

## Special report to GREVIO Committee

Association of Roma Novi Becej (further ARNB) and its SOS Helpline on minority services, provisions services for Roma and other minority women survivors of gender based violence on Romany, Romanian and Hungarian languages, Legal Aid and court representation free of charge. Among specialized services the ARNB provisions significant pallet of services:

1. Psychological counseling
2. Individual consultations and self-confidence building to proceed cases to courts
3. Trauma healing especially for adolescent girls victims of sexual abuse and rape
4. Support in crises situations for girls and women in acute and life threatening situation of violence – avoiding possible femicide
5. Court representation and court interpretation
6. Supporting women survivors of violence in building their employment capacities
7. Obtaining personal documents, determining identities or acquiring any additional documents needed to accessing justice under the legal system in Serbia.

For the purposes of reporting to the Grevio Committee we had paid special attention to the Articles 22, 23 and 25. Our intention is to draw your attention to the existence of services, but inability of Roma women to access it (we consider also migrant women to be under the same situation). Also, we determined this necessary since the reports that will be submitted will be filtered to comply with the format instead giving the real in-life perception of multi-marginalized women. We participated in the process and saw how efforts of smaller and Roma women`s NGOs were just mentioned without any kind of value or measuring its influence. We based this data on our publication “Multiple faces of discrimination and racism” that is still only available in Serbian language on our web site [udrezenjeromanb@gmail.com](mailto:udrezenjeromanb@gmail.com)

## REPORT ON ARTICLES 22, 23 and 25

### Articles 22, 23 and 25 specialist women’s support services for all women victims and their children

#### Women’s shelters

National standards for shelters (Safe houses, as described in Brankovic, 2016), are defined in the Rule book on conditions and standards for providing services of social protection (Vlaovic-Vasiljevic, 2013)<sup>1</sup>. Target groups "for placement in shelters" are:

1. Children, youth and adults - victims of domestic violence, abuse and neglect;
2. Children, youth and adults - victims of human trafficking;
3. Children, youth without parental care in various crisis situations, who require temporary accommodation and have to be directed to other services;

---

<sup>1</sup> We are also relying to the data from : Brankovic, Biljana (2016). *Multi-country study on violence against women support services: National study – Serbia*. Belgrade: UN Women (unpublished).

#### 4. Adults in crisis, homeless people and beggars

Minimum standards have been defined in relation with the location, safety, number of beneficiaries per room, personnel, specific conditions for accommodation, needs assessment and creating individual services plan.

Earlier quoted definitions of target groups seem to imply that shelters for victims of domestic violence aren't exclusively services for women ("women victims" of "shelters for women" aren't specifically mentioned).

Further, **shelters for women victims of domestic violence are not recognized as a specialized service that has to be based on specifically stated principles and standards. Instead, however, standards for domestic violence - victims of trafficking are defined within the framework of social protection, whilst the victims of violence against women are treated together with other groups "persons in need". Such tendency is not in accordance with Istanbul convention.**

The report on explanation of the Convention explains the purpose of shelters and clearly states that "temporary accommodation per se and accommodation for homeless people aren't adequate enough". Report clearly defines that specialized shelters for women have to apply set of standards for their proper functioning:

a) Purpose of shelters is to provide urgent accommodation, preferably 24/7 access to the secure accommodation for the victim, particularly women and children - when they are not safe in their homes anymore. Temporary accommodation per se, or general shelters, such is shelter for homeless people are not adequate to provide necessary support and empowerment. Victims are facing multiple, intersected problems related to their health, safety, financial situation and wellbeing of their children. Specialized shelters for women are best equipped for working on these problems, considering that their functions overcome mere insurance of safe space to stay. Such shelters provide support to women and their children, enable them to cope with their traumatic experiences, to leave from violent relationships, regain self confidence and set grounds for independent life they have chosen themselves. Furthermore, women shelters play central role in networking, multi sector cooperation and raising awareness in their communities (report on explanation, paragraph 133).

