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ROMA WOMEN AND THE WORLD-OF-WORK IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

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Foreword

Promoting decent work opportunities is a key to break the poverty cycle experienced by much of Moldova's Roma population. The human capital of Roma women in particular is being under-utilized. Enabling Roma women to access decent work will not only improve their economic situation, but also to strengthen their voices in society, and benefit the entire Moldovan economy.

At the global level, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), to which all countries including the Republic of Moldova has committed, provide a solid basis on which to advance policies to promote the rights of Roma women in Moldova. In the context of Roma women and the world-of-work in Moldova, the following SDGs are particularly applicable: SDG 5 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'; SDG 8 'Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all' and SDG 10 'Reduce inequality within and between countries'.

Under the framework of a Technical Cooperation Project funded by the Government of Czech Republic, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has been providing technical assistance to the Republic of Moldova on:

- Adapting and disseminating the ILO Resource Guide "Promoting Decent Work Opportunities for Roma Youth in Central and Eastern Europe" with Moldovan contents;
- Producing introductory material to present the ILO Resource guide;
- Presenting international experience including Czech experience on social and labour market inclusion of Roma; and
- Producing technical report with a specific focus on Roma women in Moldova based on focus group discussion method.

This report is the final output of the last component, and is the first ever ILO country study with a particular focus on Roma women. In the absence of sex-disaggregated statistics collected by the Moldovan government, this paper tried to capture the specifics of Roma women in Moldova by conducting a series of focus group discussions. For the purpose of comparing the voices and viewpoints between women and men, separate focus group discussions addressing the same questions were organized. This primary data is contextualized by findings from a Gallup survey on attitudes to women engaging in paid work, and with the findings of a number of other multilateral agencies working in Moldova.

We trust that this report will serve as a useful reference particularly for those who are actively working on social and labour market inclusion of Roma population in the Republic of Moldova.

Budapest, February 2018

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Executive Summary

The Moldovan government is seeking to better integrate the Roma population into the economic, political and social life of the country. In 2011 it launched the second phase of an Action Plan in this regard. The Action Plan set out a system whereby state and Roma communities were to be connected via a system of Community Mediators. The plan has had some success, but overall the systemic problems of exclusion and discrimination remain in place. A 2012 survey finding that half of Moldovans would not accept a Roma neighbour;¹ Moldovan Roma are more than twice as likely to live in poverty than non-Roma; they face serious problems in accessing education and in educational achievement; and Roma adults are more likely than non-Roma adults to be illiterate. All of these factors make accessing the labour market very difficult for the Roma population, particularly given that Moldova is itself the poorest country in Europe and jobs are scarce for all Moldovans.

Discrimination and exclusion are experienced particularly by Roma women, who face discrimination at the intersection of multiple levels, including race, gender, and class. Roma women have lower levels of education, higher rates of unemployment, poorer health, and significantly lower incomes than both Roma men, and non-Roma women.² These factors, combined with cultural expectations that Roma women undertake domestic and household chores, mean that Roma women are almost entirely excluded from economic and political life in the country.

Many Roma girls marry young, and high rates of violence against women in Roma communities are found within a system of male dominated households and communities that severely limit women and girls' freedom of movement and choice. While clearly problematic in and of itself, this also prevent Roma women from accessing employment. However, there is evidence that such attitudes are changing with young Roma women and men advocating for greater freedoms and protection of their rights.

Overall there is a positive legislative framework in place and with the Action Plan the Moldovan government is attempting to provide policy expression to these legislative commitments. Moldova is also bound by its international commitments to human rights, and questions regarding gender equality and inclusion are likely to feature quite prominently in Moldova's accession process to the European Union over the coming decade.

