

## Greek Gathering Report

### Online Roma Women Student Gathering

Greek Gathering Report. RTransform: Roma Women transforming the educational systems around Europe through their social and political mobilization

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<i>Organization in charge of co-implementing the activity:</i>	Alternative Innovative Development (AID)
<i>Date of the Gathering:</i>	20 of November 2021
<i>Place:</i>	Online, Greece
<i>Hosting institution:</i>	AID

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The Roma Student Gathering was implemented online via ZOOM platform. Roma women from different regions of Greece were invited and participated at the Gathering (20th of November). Women from Thessaloniki, Serres, Larissa, Karditsa, Trikala, Florina and more locations introduced themselves and shared their thoughts and ideas relevant to school years, education, Roma life, and their experiences. People and representatives from the Municipality of Ampelokipoi from Thessaloniki have also participated at the Gathering. the title of the Gathering was “*Dialogue for Education: 1st Gathering of Greek Roma Women*”. A poster had also been created to accompany the Gathering. Roma women showed their enthusiasm as they had the opportunity to take part in this activity, bringing them memories from their school years as the majority of them had to leave it from early age. Staff members from AID explained the objectives of the Gathering and they introduced the project’s aim at the grassroots.

## **PREPARATION PHASE BEFORE THE GATHERING**

For the smooth planning and organization of the Gathering of Greek Roma Women, a total of 6 preparatory meetings were held between AID members, volunteers, and the participating women during the period of 5 months before the date of the Gathering. These meetings were also attended by members of the National Coordinating Committee who are Roma women and brought and shared all the relevant and thorough knowledge related to the needs of the Roma community. Each time, from 4 to 6 women participated in these meetings. The preparatory meetings took place mostly via internet and aimed at organizing and coordinating the activities for the Gathering of Greek Roma Women. More precisely, at the preparatory meetings women had to make decisions on many specific issues such as the choice of the topic of the Gathering of Greek Roma Women and its final title, the dissemination and promotion activities of the event (e.g., poster development, banner and digital material development that would support the Gathering's identity, the image and promotion of the event), selection of the date and the online platform that would host the event, as well as other issues related to the speakers and the overall process. In addition, a chat was created on the Viber app that was used daily for the entire month of preparation and was kept active so that committee members could communicate and exchange information throughout the program. More information on each of the meetings is given below.