b) To ensure primary task - providing safety and security for women and children, it is crucial that shelters apply **set of standards**. To that end it is necessary to assess every individual victim's situation regarding safety and security, thus to create personalized safety plan for each victim based on this assessment. Technical safety of the building is another crucial question for shelters because of the aggressions by perpetrators that represent a threat not only for women and their children, but for personnel and other people who are in vicinity. Moreover, efficient cooperation with the Police is irreplaceable. (Paragraph 134)<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/16800d383a>

It has to be however mentioned that, after above in the text described standards created for safe houses, the government of republic of Serbia undertook following step: it developed a system for licensing Safe houses that defines for example the structure of personnel, requirements that safe houses that Safe houses have to meet, in terms of space etc. Few Safe houses have been licensed in accordance with this system and they can continue their work.

In addition to the listed above, Association of Roma Novi Becej - SOS Hotline in languages of national minorities and other partner organizations have analyzed the current situation in relation with the issue of reception of Roma women in Safe houses by using information and documentation of their organizations, SOS hotline registers, that contain information on experiences of access and stay in Safe houses of their beneficiaries, Roma women.

Problem of poor and rare reception of Roma women also confirms the analysis of register from women's organization that submitted this analysis for the requirements of this research: office of the Centre for support for women from Kikinda. Between 2010 and 2017, 29 Roma women called or came to this organization to receive some support and they have been provided with 116 different services. The analysis of this organizations states that the information about affiliation aren't taken, unless a woman gives this information on her own, and if she does that this organization would direct a woman to Association of Roma - Novi Becej in the languages of national minorities, so are just listed in the records of the organization.

**According to the analysis of the register of SOS hotline in languages of national minorities** that is managed by Association of Roma Novi Becej, during 10 years (2007 to 2017), only 6 Roma women in total have been admitted to the Safe house, whilst 24 haven't although it was a necessity. The register records following reasons for rejection of admittance in Safe houses (shelters): problem of nationality (when the personnel hears that the women in question is a Roma woman, immediately "there is no place"), problem with lot of children (rejection because she has lot of children, or conditioning that only babies and very little children can come with her). In all cases, even when women have been admitted in Safe houses, local Centres for social work didn't have funds for travel costs, so that was the burden of our Association and our projects.

For the requirements of this research Association of Roma Novi Becej has filed an official request for annual reports on acceptance of Roma women during the period between 2007 to 2017 from following Safe houses: Sremska Mitrovica, Vranje, Beograd, Zrenjanin, Sombor and Pancevo (those safe houses that had contact and worked with us). However the only three shelters that submitted the reports are Pancevo, Zrenjanin and Vranje, Safe house from Zrenjanin sent only information about Roma women, while the one in Pancevo submitted reports without this data because they don't record information on woman's national/ ethnic affiliation. Only the report from Vranje contained information on all women, with specific information on Roma women.

In this part of the research, the Association didn't rely only on the written letter, but also on the direct communication towards urging Safe houses to submit any kind of written information, so we could have also official confirmation that they don't register information on national affiliation or that perennial report isn't available. We haven't however received confirmation on the absence

of separated data or general reports from other houses that we contacted with, till the end of this research.