¹ Study on the Situation of Romani Women and Girls in the Republic of Moldova, UN Women, 2014

² "No Jobs for Roma": Situation Report on Discrimination against the Roma in Moldova Equal Rights Trust, 2015

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List of acronyms

CEDAW:	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women
CERD:	Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
EU:	European Union
EUR:	Euro
GDP:	Gross Domestic Product
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
OCHCR:	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PGA:	Participatory Gender Audit
SDG:	Sustainable Development Goal
SPF:	Strategic Policy Framework
SWOT:	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
UN:	United Nations
UNDP:	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund

1. Background and introduction

This study assesses the situation faced by Roma women in Moldova, with a particular focus, the world-of-work. It describes some of the main labour market challenges for Roma women, and outlines how these are affected by, and impact upon social issues such as healthcare and education. Discrimination stifles opportunities, wasting the human talent needed for economic progress, and accentuates social tensions and inequalities. Success in promoting gender equality and the inclusion of minorities in the workplace has positive economic and social benefits for the entire country. This is as true for Roma women in Moldova as anywhere else.

In 2011, the Government of the Republic of Moldova approved the second phase of an Action Plan to Support the Roma Ethnic Group for the period 2011-2015, the first phase having run from 2007-2011 (Hereinafter ‘The Action Plan’). The Action Plan focused on integrating the Roma community into Moldovan society in employment, education, healthcare, social protection, cultural activities, and participation in decision-making structures. It aimed to promote decent work, inclusion and social justice by empowering Roma women and men at community and grassroots level, and included a particular commitment to mainstreaming gender equality and to promoting the rights of Roma women across the entire legislative and policy framework.

The Action Plan has undoubtedly had some success. From 2013 onwards, the government began recruiting Roma Community Mediators to act as a bridge between government and the communities. The Community Mediators were tasked with representing their communities’ interests to government, and communicating government policy to Roma communities.³ Following a mapping process held in settlements densely populated by Roma people, it emerged that 48 Community Mediators would be required in 44 localities, and the government allocated 1.5 million lei (\$82,470) to the scheme. 21 Community Mediators were employed until 2014, and as of 2016 there were eleven Roma Community Mediators working for the Moldovan government.⁴

In the sixteen years between independence and the adoption of the Action Plan the inclusion of Roma communities was a priority of neither the national government, nor the local authorities. While only making up a small percentage of the Moldovan population, the Roma remain the largest ethnic minority in East and Central Europe, and one of the most disadvantaged. A vicious circle is at play: their poor socio-economic situation fuels negative attitudes toward Roma leading to segregation and discrimination. This dynamic is at play in Moldova in the same way as other countries with larger Roma populations.

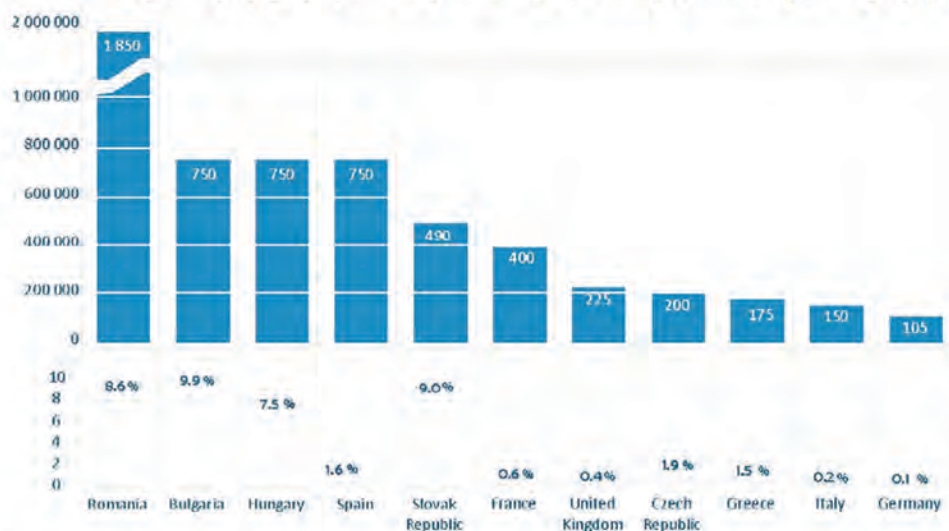
³ The Community Mediators were recruited and employed under the terms of the Law No.69 of April 5, 2013 to supplement the Article 14 of the Law No. 436 of 28 December 2006 on Local Public Administration by the MLSPF, whereby the Local Council was given a new competence to decide on the establishment of the community mediator system in compact or mixed settlements inhabited by Roma and inclusion of "23256 Community Mediator" occupation into the Alphabetical Index of Occupational titles (functions) of the Classification of Occupations of the Republic of Moldova.

