

# *The Invisible Ones*

## HUMAN RIGHTS OF ROMANI WOMEN IN VOJVODINA

футура публикације 



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# **THE INVISIBLE ONES**

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**THE INVISIBLE ONES:  
HUMAN RIGHTS OF ROMANI WOMEN IN VOJVODINA**

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*Authors*

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## ***Introductory remarks***

***The Invisible Ones: Human Rights of Romani Women in Vojvodina*** is the result of the work on the short term project at Women Studies and Research 'CEDAW Shadow Report on the Rights of the Roma Women in Vojvodina' (Project) and was supported by the British Embassy in Belgrade.<sup>1</sup>

*The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*<sup>2</sup> (CEDAW) is an international treaty, which guarantees women human rights among the members of the United Nations. When Serbia & Montenegro<sup>3</sup> ratified CEDAW in 1981, the nation undertook to:

- protect and advance women's rights and equality regardless of national, religious or cultural factors;
- accept measures for the elimination of discrimination against women;
- take affirmative measures in the direction of gender equality;
- periodically submit reports on the state of women's human rights;

By signing CEDAW Serbia & Montenegro undertook to submit periodic reports to the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination of Women (Committee) on the legal, administrative and other measures taken for the advancement of women's human rights. The Committee evaluates reports and makes general recommendations for further actions concerning women's human rights to state authorities. The state is obliged to translate the recommendations, to make them available to the public, and to take all necessary measures towards realizing them. Serbia & Montenegro submitted its last official report to the Committee in 1998, but the Committee did not evaluate it. Government bodies are working on the official draft report, which will include the period from 1992 to 2003. The report should be submitted to the Committee in 2004. Government bodies still have not presented a draft of this report to the public. Therefore, there is currently no official report on the state of women's human rights, as defined by CEDAW, on Serbia & Montenegro.

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<sup>1</sup> Project titled: CEDAW Shadow Report on the Rights of the Roma Women in Vojvodina took place over a period from 22 December 2003 to 30 June 2004 and was financially supported, with the sum of €6.370, by the British Embassy in Belgrade.

<sup>2</sup> Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, Official Gazette of the Socialist-Federative Republic of Yugoslavia- International treaties, ref no 11/1981.

<sup>3</sup> By adopting the Constitutional Charter of Serbia & Montenegro in 2003 a new state was established which took over all the international obligations of the former Yugoslavia. In this text the term Serbia & Montenegro will be used even for the time period when it officially did not exist.

In order to obtain balanced information on the state of women's human rights in a country, the Committee accepts alternative or 'shadow' country reports, which it then takes into consideration when evaluating the official state report. NGOs can prepare shadow reports, and the reports may limit their focus to specific groups of women or certain articles of the treaty.

The aim of this Project was twofold: to create, present and submit to the Committee a shadow report on the human rights of Romani women in Vojvodina and to make recommendations for the elimination of discrimination against Romani women. Vojvodina has been chosen because it presents an example of a multi-religious and multicultural environment that differs from central Serbia & Montenegro. The previous report focused on women in general, overlooking religious and cultural differences. Romani women have been chosen as they often suffer double discrimination: as members of the Romani nationality and as women. Moreover, neither the specific problems which Romani women face in the realizing their human rights nor the violations of Romani women's human rights were specifically addressed in previous official reports.

In the Project, Romani women were involved in the process of the report preparation not only as the objects of research but also as active research participants. This was done to train the young Romani organization activists in monitoring human rights of Romani women in the region and to establish a network of local organizations which will work on Romani women's human right in the future.

Members of the Women Studies and Research and activists from Romani organizations in Vojvodina cooperated on the Project: Romani researcher, Žabalj; Romani Women Association 'Amarilis', Novi Sad; Roma People Association, Novi Bečej; Romani Women of Banat, Kikinda; Roma Cultural Centre, Subotica; and Romani women's rights expert, Tatjana Perić. The project initiator was Tatjana Perić. The proposal of this project is the result of her unselfish voluntary work and the financial support she managed to obtain. On behalf of Women Studies and Research the Project was coordinated by Veronika Mitro, under the supervision of Svenka Savić. In addition to coordinating the Project, Veronika Mitro also organized training for its associates, made the final draft of the text, and created the project website ([http://www.dicens.org.yu/Romkinje/ Romkinje.htm](http://www.dicens.org.yu/Romkinje/Romkinje.htm)). The following people took part in the training of Romani activists: Marija Aleksandrović, Mirej Grčki, Đorđe Jovanović and Jelena Jovanović. Articles on the Romani people and Romani women in local newspapers were selected by Jelica Ejić. Mirej Grčki, an attorney of law, conducted an analyses of the legal system. Romani women collected stories about the violation of human rights of the Romani in Vojvodina during the project's duration. Activists from Romani organizations who were involved

included Ksenija Aleksandrović, Sanija Beriša, Ljiljana Jovanović, Sanja Jovanović, Ruža Nikolić, Đule Ređepi, Nataša Šajin, Lejla Toplica, Sejdića Valdeta and Radmila Zećirović. The legal analysis by Mirej Grčki, examples of stories collected by Romani women associates, and the selection of newspaper articles are available on the project website.

*The Invisible Ones: Human Rights of Romani Women in Vojvodina* is an independent review of the position of Romani women in Vojvodina and is written according to the instructions for writing reports according to CEDAW.<sup>4</sup>

The text is outlined in the following way. First, the basic facts on Vojvodina and Romani women living there are presented. The report on the state of human rights of Romani women in Vojvodina according to each article of CEDAW (16 altogether) then follows. Finally short-term and long-term proposals are given to state institutions to ensure equal rights for Romani women in Vojvodina.

*The Invisible Ones: Human Rights of Romani Women in Vojvodina* is initially based on the analysis of the legal system and stories told by Romani women during the Project. A total of 122 stories about the violation of the human rights of Romani women were collected. The stories were recorded in Serbian. Violations of human rights suffered by both of young and elderly Roma women were recorded- the youngest Romani included in the study was born in 1993 and the eldest in 1950. Both literate and illiterate Romani women were included. Romani women who attend school, who left school early, who finished school, who had never married, who are married and who are divorced were all included. Romani women whose ancestors have lived in Vojvodina for generations are included, as are Romani women refugees and IDPs. Stories were told by Romani women from Catholic, Muslim and Orthodox religions. Some of the Romani women participants live in towns (Novi Bečej, Novi Sad, Sombor, Subotica, Kikinda, Stara Pazova, Zrenjanin) and others in villages (Silbaš, Golubinci, Dač, Bašaid, Novo Miloševo, Mokrin, Vojka) in Vojvodina. We also consulted the other documentation from Women Studies and Research in the fields of Romology and Women's Human Rights. This included a substantial number of reference books, newspaper articles, video, audio, photo and printed materials, and earlier reports (both official and unofficial) which were submitted to the Committee by Serbia & Montenegro. We included the available institutional and statistical data about Romani women in Vojvodina, as well as the data and reports of the United Nations and the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) which were published in Serbian or are electronically available in Serbian or English.

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<sup>4</sup> Evaluation on the position of women- Instruction for making reports concerning CEDAW on elimination of all sorts of discrimination against women, UN, 2003.

*The Invisible Ones: Human Rights of Romani Women in Vojvodina* is a documented testimony about Romani women in Vojvodina which evaluates to what extent Serbia & Montenegro fulfils the obligations it took upon itself by signing CEDAW. It has been published in order to point out the situation of Romani women in Vojvodina and to serve as a benchmark to state institutions and relevant non-institutional groups in their initiatives to protect and advance the rights of Romani women in Serbia & Montenegro. It hopes to fill a gap in the reviews on Romani human rights in Serbia, which either do not take gender into consideration or do not afford enough attention to Romani women. It also will serve as a reminder to the state and its citizens of the obligations the state has in the promotion and protection of women's human rights.

## ***Vojvodina and Romani Women***

Vojvodina is the autonomous province of Serbia & Montenegro with borders towards Croatia, Hungary and Romania. The capital of Vojvodina is Novi Sad, which is the seat of the provincial government. According to the last census (2002) in Vojvodina there are 2,013,889 citizens, 49% male and 51% female. The citizens come from around thirty different national/religious/ethnic/regional groups: Serbian, Montenegrin, Yugoslav, Albanian, Bosnyac, Bulgarian, *Bunjevci*, Greek, Gorani, Croat, Italian, Jewish, Hungarian, Macedonian, Muslim, German, Polish, Romani, Russian, Ruthenium, Slovak, Slovenian, *Šokci*, Ukrainian, Czech, Vlachs and Vojvodinian<sup>5</sup>.

In Serbia & Montenegro the Romani people gained the status of the national minority in 2002<sup>6</sup>. A total of 29,057 men and women declare themselves to be of Romani nationality, which represents 1.43% of the population of Vojvodina. In comparison to the census from 1991, an increase of 19% in Roma population has been recorded. This change should not be attributed to a growth in the birth rate, as the birth rate in the Romani community is decreasing. (It is, however, still twice as high as in the rest of the population, excluding ethnic Albanians.) Most likely the rise in numbers is due to the attention and indirect encouragement to declare themselves as members of the Romani national community the Romani people are receiving. Besides, it is assumed that the number of the Romani people is considerably higher, as there are still many who declare themselves as

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<sup>5</sup> \*(2003), Serbia in Numbers, Republic of Serbia, The Republic Institute for Statistics, Belgrade.

<sup>6</sup> Law on the protection of rights and liberties of national minorities, Official Gazette of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, ref no 41/2002.

members of others national groups, most often according to the language they speak (Serbian, Hungarian, Romanian) and many Romani people who are not registered and therefore not included in the census. In addition, the mobility of the Romani national community, as exemplified by migration waves from smaller to bigger settlements, underdeveloped to developed regions, and away from Kosovo, contributes to the fact that the official number of the Romani is still unknown.

The average age of the Romani population is relatively low: 62% are younger than 25, and only 4.1% are older than 60. The overarching socio-economic position of the Romani people displays some main characteristics: a great number of Romani people have no income, the economic activity among them is very low, the rate of unemployment is high, they have a high rates of illiteracy, many leave school before completing their studies, poverty and very bad living conditions can be found in isolated settlements, early marriages, many of them do not have any personal identity documents, long-term refugee status and a great number of cases of imperilled basic human rights. For the Romani national community, patriarchal relationships and attitudes are characteristic. Romani women very often receive no education and are tied to their homes and families.

Only one Romani woman is employed in the provincial government (0.12% of the total number of employees, and 0.2% of the total number of employed women), and she works in the state administration (as an associate for Romani issues in the Secretariat for Administration, Regulations and National Minorities). Only 2 Romani people work in the local administration, and only a further 2 work in the city administration (none of them women).<sup>7</sup> In the National Romani Council, out of 35 members 2 (5.71%) are women. In Vojvodina there are two active Romani political parties (the Romani Congress Party and the Democratic Union of the Romani). The number of women involved in the work of these parties is insignificant, and none occupy leadership positions.

There are no Romani women in the parliament and executive bodies and the total involvement of the Romani nationality in the structures of authority is substantially lower in comparison to their number in general in Vojvodina. Romani women share the marginalized destiny of their national community in

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<sup>7</sup> Information on national and gender structure, level of education, way and date of employment in provincial, local and city administration on the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Republic of Serbia – and the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Executive Council of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, October 2003, Novi Sad, ref no 101-00001/2003.

Vojvodina, and in the destiny of women in general when it comes to participation in the public authorities in Vojvodina.

In Vojvodina there are various active Romani organizations which are engaged in solving the problems of both the Romani national community and Romani women. A total of 54 Romani non-governmental organizations have been registered, including two women's organizations: Romani Women's Association 'Amarilis' in Novi Sad and the Roma Women of Banat in Kikinda.

Cultural and creative work of Romani women is very extensive and in the last few years there have been many publications in the Romani language. There are TV and radio shows in the Romani language on Radio and Television of Novi Sad and in some other smaller centres in Vojvodina. There is a magazine 'Romology' and the fortnightly information newsletter THEM.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS OF ROMANI WOMEN ACCORDING TO CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN<sup>8</sup>**

### ***Definition of the Discrimination against Women***

**According to CEDAW (article 1) '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, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all spheres of life.**

There is no legal document by Serbia & Montenegro that contains either the definition of discrimination in general or the definition of discrimination against women. By the Provision of the *Constitutional Charter of the State Union of Serbia & Montenegro*<sup>9</sup> human and minority rights guaranteed by international treaties are primary in implementation of the laws of Serbia & Montenegro. In this sense, the definition of 'discrimination against women' provided by CEDAW is accepted in Serbia and Montenegro and in Vojvodina.