According to the register of **Safe house from Zrenjanin for the period from 2009 to 2017 (01.10)** 175 Roma women in total have been received in this Shelter. By years most of them from 2010 to 2012, and in 2015 and 2016. Out of 175 Roma women, 11 had one child, 17 two children and 17 had 3 or more kids (but it is not clear how many more and in which cases). The problematic issue in this report is that Roma women stayed in this shelter mainly for 7 days (36 of them) and only 3 have stayed more than 3 months. Having in mind that the accommodation is provided for longer periods (more than 3 months) this confirms testimonies of Roma women about secondary victimization, and exposure to discrimination and violence in Safe houses. Considering that this house records the information of permanent residence, it is clear that it confirms the request that women who are admitted into a Safe house poses personal documentation (which is not always the case, or more often it is not the case when the women in question are Roma women). From total number of admitted Roma women, only in the cases of 63 of them there is information on the type of violence they experienced (listed physical, sexual violence and human trafficking). In this statistics, only two Roma women confirmed that they have been victims of trafficking (till 2013) and only one reported that she has been a victim of sexual violence (2016). Data base that is received is of numeric type, without any notes and descriptive information (and numbers in individual categories aren't harmonized with total number of admitted women, which confirms the fact that Roma women haven't stayed long enough to leave their information and information on the type of violence they have survived.

According to the statistic data from Centre for social work in Zrenjanin, available in the media, average number of beneficiaries of this service on annual level varies and is between 80 to 110 persons. One third are women and two thirds children.<sup>3</sup>

Based on the register of **Safe house from Vranje, for the period from 01.07.2015 to 01.10 2017**, there were 10 Roma women with 18 children in this shelter, three babies and one minor. In total, 11 Roma girls - woman with 21 kids. It is important to note that there were no Roma women in the shelters during the first 6 month of the work of the Safe house in Vranje. During the mentioned period there were 49 women and 5 minors with 61 children and babies in the Safe house in Vranje. The report doesn't mention the length of stay, type of violence that women reported nor their education or financial status. The report mentions that the Safe house in Vranjska Banja is a special organizational unit of the Centre for the development of local services of social protection in Vranje that began to work in July 2015.

According the information from **register of Safe house in Pancevo, between 2012 and 2017**, there is no separated information on nationality of women who have been admitted to this safe house. Towards avoiding discriminatory and prejudicial attitudes of the publication we didn't want to related information on Roma women with those on young mothers (under 20 years old), with the level of education, and employment status. One information that is visible is that the

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://ilovezrenjanin.com/aktuelno/sigurna-kuca-brojke-nam-daju-krivu-sliku-o-broju-zrtvi/>

accommodation is mainly provided based on the residence in Pancevo, Kovin, Kovacica, Alibunar, but also Vrsac, Opovo, Plandiste. This house has made interventions on violence also for persons from Lebane, Zitoradja, Sabac , even for the citizen of Macedonia. Considering that our beneficiaries testify about admittance to the Safe house in Pancevo , and rejection as well, based on their experiences what is determined is a very high level of discrimination, secondary victimization, segregation and violence against them in mentioned shelter.

**Seven organizations that manage shelters have responded to the online poll (Brankovic, 2016)<sup>4</sup>.** In this context, it should be kept in mind that in fact one women NGO manages three shelters (based on the methodology of the study we had only one respondent per survey, as organization, so responses for these three Safe houses come from one organization). It needs to be clarified as well that national legislature doesn't recognize terms shelters or refuge. Thus, this term cannot be adequately translated to English without using the connotation of temporary accommodation. In the public and media on national level, as well in women NGOs , the use of the term "Safe house" became most common. Besides, it is important to mention that most of the Shelters in Serbia, including some that participated in this research, have been created due to the long perennial campaign which was initiated by B92 Foundation. **Therefore, the necessary funds weren't provided by the government, but raised from the donations made by private companies, embassies and endless list of small donations from citizens.**

Six of these shelters provide accommodation for victims of domestic violence while one is more specialized for the trafficking victims and is located in Belgrade. This specific form of accommodation ran by a woman NGO, insists to use the term Transition House rather than shelter. They are also insisting on the fact that their programs are more focused on social inclusion rather than "rehabilitation" or "reintegration".

