

ROMANI WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT IN BULGARIA

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 the 2001 census, Roma were estimated to be 4.6 percent of the population, while other statistics estimate that Roma make up six to seven percent of the population.¹

While the life of Romani women is often characterized by a conflict between traditional culture and modern developments, in reality there is great diversity among Roma women and their experiences. For example, there are striking differences between the problems faced by activist Romani women and the young Romani women belonging to the Kalderash Roma group.²

In 1999, the Bulgarian government adopted a Framework Program for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society, which includes a chapter on Romani women. In addition, the section on employment contains provisions focused on Romani women, such as professional, vocational and entrepreneur training. Unfortunately the government has not implemented these measures.

The Bulgarian National Action plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005–2015) only addresses the specific needs of Romani women in the chapter on health.

WHAT DO THE FACTS SAY?

- The unemployment rate for the Roma population ages 15 to 54 is approximately 80 percent.³
- 66 percent of Roma who have never worked are women and 34 percent are men.⁴
- 64 percent of Roma who have never worked quit school before eighth grade,⁵ and more than 98 percent of Roma without work experience are under the age of 39;
- 90 percent of Roma would prefer to have permanent work rather than to live on social benefits.⁶
- Romani women who are employed work predominantly in the textile industry and communal services, such as sweeping the streets and planting trees and flowers.⁷

¹ Preface released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, February 28, 2005, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – 2004 Section 5 Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities.

² Nicoleta Bitu, *Situation of Roma/Gypsy Women in Europe*, 1999. OSI and Romani CRISS, Council of Europe.

³ UNDP, *Faces of Poverty, Faces of Hope*, 2004. Vulnerability Profiles for Decade of Roma Inclusion countries, Section on Unemployment, 13.

⁴ Foundation Partners Bulgaria and Agency of Social Analysis, *Roma: the Other Measure of the Changes*, 2004.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Deyan Kolev, *The Rumors of our Integration have been Greatly Exaggerated*, Research done by Center "Amalipe."

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?

- The end of the socialist agricultural cooperatives where many Roma once worked left large numbers of Roma unemployed and without options for reentering the labor market.
- Two thirds of Roma who have never been employed are women. While limited educational opportunities for Roma girls partially explains this statistic, the conservative, traditional role that woman often occupy in the Roma communities must also be addressed.
- Romani women are still underrepresented in national politics, with no Romani women in parliament. In the last elections, only one Bulgarian political party had a Romani woman on the ticket.
- In contrast, Romani women have been able to integrate into politics on the local level. According to research done by Centre Amalipe, there are more than 200 Roma city councilors. Roma make up 7.85 percent of city councils and 12 percent of these council members are women. Approximately 40 percent of Roma who hold public administration roles are women.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

- Consistent efforts are needed both on the part of the government and civil society organizations to educate the Bulgarian society to respect the norms of the Protection Against Discrimination Act and to recognize the right of equal treatment of the minority groups protected under the law.
- Romani women should participate in the design and implementation of all policies and programs concerning Roma, and the concerns of Romani women should be addressed. Roma women's issues should be mainstreamed into all relevant policies designed for the population as a whole.
- Government programs and public funds should help Romani women entrepreneurs access capital.
- Governments and NGOs should support programs and strategies for providing skills development for Romani women, thus increasing their possibilities for employment and expanding their options for work.
- Investments should be made in the skills and education of Romani women to improve employment opportunities and increase the participation of Romani women in politics.
- Political parties should invite and include Romani women in their election lists.

MORE INFO:

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

<http://www.romawomensinitiatives.org>

<http://www.soros.org/women>