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<sup>8</sup> Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, Official Gazette of the Socialistic Federative Republic of Yugoslavia- International treaties, ref no 11/1981.

<sup>9</sup> Official Gazette of the State Union of Serbia & Montenegro, ref no 1/2003, article 10.

The text of CEDAW is available in printed and electronic versions in Serbian and everyone looking for the definition will probably find it. In Vojvodina first steps have been made to incorporate the definition into provincial legal documents. A group of lawyers have prepared the Resolution on Gender Equality,<sup>10</sup> which will soon go into parliament, and it defines 'gender based discrimination'. The Resolution is published in Serbian and English, and it has been publicly promoted and distributed on several occasions. It has not been promoted amongst Romani women.

The state did not organize campaigns nor did it develop mechanisms which would make the definition on discrimination against women well known among civil servants and citizens. It has been shown in practice that civil servants do not know what the discrimination against women means, and that it refers to all women, including those of Romani nationality.

Romani woman V.J. (born in 1972), married with two children, said: Two days before St. Petka (26th October 2003) around 8 o'clock my husband came home drunk and immediately started hitting me on the back and in the ribs. He called me a whore and started undressing me. I tried to defend myself. He ripped all my clothes, even my knickers, and raped me. It happen before as well, but this time I went to report it to the police. I waited until the following day to go to the police, as it was late and I could not leave my children alone with him. When I arrived at the police station one policeman, I don't know his name, asked me insolently what I was doing there. I started crying and said to him in a scared and shy way, "My husband beat and raped me." Then the policeman told me, "You should have been smart and good and then your husband wouldn't have beaten you."<sup>11</sup>

Romani woman M.N. (1954), a widowed pensioner, said: In December 2003 I went to the Pensioners' Home to join, as I heard that they are supplying fuel for heating which could be paid for in instalments. I came to the president, D.V., and asked her if I could join. She told me that it would

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<sup>10</sup> Pajvančić, M, S. Pihler, A. Kartag Odri, S. Jašarević (2004), Resolution on Gender Equality RS APV, Provincial Secretariat for labour, employment and gender equality, Novi Sad. article 3- Discrimination against women represents 'any legal or physical, direct or indirect differentiation, privilege, exclusion or restriction based on gender, the aim or consequence of which is reflected in greater difficulty, prejudice or denied recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights in political, educational, cultural, economic, social, sports, civil and any other sphere. Direct discrimination on the grounds of gender exists when a person is unjustifiably treated in a manner which is less favourable than the manner in which a person of different gender is treated, would be treated, in the same or similar circumstances.

<sup>11</sup> Story recorded by Nataša Šajin on 15th January 2004 in the village of Bašaid.

not be proper for the 'Gypsies' to join in as it would make other members angry.<sup>12</sup>

In Vojvodina Romani women themselves are very ignorant of what 'discrimination against women' is. Even the Romani organization activists are not aware of the definition. Out of 20 Romani organization activists who took part in the Project training,<sup>13</sup> 14 could recall a time, or still are, discriminated against as women, although they were unaware that their experiences were forms of gender-based discrimination. (One woman's uncle does not let her go to school, the other woman's husband will not allow her to work, while the third did not get a job because she is of Romani nationality.) They have accepted discrimination as the sad state of their everyday lives: something which they have to endure.

Ignorance among civil servants and Romani women of what discrimination against women is contributes to Romani women's inertness in the realization of their human rights.

### ***Condemnation of the Discrimination against Romani Women in Vojvodina***

**According to the CEDAW (article 2) State Parties undertake to condemn discrimination against women, eliminate it in their national constitutions, legal or other appropriate legislation, to incorporate the principle of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions other appropriate legislation, and to ensure practical realization of this principle.**

The *Charter on Human and Minority Rights*<sup>14</sup> prohibits discrimination, either indirect and direct and on any grounds, and allows for the implementation of temporary specific measures necessary for the realization of equality and protection of individuals whose position is not equal to others. As an independent and singled out principle, the equality of men and women is incorporated in only one legal act – *Law on Employment and Insurance in the*

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<sup>12</sup> Story recorded by Ljilana Jovanović on the 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2004 in the village of Golubinci.

<sup>13</sup> Preparatory training for collecting the stories on the violation of Roma women human rights held on the 8th of January 2004 as a part of the Project. Details on the Project stated in the Introductory remarks.

<sup>14</sup> Charter on human and minority rights, Official Gazette of Serbia & Montenegro, ref no 6/2003.

*Case of Unemployment.*<sup>15</sup> This act guarantees equal availability of jobs and equality in the process of employment of women and men, and prohibits any form of discrimination on national, ethnic, racial or linguistic grounds, against individuals belonging to a minority nationality. *Basic Criminal Law*<sup>16</sup> states that crime is any violation of human rights and liberties which is committed by differentiating on the grounds of race, skin colour, national and ethnic origin, but not on the grounds of gender.

The state condemns discrimination, but its formal and institutional mechanisms for the protection of women's rights cannot protect Romani women against discrimination. The legal system provides one way in which Romani women can claim their rights. Accessing the legal system is not simple, however, and rights need to have already been violated for women to bring their claims to this forum. The state does not prescribe measures to decrease ethnic distance and/or overcome the widespread prejudices against Romani women which instigate discrimination.

In Serbia & Montenegro ethnic distance from the Romani is very prominent, although it showing signs of diminishing.<sup>17</sup> Many negative stereotypes of Romani women persist in Vojvodina: the Romani woman is dirty, uneducated, illiterate, she is a liar, a beggar, has many children, and likes to sing and dance.<sup>18</sup> Romani women are fully aware of how others see them, and often endure discrimination in their everyday lives due to ethnic distance and stereotypes.

Romani woman D.N. (1960) divorced, lives with her son, daughter-in-law, and grandson said to our research participant: A few months ago my son, daughter-in-law and I were in town going round shops, buying some things for the little one. As we were walking the whole day, I felt hungry so I bought a roll. We were walking inside "Bazar" (department store) and before entering the shoe department I finished eating the roll. My son and daughter-in-law went in front of me and entered the department without any problems. My ex-husband is not a Gypsy, and my son looks like him. His complexion

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<sup>15</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 71/2003, article 8: Guarantees equal availability of jobs and equality in the process of employment of women and men.

<sup>16</sup> Official Gazette of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ref no 44/76, 36/77, 34/84, 37/84, 74/87, 57/89, 3/90, 38/90, 45/90 and 54/90; Official Gazette of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ref no. 35/92, 16/93, 31/93, 37/93, 41/93, 50/93, 24/94, 61/2001; Official Gazette of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ref no 39/2003.

<sup>17</sup> Biro, M. (2004), Serbian Ethnocentricity before and after 5th of October 2002, The New Serbian Political Thought, special edition Ethnic Stereotypes, issue 3, ICC The New Serbian Political Thought, Belgrade, pages 57-62.

<sup>18</sup> Savić, S. (2002) Women of minority groups in Vojvodina- Review from the point of view of the majority nation, CMK Informator, issue 35/36, Novi Sad, pages 8-20.

is quite white and one can never say that he is a Gypsy. They went in and I was stopped by a man, probably working there, who told me that I could not enter. When I asked him why, he told me, "You were eating just a minute ago and now you will be touching the shoes with those greasy hands of yours, go away." I felt very ashamed. I know very well what it was all about. I am dark, you can immediately see who I am and what I am, and people think that the Gypsies are dirty and smelly, and they all run away from us. Whatever we do, this prejudice will haunt us and it is very unlikely that it will ever change. We can be even the best, but we are Gypsies, and that mark is enough for other people to consider us lower than themselves.<sup>19</sup>

Romani woman S.D. (1987), secondary school student, said:

In my class at school we were voting for the class president, secretary and treasurer. My friend V.P. proposed me as a treasurer. Some of the students did not want to elect me because I am Romani. I went to the school pedagogue and told her my problem, and she explained to me that she could do nothing about it as the Gypsies have the reputation that they lie and steal.<sup>20</sup>

Romani woman A.J. (1984), single, finished elementary school, said: On the December 31<sup>st</sup> 2003 my boyfriend, who is also Romani, and I were on our way to a New Year's celebration in the disco 'Renesansa' in Belgrade, where we had already paid for reservations. When we arrived at the entrance a security man told us that the Romani people are forbidden to enter.<sup>21</sup>

## ***The Development and Emancipation of Romani Women in Vojvodina***

**According to CEDAW (article 3) State Parties shall take in all fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men.**

In Serbia & Montenegro there is no institutional framework which would ensure the protection of women's rights in accordance with CEDAW. On the Republic level, in 2003, the Government of the Republic of Serbia formed the

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<sup>19</sup> Story recorded by Ksenija Aleksić, 24th January 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>20</sup> Story recorded by Ljiljana Jovanović, 18th February in Stara Pazova.

<sup>21</sup> Story recorded by Ljiljana Jovanović, 20th January in Dač.

Council for Gender Equality, as an expert and advisory body.<sup>22</sup> Within the National Assembly, a Committee for Gender Equality has been formed.<sup>23</sup> On the level of AP Vojvodina, the Secretariat for Employment and Gender Equality<sup>24</sup> was formed in 2002. Within the Secretariat for Employment and Gender Equality the Council for Gender Equality has been formed as an expert body for gender equality. Also the Committee for Gender Equality has been formed in the Assembly of AP Vojvodina. Resolution on the Provincial Ombudsman<sup>25</sup> has been passed, according to which one of its deputies is in charge of gender equality and is just starting to work. In fifteen municipalities assembly bodies for gender equality have been formed. A group of lawyers from University of Novi Sad have prepared the Resolution on Gender Equality, but these acts still have not come into effect.

The Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality financially supported two existing organizations of Romani women in Vojvodina<sup>26</sup> and, in cooperation with the Secretariat for Administration, Regulations and National Minorities and Romani women NGOs, in 2003 realized short term projects for the political empowerment of Romani women through the program of the Stability Pact for the South-East Europe - 'Women can do that'.

At the University of Novi Sad, as a part of the Associations between Centres for the Interdisciplinary and Multicultural Research, postgraduate and specialist studies were started at the University Centre for Gender Studies in the 2003/2004 school year. There were no Romani women enrolled at the first year of studies, but three Roma women finished the alternative educational program

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<sup>22</sup> According to the Resolution of the Council for Gender Equality formation, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no13/2003 – this task force has the aim to evaluate and propose measures for the advancement of the policy for gender equality achievement, and give initiatives for law modifications, monitors and analyses the application of the law provisions and ratified international documents against gender based discrimination and proposing measures so that they are consistently put into effect.

<sup>23</sup> Rules of Procedure of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 32/2002- edited text, 57/2003 and 12/2004, article 68- Committee for Gender Equality considers the law proposition.

<sup>24</sup> Official Gazette of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, ref no 21/2002.

<sup>25</sup> Resolution on the Provincial Ombudsman, Official Gazette of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, ref no 23/2002.

<sup>26</sup> Additionally, the Secretariat for Administration, Regulations and National Minorities through their regular open competitions for the support of national minorities projects financially supported many projects for Roma women as well as the Fond for the Development of Non-profit Sector of the Assembly of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

at the Women Studies and Research in Novi Sad and another ten were trained to document violations of women's human rights within this project.

In 2002 in Vojvodina, two women's Romani organizations (Association of Romani Women 'Amarilis', Novi Sad and Romani Women of Banat, Kikinda) were founded. These organizations are working on the emancipation of Romani women in Vojvodina in the fields of education, prevention of domestic violence, and sex trafficking. Other Romani and non-Romani NGOs are contributing greatly to the emancipation of Romani women through different projects: programs of pre-school education and women human rights (Association of the Romani, Novi Bečaj, Romani Cultural Centre, Subotica, Romani Researchers, Žabalj), SOS services (Novi Sad Women Centre, Novi Sad, Women Alternative Workshop, Kikinda), support in higher education (Women Studies and Research, Novi Sad, Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, Belgrade), legal help, support to primary education, employment programs (Association for Romani Literature and Language, Novi Sad, Humanitarian Centre of Novi Sad), health programs (Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization).