**It is of utmost importance to mention that one of the shelters for victims of domestic violence also provides refuge for trafficking victims , which cant under any circumstances be taken as an example of good practice.<sup>5</sup>**

Five shelters are run by state institutions (Centres for social work) and 2 that are ran by women NGOs , out of which one has 3 shelters. All 4 shelters are located on different addresses in Belgrade. <sup>6</sup>

**Employees in shelters** are rarely full time employed. Out of shelters participated in the poll have only **20 paid employees who are working full time, 12 who are working part time , and 13 volunteers, whilst one shelter has 8 members who are employed on "temporary contracts"**. One shelter didn't answer the question about the number of paid personnel.

**The role of volunteers** is related to supporting children - younger beneficiaries with the programs of learning foreign languages, organization of short trips or going to the movies (varying

---

<sup>4</sup> We are also relying in this chapter to beforehand mentioned source: Brankovic, Biljana (2016). *Multi-country study on violence against women support services: National study – Serbia*. Belgrade: UN Women (unpublished).

<sup>5</sup> According to information from the Association and received reports, we determined that shelters in Zrenjanin and Pancevo have this practice, but it should be kept in mind that these cities are located on the trafficking route so maybe this is the reason to accept this.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.sigurnakuca.net/informacije/sos\\_telefoni.79.html](http://www.sigurnakuca.net/informacije/sos_telefoni.79.html)

on their interests and desires), education and creative work with children, assisting in administrative work and providing psychological support for beneficiaries. One shelter responded that one of the volunteers has a master's degree in psychology and is hired to work directly with beneficiaries under the supervision of a much more experienced colleague.

**Admission criteria** In its Concluding comments to the Republic of Serbia 2007 and 2013, Committee for elimination of discrimination against women, expressed concern due to the "cases of de facto discrimination against Roma women, victims of domestic violence, who were rejected from shelters based on applied criteria for admitting women". Further, Committee requested that the signatory state "revises and monitors the implementation of criteria for reception in order to prevent further exclusion of Roma women." According to the CEDAW committee recommendations, government of Serbia has taken measures to question regulations and criteria for reception to the shelters that are related to Roma women and one member of Roma women's civil society organization was included in this process.

However the poll done with those responsible for managing shelters showed that there are still conditions and limitations that are justified with the lack of expertise, bad conditions, problems in the infrastructure, etc.

Those questioned said that none of the criteria listed in electronic survey needs to be fulfilled for reception to the shelters such are: "valid document on protection measures", "approval from the commission for identification", "citizenship" or "approved victim status through formal procedures". However, one shelters listed "age" as the criteria, while another one listed location. Based on the information from the poll it can be concluded that more than one shelter uses this second criteria. Furthermore, among "other criteria" two shelters responded that women have to be sent to their shelters by Centres for social work from specific geographic location - so called administrative region. Such practice can greatly impact the accessibility of services of Safe houses in Serbia.<sup>7</sup>

Among "other criteria" few members of the Shelters ran by Centres for social work following is mentioned:

- *Filed reported for domestic violence*
- *We aren't applying any of the criteria listed in the survey. For example, citizenship is not a criteria; we had two foreign citizens. However we request the victim to sign the statement - consent for reception. Nobody can forcibly keep her in the shelter. We don't accept women with mental health conditions, but we can accept all others".*
- *There should be risk assessment that proves that her safety is jeopardized."*

Those questioned also say that women - potential beneficiaries of shelters need to meet "health criteria", for example:

---

<sup>7</sup> From the experience of Association, location is very important factor when it comes to accommodating woman and accessibility of the shelter. Realistically none of the women from Vojvodina can be admitted to a Safe house in Ns, because none of Centers for social work would be willing to cover for the travel costs, and NGOs don't have that much funds to spend on a single beneficiary. Women from another municipality are placed only if the violence occurred shortly after marriage or if it occurred in this municipality. It is visible in the reports sent by Safe house in Pancevo.