⁴ Republic of Moldova, 26th session. Resource Center for Human Rights (CReDO) and Roma National Center (CNR) 2016, Chisinau

According to official statistics Roma account for 0.3 per cent of the population of Moldova, estimated at 9,300 people in 2014.⁵ Indeed the numbers are so low that Moldova does not even feature on the Council of Europe's bar-chart on Roma populations in Europe (See Figure 1 below). However, these figures are disputed, and many civil rights campaigners in Moldova put the figure closer to 20,000, while some Roma leaders promote the idea of 250,000 Roma living in Moldova.⁶

Many Roma chose to hide their identity as a means of avoiding discrimination. The low percentage may be due to the reluctance of people to identify as Roma given the widespread stigma attached to Roma identity. Some focus group participants argued that keeping the official number of Roma population low leads to further exclusion of their communities, as they drop down the list of priorities. The Roma are not the only minority in the country. Moldova is a multicultural and multilingual country, and almost a quarter of the population belongs to one of the national minority groups, namely: Romanian (7 per cent), Ukrainian (7 per cent), Gagauz (5 per cent), Russian (4 per cent) and Bulgarian (2 per cent).⁷

Figure 1: Average estimates of Roma population in selected Member States (2012)
In absolute figures (top graph) and as percentage of total population (lower graph)



Data source: [Council of Europe](#). NB average estimates are those used by the Council of Europe, and fall between the minimum and maximum estimates for each country.

There is public commitment and public openness from state institutions to Roma issues, a positive and very public signal being the Prime-Minister's employment of a Roma person as counsellor on social issues. However, some observers remain sceptical, noting that that a commitment to fund a third phase of the Action Plan has not, at the time of writing, been forthcoming.

⁵ Census, National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, 2014

⁶ Equal Rights Trust: *From Words to Deeds: Patterns of Inequality and Discrimination*, 2016

⁷ UNDP: *Roma in the Republic of Moldova*, p.36, 2007

Roma women in Moldova, like women from minority ethnic groups in many countries, run the risk of double discrimination - both as women and as Roma. They are exposed to greater risks of social exclusion and poverty than Roma men, and suffer greater gender-based discrimination than non-Roma women. Roma women suffer from a range of problems related to the violation of their rights, all of which impact negatively on their employment prospects and their rights as workers. The situation facing Moldovan Roma women is not unique. Roma suffer discrimination and exclusion on a massive scale throughout Europe, with limited participation in decision-making processes, access to education, and control over income. In addition to discrimination because they are Roma, Roma women and girls experience gender-based discrimination. They are often exposed to early marriage, limitations on their freedom of movement, and gender-based violence.

Moldovan Roma are younger, have a higher birth rate, and a shorter life expectancy than the Moldovan population at large.⁸ One third of the Roma population live in rural areas⁹ and 64 per cent speak the Romani language in their home.¹⁰ 42 per cent of the Roma households do not have a kitchen, compared to 17 per cent of non-Roma households; ten per cent of Roma households have no electricity, compared to two per cent of non-Roma; and 81 per cent of Roma households have no access to running water and sewerage, or a flushing toilet, compared with 51 per cent of non-Roma.¹¹ Mostly wood is used for cooking and heating, as Roma have less resources to afford other heating materials, such as charcoal and gas.

The Moldovan government is committed to ending poverty by 2020. While poverty has been declining in recent years, the country remains the poorest in Europe. According to figures from 2011, 41 per cent of the Moldovan population lives below the regional poverty line of US\$5 per day, and 3 per cent live on less than US\$2.50 per day.¹² A United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) survey found that six out of ten Roma families live in absolute poverty¹³, significantly higher rates than the population at large. The greater propensity to live in poverty stems from the fact that Roma, generally speaking, do not have access to land, and cannot produce their own food, which, in the absence of a regular income, leads to high levels of food insecurity.

