ROMA WOMEN’S INITIATIVE

Founded in 1999 by the Open Society Institute’s Network Women’s Program (NWP), the Roma Women’s Initiative (RWI) works to develop, link, and catalyze a core group of committed Roma women’s leaders – including many dynamic young women – in an effort to improve the human rights of Roma women in Central and Eastern Europe.

ROMANI WOMEN

ROMANI WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT

Equal opportunity for Roma women is limited not only by gender-based discrimination, but also by racial discrimination. Roma women face prejudice in hiring, promotion and salary. Moreover, many Roma women remain entirely excluded from the formal economy, constrained by limited educational opportunities, inadequate housing, poor healthcare, traditional gender roles, and general marginalization from the majority communities.

According to a report completed by the European Commission, while “…gender is specified as a priority issue within the [EU Employment] Strategy…race and ethnicity have not received the same level of attention, despite evidence that racial and ethnic discrimination exist within the employment market, particularly in respect of Roma communities.”

Roma women’s work in informal, non-registered, temporary and seasonal jobs contributes to their invisibility and vulnerability.

To better understand employment issues for Roma women, we must have disaggregated data by ethnicity to allow for targeted analysis. We also need systematic research on labor-market discrimination against Roma women.

WHAT DO THE FACTS SAY?

➢ In some new Member States, unemployment rates among Roma continue to be as high as 80 percent;

➢ In Romania, 35 percent of Roma women ages 25-54 are unemployed, which is four times greater than the unemployment of women in the general population;

➢ In Bulgaria, 41 percent of Roma women over the age of 55 are unemployed, compared to 19 percent in the general public;

➢ Cases of discrimination in hiring practices have been documented and brought before the Czech legal system, including two recent court decisions finding employment discrimination against Roma women;

➢ The segregation of Roma pupils into inferior schools, whether all-Roma schools or schools for mentally handicapped children, continues to be an obstacle that prevents all Roma children from going further in school and receiving vocationally-relevant educations;


“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
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.”


WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

- In Romania, only 3 percent of Roma women and 7 percent of Roma men have completed secondary school, as opposed to 63 percent of women and 73 percent of men in the majority population;⁶
- Unequal educational opportunities for Roma girls further limit employment opportunities for Roma women. At all levels of the educational system Roma women’s enrollment rates are significantly lower than that of Roma men’s (and certainly than that of majority girls);
- Poor healthcare impedes Roma women’s participation in the workforce. The life expectancy for Roma women in the Czech Republic is age 60, a full 14 years shorter than the national average for Czech women. In Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic, infant mortality rates for Roma are close to twice as high as the national averages.⁸

MORE INFO:

- www.romawomensinitiatives.org
- OSI, Research on Selected Roma Education Programs in Central and Eastern Europe, 2002.