Emancipation of Romani women is, to a certain extent, helped by the media in Romani language. Television programs on TV Novi Sad in Romani occasionally include shows on Romani human rights which promote Romani women's rights. In the editorial of the radio program in the Romani language on the Radio Novi Sad there is one Romani woman associate, and the editor of the news program in Romani language of the Radio Kikinda is a woman of Romani nationality. Within their radio programs they promote initiatives for Romani women as well as Romani women themselves. In Vojvodina a magazine called "Romologija" and a fortnightly information newsletter, THEM, are issued. Two Romani women work as journalists for these publications.

Romani women are hardly ever mentioned in the positive context in the Serbian media. Romani women are rather mentioned when they commit a crime, even though those women are often from other regions. There is a general opinion that these news articles reproduce stereotypes present in the society.<sup>27</sup> The state does not react to such cases of discrimination.

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<sup>27</sup> E.g. the article published in the Dnevnik, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2004 under the headline **Roma Woman Killed for Coal**, or the part of the text in the article on prostitution appeared in the Blic, 8<sup>th</sup> January 2004. under a headline **Fruška Gora full of 'red lights': 'Mostly Roma women and under aged girls work on the motorway.'**

## ***Acceleration of the Equality between Romani Women and Men in Vojvodina***

**According to CEDAW (article 4) adoption by States Parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between women and men shall not be considered discriminatory and are justified by the fact that the formal equality is insufficient to overcome the inequality of women in practice.**

*The Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties*<sup>28</sup> allows the adaptation of temporary measure when they are appropriate for the realization of equality, protection and advancement of persons or groups who are in unequal position, and recommends the implementation of these measures until the objectives have been achieved.

The federal *Law on the Protection of the Rights and Liberties of National Minorities* explicitly authorizes state bodies to pass legal acts and take measures to ensure equality, especially the advancement of persons from the Romani national minority.<sup>29</sup> In practice, however, this authorization has not been exercised. But the Federal Ministry of National and Ethnic Minorities has translated into Romani language the *Law on the Protection of the Rights and Liberties of National Minorities*.

As far as republic laws are concerned, a few important laws in the field of employment (see article 11), health protection (see article 12), social security (see article 12), and political and public life (see article 7) contain special measures.

None of the special measures refer specifically to Romani women, although, in practice, there is an explicit inequality between men and women in the Romani community in relation to, for example, marriage and family, education, employment, political and public life. The state has not taken any measures or organized action to enable Romani women to achieve equality with men from their community.

Unlike Romani men of the same age, many young Romani women must take on the responsibility of caring for the entire family. Many also leave school early, are forced to marry before they come of age, and/ or cannot get employment once married because of their unequal status with their husbands.

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<sup>28</sup> Charter on human and minority right and civil liberties, Official Gazette of Serbia & Montenegro, ref no 6/2003, article 3, paragraph 4.

<sup>29</sup> Official Gazette of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ref no 11/2002 article 4.

Romani woman T.E. (1988), said: I live with my grandmother, father and aunt who is ill. My mother remarried and abandoned us when I was one year old. After a year my father also remarried. This woman also abandoned us and left me with two younger sisters. I have a brother and two sisters. I have to look after them as there is nobody else to do that.<sup>30</sup>

Romani woman V.J. (1969), married, with five children, said:

My eldest daughter finished elementary school and started attending the Secondary Agricultural School in Futog. She did not want to study and kept missing classes, so her father withdrew her from school. He said that he has no intention of paying for her fooling around when she is going to marry soon and will not need school anyway.<sup>31</sup>

Romani woman T. N. (1980), married, with two children, said:

We hardly make ends meet and I keep telling to my husband that I need to get a job, too. He refuses and says that I should not mention it any more because he is completely capable of supporting us, and that my place is at home with the children.<sup>32</sup>

## ***Role of Gender Stereotypes in the Lives of Romani Women***

**According to CEDAW (article 5) State Parties shall take appropriate measures: to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women; to ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and the recognition of the common responsibility of men and women in the upbringing and development of their children, it being understood that the interest of the children is the primordial consideration in all cases.**

Serbia & Montenegro did not take any significant measures nor organize any action to eliminate stereotyped roles for man and women in any part of their lives. On a legal level a step forward has been made by criminalizing domestic violence and rape in marriage. By The *Law on Modification and*

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<sup>30</sup> Story recorded by Sanija Beriša, 17th February 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>31</sup> Story recorded by Ksenija Aleksandrović, 17th January 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>32</sup> Story recorded by Ljiljana Jovanović, 20<sup>th</sup> January 2004 in Vojka.

*Supplementation of the Criminal Law*<sup>33</sup> a number of supplements have been passed, but the most important is the one concerning the definition of the passive subject in the act of rape. Until the aforementioned changes the definition referred only to female persons with whom the rapist did not live in marriage. This meant that rape could not be committed in relation to the marital partner or a person with whom the rapist permanently cohabitated. Now the passive subject of this criminal act is any female person regardless of whether they are married or not. Also, the punishments for this criminal act<sup>34</sup> are more severe. By these modifications and supplementations a new criminal act has been introduced-domestic violence.<sup>35</sup> These changes ensure legal protection for the members of a family against the violent behaviour of other members of that given family.

The state did not act upon the introduction of measures for protection against domestic violence, which would temporarily prohibit or restrict personal contact with other members of the given family and thus reinforce the domestic violence victim's protection. For example, the perpetrator could be prohibited from coming within a certain distance of certain family members. Expulsion warrants could be issued to force the perpetrator to leave the family home, regardless of who the legal owner of that home is.<sup>36</sup> The state has not taken any actions to train civil servants, who are dealing with this type of violence, such as police, lawyers, social workers and medical staff. During 2003 the Province Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality financially supported training programs for police acting in situations of domestic violence in six municipality in Vojvodina. Also the Secretariat supported the program 'Prevention of Domestic Violence' at the Centre of Social Affairs in Novi Sad, in which the social workers were involved. Unfortunately, actions taken until now are insufficient. Real life examples exist where civil servants treat victims as culprits, and expose the women, who have already suffered molestation and violence, to further molestation.

Romani people learn in early childhood, from their families and wider community, customary standards for men and women. That women are treated as inferior to men is clearly shown by the custom which explicitly prohibit pre-marital sexual relationships for women. Romani men are also given unequal access to education, due to the traditional role of a woman being bound to the

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<sup>33</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no10/2002.

<sup>34</sup> See the details in: Lazarević, Lj. (2002), *Criminal Law of the Republic of Serbia with a comment*, Savremena administracija, Belgrade.

<sup>35</sup> Criminal Law of the Republic of Serbia, re no 10/2002, article 118 a.

<sup>36</sup> See the details in: Kovaček Stanić, G. (2003), *Family legislation regulations for family violence as a way to advance the position of women, On Law From a Woman's Point of View*, the Secretariat for labour, Employment and Gender Equality, Novi Sad, pages 23-24.

house and family. Domestic violence, where both women and children suffer, is also a frequent occurrence. The state has not done anything in the direction of emancipating Romani women in their private lives.

Romani marriage customs respected in Vojvodina clearly state the roles of girls and boys. As high as 64.93% of people think that it is not proper for a girl to have pre-marital sexual relationships, which clearly shows that this custom is accepted and respected in many families. Adult men (82.44%), which is a much higher percentage than adult women (63.41%), are of this opinion. With regards to young people, 61.18% of girls and 53.49% of boys think that a girl should be a virgin when she gets married. These facts indicate that men, when grown up, turn towards tradition and as heads of families become bearers of custom. Girls internalise the Romani community's message of desirable behaviour and accept it as the only proper one. Most girls do not even question whether it makes any sense or not, themselves confirming all sorts of prejudices.<sup>37</sup> These outlooks and behavioural norms in the Romani community often lead to violations of Romani women's human rights.

Romani woman, M.J. (1981), unemployed, left elementary school after the sixth grade said: On August 7<sup>th</sup> 2003 I ran away to marry A.J. in Indija. There was a wedding celebration and then we went to sleep. I was a virgin and I could not bear that pain. A.J. was trying hard with me for two good hours when he started to insult me. That I was a whore, that I was lying that I was a virgin, that who knows who had fucked me. He called his mother and told her I was not a virgin. I was crying and told them that it wasn't true. But his mother believed her son, not me. They kicked me out in front of all the guests and disgraced me for life.<sup>38</sup>

In Romani families parents often treat their sons and daughters in different ways, because of the different gender roles prescribed to them.

Romani woman, U.V. (1985) attends secondary textile school, said: I don't have any problems at school, I only have problems at home with my family. I live with my mother, father and brother. My brother is a year younger than me, but he can go out and I can't. He is allowed to socialize and have a girlfriend, and I can't. My parents tell me, 'you are a girl, something bad can happen to you in town', and my girlfriends can go out and go to town. What bothers me the most is that my brother is younger than me and he can do anything, and I can't. When I ask my parents why he can, and I can't, they tell me that he is a man and that he can, and that I am a girl and somebody can take advantage of me. What I hate most of all is when my

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<sup>37</sup> Mitro, V. and M. Aleksandrović (2003), *Virgin, yes or not?*, AB print publikacije, Novi Sad.

<sup>38</sup> Story recorded by Sanja Jovanović, 15th January in Stara Pazova.

girlfriends come to pick me up to go out to town I have to beg them for half an hour and then they let me go but only if my brother comes with us. If he was older than me I wouldn't mind, but he is younger and he is bothersome. I know that my brother smokes pot, I've seen him. My mother always goes through my stuff, and never his. If she searched through his things she would know what he uses and what sort of things he does in town, but they don't control him because he is a man and he is allowed to do whatever he wants. A couple of times he came home drunk and they didn't say anything to him, and if I did that who knows what they would do to me.<sup>39</sup>

Many Romani women are exposed to domestic violence, by their fathers, married or unmarried partners, and other male relatives, such as brothers or uncles. They most often endure the violence as their own shame. They are not informed on legal regulations and do not trust state authorities because many have already had bad experience with civil servants. Out of 122 recorded stories during the Project, 48 Romani women talked about permanent or occasional violence which they experience within their families. Most of them did nothing to get out of this situation, and those rare ones who did go to the police were humiliated because of it.

Romani woman L.B. (1978) said: I got married when I was 15 and in that marriage I experienced the worst things that could have happened to me. My husband molested and beat me and my father-in-law was an alcoholic. I divorced last year on 15th March 2003. I would never go back to my husband as he treated me as a real idiot. One night (it was on 14th March 2003) he came home and I was angry because of his going out. He beat me and seriously injured me. He kicked me out of the house naked, so I had to hide in the stable in the yard, and the next day I left him and I will never go back to him again. I am now living with my mother; I have no father. I have health problems from this horrible marriage: I have problems with my heart, my blood pressure goes up and down. But what can I do? That's life. I will live, work and bring up my children to be proper people. I shall never marry again as all men are the same.<sup>40</sup>

Romani woman D.M. (1982), single said: Two months ago, on 28th November 2003, I met a boy S. He is not from my village, but I liked him immediately, at first sight. He is 4 years older than me. When we met, he was very nice, shy, quiet. I thought that I've found a right person for me. After a month of dating S. suggested going to Pančevo, supposedly to his home to celebrate New Year. As my parents did not let me go anywhere

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<sup>39</sup> Story recorded by Radmila Zečirović, 24th February, in Sombor.

