



**OPENING REMARKS: Launching conference SK Social – Women and Roma Empowerment Programme, 10.06.2026, Košice, Slovakia**

**Dear Mr plenipotentiary, partners, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,**

**it is my honour to welcome you this morning on behalf of Norway at the opening conference of this new programme on Women and Roma Empowerment.**

**As we stand at the beginning of a new programming period, let me first express my sincere gratitude to our valued partners. I would like to thank the Slovak Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatisation – both the National Focal Point and the Programme Operator – as well as our donor programme partner, the Norwegian Directorate of Health, and our international partners, the Council of Europe and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights. Your commitment and hard work have made this programme possible.**

**Launching a new programme together with its first calls is an important milestone and a moment worth celebrating. It reflects strong cooperation, effective coordination, and open dialogue among all stakeholders. Congratulations to everyone involved.**

**I have had the opportunity to visit several inspiring projects and to see the results of previous programmes.**



**Everywhere I went, I encountered both appreciation for what has been achieved and a clear desire to continue this work. This confirmed that the programme areas we are focusing on remain highly relevant.**

**The new programme builds on this solid foundation. It aims to prevent and combat domestic and gender-based violence, including the establishment of the first Sexual Assault Centres in Slovakia.**

**At the same time, it will support the social inclusion and empowerment of Roma communities across key areas such as education, employment, healthcare, housing, and anti-discrimination - with a strong focus on women and youth.**

**Today, we are not only celebrating our long-standing cooperation between Norway and Slovakia but also reaffirming our shared values: respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, gender equality, the rule of law, and human rights.**

**One of the key strengths of the Norway Grants lies in their emphasis on bilateral cooperation. Through partnerships between NGOs, universities, public institutions, and experts from both our countries, we share knowledge, build trust, and deliver tangible results - making a real difference in people's lives.**

**Great to see a representative of the Center for Victims of Sexual Violence in Oslo taking part in this afternoon's panel discussion. I am also very pleased that the Norwegian Centre for Violence and Traumatic Stress Studies will be involved as a partner in one of the strategic projects, together with the Slovak**



**Coordinating-Methodological Centre for the Prevention of Violence against Women.**

**Such people-to-people cooperation and exchanges creates lasting connections that go beyond institutions. Especially in today's challenging global context, this kind of collaboration is more important than ever.**

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

**following the launch of the new Cultural Programme in Levoča last month, I am glad to see Slovakia moving forward with a second programme and announcing its first calls in this very important areas.**

**Slovakia has made significant progress, but important challenges remain. Today marks the start of a new phase - one that brings new opportunities to create meaningful and lasting change.**

**I wish the Programme Operator, donor partners, international organisations, and all future project promoters and partners every success. Your work has the potential to improve lives and to uphold fundamental rights where it matters most.**

**Thank you for your commitment, your dedication, and your partnership. The work ahead is important - and it truly matters for those who need it the most.**