

# The first round table – „Rights for moms”

On Thursday, November 4, 2021, the first round table "Rights for moms!" was held, where the Institute for Development and Innovation gathered representatives of civil society, non-governmental organizations and state institutions. The first round table raised a large number of topics and identified a number of problems that moms face in the labor market and in relations with employers.

The opening remarks was given by Ana Milenković, Public Finance and Economic Development Program Manager. After short introduction, Director of the Institute for Development and Innovation, Nenad Jevtović, presented the work of the Institute for Development and Innovation in the past three years and implemented projects, as well.

In the behalf of the Open Society Foundation, project donator, Aleksandra Šanjević was attend. Aleksandra Šanjević presented the work of the Open Society Foundation and pointed out that since 2020, the Foundation has focused its work on improving social and economic justice, ie improving the position of the most vulnerable groups in the society. Through the conversation, she emphasized the importance of focusing on the most important problems that moms face in the labor market and in relations with the employer.

After the introductory speeches, the participants of the round table introduced themselves. Participants spoke about their organizations and their work in the field of women's rights and gender equality. Anja Stanišić spoke about her experience with the employer after maternity leave. After maternity leave, Stanisic was demoted to a lower position. Also, in that period, she was an entrepreneur and faced a number of challenges when she wanted to transfer her entrepreneurial activity to her colleague. Stanisic also presented her organization "Pre svega ja", which was created with the aim of providing support to all women who want to start their own businesses through training.

Jovana Stanar Vukovic introduced herself in front of the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality. Vukovic spoke about the duties and responsibilities of the Commissioner. She stated that the annual report of the Commissioner for Equality recognized that the area in which women most often address the Commissioner is precisely employment and work. She highlighted the importance of partnership with civil society organizations in order to combat discrimination more effectively. She stated that the Commissioner can initiate misdemeanor proceedings and file a lawsuit, if the lawsuit is of greater social significance. Such lawsuits require the agreement of the discriminated person.

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Tatjana Macura and Marica Bursać presented the work of the organization "Mame su zakon". Through the work of their organization, they successfully advocated providing compensation for 9,000 mothers who were affected by the application of unconstitutional provisions from the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children. Since June, they have been providing support to these mothers in order to acquire the right to the same. They also presented the initiative "I preduzetnice su mame", which they launched in cooperation with the Digital Community. In cooperation with the organization "Kreni-promeni", they collected over 40,000 signatures, which they submitted to the Government of the Republic of Serbia with requests for changes to the law. In addition to all activities, they are also dedicated to providing support to girls aged 13-15 in terms of recognizing and reacting to violence.

On behalf of the Ministry of Labor, Employment, Veterans' Affairs and Social Affairs, Snezana Bogdanovic, spoke about the work and competencies of the Ministry, as well as about the laws concerning mothers on the labor market. She pointed out that the Labor Law provides mothers with certain protections, e.g. the possibility for both parents to use leave equally for the care of the child, but that the big question is how much women are aware of the rights they have. She stated that the law from 2013 introduced a ban on termination of employment while the woman is pregnant. Bogdanović pointed out that since then, employed women have been in a more favorable position, because the employer must automatically extend the employment contract.

She agreed with the other participants that there is no protection for parents who return after maternity leave to be degraded. According to the Law, it is prohibited for an employee to be placed in a lower position by an annex to the contract, after maternity leave. It is also forbidden to ask a question related to the family during job interviews.

Marina Pavličić, general director of the organization "Kreni-promeni", spoke about the fact that her organization represents support for collecting signatures, but also informing as many citizens as possible about a certain topic. She pointed out that cooperation with them is important because they have a large database and contacts.

At the end of the event, the representative of the Open Society Foundation, Aleksandra Šanjević, pointed out that it was especially interesting for the round table that representatives of civil society, the state and independent institutions gathered. She stated that the participants talked meaningfully and in peace, and in order to jointly solve the problems of mothers on the labor market. Šanjević drew attention to the fact that the participants mentioned a large number of problems that moms face in the labor market and in relations with the employer, but that it is now very important to focus on the main problems and solve them.

The event was moderated by Ana Milenković, Public Finance and Economic Development Program Manager at the Institute for Development and Innovation.