<sup>40</sup> Story recorded by Nataša Šajin, 30th January 2004 in Mokrin.

out of the house on that day, I told him that I was not allowed to go with him so far away, let alone stay for two days. After two days S. called me to come out in the street, just to see me and wish me a “Happy New Year,” as we did not celebrate together. He was with his company and I was not allowed to go with him. He wished me “Happy New Year,” but he looked strange. He was drunk, his eyes were red, and he hasn't slept for days. We talked in the street for about 15 minutes and then S. phoned his friend to come and pick him up by car. When he came closer to us, S. was hinting something to him with his eyes and in that moment S. pushed me into the car and was very rude to me. He said, “you are mine now and you will go with me to Pančevo to my flat.” I cried and screamed, but there was nothing I could do. On exiting Novi Bečej he gave me some juice which I did not want to drink, but I drank it. It tasted bitter and I immediately fell asleep. When I woke up I was in a bed, in a locked room and one strange boy was sitting near me. I started shouting and calling for S. He came in from the bathroom naked, I started to get hysterical but he approached me and started undressing me. That was horrible. S. raped me, and then his friend did as well. After three days they gave me money for the bus and sent me home, but they threatened that they would kill me if I told anyone what happened to me. As soon as I arrived to Novi Bečej I went to police and told them what happened. My parents also reported me missing, as they were suspecting that something happened to me, as I didn't go anywhere without their knowledge. The police immediately sent me to medical examination where, two weeks later, I found out that I was pregnant and that I would have to have an abortion in one month. Criminal charges were pressed against them and I am waiting for a trial. I don't go anywhere without my parents and in this way I would like to warn all the girls to take care and to be clever. One mistake can ruin your life forever.<sup>41</sup>

## ***Exploitation of Romani Women in Vojvodina***

**According to CEDAW (article 6) State Parties shall take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of prostitution of women.**

Serbia & Montenegro ratified *The Conventions Against Transnational Organized Crime* and *The Protocol on Prevention, Eradication and Legal*

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<sup>41</sup> Story recorded by Nataša Šajin, 15th February 2004.

*Punishment of Crimes Connected to White Slave Trafficking*<sup>42</sup> as well as The *European Convention on the Protection of Rights and Fundamental Liberties*<sup>43</sup> which prohibits slavery and forced labour. The *Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties*<sup>44</sup> prohibits trafficking in people in any form as well as forced labour, which implies sexual or economic exploitation of persons who are in unfavourable positions. Also it regulates the prohibition of slavery and any other position similar to it.

The *Basic Criminal Law* considers the formation of slavery based relationships and/ or the transport of persons who are in servile or similar position and mediation in prostitution a criminal act,<sup>45</sup> while The *Criminal Law of the Republic of Serbia* added criminal acts against the dignity of the individual and morals, by introducing the criminal act of trafficking in people.<sup>46</sup> This prescribes that a person who, in contravention of international law, reduces a person to a servile or similar status, or keeps him in such a status, buys, sells, hands over to another person or mediates in the purchase, sale or disposal of such a person or induces another person to sell his freedom or the freedom of a person dependant on him, shall be punished with a prison sentence of from one to 10 years. If the act is committed on an under-age person or it caused his/her death the perpetrator shall be punished with a prison sentence of at least 5 years.

Prostitution is not prescribed as a criminal act but violation of law.<sup>47</sup> The person who engages in prostitution or a person who provides premises for prostitution will be punished with 30 days in prison, a person who provides premises for prostitution to a person under legal age will be punished with 60 days in prison. The law does not prescribe as violation of law the usage of prostitute's services nor does it prohibit establishing 'escort agencies' or 'dating agencies,' which very often mediate in prostitution.

The state has not dealt with this problem seriously enough. Many police officers, attorney of law and judges do not know anything about the problems concerning trafficking in people. The fact that people are not aware of this problem is one of the main obstacles in dealing with and solving it. Victims are

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<sup>42</sup> Law on Ratification of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and Additional Protocols, Official Gazette of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia – International Treaties, ref no 6/2001.

<sup>43</sup> Came into effect on 3rd March 2004.

<sup>44</sup> Charter on human and minority rights and civil liberties, Official Gazette of Serbia & Montenegro, re no 6/2003, article 13.

<sup>45</sup> The Basic Criminal Law, article 155 and article 251.

<sup>46</sup> The Criminal Law of the Republic of Serbia, article 111b.

<sup>47</sup> The Laws on the Public Peace and Order, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, 51/1992, 53/1993, 67/1993 and 48/1994, article 14.

often treated as perpetrators. Only recently the government recognized that trafficking in women exists in our country. On the level of the Republic, an anti-trafficking team was formed, and in cooperation with non-governmental organizations this team has organized a number of training sessions on the treatment of women and the ways of recognizing human trafficking.

Neither exact numbers nor even approximate data on women and girls who are victims of trafficking in Vojvodina exist.<sup>48</sup> This information does not exist on Romani women either. On the basis of research conducted in 2003, the Victimology Association of Serbia claims that 940 women victims of trafficking were registered in Serbia. The problem of trafficking in people especially affects Romani women, because of their often difficult economic positions. It is estimated that about 7,000 Roma left Serbia & Montenegro and went to Italy in the period of only few weeks in 1999. Roma women are either sold or forced to beg and do criminal activities.<sup>49</sup>

NGOs such as Association for Female Initiative, Astra, the Victimology Association of Serbia in Belgrade and 'Energy, Action, Vision' and Girl Centre 'Mila' in Vojvodina are dealing with the problem of trafficking in people. They most of all to raise awareness about this problem and collect data. There wasn't any significant campaign among Romani women, however women activists from Romani organizations in Kikinda, Novi Bečej, Novi Sad and Subotica took part in training sessions where they were introduced to the problems related to human trafficking.

### ***Discrimination against Romani Women in Vojvodina in the Political and Public Life***

**According to CEDAW (article 7) State Parties shall undertake all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men rights in these fields.**

*The Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties*<sup>50</sup> and *The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia*<sup>51</sup> guarantee all the citizens of Serbia &

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<sup>48</sup> Ljubinković, S. ed. (2001), *Trafficking in Women*, Association for Female Initiative, Belgrade.

<sup>49</sup> According to: Bjelica, J. (2002), *Trafficking in People in the Balkans*, Belgrade.

<sup>50</sup> Official Gazette of Serbia & Montenegro, ref no 6/2003.

<sup>51</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 1/1990.

Montenegro the right to participate in the political and public life, without discrimination on the grounds of gender. *The Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties* prohibits direct or indirect discrimination in realization and protection of rights and allows the implementation of temporary measures appropriate for the realization of equality, protection and advancement of a person or groups of people who are in unequal position. A citizen who is 18 years old has a right to vote and to be eligible for election to the bodies of local government, state bodies of member states, and bodies and institutions of the state union.

The *Law on the Election of MPs*<sup>52</sup> puts this right into practise in such a way that every citizen who is 18 years old can vote and is eligible for election under the condition that he/she is able to work, is the resident of the Republic of Serbia, and that has the citizenship of Serbia & Montenegro. According to the same law, a person cannot vote unless he/she submits the proof of his/her identity, he/she also has to sign a voter registration list and only then may take the ballot paper.

One of the measures taken to increase the number of women in the political and public life, is the implementation of the decree in the *Law on Local Elections*<sup>53</sup> according to which on the list of candidates every fourth candidate has to be of a gender which is the minority on the list, and the total number of candidates of a minority gender on the list has to be at least 30%. The *Law on Modifications and Supplementations on The Law on the Election of MPs*<sup>54</sup> introduces the same decree, which ensures that the list of candidates for the election of MPs contains at least 30% of candidates of a minority gender. Unless the list fulfils these conditions, or eliminates the inappropriate elements in the given period, the Republic Election Committee will not validate the list of candidates.

These decrees are not directly discriminatory on the grounds of gender nor nationality, but taking into consideration that many Romani women are not registered, do not have proper ID, nor proof of citizenship (see article 9), as well as the fact that many of them are illiterate (see article 10), these decrees are factually discriminatory against Romani women. Romani women often, for these reasons, do not vote nor are they engaged in political and public life. During the Project we interviewed 100 Romani women about voting at the presidential elections in December 2003. Only 18 of them voted, and they voted for different parties (Serbian Radical Party, Democratic Party of Serbia, G17+). Out of those

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<sup>52</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 72/2003.

<sup>53</sup> The Law on Local Elections, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 72/2003.

<sup>54</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 18/2004, article 40a.

who did not vote the majority said that the reason was their lack of ID. However, 16 of them said that they did not vote because their husbands did not let them.

Romani woman S.S. (1968), married with nine children, a refugee from Skoplje, said: I did not vote on 28th December 2003. My husband went to vote. He was born in Novi Sad and he has documents. I did not vote because I don't have them, and neither did my children as they are also born in Skopje and they have no documents.<sup>55</sup>

Romani woman M.B. (1970), married, said: I got married when I was 15 and I never went to vote as my husband does not allow me to vote. Now when there was the election, on 28th December 2003 I also didn't go. I have been a supporter of Šešelj's party for the last 10 years, but I can't go and give my vote because I would only make problems. My husband is a very dangerous man and says that I shouldn't meddle. But, you see, although my husband says that party is no good, I think what I think, and now my party will come into power and they will help us poor people and I am happy for it. See, women have no rights anywhere, not even a right to vote. My sisters and neighbours also did not go to vote this year. They say that my vote will not help the Serbian Radical Party to win and that it can all happen without me.<sup>56</sup>

Romani woman T.N. (1980), married, said: On the day of 28th December 2003 (Sunday) there were elections. I got up and made coffee and my husband got up soon. I asked him if he was going to vote. He immediately stood up and slapped me on the face, and then found my ID and tore it. Then he again went looking for something, and found my medical-care booklet. He tore it as well, telling me that he had already told me that I have no business in going to vote and that my place is at home with children.<sup>57</sup>

Romani woman J.N. (1976) said: I didn't go to vote. I am not interested in that. I know nothing about it. I got the information leaflet but I didn't go. Who to vote for? They are all the same, there is no difference.<sup>58</sup>

In Serbia & Montenegro there are five registered national political parties of Romani women, and two of them are in Vojvodina (Romani Congress Party and the Democratic Romani Union). None of them are in any way present in any parliament nor in any assembly. There are a few Romani present in municipality assemblies (not a single Romani woman), but none of these people were elected on the grounds of being members of their national parties. The number of

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<sup>55</sup> Story recorded by Sanija Beriša, 17th February 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>56</sup> Story recorded by Nataša Šajin, 21st January 2004 in Mokrin.

<sup>57</sup> Story recorded by Ljiljana Jovanović 20th January 2004 in Vojka.

<sup>58</sup> Story recorded by Ksenija Aleksandrović 27th February 2004 in Novi Sad.

women active in these parties is insignificant and there are none in leadership positions. These parties lack in political experience and their activities are not very intensive, so when the Romani do vote, they do not vote for them. In the National Romani Council only 2 out of 35 (5.71%) are women.

In 2003 The Secretariat for Work, Employment and Gender Equality in association with the Secretariat for Administration, Regulations and National Minorities and Romani women NGOs realized the project for the political empowerment of Romani women through the program of the Stability Pact for the South-East Europe 'Women Can Do That'. 75 Romani women from Vojvodina were involved in the program. None of the women which participated in the program became politically active, but they gained useful knowledge about political and public life. This is the only program of political empowerment among Romani women which has been realized so far.<sup>59</sup>

There are no Romani people working in the parliament or executive authorities and the total participation of the Romani national community in the structures of the authority is considerably smaller in relation to the number of Romas living in Vojvodina. In the provincial government only one Romani woman is employed (0.12% of the total number of employees, and 0.2% of the total number of employed women), and she works in the state administration (as an associate for Romani issues in the Secretariat for Administration, Regulations and National Minorities). In municipal government, also in administration, 4 Romani people are employed (no women).<sup>60</sup>

### ***Participation of Romani Women of Vojvodina in Representation at the International Level***

**According to CEDAW (article 8) State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.**

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<sup>59</sup> 'Rromnija godoja ša' (Roma Women Can Do That), the Regional project 'Women Can Do That I- 1990-2003', the Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality, of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and Stability Pact of South-East Europe- Task force for Gender Equality, Belgrade, 2003.

<sup>60</sup> Information on national and gender structure, level of education, manner and date of employment in provincial, municipal and city administration bodies on the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, October 2003, Novi Sad, ref no 101-00001/2003.

The *Constitution of the Republic of Serbia* guarantees all its citizens, on equal terms, appointment to public functions.<sup>61</sup>

The state did not take any measures in the creation of conditions and opportunities for women, including those of Romani nationality, to represent their Government at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations. There are no official laws, nor official document that implements special measures to stimulate women to participate in the representation at the international level and in the work of international organizations.

