1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the 1990s there has been an evident blossoming of the Romani movement in Europe and also a tremendous increase in the interest in the human rights of Roma. Despite this, whole communities of Roma continue to face racial discrimination on a daily basis. They are victims of violence from extremist racist groups such as skinheads, but also non-Romani individuals in general, including law enforcers. Roma are mainly without formal education and rarely have permanent jobs. High numbers of European Roma live in extreme poverty in illegal substandard settlements. Hundreds of thousands of Roma are refugees or internally displaced in consequence to the armed conflicts in the area of the former Yugoslavia.

When it comes to Romani women, their burden is at least double. The vast majority of society views them as members of a marginalized, impoverished and often despised ethnic group. At home, many Romani women are often considered inferior on the grounds of their gender in the community that is led almost exclusively by men.

This paper will try to address the main areas where the human rights of Romani women are violated, in terms of...
2. Discrimination of Romani Women

2.1. Images of Romani Women, by Romani Men, and Non-Roma

The prevalence of discrimination against Romani is firmly grounded on negative prejudice. Popular perceptions of Romani women are mostly disapproving too: they are considered “dirty,” they “like to steal,” they “tell lies,” and they are “dangerous” because of their alleged magical powers and fortune telling skills. Non-Romani women hardly have anything but negative thoughts about Romani women, with the exception of their looks - they consider Romani women beautiful – and their alleged love of music and dance.

While the Romani community is considered “the other” by the majority culture, Romani women represent “the other” within the Roma group itself. Within the community, women are seen as weaker on the basis of their gender. A survey published in 2004 discovered that 65 per cent of Roma in Serbia strongly believed that “men have to rule the family” and another 46.1 per cent Roma ap-
Romani women are also subject to the strong virginity cult present in a number of Romani groups. Violating the premarital virginity code can bring shame for the rest of a woman’s life in some communities. In Macedonia, 76 per cent of young Romani men interviewed expected their future wives to be virgins, though 75 per cent consider it normal that Romani men should have premarital sexual relations.\(^7\) A Romani man interviewed in a poll in Serbia, for instance, stated how “Virginity is the only [valuable] thing a woman has!”\(^8\) Other research showed that over 64 per cent of young Romani women in Serbia thought that it was unacceptable for women to engage in premarital sex, while less than 20 per cent of them thought that same should apply to men. According to the researchers, “many young women have deeply internalised the message on desirable behaviour prescribed by the Romani community, they accept it as the only right attitude, most of them do not question its sensibility, and they support it with various forms of prejudice.”\(^9\)

On all these accounts, it appears clear why a single-handed gender-blind approach to the human rights situation of Romani women is considered widely inadequate by Romani women activists:

“The gender analysis of racial discrimination recognizes that racial discrimination does not affect men and women equally or in the same way. Romani women often experience discrimination based on their gender and on their ethnic
2.2. Образование

Областите на образованието истовремено е ключно поле за развој на секоја група, но исто така и област во која разликата помеѓу Ромите и припадниците на не-ромски групи, како и разликата меѓу мажите Роми и Ромките е највидлива.

Поради притисокот од строгите патријархални верувања, многу млади Ромки никогаш нема да одат на училиште или ќе го напуштат училиштето на многу рана возраст. На прашањето зошто ги пракса трите сина, а ниедна керка на училиште, татко Ром од Косово одговори дека „школувањето девојчиња е губење време“.13 Поради ограничениот финансиски ресурси, во голем број ромски семејства од регионот, момчињата одат на училиште, додека девојчињата или остануваат дома, или им е дозволено да завршат

The lack of attention paid by the states to the issues at the intersection of gender and race was criticised by Romani women activists as the “racist assumption that practices harmful to women unequivocally constitute a homogenous Romani culture.”11 At a March session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, Romani activists called for the cooperation between UN agencies, states and NGOs and Romani women activists in combating “early marriages and virginity tests in a manner that takes into account both internal gender roles and the role played by racism in reinforcing these practices.”12

Because of the pressure of strong patriarchal beliefs, many young Romani women will never go to school or will leave it at an early age. A Romani father in Kosovo, asked why he sent three sons and no daughters to school, replied that “educating girls is a waste of time.”13 Because of limited financial resources in quite a number of Romani families in the region, boys will go to school while girls will either stay at home, or be allowed to finish just a few grades of primary school.14 According to UNDP, 90% of Romani women in Serbia and Montenegro get married...
Само неколку степени основно образование. Според УНДП, 90% од Ромките во Србија и Црна Гора стапуваат во брак пред 16 години и речиси 80% од нивните бракови се договорени. Ваквите ставови ги прифатиле и некои од самите ромски жени. Одговарајќи на прашање на ќерка си дали ќе присуствува на родителски состанок, една мајка-Ромка во Србија одговори: „Ћи ќе се мажиш, јас немам време да одам таму“. Сепак, времењата се менуваат и пример за овој нов бран е дванаесетгодишно девојче од Косово кое им кажа на истражувачите за нејзините соништа да заврши факултет, и да не се омажи пред тоа.