Roma women tend to be at the forefront of such poverty. They suffer socio-economic deprivation and racial and gender-based discrimination, and are almost entirely excluded from the labour force. According to a UNDP Study in 2014, only 15 per cent of Roma women aged 15 years or above are in paid work, compared with 39 per cent of the population at large, with the vast majority engaged in unpaid caregiving, and household work.¹⁴ Attempts to promote women's empowerment, and labour force participation among Roma women is often perceived as standing in contradiction

⁸ Census, National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova, 2014

⁹ National Bureau of Statistics, Moldova 2017

¹⁰ UNDP: *Roma in the Republic of Moldova*, p.9, 2007

¹¹ Equal Rights Trust: *Situation Report on Discrimination against Roma in Moldova*, 2015

¹² World Bank Moldova: *Poverty Reduction and Shared Prosperity in Moldova: Progress and Prospects*, 2016

¹³ The UN defines absolute poverty as "a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services."

¹⁴ UN Women, OHCHR and UNDP Moldova: *Study on the Situation of Romani Women and Girls, in the Republic of Moldova*, p. 36, 2014

to the tradition, culture and values of their communities. Consequently, in addition to the discrimination faced for being Roma, they also experience significant gender-based discrimination from both within and outside their own communities.

2. Methodology

The study consisted of a combination of desk research - chiefly reports by the Moldovan government and multilateral agencies - and primary research. The primary data was gathered through a Participatory Gender Audit (PGA) workshop, including using a SWOT analysis (See Annex). The workshop, held in July 2017, brought together twenty Roma women from twelve different localities for two days in Chisinau. Thirteen of the women were Community Mediators (as per the Action Plan outlined above), five were high school students, and two were young adults who just finished university. In addition, attitudinal data from a Gallup survey on attitudes toward women's participation in paid work are referenced throughout the report. The Gallup survey was conducted across the globe, enabling international and regional comparisons. In Moldova 300 Roma (150 women and 150 men) were surveyed, thus enabling comparisons between Roma and non-Roma respondents, and between the attitudes of Roman women and men.

The majority of the Community Mediators recruited under the Action Plan in the country were women, and their role varied from ensuring children attend school, to trying to source work for Roma women and men. However, in practice their role depended very much on the individual skills, and their status both in the community and in the state-system remained very ambivalent. The workshop with the Roma women consisted of a series of structured and semi-structured participatory group discussions, which facilitated self-reflection by the Roma women on their situation. The methodology drew upon Carolin Moser's conceptual framework for gender analysis and planning.¹⁵ In this respect it used focus groups to enable the women to identify and assess their gender roles, conducted a gender needs assessment, and looked at the control of resources and decision making within the household. The Chisinau workshop also analysed Roma women's economic and employment situation, by discussing what they saw as the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in promoting Roma women's economic empowerment in Moldova.

The main focus of all discussions at the workshop was on employment opportunities and the workplace treatment of Roma women in Moldova. However, the workplace does not exist in a vacuum, but is influenced by, and indeed influences people's entire lives and the lives of their families. Consequently, discussions also turned to demographics, education, housing, health (including reproductive rights), gender-based violence, and citizens' rights and safety. However, the workshop facilitators ensured that discussions of these issues were contextualized in relation to their impact on Roma women's employment and economic status.

Roma men's perspectives and concerns on gender issues were also solicited via a Men's Voice workshop for one day in Chisinau in September 2017. Eleven Roma men, with different educational backgrounds, from different age groups, and from both rural and urban areas were invited. With minor adjustments, the men were asked the same focus group questions as the women participants.

¹⁵ Caroline Moser. *A Theory and Method of Gender Planning – Meeting Women's Practical and Strategic Needs*, 1986

The situation of Roma women in terms of access to work and conditions of work as found in secondary sources are presented, as well as the opinions of Roma women and men, as expressed in the workshops, and through the Gallup research. The sample of 20 women and 11 men is far too small to be representative of the entire Roma population of Moldova. Nonetheless the opinions expressed do provide valuable insight when looked at in the context of the secondary data.

