

RomABC – The Next Dimension!

European Conference RomABC Sustainability and Validation

12 June 2019, Athens, Greece

Press Release

On June 12, 2019, the **Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.)** and the **Panhellenic Confederation of Greek Roma “Ellan Passe”** co-organized the European Conference “RomABC Sustainability and Validation.” The conference was held with great success at The Golden Age Hotel, in Athens, Greece.

The event convened in the framework of the “**RomABC the Next Dimension!**” **Erasmus+ European Program**. The main objective was to present the results of the program and to promote the debate on the need to improve living conditions for Roma communities in Greece and in other European countries through adult education

In addition to B.I.O. and Ellan Passe, the conference involved all of the project’s European partners, including **JugendStil e.V.** and **Kontakte fur Europa** from Germany, **HEEDA** from Hungary, and **Vox Civica** and **School Inspectorate of Buzau County** from Romania, and was also supported by representatives of the **Mentors of Europe's Diversity Network**.



Discussions were coordinated by **Efthymios Bakas**, former General Secretary for Life-Long Learning at the Greek Ministry of Education and were attended by many participants from government, academia, and civil society, including: **Christos Efthymiopoulos**, President of

B.I.O.; **Vassilis Pantzos**, President of Ellan Passe; **Maximilian Thinnés**, Researcher at the University of Hamburg, Department of Special Needs Education and Representative of the External Evaluator of the Project (Germany); **Alexandra Karagianni** Representative of the Secretariat for the Social Inclusion of the Roma at the Greek Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Solidarity; **Kostantinos Paiteris**, President of the Hellenic Roma Association of Mediators and Associates; **Christos Parthenis**, Associate Professor of Pedagogy, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens; **Myrto Lemou**, President of the Center for the Support of Children and the Roma Family; **Margaritis Doumos**, Director of the 1st Second Chance School of Larissa; **Konstantinos Economou**, Deputy Director of the 1st Second Chance School of Larissa; and, **Efthymia Chasiotou**, Scientific Coordinator at Klimaka's Roma Day Center.

Christos Efthimiopoulos, President of B.I.O., delivered an opening greeting and stressed the importance of lifelong learning as a prerequisite for raising awareness among social groups about the challenges faced by the planet today. He also pointed out the urgent need for social cohesion and for the integration of respect for life and the environment in every facet of human activity and culture.



In his opening remarks, **Vassilis Pantzos**, President of Ellan Passe, underlined the hard work that has been done in this project and mentioned that the project has strengthened and improved, at the local level, the position of the Greek Roma. He also pointed out that these projects are necessary for the Greek Roma, who are victims of social exclusion and discrimination, in order for them to claim their basic rights. *“In order to change the situation, cooperation, education and ongoing projects are needed on our part and on the part of the EU. A lot of problems for the Roma Community start from the lack of education but they do not end there. We need to take action to deal with the problems in housing, health and work issues, in order to change the situation of the Roma in Greece and Europe as soon as possible.”*

Ronald Schönknecht, from JugendStil e.V., Project Manager for RomABC the next dimension!, made a brief presentation of the objectives, results and intellectual outputs of the project, stressing that the test phase in all four European countries participating in the project showed that the long term objectives of the project are feasible, highlighting the opportunity to implement the program in Second Chance Schools in Greece and in other EU countries.



Maxmilian Thinnies, Researcher at the University of Hamburg, Department of Special Needs Education and Representative of the External Evaluator of the Project, congratulated all participating organizations for the great success of the project and presented a brief evaluation of the project. He pointed out that the learning needs and the living conditions of the target group were seriously considered in the project, through the participation of Roma in courses, trainings, workshops, networks and the involvement of Roma organizations in the assessment of the intellectual outputs, through conversations, interviews and consultations, with the help of mediators between the world of the Gadge and the Roma, with gender-sensitivity and intergenerational approaches, and with quality criteria for the design of material, pictures and texts. He also stressed the importance of the “double” curriculum which was developed in line with particular competences and featured subjects from real life, which made the project’s approach to literacy particularly successful.

Alexandra Karagianni, Representative of the Secretariat for the Social Inclusion of the Roma at the Greek Ministry of Labor, Social Security and Solidarity; pointed out that education is one of the four main pillars of the National Strategy for the Social Inclusion of the Roma in Greece and added that the Secretariat for the Social Inclusion of the Roma recognizes the serious difficulties the Roma community faces regarding accessibility to education. She also

underscored that the Secretariat for the Social Inclusion of the Roma recognizes and encourages all the initiatives and programs of Second Chance Schools and the participation of Roma adults, all programs for Roma children addressing school drop-outs, as well as all programs for training educators and creating innovative teaching methods that take under consideration the special needs of the Roma.



