

RESEARCH ON THE BARRIERS OF ROMA WOMEN'S ACCESS TO JUSTICE IN FOUR COUNTRIES

Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Romania

JUSTROM

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August 2022

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GLOSSARY

■ The following glossary explains seven key terms that are included in the report.

“Access to justice”:

The notion of access to justice obliges states to guarantee each individual’s right to go to court or before an alternative dispute resolution body, to obtain a remedy if it is held that the individual’s rights have been violated. It is an essential right, representing a pre-requisite so that individuals can enforce other rights¹.

The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women established six elements of access to justice which are inter-connected and key for a justice system responsive to gender: justiciability; availability; accessibility; good quality; accountability and the provision of remedies for victims².

The right of access to justice for women is essential to the realisation of all the rights protected under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. It is a fundamental element of the rule of law and good governance, together with the independence, impartiality, integrity and credibility of the judiciary, the fight against impunity and corruption, and the equal participation of women in the judiciary and other law implementation mechanisms.³

“Women”: Includes girls under the age of 18.⁴

“Gender”: The socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men.⁵

“Discrimination against women”: Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment, or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.⁶

“Violence against women”: Violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.⁷

“Domestic violence”: All acts of physical, sexual, psychological or economic violence that occur within the family or domestic unit or between former or current spouses or partners, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the victim.⁸

“Gender-based violence against women”: Violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately.⁹

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1. [Handbook on European Law relating to access to justice – Council of Europe and European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights](#)
 2. [Women’s Access to Justice: A Guide for Legal Practitioners, Council of Europe, 2018](#)
 3. [General recommendation on women’s access to justice](#)
 4. Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, art. 3f.
 5. *Ibidem*, art. 3c.
 6. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, art. 1.
 7. Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, art. 3a.
 8. *Ibidem*, art. 3b.
 9. *Ibidem*, art. 3d.

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE REPORT

■ This report represents one of the activities of the Joint European Union and Council of Europe Programme “Roma Women’s Access to Justice” (JUSTROM3). The aim of the programme was to address multiple discrimination and improve related access to justice of Roma women by supporting the empowerment of Roma women, enhancing professional resources used at national level by the judiciary, law enforcement and NGOs/human rights advocates regarding the application of anti-discrimination standards with a focus on multiple discrimination, gender equality and Roma women, and by increasing synergies between local, regional, national and international stakeholders. The programme was implemented until February 2022 in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Romania.

■ This report incorporates and summarises the most important findings of the four national research reports from Romania, Bulgaria, Italy and Greece on the “Roma Women’s Access to Justice” (JUSTROM3) Programme, which set out to explore and identify the barriers which Roma women face while accessing justice and to document their challenges and needs with regards to access to justice. It draws on data from interviews, focus groups and questionnaires with Roma women, Roma and pro-Roma civil society organisations, and state actors. The purpose of this report is to identify and analyse the main factors contributing to the multiple interconnected inequalities, discrimination in accessing justice and social services and violence against Roma women.

■ Four key questions were subject to research in all project countries, namely:

1. What is the position of the Roma in national legislation and policy? Is there a specific regulation or policy focusing on Roma women?
2. What mechanisms are in place to access to justice and social services? Do Roma women tend to face discrimination in the process of accessing justice mechanisms and social services?
 - ▶ identity documents/legal status
 - ▶ legal information and empowerment
 - ▶ legal aid and courts
 - ▶ State legal/human rights institutions of Roma Women
 - ▶ health care
 - ▶ education
 - ▶ employment
3. What is the current perception of Roma women of the process of accessing justice and social services? (health care, education, identity documents/legal status and employment)
4. What are key barriers and needs of Roma women in order to facilitate their access to justice and social services and legal status? (health care, education, identity documents/legal status and employment)

■ In addition, two underlying themes emerged from the main four questions: discrimination in accessing justice and barriers to accessing justice. These themes point to three main barriers: firstly, the prevalence of discrimination against Roma women in the project countries; secondly, the administrative challenges, such as the complex procedures that constrain access to rights and social services for Roma women; and thirdly, the lack of trust in the public authorities and institutions.

■ To that end, the report presents several key issues that emerged from the research: barriers to accessing documentation (birth registration and identification), employment and education, access to courts, legal information, empowerment and violence against women.

■ Although the degree and impact of discrimination may vary in different contexts, and different actors attribute different causes for it, the report explores how interviewees perceived and experienced discrimination as a factor exacerbating the risk for restricted access to justice.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION

As an inherent aspect of the rule of law, access to justice also represents a fundamental requirement of any democratic society. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union guarantees the right to an effective remedy, to a fair trial and legal aid¹⁰ to those who lack sufficient resources.

The right to a fair trial and the right to an effective remedy set forth by Article 6 and 13 of the European Convention on Human Rights are encompassed by the broader concept of access to justice, which refers to the various elements leading to appropriate redress against the violation of a right, such as information on rights and procedures, legal aid, legal representation, legal standing or general access to courts.

The first international binding instrument explicitly referring to access to justice is the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union within which Article 67.4 stipulates that :“the Union shall facilitate access to justice, in particular through the principle of mutual recognition of judicial and extrajudicial decisions in civil matters.”¹¹

The Agency for Fundamental Rights of the European Union (FRA) describes the concept of access to justice as a concept that includes the following elements: the right to an effective remedy; the right to a fair hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial body previously established by the law; the right to be advised, defended and represented; and the right to legal aid for those who lack sufficient resources.¹²

It is important to underline that the notion of access to justice is not limited to judicial bodies, but includes alternative dispute settlement mechanisms, such as quasi-judicial procedures available before some equality bodies and national human rights and ombudsman institutions. As clarified by the European Court of Human Rights, these mechanisms are perfectly valid as long as their decisions may ultimately be supervised by a judicial body and conform to a general requirement of fairness.¹³

Each element of access to justice, understood as a general concept, is faced with several obstacles that prevent equal access to justice. For some categories of people, these barriers – whether societal, social or legal – are harder to overcome. It is therefore necessary to raise awareness of the different types of barriers to access to justice and to recommend means to address them.¹⁴

The effective enjoyment of rights by individuals is too often hampered by both practical and legal obstacles. The lack of legal information, the lack of trust in the authorities and the incomplete legal framework applicable to specific situations significantly contribute to the persistence of barriers to access to justice.

Women’s access to justice is in the focus of the attention of the Council of Europe and other international bodies, such as the Committee of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)¹⁵ and the European Union.

Prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination, hate speech and violence against Roma and Travellers (“antigypsyism”) were tackled notably through the adoption by the Council of Europe of Committee of Ministers’ Recommendation to member States on improving access to justice for Roma and Travellers in Europe (CM/Rec (2017)10) and through technical co-operation in Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Romania, namely the implementation of three phases of the Joint European Union and Council of Europe Programme “Roma Women’s Access to Justice” (JUSTROM).¹⁶

ABOUT ROMA WOMEN

“Roma people are the largest ethnic minority in the European Union (EU) and among the most deprived, facing social exclusion, discrimination and unequal access to employment, education, housing and health.”¹⁷

10. Please see Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2012/C 326/02), art.47.

11. Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, Equality and non-discrimination in the access to justice, Doc. 13740 Report of 31 March 2015.

12. FRA, Access to justice in Europe: an overview of challenges and opportunities, 2011.

13. Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination, Equality and non-discrimination in the access to justice, Doc. 13740 Report of 31 March 2015.

14. Ibid.

15. <https://www.ohchr.org/documents/professionalinterest/cedaw.pdf>

16. Human rights, democracy and the rule of law, Activity Report, French edition: Points forts 2018.

17. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights; Roma survey – Data in focus Poverty and employment: the situation of Roma in 11. EU Member States (http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-roma-survey-employment_en.pdf)

■ “Romani women¹⁸ across Europe face the additional burden of racism, as well as gender discrimination, which pushes them to the margins of their societies.”¹⁹ Low educational achievement, high rates of irregular attendance and school dropouts are all hallmarks of the Romani women and girls educational reality that in turn creates high unemployment rates and poor employment opportunities. All of which deprives them of realistic possibilities for integration and full participation in society.²⁰ In addition, lack of personal documents adds to the low access to education, health care, employment and other related services for Romani women and girls.²¹ As pointed out by the Council of Europe Strategy on the advancement of Romani women and girls (2014-2020), “Romani women and girls are often excluded from consultation and decision-making processes on legislation, policies and programmes, including those that are specifically designed to address their situation. This contributes to a lack of, or a limited perspective on Romani women and girls in policies on gender, social inclusion or Roma which further hinders Romani women’s equal access to resources and their full participation in all spheres of public and private life.”²²

■ Roma women’s activism dates back to the early 1990s, with the emergence of certain movements²³ and associations²⁴ aimed at making Roma women visible. The first step of Roma women’s activism was marked by the First Congress of Roma in the European Union organised with the support of the European Commission, in Seville, Spain, in May 1994, where Roma women from all over Europe discussed their problems for the first time. They stressed the crucial importance of addressing their needs and interests. Thus, the outcome of the meeting was the “Manifesto of Roma Women” that referred to the situation of Romani women in Europe and stressed the need for establishing an access to education as a means of empowering the fight against discrimination and patriarchal rules within and outside the family.²⁵ Over the years, Romani women have participated in many international meetings, events and conferences, such as: the Beijing Plus Five meeting in New York (2000) and the UN World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa (2001). In February 2003, with the help of the Council of Europe, Romani women activists from 18 European countries launched the International Network of Romani Women (IRWN). The initiative to establish IRWN emerged at a meeting in Vienna in 2002, when Romani and non-Romani women from approximately 20 European countries came together to discuss access to health care in Roma communities.²⁶ During the meeting, problems faced by Roma in accessing the health care system and education were identified as being influenced by several drivers such as discrimination, poverty and poor living conditions, coupled with traditional customs (in some Roma communities) that do not allow women to participate in decision-making, often restrict girls’ access to education, and impact health negatively.²⁷

■ The Roma Women’s Forum, held in Budapest in June 2003, served as a platform for Roma women to present their comprehensive policy agenda to senior representatives of regional governments and international agencies, such as donors, international human rights activists, and government representatives from Europe and the United States.²⁸ A day later, the conference “Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future”²⁹ was held, marking the beginning of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015).