3. The Legal, policy and institutional framework

The Moldovan constitution guarantees and codifies several basic human rights. Article 16 of the Moldova Constitution is explicit that “all citizens of the Republic of Moldova are equal before the law and public authorities, regardless of the race, nationality, ethnic origin, language, religion, sex, opinion, political affiliation, property or social origin.” Consequently, discrimination against Roma women is illegal on two grounds – ethnic origin and sex. Article 4(1) of the Law on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National Minorities and the Legal Status of their Organisations guarantees national minorities the right to equality, and equal protection, before the law, while Article 4(2) specifically prohibits all discrimination for reasons of belonging to a national minority. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) 1958 (No.111), ratified by Moldova in 1996, prohibits discrimination in employment and occupation on the basis of a person’s sex, race, skin colour, religion, national extraction, political opinion, or social origin”, and is reflected in article 8 of the Moldovan Labour Code.

Promoting gender equality and economic empowerment for women workers is at the heart of the International Labour Organization’s decent work agenda¹⁶, and gender equality and non-discrimination is a cross-cutting policy driver across the ILO’s Strategic Policy Framework (SPF) 2018-21.¹⁷ In this regard, the ILO’s normative human rights framework and its programmatic outreach can assist the Moldovan government, and the Moldovan social partners to implement its own laws and meet its international commitments vis-à-vis Roma women workers’ rights.

There is tangible evidence of progress in gender equality in Moldova. The Parliament recently adopted a new law that, for the first time, introduces gender quotas for party list candidates and cabinet nominees. Passed in April 2016, it stipulates that women and men must each make up a minimum of 40 per cent of every political party’s candidates and of cabinet nominees. It amends other national laws, including the Electoral Code, the Law on Government and the Labour Code of the Republic of Moldova. The law introduces 14 days paid paternity leave; prohibits sexist language and images in the media and advertising; establishes a Gender Equality Coordination Group in the central public administration, and expands the responsibilities of local public authorities on gender equality.¹⁸

As of 2017, 39 per cent of Moldovan women are in the paid labour force, a significant decline from 47 per cent at the end of the Soviet era in 1990.¹⁹ Meanwhile the gender pay gap stands at approximately ten per cent.²⁰ Women’s representation in Moldovan politics is relatively high for a country with its rate of economic development. Women hold 31 of the 101 seats in Parliament (albeit no Roma women) and 31 per

16 Defined by the ILO as “an agenda for the community of work looking at job creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue, with gender equality as a crosscutting objective.”

17 ILO: P&B 2018-19, para. 185

18 International Labour Conference 106th Session, 2017, Report of the Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations, p. 419.

19 ILOSTAT database. 2017.

20 ILO: *Wage Regulations and Practices in the Republic of Moldova*, 2017

cent of government posts. At the local level, women hold 21 per cent of mayoral posts, 19 per cent of district and municipal council seats, and 30 per cent of local council seats.²¹ However, Roma women are virtually excluded from representation in public life at all levels.

Box 1 Roma Women and the Agenda for Sustainable Development

Officially known as transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emerged from the need to create a framework for international development around which all stakeholders – public and private sector, developing and developed countries, civil society and others – could converge. No SDG is achieved unless and until all SDGs are achieved. The SDGs provide a solid basis on which to advance policies to promote the rights of Roma women in Moldova.

SDG 5 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' calls for an "end to all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere", and for "reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national law." SDG 8 'Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all' is unambiguous that promoting gender equality, women's empowerment, and the inclusion of marginalized groups is a central component to all its sub-objectives being met. And in SDG 10 'Reduce inequality within and between countries' - there is a recognition that gender can, and often does intersect with other forms of discrimination and that women tend to be relatively more disempowered in poor and marginalized communities such as ethnic minority and indigenous communities.

Progress in advancing the rights of Roma have not achieved the same degree of attention, or showed the same levels of progress as women's rights. According to a European Agency for Fundamental Rights survey of 2011, covering a number of countries in Eastern Europe, almost half of the Roma surveyed reported experiencing discrimination, and very few Roma were aware of their rights as guaranteed by the laws of the countries in which they reside. In European Union (EU) Member States, only 35 per cent of Roma women and 45 per cent of Roma men showed awareness of laws against discrimination in employment.²² While Moldova is not an EU member State, available evidence supports similar trends in the country. Even Roma that are aware of their rights face serious obstacles in accessing them, including "factual restraints such as the lack of appropriate laws to define the crime or permit civil redress, reluctant prosecutors or investigators, immunities protecting certain individuals or institutions from lawsuits, and procedural restrictions, as well as practical constraints such as a lack of funds or access to a lawyer."²³ In addition, judges, investigators, and prosecutors, may have preconceived notions, biases, and prejudices with regard to Roma, and indeed preconceived notions regarding gender equality.