### **DATES OF THE MEETINGS:**

**Meeting 1.** 20<sup>th</sup> of October 2021

**Meeting 2.** 25<sup>th</sup> of October 2021

**Meeting 3.** 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2021

**Meeting 4.** 12<sup>th</sup> of November 2021

**Meeting 5.** 18<sup>th</sup> of November 2021

**Meeting 6.** 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2021

## **STAFF MEMBERS INVOLVED IN MEETINGS:**

**Meeting 1.** Papakonstantinou, Rapti Ourania, Vatali Vasiliki

**Meeting 2.** Papakonstantinou, Rapti Ourania, Vatali Vasiliki

**Meeting 3.** Papakonstantinou, Rapti Ourania, Vatali Vasiliki

**Meeting 4.** Papakonstantinou, Rapti Ourania, Vatali Vasiliki

**Meeting 5.** Papakonstantinou, Vatali Vasiliki, Rapti Ourania

**Meeting 6.** Papakonstantinou, Rapti Ourania, Vatali Vasiliki

## **NCC MEMBERS INVOLVED:**

**Meeting 1.** Kalpazidou Georgia, Voula Marolou, Eirini Rapou, Marieta Pavlou

**Meeting 2.** Kalpazidou Georgia, Voula Marolou, Paraskevi Kamperi, Eirini Rapou

**Meeting 3.** Kalpazidou Georgia, Voula Marolou, Karafyllidou Georgia, Paraskevi Kamperi, Eirini Rapou

**Meeting 4.** Kalpazidou Georgia, Voula Marolou, Karafyllidou Eleni, Paraskevi Kamperi, Eirini Rapou, Katerina Bebe

**Meeting 5.** Kalpazidou Georgia, Voula Marolou, Karafyllidou Georgia, Eirini Rapou

**Meeting 6.** Kalpazidou Georgia, Voula Marolou, Karafyllidou Eleni, Paraskevi Kamperi, Eirini Rapou, Katerina Bebe

## LOCATIONS:

**Meeting 1.** online via Google Meet/Viber

**Meeting 2.** online via Google Meet/Viber

**Meeting 3.** online via Google Meet/Viber

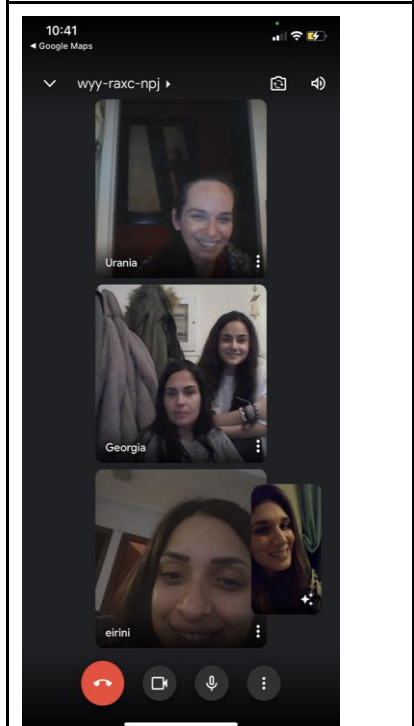
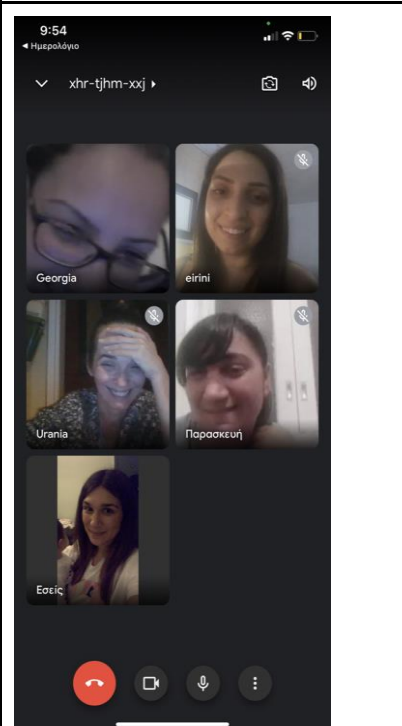
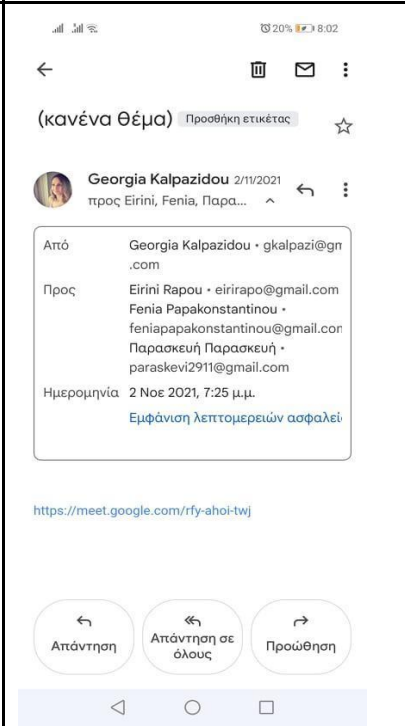
**Meeting 4.** online via Google Meet/Viber

