

Roma continues to be one of the most excluded and discriminated group in my country. According to the Study on perceptions and attitudes towards equality in the Republic of Moldova<sup>1</sup>, developed in 2015 by the Council for prevention and elimination of discrimination and ensuring equality, the level of acceptance of Roma by the community represents 3,1 points. Within the study, the respondents were proposed a set of 12 questions to measure the attitudes towards Roma.

According to the findings,  
44,5% of respondents consider Roma are thieves,  
39,8% consider that Roma are liars and  
33,4% consider they are beggars.

Anyway, the same study reveals that 78,3% respondents acknowledge the statute of citizens hold by Roma and support the idea that Roma should be integrated in the society, with respect of their identity.

Besides this, according to a sociologic study issued in 2014 by Institute for Public Policies<sup>2</sup>, 63,7% of respondents would accept Roma to live in the Republic of Moldova, but only 37,5% of respondents would accept a Roma person to be their neighbor.

Due to existing stereotypes regarding Roma, this group confronts with a lot of issues, like poverty, school drop-out, unemployment and lack of participation in civic and political life. The lack of updated official statistical data on number of Roma in the Republic of Moldova cumbers to undertake of an objective analysis of the situation in this regard. Some administrative sources and researches report different data on the Roma population in the country, which varies from 14,000<sup>3</sup> to 200, 000<sup>4</sup>. This makes more difficult to promote some legal amendments in order to create better opportunities for Roma to participate in civic and public life and to take a stand for their rights.

If I am to speak about **Romani women**, I would like to state that the level of discrimination is even higher than Roma population in general. According to a 2014 UN comprehensive study on the situation of Romani women in Moldova<sup>5</sup>, Romani women represent **one of the most** vulnerable groups in the Republic of Moldova.

This means that they have lower levels of education, much higher rates of unemployment, significant lower level of income and poorer health than the rest of the population.

Existence of double discrimination of Romani women is not only a statement, but it's a rough reality which conducts to a dramatical *elimination of Romani women from the decision-making process*.

Child marriages which are practicable in Roma communities bring to an early school drop out of the girls. Parents tend to ignore the need of their daughters to be enrolled in schools, considering their primary role should be getting married and raising children. This results in the fact that women are less educated than men.

According to the data from 2014 Study on the Situation of Romani women in Moldova, only 15% of age 18+ Roma women are employed, compared to 34% of non-Roma women and 25% of Roma men. Being less educated, being mostly unemployed, being taught to be good housewives, *Romani women are almost invisible in civic and political life*.

In this regard, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) in its 2013 Concluding Observations to Republic of Moldova<sup>6</sup> expressed concerns that disadvantaged groups of women, including **Romani women and women with disabilities**, are, in practice, almost completely excluded from political and public life and recommended introducing procedures to ensure their effective participation in elected offices and appointed

<sup>1</sup> [https://egalitate.md/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/RO\\_Studiu-Perceptii-2015\\_FINAL\\_2016-Febr-25\\_Imprimat.pdf](https://egalitate.md/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/RO_Studiu-Perceptii-2015_FINAL_2016-Febr-25_Imprimat.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://egalitate.md/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Sondaj-sociologic---Fenomenul-discrimin---n-Republica-Moldova-percep-ia-cet---eanului---.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> MTIC (2012). According to statistical data from "State population register" related to Roma individuals residents of the Republic of Moldova, there are 14208 documented citizens registered in the country's territorial-administrative profile. [www.registru.md/news\\_2011/165210/](http://www.registru.md/news_2011/165210/) (accessed at 04.07.2015).

<sup>4</sup> Study on the situation of Romani Women and Girls in the Republic of Moldova

[http://md.one.un.org/content/dam/unct/moldova/docs/pub/Study\\_on\\_the\\_Situation\\_of\\_Romani\\_women\\_and\\_girls\\_in\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Moldova.eng.pdf](http://md.one.un.org/content/dam/unct/moldova/docs/pub/Study_on_the_Situation_of_Romani_women_and_girls_in_the_Republic_of_Moldova.eng.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://md.one.un.org/content/dam/unct/moldova/docs/pub/Study\\_on\\_the\\_Situation\\_of\\_Romani\\_women\\_and\\_girls\\_in\\_the\\_Republic\\_of\\_Moldova.eng.pdf](http://md.one.un.org/content/dam/unct/moldova/docs/pub/Study_on_the_Situation_of_Romani_women_and_girls_in_the_Republic_of_Moldova.eng.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.refworld.org/publisher,CEDAW,CONCLOSURE,52f385744,0.html>

bodies, as well as effective measures, including Temporary Special Measures, in order to accelerate the realization of substantive equality for them.

According to the Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on minority issues, Rita Izsak-Ndiaye, on her mission to the Republic of Moldova in 2016, Roma representatives expressed their concern over the fact that Roma are largely absent from decision-making processes and public life, both at the local and central levels. This is particularly acute in the case of Romani women<sup>7</sup>. The Special Rapporteur stated “Roma communities continue to experience economic, social and political marginalization and are often victims of discrimination, particularly in regard to access to the labour market, education and health-care services. The situation of Roma children and women and girls is of particular concern”.

An important break-through occurred in 2015 when 7 Romani women for the first time run for local elections and 2 of them were elected as local councilors. While there have been some encouraging advancements, including the election in 2015 of the first two Romani women as local councilors, the participation of Romani women is lower in comparison with both Roma men and non-Roma women.

