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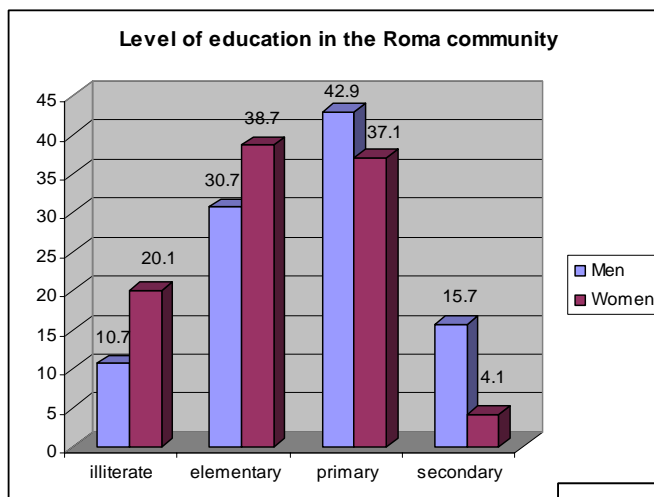
**THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE
IN THE POLICY FOR ROMA INTEGRATION IN BULGARIA**

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years we have witnessed increased attempts and straightforward policy (more or less) towards social inclusion of Roma minority within the countries of CEE, both on behalf of national and international actors. Bulgaria is not an exception in this direction. The state has formulated its will to integrate Roma community in 1999 with the accepting of the Framework program for equal integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society. Nevertheless, no consequent activities at the national level have followed this single act until 2003 when an Action Plan for the Implementation of the Framework Program for 2004 has been signed by the Council of Ministers. Almost a year later, with the launch of the international initiative, the Decade of Roma Inclusion, more specific governmental policy has been developed through the National Decade Action Plan (2005 – 2015).

All these documents and actions tend to address the most aching issues in Roma community and foster the integration processes through filling the gap between majority and minority. At the same time, an issue that is rarely tackled is the existing gender gap within these initiatives. **Roma women still face double discrimination: once as being Roma and second as being women in the Roma community and thus being subject to all patriarchal norms and conventions.**

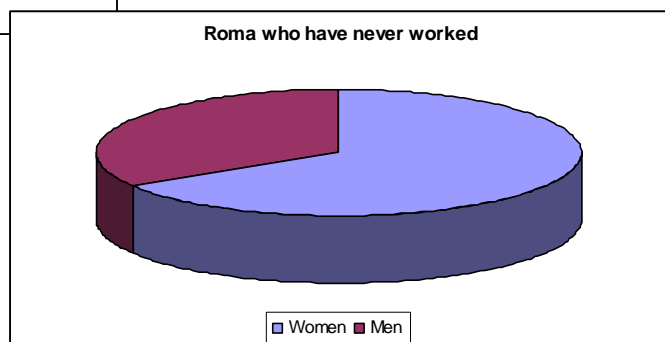


A significant gender difference can be observed in the sphere of education. Illiterate Roma women are twice as more than Roma men. Roma women with secondary education are three times less than men. **Unlike Bulgarians where women with secondary and higher education outnumber men, speaking about Roma women show lower indicators at every educational level.**

As it becomes clear from the statistics, basic problem is equal access of Roma girls to primary and secondary education taking

into consideration both intercultural group specifics and external reasons (related to all Roma kids). 80 % of the Roma girls from the groups of Kaldarshi and Burgudjii do not finish primary education.

According to data from UNDP around 80 % of Roma in Bulgaria have declared to be unemployed. Concerning Roma women there is a serious gender division within Roma employment. **Roma women who have never worked**



are twice as more (66.1%) than Roma men (33,9 %). Romani women are predominantly occupied in the sphere of communal services and textile industry. The conditions in the latter are extremely heavy which results in an increase of the sick rate among Romani women.

At the same time, the participation of Romani women in political and administrative sphere is extremely low. *At present around 92 000 people work in the state administration in Bulgaria. Not more than 100 of them are Romani women!*

The OSCE AP for the promotion of gender equality states that the participating States “have committed themselves to making equality between men and women an integral part of policies both at State level and within the Organization.” (Part IV) Nevertheless, documents directed partly or explicitly to the social inclusion of the Roma community in Bulgaria fail to put in practice this commitment (with few exceptions). Roma are usually perceived as an entity and no gender issues are included in governmental documents in relation to the Roma community.

THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN THE DOCUMENTS FOR ROMA INCLUSION

1) Framework program for equal integration of Roma into Bulgarian society

The Framework program was accepted on 22 April 1999 by the Council of Ministers. Its strategic goal is eliminating all forms for unequal treatment of Roma in society and one of the major priorities is combating discrimination. Just a small section at the end of the Framework Program is devoted to the problems of Roma women. They however are presented *rather nominally than practically*. An illustration of this is the fact that no concrete directions of actions are envisaged.