- "Local centre for social work will refuse to admit women in our shelter in following situations: severe mental condition or suicidal behaviour, abuse of drugs alcohol or other psychoactive substances, mild to severe mental health condition or physical disability."
- "Women suffering from mental health disorders such is schizophrenia cannot be admitted."
- "Women with mental health issues cannot be admitted".
- "Beneficiaries cannot be alcohol or drug addicts".
- "We request that our psychiatrist determines whether women with mental health disorders can be placed in collective accommodation or not."
- "We only have health related condition in the question of accepting psychiatric patients. Our Safe houses don't meet the criteria for their placement. Because Safe house is a collective accommodation it is impossible to predict their reaction and potential adaptation. They might have problem adjusting to this type of accommodation..... If we potentially admit such women it could bring serious risks for collective accommodation with heterogeneous group of women. This is based on previous experiences. Thus , practice was the main reason for putting this criteria ."

Admission criteria for children When it comes to reception of children and potential limitations related to the child's age, three shelters said that they don't have such limitations. Three shelters apply criteria according to the age of boys: one doesn't accept boys older than 14, one accepts boys to 18, and one applies different option:

- *" If a woman has sons who are older than 14 they are being placed in Shelter for children and youth that exists in our city."*

Member of the local Centre for social work

- *Boys older than 14 aren't admitted , but there can be exception under specific circumstances. This criteria is set up based on our perennial experiences."*

Member of a women NGO that manages three shelters

Having in mind also information on the number of paid staff in shelters , it is not surprising that only 3 shelters mentioned that they have staff members whose job is to support the children during their stay.

**Length of staying in Safe Houses only** shelter that doesn't have limited stay is Transition shelter for victims of trafficking. Four shelters have limited the stay in their Safe house to the period from 3 to 6 months, whilst 2 shelters have limited the stay for maximum of 3 months. The length of stay in Safe house is determined by the internal rulebook of the Safe house and financial abilities of local administration and local Centre for social work (what is the length they can financially cover).<sup>8</sup>

Survey done in the focus groups confirmed that the big problem is related to the length of stay in the Safe house. Because of early , arranged, forced and child marriages , most of Roma women don't have primary education which is minimal requirement for the registration on the labour market. Without this, there is no confirmation of unemployment thus the problem to access the system of social protection. Some of the women who are contacting our organization also have a

---

<sup>8</sup> <http://upravusi.rs/bezbednost-kat/nasilje-u-porodici-bezbednost-i-mladi/sigurne-kuce/>  
[http://www.sigurnakuca.net/fond\\_b92\\_protiv\\_nasilja/izgradnja\\_sigurnih\\_kuca/sigurne\\_kuce\\_kao\\_mehanizam\\_zastite.202.html](http://www.sigurnakuca.net/fond_b92_protiv_nasilja/izgradnja_sigurnih_kuca/sigurne_kuce_kao_mehanizam_zastite.202.html)

problem of origins: they don't have precise information about their place of origin, or birth so it is difficult to determine how they arrived to the municipality from which they are reporting violence. According to the law on the system of social protection it is possible to receive financial aid maximum 3 times in one year. In the experiences of beneficiaries of the Roma Association Novi Bečej - SOS hotline in languages of national minorities this amount is between 5000 to 10000 RSD which is significantly below sufficient amount necessary to survive per one or 2 weeks. If the costs of having a baby or a child that goes to school are added, sometimes both, it is clear that it is impossible to regard this as "aid". In experience of our Association, the Decision on the measures of welfare can be acquired within one month, but this document requires the following:

1. Alimentation lawsuit against parents, which prevents woman from returning to her primary family and worsens family relationships.
2. If she has any property listed in her name she doesn't have the right to welfare
3. Alimony lawsuit, which reduces the amount of welfare regardless of whether the alimony is paid at all (repudiation of alimony in Serbia is very high according to some informal research).

For Roma women who don't have education, have language barrier for employment, stay in the Safe house for 3 to 6 months is useless because they need more long term support in and out of the Safe house to improve their social status.