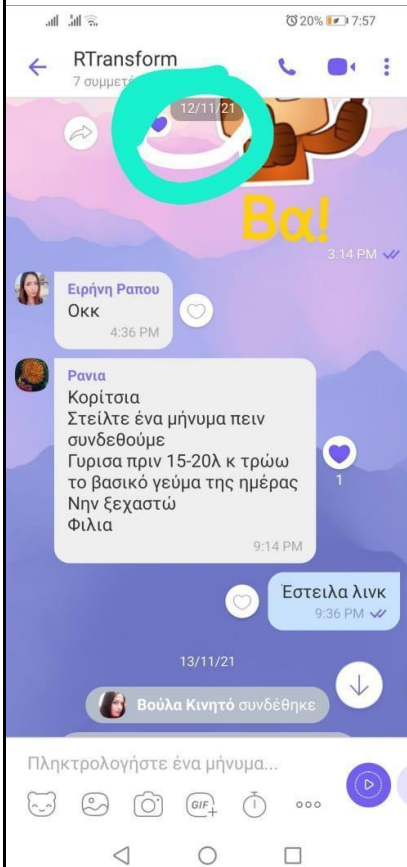
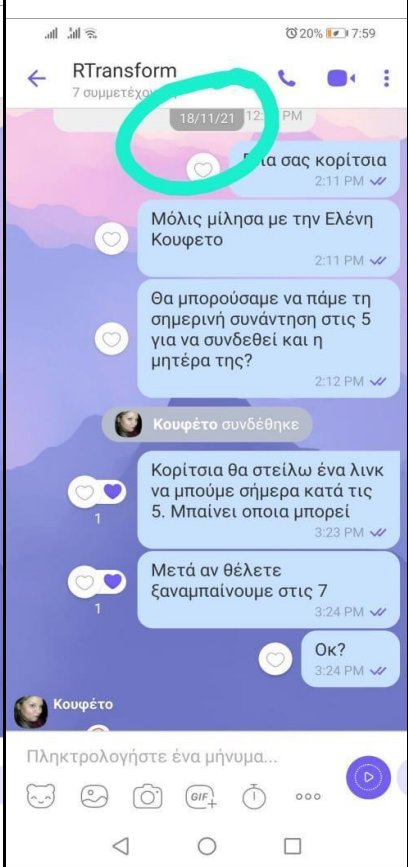
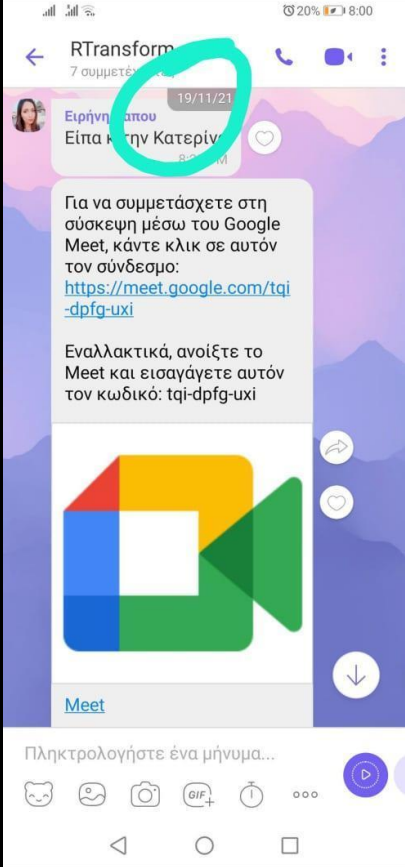
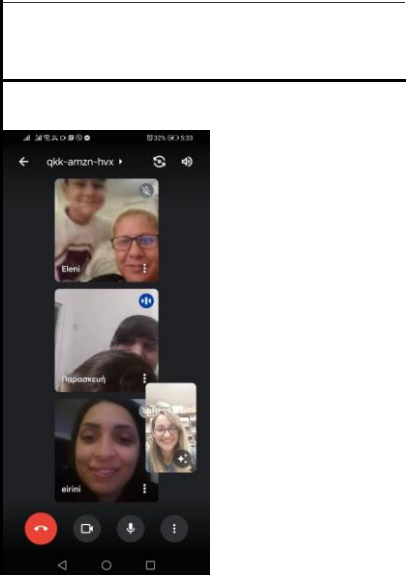
**Meeting 5.** online via Google Meet/Viber

**Meeting 6.** online via Google Meet/Viber

*Viber Chat is active and committee members often discuss on project-related issues and other issues related to women's empowerment.*

## EVIDENCE

Meeting 1	Meeting 2	Meeting 3
		

Meeting 4	Meeting 5	Meeting 6
		
		

## **ACTION POINTS**

### **Meeting 1**

⇒ In the first meeting specific explanations and guidelines were given regarding the concept of the Gathering as well as its organization and implementation, so that everyone has the necessary information. More specifically, explanations were given regarding what the Gathering of Greek Roma Women is, who can participate, what is its purpose and objective goals, as well as the structure that we will be followed. Participants were encouraged to share their opinion freely and they motivated to conduct research with their contacts in the community in order to choose the appropriate topic for the 1st Gathering. The women decided and agreed to devote time to consider and search for issues to discuss at their next meeting. The subject was decided as women contacted with other Roma women.

### **Meeting 2**

⇒ In the second meeting, the participants discussed on the subjects that could be the main topic of the Gathering and the topics that need to be covered.

⇒ They also discussed on the speakers they would like to invite and join the discussion.

⇒ Women discussed also on possible ways to motivate Roma women to participate at the Gathering. Because of the family care demands and the time they devote to it, they agreed that it would be good to have childcare so that more women could attend the Gathering. A proposal was made to hire a childcare teacher and all involved members agreed. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, a Plan B was proposed to implement the Gathering online whereas the platform and other relevant information were decided.