Konstantinos Paiteris, President of the Hellenic Roma Association of Mediators and Associates, pointed out that many of the educational programs and initiatives that have been implemented in the past haven't taken into consideration the real needs and the daily life and culture of the Roma, nor the differences between the Roma in different areas of Greece and Europe. He specifically pointed out that there cannot be a plan for helping the Roma without cooperation with the Roma communities and without planning with them according to their own needs, and proposed, as a good practice, the HORIZON 1998-00 program for the training of mediators, including practice and work counseling.

Isabelle Jahn, from Kontakte für Europa, presented the good practice of The "National Decade for Alphabetization and Basic Education in Germany." She explained how the National Decade program (2016-26) intends to raise basic education levels and to improve adult reading and writing skills. During this decade, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBWF) will be providing approximately €180 million of funding for projects involving, among others, the Federal Government, social groups, advisory boards and scientific boards.

Christos Parthenis, Associate Professor of Pedagogy at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens; congratulated all those involved in the project for their hard work and good results and presented the results of a program themed "Education of Roma Children"

implemented during the school years 2010-2015. The main objectives achieved in this program were: 1) increase in the number of Roma students enrolling in school, 2) increase of the expected school attendance time, 3) increase in the number of Roma students completing basic education, 4) increase in the number of Roma students completing basic education, 5) reduction of school dropout rates, and 6) raising of awareness among Roma parents. The program implemented seven actions which, among others, benefited thousands of young pupils and their families and improved the networking of schools with respect to the education of Roma children. Thousands of teachers were trained in both primary and secondary education and the program helped in the creation of strong bonds between Roma communities, families and school authorities.



Margaritis Doumos, Director of the 1st Second Chance School of Larissa and **Konstantinos Economou**, Deputy Director of the 1st Second Chance School of Larissa, both congratulated the organizations involved in the implementation of the project and presented a case study regarding the First Course of Study for Roma adults in the 1st Second Chance School in Nea Smirni, Larisa. They briefly described the planning of the program and its main actions, which were to bring 17 adults from a mixed Roma-Gadje neighborhood to study for an entire school year at the 1st Second Chance School of Larisa. Approximately 50% of the students managed to move up to the next class.

Efthymia Chasiotou, Scientific Coordinator at Klimaka's Roma Day Center; pointed out that non-inclusion in the educational system deprives Greek Roma of the possibility for education and professional integration. This has the effect of increasing social aggression, unemployment and delinquency. She underlined that the education of the Roma, in the framework of their cultural context, will help them to improve their lives. Combining holistic intervention on education, health, housing and occupational integration will bring real and measurable results. She also briefly presented a program of education and occupational

integration, implemented by Klimaka's Roma Day Center, which operates with great results since 2003, proving that the Roma, when having a social and professional identity, are smoothly integrated into society.



Myrto Lemou, President of the Center for the Support of Children and the Roma Family, spoke about child poverty and the deficits of educational policy regarding the social inclusion of Roma children. She explained that there is a 6-year gap for Roma children and teens, between the ages of 12 and 18, where children and teens that drop out of primary or secondary school have no access to formal education, as Second Chance School benefit only adults and not children or teenagers. This results in a large percentage of NEETS (persons Not in Education, Employment, or Training) in Greece.

Representatives of the **Mentors of Europe's Diversity Network from Serbia and North Macedonia** congratulated all those involved in the program for their hard work and the good results achieved and highlighted the need of transferring knowledge, outputs and educational methods from this project to similar projects in their countries.

The event concluded with an open discussion on the need to improve the standard of living of Roma communities and an exchange of ideas regarding concepts for possible follow-up projects in groups. The conference proceedings and proposals will be published shortly

RomABC – The Next Dimension!, coordinated by JugendStil e.V., is an endeavour to develop the first ever European syllabus for functional illiteracy in populations of adult Roma and aims to train qualified tutors who will help adult Roma gain competencies in basic reading, writing and numerical skills. It is a joint effort by Roma organizations and educational institutions from Germany, Greece, Hungary and Romania to actively involve Roma stakeholders in the design, implementation and final evaluation of educational material



specifically created for their needs. For more information on the event and on the overall project, please visit:

ROMABC: <https://www.facebook.com/Romabc-819777141484398/>

Ellan Passe: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100014804298934>



Contact us at:

Ellan Passe: Tel: (+30) 2168092641, ellanpasserom@gmail.com, www.ellanpasse.gr

Biopolitics International Organisation (B.I.O.): Tel: (+30) 2106426221, biopolitics.org@gmail.com,

<https://biopolitics.gr/>