Register from the Safe house in Zrenjanin that keeps record in the segment of education of placed Roma women states that 42 Roma women didn't have primary education (31 didn't have any education), and 17 have finished primary education. **Only one woman was registered as employed, and 62 without employment.** Out of this number, 11 said that they don't have any income, 50 receive welfare, and one is retired. This is the information from 175 women who are placed in the Safe house, having in mind that 36 of them stayed in this shelter only for one week.

The same type of information has also the Safe house in Pancevo, but not based on national affiliation and it is highly discriminatory to make conclusions on position of Roma women based on the information on women without any education or only with primary education. However, the information clearly shows that the high percentage of victims either didn't go to school, or went partially to primary school or finished primary school. Most are unemployed, working in the black or grey zone or is receiving some form of social aid.

#### **Accessibility for women with disabilities and mental health disorders**

**Four out of 7 respondent Shelters are not ACCESSIBLE for women with disability.** One of them has access to the main part of the house for women who are using wheelchair, but bedrooms are on the first floor and thus are not accessible for women with disability.

Member of a shelter managed by woman NGO explained:

*"We can place a woman with disability who is using wheelchair, as well as those who have personal assistant."*

According to the answers in the online poll three shelters do not admit women with mental health disorders. Remaining shelters gave explanation.

*" We are accepting women with small health issues if they are capable to take care of themselves."*

*"We are accepting women with mild mental retardation." (Original definition is used that shows that social workers consider mental health disorders as retardation).*

*"Women with mild and moderate mental health disorders are admitted."*

*" We had, among our beneficiaries, women with various mental health conditions, including mild and moderate intellectual difficulties , disorders, conditions after brain surgeries, Down's syndrome, autism and dementia." Members of local centres for Social work.*

When it comes to the reception of women with addiction problems, four shelters responded that they don't admit such women. Remaining stated that certain requirements need to be respected.

*"Reception depends on form of addiction and phase of treatment" Member of women's NGO*

*"Women with addiction problem can be accepted. However, the severe use of substances during the stay in the shelter (if it jeopardizes the safety of other beneficiaries) can lead to the interruption of their right to stay in the shelter earlier than it was planned when creating their individual plan, that was created each of the beneficiaries individually."*

*Member of the Centre for social work:*

*" We are often placing women who have addiction problems - they are placed in our house during the time they are receiving some kind of treatment. Some of them are also hospitalized for the needs of treatment but are then returned to us. We are supporting them during the treatment process."*

*Member of women's NGO*

**Limitations of women's rights during the stay in Safe Houses** Members of three shelters have stated that they have certain limitations that are listed in their internal rulebooks.

*"Beneficiaries are not advised to live the shelter from 7:00 PM to 7 :00AM, but under certain circumstances they can sign the statement and be absent in this period."*

*Member of the Centre for social work*

*"According to our internal rulebook , we accept that women return to the shelter by 10:00PM, unless they are working nightshift."<sup>9</sup>*

**Safe Houses are considered as prisons for victims** Regarding freedom of movement Shelters are working according to the principles of social protection. Each of the victims that we admit has her personal life and we request that she signs the statement about placement to the shelter. Some shelter are locked; victims are locked and cannot go anywhere without our approval. They can go out only with agreement with us; under our control and with our approval. For example, they can

---

<sup>9</sup> Internal rulebooks of Safe houses aren't available for NGOs so it is impossible to confirm this information as accurate and part of the rulebook.

go out for weekend, go for a walk and then come back. This is not the case for all shelters. Therefore the freedom of movement is certainly limited, but not in the sense that they are prisoners... they can go out but only with our approval in accordance to our assessment and in agreement with each individual Shelter.

### **EXPECTATIONS FROM PLACEMENT IN THE SAFE HOUSE<sup>10</sup>**

All of 98 women who participated in focus groups had expectations from placement in the safe house. Women who have been admitted could share their expectations prior to the placement and what they received after they have been admitted.