The discrimination against Roma women emanates from both within and outside their own community simultaneously. Multiple forms of discrimination on grounds of ethnicity and gender operate in interrelated ways and exacerbate social exclusion.²⁴ For example, Roma women and girls are typically responsible for a larger share of unpaid care work and household duties, with very limited access to childcare services, even while striving to generate an income from work outside the household.

21 Council of Europe. 2016. *Women's Political Representation in Eastern Partnership Countries*

22 ILO: *Promoting decent work opportunities for Roma youth in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2016

23 European Roma Resource Group, 2011

24 ILO: *Promoting decent work opportunities for Roma youth in Central and Eastern Europe*, 2016

Focus groups participants perceived that government programmes to promote integration remain inadequate. They expressed the view that the programmes are often under-funded, over-simplistic, and often don't tackle the real problems faced by Roma women. For example, while Roma women and men may undergo a training programme to better prepare them for the job market, the lack of job opportunities and the discrimination faced by Roma in trying to access jobs is not addressed. There was a broad consensus in the groups that the Action Plan fell into this category: that it was overly focused on equipping Roma with skills, and did little to address systemic exclusion and discrimination.

Box 2 Examples of projects to empower Roma women in Moldova

A project entitled *Roma Women: First Step to Rise* was implemented during 2014-2015 and enabled 20 Roma women to attend entrepreneurship training, where they gained practical guidance on the basic elements of starting and running a business, such as finance, business planning, marketing and accounting.

During 2016-2017 the Moldsolidaritate Association ran a project entitled *Roma Career Women - Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, through which 40 young Roma women were trained in leadership skills and in building their self-confidence. The training covered the practical aspects of how to find a job such as composing a CV, and how to present oneself at job interview. The project also developed a Guidebook on Roma Women's Careers, and at the time of writing, over 1,000 Roma women have benefited from the Guide for finding job opportunities and career development of Roma women in Moldova.

Participants also suggested that NGOs can and do instigate self-help measures in education and health at a community level, and have in some cases actually overtaken the responsibility and roles of local government in providing services. However, there are threats to the sustainability of even well-managed projects. In some cases, they have failed due to a lack of community support, monetary constraints, and long-term commitment from those in charge. There are however examples of projects that have achieved successful outputs for Roma women. For example, the Moldsolidaritate Association, a non-governmental organization has implemented two projects for Roma women (See Box 2).

The frequent change of personnel at ministerial level in Moldova; and consequent shifts in policies make it very difficult for Roma to advocate for their needs on a long-term, strategic basis. Participants in the men's focus group in particular felt that Roma interests would benefit from an *internationalization* of the issue, and could be advanced by the monitoring activities of the Council of Europe, the EU and various UN agencies and commissions.

It was apparent from the focus groups discussions that the Roma men were much more aware of political issues and policy questions than the women, even than women working as Community Mediators. Roma women often lack an understanding of politics, the role and structure of political parties, the importance of participation in local elections, and the pros and cons of stepping forward as candidate of a party or as independent candidate. They report difficulties in choosing a political party and in accessing financial support for the election campaign. Despite the obstacles, seven Roma women ran in the local elections in 2015, and two were elected as local councillors. These women were among the first Roma to be elected in any election

at any level since independence in 1991,²⁵ and were the first ever Roma *women* elected to any office in the country.²⁶

Box 3 Roma Women and Moldova's Application to join the EU

In 2014 the EU signed an Association Agreement with the Republic of Moldova, and the country is covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy. Moldova receives technical, financial and legal support from the EU, and the country has committed to political and economic reforms. The process of EU accession requires that Moldova comply with standards and regulations with respect to human rights, gender equality and non-discrimination. The focus groups participants view this as a clear opportunity to highlight their situation on the European stage, and see the EU accession process as a unique opportunity to promote inclusion for Roma women and men in Moldova.