Field	Direction of actions	Number of tasks
Protection from discrimination	3	
Economic development	3	-
Health care	2	-
Roma neighborhoods regulations	-	-
Education	6	5
Preserving the ethnic specifics and culture of Roma in Bulgaria	-	6
Presence of Roma in national media	-	-
Roma women	-	5

In addition the measures envisaged for equal integration of Roma women are directed just towards basic need and do not address one of the basic factors for real emancipation: political participation and participation in public life.

Furthermore, the gender perspective is generally lacking in the Framework program. None of the specific problems of Roma women in the field of education, employment and health care is explicitly stated and addressed.

At the same time, the Framework Program played one important role: nonetheless, Roma women are just nominally presented, their problems have been introduced as an issue. As a result a number of local strategies for integration of Roma devote a special part to the problems of Roma women. It is hard to say that this is an issue consciously articulated by the local authorities but this is a good starting point for further actions.

2) The Action Plan for Implementation of the Framework Program for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian society and the Decade National Action Plan

The Action Plan for Implementation of the Framework Program was approved by the Bulgarian Government on October 6th, 2003 and refers to 2004. Again, like the Framework program, it has the lowest possible status: only a decision of the Council of Ministers.

The Action Plan is an extensive document with a lot of measures believed to follow the Framework Program. It however omits one of the sections of the latter, namely the one directed to Roma women. Moreover, *the Action Plan does not envisage a single measure targeting the problems of Roma women in education, health, employment and the other spheres. No gender perspective is regarded in the reports concerning the Action Plan implementation.*

The National Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion has 6 priorities: education, health care, living conditions, employment, protection from discrimination and culture. Although Roma women are mentioned as a cross-cutting issue, *the Plan envisaged measures directed to Roma women only in the field of health care: breast cancer prevention, care for pregnant women, prevention of the early marriages, and family planning. In all other priorities actions directed to Roma women are not envisaged. At the same time the measures and actions in these spheres do not take into account the specific ways for reaching Roma women.*

The National Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion envisaged only 600 000 BGN (307 692 EUR) from the State budget for actions directed to Roma women (in the field of health care) that is an extremely low amount for a ten-year period.

3) Ministry of labor and social policy: including Romani women issues in the agenda without a strategy.

Before July 2005 the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy was not considered an institution with active engagement with the Framework Program implementation and the Roma integration process in general. It did not develop its “Roma strategy” and did not participate actively in the preparation of the Action plans for the Decade of Roma Inclusion. After September 2005 this situation has changed. Gradually the Ministry has started developing a tailored approach which takes into account the specifics of the Roma community within its mainstream programs. For the first time special programs targeting Roma have been initiated. Some of the most aching problems like illiteracy and social exclusion at the labor market have become the core of the activities of the MLSP towards Roma. For the first time the MLSP has undertaken special actions (although still scarce and seemingly without a clear strategy) for overcoming the disadvantaged situation of Romani women. Romani women have been given priority as a target group in many of the MLSP programs directed to Roma (e.g. the literacy program).

Despite these efforts however there is still a lack of a long-term targeted approach. There is no doubt that poverty and social exclusion remain serious issues for Bulgarian Roma. One of the reasons for the difficulties in designing long-term sectoral strategies directed to the problems of the Roma population is the lack of reliable official data concerning Roma. Other reasons are the lack of a good balance between mainstream and special targeted programs and the insufficient coordination between actions carried out in different ministries.

THE EU ACCESSION: A POSSIBILITY FOR INCLUDING ROMANI WOMEN ISSUES IN THE POLICY AGENDA

Within the process of EU accession new policies have been developed. Therefore, it has the chance to enhance significantly the Roma strategies implementation and devote significant place to Romani women issues. One of the ways for this is mainstreaming the major issues concerning Romani women within the gender sections in each OP and through out the programs (through proper operations, activities and indicators) which could provide the necessary financing and administrative engagement for the next 7 years. Furthermore, gender equality is a cross-cutting issue in all OPs. It provides us with a stronger tool for broader inclusion of Romani women issues in the political agenda.

The four major Operational programs where Romani women issues should be mainstreamed are the Human Resources Development OP, Administrative Capacity OP, Regional Development OP and Rural Areas Development OP. The process of their drafting is going on at the moment. At the moment they do not contain points from the Roma strategies at all. Changes have been made so far only in the

OP HRD. It is an exception also regarding Romani women issues. In discussions so far a special indicator for monitoring the advance in the situation of Romani women cross-cutting all operations has been suggested by Center Amalipe.

Therefore, our main recommendations are:

1. Mainstream Roma issues within the priorities of the Operational Programs

2. Incorporate indicators for monitoring activities aimed at overcoming the backward situation of Romani women within both, Roma related activities and within the gender section of the Operational programs.