There has never been any Romani women members in the state delegations at the international level. One Romani woman from Vojvodina is employed in an international organization.

### ***Citizenship of Romani Women in Vojvodina***

**According to the CEDAW (article 9) State Parties shall grant women equal rights with men to acquire, change or retain their citizenship. They shall ensure in particular that neither marriage to an alien nor change of citizenship by the husband during marriage shall automatically change the nationality of the wife, render her stateless or force upon her the citizenship of her husband.**

The State Union of Serbia & Montenegro signed the *Convention on the Citizenship of Married Women*,<sup>62</sup> which was ratified and became the constituent part of the internal legal system. The *Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties*<sup>63</sup> guarantees all citizens of the State Union of Serbia & Montenegro that they cannot be deprived of their citizenship, expelled from the country or extradited to another country except in accordance with the undertaken international obligations. A child born on the territory of Serbia & Montenegro is guaranteed the right to the citizenship, unless the child already has other.

According to the *Constitution of the Republic of Serbia*<sup>64</sup> a citizen of the Republic of Serbia has the citizenship and cannot be deprived of it, expelled or

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<sup>61</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 1/1990., article 35, paragraph 2.

<sup>62</sup> The Law on the Ratification of the Convention on the Nationality of Married Women, Official Gazette of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia - international treaties and other agreements, ref no 7/1958.

<sup>63</sup> Official Gazette of Serbia & Montenegro, ref no 6/2003.

<sup>64</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 1/1999.

extradited. Conditions for acquiring as well as cessation of citizenship are equal for men and women as well as children regardless of their sex.<sup>65</sup> A child has the right to acquire citizenship if one of the parents is the citizen of Serbia & Montenegro. An alien married to the citizen of Serbia & Montenegro can acquire the citizenship of Serbia & Montenegro under certain conditions. It is a matter of opportunity, not of obligation, of that person to change his/her citizenship by marriage to the citizen of Serbia & Montenegro.

According to the *Law on Passports*<sup>66</sup> a child of a citizen of Serbia & Montenegro until the age of 14, can, at the request one parent or other legal guardian, be on one of the parents' or other legal guardian's passport, provided the child has no passport of his/ her own. This will be valid for two years and cannot be extended. The law does not provide as a condition for the child to be on a parent's passport, the other parent's consent, but provides the opportunity for that parent to ask for its annulment.

Lack of personal documents and citizenship is a big problem among the Romani people, especially those who moved from Kosovo. Many Romani women have never had any basic personal documents or they have lost them. Many young Romani women give birth to their children at home. The children are never registered, and consequently do not gain citizenship. Many Romani women moved from Kosovo or other countries of the former Yugoslavia and either did not bring their documents with them or had the documents destroyed. They are often unaware of the consequences not having personal documents will have on their lives. When they decide to regulate their legal status in this field they are faced with a number of legal and practical difficulties.<sup>67</sup> The state has not taken any organized action towards solving this problem.

Romani woman E.D. (1973), married with one child, said: Five years ago I came from Kosovo to Novi Sad as an IDP and settled in Veliki Rit. I did not take any documents with me as my house was burnt.<sup>68</sup>

Romani woman S.S. (1968), married with nine children, said:

There are twelve of us living in the house, my husband, my children, mother-in-law and I. 15 years ago we moved from Skoplje to Novi Sad, and we illegally built our house: we have two rooms and a hall. We have no income and we forgot our documents in Skoplje. It is difficult to get them

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<sup>65</sup> Law on the Yugoslav Citizenship, Official Gazette of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, ref no 33/1996, 9/2001; Law on the Citizenship of the Republic of Serbia, Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 45/1979; 13/1983.

<sup>66</sup> Official Gazette of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, ref no 5/2003.

<sup>67</sup> Memorandum – Protection of the Rights of the Romas in Serbia & Montenegro, European Roma Rights Centre and the United Nations High Commissariat for Refugees, Belgrade 2003.

<sup>68</sup> Story recorded by Sanija Beriša, 20th February 2004 in Novi Sad.

now because it costs a lot of money. I did not go to complain anywhere and I can't register my children as I am illiterate and I don't know where to do it, to get the documents. My husband was born in Novi Sad and he has documents. The children are born in Skoplje so they don't have any documents either.<sup>69</sup>

## ***Education of Romani Women in Vojvodina***

**According to CEDAW (article 10) State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with the men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women**

The *Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties* guarantees equal rights in the field of education. Elementary education is obligatory and the tuition is free. One section of the Charter states that the members of the national minorities are also guaranteed the right to freely use their language and alphabet, to receive education at state schools in their mother tongue, as well as establish private schools at all levels. Besides, it prohibits and punishes any incitement and instigation of national, racial, religious and other inequality, as well as incitement and instigation of national, racial, religious and other hatred and intolerance.

The *Constitution of the Republic of Serbia* prescribes that everybody is entitled to education under equal conditions. Elementary education is obligatory and members of national minorities have the right to education in their own language, in accordance with law. All citizens are guaranteed the freedom to declare their nationality and culture and are free to use their language and alphabet.

The *Law on the Protection of the Rights and Liberties of National Minorities*<sup>70</sup> prohibits all forms of discrimination against the members of the national minorities and authorizes the authorities to pass legal acts and take measures to ensure equality, with the aim of advancement of the position of the persons who are the members of the Romani national minority. The law, among other rights, regulates in detail the right of national communities to receive education in their own language starting from pre-school up to university level.

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<sup>69</sup> Story recorded by Sanija Beriša, 17th February 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>70</sup> The Law on the Protection of the Rights and Liberties of National Minorities, Official Gazette of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, ref no 11/2002.

It defines the obligation of the state to create conditions for organizing education in the languages of the national communities or to provide for bilingual teaching or learning of the language of the national community with the elements of national history and culture, to provide for departments and faculties which will, in the languages of national minorities or bilingually, educate teachers of national minority languages and help their professional advancement. It is the right of the members of all national minorities to establish private school and universities where the lessons will be taught in the languages of national minorities or bilingually.

The *Law on the Bases of the System of Education*<sup>71</sup> regulates the basic systems of pre-school, elementary and secondary education. All citizens have equal rights to education and upbringing regardless of their gender, race, nationality, religion or language, age, physical and mental constitution, social and cultural background, material status, political orientation or other personal attribute. Elementary education is obligatory and tuition is not required for regular education financed from public funds. Further, it prohibits activities, as well as the instigation of such activities, which will violate, belittle or discriminate against groups or individuals, on grounds of race, language, religion or gender, social and cultural background or material status. The law defines discrimination against children<sup>72</sup> and prohibits physical violence and insolence towards the personality of the children, pupils, students and employees. Furthermore, the school will be fined for such violation if it violates, belittles or discriminates against groups or individuals, on the grounds of race, language, religion or gender, physical and mental constitution, social and cultural background or political orientation and if it instigates such activities.

The *Law on Elementary School* prescribes that the members of the national communities have the curriculum and syllabus realized in their mother tongue if at least 15 students, or even less with the consent of the Ministry of Education, enrol. In the case when the curriculum and syllabus, due to the small number of students, cannot be realized in their language, the Law provides for the additional/supplementary subject – mother tongue with elements of national culture. Identical provisions are included in the *Law on Secondary Schools*. The *Law on Higher Education* prescribes that the citizens enrol schools under equal conditions and that the lessons can be taught in the language of minority as well,

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<sup>71</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 62/2003 and 64/2003.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., article 46, paragraph 2 which states: Discrimination against children, or pupil/students implies any indirect or direct differentiation or its approval, exclusion or restriction, with the aim to prevent the realization of the right, decrease the right or cessation of equal treatment of children or pupils/students.

while the *Law on University* contains a provision on the possibility of teaching in the language of national minorities.

In Serbia & Montenegro all citizens have the right to education regardless of their gender, ethnic or other background. However there are individuals or groups who cannot realize this right in practice, out of different reasons. Romani women are one of these groups whose members could not and still cannot realize this right. The last research done by the Federal Ministry for Human and Minority Rights of Serbia & Montenegro has shown that the Romani population is the least educated. As much as 80% of the Romani population is functionally illiterate, and only 0.2% hold a university degree. The average age of the illiterate Romani is 41. At the age of 10-14, 19.6% are illiterate, at the age of 15-19, 9.2% are illiterate, at the age of 20-39, there are 27.5% those without education, those of 40-49 are 16.8% illiterate and 50-59, 12.7% illiterate. The level the Romani education (according to 1991 Census, for those over 15): 47.3% - uneducated or with 1 to 3 years of elementary education; 27.4% - 4 –7 years of elementary education; 17.2% - 8 years of elementary education, 4.6% - with secondary education, 0.2% higher or university education. Recent research in Vojvodina has come up with similar results.

The state has not taken all appropriate measures and actions to ensure the equality of Romani women in the education system. Many Romani women do not have the opportunity to go pre-schools, to cherish their mother tongue and culture under formal circumstances or to receive elementary, secondary and university education without interruption. There is no faculty or department for the education or training of educators for the work and teaching of Romani children and youth.

Many Romani women are facing discrimination from pre-school to university education.

A low percentage of Romani children go to state kindergartens. There is a certain number of pre-school children in nursery schools run by NGOs whose target groups are Romani children. (In Novi Sad Apatin, Novi Bečej, Čantavir, Subotica). Romani boys have more luck than girls when it comes to going to the kindergarten. Many Romani girls already have duties in their families or for different reasons have limited opportunities to circulate outside the family surrounding. Their parents are often overprotective towards them, not motivated enough to educate them or are too poor.

Romani woman I.M. (1963), married with six children, said: All my children go to school, and my youngest daughter should be going to the

kindergarten but she can't because I can't pay for it. I have no money to pay for my child to go to the kindergarten.<sup>73</sup>

Romani woman A.M. (1980), married with one child, said: I cannot enrol my child in the kindergarten because I have to pay 5,000.00 dinars plus meals.<sup>74</sup>

Elementary education is available and free of charge for all and at 22 elementary schools in Vojvodina, 'Romani language with the elements of national history and culture' is taught as an optional subject. Still, a great number of Romani children do not attend elementary school or leave it in the third or fourth grade. Girls are also in the more unfavourable position. They do not even enrol in school or are withdrawn from school due to poverty, bad life conditions, the distance between their home and the school, the lack of available public transport, the fact they don't speak Serbian, the fact they often move or their lack of personal documents. They are also not enrolled as a means of keeping them intact and preparing them for early marriage and family duties.

Romani woman T.E. (1988), said: My main problem is that I can't enrol in school because I don't have any documents. I live with my grandmother, father, and a sick aunt. My mother remarried and left us when I was one. After a year my father also remarried and that other woman also abandoned us and left me two younger sisters. I have a brother and two sisters. They don't go to school either, out of the same reasons. Nobody works in the family, my grandmother receives 2,000.00 dinars in two parts.<sup>75</sup>

Romani woman S.S. (1970), married with three children said: My children don't go to school. What do they need it for, and where would I get money for that?! We hardly make ends meet; we only have money for food and clothes. I have one sister and three brothers. My parents didn't have the money to send us to school either.<sup>76</sup>

Romani woman (1988), IDP from Kosovo, said: I went to school for the education of the adults 'Sveti Sava'. I finished the sixth grade (out of eight) and now I'm in the seventh grade. But I don't go to school anymore because my eldest brother doesn't let me to. My elder sister got married, that's why he won't let me go to school. He is afraid I'll get married, too.<sup>77</sup>

Optional lessons in Romani language with the elements of their national culture is attended by nearly four hundred Romani children who nurture their

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<sup>73</sup> Story recorded by Radmila Zećirović 21st February 2004 in Subotica

<sup>74</sup> Story recorded by Radmila Zećirović, 29th January 2004 in Sombor

<sup>75</sup> Story recorded by Lejla Toplica, 25th January 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>76</sup> Story recorded by Ksenija Aleksandrović, 24th January 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>77</sup> Story recorded by Radmila Zećirović, 10th January 2004 in Novi Sad.

language and culture under formal conditions. Although there is almost an equal number of boys and girls, girls more frequently miss classes or completely drop out of them.

Romani women who completed elementary education most frequently do not enrol in secondary schools, and among those who do, a great number drop out due to various reasons.