### Meeting 3

- ⇒ At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting, the women discussed the design of Gathering, the promotion, and the dissemination activities. The women suggested several ideas related to the banner, the posters, and brochures and leaflets. Finally, they decided on the colors of the material that will be developed.
- ⇒ The women also discussed about the topic and the title of the Gathering and defined a profile for the participants.
- ⇒ The women agreed on the next steps that have to be taken and how it would be possible to ensure that the Gathering would take place inside the Municipal Hall. All relevant restrictions were discussed.

### Meeting 4

- ⇒ At the 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting, a presentation of all the collected information and data relevant to the previous meetings was occurred. Proposals on posters, topics, and sections for of the Gathering were made, decisions on the date, and dissemination activities.
- ⇒ The women made suggestions on how to approach more Roma women for the Gathering of Greek Roma Women and how to solve limitations relevant to Covid-19 pandemic (vaccination, rapid tests, etc.).

### Meeting 5

- ⇒ Plan B had to be activated because the Gathering in person could not take place.
- ⇒ It was decided to implement the Gathering via online means.

## Meeting 6

- ⇒ At the last meeting, the final discussion took place, and the final instructions and information were given for the implementation and coordination of the Gathering of Greek Roma Women.

## NOTES

### Meeting 1

- ⇒ Women made a brief presentation of themselves.
- ⇒ Women expressed their personal experiences and knowledge related to their educational background.
- ⇒ They generally discussed for the project and the Roma community in conjunction with education.
- ⇒ Women discussed Roma issues and educational barriers as well as incentives to return to school.

### Meeting 2

- ⇒ Decided and agreed on the division of duties and responsibilities for speakers, etc.
- ⇒ Women expressed concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic, while the first discussion about the composition of the Gathering took place (e.g., live, hybrid form or online). The existence of a Plan B was decided and defined.
- ⇒ In the second meeting, the participants discussed the issues that could be the main topic of the Gathering and the issues that need to be covered. The women discussed the modern education system.
- ⇒ They highlighted the difficulties in education faced by the Roma.
- ⇒ They mentioned the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on education.



### Meeting 3

- ⇒ The women decided on how to spread the event, the social media that they will use, the colors for the poster and the banner as well as the type of promotion and communication that should be followed for the dissemination of the event. They also reviewed the topic and profile of women they would like to have at the Gathering. A strong statement was heard that there are women from many communities.
- ⇒ The women also chose the Hall from the Municipality that they would like to have for the Gathering, and it was decided to make it in the one that was close to the community.
- ⇒ The women discussed the limitation(s) that may affect the event.

### Meeting 4

- ⇒ The women shared their views and ideas on the topic of the Gathering and discussed again the main points of the whole implementation of the Gathering because more new members of the committee joined
- ⇒ Described the profile of women to join and explored ways to motivate more women to get involved, propose and share solutions on problems due to Covid-19
- ⇒ It was decided to review the protocols and make some communication with the Municipality in order to offer free rapid test to those who were not vaccinated. In addition, it was decided to review the protocol for children who can attend.

### Meeting 5

- ⇒ Women discussed on the Roma issues and educational barriers and motives to go back to school.

### Meeting 6

- ⇒ They decided on the Gathering date and the format. Based on the COVID-19 preventions, women decided on online format of the event. They ended up on ZOOM application as the best choice.

⇒ They decided on the title of the Gathering which was “Dialogue for Education: 1st Gathering of Greek Roma Women”

## ACTIVITY IMPLEMENTATION: THE GATHERING

The online event entitled “*Dialogue for Education: 1st Gathering of Greek Roma Women*” was held through ZOOM, on November 20 between 16:00 and 20:00 from AID. The event was ended with smiles and success. A representative from the Municipality of Ampelokipi Menemeni, Mrs. Vatali Vasiliki has also joined the event. The aim of the event was the national gathering of Greek Roma Women in the framework of the RTransform European Project. Roma women from all over Greece such as Thessaloniki, Serres, Corinth, Florina, Larissa, Crete, and other areas, connected and developed a concrete dialogue.

For bureaucratic procedures and the overall coordination, the AID team and its staff members were responsible for making things easier for participants and committee members. The team that helped to develop the activity was formed by educators, trainers, specialists and non-Roma AID volunteers.

