



## **Advocacy Card**

# **Addressing Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Romania's Development Cooperation**

**International Gender Policy Network**

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and women's empowerment have come to be understood as crucial prerequisites to development, and have been included among the ambitious UN Millennium Development Goals, which were signed by 189 governments in 2000. These commitments have been declared to reduce the gender gap and empower women in the developing world. The situation in developing countries, nonetheless, remains critical: women are the poorest of the poor; they are largely excluded from decision-making processes; they often lack equal access to resources, land, credit, education, and health care. Civil society organizations across Europe have emphasized that governments are failing to deliver on their promises. According to the Concorde report of 2008, the situation is more critical in new EU Member States where the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment is "a secondary element for the moment" (Romania) or "non-existent in the development aid agenda" (Latvia).<sup>1</sup>

The International Gender Policy Network (IGPN) has examined gender equality and women's empowerment in the development cooperation of Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia as part of the project Development Cooperation and Gender. Within the framework of this advocacy activity, IGPN has prepared twenty two Advocacy Cards for individual countries and one Regional Advocacy Card. The documents demonstrate that gender equality and women's empowerment are not integrated into all phases of the development processes in this region, and a more intense and determined approach is needed from the development actors. The aim of this advocacy work is to call for action by reminding the national as well as European representatives of their formally anchored commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment.

The Advocacy Card for Romania focuses on its role as an emerging donor country. This document provides a review of Romania's key political and legal commitments, and examines the gender aspect of bilateral development cooperation. On the basis of these reviews, recommendations are made to the national government, and to the European institutions.

## COMMITMENTS TO GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

- ❖ Romania's commitment to gender equality is reflected in a **number of politically and legally binding documents** of the EU and EC (Treaty of Amsterdam, Maastricht Treaty, Charter for Fundamental Rights of the EU, CEDAW, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals).
- ❖ In terms of the EU development cooperation policy implemented by the institutions as well as by the Member States, the crucial policy framework for promoting gender equality is the **European Consensus on Development**, agreed upon in 2005 by the European Commission, the Council and the Parliament, and the representatives of the member states, where gender equality is defined as a cross-cutting issue.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the **2007 Commission Communication on "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation"** is the first step towards a coordinated European approach to promoting gender equality and empowering women through development cooperation.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> No Time to Waste: European governments behind schedule on aid quantity and quality, *Concorde*, 2008, p. 15 <http://www.concordeurope.org/Files/media/extranetdocumentsENG/NavigationSecondeaire/WorkingGroups/Aidwatch/Aidwatch2008/Light-Full-report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> "EU Policy Framework for Promoting Gender Equality," *European Commission*, [http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/crosscutting/genderequ\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/crosscutting/genderequ_en.cfm)

<sup>3</sup> "EU Policy Framework for Promoting Gender Equality," *European Commission*, [http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/crosscutting/genderequ\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/development/policies/crosscutting/genderequ_en.cfm)

- ❖ Related to the 2007 Commission Communication is the document “Conclusions of the Council of the EU and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States”, also known as the **Council Conclusion**. One of the conclusions is the following: “The Council recognizes the Commission’s and the Member States’ specific responsibility to support developing country partners in eliminating discrimination and gender inequality by increasing visibility and accountability on gender equality and women’s empowerment in development cooperation and to promote and engage in an enhanced political dialogue at all levels, including the highest political level, which incorporates gender equality explicitly as a central theme.”<sup>4</sup>
- ❖ In line with these documents, the EU (and thus the Member States) has supported a **twin-track approach: gender mainstreaming** (mainstreaming gender issues into all aspects of development policy) and **specific measures** aimed at socioeconomic and political empowerment of women.

## GENDER IN ROMANIA’S ODA

As an emerging donor, Romania still needs to develop a more comprehensive strategy on development cooperation. The 2008 Concorde report points at the limited capacity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) which is responsible for development cooperation: the lack of capacity is the main reason why most of Romania’s ODA is channeled through multilateral institutions and programmes, and why there are no clear mechanisms for disbursement of bilateral aid.<sup>5</sup> The overall problematic situation of the country’s development cooperation naturally also affects the gender dimension of Romanian ODA.