Сепак, сликата е многу посложена: едно истражување за образованието направено меѓу Роми од Србија ги наведе следниве одговори на прашањето зашто девојчињата Ромки од семејството не одат на училиште: бидејќи немаат пристойна облека (69.7%), бидејќи треба да се грижат за помладите деца (61.3%), бидејќи нема да најдат работа дури и ако завршат училиште (59.8%), и - на крај - бидејќи се омажиле (57.4%). Едно единасетгодишно ромско девојче од Босна сакаше да оди на училиште, меѓутоа немаше кој да се грижи за нејзината помлада хендикепирана сестра откако постарата сестра се омажи, а нивната мајка исто така не можеше да го прави тоа бидејќи го издржува семејството продавајќи стоки на пазар. Една млада жена од Црна Гора драбоко жали што никогаш не одела на училиште, бидејќи како најстаро дете таа морала да готви и да ја чисти куќата - на 22 годишна возраст, таа сметаше дека е предоцна за образование.

Оние деца што се запишуват на училиште некогаш го напуштаат заради расистичкиот третман што го трапат од децата од не-ромско потекло, од нивните родители, или од учителите. Во Албанија, мајка before the age of sixteen, and almost 80% of their marriages are arranged. These attitudes are internalised among some Romani women themselves. Answering her daughter’s question whether she would attend the parent-teacher meeting, a Romani mother in Serbia replied, “You will get married, I have no time to go there.” Times are changing, though, and a sample of this new wave is a twelve-year-old girl in Kosovo who told researchers of her dreams of finishing university, and not getting married before that.

However, the picture is more complex: Educational research conducted among Roma in Serbia listed the following responses why Romani girls in the family did not go to school: because they lack decent clothes (69.7%), because they have to take care of younger children (61.3%), because they won’t find employment even if they finish school (59.8%), and – lastly – because they got married (57.4%). An eleven-year-old Romani girl in Bosnia liked going to school, however there was no one to take care of her disabled younger sister after her elder sister got married, and their mother could not do it as she supports the family by selling goods in the market. A young woman in Montenegro deeply regrets that she never went to school, because as the eldest child she had to cook and clean the house – at the age of twenty-two, she thought it was too late for education.
Ромка сподели како нејзината осумгодишна ќерка се плашела од другите деца на училиштет; како единственото ромско дете во нејзиниот клас, таа често трпела тешава и вербално злоставување од нејзините соученици. Таа исто така имала малку доверба во наставниците, кои наместо да му помогнат на девојчето со нејзините тешкотии во учењето, избрале да ја испратат дома. Некои ромски деца се образуваат одвоено од нивните не-ромски соученици, во сегрегиран класови, па дури и во сегрегирано училиште. Често се случува ромските деца да бидат сместени во специјални училишта за ментално хендикипирано деца.

Напредокот во подобрување на образовните потреби на Ромите е поспор од очекуваното. Едно истражување направено меѓу Ромки од Босна го спореди образованието на мајките Ромки, најчесто остварено во социјалистичко време, со она на нивните деца, и покажа дека немало видливо подобрување во образовната с состојба на новите генерации. Одговорност за ова главно треба да преземат образовните власти и нефлексibiliантите образовни системи кои покажуваат малку разбиране за проблемите на Ромите. Образовните тежнија на ромските деца неизбежно се обликуваат од сиромаштијата и тешките услови во кои живеат: запрашането што би сакала да стане кога ќе порасне, девојче Ромка од Србија, кое воедно беше и одлична ученичка, призна дека би сакала да стане пекарка, за секогаш да биде опкружена со леб.