Expectations of 46 women who have been admitted to safe houses can be summarized as following:

1. Pleasant environment
2. Expressed welcoming, smile of acceptance, nice words
3. Equality between Roma women and other women
4. Treatment without discrimination, equality, respect
5. Freedom of movement , peace and quiet
6. Childcare, warm spaces , lots of toys
7. Available hygiene products and enough food for everyone
8. Respect
9. Safety
10. Help and support to plan life after they leave the safe house

Their feelings upon placement in the safe house can be described as following:

1. Disappointment
2. Anger and sadness
3. Prejudice and stereotypes towards Roma women
4. Limited movement, isolation
5. Unequal approach to all of the women and their needs
6. Neglect of children's needs
7. Absence of clear procedures and rules, task division
8. Personnel is uninterested, rude and disdainful
9. Arbitrariness of the director
10. Lack of making plans for long term support

These are the prevailing feelings of women who were in safe houses in Belgrade, Pancevo and Novi Sad.<sup>11</sup>

Women who were admitted in the safe house in Zrenjanin had following comments about the treatment and their feelings:

---

<sup>10</sup> [https://udruzenjeromanb.org.rs/images/publikacije/Vise\\_Lica\\_Diskriminacije\\_i\\_Rasizma.pdf](https://udruzenjeromanb.org.rs/images/publikacije/Vise_Lica_Diskriminacije_i_Rasizma.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> It is interesting that all of these Safe houses do not document the national affiliation of women victims of violence. It is visible also in annual reports of Safe house in Pancevo, while we got information from the other two that they don't keep information on Roma women in their safe houses , and by doing so they also refused to give us their general annual reports.

1. They gave us a warm and nice welcoming
2. We had organized conversations with psychologist, counsellors and social workers
3. There were schedules with clearly stated daily tasks for women
4. They paid attention to the children and played with them
5. There were also other women, not just Roma women
6. There was no discrimination towards Roma women
7. There were no limitations of movement, all with agreement , without pressure and orders
8. without judgment
9. Spending time with other women
10. Feeling of safety during the stay in the safe house

In the safe house in Zrenjanin , till October 1st 2017 there are/were eight Roma women and five of their children.

Out of 98 women who participated in focus group discussions , 52 of them weren't admitted in safe house.

Reasons for this are multiple and can be described as following:

**1. Lack of understanding and recognizing the situations of violence in cases of Roma women , by the institutions**

- Minimizing severity of the reported situation of violence
- Inadequate penalties for perpetrators
- Stereotypes and prejudice professionals have towards Roma people
- Neglecting the needs of Roma women and children in situations of violence

**2. Obstruction of placement of Roma women in safe houses by professionals in institutions**

- Giving various excuses for rejection of placement for Roma women
- Tightening the criteria for admittance to the safe house for Roma women , comparing to the criteria for majority women
- Keeping Roma women to wait for long time to be admitted to a safe house.

**3. Roma women , themselves, gave up on the idea to go to a safe house**

- Fear from perpetrators revenge because of leaving
- Shame from family and relatives
- Short term solution , and it is not clear what to do after the safe house
- Long waiting period
- Fear from losing even those little resources for life

**All of the women who reported violence and asked for admission to safe house , and were not admitted, stated the following as their expectations:**

1. To have safe space for themselves and their children
2. Peace and protection from the perpetrator during their stay
3. They wanted to get only services provisioned to all women who are in the situations of violence get
4. They expected more permanent solution for their situation, not for only couple of months

5. They expected that institutions will understand their situation and provide support
6. They expected that institutions don't act in discriminatory way towards women in situations of violence
7. They expected to come to the place that is warm and pleasant for their children, lots of toys

### **Financial management of women's stay in Safe Houses**

Women using services of Safe Houses in Serbia need to pay for it. Their stay is paid by the local self-government from the social services budget lines. In smaller and economically undeveloped locals self-government such service had no substantive financial sources to cover higher demand then envisaged annually. In such situation if a woman is on social welfare, the local Centre for Social Work has the right to take her social welfare money while staying in a Safe House to cover her expenses (we had one woman testifying such case). Since our clients are not employed we do not have experiences related to a woman's in employment status. We had testimonies of women that they were deprived of fruits and meals, diapers for babies (3 for a week), medicines that they had to purchase (for them and children) since the Safe House cannot provide medicines.