According to the current National Strategy on International Development Cooperation Policy, Romania, in the first phase, will focus on a limited number of areas: strengthening democracy and promoting human rights (child protection, equal opportunities, combating discrimination), education, career development and economic development. The main goal of Romania’s assistance policy consists of the reduction of poverty, as poverty represents the major obstacle for a country’s social and economic development. Taking into account that most funds are distributed through UN agencies, Romania’s strategy aims at integration of the MDGs, including the promotion of gender equality and women’s empowerment.

In 2007, multilateral financial contributions amounted to 4.675.000 Euro, out of which 2.350.000 Euro were for different international organizations and structures (Global Fund for Combating HIV/SIDA, OHCHR, UNICEF, UNHCR, UNFPA etc), as well as a financial contribution for UNDP, amounting to 2.325.000 Euro, for the implementation, in 2007-2009, of development assistance programs in priority partner states, The Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Serbia (including increasing the institutional capacity and implementing, in Romania, a program of education and information in the development field). The funds distributed in priority states amounted to, as follows: the Republic of Moldova – 800.000 EURO, Georgia – 300.000 EURO, and Serbia – 400.000 EURO. In Moldova, a project specifically focusing on gender issues was funded: Better Opportunities for Youth and Women – 300.000 USD. The overall objective of the project was to support the social, economic and professional reintegration of graduates of boarding schools – orphans or

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<sup>4</sup> Conclusions of the Council of the EU and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting with the Council on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Development Cooperation, *Council of the European Union*, 15 May 2007, <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/pdf/en/07/st09/st09561.en07.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> No Time to Waste: European governments behind schedule on aid quantity and quality, *Concorde*, 2008, p. 44 <http://www.concordeurope.org/Files/media/extranetdocumentsENG/NavigationSecondaire/WorkingGroups/Aidwatch/Aidwatch2008/Light-Full-report.pdf>

children without family care – mothers with children at risk and pregnant women at risk, by providing shelter services (up to 12 months), with conditions that are similar to family conditions, psychological and social care, provision of education for independent life skills, activities aiming at facilitating beneficiaries' access to labor market and financial and material support.

Even though some references to gender equality and women empowerment exist in Romanian ODA, gender is more or less treated as a secondary issue. A gender mainstreaming strategy is not specifically included in official documents. Moreover, gender concerns are deterred by the fact that Romanian bilateral ODA lacks a clear mechanism for disbursement of aid as well as a long-term strategy. The government does not make multi-year funding commitments, and even one year programming is all too often unclear and uncertain.<sup>6</sup>

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT:**

#### **General Recommendations:**

- To deliver on its promises to international gender agreements
- To comply with the Consensus on Development and the Commission Communication and place gender equality and women's empowerment at the center of Romania's ODA
- To comply with the Council Conclusions and make gender equality a core aspect in the development policy's programming, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and to provide special support for women that enables their economic and political empowerment

#### **Concrete Recommendation:**

- To elaborate coherent, multiannual strategies for bilateral and multilateral development assistance
- To strengthen the capacity of the Romanian MFA in the area of development cooperation including the capacity in terms of gender concerns
- To include gender perspective in all funded projects, to develop mechanisms on monitoring and evaluation of the gender aspect in ODA projects
- To improve the transparency of Romania's ODA by making all data, reports and documents available, and by developing the mechanism of grant allocation
- To ensure close cooperation with NGOs, including women's rights organizations, in terms of policy and strategy formulation
- To ensure an increase in awareness among the Romanian population about development problems, including gender issues

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION:**

- To deliver on its promises to international gender agreements
- To press for EU Member States' development cooperation policy to include a gender equality perspective consistent with EU-level policy and commitments
- To provide information to new EU members on older EU donor states' experiences and good practices in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in development

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<sup>6</sup> No Time to Waste: European governments behind schedule on aid quantity and quality, *Concorde*, 2008, p. 44 <http://www.concordeurope.org/Files/media/extranetdocumentsENG/NavigationSecondaire/WorkingGroups/Aidwatch/Aidwatch2008/Light-Full-report.pdf>

- In relation to gender mainstreaming, the EU should be leading by example. European CSOs say that the EU is failing to deliver on its promises. Implementation of the gender mainstreaming strategy is still hindered by a number of factors (mainly, the inadequate allocation of human and financial resources, the evaporation of policy commitments at the level of program implementation, limited gender competence among staff members, and the absence of political will) and is undermined by other EU policy initiatives, most importantly by the neo-liberal economic policy approach.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Who decides? Gender mapping the European Union's policy and decision-making in the areas of development, external relations and trade, *WIDE*, 2007, p. 7