### The program of the Gathering was as follows:

1. **Welcome and Introduction** to the Gathering from AID representatives
2. **Welcome of the participants**, inform regarding the expectations and Gathering’s goals
3. **Ourania Rapti**, Expert Representative of AID, Reasons behind the early school leaving of Roma women and girls. She shared the obstacles and motives of Roma girls and women based on her 25 years of experience in the Roma sector.

### **Main program**

4. **Stories of inspiring Roma women**

**Voula Marolou:** *Why I left school. Stereotypes and norms of the Roma community that kept me away from school.*

The story of motivating children and especially the little daughter to break away from community norms and stereotypes.

**Katerina Bebe:** *Finding the paths of education in adulthood (at 37).*

Reasons that kept me away from school and how I managed to get back to school when I was an adult, and my kids went to school. Roma mediator at the Roma Community Center. She graduated from school as an adult and in her endeavor encouraged her children to stay in high school.

**Irini Rapou:** *The process of introduction and study at the University from a traditional community.*

The positive factor of family support. Graduate of the Pedagogical Primary School of the University of Florina and Postgraduate in Human Resource Management

**Paraskevi Kamberi:** *The decision to continue school at an old age, the graduation race, and the introduction to the University at the age of 25.*

A story about overcoming family and financial obstacles. Currently a student at the Agricultural University of Patras

## 5. Working Groups

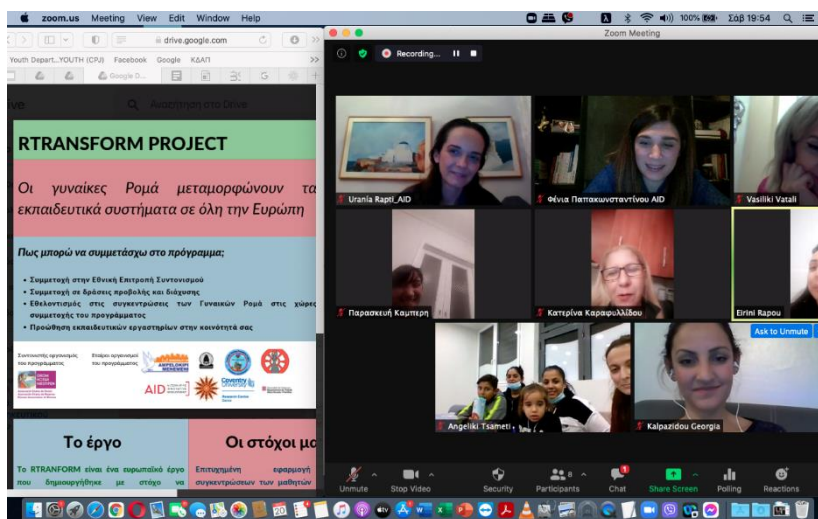
The women were divided into groups and a person-speaker was present to gather information and data for the discussions.

## 6. Plenary Session

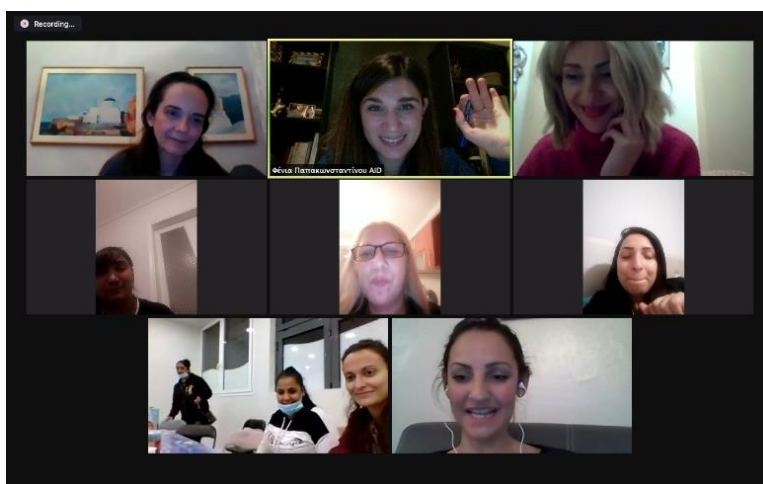
## 7. Closing

## Conclusions

The women shared their own story, discussed on the obstacles and difficulties they faced in education, the reasons they left school early, and their desire to continue school after all. Some women also shared their motives, and they mentioned on how they found both the courage and strength to complete school and pursue higher education, attending university.