This was followed by the first international conference on the rights of Roma women in 2007, “Our Voices Heard” that elaborated on the challenges faced by Roma women, such as: the rights of Roma women, including reproductive rights, the fight against human trafficking and access to public health care, as well as the good practices among policy makers and networks of Roma women across Europe.³⁰ To date, eight conferences have been held to enable Roma women to address issues, on the international stage, that affect them and their families.³¹

18. Romani women is a generic term used to cover all diverse groups of women that associate with the plight of Romani women, such as women belonging to Sinti, Manush, Kale, Dom, Lom, Gypsies, Travellers, Yenish, Beash, Ashkali, Egyptians, and other related groups.

19. Council of Europe; Phenjalipe Strategy on the advancement of Romani women and girls (2014-2020).

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. In 1990, the Gitanas movement (political and social action of Spanish Roma) was the first to emerge.

24. One of the first explicitly Roma women’s organisations was founded in Hungary in 1991, the Gypsy Mother Association.

25. Council of Europe; Phenjalipe Strategy on the advancement of Romani women and girls (2014-2020).

26. Changing Their World 1st Edition, The European Romani Women’s Movement – International Roma Women’s Network, Rita Izsak, The Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) 2008, page 1, available at: <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/building-blocks-romani-womens-movement-europe/#fn27>

27. Ibid, page 2.

28. <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/building-blocks-romani-womens-movement-europe/#fn27>

29. <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/pt/551581468184471377/pdf/101608-WP-Box393261B-PUBLIC-2003-07-01-JDW-Roma-in-an-Expanding-Europe-Challenges-for-the-Future.pdf>

30. <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=0900001680082caf>

31. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/previous-international-roma-women-s-conferences>

■ Despite the continued efforts of Roma women and international organisations to achieve real change in the realisation of Roma women's rights and to strengthen their position in societies, the fact remains that deep-rooted systemic problems still persist.

■ "Roma and Traveller women and girls all around the world are faced with intersectional challenges and multi-dimensional discrimination. The increased awareness of the fact that a person can be exposed to discrimination based on several personal factors or on their intersection, has had a direct impact on international and national anti-discrimination standards and legislation. However, despite the development of targeted measures and the overall achievements of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action³², gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls remain goals unreached in the UN Sustainable Development Agenda 2030³³, and even further out of reach for minority and Roma and Traveller women."³⁴

■ As concluded within the analysis on "Empowerment of Roma and Traveller women: a change under construction – Towards a Roadmap for Advancing Gender Equality of Roma and Traveller Women in Council of Europe member States"³⁵ 2021, the situation of Roma and Traveller women has not advanced over the past decades and "the violations of their human rights are still perpetuated which indicates a need for special legal and/or strategic provisions to ensure efficient protection of the target groups."³⁶

NATIONAL LEGAL FRAMEWORK IN RELATION WITH ANTIDISCRIMINATION

■ The research countries are Council of Europe member States and are parties to the European Convention on Human Rights, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and the European Social Charter. All research countries are subject to scrutiny by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), which monitors racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, intolerance and discrimination. In its monitoring visits and reports, ECRI closely examines the situation of Roma. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)³⁷ accompanied by its optional protocol has been ratified³⁸ by all four project countries, as has the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention)³⁹, with the exception of the Republic of Bulgaria, which has signed the latter, but not ratified it.

■ In addition to the above-mentioned two crucial conventions, all of the project countries have anti-discrimination legal frameworks.

■ In the Republic of Bulgaria, legal guarantees for equality and equal treatment of women and men are contained in the Bulgarian legislation currently in effect – the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Labour Code, the Social Security Code, the Protection against Discrimination Act, the Social Assistance Act, the Employment Stimulation Act, the Protection against Domestic Violence Act, the State Employee Act, and a number of other special and sector laws.⁴⁰ According to the Protection against Discrimination Act⁴¹, direct and indirect discrimination on any basis is prohibited. The Gender Equality Act regulates the implementation of the state policy on equality between women and men and it facilitates the alignment of the national legislation with EU standards and international legal acts in the field of equality between women and men, to which Bulgaria is a party. The document also regulates the bodies and the mechanisms of implementation of an integrated government policy on gender equality and specifies government responsibilities.⁴² The Bulgarian National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma 2021-2030 includes a special chapter dedicated to the empowerment of women and gender equality. It envisages specific actions aimed at improving access to justice and legal aid, as well as achieving gender equality and empowerment.

32. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/BDPfA%20E.pdf>

33. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

34. Empowerment of Roma and Traveller women: a change under construction – Towards a Roadmap for Advancing Gender Equality of Roma and Traveller Women in Council of Europe member states, Dr. Zora Popova, Council of Europe, September 2021 page 5, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/empowerment-of-roma-and-traveller-women-a-change-under-construction-to/1680a4bd40>

35. Ibid, page 45 and 46.

36. Ibid.

37. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cedaw.aspx>

38. <https://indicators.ohchr.org/>

39. <https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>

40. Equality policy (government.bg)

41. https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/7046/file/Bulgaria_anti-discrimination_act_2003_2006_am.pdf

42. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/ESCR/RighttoWork/Bulgaria.pdf>

■ In the Italian legal system, the general concept of a minority is linked to linguistic peculiarity and finds its foundation in Article 6 of the Constitution: “The Republic protects linguistic minorities with appropriate regulations.” The Law no. 482 of 15 December 1999, recognizes and protects 12 linguistic minorities linked to the concept of “territoriality.” This principle excludes the Roma minority from the law since it is a “widespread minority” without a recognizable territorial concentration⁴³. The Legislative Decrees no. 215 of 9 July 2003 that transposes the Directive 2000/43/EC for the equal treatment of people regardless of race and ethnic origin⁴⁴ and no. 216 of 9 July 2003⁴⁵ that transposes the Directive 2000/78/EC for equal treatment in the field of employment and working conditions, regardless of disability, religion, personal beliefs, from age or sexual orientation, were the first laws in Italy to regulate discrimination on multiple grounds. The Legislative Decree no. 215/2003 in Article 1 foresees equal treatment between persons “irrespective of race and ethnic origin, providing the necessary measures to ensure that differences in racial or ethnic origin are not a cause of discrimination”. On a similar note, Article 1 of the Legislative Decree no. 216/2003 foresees equal treatment between persons “regardless of religion, personal beliefs, disability, age and sexual orientation, with regard to employment and working conditions, taking the necessary measures so that these factors do not cause discrimination”. Legislative Decree 150/2011 harmonizes the anti-discrimination procedure, providing for the summary procedure for all cases relating to discrimination, with the exception of discrimination action based on gender in the workplace, which is regulated with the Equal Opportunities Code (EOC). At the same time, multiple discrimination is covered by the Motion no. 1/00243, unanimously adopted by the Parliament on 15 October 2019, which deals with multiple discrimination against women with disabilities in Italy, with regard to the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Due to the ratification Law no. 18/2009, Article 6 “Women with disabilities” of the Convention is part of the Italian legal system stating that “States Parties recognise that women and girls with disabilities are subject to multiple discrimination, and in this regard shall take measures to ensure the full and equal enjoyment by them of all human rights and fundamental freedoms”. Motion no. 1/00243 of 2019⁴⁶ notes that the Italian Government should, inter alia, “always take into account multiple discrimination affecting minors and women with disabilities and the seriousness of the consequences it entails for their lives and, consequently, to ensure that they are always integrated in the implementation of public policies, actions and measures on the subject of gender equality as well as those relating to disability”. The National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti (RSC)⁴⁷ is a strategic guiding tool for addressing issues on the inclusion of Roma people. It aimed to ensure the policy framework necessary for concrete initiatives on Roma, Sinti and Caminanti social inclusion and integration in the course of almost a decade (2012–2020). UNAR⁴⁸ acts as Focal Point for this Strategy, which was articulated around four axes of intervention: home, health, education and work. This Strategy did not entail an explicit intersectional approach, but it adopted a gender approach that took into consideration the “double discrimination” faced by Roma women.

■ In Romania the Government Ordinance (GO) no. 137/2000⁴⁹ regulates the prevention and sanctioning of all forms of discrimination. The GO transposes the provisions of Directive no. 2000/43/CE, including the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin, as well as of Directive no. 2000/78/CE, establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation. GO no. 137/2000 protects all individuals regardless of their status. It contains detailed provisions on discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and it prescribes sanctions applicable in case these legal provisions are breached. Law no. 178/2018 regulates the issue of equality and equal treatment between women and men. In the consolidated version under Article 4, a new section was introduced, defining gender-based violence and including forced marriages and forced sterilisation as forms of violence. The law on gender-based violence no. 217/2003 republished in 2020

43. Circuiti della Separazione (Separation Paths), Catania D. Serini A, Armando Editore, UNAR, Roma. 2011.

44. Decreto Legislativo 9 luglio, 2003 n. 215. Attuazione della direttiva 2000/43/CE n.215 per la parità di trattamento tra le persone indipendentemente dalla razza e dall'origine etnica. (Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 186 12 agosto 2003), 9 luglio 2003.