### **Rape crisis and sexual assault centre**

Serbia has ratified in the 2013 Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention and Combating Violence against Women in the Family. Criminal Code of Serbia rape defines as "unlawful sexual activity". Unfortunately, in Serbia, it is still difficult to prove the rape if a victim is not injured. It's harder if there are no DNA materials. Still the Police and legal system do not understand the phenomenon of the rape with an object or by hand.

#### **Acts against sexual freedoms and rape<sup>12</sup>**

Reported and convicted in 2016

Reported cases against sexual freedom – 367

Reported cases of rape -91

Total of 204 convicted for acts against sexual freedoms

Total of 51 convicted for rape

In Serbia there are no specific support envisaged by the State for women, victims of rape. Forensics is conducted only in the secondary health centres (in Belgrade only GAK Narodni front – birth clinic). However, in Vojvodina situation is different. Two pilot “Rape crises centres” have been initiated in 2016 within the project of Provincial Secretariat for health “-Stop - protect-help - Stronger institutional response to gender based violence in Autonomous province of Vojvodina”: one in General hospital “ Dr. Djordje Jovanovic” in Zrenjanin and at the Clinic for gynaecology and

---

<sup>12</sup> The States official statistical records

obstetrics in the Clinical centre of Vojvodina "Betanija" in Novi Sad. Five more centres like this are planned in this project (7 in total) that are aiming to provide health, legal and psycho social support and counselling and therapy for women and girls who have survived sexual violence. According to the information from media, 10 women were admitted as patients to the Clinic for gynaecology and obstetrics in Clinical centre of Vojvodina "Betanija", " under the suspicion that they were raped".<sup>13</sup>. Practice of Association of Roma Novi Becej - SOS Hotline in languages of national minorities showed that these centres haven't recognized specific position of Roma women. In the process of elimination of violence against girls, system of social protection acquired yet another service that is not adequate and is inaccessible for Roma girls in elimination of early, arranged, forced and child marriages. According to experiences of the Association of Roma Novi Becej, problem in providing specific support to adolescent, underage girls, is not envisaged through innovative approach and it is not inclusive. Problem of early, arranged, child marriages are still perceived from the perspectives of the 'traditional rule among Gypsies', so claiming that 'the rape' happened it is more difficult to do when supporting Roma adolescent girls.

The general concern related to provisioning services to women and adolescent girls victims of rape or sexual assault is that procedures differ if the person is known or unknown perpetrator. If it is unknown there is more sympathy and the process goes much faster. If perpetrator is known there is the high risk of secondary victimization and accusations of victims that she was also responsible of that not giving enough attention that influence on later discards of evidences.

Also there is problem in giving testimonies. Victims are obliged to give several statements, firstly to the NGO, then the Police, Centre for Social Work, then to the public prosecutor and then to testify in courts. If they are referred to some specialized institutional service she needs to give her testimony again (Safe Houses, Rape Crises centres etc.). This has very negative and traumatic influence on underage girls and adolescent girls increasing their fear and shame of the trauma they had experienced.

It is important to mention that Rape crises centres in Vojvodina are managed by the AP Vojvodina government and by the Centre for Support of Women from Kikinda as their major partner that is currently applying for international funds to support further work and capacities building of doctors and nurses that will provide such services. It is not possible to determine the financial support of the Vojvodina Government related to the Crises Centres.

---

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/srbija.73.html:651426-Centar-za-zrtve-silovanja-Nasilje-cesto-prethodi-zlocinu>