During the online event, Papakonstantinou explained the project, its goals, and activities, coordinated the event dialogue, and empowered Roma women to share their stories, while at the same time Rapti Ourania, a specialist in education for Roma women, referred to examples of women who continued their education.



At the second half of the event, the women were divided into groups and discussed in more detail the problems they faced in the school years and education, explaining the reasons why most of them left school early. Some of the reasons were the frequent mobility of their families across Greece due to seasonal jobs in different cities, the marriage obligation, starting a family from a very young age, the devotion to the family and the children's upbringing. Moreover, the multiple obligations and symbolisms that frame the Roma Woman and her role within the Rome community. The women also discussed on taking measures that could help to overcome these difficulties and reverse obsolete habits and situations. The *Gathering* ended with all women emphasizing the importance of such actions and initiatives. They expressed their positive feelings towards the event as they had the opportunity to take part in the Gathering, to speak, share stories and thoughts, and have their voices heard. All the women are being committed and looking forward to the next Gathering which is expected to take place in autumn.

**Women played a significant role** in the Gathering of Greek Roma Women by sharing ideas and proposing solutions to the problems faced by them and their families regarding education. All contributions made from the conclusions.

Some quotes from the Gathering are presented below.

## OBSTACLES

In terms of the obstacles that Roma women are facing, here are some thoughts and proposals.

A woman mentioned the old-fashioned patterns regarding the role of the two sexes, what a woman should do and what a man should do, she referred to the obvious discrimination between men – women that derives from their culture and tribe itself. Specifically, one of the women said: *"My parents told me where you will go, with the balame, what will people say, when will you get married?"*

In addition, another woman said: *"When I was looking for peers to go to school, no one followed me. On the contrary, they reacted in a racism way, and they were making fun of me"*. From this description it appears that when a woman tries to overcome established practices and follow a

different way of life from that of women in her community, in other words, when a woman chooses to go to school rather than marry at a young age, it is possible to receive ironic behavior and ridiculous comments from other women in the community. Such reactions can have the effect of quitting the educational process and decrease the person's self-confidence.

Another obstacle is living in a closed community with only Roma and the lack of interaction with the wider society. However, one woman stressed that it is difficult to leave the community due to financial and family problems.

In addition, the lack of standards and the lack of promotion of people from the community who have made educational progress are among the factors that do not help to run a successful educational course.

The main obstacles are poverty and discrimination.

## **BENEFITS**

The women also discussed the benefits and advantages of education, encouraged, and empowered each other, shared their experiences from the Second Chance School.

The Second Chance School is an innovative public adult education school of two academic years. Upon successful completion, a certificate equivalent to a high school diploma is provided.

The school's curriculum differs from that of the normal education, it is more flexible, and it follows an adapted teaching methodology and assessment of the trainees.

A woman mentioned that she was disappointed with the school, she couldn't make friends, and she quitted school because of family businesses.

A woman at the age of 45 with three kids, she went to Second Chance School, she shared her experiences, she mentioned that she will not give up, she learned informatics, and she wants to continue in high school. Today she helps her family with job. She tried to explain that people do not go to school only for learn and obtain knowledge relevant to math, physics, and so on, but also

it is necessary for us to make friends, to broad our horizons, to become extrovert, to obtain soft skills, to learn new things that will be useful for a job, to help us learn how to talk to a potential employer.

Another woman mentioned *“There is not enough information for the parents about the educational perspectives, parents do not know what paths they could follow after high school, they are missing information regarding the legislation, because you know things in the education system change all the time. In addition, another problem is that when parents want to learn about their kids’ educational progress, asking the school managers, ask questions, there is also the problem of understating, as they still leave with the same questions”*.

Another woman referred to the Centers of the Roma Community. She highlighted that these centers are linked to education and that these are almost unknown to the most Roma people. They are interested only for the economic benefits and not for other services.

Afterwards, there was a woman that mentioned

*“Education is not related to professional status. We are told to leave school and go find a job to live instead of going to school, to learn, get the skills and knowledge you need and then go find a job to work, so education is not related to the living”*.

Another woman mentioned an example of Myth of Plato’s cave. More precisely, she said

*“The ancestors lived in the caves, the caves are in the dark, the Roma people live in the darkness in terms of education, both knowledge and learning, inside the cave there was a little light, something like the sunrise and they did not risk going out of the cave so easily. However, whoever took the risk, then he/she did not return back to the cave again. We have the love and the will to walk towards the light and most of the Roma people stay in the darkness. Those who do not get closer to education and learning, they cannot love it, if people do not know the light that learning offers, thus the mother could not transmit this light to her child. For sure, there are exceptions”*.