45. Decreto Legislativo 9 luglio 2003, n. 216. Attuazione della direttiva 2000/78/CE per la parità di trattamento in materia di occupazione e di condizioni di lavoro. (Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 187, del 13 agosto 2003), 9 luglio 2003.

46. <http://aic.camera.it/aic/scheda.html?core=aic&numero=1/00243&ramo=C&leg=18>

47. <https://www.lavoro.gov.it/temi-e-priorita/infanzia-e-adolescenza/focus-on/integrazione-rom-sinti-e-caminanti/Documents/Strategia%20Nazionale.pdf>

48. UNAR is the Italian Office against Racial Discrimination which is based within the Prime Minister's Office (Department of Equal Opportunities). It mainly is a promotion-type and legal support body. Since its inception in November 2004, it aims to promote equal treatment and tackle racial and ethnic discrimination. This Equality Body also seeks to monitor the impact of discrimination on men and women. Its mandate also covers the relationship between race/ethnic origin and other forms of discrimination, such as those based on culture or religion. Its area of competences covers all those mentioned in Legislative Decree 215/2003 (following Directive 2000/43): employment and occupation, social protection, including social security and healthcare; social advantages; education; access to and supply of goods and services which are available to the public, including housing. Since 2011 UNAR has been the National Contact Point for social inclusion of Roma people.

49. Please see Government Ordinance no. 137/2000 on preventing and sanctioning all forms of discrimination.

focuses on preventing and combating domestic violence. It defines domestic violence and its different forms, as well as the types of potential victims, including children and children in care. It brings in provisions to create special social services tailored to the victims of domestic violence, and the protection order. The Law makes a connection with Article 12 (5) of the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), namely that culture, custom or tradition is not to be used as an excuse or a justification for any form of violence against women. The Government's Strategy for the inclusion of Romanian citizens belonging to the Roma minority for the period 2012-2020 aimed at ensuring the social and economic inclusion of Romanian citizens belonging to the Roma minority, by implementing integrated policies in the fields of education, employment, health, housing, culture and social infrastructure. The strategy was based on nine key principles including the principle of equal opportunities and gender awareness, non-discrimination and respect for human dignity. In light of the principle of equal opportunities and gender awareness, having in mind the central role of women within their families, the Strategy proposed measures to increase their level of education, qualifications and employment rate, involving them in the education of children and other activities to determine the increase of the welfare level of families, family cohesion and the development of future generations. Law no.2/2021 on the measures for preventing and combating antigypsyism, recognises the hate against Roma as a special form of racism. It prohibits, *inter alia*, the establishment of associations with a clear antigypsyist agenda, and the use of public antigypsyist symbols classifying them as criminal offences.

■ In Greece, the Law no. 4443⁵⁰ of 2016 concerning "equal treatment" forbids any form of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnic or national belonging, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. The law creates a clear and legally robust application of the principle of equal treatment in accordance with the case law of the European Court of Justice.⁵¹ The National Strategic Framework for Roma 2011-2020⁵² addressed the key areas of education, employment, healthcare and housing. It also included a territorial approach with four main geographical regions where the largest number of Roma population was concentrated. The primary objective of the Action Plan was to lift social exclusion conditions and to create the conditions for the social inclusion of the Roma. This strategic objective was served by three individual general targets: ensuring and guaranteeing accommodation; development of a supportive network of social intervention (in the sectors of employment, education, health and social inclusion); and development of social dialogue and consensus through social empowerment and participation of Roma themselves.

■ All EU member states are about to design and adopt new policy frameworks on the inclusion of their Roma citizens, considering the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation for 2020-2030, issued in October 2020.

50. Please see: Law 4443/2016 (Official Gazette, A', 232, 9-12-2016).

51. <https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/eighth/Inputs%20Member%20States/Greece.pdf>

52. http://www.esfhellas.gr/elibrary/roma_strategy_en.pdf

METHODOLOGY

As part of the Joint European Union and Council of Europe Programme “Roma Women’s Access to Justice” (JUSTROM3), national consultants from all four project countries – Bulgaria, Greece, Italy and Romania – have been collecting data in the field and online in nine JUSTROM locations: in three different cities in Greece, two cities in Italy, Bulgaria and Romania from the end of October 2021 until the beginning of February 2022. The collected data served as the basis for national research reports. Research instruments were developed, namely as guides for focus groups and interviews and questionnaires for the research, in all project countries.

■ The final research report processes three important topics for Roma women – the issue of existing mechanisms to access justice and social services, discrimination in accessing justice and barriers to accessing justice.

■ Qualitative research methods were used for documentation, including semi-structured interviews and facilitated focus groups with key stakeholders (national human rights institutions, NGOs, Roma rights informal groups, government officials and Roma women), accompanied by desk-based research and questionnaires. A qualitative approach was adopted in order to provide an in-depth view and to obtain a detailed picture about Roma women’s perceptions while accessing justice. The fact that many Roma do not openly declare their ethnicity could have represented a significant obstacle to quantitative research, since the real number of Roma people in each country is just an estimation, sometimes far from reality.

■ The national reports of the four project countries⁵³ were prepared through qualitative research of the national legal framework related to equality, non-discrimination, women’s rights and violence against women accompanied by documenting discrimination challenges of Roma women through semi-structured interviews and facilitated focus groups in two locations in Bulgaria (Plovdiv and Veliko Tarnovo), two locations in Italy (Naples and Rome), three locations across Greece, Athens (Halandri and Ilion), Thessaloniki (Dendropotamos) and Xanthi (Drosero and Kimeria) and two locations in Romania (Bucharest and Iasi). The focus of the national reports was exploring in-depth the multidimensional discrimination faced by Roma women when accessing the States’ justice mechanisms to respond to discrimination in accessing identity documents/legal status, housing, health, education, employment, hate crime and domestic violence. Therefore, the national reports were based on two research assumptions: firstly, Roma women facing discrimination when accessing justice mechanisms to respond to discrimination in accessing identity documents/legal status, housing, health, education, employment, and to hate crime, domestic violence, etc.; and secondly, Roma women facing lack of legal empowerment and basic legal knowledge which prevents them from accessing justice.

The final research report was made by unifying the national reports and emphasising the parts that were the most significant for the three underlined topics. When developing this report, most attention was given to the voices of Roma women and girls from the four project countries, Bulgaria, Italy, Greece and Romania.

53. Bulgaria, Italy, Greece and Romania.

FINDINGS

Discrimination in accessing justice mechanisms and social services

■ The Republic of Bulgaria has introduced legal mechanisms for the provision of access to justice and legal aid. The system for legal aid is organised and co-ordinated by the National Bureau for Legal Aid and the regional Bar Associations. Legal aid is provided by qualified lawyers who are registered in the Bureau for Legal Aid. National legislation does not attach a common level of protection to the constitutional right of access to a lawyer and to the right to access to legal aid to all persons. The main challenge is the implementation and the interpretation of this legislation and the resulting concrete policies by state institutions and law-enforcement authorities.

■ The legal mechanisms, however, have not been adequately adjusted to the needs of vulnerable women, especially women from different ethnic backgrounds. Practice and findings from the present survey reveal a lack of fair access to the legal aid system in the country.

■ The survey reveals that women may have inadequate information concerning their rights, or that they fear social censure or reprisals, or that victims with limited resources fear the cost and complexity of the judicial process; there is a lack of trust in the police and judicial authorities; the authorities are insufficiently alert to or aware of offences involving racism.⁵⁴

■ In Italy, there are several possibilities to appeal to the courts to defend fundamental rights. Firstly, there is the possibility of appealing directly to the courts' local branches. Another way is with the help of an intermediary such as NGOs, attorneys or a trade union to appeal to the courts' local branches or to UNAR, the Italian equality body or sectorial NGOs. These procedures for the most marginalised are not so simple, requiring a great deal of commitment and care from legal experts.

■ In Greece the members of the Roma communities cannot overcome the existing structural barriers when accessing justice. This is mainly the result of dysfunctionalities in the existing supporting mechanisms – like free legal aid, coupled with the illiteracy and poverty that characterise some of members of the Roma communities.

“The system of justice operates, but only for those that can understand it and meet its formal or informal requirements”.

“Roma are not sufficiently informed about their rights, but this is not where the problem is mainly located; the problem is that existing institutions operate in ineffective way, and they do not sufficiently support the victims”.

Focus group participants

■ Mechanisms specifically targeting Roma populations include the **Roma centres** operating within the municipal social centres. The social centres have been established in 2016 to provide support services to all citizens, prioritising those that live under the poverty level, migrants, people with disabilities, etc. Roma centres operate in some municipalities across the country within the social centres in order to provide services to Roma, such as support services, empowerment of women, assistance to access social benefits, etc.⁵⁵ At the current time 66 such centres operate across the country. However, the data collection process showed that most Roma centres do not perform their full role but mainly assist beneficiaries in their access to social benefits.

