

PANEL 1 - The situation of Roma women: Looking at the causes of exclusion

Thank you EESC, in particular, the Permanent Study Group on Roma Inclusion for organising such an important event and for inviting ERIO.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today I'm representing the European Roma Information Office (ERIO), a European Roma advocacy organisation. With our network, we aim to combat racist discrimination against Roma through awareness raising, lobbying and policy development.

Today's hearing addresses an issue that is extremely relevant for Roma inclusion: Roma women's participation in public life. For a long time, ERIO has been highlighting the need to empower Roma women and ensure their full and active participation in society.

Their participation in the social, economic, cultural and political fields is part of democracy and essential for the successful inclusion of Roma communities and for achieving an equal society. This is why any Roma inclusion policy should take into account a gender dimension. This has been clearly stated in EU policy documents such as the "10 Common Basic principles on Roma Inclusion" (i.e. principle 5 "awareness of the gender dimension") which asks MS to ensure that Roma women participate and have a leading role in consultative bodies or monitoring committees, in some EP resolutions and the Council Recommendation.

As the previous speakers demonstrated, Roma women represent one of the most excluded and discriminated group in the EU.

They encounter more serious obstacles than Roma men or non-Roma women due to the everyday multiple discrimination they face, fuelled by widespread stereotypes and anti-Gypsyism which affect the possibilities for their active participation in society.

What are the causes for Roma women's exclusion from public life? They face several obstacles:

- **Multiple discrimination:** as women and as members of the Roma community
 - o **Gender discrimination** - Conditioning from patriarchal traditions within their own communities, which maintains traditional domestic roles for women as mothers and caretakers. This usually comes with the lack of support and resistance from family members to encourage them to be

socially active and invest in any sort of empowerment. This has a strong impact on their ability to participate in the labour market, education system, and in civic and political life.

- **Racial discrimination** – mainly due to stereotypes and widespread anti-Gypsyism from mainstream society (in access to quality education, employment, healthcare, housing and basic services or even to restaurants). This decreases the opportunities available for Roma women to actively engage in public life.

- **Socio-economic factors:**
 - **High levels of poverty** – poor living standards with numerous Roma families living in poverty, where “surviving” is the priority, makes the issue of participation irrelevant and Roma women have less time and resources to be active in society.
 - **Segregated settlements** - prevent access to local public services (health, education, etc.), thereby worsening their conditions of marginalisation and social exclusion.
 - **Low levels of education** - due to school absenteeism, segregated schooling, early marriages, low expectations and racism towards Roma children. Education is an effective tool to empower Roma women, promote their economic development and active participation in society. Without it, they are more likely to be socially and economically excluded.
 - **Very high unemployment rates**, excluding Roma women from participating in formal economy - due to gender disadvantages and structural obstacles (such as low level of education, lack of stable housing) and discrimination from employers and co-workers.

- **Human rights violations:** Roma women continue to experience extreme forms of human rights violations. Many do not enjoy full respect for their freedom of choice in issues concerning the most fundamental decisions of their lives, and are thus limited in their ability to exercise their fundamental rights, such as participating in society.

- **Legal factors:**

- **Non-compliance of EU anti-discrimination legislation** by the MS and slow transposition into national legislation - particularly, the Equal Treatment Directive (2006/54/EC) prohibiting gender discrimination and the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC) prohibiting discrimination on ethnic and racial grounds.
- **Inadequate investment in measures targeting Roma women.** As the latest EC NRIS assessment report demonstrated, action in areas affecting Roma women (violence, human trafficking, underage/forced marriages, and begging with children) are lacking.
- **Lack of accurate demographic data disaggregated by gender and ethnicity.** This makes it more difficult to design policies for Roma women.

But why is it important that Roma women participate in public life?

- Symbolically and socially important for the inclusion of these communities.
- In addition to strengthen democracy, Roma women's participation will give them a sense of belonging.
- Having Roma women participate through politics can also mean a better representation of the interests of Roma women and a genuine interest to improve their lives.
- Roma women's participation in the social, economic, cultural and political fields is essential for the successful inclusion of Roma communities and for achieving an equal society.

Thank you.