

R O M A N I W O M E N

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.

“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*

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.”¹

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;²
- 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;³
- In Bulgaria, 41 percent of Roma women over the age of 55 are unemployed, compared to 19 percent in the general public;⁴
- 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;⁵
- 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;

¹ European Commission, Directorate on Employment and Social Affairs, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*, 2004, p. 2.

² EC, 2004, p. 2.

³ UNDP, *Faces of Poverty, Faces of Hope*, 2004, p. 13.

⁴ UNDP, 2004, p. 13.

⁵ U.S. State Department, *Country Report on Human Rights Practices*. 2004; Kenety, Yveta. Athinganoi - Romani Association, Czech Republic.

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 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, Preamble 14)

- 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

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

- Involve Roma women in creating policies and programs affecting their lives;
- Include minority women's concerns in programs addressing equal opportunities;
- Make sure that national action plans on Roma consider gender and include efforts directed at Roma women;
- Collect data on race and gender, and target analysis accordingly;
- Combine vocational training with mediation into jobs and continued professional support;
- Strengthen social structures to provide welfare services, including health care, child care and education, in disadvantaged regions to enable Roma women's employment;
- Improve Roma women's economic independence by extending micro-credit loans based on group or mutual solidarity, as recommended by the Council of Europe Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men;
- Provide benefits to employers for hiring Roma women (e.g. social security allowances/tax benefits);
- Consider affirmative action for publicly-financed projects;
- Develop new rules/methods to legalize informal employment;
- Create non-profit banks for small- and medium-sized enterprises with community development aims, since commercial banks are reluctant to deal with such small clients.

MORE INFO:

www.romawomensinitiatives.org

⁶ OSI, *Research on Selected Roma Education Programs in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2002.

⁷ European Centre on Health of Societies in Transition (ECOHST), 2000, cited in World Bank, *Roma in an Expanding Europe*, 2005, p. 48.

⁸ UNDP, *Roma Regional Human Development Report*, 2002.