■ In Romania, there are provisions for legal assistance in place, named public legal aid⁵⁶. These provisions are regulated by the professional statute of the lawyers adopted in 2011. This type of legal assistance is accessed only through very specific conditions, such as proof of income. This mechanism of legal assistance can be provided in cases of discrimination, if they are brought before civil courts. It does not cover discrimination cases brought before the quasi-judicial body, the National Council for Combating Discrimination.

54. Guilty by Default, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 2020, available at: [2020-angelova-kukova--guilty-by-default--discrimination-against-roma-in-the-criminal-justice-system-in-bulgaria-EN.pdf](https://www.bghelsinki.org/2020-angelova-kukova--guilty-by-default--discrimination-against-roma-in-the-criminal-justice-system-in-bulgaria-EN.pdf) (bghelsinki.org)

55. https://www.mou.gr/elibrary/Guide_KentraKoinothtas2016.pdf.

56. Notes from the focus group with stakeholders, held in January 2022.

Identity documents/legal status

■ National reports show that majority of the Roma women that participated in the research have identity documents and regulated legal status or at least did not report any challenges in the process of acquiring them. This is mostly due to the fact that the majority of respondents who participated in the survey are either from settlements that are legally regulated, or they had help from mediators in the process of obtaining documents.

■ In the Republic of Bulgaria, it is almost impossible to provide information regarding permanent address registration and issuance of identity documents of Roma. This is due to the fact that most of them are living in segregated neighbourhoods that have never been regulated. In addition to this, illegal house dwellings represent a significant obstacle in the process of obtaining identity documents. Another set of key challenges are the lack of birth certificates and the renewal of already-expired identity documents. Currently, there is no reliable information available on the extent to which Roma are affected by this inaction of the Bulgarian government.

■ Out of 17 Roma⁵⁷ women that have participated in the research, none of them reported facing similar challenges. They all possess some kind of identity document, such as an identity card or a passport. However, NGO experts highlighted the lack of identification documents in the wider Roma population as an ongoing challenge. They have stated that, in the vast number of cases in which they gave legal consultations, the lack of identity documents was the cause of problems regarding access to social services, health and education and employment services.

■ According to the research findings highlighted in the report on Italy, there is a significant difference between the participants residing in Rome and those residing in Naples regarding documents/legal status issues. Most Roma women residing in Rome have their documents, probably due to a change of pace in access to the City Registry Office, whereas many women residing in Naples struggle to obtain their identity documents due to various administrative reasons. According to the results from the two locations, more than 20% of the respondents in Naples have no identification documents, compared to 10% of respondents in Rome who do not possess any kind of identification documents. The reason for the inability to provide documents is mainly the complexity of the procedures and the indifferent and inert attitude of the officials in charge, both within the municipality and the police headquarters.

■ In Greece, none of the Roma women that participated in focus-group discussions and interviews had any problems with their identity documents and legal status, but some reported that they had come across other Roma persons with no documents. Local experts in Athens have come across more than 100 cases of Roma with all their ancestors born in Greece that have either no identity documents or incomplete documents. The findings showed that Roma with no valid identity documents face multiple barriers regarding their access to their rights: they risk being arrested during police controls; they cannot obtain a health insurance number; they cannot issue a VAT number; they face difficulties in accessing public services, including hospitals and courts; they cannot obtain any social benefit; they cannot get vaccinated against COVID-19, and many others.

In 2016, Maria gave birth in a public hospital in Athens. Because she had no identity documents – as both her mother and grandmother did not have them either – the hospital staff called the prosecutor, who ordered that the newborn remain in the hospital until her mother could obtain identity documents. After some months, Maria still had no documents, as she received no support, and she could not figure out how to have them issued. Therefore, her baby was transferred to a public institution and later was given to a foster family. Maria never got her child back.

Case of a Roma women from Greece

■ In Romania, 70 % of the Roma women interviewed stated that the procedure for obtaining identity documents is clear enough, but 50% of them pointed out that the procedure is very bureaucratic, difficult and limited especially for Roma families from segregated neighbourhoods, because of the absence of property papers which are necessary to obtain identity documents. The Romanian legislation for obtaining identification cards is one of the few in the world which conditions the legal status to property ownership. In order to get IDs, Roma women need to prove that either they owned, rented or have been accepted by a house owner to live in their property. 90 % of the Roma women interviewed stated that they did not encounter any issues in the process of obtaining

57. Results obtained from the questionnaires.

IDs and all of them reported owning identity documents. However, in accessing different public services, 90% of them felt discriminated against due to their place of residence in Roma neighbourhoods.

Legal information and empowerment

■ In Bulgaria, only 37% of Roma are aware of at least one equality body⁵⁸, 84% of Roma do not know of any organisation offering support or advice to people who have suffered discrimination, and about 86% do not even report discrimination when they encounter it. As it was reported, the situation has improved slightly with the implementation of the JUSTROM Programme. Roma women are more inclined to ask the local programme facilitators for help and benefit from the free legal consultations offered through the programme. Some of them have participated in the empowerment and awareness-raising campaigns organised locally by the JUSTROM Programme, which made them feel better equipped to address the discrimination they experience.

■ All of the interviewed Roma women stated that the increasing mistrust toward public institutions and the belief that there will be no change are the main reasons for not reporting cases of discrimination. In cases of encountered discrimination, almost 55% of those interviewed shared the negative experience only with family and close friends. Only 8% of the respondents turned to a lawyer. Discriminating practices and extremely negative attitudes from public authorities were reported by all the respondents, especially the respondents from Plovdiv. They shared their perception that it is happening due to their ethnic identity and gender. However, none of them are willing to file a complaint in cases of discrimination because they do not believe it will be effective. Lack of fluency in the Bulgarian language also presented a severe challenge in understanding instructions and guidance in filling in documents for accessing public services.

■ In Italy, none of the Roma women that participated in the research reported any kind of challenges towards obtaining legal information and empowerment programmes. On the other hand, most of the interviewed stakeholders showed appreciation for the legal clinic initiated by JUSTROM, which seems to be able to train paralegal practitioners who effectively assist women in these kinds of procedures.

“Legal information in Italy is often very complex even for acculturated citizens themselves, having very articulated legislation, even between the national and regional level, and an equally complex application and regulation.

Listening to the participants reveals the need for mediation figures and paralegal assistance for even the most trivial situations. The JUSTROM project in Rome and Naples achieved remarkable results thanks to expert mediators and interpreters who could interface with the Roma community and inform them about denied civil rights. This has dramatically improved the supported empowerment of the girls and women, who now feel more integrated and have more hope for their children.”

“Stakeholder Focus Group – Italy”

■ In Greece, no institutions identified at either national or local level provided legal information to members of the Roma communities. As a result, most of the respondents reported that they had received legal information only through the JUSTROM Programme. On empowerment, Roma branches of the community centres include in their responsibilities the role to empower Roma women, but they do not usually perform this task.

■ Almost half of the respondents reported that, in interacting with the public authorities, they are being assisted by a relative (sister, brother, child). The rest (almost a quarter) reported being either assisted by their spouse or receive no assistance. A much smaller number receives assistance from civil society organisations. It is very rare to receive assistance from a public authority.

■ None of the Roma women respondents have ever submitted a complaint when faced with discriminatory attitudes. Respondents from Drosero-Xanthi felt more discriminated against and felt negative attitudes from public authorities. They have all reported that they face racism in their daily interactions with public authorities. On the other hand, respondents from Kimeria-Xanthi reported that they have felt less discriminated against.

■ As results showed, the most significant challenges women faced when contacting public authorities were mainly related to forms they did not understand and negative or rude attitudes from the staff. Respondents

58. 86% of Roma do not report cases of discrimination | Център за междуетнически диалог и толерантност АМАЛИПЕ (amalipe.bg)

pointed to local Roma associations as the main mechanism that can offer support or advice to people who have suffered discrimination. Most of them were also aware of at least one equality body, mainly due to their participation in activities of the JUSTROM Programme. All respondents were familiar with “empowerment” as a concept. Some linked it with psychological support and the provision of information, others with power and the need for solidarity among women. They all underlined the need to empower Roma women while some emphasised that there are already Roma women who have been empowered enough and they inspire others. Some of the respondents also emphasised issues that disempowered women: the lack of efficiency of redress mechanisms and of structural change; also, the fact that not many Roma women are involved in the decision-making processes or in programmes that target their communities.

“Not all Roma women are that vulnerable. There are some who are very dynamic. Younger women especially are dynamic, and they can further change and be more empowered.”

[Roma woman, Athens]

■ In Romania, 70% of the interviewed Roma women declared that they have information on anti-discrimination legislation on Roma rights and most of them are familiar with anti-discrimination legislation on women rights, especially on domestic violence.

■ However, when it comes to the point of reporting the discrimination cases, due to the persistent lack of trust in public institutions and the system, they turn to their families and Roma community facilitators or leaders for support to access different services.

Almost all beneficiaries are accompanied by me when they go to the social municipality, to avoid this behaviour. I've observed that when I present myself, where I am from and what I do, how the authorities look at them or talk is different than when they go by themselves. These are the issues that I have observed. I was with a beneficiary, and she told me: “Look! She's changed! How nice she talks now. Before she screamed at me”

Roma woman/Social worker, Bucharest – 42 years old

■ The results from the interviews indicated that 50% of the respondents had encountered some kind of discrimination as adults while accessing public services and just 20% of them had made official complaints. Only one respondent received a positive outcome following her complaint.

Many times, they don't want to file a complaint because if they do, they will be excluded and they will not benefit from any help, they (representatives of authorities) look for issues to not grant their rights.