2.3. Вработување

Мнозинството Ромки во Југозападна Европа се невработени. Во неодамнашниот извештај за Ромките е вработувањето накратко беа резимирани прашањата што влијаат на Ромките:

The progress in improving the educational needs of Roma is slower than expected. Research conducted among Romani women in Bosnia compared the education of Romani mothers, mostly taking place during socialist times, and their children, and showed that there has been no visible improvement in the educational situation of the new generations. The responsibility for this is mainly to be taken by the school authorities and inflexible educational systems which show little understanding of Roma concerns. Romani children’s own educational aspirations are inevitably shaped by the poverty and hardship they live in: when asked what she would like to become when she grew up, a Romani girl from Serbia, who also happened to be an excellent pupil, admitted that she would like to become a baker, just so that she could always be surrounded by bread.

2.3. Employment

The majority of Romani women in south-eastern Europe are unemployed. A recent fact sheet on Romani women and employment briefly summarized the issues affecting Romani women as the following:
“Romkite se socuvaat so predrasudi pri vработувањето, unapreduvaweto i platata. U{te pove}e, mnogu Romki ostanuvaat celosno isklju~eni od formalnata ekonomija, spre~eni od ograni~enite obrazovni mo`nosti, neso­odvetni stanbeni uslovi, siromashna zdravstvena
заштита, традиционални родови улози и општа маргинализациja od страна на мнозинските заеднici. [...] Romkite работат на неформални, нерегистрирани,
привремени и сезонски работи што придонесува за нивна видливост и ранливост“.25

A recent survey showed that 63% of Romani women aged between twenty-five and fifty-four in Serbia are unemployed, compared to 21% for Romani men of the same age, and 18% of non-Romani women of the same age.26 In Montenegro, the percentages for the same age group were 61% unemployed Romani women, 36% unemployed Romani men, and 22% unemployed non-Romani women living in close proximity to Roma.27

Many Romani women cannot find employment because they lack formal education. However, the majority of Romani women who have even secondary or tertiary education have enormous difficulties finding employment, mostly because of racial discrimination. A Romani woman in Serbia spoke, based on her own experience, of how Romani women who pass all the obstacles posed by both their families and the non-Romani society finally get an academic degree, they can never find an adequate workplace; Romani teachers cannot work in kindergarte­ns or schools because they are stigmatised as Roma, and school authorities will not give them jobs because they fear the parents would not allow their children to be taught by Roma.28 A young Romani hairdresser complained how she is only allowed to do unpaid one-month apprenticeships; once she was told how some customers do not like having their hair done by her.29
Those Romani women that secure employment are commonly asked to work harder than non-Romani colleagues. Racial abuse on the part of employers is also common, as was the case of a Romani woman in Serbia who was regularly addressed as “Jasmina the Gypsy” by her supervisor. Some Romani women face discrimination from customers, like a Romani saleswoman in Montenegro who experienced situations where non-Romani customers refused to take bread from her hands; as the number of customers declined since she was employed in the supermarket, she chose to leave her job.

The abovementioned circumstances surrounding the employment of Romani women make many of them seek work in the informal sector. Yet, because of unregistered work, Romani women in Croatia, for instance, risk having their children taken away by social workers, as they have no means of providing officially-acceptable documents on their income and are thus considered incapable of caring for their children.

2.4. Housing Conditions

Many Romani settlements in south-eastern Europe are illegal and substandard, lacking running water and often lacking a regular power supply. Studies conducted in late 1990s established that 46.6% of Romanian Roma had toilets outside their home and 34.8% had none at all; similarly, in Bulgaria, as many as 27.7% of Roma had taps outside their homes. All over the region, there are records of cases of rat-infested poor Romani settlements
Roma often live in settlements placed in dangerous locations, often as these are the only places where they would be allowed to live. Near the town of Herakleia in Greece, two Romani mothers lost children in separate incidents as they drowned in the unfenced irrigation channel in the vicinity of their homes. Many Romani settlements are located in areas with the worst environmental conditions, which undisputedly endangers the health of its inhabitants. In Kosovo, for instance, a camp for internally displaced Roma was built near a waste site of a nearby lead mine. Reports detail alarmingly high blood lead levels in the community, which can be a cause for serious damage to the health of children and pregnant women in particular. As much as a year ago, the World Health Organization recommended moving children and pregnant women to a safer location; as of June 2005, the local and international authorities still took no action in this respect.