Being this said, we have to underline the fact that Romani women are not a homogeneous group. They are of different age, living in different communities, they could have different sexual orientation and having or not a disability. Based on all these mentioned factors, a Romani woman could be more or less excluded from her own community. In this case, a woman would face a situation of multiple discrimination, with one of the most excluded group being Romani women with disabilities. Again, we can't speak about an exact figure as far as we don't have available up-to-date statistical data. The issue of under-representation in politics and decision-making processes is particularly acute for women from specific vulnerable groups who face multiple forms of discrimination. Women with disabilities are among these groups. According to [Women with Disabilities' Profile](#)<sup>8</sup>, women with disabilities are one of the most vulnerable social groups, facing double discrimination, both in terms of gender, because they are women, and also because they suffer from disabilities. About 5.4 thousand girls and 82.5 thousand women, including 30 thousand women of childbearing age, are part of this vulnerable group. The highest prevalence of disability is characteristic for women in the 55-70 age group, and, with the accentuation of the population aging process and increase in life expectancy, the number of women with disabilities will most likely register higher growth rates compared to that of men<sup>9</sup>.” There is no official data on women with disabilities running for elections and being elected in specific decision-making positions, but out of those two elected Romani women, none of them is with a specific disability.

While the stereotypes regarding women's capacity and role in decision making are widespread in the society in general, the stereotypes regarding women with disabilities are even more pronounced. Women with disabilities are in general either invisible in the public sphere or, when portrayed, are represented as victims. This requires dedicated efforts towards challenging norms and stereotypes and supporting women with disabilities in various information and awareness raising actions that create a positive image and reduce stigmatization and victimization.

In terms of recommendations to ameliorate the faced discrimination by Romani women and make their voices to be heard, I consider the following as being best practices to be used by the member states to support the most under-represented groups to support their causes and fight for their right:

- A strong network of Romani women from the member states should be created in order to act as a knowledge hub and a platform for sharing best practices, experiences and lessons learnt. Taking into account that each of us is unique and our experience is unique as well, sharing it would create a lot of opportunities to increase our capacities, to provide us new tools for advocacy and for raising our voices and to avoid potential obstacles and mistakes. We have to learn from each other and to borrow the tools and methods for “what works”. This would allow us to develop strong expertise in terms of destroying the existing stereotypes towards Romani women, especially those ones representing most discriminating groups and facing multiple discrimination. Being aware about the fact that each country has its own specifics as well, we still could adapt the international best practices to the national context. Moreover, bringing international expertise at the local level would empower local Romani women, as they would have the possibility to see that women from other countries have the same struggles, that women from other countries could break through barriers and succeed.

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<sup>7</sup> See the concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on the combined fourth and fifth periodic reports of the Republic of Moldova (CEDAW/C/MDA/CO/4-5), para. 23.

<sup>8</sup>[http://www.statistica.md/public/files/Cooperare\\_internationala/PNUD/10\\_tablouri\\_femei\\_RM/prof\\_3\\_disabilitati.pdf](http://www.statistica.md/public/files/Cooperare_internationala/PNUD/10_tablouri_femei_RM/prof_3_disabilitati.pdf)

<sup>9</sup>[http://www.statistica.md/public/files/Cooperare\\_internationala/PNUD/10\\_tablouri\\_femei\\_RM/prof\\_3\\_disabilitati.pdf](http://www.statistica.md/public/files/Cooperare_internationala/PNUD/10_tablouri_femei_RM/prof_3_disabilitati.pdf)

- Undertake continuous and strong advocacy campaigns to debunk myths related to Romani women. Roma communities should build alliances especially with media outlets in order to inform society at large about the existing stereotypes on Roma, with a special focus on Romani women. Media plays an important role in educating people's opinion about various issues. In this sense, in case people would have more opportunities to find out stories about Romani women's life, struggles and especially about the positive examples and role models, the attitude towards Roma in general and Romani women in special will change. More than this, promoting positive examples in media about Romani women leaders will educate society that Romani women could be as effective leaders as men and people would be more open to vote for a Romani woman in a decision-making position
- Enhance capacities of Romani women on a continuous basis on various topics, such as women's leadership, increasing women's self-confidence, assertiveness, gender equality, and women's role in the society. It is well-known that in order to perform, people need to strengthen their capacities on a regular basis. But tackling such topics as leadership, gender equality and women's rights would allow Romani women not only to be informed, but also will equip them with enough tools to make their voices heard and to fight for their rights. Romani women should be helped to start to believe in themselves, to become more confident and more vocal.
- Sharing of success stories of Romani women role models. It's very important and extremely effective for other Romani women to get inspired of existing positive examples of other women, who have the same story, but who succeeded to destroy all the obstacles and become effective leaders. Sharing of success stories would not only contribute to encouraging of other Romani women to take the fate in their own hands, but also would allow them to get acknowledged with existing best practices and find out some useful tools, resources and methods to initiate their own life projects.
- Promoting political participation of Romani women at all levels of decision making processes. Strengthening women's participation in politics is extremely important to ensure that interests of each and every person is taken into account. Here I am not saying that men can't ensure that the interests of everyone are transposed into public policies and regulations, or that women are better than men. The idea is that men don't confront with the same life experiences as women. The importance of increasing political representation of all people from under-representing groups would bring us to the situation that life perspectives and needs of everyone would be heard and taken into account when developing a new policy.
- OSCE could contribute to enhancing capacities of Romani women on increasing their political participation, like provision of trainings and coaching on running for elections nationally and locally and launching raising awareness campaigns in media about political and civic participation of Romani women.
- In this respect, OSCE could bring a substantial contribution in capacitating Romani women to become financially independent. Financial independence contributes not only to improvement of life conditions, but also helps Romani women to fight with injustice and also to run away from gender- based violence. Thus, OSCE could contribute with enhancing capacities of Romani women on how to run their own business, provision of vocational trainings, but also provision of grants for Romani women to launch a business.

Being said all these, I want to reiterate that I really hope to live once in a world where nobody would feel himself or herself discriminated, excluded or neglected because of ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation or any other criteria.