Roma woman, Bucharest – 43 years old

Legal aid and courts

■ In Bulgaria, the research shows that only a few of the respondents in the survey have had an interaction with the justice system in the country. The majority of Roma women prefer not to undertake lengthy and complex processes because they do not believe that these will effectively impact their lives.

■ In Italy, the results obtained from the research show a slightly different situation. 19% of the interviewed Roma women have had an interaction with criminal justice system, while none of the respondents reported contact with civil courts. The rest (81%), did not report any contacts with the courts. In the criminal field, they all have been assisted by a lawyer, and their relationship with the judges and alternative services to detention has mainly been positive. It seems that the Italian system has a certain clemency regarding young offenders and has structured a system of alternative measures that try to give them a different future, for example, through attendance at vocational training centres. Regarding the possibility of taking legal action, 87.5 % of respondents never thought of starting a legal procedure to protect their rights because they did not trust the Italian justice system. However, the rest of respondents (12.5 %) began legal procedures with the help of a lawyer.

■ In Greece, the research showed that almost all the interviewed Roma women were informed about the free legal aid scheme. Until 2017 Roma with no identity documents were *de facto* excluded from accessing the free

legal aid mechanism, even when trying to begin a court process and obtain identity documents. Their applications were not processed at all, as they did not include an ID or VAT number. This led to the intervention of the Chief Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Greece, who issued a circular that required persons with no identity documents, including stateless persons, to also be entitled to free legal aid.⁵⁹ However, no official data exist on the number of persons that have benefited from the implementation of the circular and none of the respondents had any additional information as to whether this was implemented on all occasions or if there were still problems in accessing free legal aid. Very few respondents experienced going to court, either as witnesses or for administration purposes. All of them have stated that they faced serious difficulties in the process, especially when they had to complete forms and applications. Illiteracy was the main reason for their difficulties, while none received any assistance from the court administration. They all had to either hire a lawyer or ask a literate community member to accompany and assist them.

“Because of the fear that you feel, you cannot talk. Even if you go as a witness, you are shaking. Courts terrify me”

[Roma woman from Thessaloniki]

■ In Romania, there are provisions for legal assistance in place, named public legal aid⁶⁰ which is regulated by the professional statute of lawyers adopted in 2011.

■ It was expressed during the focus group with stakeholders in Bucharest and in three out of ten interviews of Roma women as well, that this type of assistance needs to be better regulated by law and that this does not fully respond to the need for pro-bono and paralegals.

■ Roma women experience various and simultaneous forms of discrimination. Even though most of the Roma women are facing discrimination in accessing their rights and are complaining against violence, they believe that, in their cases, justice will not function correctly or properly.

■ 43.3% of the Roma women interviewed reported having had experiences with the courts, whilst 56.7% stated that they had never been to court. Due to the lack of appropriate legislation and ineffective policies, it seems almost impossible for a victim of intersectional discrimination to prove indirect or direct discrimination without the assistance of a lawyer.

Health care

■ Most Roma women from Bulgaria have reported particularly difficult access to health services. Medical professionals and especially gynaecologists decline to examine Roma women. Their attitude is very negative, and it is not only due to the Roma women lacking medical insurance, but also to discriminatory practices and unequal treatment in hospitals and emergency health care units. Roma women often need to pay “under the table” to obtain a quality health care service. Cases of serious neglect by medical institutions and doctors because of ethnicity of patients were also reported.

“We went to see a doctor when I found out I was pregnant. He established the pregnancy, but then he did not tell us that the baby was not developing. I faced severe health issues followed by an abortion.”

Focus group participant, Veliko Tarnovo

■ One of the reasons for the lack of access to health care is also the higher level of unemployment, or employment in the informal economy, which ultimately results in Roma women lacking health insurance which is a pre-condition for being considered eligible to accessing health care services.

■ In Italy, the situation is far better with regard to access to health services for Roma women. If they do not have the required documents, Roma women have access to the National Health Care Service through the STP

59. Circular of the Special Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Greece, to the President of the Supreme Court of Greece, “Legal aid in citizens of low income based on Law 3226 of 2004”, 11159/2017 of 24 November 2017.

60. Notes from the focus group with stakeholders, held in January 2022.

system (STP meaning Temporarily Present Foreigner – temporary for six months and renewable), which is widely provided, but does not replace all the services accessible via the national health care system. Roma women with regular documents have noticed a clear improvement with respect to access to health care compared to the past. However, some level of discrimination while accessing health care services was reported by 50% of the interviewed Roma women, such as delays, indifference of health professionals and lack of care. The discriminatory attitude of health professionals is mostly related to ethnic identity. On the other hand, 37.4 % of respondents reported having had some bureaucratic difficulties, which they managed to resolve, and 12.6% of the interviewed Roma women did not report particular problems in accessing healthcare.

■ In Greece, the results from the research indicate that most Roma women face verbal abuse and hate speech when contacting health care services. Most stakeholders believe that Roma women may occasionally be treated badly in hospitals, but that they do have adequate access to health services.

■ The experiences of Roma women in accessing health care facilities depend on their age, their location and their visibility as Roma women. Older Roma women are more noticeable and therefore at greater risk of negative treatment. Because many Roma women are unemployed, they do not have social security and medical insurance. Therefore, they receive poorer medical services in comparison to other women with medical insurance. Roma women also experience discrimination and segregation in hospital rooms when giving birth, as they are often put in over-crowded maternity rooms with exclusively other Roma women. Members of the Roma civil society emphasised the fact that the majority of Roma women in their communities do not undertake medical tests and do not go to a doctor unless it is often too late. The main reasons for that are the lack of medical insurance and illiteracy that prevents them from using online platforms to make doctors' appointments.

"I can see it in their faces whenever I am with my mother in a hospital, there is this face of discontent, and they talk to her in a very bad and disrespectful way; this makes me feel very bad for her".

[Roma woman from Thessaloniki]

■ In Romania, Roma women underlined the discrimination in access to health services and quality of the services during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

■ 80 % of the interviewed Roma women do not consider themselves to be healthy or with a moderate health primarily due to the discriminatory attitude of doctors who do not provide quality health services to them. Compared to other health areas, in case of problems with family doctors, almost half of the interviewed Roma women are ready to solve the problem and change doctor if necessary.

It is the second time that I have experienced discrimination with the family doctor and I could change him for another doctor.

Roma woman, Bucharest – 46 years old

Education

■ In Bulgaria, 59% (10) of the Roma women who took part in the survey in Plovdiv had attended school for 8 to 12 years, while 60% of the interviewed Roma women from Veliko Tarnovo had finished either elementary or secondary education.

■ Additionally, respondents have reported ongoing discrimination in schools against Roma children and a lack of inclusiveness, which also represents an obstacle to children's motivation to stay in school.

A participant shared her story.

Her son was deeply saddened and his motivation to attend school was dropping continuously because of ongoing discrimination. The mother met the teacher, then the principal of the school.

"Nothing much has changed since then."

As a result, she is considering moving her child to another school.

■ In Italy, the educational situation of Roma women shows no improvement compared to the past, at least as far as primary education is concerned, with no difference between the two analysed cities. Over the years, the municipalities have maintained their commitment to providing Roma people with primary education. But unfortunately, it is a level of education that does not give any professional qualification and, in fact, precludes access to the world of work, except in many unqualified roles. More than 60% of the participating Roma women have completed compulsory schooling without going on to higher education (high school or university). However, not even 10% of those who have reached this level have pursued their studies with other vocational training or higher education courses or professional courses, including cookery and beauty courses. There are also often inequalities between Roma and their non-Roma schoolmates. These differences are economic, cultural and social, and are reflected in subtle discrimination, sometimes insults and exclusion by other children's families, and marginalisation due to staying in camps, to the point of almost complete inability to socialise with peers.

■ Greece is among the European countries with the smallest percentage of participation of Roma in education. According to a poll by the Hellenic Ministry of the Interior in 2013, up to 54% of parents stated that at least one of their children had never attended school. Even among the children that were enrolled in school, 89% of them had dropped out before they reached 12 years old.⁶¹ Most of the respondents highlighted that since then the mentality of parents has changed and completing formal education is nowadays considered an important step for future employment. Respondents emphasised that now Roma people travel less due to their work than in the past, therefore their children can regularly attend school. Despite improvements, younger women still face prejudicial behaviour from the teaching staff, racism by non-Roma students and poor quality of education. Furthermore, the results from the focus group discussions showed that older women attended school for fewer years than younger ones. Some Roma women were enrolled in the adult "school of second chance" in order to obtain their high school certificate and increase their chances on the job market, as this is a formal requirement for being contracted in the public sector. It was reported that Roma girls were not attending school sufficiently, due to various factors: attendance in ghetto schools; school drop-out because of early marriages; difficult access to school caused by the lack of transportation, when they are enrolled in schools located far away from their settlement/house; and poverty and poor living conditions.

■ For many respondents, quality education still remains a challenge, as many Roma children remain illiterate despite completing primary education. They emphasised the fact that there are no mechanisms to monitor attendance or performance of children in schools and to offer support when needed.

"From some teachers, we were getting disbelief that we were not good with letters because we were Roma."

