



## ROMANI WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

FACT SHEET 2006

### OSI JOINT ROMANI WOMEN'S INITIATIVE

Established in 2006 as a partnership between the NWP Roma Women's Initiative and the Roma Participation Program, OSI's Joint Romani Women's Initiative (JWRI) continues to support young Romani women's leadership, capacity building, advocacy and research.

"We cannot expect to attack poverty effectively and empower women economically if these women are suffering from poor health, inadequate schooling and skills, social exclusion, and gender-based discrimination."

*Jennifer Tanaka, Assistant Director,  
Pakiv European Roma Fund in Budapest*

### BACKGROUND

Reliable data on Roma in Serbia and Montenegro is very limited due to the internal displacement and migration of thousands of Roma after the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the wars that followed. According to the official census in 1991, there were 143,519 Roma in Serbia and Montenegro. According to Roma NGOs experts, however, the number of Roma living in Serbia and Montenegro ranges between 400,000–700,000 persons.

Today, many of the people who faced ethnic cleansing during the wars and sought asylum in western countries have returned or were forced back to the region, mostly to Serbia. According to NGOs and international organizations, many of these returnees are Roma, who have limited access to housing, basic social services, employment, and education. The exact number of returnees is not available.

According to the United Nations Development Program's research, approximately 60 percent of the Roma population is living at or below the absolute poverty level.<sup>1</sup> In 2002, with support from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the government developed strategies for Roma integration, for the education of Roma in Serbia, and for combating poverty among Roma in Serbia and Montenegro. As part of the Roma Decade, separate National Action Plans were elaborated for Serbia and for Montenegro. The government must now implement these policies, ensuring that issues related to Roma women's employment are addressed.

### WHAT DO THE FACTS SAY?

- There is no data segregated by gender and ethnicity, which prevents the government from creating policy measures that address the problems of Romani women in Serbia and Montenegro.
- The Poverty Reduction Strategy does not address the lack of access to employment for Romani women.
- Research carried out in 2002 indicates that in one neighborhood, 68.4 percent of the Roma population was unemployed compared to 15.7 percent of the non-Roma population. In a Belgrade neighborhood, in 2001, 80.9 percent of the Roma population was unemployed; 27 percent stated that they did not have regular earnings; 7.9 percent received a regular salary; and 42.6 percent stated that "collecting secondary raw material" had provided them with some income.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Available online at <http://vulnerability.undp.sk/DOCUMENTS/serbia.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> *Romani Settlements, Living Condition and Possibilities of Integration of Roma in Serbia*. Research conducted by Dr. Bozidar Jaksic and Goran Basic. 2002. Belgrad: Ethnicity Research Center, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, OXFAM, 51–52.



## WHAT IS DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN?

“Discrimination against women shall mean any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”

*(Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, Article 1)*

## WHAT DOES THE EU RACE DIRECTIVE SAY?

“In implementing the principle of equal treatment irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, the Community should, in accordance with Article 3(2) of the EC Treaty, aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality between men and women, especially since women are often the victims of multiple discrimination.”

*(Council Directive 2000/43/EC of June 29, 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, Preamble 14)*

## WHAT DO THE EXPERTS SAY?

- The lack of access to employment for Romani women is particularly alarming.
- Romani women are discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, gender and age. Those Romani women who are refugees or displaced people suffer from even further disadvantages.
- There are few employment opportunities in the agricultural sector for Romani women on a temporary or seasonal basis.

## WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

- The government should take concrete steps and adopt a comprehensive anti-discrimination law, in line with European Community law, to prevent discrimination against Romani women.
- The government should establish a data collection method segregated by ethnicity and gender, according to the international standard, to address the exclusion of Romani women from the social and economic system and to integrate them into the labor market.
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- The government should implement the Action Plans for Roma employment outlined within the Integration Strategy, giving a special emphasis to employment measures and larger authority to Roma.
- European institutions (European Union, Council of Europe) should make sure that funds and institutional support for improving the economic conditions in Serbia and Montenegro address the equality of Romani women.
- Financial and technical support should be provided to improve the employability of Romani.
- Increasing employment opportunities for Romani women should be a priority for mainstream policies that deal with poverty and employment.
- The government should organize vocational trainings for Romani women to increase the employment rate.

## MORE INFO:

<http://cps.ceu.hu/>

<http://www.romawomensinitiatives.org>

[www.soros.org/initiatives/women](http://www.soros.org/initiatives/women)