Many Roma live under constant threat of eviction, and this is an exceptionally difficult situation for female-headed households. A single Romani mother met in Romania could not pay the meagre rent for their one-room flat from their modest income of child support and seasonal work in the summer; she lived in constant fear that she and her children would be thrown out into the street by the building’s owners.
Specific housing issues affect Roma who left their property as they fled armed conflict-affected areas. In Bosnia, Romani returnees to the areas they had lived in before the war face enormous difficulties in getting their houses and property back.\textsuperscript{40} This process is more difficult for women-headed families. A Romani woman whose house in the town of Bijeljina is occupied by an ethnic Serbian family asked the family to allow her and her children to live in a small shed adjacent to the house, where the family now keeps the pigs; they were refused. The family finally moved out of the house seven months later, yet leaving the house completely demolished and without furniture and appliances.\textsuperscript{41}
would cover the bill; six months later, the young woman still did not have her ID, and bearing in mind her family’s financial situation, she is unlikely to be able to pay the hospital bill any time soon. 

A study conducted in Greece, France and Spain in 1998-2000 showed that 65 per cent of Romani women lack contraception, that they suffer from a high number of natural abortions, and that the rates of child mortality and neo-natal mortality are eight times higher than that of the general non-Romani population. Contraceptive pills are considered to be far beyond the financial means of Romani women in Croatia, for instance, while the cost of an abortion reportedly reaches the amount of an average salary and does not include any support or counselling. Pregnant Romani women rarely seek advice from doctors, and in some cases it is because of verbal abuse and humiliation they suffer from the medical staff. Such was the experience of a Romani woman in Bulgaria who testified to her Romani male MD that she was even slapped in the face when she resisted her painful examination by non-Romani staff.

It appears a common occurrence in the region that medical emergency teams refuse to come to Romani settlements. In a case in Croatia, after the local ambulance teams refused to provide assistance to a pregnant Romani woman seeking help, her baby was stillborn. There have also been concerns of the lack of attention given to Romani women giving birth in hospitals, and last autumn two Romani women died in Bulgaria under circumstances that indicate that the medical personnel did not treat them adequately and that the women’s racial background contributed to the neglect.
2.6. Violence against Romani Women

All around the region, Romani women and men fall victims to police abuse. For instance, three cases of police violence against pregnant Romani women were registered in Croatia in recent years. Some communities are often subjected to abusive police raids, which women experience in specific ways. One woman in Greece testified in the following way:
“[The police] had broken a sewing machine, smashed plates and glasses and emptied onto the ground three large containers of instant coffee. They opened Coke cans and emptied the contents on our clothes and blanket.”

A Romani woman in Romania spoke of a cosmetic change in police behaviour: while earlier it was the case that police would regularly violently break into Roma houses during raids, now they would knock on doors, yet if the doors would not be opened immediately the police would break it down anyway. Or, during an abusive police raid on a Romani settlement near Athens in Greece, a young Romani woman was taking a bath when officers came to her house and shouted that she should come out. As she replied that she would be out immediately and started getting dressed, the officers broke into the house and threatened to rape her. The girl was then taken to another house, where she was searched by female officers but in a space that was visible from the outside. The treatment made the girl feel “very ashamed.”

Romani women were victims of sexual violence during the armed conflicts in the region of the former Yugoslavia as well. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for instance, Romani activists spoke on cases of abduction and consequent sexual exploitation of Romani women, and also cases of rape of Romani women by non-Romani men, mainly combatants, in the 1992-1995 war. Cases have been recorded where non-Romani combatants raped Romani women in front of their husbands and family members. Romani women victims of sexual violence reportedly also often experience rejection from their communities as a consequence. In Kosovo, the international community left crimes against Romani women unnoticed, and because of the fear of being despised by their communities, Romani women themselves fear taking these
cases to courts. Some accounts of sexual crimes against Romani women in this conflict were collected by the human rights organization Humanitarian Law Centre in Belgrade. So far there has been only a single instance where charges have been pressed for war crimes that included sexual violence against Romani women. In January 2005, the War Crimes Prosecutor in Belgrade, Serbia, pressed charges against an ethnic Albanian man from Kosovo for war crimes committed in June 1999 in the Djakovica/Djakove municipality. A Romani wedding party was passing a paramilitary check point when they were stopped by ethnic Albanians. Eleven persons from the party were taken away; the abuse that ensued included four murders, rape and torture.

Romani women are also victims of domestic violence, and one of the obstacles that Romani women activists face in their work combating domestic violence is the denial of violence generally, or its accurate extent. When a group of Romani activists gathered to prepare for participation in the World Conference Against Racism in Durban, Romani women activists wanted to highlight issues of involuntary sterilization, unemployment, and violence against women. However, their male colleagues from the group allowed only for the sterilization issue to be discussed, and through a race lens alone.