## **MOTIVES**

Afterwards, women discussed on several motives. Motives are presented below.

*“It is very motivational for a Roma woman when she meets and interacts with other women either Roma or not with whom they have a common starting point, same obstacles and problems as well as common standards. These women operate like positive role models for us, and I think that since one can do something and overcome a situation, then I can too. It is a good opportunity for a Roma woman to socialize with people in this way”*

Another woman mentioned that a motive could be a well- constructed relationship between teacher-student.

In particular she mentioned that *“it is very important for a little Roma kid to receive the love that the teacher shows to him/her. The teachers act as good examples, and it would be also very important the teachers do not afraid to face the Roma community, and the parents’ kids when they stand in their child’s education progress. The teacher should have the strength and the mentality to support the child’s right to learn”*.

Another motive that a woman mentioned was the relationship between a mother and her child.

Moreover, another motive that reported was the woman’s perceived sense of independence under the framework that education can offer her with qualifications and skills.

A woman mentioned that *“when a woman gets a job, when she works even once time, then she realizes the significance to be independent, you can see the changes at her face. And you know, the change comes from the inside”*

Moreover, a person's desire for a better life quality compared to the life and difficulties his/her parents had, is a strong motivator for women. One of the women mentioned that when a child experiences difficult situations in the family environment, he/she often acquires a strong will to have a better life and this can happen through education.

Along the same line, the common characteristics of women who had a successful educational course were emphasized and these were perseverance, flexibility, breaking the norm as well as the



presence of a supportive person with an open mind.

Finally, a woman reported that she was irritated to go to school by her younger sister's insistence on studying.

The poster that framed the Gathering



## IMPACT

At the Gathering that took place online in Greece, 22 women were attendees. The women had the opportunity to introduce themselves, share their experiences, work in groups, hear life stories from other Roma women, share their thoughts on obstacles and motives in education,

explain why they left school. The participants were good listeners but also good active speakers. They asked questions and took the floor. Women played an important role in sharing ideas and proposing solutions to the problems they and their families face in education.

The main findings highlighted that these women are eager to learn and want to acquire knowledge and get access to more information and training on initiatives and relevant training practices. Most of these women have expressed their support for education and today they are actually motivating their children to go to school and try to be good students. All women recommended that such activities are especially necessary for their community to bend and break stereotypes and help other women realize the importance of education. These women expressed their enthusiasm to set a good example for other women and to spread such activities in their communities, to empower their peers. This information should be provided by the training centers or the training administration and ensure that it reaches all stakeholders and families. The women who participated in the 1st Gathering of Greek Roma Women are looking forward to the next one. They all said they really enjoyed it!

Finally, the main points of the conclusions were the following:

- ⇒ All women recognize the value of education and the need for their support to continue it.
- ⇒ In several cases Roma women claim to continue their education as adults and after having taken care of their family.
- ⇒ Building of Second Chance Schools close to Roma communities is an important incentive for women to continue education/school.
- ⇒ Gatherings for the empowerment of women in general and the inspiration / motivation of each woman are important.
- ⇒ Encouraging actions and organizing workshops for Roma women with the aim of removing obstacles related to the Roma community itself (conflict management, etc.).

- ⇒ Implementation of institutional tools for the control and prevention of student dropout.
- ⇒ Need for institutional support of Roma children in education establishing an effective educational approach after the end of the school day, aiding with homework.
- ⇒ The integration of Roma history and folklore at national and European level is important, in order to strengthen their cultural identity as equal to the rest in Greece. Similarly, there should be textbooks that refer to the "minority" Greek dialects with thematic work to stimulate motivation and equal integration of children in the school context (Romanesque, Vlach, Pontian, etc.) and the cultivation of diversity.
- ⇒ Educating students of pedagogical and educational University departments on the particularities of the living conditions of Roma communities (referring to ghettoized neighborhoods and camps) is important, so that future teachers know educational and psycho-pedagogical tools to stimulate and support their students.
- ⇒ Support of the employment of Roma women and the operation of kindergartens and "tutoring" departments of supportive extracurricular teaching at the level of Municipalities (with the inclusion of programs under the auspices and budget of the Ministries of Education and Interior is necessary).