[Roma activist]

"Nowadays women from our communities want to go to school, while the mentality of our parents has also changed, and they now believe that school is important for their daughters"

[Roma woman, Athens]

■ In Romania, Roma women consider that one of the spheres where they experience discrimination most is education. 50% of respondents declared that more visible and relevant experiences of discrimination with a significant impact occurred inside education institutions, such as school or universities, and from colleagues and educational professionals. It was reported that discrimination occurs mostly during secondary school, followed by university. The main reasons for early school dropouts (high school, university) of Roma women were identified as lack of financial support for attending school, an early romantic relationship or the absence of family support.

Employment

■ Employability of Roma in Bulgaria has a certain correlation with the type of community in which they live. About two thirds of the Roma women included in the research have entered into a traditional marriage, while the rest are in a civil marriage or are single mothers. Roma women from Veliko Tarnovo region living in a mixed neighbourhood reported a higher rate of employment in comparison to Roma women from Plovdiv, whose

61. E. Kokkinou, "Roma Integration in Greece: The Aspect of Education", Policy Brief, http://edutrip.eu/files/policybriefs/No23_ELENA_KOKKINOU_POLICYBRIEF2019.pdf

share of unemployment is extremely high and live in homogenous neighbourhoods. The ratio of interviewed Roma women in terms of employment is 71% unemployed and 29% employed.

■ The reasons indicated for unemployment were insufficient education due to early school dropout, a low level of qualifications and skills, and a lack of adequate assistance from the employment office and social workers. Respondents also pointed out that there is an ongoing and high level of employment discrimination from the municipal authorities and social services and unfavourable treatment because of their ethnicity.

■ The situation with Roma women's employment in Italy is worrisome. Although there were some Roma women in the research sample working for cleaning companies or restaurants, 92.3% do not work at all. All the respondents faced employment challenges due to discrimination, lack of education and the choice to take care of children and family only.

■ 66 % of the interviewed Roma women pointed out the discriminatory attitudes of the employer as the most common barrier in the employment process, 33.3% identified the lack of education and lack of contacts of possible employers as an aggravating circumstance, while 33.3% of the interviewed Roma women chose to take care of children and family. One of the most significant issues for the employment of Roma women is access to recruitment channels. In Italy, except for the extremes, either the more highly-qualified roles, or unskilled jobs, recruitment is often through connections and social networks. Social stigma and fear of theft also play a role in finding even a low-skilled job. In addition, Roma women do not have sufficient digital skills to search for a job. The other challenge they faced was the COVID-19 pandemic, which reduced opportunities for temporary jobs in tourism and catering. One of the issues reported by stakeholders is the risk, in the employment sector, of funding mainly ineffective activities for the benefit of non-Roma, even when the recipients should be Roma women. Here are some of the statements about it:

"We selected a group of ten girls basically from two camps, carried out a social inclusion path, and then got to job inclusion. It was a beautiful project. However, it was challenging because we carried it out during the pandemic."

"Statement of a stakeholder"

■ In Greece, access to employment was considered to be a key issue for 90% of respondents. Low education levels and ethnicity were found to be the key factors that negatively affected access to employment. Most Roma women are convinced that if they were not Roma, they would have much more employment opportunities than they currently have, thus younger women hide their identity when seeking employment.

■ In response to the question "Do you work?", 82% of the respondents answered "No" and 18% "Yes".

■ Most employed women were self-employed – mainly as sellers at local open markets or in the private sector as unskilled workers (cleaners, sellers, etc.). The majority of the respondents depend on income from the social benefits they receive or on their husband's income. Roma women that live in mixed areas (like Ilion, Athens) reported a higher rate of employment in comparison with Roma women from segregated (homogenous) areas (like Xanthi, Drosero).

"All the women I personally know who have managed to overcome segregation and find a job, are hiding their identity"

[Roma woman, Xanthi]

■ In Romania, the lack of reaction from institutions makes the discrimination in employment disturbing and exhausting for Roma women. The reported barriers in accessing the labour market were insufficient education, ethnicity and racial factors. Discrimination at the workplace because of skin colour is the most present discrimination in the labour market (50 %) and that include discrimination from the employer, colleagues and clients and from public and private organisations. For three of the interviewed Roma women, access to labour market was limited due to their low level of education.

Gender-based violence

■ In Bulgaria, gender equality is not a widely-accepted value by the Roma community. However, a process of re-evaluation and re-negotiation of gender roles has started in some of the communities. These changes are particularly visible in the sharing of domestic responsibilities. Educated women openly challenge the traditional division of labour in Roma families and demand that men take a more active role in household chores and childcare responsibilities. According to interviewed NGO experts, in cases of domestic violence the victims do not have any adequate protection, which represents a violation of basic human rights, guaranteed by both Bulgarian and international law. Domestic violence victims often become subject to re-victimisation by institutions. There have also been cases where the lack of a timely intervention or of a co-ordinated approach has led to recidivism, which in turn has put the victim's life and health at risk.

A Roma woman suffered from domestic violence and wanted to submit a complaint. The police officer said: "This is how you live", implying that this is part of the Roma community's lifestyle and culture.

NGO activist, testimonial

■ Initially, a respondent was hesitant to share a domestic violence situation that she had faced, but in the end she opened up and told her story. Eventually she filed a complaint against her husband with the help of an attorney at law. She believes that he has changed, as she has since returned to him, because he became Christian, and his religion impacted his alcohol addiction.

■ In Italy, when it comes to the topic of gender-based violence, the interviewed Roma women and girls did not provide many responses to the researcher's questions. There are no data that could point to the in-depth reasons for this evasiveness. One hypothesis, also due to the answers received, is that in their culture and social context in which they find themselves, this is a sensitive theme, which they are afraid to speak about. All of the interviewed Roma women said that they would report an assault or violence. However, only 50% of them mentioned the institution they would report the assault to, referring to the police. When it comes to awareness of the laws that protect against domestic violence and gender-based violence, none of the interviewed Roma women knew of any.

■ Younger Roma women seem to have a confident attitude towards the opposite sex. 60% of respondents reported that marriage imposes rules on both partners, including mutual respect and the lack of violent behaviour. The interviewed women suggested that the husband should not have a violent attitude, or he would risk a certain social stigma in the community. In cases of conflict between spouses, the intervention as a mediator by the council of elders was also reported by a total of 18.75 % of the respondents. This council still has a role, at least in some communities.

■ Data about violence against women are limited in Greece. The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) of the EU reported in 2012 that 25% of women interviewed in Greece had experienced some incident of domestic violence in their lifetime.⁶² The 2021 report by the Secretariat General for Demography, Family Policy and Gender Equality accepts that Greece "is not in a position to collect reliable and comparable data" in that area. Police reports about domestic violence do not include ethnic, religion or other vulnerability indicators.⁶³ All women involved in the research understood the term gender-based violence as violence against women. None of the women reported experiencing violence, but many had witnessed violence against friends or other community members. All respondents believed that women should not consider violence as normal and that they should react against it. They also asserted that victims should be empowered in order to report such incidents. The majority of the interviewed Roma women reported that the number of incidents of gender-based violence has declined during the last years. Some pointed out that this may simply be because they hear less of such incidents due to the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic reduced social interactions. Others emphasised that women speak up more openly nowadays than they used to in the past. Gender, together with ethnicity, literacy and poverty constitute a combination that makes certain groups of Roma women particularly vulnerable. When asked "whether Roma women report incidents of gender-based violence against them, and why not", there were various replies, but the most important ones could be summarised as follows:

62. FRA, <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/survey-data-explorer-violence-against-women-survey>.

63. "2nd Annual Report for the violence against women", pp. 88-90: <https://isotita.gr/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2h-ethsia-ekthesi.pdf>.

- ▶ **Even when women do leave their partner if they are victims of domestic violence, they almost never report the incident to the authorities, but find support in family and friends.**
- ▶ Almost no Roma woman would go to the police to report an incident or advise the victim to go to the police. Based on their previous negative experiences, women do not believe that they would be treated with respect.
- ▶ Widespread patriarchy and stereotypes that women are second-class citizens makes violence against women acceptable by the rest of the community.

“I cannot think of any support mechanism, because a woman would not go to the police; there is fear”.

[Roma woman from Thessaloniki]

■ In Romania, results from the interviews with Roma women indicate that Roma women do not easily identify gender discrimination and had the tendency to refer more to ethnic discrimination and inequality, and less to gender discrimination (or other criteria). Domestic violence was firmly condemned by 80% of the interviewed women (eight out of ten), while all of them pointed out that the number of complaints against violence in Roma families are increasing.

■ Factors that influenced gender-based violence were connected to the lack of adapted public social and education services for Roma families, lack of childcare facilities in the proximity of Roma inhabited areas, and the mentality of representatives of institutions, as well as the mentality of Roma men to limit women’s autonomy, in particular of mothers.

Conclusion

■ From the available research undertaken in the project countries, as well as from the interviews and focus group discussions with Roma women and stakeholders, it can be concluded that most of the Roma women face discrimination in the process of accessing services that public institutions provide and, with that, face discrimination in accessing their basic rights such as legal status, health, education, social protection services, etc. Although almost 90 % of the Roma women participating in the national research did not report having issues with identity documents, and all of them have regulated legal status, most of them did point to the difficulty of acquiring them. Usually, the only way to obtain identification documents was with the help of an intermediary, most often a representative from the JUSTROM Programme.