As one male colleague contented that violence against Romani women was “not a big issue,” a woman activist from Serbia contradicted him with the fact that almost 95% of Romani women she worked with had experienced family violence. Denial of domestic violence is also present among some Romani women. “We are brought up as if we still lived in the Ottoman times!” a grassroots activist exclaimed at a seminar. A comparative analysis of domestic violence against Romani and non-Romani wom-
ен in the area of Zenica showed that numbers of victims of violence were alarmingly high in both communities, while it was still higher when it came to Roma. This research also emphasized a principal aspect: Because of the important correlation between gender and violence, and the influence of racial and class factors, Romani women are a high group risk in this respect – not that Roma, as an ethnic group, would be more prone to domestic violence.

Romani women victims of domestic violence rarely seek external assistance. One middle-aged Romani woman from Serbia described the issue in following words:

“I know a lot of Romani women who are discriminated, abused by their husband, beaten as well. These women stay married to them because they have no place to go back to, they often tolerate such a marriage for the sake of children. [...] They mostly stay because it is a shame to get a divorce, and usually it is said that a divorced woman is a whore, yet nobody asks her how this marriage was for her, was her life in danger? I am sorry that there are no institutions that could help these women fight for their rights, and even though there could be some I don’t think Romani women are informed about where and how and to whom they could go.”

However, those women who know where to seek help are sometimes faced with ridicule, such as Serbian Romani woman who reported her husband’s abuse to the police and was in return told that, if she had behaved herself, this would not have happened in the first place. Such attitudes, combined with the fear of police violence, leave little space for wondering why Romani women are reluctant to seek police assistance.
2.7. Trafficking in Romani Women and Children

Activists in the field of trafficking consider Romani women and girls living in socially excluded areas as being under particular risk of trafficking:

“In Roma ghettos and locations with high concentrations of Romany, risk factors accumulate which significantly increase the threat to Roma women from trafficking. Social and economic risk factors include unemployment, employability challenges, poverty, low levels of education, and the acceptability of unprotected employment or drug and alcohol addiction. Additional ethnic and cultural risk factors pertinent to women among the Roma community include their different attitude to women’s rights (Bitu, 1999; Hubschmannova 1999), orientation to the present, the growing number of emigrating Romany and, last but not the least, the ‘exoticism’ of the Roma women for potential purchasers. The general ignorance of women concerning trafficking in socially excluded locations and Roma communities is deeper, owing to the fact that the community inhabitants are difficult to inform, and this is a serious risk factor.”

Romani activists warn that street children are also at risk of being trafficked, and it is mainly girls that are sought by traffickers.

Activists also caution that trafficking is often mistaken for prostitution, which is unacceptable for traditional Romani communities, and shameful for both the woman and the family. This raises concerns that Romani women exploited by traffickers end up in situations where they do not have the protection of either law or their community.
It is generally considered that the problem of trafficking of Romani women has not yet received adequate attention of both governmental and intergovernmental institutions.\textsuperscript{72} Romani women human rights activists recently called the states and NGOs “to implement policies addressing [...] trafficking and prostitution in a manner both sensitive to socio-economic factors and careful not to reinforce stereotypes”\textsuperscript{73} – cracking down on trafficking should by no means “feed into widely held stereotypes about Romani criminality.”\textsuperscript{74} This is an important concern, particularly as it is common in the region that the press will disclose the ethnicity of persons involved in trafficking or other crimes if these are Roma.\textsuperscript{75}

With regards to the discussions of human rights violations within the Romani community and the dangers of having this discussion abused for reinforcing negative stereotypes, Anna Karamanou, a member of the European Parliament, warned that minorities cannot always be judged according to the standards of the majority, however no compromise should be made with the universality of human rights. She also called for Romani women activists to be the main, and natural, champions of this cause.\textsuperscript{76}

2.8. Political Participation of Romani Women

The vast majority of Romani women in south-eastern Europe do not exercise their political rights, either as voters or as candidates. Some Romani women activists refuse to get involved in political matters, discouraged by what they perceive as great intolerance among various political parties.\textsuperscript{77} Many other women are politically inactive...
for this reason, but also because they do not have personal documents and cannot exercise their citizenship at all. Yet, some women do not vote as their husbands or fathers might disapprove: a Romani woman in Serbia testified how her husband tore both her ID and her medical security card upon hearing that she intended to cast a vote in the local elections that day.\textsuperscript{78}

One of the notable projects on the political participation of Romani women in the region is the “Romani Women Can Do It” initiative in 2002/2003, launched by the Stability Pact for South East Europe and its Gender Task Force. The programme aimed at raising awareness of Romani women about their human rights and empowering them to take public and political roles in their communities.\textsuperscript{79} The political awakening of Romani women is still considered to be in its initial stages, however progress is inevitable.

