that doctors prescribe them.** This sort of actions shows that a **good use of technology can provide an improvement in lives of the vulnerable groups.**

Specific **support actions are also needed to work with pregnant youth women** who are in precarious situations. This support implies actions such as information about available help services for them, training or support for combining motherhood with a job or education. **Health literacy** – the ability to read, understand and use health information to make decisions – was also stressed as a support mechanism that is contributing to improve women's health conditions as well as to prevent possible illnesses.

In the field of employment, many women interviewed mentioned **equality in terms of working conditions, job opportunities and affirmative action policies as very**

important actions that need to be reinforced, such as nursery schools offering more flexible timetables.

Finally, support actions to prevent or combat gender violence were also mentioned, including the availability of **shelter houses for women and for victims of gender violence and houses for single-parent families more affordable**, providing help with the domestic and economic difficulties that single parenthood and caring for elderly family members involve.

In the Hungarian workshop conclusions about support actions were mentioned. From the gender round table emerged the idea that the implementation of support mechanisms will be helping young women from vulnerable groups to have a better access to education and work.

3.2.5 Democratic structures and specific spaces for women motivate their participation, promote their empowerment and help overcoming their discrimination

Referring to actions that lead to success, we identify **that women** (in most of the vulnerable groups) **start to be engaged in any NGO's or entity when there exists a democratic environment where their voices are taken into account. Their involvement in decision making processes is also highlighted as a key element that increases their participation in different social fields.** Women feel encouraged to participate in democratic and dialogic contexts; they become involved in decision-making processes and dialogic events and spaces where their interests and needs are considered a priority. The words from a woman who participated in the Spanish workshops show the relevance of these democratic structures and dialogic contexts. She had low educational levels but she is involved in an association of participants in a democratic adult school. She explained how their participation was increased because she could participate on equal basis, without experts from outside taking the decisions that affect the association where she is involved.

The promotion **of spaces for women for dialogue and reflection, to share and discuss** was also underlined in the interviews with women who said that these spaces are contributing to increase solidarity among women. Especially for women belonging to vulnerable groups **it is very important to build networks, in order to have support and solidarity in difficult situations.** A Roma woman who participated in the Spanish

Workshop stated the necessity to create these spaces for dialogue, especially for Roma women, who have more opportunities to talk about their needs and to transmit them to the decision makers. This is an example that she lived in the *First International Conference of Romani Women: The Other women* held on Barcelona on October 8, 9 and 10th of October². The Conference became the first event that met Romani women from the entire world discussing about their future and expectations.

² The Conference was organised by Roma association of women Drom Kotar Mestipen (<http://dromkotar.org/en/>)

4. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section we are presenting several policy recommendations from the gender dimensions, dividing them into the five areas of society: education, housing, employment, health and political participation.

Social Area	Policy Recommendations
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="400 701 1457 786">✚ To promote educational actions which contribute to increase the educational levels of the women who belong to vulnerable groups. <li data-bbox="400 846 1457 931">✚ To recognise the skills and educational credentials of migrant women to favour their labour insertion. <li data-bbox="400 992 1457 1140">✚ To facilitate training (vocational courses, lifelong learning activities, courses to access a higher education) in order to improve the educational qualifications of women with low levels of education. <li data-bbox="400 1200 1457 1285">✚ To involve migrant and Roma women in educational provisions in order to provide reference models for migrant and Roma students. <li data-bbox="400 1346 1457 1494">✚ To foster dialogic learning and democratic adult education schools as educational provisions that increase women’s educational success and empowerment as well. <li data-bbox="400 1554 1457 1760">✚ To promote educational actions focussed on the preventive socialization of gender violence. These actions should consider the involvement of the whole community and the creation of spaces of dialogue for victims.

Social Area	Policy Recommendations
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ To design practices which ensure the conciliation of employment and family life. ✚ To develop types of training programmes for employment which guarantes women’s from vulnerable groups labour insertion. Take the demands from the labour market in the design and implementation of these training programmes into account. ✚ To promote actions which support women’s labour insertion in terms of labour advice: career guidance, help with writing a CV, learning about job search methods. ✚ To design initiatives that promotes self-employment and entrepreneurship among women in order to bring female entrepreneurs together.
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ To promote lifelong learning programmes focussed on instrumental learning (math and language literacy) in order to guarantee an increase of self-steem to face and solve housing issues (bureaucracy, landowner relationships, contracts, etc.). ✚ To develop education initiatives which foster financial literacy programmes. ✚ To reinforce the creation of shelter houses for women and for victims of gender violence. ✚ To design actions that promotes housing for single-parent families more affordable.

Social Area	Policy Recommendations
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ To plan health literacy programmes on issues which responds to the demands of women from vulnerable groups like sexual and reproductive health, family planning and contraceptives, maternity, abortion, the menopause, and gender violence and sexually transmitted diseases. ✚ To design support mechanisms which will be available to pregnant women and children, especially for young women in precarious situations. ✚ To facilitate access to quality public health services and to provide advice on administrative procedures and documentation to most vulnerable women (migrant women without host country language and illiterate women). ✚ To promote protocols in health care centres for cases of gender violence.
Social and political participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ To develop mechanisms that assure the consolidation of democratic environments in NGOs where women get involved in decision making processes and their voices are taken into account. ✚ To foster all kinds of social participation of women in order to promote the creation of women's solidarity networks. ✚ To guarantee the representation of women as a group in different areas (like political parties and public bodies) with the aim to achieve gender equality.

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