■ With respect to healthcare, the situation is not much different. Discriminatory practices such as unequal treatment due to ethnicity, verbal abuse and hate speech are common experiences of Roma women when accessing health care. In Bulgaria and Greece, Roma women have difficulties in accessing health services and one of the main issues is the discrimination and stereotyping by health professionals. Health professionals, especially gynaecologists, often decline to examine Roma women and their attitude is very negative towards Roma women patients. Another issue contributing towards receiving poorer medical services is illiteracy – which prevents Roma women from using online platforms and making an appointment with the doctors – and the unemployment of Roma women that leads to not having medical insurance, that in turn deters Roma women from having regular medical check-ups or tests and from going to a doctor until it is often too late.

■ The situation in Italy with respect to access to healthcare of Roma women is quite different. Roma women without identification documents can access healthcare because the country has developed a health system that offers services regardless of identity issues. However, some level of discrimination while accessing health care services was reported by 50% of the interviewed Roma women, such as delays, indifference of health professionals and lack of care mainly determined by ethnic identity.

■ Access to education continues to be affected by discrimination. All national research reports concluded that all respondents reported negative stereotypes from the teaching staff, racism from other students and poor quality of education. Although the situation is improving for example in Greece, where the mentality of the parents has changed and completing formal education is now considered an important step for future employment, the fact remains that the majority of the Roma women and girls only finish primary education. This has a negative impact on their ability to find jobs, since primary school does not give any professional qualification and, in fact, precludes access to the labour market. The fact remains that quality education still represents a challenge, as many Roma children remain illiterate despite completing primary education.

■ The level of employment of Roma women was found to be very low in all of the project countries. The majority of Roma women are unemployed, with the low level of education and ethnic identity being deciding factors in the selection of employees. The degree of discrimination experienced in the job search process is very disturbing and has led to most Roma women concealing their Roma appearance and identity in order to get a chance at employment. As Roma women, they face discrimination from the beginning of the job seeking process. One of the possibilities is to make these processes transparent or anonymous.

■ To summarise, the most challenging field for the Roma women in all project countries is employment, followed by access to education, where Roma women and girls are subjected to severe forms of discrimination on a daily basis. This is followed by difficult access to health services due to the lack of health insurance, which is a result of the lack of stable work and also ethnicity. Another challenge is the access to police and the courts when it comes to gender-based violence or domestic violence, hindered by the fear of reaction by the police or the mistrust in the court procedures' effectiveness. Finally, the access to identification documents, although not so alarming, was generally presented as difficult and complex in all countries, but without the presence of discriminatory practices.

■ The overall conclusion is that Roma women in all project countries are facing discrimination in the process of accessing public services, due to the stereotypical views of the public employees and their unwillingness to assist the former.

Barriers to accessing justice

Current perceptions

■ Current perceptions of Roma women from all project countries are that accessing justice and social services is extremely difficult.

■ In Bulgaria, the response rate varied depending on the educational background of the respondents, their previous experience and reliance on the community for support. Roma women stated that they do not feel that their access to justice and social services is at the same level as for other Bulgarian citizens. They believe that their ethnicity is among the main reasons for this, including the negative attitudes and prejudices of society towards them. Out of all of the Roma women interviewed, 31% felt that access to public services, including courts and justice systems, was extremely difficult, 31% felt that it was somewhat difficult, 25% described it as difficult, and 13% considered it as not that difficult.

■ For the vast majority of Roma women interviewed in Italy, there is a deep dissatisfaction with access to public offices. The results of the research showed that 46.2% of the respondents assessed the experience with public authorities as very poor, 38.5% as poor and 15.4% of the respondents stated that the experience was average. Regarding access to health services, the perception of 50% of the respondents is that due to the existence of discrimination caused by ethnicity, they often do not receive the necessary health services or else receive them with delay, indifference, and negligence.

"At the hospital, they treat you differently as soon as they understand you are Roma, from your surname or how you speak. They do not give the attention they would give to an Italian. First, they go to the Italians."

Statement of Roma women

■ The perception of Roma women respondents regarding access to school refers to the lack of Roma girls' integration. 17% of the respondents mentioned a sense of exclusion, social stigma and lack of motivation from the teachers.

"Years ago, we were discriminated against at school so much, even by our classmates. A lot of them were afraid of us. They did not teach us the same things as the others."

"They gave me the fifth-grade books, and I was already in the eighth grade."

Statements from a focus group in Rome

■ There is also often inequality between Roma and their non-Roma schoolmates reflected in subtle discrimination, sometimes insults and exclusion by other children's families, and marginalisation due to staying in camps, to the point of an almost complete inability to socialise with peers.

■ The perception of employment among the interviewed Roma women was that it is a challenging achievement for them. This is due to the fact that Roma in Italy are often synonymous with low professional qualifications, precariousness and undeclared work. Unfortunately, most often they are subject to oppressive and discriminatory attitudes from employers, as was the case these past couple of years, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, when most of them had suffered job losses in the restaurant sector, which was not the case with non-Roma employees. In the Neapolitan context, it is difficult for the women interviewed to even imagine getting a regular job, especially the younger ones.

■ In Greece, the research showed that the majority of Roma women faced difficulties when trying to access the justice system and social services. Responses varied depending on location, educational background, age and visibility as Roma. Only a few Roma women felt that they did not face significant barriers when accessing the justice system and social services. However, all Roma women respondents felt that their access to justice and social services had not been on an equal footing with other Greek citizens, due to prejudice and negative attitudes from the authorities, employees, etc. When asked "How difficult is it to access public institutions, including courts and the justice system?", 38% of the interviewed Roma women answered somewhat difficult, 30% stated difficult, 24% not that difficult, and only 8% said that it was very difficult.

■ In Romania, the majority of Roma women are affected by discrimination, which negatively affects their self-esteem. Half of them mentioned that discriminatory experiences motivated them to demonstrate that they can be successful. Two thirds of the interviewed Roma women mentioned differences between Roma women, mainly belonging to different groups of Roma and being relevant inside community initiatives.

■ In both cities, Bucharest and Iasi, the community public centres and informal group supports of Roma women were mentioned as positive models of intervention for improving access to justice and services for Roma women. 50 % of the interviewed Roma women stated that the possibility to represent themselves in the procedures related to complaints of discrimination and being taken seriously was of great importance. 70 % of them also considered important that Roma women and their families could avoid stereotypes by taking part in campaigns on successful and positive models in addressing justice and social support for Roma women. Community initiatives, sharing experiences and information on different issues focused on Roma needs, were considered as crucial factors in empowering Roma women.

There are women who are afraid. Let's encourage them, let's support them and motivate them to go to the courts for multiple discrimination, to have more information about the types of discrimination and how to petition.

Roma women, Bucharest – 48 years old

Identified barriers

■ In Bulgaria, the research showed that one barrier for Roma women in accessing justice and social services is the lack of fluency in the Bulgarian language. There is a higher chance for a woman to have better access if she clearly understands the process and can read through guidance and forms. An equal share of Roma women believed that their access was restricted because of a lack of help from local public servants and an intolerant attitude towards their ethnicity. Furthermore, financial difficulties were also mentioned as a barrier to accessing legal services and the justice system. There was a strong belief that these services and proceedings are expensive, lengthy and non-productive. The respondents felt most discriminated against by employees at the municipalities, followed by professionals working in social services and labour offices, and finally by professionals in educational institutions. The system's inconsistencies and unwillingness of municipal staff to support Roma women lie at the core of the lack of coherent services, such as psychological and social help, legal aid, shelters, and job seeking advice to women and especially Roma women.

■ In Italy, the most severe barrier to accessing healthcare is related to discrimination from healthcare professionals. 40% of the interviewed Roma women had suffered from discriminatory attitudes such as delays, indifference by health professionals and lack of care due to identification of their origin by surname or appearance. All respondents believed that being recognised as Roma, even if they did not declare it, represented an obstacle in accessing health services. The voices of the interviewed women and girls are the ones that report what the

barriers are to their continued education and increased professional qualifications. All of them have received insults and some marginalisation in compulsory schooling. They all reported frightened classmates and teachers who demanded the bare minimum from them. Because of that, they did not find it easy to continue their studies. In addition, another Roma cultural barrier persists. Almost 70% of the respondents declared that their early marriage, traditional or official, has interrupted their commitment to continue their studies or to look for work. When it comes to identity documents, the first barrier to be removed is the social stigma suffered by those who live in the camps in Italy. As soon as public employees understand women are Roma, they view them with great suspicion. Many women living in Naples reported that they always need help from a mediator to get access to documents when they go to public offices. In addition, regardless of their legal status, they find it hard to apply for financial aid, such as bonuses or loans. Finally, many reported having mainly language-related difficulties, as they do not know enough Italian. The irregularity of documents and how it affects many young Neapolitan women obviously constitutes a barrier to getting a job. This includes identity documents and other health and administrative documents, driving licences, and health permits for working in restaurants. More subtle and therefore pernicious is the question of ethnicity. Although officially unclassifiable in identity documents, the surname, accent, or other elements make the women identifiable as Roma, or at least a good percentage believe so. In addition to formal difficulties, many Roma women also find in the public sector hostile attitudes and unwillingness to solve their problems. This situation becomes an insurmountable obstacle for 25% of them. Finally, the low level of education means that job opportunities are very limited. Regarding the discrimination or insulting expressions that they suffer from, 91.7 % of the interviewed women and girls declared that they let it go with a sense of powerlessness.