\subsection*{2.9. Personal Documents}

Alarming numbers of Roma in south-eastern Europe do not have personal documents and are stateless; the majority of persons affected by these problems are in fact women.\textsuperscript{80} This issue particularly affects the Roma from Kosovo who are internally displaced in Serbia. Having no documents, they have no entitlement to health care. Romani women are traditionally in charge of child care, including taking children to hospitals, so they are more vulnerable to conflicts with hospital employees who refuse to treat children, or adults, if documentation is not provided.\textsuperscript{81}
In the areas of armed conflict, the confinement of Romani women to their home presented a major obstacle for registering their children with the authorities. A number of young Romani mothers in Bosnia during the war gave birth while their husbands were drafted and away from home, and they were afraid to go to town on their own to register their children with the authorities;\(^8\) in order to register their children at a latter stage, the families would need to pay high fees for belated registration, which most of them cannot afford. A Croatian Romani woman also disclosed that she has considerable concerns approaching any authorities, including those dealing with personal documents, because she works in the informal sector which is, technically, illegal.\(^3\)

Roma also experience difficulties when changing their official residence from one location to another. In Greece, a local mayor attempted to prevent two Romani women from registering their change of residence from one municipality to another in 2002, though they fulfilled all the legal requirements, and merely on account that he, allegedly, would never allow Roma to register. The mayor agreed to allow the registration only under both public pressure and the threat of complaints lodged by the women.\(^4\)

2.10. Ethnic Data and Statistics

The lack of statistical information on the Romani community in general, and the Romani women in particular, is a major problem that presents a great obstacle in addressing the issues affecting the group. While the numbers of statistical records on the community are slowly growing, gender-disaggregated data are still rare. Those
3. Good News: Romani Women’s Civil Society

The overwhelming discrimination of many Romani women in numerous aspects of their lives still does not create a full picture of Romani women in south-eastern Europe. This would only be a partial and thus inaccurate image unless due attention was paid to existing recent positive trends, primarily the growth and activism of Romani women’s organizations.

Little is known on the activism of Romani women in this region before the 1990s. One of the exceptions is the research work of Romani activist Rozalija Ilić from Kragujevac, Serbia, who has been documenting and speaking on
Identities

local Romani women taking part in the movement since the 1960s.\(^{88}\) Or, some information on the founding of the first Romani association in Serbia in 1969, for instance, makes mention of three women involved in the process, where one of them was elected to become a member of the management board in the role of a treasurer. None of the speeches of women activists, however, dealt with any concerns specific to Romani women.\(^{89}\) There was a notable lack of public discussion on issues affecting Romani women in the public and the media,\(^{90}\) and this appeared particularly to be the case with issues such as domestic violence or patriarchy.\(^{91}\) Being an NGO activist was not considered a career choice for Romani women.\(^{92}\)

The contemporary Romani women’s organizations mostly date from 1995, following the massive mushrooming of general Roma rights organizations. However, the development is not equal in all parts of south-east Europe, and in Bosnia, Greece, Albania, and Croatia, Romani women’s activism is far beyond that of their colleagues in other countries of the region. Many Romani women activists are university students or graduates.

Romani women activists acknowledge the difficulties faced by all women engaged in activism on ‘subversive’ issues such as women’s rights, domestic violence, or trafficking. They risk being labelled the “black sheep” of the community who can “never get married” because of their dealing with controversial topics in the community.\(^{93}\) A young Romani activist who founded the first Romani women’s NGO in the Vojvodina region in Serbia spoke how the most fervent opponents of the NGO were Romani men, who thought that women’s activism would result in “the collapse of marriages.”\(^{94}\) Some Roma even question the “Romaniness” of prominent women activists.