²⁵ Moldovan Electoral Commission, 2016

²⁶ One of the two women elected did not take up her post as it paid less than her job as a Community Mediator. Councillors in Moldova are paid approx. €10 per month (depending on the number of meeting attended).

4. Roma women and workplace

4.1. Employment conditions and wages

Despite anti-discrimination legislation, discrimination against Roma women and men in the labour market is endemic in Moldova. There is evidence of discrimination in all aspects of employment: in pre-recruitment and recruitment; conditions of work; wages; skills development; and career progression. Despite increasing levels of education, Roma graduates often find work only in Roma-related areas, such as service delivery to other Roma, or Roma policy-related employment. Where the “glass ceiling” is often used to describe barriers to senior jobs for women, for Roma, a “glass box” blocks access to employment per se. While the public sector is one of the largest employers in Moldova, Roma are rarely found in public employment. Despite the recent policy focus inclusion of Roma, mandatory anti-discrimination training for staff in public institutions is rare.

Analysing the situation of Roma women in Moldova is limited by a fundamental challenge from the outset – the lack of sex-disaggregation in Moldovan labour market data. Accurate data is obviously a foundation plank of policy formulation, but also serves to raise awareness among the public on the levels of discrimination faced by a particular group or groups. Moreover, data serves as a baseline from which to assess the effectiveness of policies over time. In this regard the lack of data makes it virtually impossible to draw empirical conclusions. However, as mentioned in Section 2, we can draw important and meaningful qualitative conclusions from the focus groups conducted with Roma women, and from the results of the ILO-Gallup survey.

The data that does exist, from 2013, points to significant disadvantages for Roma women and men in Moldova. While the weak economic and employment situation affects the entire population, there are significant differences in labour market participation between Roma and non-Roma. 14 per cent of all Roma workers, and 3 per cent of non-Roma workers earn less than USD\$2.15 per day (based on Purchasing Power Parity (PPP)).²⁷ In most cases, employment in Roma families’ is a temporary measure to cope with destitution. Their wages are too low, and insufficient to support their households move out of poverty. The work that Roma women do have tends to be in the informal economy, and focus group participants stressed that even formal work was often de-facto informal as employers did not register them with the tax and social insurance authorities.

In Moldova 15 per cent of Roma women aged over 15 are employed, in comparison to 34 per cent of non-Roma women and 25 per cent of Roma men. In 2011, 80 per cent of Roma women in employment worked in the informal sector, and 84 per cent of them worked without a contract and without social security. Young Roma women face an extremely difficult situation in the labour market. While in the age group 15 to 64 around 31 per cent of Roma women have work experience, only 11 per cent in the age group 15-24 have. In age group 15-64, 41 per cent are

²⁷ UNDP: *Migration of Roma and non-Roma from Central and Eastern Europe*, 2013

unemployed, while in age group 15-24, 52 per cent are. Roma women's enrolment in vocational courses is very low: only 4 per cent have ever attended a vocational course, and only 11 per cent are computer literate.²⁸

Access to the workplace is often complicated by a lack of official documentation, whether it be a birth certificate, marriage certificate or identity card of any kind. The fact that Roma women often do not register these significant events with the Moldovan state may itself be a sign of marginalization and exclusion; of not feeling part of the nation. Several measures have been taken to provide temporary access to free registration. However, lack of adequate information meant the bulk of the Roma population remains unaware of the initiative.

Labour market opportunities particularly in rural areas are limited in Moldova and there is little in the way of large-scale private sector investment. However, the statistics do not fully capture the influence of labour migration so that the high numbers of Moldovans working or searching for work abroad are considered inactive in the Moldovan labour statistics.²⁹ Despite cultural taboos on women leaving the community, many Roma women do travel abroad for work, often through agencies, which arrange the documents and transport. The majority go to Ukraine and Russia, for seasonal agricultural work. And some young people have the opportunity to go to Germany, where they can earn a better wage and send remittances back to their families.

