



## **ERGO Youth Programme 2010 – 2015**

ERGO is starting a multi-annual Roma youth programme in the period 2010 - 2015. This programme invests in Roma teenagers and students from across Europe, because they will be the future generation which will improve the situation of Roma in Europe.

### **Focus on identity, activism and responsibility**

In our Roma youth programme 2010 – 2015, we want to focus on the issues of identity, activism and responsibility. For Roma youngsters, identity plays a central role in their lives. We want to focus on the issues of responsibility and activism as well, because they are central in the ERGO concept of active citizenship.

ERGO decided to focus on identity in its youth programme 2010 - 2015, because the issue of identity plays a central role in the lives of many young Roma. Roma youngsters have a strong tendency to drop their identity. This is not very surprising, since young Roma are often confronted with negative stereotyping and are regularly depicted as being lazy or even criminal. It is very hard for young Roma to escape this stigmatization. Being a young Roma is often rather a 'forced framing' than a freely chosen ethnic identity. As a result, they often consider the outside environment to be hostile and therefore many young Roma decide to remain in the more safe, familiar environment of their families and community.

We want to offer space to Roma youngsters where they can discuss the different aspects of identity. Roma youngsters should realise that their identity should never be an excuse for exclusion, but should be seen as a value. At the same time, we want to make clear that ERGO is not propagating for a 'new Roma identity', nor for some sort of 'new Roma nationalism'. We want to make Roma youngsters aware of the fact that their identity is an added value, next to their other identities, such as being a European citizen.

Apart from the identity issue, the ERGO youth programme will also focus on the responsibility of young Roma to actively participate in society as European citizens who care about the community where they live. Currently, Roma youth across Europe are hardly organised. Young Roma should be aware of the need to take their place as active citizens in society and act accordingly. The youth programme of ERGO therefore aims to connect and empower the Roma youth generation across Europe.

Through our youth programme, hundreds of Roma youngsters will improve their social competencies and their self-esteem. They will become aware of their situation, their place in society, their rights and the need to connect among themselves. Roma youth will become able to make their voice heard. They will be empowered to take their place as equal citizens in our society and assume the responsibilities that belong to equal citizenship.

### **Need for a youth programme**

ERGO feels there is a strong need for a youth programme 2010 - 2015, because, so far, there are very few Roma youth organisations involved in youth work on the European level. The ERGO youth programme 2010 – 2015 will therefore be unique and have an added value, because it offers space for Roma youth across Europe to develop their own visions, plans and activities with a long-term perspective. In the ERGO youth programme we will focus on the responsibility of the Roma youth to take up their responsibility as citizens in their society, to improve their situation.

The Roma youth programme 2010 - 2015 has been developed in cooperation with the key ERGO members. ERGO wants to get more Roma organisations involved with youth work, and to strengthen Roma youth organisations across Europe. It is very important to start a coordinated Youth Programme which covers large parts of Europe, with a wide range of different activities taking place at different levels.

### **Main programme components**

The ERGO ROMA youth programme will consist of three main areas of work.

#### **1. International Roma Youth Network**

The international Roma youth network will provide a European platform for Roma youth organisations from ten to fifteen European countries. Here, Roma youth organisations can share concepts of Roma youth mobilisation and empowerment as well as their experiences in local, national and international Roma youth work. The international network is a platform for exchanging ideas and information about Roma issues.

The cooperation in this network, based on equality, trust and a continuous dialogue, will enable the network members to develop by themselves transnational youth exchanges, youth initiatives and (transnational) trainings. During two international networking meetings per year (each six months), the international Roma youth network will elaborate its own mission and strategies and will develop rules for membership in order to start a sustainable and inclusive process. In between these meetings, the network will make intensive use of modern communication methods such as websites, weblogs, skype, social networks, etc, to keep each other informed.

#### **2. National and Regional Roma youth Networking and Activities**

ERGO and its member organisations have a long history of supporting Roma youth initiatives in South-Eastern Europe. In Moldova, Romania, Albania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and Turkey for instance, successful national Roma Youth networks have been set up. These national Roma youth networks typically focus on issues such as education in Romani language, improving debating skills, intercultural exchanges, the setting up of Roma students' associations, empowerment of local Roma, discussions on Roma identity, discussions about role models, etc.

In order to strengthen existing national and regional networks of Roma youngsters, ERGO wants to support different Roma youth clubs, where young Roma, school pupils and students, can meet, exchange, learn from each other, become aware and build their capacity.

Within the programme, ERGO also wants to intensify the cooperation between already existing regional and international youth networks, for instance in Albania, Macedonia and Bulgaria. The added value of such a regional network lies in the international context of the network, which usually is very motivating for youngsters.

#### **3. International Campaign "Be young, be Roma"**

Currently, ERGO is conducting the international Roma youth campaign 'Typical Roma...?' with a focus on improving the image of Roma together with Roma youth organisations from five South-Eastern European countries. By playing with stereotypes, the participants succeed to get the attention of both Roma, non-Roma and decisionmakers, in their countries and on the European level.

Based on our experiences with the 'Typical Roma...?' campaign, ERGO plans a follow-up of the international campaign. One of the working titles could be "Be young, be Roma". The campaign might also be divided into several sub-campaigns, with different phases and approaches.

The methods and ways of campaigning are based on artistic creative tools and on non-formal education, and the campaign will be realized by national Roma youth organisations. The campaign will take place in ten to fifteen European countries. By being involved in campaign activities, participants will learn how to cooperate in an international setting, improve their language skills, see how politics function, get skilled in the latest information technologies, learn to respect other people`s opinions, get in contact with new, creative campaigning tools, learn how to formulate opinions, or, in other words, become empowered and realise what active citizenship means. Also, the campaign will encourage Roma youth to start their own self-organisation and networking process on the national level.

The dissemination of information about the different parts of the youth programme will be done mainly through internet platforms, weblogs and social networks of the European Roma youth work and through strong links and cooperation with other existing youth organisations and national youth councils in all participating countries. The Roma youngsters themselves will be responsible as much as possible for the dissemination of the information.

*February 2010*