podatoци и зборуваше за учеството на локалните Ромки во движењето од 1960-те.\(^{88}\) Или, на пример, во некои информации за основањето на првата Рomsка асоцијација во Србија во 1969, се спомнува учеството на три жени во процесот, од кои една била избрана за членка на Управниот одбор во улога на благајник. Сепак, ниску излагање на жените активасти не содржеше прашања од интерес на Ромките.\(^{89}\) Постоеше забележителен недостаток од јавни дискусии во јавноста и медиумите\(^{90}\) за прашања што ги тангираа Ромките, особено за прашањата како домашното насилиство и патријархатот.\(^{91}\) Да се биде НВО активистка, не се смете за избор на кариера за Ромките.\(^{92}\)

Современите организации на жени Ромки датираат од 1995, по масовното будење на организациите за правата на Ромите. Сепак, ваквото развој не е поединков во сите делови од Југоисточна Европа: во Босна, Грција, Албанија и Хрватска, активизмот на Ромките е многу поназад отколку оној на нивните колешки во другите делови од регионот. Голем број Ромки активистки се студентки на универзитет или дипломирани.

Активистките Ромки ги разбираат тешкотиите со кои се соочуваат сите жени вклучени во активизмот за „субверзивните“ прашања, како што се правата на жени, домашното насилиство или трговијата со луѓе. Тие ризикуваат да бидат етикетирани на заедницата како „црни овици“, кои „никогаш нема да се омажат“ поради нивната работа на контроверзни прашања во заедницата.\(^{93}\) Млада Ромка активистка, која ја основаше првата женска ромска неладина организација во регионот Војводина во Србија, зборуваше дека најревнош опоненти на неладината организација биле Ромите мажи, кои миселе дека жен-
who engage in criticising certain internal practices harmful to women. “Not only is discussion of issues [such as domestic violence, family planning, arranged marriages, and virginity tests] not considered an essential facet to empowering Romani communities, it is considered detrimental to the best interests of the ‘struggle’ for Romani rights,” Alexandra Oprea poignantly states.

In addition to the marginalization of women activists in comparison with their male counterparts, they are also marginalized in the anti-racist, feminist and general civil society realm, according to Oprea:

“When Romani women manage to overcome barriers and participate in NGOs, they find that their issues are not given the same weight as ‘mainstream’ Romani issues. The work done by Romani women aimed at combating triple marginalization is not considered ‘Romani politics.’ Nor is it given due respect as gender politics, since it deals with Romnia who are considered ‘Gypsies’ not women. Feminist discourse in Europe effectively ignores the existence of Romani women and other minority women while preaching a universal doctrine of gender empowerment. The two terms ‘Roma’ and ‘women’ have effectively been constructed as mutually exclusive.”

Angela Kocze also emphasizes some aspects of this problem:

“Roma women are irritated that in any forum their issues are reduced and subsumed within ethnicity and culture. They share common problems with non Roma women, such
problemi so `enite {to ne se Romki, kako poniski plati od mажите и нemoќност vo сопствените организации.“\(^98\)

Сепак, возможни сe и исключително успешни приказни. На пример, коалициjата на Организациjи на жени (не - Romki) заедно со пет ромски организации, публикуваше извештаj за човековите права на Romkите vo Воjводина, што изведе на виделина многуброjни случаи на злоупотреба на жените и девоjчичињата Romки.\(^99\) Сличен обид и во Hрватска, meѓutoa предизвика јавно негодувањe: кога, во јануари, Јевропскиот центар за правата на Ромите од Будимпешта гo презентира извештаjот во сенка за Romkите во Hрватска, напишан во соработка со Romки активистки и прeзентиран пред Комитетот за елиминациjа на дискриминациjата против жените (CEDAW) при ОH во Њуjорк, следниjот јануари хрватските власти и некои медjуми се произнесоa дека извештаjот е „преувeличен и злонамерен“.\(^100\) Некои активисти Romи исто така јa оспориja точностa на извештаjот.

Exceptional success stories are, nevertheless, possible. For instance, a coalition of a non-Romani women’s organization and five Romani organizations jointly issued a report on human rights of Romani women in Vojvodina, which brought to light numerous cases of abuse of Romani women and girls.\(^99\) A similar attempt in Croatia, however, produced a public outcry: when the Budapest-based European Roma Rights Center presented a shadow report on Romani women in Croatia, written with the assistance of Romani women activists, and presented it before the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in New York the following January, the Croatian state authorities and some of the media proclaimed the report “exaggerated and malicious.”\(^100\) Some Romani activists also denied the accuracy of the report.

