

## ROMANI WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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

According to Bosnia and Herzegovina's constitution, as well as the Entity Constitutions, Romani people do not belong to one of the three constituent groups of the country, but are classified as "other." In the last census, conducted in 1991, 8,867 people registered themselves as members of the Romani community, which constitutes 0.2 percent of the total population. However, NGOs estimate the Roma population to be between 75,000 and 100,000 persons.

The Action Plan on Educational Needs of Roma and Other National Minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina was signed in February of 2004. The Council of Ministers adopted a National Strategy for Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina in July of 2005. Though the strategy recognizes Roma as the largest and most vulnerable national minority, it lacks deadlines, specific goals, a budget, and the designation of a body responsible for overseeing the implementation of policies leading towards the resolution of problems.

The National Action Plans for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan do not discuss issues of concern to the Roma population nor strategies to address these problems. Though a Gender Equality Agency was established in 2005, the gender action plan drafted by the agency does not address the situation and needs of Romani women.

An anti-discrimination law has not yet been adopted in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### WHAT DO THE FACTS SAY?

- One third of the employed population is in economically unsustainable jobs, and one third of the labor force population is unemployed. The situation is much more severe for marginalized populations, including women, the elderly, and minorities. Romani women are left marginalized by limited access to education, employment, and psychosocial and material support.<sup>1</sup>
- In 2004, the total number of employed persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina was 388,310, of which 36 percent were women.<sup>2</sup> The Federal Office for Statistics and Federal Employment Services does not have statistics segregated by ethnicity.
- Before 1992, 17 percent of the Roma population was employed.<sup>3</sup> The current employment rate of the Roma population is less than 1 percent, based on information provided by NGOs.
- Roma are the most unemployed ethnic group. Though several state agencies were responsible for coordinating and drafting a plan to address this issue by the end of 2005, it has not yet been completed.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Roma access to employment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2004. Council of Europe.

<sup>2</sup> Federal Office for Statistics, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

<sup>3</sup> Council of Roma, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

<sup>4</sup> These state agencies are: the entity/cantonal Ministries for Labor and Employment, the Employment Agency, the market and labor inspection, the employment office, the Coordinator Office for Implementation of the Development Strategy of BiH, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs.

## 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?

- Ethnic divisions within society reinforce structural discrimination and institutionalize prejudice. Romani women are stereotyped as criminals who lead lazy and dirty lifestyles, preventing them from gaining employment.
- Discrimination in hiring practices is difficult to prove, especially in a market with a surplus of labor. Romani women who find employment are eager to keep their jobs even when the working conditions are not in accordance with the law.
- The largest numbers of Roma earn some income in the informal economy, recycling raw materials, doing public work, cleaning, or working in construction.
- Most Romani women are unregistered employees, selling goods door-to-door and on the market or cleaning private businesses and homes. Alternatively, they earn a living begging on the street.
- The majority of Romani women are housewives, working at home and raising children, even though many of them are qualified to work as hairdressers, textile workers, or cooks.
- According to NGO representatives, more than 65 percent of Romani women are illiterate. Research conducted in 2004 shows that out of a random sample of 63 women, 33.33 percent have no formal education at all, 19 percent have completed only the fourth grade, and 19 percent have finished primary school.

## 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 introduce measures to integrate them into the labor market.
- European institutions (European Union, Council of Europe) should ensure that funds and institutional support for improving the economic conditions in Bosnia and Herzegovina address the equality of Romani women.
- Provide financial and technical support for improving the employability of Romani women.
- Romani women should be included in the design of any policies or programs that address them.
- Require that the Office for Gender Equality develop programs for Romani women and girls to improve their access to health, education, employment, and political participation. Facilitate the development of better links between Romani women's organizations and mainstream women's organizations.

## MORE INFO:

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

<http://www.romawomensinitiatives.org>

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