■ In Greece, the main barriers Roma women face when accessing justice mechanisms and social services are related to a lack of sufficient information and negative attitudes from staff, including an unwillingness to help. These factors overlap with structural barriers – like illiteracy, insufficient knowledge of the Greek language and poverty. The majority of Roma women who interact with local authorities and health services face unclear forms and explanations, while a significant proportion also face a lack of desire to help, even negative attitudes and rude behaviour from staff. Many women living in the Xanthi area do not sufficiently understand the Greek language. Moreover, almost all Roma women spoke of negative experiences from the police including an unwillingness to assist, negative attitudes and racial profiling practices. On the issue of violence against women, research has identified the need for primary legal aid and sufficient legal information, empowerment of women and better outreach by the institutions. Moreover, a clear need has been identified for police practices that are not discriminatory but more inclusive and respectful. Civil society organisations shared concerns regarding the barriers Roma with no identity documents and legal status face. They emphasised the need for better information about legal processes, trained lawyers providing legal aid services, sensible employees and amended laws in the direction of easing the process.

■ In Romania, the barriers identified by Roma women are related to access to education and employment. The main reasons for early school dropout are a lack of financial support for attending school, an early romantic relationship and the absence of family support. Discrimination in employment process seems to be the most disturbing and exhausting for Roma women, because of the lack of reactions and resources.

Conclusion

■ The barriers identified by Roma women in all four countries are related to several major issues such as an **insufficient level of education**. Due to the experienced continuous discrimination from education professionals and/or early marriages, respondents did not find it easy to continue their studies; **unemployment** due to several factors: early marriages of Roma women, low level of education resulting in low and insufficient qualifications, ethnicity resulting in low-skilled jobs and mostly part-time work, lack of knowledge of the national language and irregularities in personal documents. **Health services** are conditioned by the possession of social security, which enables Roma women to regularly perform health check-ups. Roma women who are unemployed do not have social security. Therefore, they receive poorer medical services in comparison to other women with medical insurance. Ethnic discrimination is the main reason for poor healthcare service provision from health practitioners. **Insufficient knowledge of the national language** represents the main obstacle in accessing public and social services, applying for and finding a job, as well as **insufficient regulation of the system for free legal aid**, which impacts the access to legal services and the justice and administrative system, having in mind that these services and proceedings are expensive, lengthy and not always successful.

■ Despite the fact that all countries have a solid anti-discrimination legal framework in place, it is still indisputable that Roma women face discrimination in every segment of social life. The mechanisms to access justice exist in all countries, however Roma remain invisible as a distinct category and the existing mechanisms are

not considered sufficient. Roma communities have limited access to equality bodies and compensation mechanisms, and this is reflected in the limited information that Roma women have when it comes to accessing these mechanisms. For this reason, most of them do not feel empowered to look for help outside of the community. The high level of mistrust of Roma women towards local and national authorities, especially municipal institutions and police authorities, indisputably indicates the need to strengthen the capacity of institutions, with a special focus on police officers. There is a need for programmes to address and avoid stereotypes and initiate adapted campaigns for successful and positive role models in addressing the discrimination of Roma women.

CONCLUSIONS

From the available research undertaken in the project countries, as well as from the interviews and focus group discussions with Roma women and stakeholders, it can be concluded that most of the Roma women face discrimination in the process of accessing services provided by public institutions and, with that, face discrimination in accessing their basic rights such as legal status, health, education, social protection services, etc. Although almost 90 % of the Roma women who participated in the national research did not report having issues with identity documents, all of them having regulated legal status, most of them nevertheless pointed to the difficulty in acquiring them. Usually, the only way to obtain identification documents was with the help of an intermediary, most often a representative from the JUSTROM Programme.

■ With respect to healthcare, the situation is not very different. Discriminatory practices such as unequal treatment due to ethnicity, verbal abuse and hate speech are part of common experiences faced by Roma women when accessing health care. In Bulgaria and Greece, Roma women have difficulties in accessing health services and one of the main issues is the discrimination and stereotyping by health professionals. Health professionals, especially gynaecologists, often decline to examine Roma women and their attitude is very negative towards Roma women patients. Another issue which contributes towards receiving poorer medical services is illiteracy – that prevents Roma women from using online platforms and make an appointment with the doctors – and the unemployment of Roma women that leads to not having medical insurance, that in turn deters Roma women from having regular medical check-ups or tests and from going to a doctor until it is often too late.

■ The situation in Italy with respect to access to healthcare of Roma women is quite different. Roma women without identification documents can access healthcare because the country has developed a health system that offers services regardless of identity issues. However, some level of discrimination while accessing health care services was reported by 50% of the interviewed Roma women, such as delays, indifference by health professionals and lack of care mainly determined by ethnic identity.

■ Access to education continues to be affected by discrimination. All national research reports concluded that all respondents reported negative stereotypes by the teaching staff, racism by other students and poor quality of education. Although the situation is improving for example in Greece, where the mentality of the parents has changed and completing formal education is now considered an important step for future employment, the fact remains that the majority of Roma women and girls only finish primary education. This has a negative impact on their ability to find jobs, since primary school does not give any professional qualifications and, in fact, precludes access to the labour market. The fact remains that quality education still represents a challenge, as many Roma children remain illiterate despite the fact that they have completed primary education.

■ With respect to the level of employment of Roma women, in all the project countries it was found to be very low. The majority of Roma women are unemployed, with the low level of education and ethnic identity being deciding factors in the selection of employees. The degree of discrimination experienced in the job search process is very disturbing and has propelled most Roma women to concealing their Roma appearance and identity in order to get a chance at employment. As Roma women, they face discrimination from the beginning of the job seeking process. One of the possibilities to rectify this is to make the job seeking processes transparent or anonymous.

■ The barriers identified by Roma women in all four countries are related to several major issues such as an **insufficient level of education**. Due to the experienced continuous discrimination from education professionals and/or early marriages, respondents did not find it easy to continue their studies; **unemployment** due to several factors: early marriages of Roma women, low level of education resulting in low and insufficient qualifications, ethnicity resulting in low-skilled jobs and mostly part-time work, lack of knowledge of the national language and irregularities in personal documents. **Health services** are conditioned by the possession of social security, which enables Roma women to regularly preform health check-ups. Roma women who are unemployed do not have social security. Therefore, they receive poorer medical services in comparison to other women with medical insurance. Ethnic discrimination is the main reason for poor healthcare service provision by health practitioners. **Insufficient knowledge of the national language** represents the main obstacle in accessing public and social services, applying for and finding a job, as well as **insufficient regulation of the system for free legal aid**, which impacts the access to legal services and the justice and administrative system, having in mind that these services and proceedings are expensive, lengthy and not always successful.

■ Despite the fact that all countries have a solid anti-discrimination legal framework in place, it is still indisputable that Roma women face discrimination in every segment of social life.

■ The mechanisms to access justice exist in all countries, however Roma remain invisible as a distinct category and the existing mechanisms are not considered sufficient. Roma communities have limited access to equality bodies and compensation mechanisms, and this is reflected in the limited information that Roma women have when it comes to accessing these mechanisms. For this reason, most of them do not feel empowered to look for help outside of the community. The high level of mistrust of Roma women towards local and national authorities, especially municipal institutions and police authorities, indisputably indicates the need to strengthen the capacity of institutions, with a special focus on police officers. There is a need for programmes to address and avoid stereotypes and initiate adapted campaigns for successful and positive role models in addressing discrimination of Roma women.

■ Roma women need to be encouraged to pursue education and to work, while educational and employment environments free from discrimination need to be ensured for them, considering that these are crucial drivers in helping Roma women to become more independent and empowered.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The national reports alongside the final research report demonstrate through their analysis of the legal framework and the research undertaken that the barriers faced by Roma women are very similar across the region. The recommendations given here are therefore applicable to all countries (Bulgaria, Italy, Greece and Romania) with the indication that fulfilling these recommendations would significantly improve the lives of Roma women in the countries.

— The recommendations are as follows:

HEALTH

- ▶ Raising awareness of Roma women to report the discrimination cases that they face in accessing the health care system before equality bodies and courts;
- ▶ Greece, Romania and Bulgaria should put in place a system similar to the Italian STP system (Temporarily Present Foreigner), in order to provide access to temporary health services to Roma women without identity documents;
- ▶ Ensuring in-service and pre-service training for healthcare practitioners, to diminish reluctance to help Roma patients and eradicate negative attitudes towards them.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

- ▶ Establishing support community centres for Roma women who are subject of gender violence;
- ▶ Ensuring empowerment programmes for Roma women, including information on mechanisms to respond to gender-based violence and facilitation of their access to education and employment;
- ▶ Raising awareness of Roma women about the existence of the free legal aid system;
- ▶ Adapting the legal aid systems to adequately respond to the needs of Roma communities, including by building the capacities of legal aid lawyers in areas such as anti-discrimination law.

EMPLOYMENT

- ▶ Raising awareness of Roma women for reporting discrimination cases in the area of employment to equality bodies and/or courts;
- ▶ Organising special tailored courses for Roma women so that they acquire better qualifications for different types of jobs;
- ▶ Ensuring training programmes for trade unions, to decrease the discriminatory attitudes from the side of employers.

EDUCATION

- ▶ Ensure in-service and pre-service training programmes for teaching staff, to increase inclusive education and decrease the negative attitudes towards Roma students;
- ▶ Ensure anti-bullying campaigns, with a special focus on Roma children as being targeted by the phenomenon;
- ▶ Ensure ongoing campaigns within educational institutions on the importance of continuing education for Roma girls, despite the marital status;
- ▶ Reducing the costs of the educational system for Roma women;
- ▶ Organising night or adult schools or tailored courses for Roma women who have dropped out of school regardless of the reasons.

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