Generally, there is a very strong international component of the Romani women’s movement and constant exchange of ideas and experiences in the international forums.\(^101\) Consequently, international advocacy for Romani women’s concerns in gaining ground. One recent victory was including the Romani women’s concerns to the agenda of the 49th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in March 2005.\(^102\) Сепак, и покраj позитивните промени и значителното зголемувањe на средствата за проектиjте за Роми, сe уште постоjи загриженост поради тоa што Romkите речиси воопшто не сe вклучени во процесот, и поради тоa што најчесто ониe што не сe Роми ги претставуваат интересите на Romите, на што „Ромите воопшто, а жените особено“ требa да сe спротистават“.\(^103\)
4. Hopes for the Future?

The development of strong Romani women activists and organizations is certainly praiseworthy and of exceptional importance as an inspiring example for other marginalized women’s groups. On a general scale, another important development has commenced: The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, launched in February 2005 by the World Bank, Open Society Institute, and governments of eight European countries, including Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro, and Croatia. The Decade brings hope of systematic changes that will benefit the Romani community, primarily in the four priority areas of education, employment, health and housing. However, the rights of Romani women and the issue of double discrimination were not prioritised, and will only be considered in the framework of other thematic areas. It remains to be seen how this mainstreaming will take place during the implementation of various national action plans. It would be of extreme importance that Romani women activists continue their advocacy in this direction, otherwise the promise of the Roma Decade might remain just a dream for Romani women in south-eastern Europe, and further afield.

Notes:
1. This account should by no means be understood as a comprehensive list but merely as a starting point on a selective number of concerns. The countries covered in the report were also selected only on the grounds of author’s expertise.
2. Rozalija Ilić, “Položaj romskih žena u Srbiji (izveštaji, radovi i lično razmišljanje),” *Rromnja godoja šaj* (2003); 24-5.


20. Ibid., 199.

21. Ibid., 38.

22. For more information on segregated education, see Stigmata: Segregated Schooling of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe (Budapest: European Roma Rights Center, 2004).

23. How We Live(d) (Zenica: Medica Infoteka, 2001), 15.


27. Ibid., 70.


33. “Shadow report of the European Roma Rights Center...”

34. Local Governance Brief, Budapest, Summer 2004, 7.


36. Ibid., 96.

37. Повеће информации за еколошката правда во врска со Ромите, види Local Governance Brief, Budapest, Summer 2004.


27. Ibid., 70.


33. “Shadow report of the European Roma Rights Center...”

34. Local Governance Brief, Budapest, Summer 2004, 7.


36. Ibid., 96.

37. For more information on environmental justice with regards to Roma, see Local Governance Brief, Budapest, Summer 2004.


45. “Shadow report of the European Roma Rights Center...”


47. “Shadow report of the European Roma Rights Center ...”


52. “Shadow report of the European Roma Rights Center ...”
54. State of Impunity, 57.
56. The Non-Constituents, 42.
57. Ibid., 46.
58. Ibid., 42.
64. Based on the oral presentation of Olivera Kurtić at the seminar “Creating the Strategic Plan and Forming the Roma Women’s Network,” Belgrade, 2 Dec 2004.
65. How We Live(d), 26.


70. Petra Kutalkova, “Prevention...,” 144.

71. Angela Kocze, “Double Discrimination...”

72. *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*.

73. “Statement for the 49th Session of the UN CSW.”


78. Mitro et al., 25.

80. For more information on the issue of statelessness and personal documents among Roma in South East Europe, see Tatjana Perić, “Personal Documents and Threats to the Exercise of Fundamental Rights of Roma in Europe,” *Roma Rights* 3 (2003).


83. ERRC, “Shadow report.”

84. ERRC and GHM, *Cleaning Operations*, 77.


87. RWI and ERRC, “Statement for the 49th Session.”

88. Based on the oral presentation of Rozalija Ilić at the seminar “Creating the Strategic Plan and Forming the Roma Women’s Network,” Belgrade, 2 Dec 2004.


90. Based on the oral presentation of Stanka Dimitrov at the seminar “Creating the Strategic Plan and Forming the Roma Women’s Network,” Belgrade, 2 Dec 2004.


92. Ibid.
96. Ibid., 34.
97. Ibid., 33.
98. Angela Kocze, “Double Discrimination...”
99. Veronika Mitro et al., The Invisible Ones...
102. OSI and ERRC, “Victory for the Roma Women’s Delegation.”

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