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This project is co-financed by the European Union and the Republic of Turkey

FLOWER – Fostering Local Opportunities for Women’s Effective Participation

Report Study Visit in Rome and debate in Ankara

The **study visit in Rome** was held on the 27th and 28th February 2015 with the goal of fostering the meeting of the project partners as well as sharing country experiences. It took place in an interactive manner with various presentations and group work delivered by experts in different topics. In the morning of the first day a seminar was held in FGB headquarter with representatives of all project partners. The afternoon was dedicated to the visit of the International Women’s House and to a roundtable with policy makers at local level. During the second day another seminar was organized, attended also by students of the Master in Gender Diversity Management, in order to present the work of Women's Studies Association and Yeşilpınar Women’s Social Assistance and Solidarity Association.

The study visit gave the opportunity to the participants to get acquainted with the situation of women’s rights in Italy, using an evidence based approach. In fact OECD data were used for analysing women’s situation in the labour market. Moreover thanks to the interactive presentations, the participants had the possibility to get in depth knowledge on how to conduct awareness raising campaigns.

As envisaged by the project, one of the objectives was to improve the capacity of civil society organizations. A practical example on how to support civil society organizations working in the field of women’s rights was given thanks to the visit to the International Women’s House, a women-led centre where around 50 civil society organizations share a common space (space that has a long feminist history) and work together in order to offer services to women, from counselling to health care services, from access to a library to restaurants. The management of the House could be considered a good practice in the field of social policies aimed at supporting women’s rights and gender equality and an example of how collaboration can support women’s rights. The long feminist history of the House was presented and the main services illustrated, helping to understand the necessary steps needed to arrive at this stage.

Finally, participants had the possibility to interact with policy makers at local level that presented the strengths and weakness of their respective Institutions in a comparative perspective. The speakers focused above all on the legal instruments developed in Italy for improving female participation in public and political life. The seminar highlighted the challenges that the women's movements in Italy still face, in spite of the long EU membership as well as the similarities and differences with the Turkish situation.

The information provided in relation to women’s situation in Italy, their participation in the decision-making process, the achievements accomplished so far and the changes that still need to take place allowed for comparisons to be made with the women’s movements in Turkey. A consensus was reached regarding women's rights in Turkey which were considered on a similar level to women’s rights in Italy, although their implementation is far from satisfactory.





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The **debate** which was held on March 31, 2015 was organised by the Women's Studies Association in Ankara. It aimed to open a discussion platform on the participation of women in public and political life, policy-making processes, and local authorities. The debate also covered employment participation, engagements (hiring?) methods and how studies should be monitored (?), the use of space and how civil society organizations and institutions should address issues together. The topics covered in the panel and the presentations delivered during the workshop discussed the women's representation in decision-making mechanisms both at nation-level as well as at local level from different perspectives. The speakers chosen are activists who are in direct contact with the issues and this allowed the "sharing of knowledge and experience" meaningful, which in turn has ensured that the right answers were provided thereby making the discussion very fruitful.

Concerning the issue of Women's Effective Participation in Social Life and Political Representation, it was concluded that women's participation in social and political life is directly associated with discrimination, problems and is blocking their empowerment in everyday life. Comparing women's experience in Italy, one of the focus to draw a line between limiting women's rights to make choices and the laws protecting them. In other words an overly conservative approach in the law was considered to have negative consequences for women's effective participation to public and social life. It was felt that women could create a lasting positive transformation in their lives by intervening at local level. It was felt that there was a strong relationship between the local interventions that they could make and the changes in their daily life that they could bring about. The problem at local level was emphasized by the fact that individuals (or policy makers?) tend to see people living in local area as "sexless", while it was stated that women have different needs.

Concerning the issue of Women's Participation in Policy-Making and Programme Preparation & Monitoring, many law amendments were made with the intervention of women's organizations in Turkey and the expression "the head of the household is male" in the Civil Code has been removed thanks to women's intervention. Likewise, in order for the legal regulations to be tailored to the needs of women within the context of combating violence against women, (Law no. 6284 on Combating Violence Against Women and Family Protection), active lobbying and advocacy activities were carried out by women. Participants were worried that the 2014 "Family Package", would affect women's employment and participation in social life in a negative way and promote women's return to the home. Moreover, participants conveyed the importance of the monitoring activities on the implementation process.

Finally experiences of ignored, withheld (hidden), women exposed to violence, women with disabilities and LGBTI individuals being visible (or invisible), and participating in social life were discussed. Another invisible group in Turkey is women refugees who have fled from the civil war in Syria. Experiences of local women of Hatay which is heavily populated by the refugees, their interactions with refugee women and refugee women's issues were discussed during the session.

