

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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Project: A Gendered View of the Decade of Roma Inclusion

June 2006

1. INTRODUCTION

The *Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015* comes at a peak in the interest in the position of Roma. For years now, all around central and south eastern Europe, governments have launched independent or Decade-related strategies aiming at the improvement of the Roma situation, while hosts of intergovernmental agencies and non-governmental organizations implement numerous regional and national projects. The success of these efforts, nevertheless, is often hard to measure, as the human rights situation of Roma remains precarious. Roma remain largely poor, uneducated, unemployed, ghettoized, and without a political voice.

When it comes to Romani women, they bear a multiple burden. The majority societies racially discriminate against Romani women as members of a marginalized and stigmatized ethnic group. In their own, mainly patriarchal community, Romani women are considered inferior on the grounds of their gender. Their access to education, employment, health care and housing is limited by both racial and gender concerns. This aspect of multiple discrimination against Romani women has so far remained out of the limelight of current Roma research: While human rights organizations have mostly focused on the violations of human rights of the Romani community as a whole, the universal feminist movement tended to ignore the specific plight of women from minority communities. Within the Roma movement, dealing with issues affecting women is not only neglected, moreover it is sometimes seen as subversive and a threat to the overall Romani cause.

The inclusion of Romani women's affairs into the Roma Decade seems to build upon this mixed record. The rights of Romani women are one of the cross-cutting themes of the Decade, however it does not appear that much attention has been paid to it by now. Among the Decade countries, only Serbia created a National Action Plan on the Discrimination of [Romani] Women, while the majority of others treated women's issues in a marginal manner, or not at all. Such a troubling start of the Decade from the gender point of view calls for immediate monitoring and evaluation.

2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.1. PROJECT OBJECTIVE

This project will provide a framework for monitoring how the Decade of Roma Inclusion addresses the exclusion of Romani women in three regions of south eastern Europe: Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia.

2.2. COUNTRY COMPARISON ARGUMENTS

The choice of countries was made for the following reasons: all of the countries share the same geographic area, have common borders and cross-border minorities, had common rulers in the past several centuries, bear remnants of past Communist policies, and are now countries in transition. All three countries take part in the Roma Decade.

However, their proposed approaches to the Romani women's issue in the Decade context have taken very different shapes: while Serbia has drafted a number of theme-specific plans, including a specific action plan on Romani women, Croatia referred to women's concerns in a marginal cross-sectoral way, while in the Montenegrin strategy references to gender are minimal. A comparison of these approaches would also contribute to an old debate on policies addressing women's rights: whether mainstreaming gender concerns in general policies, or creating separate gender-specific strategies address women's concerns more effectively.

Another main difference between them, with significant policy repercussions, is their formal European background: while Croatia is an EU candidate country, Serbia and Montenegro remain on the waiting list, as potential candidate country/countries, particularly with the possibility of Montenegro gaining independence from the state union in the course of 2006. Therefore, the research would also try to establish the influences on policies related to Romani women exerted by the pending or desired EU membership, and its own gender and race context and policy framework.

2.3. RESEARCH PLAN

The project will have three components:

(1) Establishing the scope of social exclusion of Romani women in the country/region in the areas designated as Decade's thematic focuses: education, employment, housing, and health care;

(2) Researching and evaluating:

- the actual national and regional legal and social context for addressing racial and gender discrimination in the abovementioned fields;
- the Decade-specific documents, policies and actions and the manner in which they address the situation of Romani women, including budget analysis;
- the participation of Romani women in Decade-related processes and projects;

(3) Proposing benchmarks and indicators to monitor and measure the efficacy of Roma Decade policies and projects with regards to eliminating the exclusion of women.

In each of the study countries/regions, the same pattern of research would be followed. Eventually the three studies would be compared, and policy recommendations for both the respective countries and the joint strategies for the Decade would be brought forward.

2.4. METHODOLOGY

The research would be conducted in a participatory and inclusive manner - the opinions and input from Romani women and particularly activists and NGOs would be actively sought and encouraged.

The rights-based approach would be used in the research, paying particular attention to various aspects of multiple discrimination against Romani women, such as racial discrimination, gender aspects of racial discrimination, gender discrimination within the community, etc. in the framework of the economic and social rights the Decade is focusing on.

In researching the current level of Romani women's exclusion, specific violations of abovementioned economic and social rights of women would also be covered, such as reproductive rights in the framework of the right to health, schooling of Romani girls in the context of the right to education, etc.

When creating indicators and benchmarks, methodologies applied by international development agencies (such as the UNDP, e.g.) would be used.

In addition to desk research, fieldwork would be conducted in all three countries/regions too.

The specific methods which would be applied in this research are:

(1) reviewing and analyzing existing literature on:

- Romani women in the country and region,
- the human rights situation of Roma in the country and region,
- the minorities situation in the country and region,
- the situation of women in the country and region,
- previous international research on gender and race concerns.

(2) reviewing the legal and policy framework on minorities, Roma, and gender;

(3) reviewing the documents, policies and project of the Decade of Roma in general, and country-specific Decade documents, policies, projects and budgets, from the gender point of view;

(4) conducting interviews with:

- Romani women victims of human rights violations,
- Romani women activists,
- activists of national and international NGOs and foundations dealing with Roma rights and/or women's rights respectively, including the OSI network,
- representatives of relevant governmental institutions,
- representatives of relevant intergovernmental bodies on the regional, European and international levels, including the World Bank,
- Decade officials and project staff on national and international levels.

3. PROJECT OUTCOME AND OUTPUT

The project would result in a unique extensive research on the exclusion of Romani women and attempts to improve their situation in the context of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. There is a dearth of research, and especially policy-oriented research, on the issues of Romani women, and in-depth comparative studies are particularly missing.

The project would provide a monitoring framework for the Decade and the activities of its member countries when it comes to addressing concerns of Romani women and promoting and strengthening the Romani women's leadership. It is of utmost importance that the implementation of an extensive and groundbreaking initiative such as the Roma Decade is closely monitored and evaluated from a gender perspective too.

The indicators and benchmarks offered by this research project would be applicable not only in the countries studied in the research, but undoubtedly in the other Decade countries as well.

The project's policy paper would offer a number of policy recommendations stemming from the research results, which could be applied on several levels:

- non-governmental, governmental and intergovernmental organizations,
- both Roma rights and/or gender activists,
- in the countries mentioned but also with the possibility of multiplication in the wider Decade framework, and other countries in the region who do not take part in the Decade yet share contextual similarities (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, etc.).

In case that the research would unearth good practices, these would be emphasized and analyzed in hope that such examples might be followed by other actors and in other countries.

In order to achieve as high a readership and public echo as possible, the results and recommendations of the research could be disseminated through hard copy publications, by posting them on an internet site, and e-mail servers. Special care would be taken that all the participants in the research receive its final results.

Additionally, Women's Studies and Research (WSR), the organization with which the author of the research proposal is affiliated, is one of the leading research institutions when it comes to Romani women in Serbia but also in the region. The WSR is deeply interested in pursuing the objectives of this proposal, and the general improvement of Romani women's situation, through new publications on the issue, and possible lectures and conferences within their respective Gender Studies and Romani Studies courses, held under the formal auspices of the University of Novi Sad. A regional advocacy event to publicise the results of this research, relevant policy recommendations, and promote the rights of Romani women in the Decade context is slated for the International Roma Day in April 2007, followed by a local publication in Summer 2007.

[Back to my home page](#)