Romani woman Z.J. (1986), said: I dropped out of school two months ago, but I intend to finish secondary school part-time. As you can see, I am pregnant and because of that I stopped going to school. The baby is due in two months and when my child grows up a little I am going to finish school part-time if I can and if I have money for that.<sup>78</sup>

Romani woman V.J. (1969), married with five children, said:

My eldest daughter finished elementary school and enrolled in Secondary School of Agriculture in Futog. She didn't want to study and kept missing classes, that's why her father withdrew her from school. He said that he didn't intend to pay for her fooling around when she will marry soon anyway and she will not need schooling.<sup>79</sup>

In the Romani community in Vojvodina, there is a noticeable increase in the level of education among the youth in comparison to the level of education among the older members of the community – there is a bigger percent of youth with secondary and higher education. As well as those who study at university and there are fewer who are illiterate or without any education at all. The generation of parents is less educated than the generation of the young, the greatest percentage of illiteracy (45%) or with only a few years of elementary education (25%). However, the level of education among men, both with young and elderly, is much higher than among women. For example, among our research subjects in Vojvodina, there is no illiteracy among young men while there is among young women. There is a considerably bigger number of young men, than women, who finished elementary and secondary schools, but there are more young women who study at university. It is clear that men are stimulated more to receive education than women are but when a young woman finishes secondary education, she will try much harder, despite all the difficulties, to continue her education.<sup>80</sup>

Romani woman N.D. (1979), said: I have no financial means to continue my education. I am on the second year at The Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematics, Department of Mathematics in Novi Sad. I work at the

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<sup>78</sup> Story recorded by Ksenija Aleksandrović, 22nd February 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>79</sup> Story recorded by Ksenija Aleksandrović, 17th January 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>80</sup> Mitro, V. and M. Aleksandrović (2003), *Virgin or not?*, AB print publications, Novi Sad.

day-care centre with Romani children and support myself. I finished the Teacher Training College in Subotica, Department of Kindergarten Teachers, but I will also try to finish my studies at the university regardless my difficult living conditions.<sup>81</sup>

A great percentage of children that attend school for children with special needs are Romani children. Their insufficient knowledge of Serbian language, and the different socio-economic and cultural background contribute to their weak results at the elementary school entrance tests. The parents have the right to appeal to the Ministry of Education, but they hardly ever do.

Romani woman S.N. (1976), married with eight children, unemployed, husband also unemployed, both illiterate, said: My children are very ill, and they all go to the school for mentally retarded children in Sombor although they are not all right for that school. They were put there because they belong to a national minority.<sup>82</sup>

Romani woman M.R. (1987), attends secondary school said: There is one maths teacher at my school, whose name I don't want to mention because it would cause me more trouble. He very often belittles me in front of the whole class. If I make a mistake in some exercise, he always yells at me and tells me that I am stupid and that I know nothing. I am the only Romani in the class. When one of my classmates made the same mistake, he just explained to him how to correct it, and yelled at me in front of the whole class and later wrote the fail mark in the mark book telling me that school wasn't for me. If I ask him a question about the work we do, he tells me that I should take private lessons and even then I will learn nothing because I am too stupid for maths. I have always been a good student and I have no problems with other subjects. I study regularly and I am can always keep up with other students. Maths is the only problem I have at school ever since he started teaching me. In the elementary school I had a good mark in maths, and now I can hardly get a pass mark. I complained to my form teacher and she said that she would talk with the teacher, but nothing has changed<sup>83</sup>.

Romani woman M.J. (1975), married with one child, said:

My daughter goes to the second grade of elementary school and she is an excellent pupil. In school my daughter can't study properly as other children will not accept her and frequently belittle her. They call her names, like 'Gypsy', 'black' and similar. It happens two or three times a week, and sometimes, when she comes in front of the blackboard to answer the

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<sup>81</sup> Story recorded by Radmila Zećirović, 21st January 2004 in Subotica.

<sup>82</sup> Story recorded by Radmila Zećirović, 28th January 2004 in Sombor.

<sup>83</sup> Story recorded by Ksenija Aleksandrović 15th January 2004 in Novi Sad.

teacher's questions, they throw papers at her and call her Gypsy! I didn't pay attention to that at first, but on 12th December 2003 she came back from school in tears and she had bruises on her right arm. She said that they wouldn't let her come into the classroom. I washed her face, and that same day I went to the headmaster. I explained to him what happened and how her teacher didn't pay attention at all. The headmaster told me that he can't do anything about it, and that my daughter shouldn't pay attention to that and that it will stop someday. But this problem still exists.<sup>84</sup>

### ***Employment of Romani Women in Vojvodina***

**According to CEDAW (article 11) State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment in order to ensure the same rights as men.**

The *Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties* guarantees all citizens of Serbia & Montenegro the right to work, fair and adequate working conditions, the right to fair remuneration, and the free choice of work.

The *Constitution of the Republic of Serbia* guarantees the freedom of work, the free choice of profession and employment, and participation in management. Everyone shall have equal access to jobs and functions. *The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia* provides for the protection of certain categories of employees such as young people, women and disabled persons.

On the republic level, the most important legal documents in the field of employment the, are: the *Law on Labour*,<sup>85</sup> the *Law on Employment and Insurance in the Case of Unemployment*<sup>86</sup> and the *Law on Pension and Disability Insurance*.<sup>87</sup> These laws guarantee equal access to jobs and equal rights in the process of employment. They prohibit discrimination on the ground of gender, birth, language, race, nationality, religion, marital status, family obligations, political or other belief, level of education, social origin or property status of persons looking for employment as well as employees. The *Law on Employment and Insurance in the Case of Unemployment* guarantees equal access to jobs and equal rights in the process of employment for men and women and provides on-the-job protection for certain categories of people.

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<sup>84</sup> Story recorded by Ljiljana Jovanović, 20th January 2004 in the village of Vojka.

<sup>85</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 70/2001 and 73/2001.

<sup>86</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 71/2003.

<sup>87</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 34/2003.

Person who are considered to be discriminated against in the process of employment may, in the proceedings before a court of law, demand reimbursement, due to discrimination from the employer who will not employ him/her. The same law provides measures for the employment of the members of ethnic minorities whose level of unemployment is very high. Further, it provides measures in the case of significant level of unemployed women, to ensure their appropriate involvement. The National Agency has the obligation to determine the involvement of the unemployed in public works, especially those who have been waiting for a job for a long period of time. According to the *Law on Labour* the employed (both women and men) are entitled to fair remuneration and are guaranteed equal remuneration for the same job or work of the same kind at the same employer. Special insurance is provided for women in the event of pregnancy and childbirth. The employed woman is entitled to maternity leave to care for the child, which will last 365 days from the day of the beginning of maternity leave. This right can be also exercised by the father of a child if the mother abandons the child, dies or due to other justified reasons is not in position to exercise her own right. For the period of maternity leave the employed woman or man is entitled to remuneration.

Legal protection of the rights in the field of employment is provided by the *Criminal Law of the Republic of Serbia*. Conscious violation of law and other legal acts, collective agreements and other general acts on the employee rights and special protection of young people, women and disabled persons, is considered a criminal act which shall be fined or punished with a prison sentence of one year.

Modification and Supplementation of the *Criminal Law of the Republic of Serbia* introduced the criminal act of sexual harassment, which refers to sexual harassment at work. Prosecution for this criminal act is done only on private charge, which means in most cases women are limited in the exercise of the protection of their dignity. To start the proceedings before a court of law is costly, on one hand, while on the other there is a present fear of the consequences of such proceedings (revenge, threats, dismissal from work by the person who committed or tried to commit such criminal offences).

In Vojvodina, 4.4% of the unemployed persons are Romani people, which represents a considerably higher percentage in relation to their total number. There are no gender disaggregated statistics and there is no data on the number of unemployed Romani women. Romani women very often do not exercise their right to work, due to the traditional gender roles in the Romani community, lack of education and/or personal documents or widespread prejudices among employers. Romani women in Vojvodina most often do not have a regular job, they work illegally, are supported by their relatives from abroad, or receive

social security money from the state. In most cases they are dependent on their husbands. The state has not taken organized action to alter the position of Romani women in the field of employment.

Romani woman M.R. (1987), attends secondary school, lives with her parents and two brothers, said: My mother is a housewife and my father is a taxi driver. Mother has always been at home and has taken care of the household, because my father wouldn't allow her to work. He used to say that he is the one who should provide for his family and my mother had to accept that. Father has no regular income: sometimes he earns more, sometimes less, but we have enough for our basic needs. Money for food, clothes and our education was always provided.<sup>88</sup>

Most Romani women earn money doing seasonal work in agriculture, the non-formal sector, cleaning private houses and premises, reselling and collecting old paper or similar activities.

Romani woman S.S. (1970), married with three children said: I work in a private shop as a cleaner. I earn 5,000 dinars and I am a non-registered employee.<sup>89</sup>

Romani woman Z.G. (1986), lives with her mother said: My mother is not employed, she works on the market, packing the goods.<sup>90</sup>

Romani woman R.N. (1975), married with one child, said: My husband was fired, so we are both unemployed. Nobody is helping us; we manage for ourselves. We are selling fruit and vegetables at the market. We live on that and pay for our daughter's education.<sup>91</sup>

Romani woman G.N. (1987), lives with her grandmother, said:

We support ourselves by black-marketing with things, she buys from the Romanians and resells in the village or on nearby markets.<sup>92</sup>

Romani woman (1980), married with one child said:

In August 2003 I went looking for work in a firm called "Pobeda" in Nova Pazova. When I arrived, I was received by a secretary T.S. Soon the production manager G.P. came. I told him that I have experience in working with plastic and that I will work very hard. The manager G.P. didn't even listen to me he just started pushing me out saying: I don't like Gypsies, so run if you don't want to be beaten. He didn't hit me, he just threw me out.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Story recorded by Ksenija Aleksandrović, 15th January 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>89</sup> Story recorded by Ksenija Aleksandrović, 24th January 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>90</sup> Story recorded by Lejla Toplica, 26th January 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>91</sup> Story recorded by Radmila Zećirović 29th January 2004 in Sombor.

<sup>92</sup> Story recorded by Ljiljana Jovanović 20th January 2004 in the village of Vojka.

<sup>93</sup> Story recorded by Ljiljana Jovanović 12th February 2004 in Stara Pazova.

Romani woman I.J. (1975), married with two children, finished elementary school, said: In the morning on October 20<sup>th</sup> 2003 my neighbour J. M., a Serbian woman, came for a cup of coffee and told me that a firm working with plastic, “Big-bull” from Stara Pazova, is looking for workers. We immediately went over to her house, (because she a phone) and phoned the firm. The man we talked to told us to come immediately for an interview. When we arrived there, a man B.K., who said that he was a production manager, received us. He gave us a form to fill out. The form contained usual questions about our work experience, date of birth, marital status, but there was also a question about nationality. When we filled the forms the manager told me that they don’t hire Gypsies and that I can go home, and he told J.M. that she can come to work the next day. When she heard this, she told him off, and I felt so sad and disappointed that I will never forget this horrible experience.<sup>94</sup>

Romani woman B.S. (1985), attends sixth grade of the Centre for the Education of Adults, said: They were looking for a shop assistant in a little shoe shop. That shop is at the Futoška market. I went there with my mother. First we phoned from the nearby phone box. After ten minutes we found the shop and went inside. The owner looked at us and started laughing cynically. We told him that we came on the advertisement and that we talked on the phone a few minutes ago. He told us that he had already hired a girl from Futog twenty minutes ago and he doesn't need workers any more. My mother and I just turned and left. I couldn't understand how he could have told me that he had hired someone twenty minutes ago when we phoned him only ten minutes ago. Then I realized that he didn't want to hire me because I was a Romani person. It is very difficult for Romani people to find work as there is a prejudice against us.<sup>95</sup>

Romani woman S.M. (1975), married with one child, works in sweet-shop as a cleaner, said: I work with another woman S.Z. who is Serbian. I always get paid less than her, although we do the same kind of work. They tolerate when she is late for work and I always have to be there on time. If I were late I would immediately get fired. My boss makes me aware of that every day.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Story recorded by Ljiljana Jovanović 16th January 2004 in the village of Golubinci.

