Introduction

This fact sheet aims to inform about the European Year 2014 for Reconciling Work and Family Life and the close link to the situation of Roma women who constantly have to juggle between work and family responsibilities. With this fact sheet, we intend to raise awareness about the multiple discrimination faced by Roma women.

In today’s society, it is becoming more difficult for European citizens to reconcile their work and family life. Financial instability, low quality employment, poverty, and social exclusion are some of the factors affecting them and often putting into conflict professional and family life.

The difficulty to balance work and family life is faced nowadays by many European families and the problem has been recognised at the European level. This is why the European Year 2014 has been dedicated specifically to Reconciling Work and Family Life.

In the context of balancing work and family life, Roma women are a particularly vulnerable group. In addition to the conflict that many other Europeans are facing, Roma women encounter other challenging factors that put them in a disadvantaged position. Traditional cultural expectations associated with the role of a woman, limited access to education and training as well as experiencing multiple discrimination when looking for employment makes it particularly difficult for Roma women to work and take care of the household.

This fact sheet consists of 1) an overview on the European Year for Reconciling Work and Family Life, 2) information on the situation faced by Roma women when it comes to balancing work and family life, and 3) general recommendations.
1) European Year 2014 Reconciling Work and Family Life

Today, all families living in Europe have to cope with the increasing conflict between their family and work life¹.

In 1983, the European Union launched for the first time a "European Year" awareness campaign which is dedicated to important social issues. Each year, the campaign aims to inform European citizens on relevant crucial topics, to trigger discussion and to promote working towards social change. It also intends to direct attention of national authorities and actors to these issues.

The current year has been declared as the European Year for Reconciling Work and Family Life and has been initiated by COFACE, the Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union.

The campaign is intended to open discussion about existing legislation in the area of social and labour market policies. Its aim is to identify and disseminate good practices on family and work life reconciliation in the different EU member states. Also, it will help to assess, promote and implement comprehensive policies which acknowledge family. Finally, the campaign will tackle the issues of family carers, mental health, intergenerational solidarity, and volunteer activities.²

The aim of the campaign is to promote balance between work and family life. Over the year, the problem of poverty will be tackled, as well as possible means to improve social integration and provide quality employment (through care services, satisfactory salaries, job security and working conditions which are family friendly). Work and family reconciliation policies taking place both at national and European level are intended to focus on employment, social services, social security and education policies. They will also aim to promote gender equality and foster women’s participation in the labour market.

Moreover, the aim of the 2014 Year is to pursue previous policy targets such as the European Year 2010 for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, the European Year 2011 of Volunteering, the European Year 2012 of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations and the European Year 2013 of Citizens.³

Looking at the relevance of the EY2014 program and its objectives for European Roma women, there is a need to advocate for an integrated approach that could help Roma women to balance work and family life. Roma women are a vulnerable group and at a particularly disadvantaged position when it comes to reconciling these two important spheres of life.

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¹ Official EY2014 website: www.ey2014.eu/
² Ibid.
2) Roma women and the reconciliation of work and family life

- Roma women and the family

Research shows that for Roma, family and children are the most important aspect of their lives. In many Roma communities, the family model is a traditional one and frequently marriage occurs at an early age. This strongly affects girls’ and women’s education as well as further options for undertaking professional activities.

According to the Fundamental Rights Agency, across all member states around 16% of Roma (men and women) aged 16-17 years, were legally or traditionally married or cohabiting and only 6% of Roma women in this group were in education (compared to 36% of all Roma women aged 16-17). Roma women in this group were also more often full-time homemakers (42%) compared to other Roma women (16%) in this group of age. This suggests that Roma women who marry young are more likely to take on a role of a housekeeper compared to Roma women who marry later. However, even if not married, many young Roma women and girls are often forced to leave school at a young age in order to help their parents with family tasks.

There is often a common belief within some Roma communities (shared by both men and women) that domestic work should be carried out exclusively by women. They are supposed to take care of the household and the children, while men are responsible for all things related to working outside the house. Living up to these expectations and combining domestic/family responsibilities with working activity outside the house might prove very challenging and burdensome for many Roma women.

- Roma women and work

According to the Fundamental Rights Agency, on average in the 11 EU member states surveyed, 21% of Roma women older than 16 years are in paid work, compared to 35% of Roma men. Around 24% of Roma women reported taking care of the home as their main activity, compared to only 1% of Roma men.

There is a gender difference between member states in terms of participation in the labour market by Roma women and men. In some member states (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Romania and Spain), Roma women are more likely to be full-time housekeepers, whereas men are more likely to be in paid work. However, in central European countries (Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia), Roma women are equally or even more often in paid work than men. In these countries, women’s participation in the labour market ranges from 24% to 36% compared with 18% to 33% for Roma men. The rate of unemployment was reported to be equal for Roma men and women in these countries.

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5 FRA (2013) The situation of Roma women: FRA data analysis
8 FRA (2013) The situation of Roma women: FRA data analysis
Independent work outside the home has an important effect of modelling power relations within the family. Working Roma women have more independence and sometimes are the only money providers in the family. In that situation they cannot manage alone family duties so some of them are taken over by their spouses. Having their own source of income makes them also less at risk of poverty, although research indicates that this effect is limited mostly to households without children. In households with one or more children, this advantage decreases and for households with four or more children, the risk of poverty is substantial and employment of women does not seem to improve the situation.

Roma women encounter many challenges in the area of employment. The most important issue is widespread multiple discrimination (on the grounds of gender and ethnicity), experienced by them in hiring, promotion and salary. Research findings show that Roma women are also more likely to be informally employed compared to Roma men and this might considerably account for lower wages that they receive compared to the rest of the population.

A common problem limiting Roma women’s participation in the labour market is their low level of formal education, often limited to primary education. Thus, even if they are given an opportunity to find employment, there is a risk that there would be limited number of job opportunities available to them.

Another issue is that participation of the Roma women in the labour market is likely to be affected also by the current economic crisis. It has been noticed that worsening economic conditions have more impact on vulnerable groups and put them at a disadvantage in terms of employment. The current economic crisis may thus contribute to higher unemployment rates among the Roma, including Roma women. Moreover, research shows that in the last years (2004-2011) Roma women have become even more disadvantaged when it comes to employment prospects than Roma men.

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10 FRA (2013) The situation of Roma women: FRA data analysis
3) Recommendations

ERIO would like to put forward the following recommendations in order to improve the situation of Roma women:

- A gender dimension and actions targeting Roma women and girls should be emphasised when implementing National Roma Integration Strategies at the local level.

- Measures should be taken to improve access to quality education for Roma girls and women to make them more competitive and active in the labour market and in society, and to be lifted out of poverty and exclusion. This should be coupled with actions to tackle anti-Roma discrimination to have an effect on the diminished opportunities and poverty that Roma women face.

- Participation of Roma women at all levels of decision-making should be ensured. European societies will only become inclusive and democratic when all women, including the Roma, fully participate in public life and their fundamental rights are guaranteed.

- A comprehensive approach should be adopted to ensure that Roma women achieve equal opportunities within the EU.

- The attention afforded to Roma women in the course of the European Year should be granted and fostered in order to gather the needed political will to adequately address the discrimination and disadvantages faced by this group.

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