<sup>95</sup> Story recorded by Lejla Toplica, 15th February 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>96</sup> Story recorded by Ljiljana Jovanović, 16th February 2004 in Stara Pazova.

## ***Accessibility of Health Care to Romani Women in Vojvodina***

**According to CEDAW (article 12) State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of health care in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning. They will eliminate all legal and social obstructions that prevent access to health care to all women, including those whose access is incapacitated or hindered due to reasons such as disability, illiteracy or place of residence.**

The *Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties* guarantees every citizen (women and men) the right to health care. The state shall take special measures to make health care accessible to children, pregnant women and elderly people, if such a right is not realized on some other ground.

The *Constitution of the Republic of Serbia* also guarantees every person the right to health care, especially children, pregnant women and elder people from public funds, if such right is not realized on some other ground.<sup>97</sup> Women and men have equal access to health care services. Women have special rights related to family planning, pregnancy, childbirth and maternity. If they do not have health insurance, means for health care related to women's reproductive function are supplied by public funds of the Republic of Serbia.<sup>98</sup>

In Serbia & Montenegro a woman has the right to terminate her pregnancy and it can be performed only at her request. For pregnancy termination nobody's consent is needed (husband or partner or any other male relative), unless it is to be performed on a person younger than 16 or a person deprived of ability to work, then a parent's, or legal guardian's written consent is necessary. Conditions under which a pregnancy termination can be performed are prescribed by the *Law on Pregnancy Termination Procedure in Health Care Institutions*<sup>99</sup>, and funds for this type of health service are financed from, according to the *Law on Health Care*, public funds of the Republic of Serbia. This refers to all persons who do not have obligatory health insurance.

Formally, the health care seems to be ideal. However, many Romani women, due to different reasons, cannot realize their right to health care. The state has not taken any action to make health care more accessible to Romani women.

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<sup>97</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 01/1990.

<sup>98</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 18/2002.

<sup>99</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 16/1995.

The main health care obstacles Romani women are faced with include fees that have to be paid at state health care institutions, the lack of health insurance, the lack of awareness of their rights, and problems in accessing health care institutions due to widespread prejudices among health workers. A lot of Romani women start having children very early in their lives and are not aware of the need for preventive examinations. A great percentage of Romani women live in very poor and unhygienic conditions, characterized by poorly and/ or illegally built houses, often overcrowded and/ or without a bathroom or drainage. In addition, due to their constant struggle for basic survival, there is widespread negligence towards their own health among Romani women.

Romani woman V.J. (1980), employed, did not finish elementary school said: I was very ill two weeks ago and when I went to the doctor, M.S. I waited in line the whole day. Some people even jumped the line and I had to wait. And when I went in, M.S. did not want to examine me because I was a Gypsy. He told me that his shift was over and that I should come another time to see another doctor because he doesn't examine Gypsies. How can I get medical treatment when doctors don't even want to examine Romani people?<sup>100</sup>

Romani woman Z.G. (1986), lives with her mother, said: I hurt my leg and I had to wear a plaster for three months. After three months I went for a check up. The doctor who treated my leg asked me if I was married. I told him I wasn't. He was very surprised and told me that I should marry as Romani women marry young, have children young and don't finish school. I told him that I didn't come there for advice but to have my plaster removed, and that I could sue him for talking like that. Then I called for my mother and when he took off the plaster we went home.<sup>101</sup>

Romani woman R.R. (1977), married with three children, refugee from Skoplje, said: My husband doesn't work and we don't have any social help. My daughter was recently ill, she had an infant fit. At the time I did not have any money or a car to take her to the doctor's. Luckily my neighbours offered to help, so we took my child to the Children's Hospital in Novi Sad. My neighbour L. came along with me because I don't speak Serbian well. She went in with me and my husband was with us. When we arrived at the hospital we went in and took the child for an examination. They asked me why I didn't properly dress my child and why I brought her in such dirty clothes. We told them that we brought her in her everyday clothes. Then she asked me why she didn't have a medical-care booklet. Where was the

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<sup>100</sup> Story recorded by Sanja Jovanović, 25th January 2004 in Stara Pazova.

<sup>101</sup> Story recorded by Lejla Toplica, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2004 in Novi Sad.

booklet? She had to have a booklet, because they would have to keep her in hospital for two weeks. If I don't bring her medical-care booklet I would pay penalties. They would not let her go with me, because they said we Gypsies are the same, we don't have medical-care booklets, and when the time comes then we come rushing to see a doctor. Two weeks later when we had to leave the hospital and didn't have money to pay the penalties, they wouldn't let us leave. Finally my husband came, had a fight with them, and told them, "Here is my ID card, so you charge the penalty to me and if it is needed I will go to prison, but I will say that you take that money for yourselves." Then they let us go home.<sup>102</sup>

### ***Social and Economic Benefits of Romani Women in Vojvodina***

**According to CEDAW (article 13) State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in other areas of economic and social life in order to ensure equal rights, in particular to family benefits. They can be economic, social or financial (childcare benefit, insurance benefits, dwelling subventions, child protection, financial and tax reduction, the allotment of council flats).**

The *Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties* and the *Constitution of the Republic of Serbia* guarantees everyone with residence in the territory of Serbia & Montenegro the right to social security and social insurance.

The *Law on Financial Support to Families with Children*<sup>103</sup> regulates the rights to financial support to families with children. Childcare benefit can be assigned to one of the parents who is directly looking after a child (both mother and father), while the parent benefit is initially assigned to a mother who is looking after a child and refers to her second, third and fourth child, while a father can exercise this right if the mother is not alive, if she abandoned the child or for justified reasons cannot look after the child. This right can be exercised by any mother or father provided he/she is a citizen of Serbia & Montenegro, has residence in the Republic of Serbia, and has the right to health care provided by the Republic Institute of Health Care.

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<sup>102</sup> Story recorded by Lejla Toplica, 26th February 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>103</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 16/2002.

According to the *Law on Social Insurance and Social Security of Citizens*,<sup>104</sup> pregnant women and single mothers with children up to nine months of age who, due to their financial situation, lack of accommodation or inappropriate family situation need temporary accommodation have the right to accommodation in facilities of social care institutions (Centre for Infant, Child and Youth Care). The fund is provided by public funds of the Republic of Serbia as well as funds for the construction, furnishing and modernization of social care centres. These funds are either too minimal or there are none at all. In addition, there are very few people who are aware of this right.

For a high number of Romani families the only source of regular income is a social security benefit. Besides the fact that social security benefit is often lower than needed (monthly amount ranges from 1,533 to 3,065 dinars, while the childcare benefit is 950 dinars), in the previous period it was not paid regularly. Many Romani face difficulties when they apply for social security. Romani women often cannot access these social benefits because they lack citizenship or necessary personal documents, awareness of their rights. Complicated administrative procedures, and civil servants' prejudices often make Romani women give up trying to exercise their rights. Even when Romani women do receive social security and childcare benefit, the money is often taken away from them by their husbands. The state has not taken any measures, nor organized actions to inform the Romani community about their social rights and/ or facilitate the acquisition of personal documents.

Romani woman S.N. (1976), married with eight children, unemployed, husband also unemployed, both illiterate, said: Three months ago while we were not at home, people came from the Social Service Centre and took four of my children that were at home, away to the Home for Neglected Children. They brought cameras and recorded my life and my poverty and showed it on TV Sombor, as if I am glad that my husband and I don't work. People laughed at me and told me that we only make children and can't support them. I was determined and brought my children back. My brother-in-laws from Germany helped me; they sent me money and clothes for the children. It took them so long to help me. First my children were taken away from me and the whole Sombor laughed at me. Now my children are with me. I get social security and for three children I get childcare benefits. We somehow make the ends meet but it is very hard.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 36/1991, 79/1991, 33/1993, 53/1993, 67/1993, 46/1994, 48/1994, 52/1996 and 29/200.

<sup>105</sup> Story recorded by Radmila Zećirović, 28th January 2004 in Sombor.

Romani woman T.E. (1988), said: I live with my grandmother, father and an ill aunt. My mother remarried and left us when I was one. After a year my father remarried, too, and that woman also left. She left me two little sisters. I have a brother and two sisters. I have to take care of them, as there is nobody to look after them. We have no documents. Nobody works in the family, and my grandmothers gets 2,000 dinars pension which she receives in two instalments.<sup>106</sup>

Romani woman N.N. (1975), married with three children, said: My parents made me marry when I was 14. I live with my husband who is an alcoholic and a bum. We live, as you can see, in two little rooms, like cattle. We don't even have a bathroom. I wash the laundry with my hands, with homemade soap, and my husband doesn't care, but when I get childcare benefit and social security he spends it on drinks. He even likes to gamble. I have no other money for my family because he doesn't work, nor is he interested in work. Last month when I got the childcare benefit, it was on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January 2004, he gambled that money away. He spent all the money, and when he got home he beat me and trampled on me. I was lucky because a neighbour came to help. I don't know who to go to, as I have nowhere to go. My parents died, and my relatives will not have me, and what shall I do with my children? I mustn't say anything and I must live and endure everything that's happening to me. Sometimes I think I would be better off dead. I am battered, hungry, naked and barefoot. He never buys me anything. I got all my clothes from my neighbours, and my children, too. I get food when I go to the slaughterhouse and bring some bowls, and my mother-in-law brings me lard and potatoes. So we make ends meet and survive.<sup>107</sup>

### ***Rural Romani Women in Vojvodina***

**According to CEDAW (article 14) State Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the informal sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the Convention to women in rural areas.**

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<sup>106</sup> Story recorded by Sanija Beriša, 17th February 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>107</sup> Story recorded by Nataša Šajin, 8th March 2004 in the village of Bašaid.

None of the laws on either the federal or republic level provides special measures which would refer to special groups. For example, Romani women who are often subjects/victims of double or multiple discrimination (on grounds of gender and nationality) often live in the country many of them are refugees or IDPs. Many Romani women live in villages or isolated, unregistered and unhygienic settlements. In these conditions the traditional family gender roles are more prominent. They are less informed about their rights and the violations of human rights against Romani women, in every field, are more frequent.

### ***Equality of Romani Women Before Law in Vojvodina***

**According to CEDAW (article 15) State Parties shall accord to women equality with men before law, and in civil matters, a legal capacity identical to that of men. They shall give women equal rights to conclude contracts and to administer property and shall accord to them the same rights with regard to the law relating to the movement of persons and the freedom to choose their residence and domicile.**

The *Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties* guarantees equality to everybody before law and equal legal protection. According to the *Constitution of the Republic of Serbia*, Citizens are equal in their rights and duties and have equal protection before the State and other authorities, irrespective of their race, sex, birth, language, nationality, religion, political or other belief, level of education, social origin, property status, or any other personal attribute. Everyone is entitled to equal protection of his rights in the proceedings before a court of law, another state or any other agency or organization.

According to the current national legislation women have equal rights as men regarding acquiring property, concluding contracts, administering property, accessing court and legal protection and legal services. They have legal rights relating to the freedom of movement and choice of their residence and domicile.

Romani women have equal rights before law, but in practice they often have no means of exercising these right due to the inferior roles they have in their families, prejudices of civil servants, and their own distrust of the legal system. The state did not take any measures to facilitate Romani women in regulating their rights in this field.

Romani women are very rarely owners of real estate, and when they come into its possession they have to give it up immediately.

Romani woman V.M. (1975), married with one child, said: On the 10th of August 2003 I inherited all my aunt's property. My aunt lived alone and she left everything to me. When my husband heard that, he ordered me to convey everything to him. I told him that everything that's mine is his, that it is already ours and that there is no reason to fight about it. He slapped me on the face and threatened me that I will never see my son or him again if I don't convey everything into his name. I had no choice but to do it. I didn't want to argue about it because I know my husband well and I know that he would carry out his threats.<sup>108</sup>

### ***Equality of Romani Women in Marriage and Family in Vojvodina***

**According to CEDAW (article 16) State Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family relations.**

The *Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Civil Liberties* guarantees the right to enter into marriage, only with the free and full consent of future spouses. Entering into marriage, its duration and dissolution are based on the equality of spouses. According to the *Constitution of the Republic of Serbia*, marriage and matrimonial and family relations shall be regulated by law.

According to the *Law on Marriage and Family Relations*<sup>109</sup> marriage is based on the free will of both woman and man to enter into marriage as well as the same rights for both spouses regarding all personal and property relations, rights and responsibilities towards each other as well as towards their children. A person can enter into marriage when he/she has reached the age of eighteen (both man and woman), and only in exceptional cases a person who has reached the age of sixteen can enter into marriage with the consent of the court. Extramarital relation is equal to legitimate marriage according to law. During marriage, as well as after its dissolution, each respective spouse can claim for the joint property to be divided, during which determining each spouses share, not only the income and other source of income, but the guardianship, household keeping, management and administration of property and any other form of work are taken into consideration. Each spouse is free to choose a profession and

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<sup>108</sup> Story recorded by Ljiljana Jovanović, 14th February 2004 in Stara Pazova.

<sup>109</sup> Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia, ref no 29/2001.

an occupation. Man and woman have the same inheritance rights in the case of other spouse's death. A spouse (both man and woman) can ask to be supported by the other spouse if it fulfils the conditions prescribed by law. Every person in her/his right mind has the right to decide freely on having children. Children born out of wedlock shall have the same rights and duties as those born in wedlock, and the parent right belongs both to mother and father. Mother and child have special protection in exercising their rights regarding family relations.

When entering into marriage woman (as well as man) has the right to choose a family name, keep her maiden name, add the spouse's family name, take the spouse's family name or add to his family name her maiden name.

A special provision of the *Criminal Law of the Republic of Serbia*, criminal acts against marriage and family, provides legal protection for, first of all children, but women as well.

It respects the principle of gender equality. Some of the criminal acts prescribed by this law are: bigamy, forcing into marriage, illegitimate relations with a minor, abduction of a minor, negligence and mistreatment of the minor, not giving child support, violation of responsibilities towards the family, and incest. Criminal law modifications and supplementations prescribe the criminal act of domestic violence.<sup>110</sup> The incrimination of this act ensures the legal protection of the members of the family (victims are usually children and women), from actions or threats, by other family member, which are directed to harm violate or jeopardise the physical or mental integrity of those persons. However, nothing has been done regarding the introduction of the protection measures against domestic violence which would temporarily prohibit or restrict the personal contacts with the other member of the family and in this way complete the protection of the domestic violence victims. For example, the perpetrator could be prohibited from coming within a certain distance of family members. Expulsion warrants could also be issued, requiring the perpetrator to leave the family flat or house, regardless of who the legal owner of that flat or house is.<sup>111</sup>

In the Romani community in Vojvodina, the respect of different traditional standards for man and women is reflected in the customs related to marriage, the age of entering into marriage, and experiences had before entering into marriage. Young Romani men are encouraged to have pre-marital contacts, while these same contacts are prohibited for girls . The more pre-marital sexual relationships

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<sup>110</sup> The Criminal Law of the Republic of Serbia, article 118a.

<sup>111</sup> See the details in: Kovaček Stanić, G. (2003), Family legislation regulations for domestic violence as a way to advance the position of women, On Law From a Woman's Point of View, the Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality, Novi Sad, pages 23-24.

they have the more the Romani boy becomes an eligible future husband. Comparatively, one sexual contact is enough for a young Romani woman to mark her as not only an undesirable wife, but also as a bad and worthless member of the Romani community. Romani women enter into marriage earlier than men, some already at the age of 12, without having completed elementary school. Men are older when they enter into marriage, usually having completed elementary school, and often unemployed. A girl simply runs away from home, and moves in with her future husband's family, and she doesn't formally enter into marriage. Very soon upon entering into marriage the young couple gets a child. Parents very often influence the decision of their children before and after entering into marriage. The experiences Romani women have related to marriage, show that Romani woman is considered inferior both to her husband and his parents. The man supports the family and if he is unemployed, the couple is supported by his family. The marriages are often short. It often happens that a Romani woman stays alone and not provided for with children.<sup>112</sup> The State has not taken organized action to inform Romani women about their marital and family rights, nor has it taken appropriate measures to enable Romani women to realize their marital and family rights.

Romani woman M.S. (1970), has no education, not married, without children, unemployed, said: I am blaming my crazy father for everything. He never let me be with the boy I wanted, no one was good enough for him. He always found something he didn't like about him and wouldn't allow me to date. He used to beat me and I was too much of a coward to stand up to him. I even wanted to run away from home, but he threatened to kill me so I couldn't. He found a boyfriend for me and forced me to marry him, but I ran away from that husband after a week. I don't know where I found courage to do that, but I couldn't stand looking at him let alone sleeping and eating with him. My father beat me then, like never before, he almost killed me. If my mother hadn't defended me I don't know what would have happened. He made me go back to my husband, but after running away my mother-in-law wouldn't have me back. And the whole story became public, everybody knew about my situation. Then I lived in a village down in Serbia, a little village where nothing can be kept a secret. Nobody even wanted to look at me, after that. I came here, I thought I could marry here, but as you can see, I haven't found a husband yet.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> See the details in: Mitro, V, J. Jovanović, D. Šajin (2003), Ready for Marriage or not?, AB print publications, Novi Sad.

<sup>113</sup> Story recorded by Ksenija Aleksandrović, 26th February 2004 in Novi Sad.

Romani woman J.N. (1976), married with two daughters, works as a house cleaner, said: My husband left to Italy to work, three year ago. He said he would go to make some money and then come back. He also said that he would send us money to live on. And now he is gone and there is no money. In the beginning he sent us some money and than he stopped sending money and calling. I heard that he is married to an Italian there. And my mother and mother-in-law won't let me marry again. They say that he will come back, he hasn't forgotten us, he just can't call us. But I don't believe that. He will never come back. He has a nice life there, he has money and everything. He is not interested in me and the children. What can I do? I will struggle with my girls, as much as I can. My mother and his mother help me. We have to help each other. Otherwise we wouldn't be able to survive.<sup>114</sup>

Romani woman Z.R. (1959), widow with two children, said: My husband died on the 12th of December 2004. He was 20 years older than me. My parents sold me to his family. He came from Germany to my parents in Prokuplje and told them that he wanted to buy a wife. My parents told me to go to Sombor and not to ask questions. I didn't know where I was going, nor where they were taking me, nor who my husband was going to be. Only when I arrived in Sombor they told me that he is going to be my husband and that they married me. I didn't have any choice and I stayed with him. While my husband was alive he never allowed me to work as he was jealous. Now when he died I have no income, I have no right to his pension as I am not old enough to get it. I finished only elementary school. After New Year I went to the Social Care Centre to complain. The social worker told me that I was young and that I should find a job. She also told me that there are people who are more in need than me, where both parents are unemployed and their children go to school. I told her that I would like to find a job but I have a weak heart and that I had a breast operation. She told me that it's not her concern. My son doesn't work, he can't find a job and he finished secondary school. My daughter studies in Novi Sad and supports herself.<sup>115</sup>

Romani women are often victims of domestic violence done at the hands of their husbands, they too often believe that is the way is should be.

Romani woman S.S. (1970), married for 16 years with three children, works as a cleaner, husband unemployed, said: In the beginning everything was really nice, but now... My husband keeps beating me. It happens all the time. Whenever he is drunk, whenever he feels like it. Three days ago and the children were here. They cry, they are afraid of their father. I get bruises

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<sup>114</sup> Story recorded by Ksenija Aleksandrović, 27th February 2004 in Novi Sad.

<sup>115</sup> Story recorded by Radmila Zečirović, 29th February 2004 in Sombor.

and that's all. I have never been to the doctor's. I mustn't, I am too ashamed. I have never reported him to the police. I can't. I'm too scared of get more beatings. And what would they say? He is my husband, and he has a right to beat me.<sup>116</sup>

## ***Conclusion***

The rights of Romani women in Vojvodina are protected by law. However, a significant number of Romani women can single out moments from their everyday lives which are proof of discrimination based on their gender and/or their nationality. As a woman she is humiliated in her family, community and in society in general, and as a Romani she is humiliated with every contact with the state. Romani women do not trust the capabilities of the legal system to solve their problems, nor are they well enough acquainted with the legal system. Many of them believe that the discrimination they are exposed to is the only, and therefore acceptable, way of life. The state should have to take special measures to promote, protect and encourage the achievement of the human rights of the Romani in Vojvodina.

## ***Recommendations***

- Complete and submit a detailed report on women's human rights with specific focus on the human rights of Romani women to the Committee without delay.
- Adopt the Resolution on Gender Equality.
- Adopt the Act against Discrimination.
- Pass the Gender Equality Act.
- Define 'discrimination against women' in the Gender Equality Act.
- Sign Protocol No.12 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Basic Liberties which ensures general protection against discrimination, including racial and gender-based discrimination.
- Define a National Action Plan for the advancement of the position of women, which will incorporate specific groups such as Romani women.

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<sup>116</sup> Story recorded by Ksenija Aleksandrović, 24th January 2004 in Novi Sad.

- Initiate the adoption of special temporary measures aiming to achieve the equality of Romani women and men within their national community.
- Introduce measures for the protection against domestic violence, specifically: restriction orders for the family member causing violence, order for eviction from the family house or flat, regardless of ownership of the above.
- Organise education programmes for members of the authorities and institutions (most of all the police, healthcare and educational institution workers and employers) on the culture and tradition of Romani people and Romani women, the recognition of the twofold discrimination against Romani women (as women and as members of the Roma community), and the fight against discrimination.
- Organise training programmes for civil servants on work with violence victims, especially Romani women.
- Organise free legal advice for victims of trafficking in human beings, especially Romani women.
- Establish a state run women's safe house for victims of trafficking in human beings.
- Examine with utmost urgency and publicly condemn cases of discrimination against Romani women.
- Increase the number of radio and television shows on the human rights of Romani women in the Romani language.
- Organise training for Romani women journalists concerning reporting on Romani women.
- Promote Romani women and women's human rights in the media in Serbian and Romani.
- Organise training for the political education of Romani women.
- Make widely known the definition of the 'discrimination against women' in the Romani community.
- Support projects for the emancipation of Romani women with the participation of Romani women.
- Organise campaigns in Romani communities to speak about equality between men and women in a form acceptable to the culture of the community and in Romani language where necessary.
- Organise campaigns to educate Romani women about sex-trafficking and methods of abduction.

- Engage Romani women in electoral and administrative bodies and election campaigns.
- Actively encourage political participation of Romani women.
- Set up a network of Romani women’s organizations. Establish a connection between them and regional and international networks to exchange experiences and creating the basis for future international representation.
- Take all appropriate measures to help Romani women, especially those from Kosovo, to acquire the necessary personal documents and citizenship.
- Establish a service to provide citizenship for the children of young Romani women, working in cooperation with Romani women's NGOs that have extensive knowledge of the Romani community.
- Introduce special measures for the improving the access of Romani women to the education system.
- Motivate Romani parents to enrol their children, especially daughters, at existing state or private educational institutions.
- Encourage educational institutions, legal bodies, and bodies of authority to take upon themselves the definition of special programs for the return of Romani girls into elementary schools.
- Develop adequate and financially acceptable programs for Romani adults who want to make up for lost education.
- Condemn and punish all cases of the discrimination against Romani children in education.
- Secure scholarships for Romani women at all levels of education (elementary, secondary, high).
- Promote the Romani culture and tradition in the educational system as a significant contribution to general culture.
- Enable Romani women to reach the critical mass of educated and skilled cadres, in order to participate in economic life.
- Establish a department for Romani studies at the University of Novi Sad.
- Condemn and punish responsible persons in cases of discrimination against Romani women in employment.
- Actively employ Romani women in government administration.
- Organise training for Romani people to act as mediators between Romani communities and healthcare centres.

- Organise informative lectures for Romani women on contraception, abortion and free healthcare.
- Investigate all cases of discrimination against Romani women in the healthcare system and social services and punish those responsible for it.
- Take necessary action to provide Romani women with full access to health and social care.
- Train the police, investigators and court clerks to properly address the problem of domestic violence in Romani families.
- Secure better work conditions and social insurance for season workers.
- Organise education programs for young Romani women on their rights regarding marriage, reproductive health and protection against domestic violence.
- Establish institutions (safe houses) which will provide Romani women victims of domestic violence with legal protection.
- Inform Romani women about existing telephone SOS help lines and ways of accessing them.