Focus group participants reported that a number of young Roma women and men had secured jobs in a chocolate factory in Germany. This is not unique to the Roma population. Over the past decade Moldovans have been emigrating in large numbers. In 2011 almost half of the working age population was abroad, and their remittances accounted for 30 per cent of GDP.³⁰ In 2007-2013, the net migration was over 30 thousand people per year, albeit this has slowed in recent years.³¹ The high number of Moldovan Roma seeking asylum in Western Europe has had a polarizing effect on the Roma community, as expressed in the focus groups – on the one hand, Moldovan people interpreted the situation as a threat, fearing that this influx of Roma from Moldova demanding refugee status will endanger their visa free travel rights. On the other hand, Roma hoped that this would shed light on the problems which they are facing in Moldova.

Amongst the Moldovan Roma women interviewed in the focus groups most thought that women had fewer opportunities of finding a good job than a man with similar education and experience. Amongst the 150 Roma men surveyed as part of a Gallup research on attitudes on women taking up paid labour in Moldovan Roma communities, 37 per cent believed the opportunities to find a good job are the same between men and women; 35 per cent believed women have better opportunities; and 28 per cent thought women had worse opportunities. It is interesting to note that despite low rates of acceptability of women engaging in paid work, among the 150 Roma women surveyed, 37 per cent indicated that they provide the main

28 UN Women: UNECE and the Moldovan Bureau of Statistics: *Profile of Women and Girls in Moldova*, 2011

29 World Bank Database, 2014.

30 World Bank Database, 2014.

31 UNFPA. 2016 *Population Situation Analysis in the Republic of Moldova*, p 9.

source of income for their household, higher than both the global (25 per cent) and the regional average (32 Per cent).³²

The Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family was responsible for the process of employing Community Mediators under the Action Plan. It should be noted that according to the initial objectives of the Action Plan, 48 Community Mediators were to be employed in 44 localities mainly inhabited by Roma. In this respect, the Government allocated USD\$ 82,470 to employ Community Mediators, and until 2014 there were 21 active in their posts. However, as the policy of decentralization and reform has extended, local municipalities became responsible for supporting the network of Community Mediators, and by 2016 only 11 continued to receive their salaries, i.e. less than a quarter of the number envisaged in the Initial Action Plan. Recently, discussions were held as to whether the Government should reaffirm its control over the situation.

As mentioned above, the available labour statistics do not provide enough information on Roma women's labour market participation, and the real extent of exclusion is not known. While Census data is not disaggregated by ethnicity, some surveys provide limited insight and demonstrate how big the gap is between the Roma and the non-Roma working age population. For example, in 2015, the National Employment Agency reported that of 1,100 Roma registered with employment agencies only 70 of them were employed.³³ The focus groups conducted with Roma women suggest that they mostly work in the informal sector, are engaged in seasonal agricultural work such as harvesting apples, or home-based businesses, such as preparing and selling food, hand-made crafts, or clothes on the street or at markets.

In focus group discussions, the attitudinal gap between generations was much more significant than between the sexes in terms of defining problems and suggesting solutions to labour market issues. Regarding labour market involvement, older men suggested that both women and men should revert back to old professions like blacksmith, and craftsperson for men, and fortune teller or tinker for women. They argued that Roma had made a living for decades working in these professions, and could do so into the future. However, the younger women and men argued in favour of improving their access to tertiary education for a career as a lawyer or in academia, or for entrepreneurial or IT skills. The focus for the young women and men was on reforming education and employment policies so that discrimination against them would end.

While Roma are de facto excluded from many professions, the reality is that the entire family has to work to make ends meet. Older Roma men in the focus groups reported it shameful for a husband if his wife has to contribute to the household income. However, the younger Roma women and men did not see it this way. They felt that most problems affect men and women alike, with the caveat that women face an additional challenge as they have care and domestic obligations.

Women in the focus group from Hincesti county, North-East of Chisinau, near the

32 UNFPA. 2016 *Population Situation Analysis in the Republic of Moldova* ps. 59 and 60

33 Promo Lex: *Alternative report submitted to the 92nd session (24 April – 12 May 2017) of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*, 2017

Romanian boarder, said they do not see any real, durable opportunities to accessing stable employment. In their experience Roma women, even if well-educated, can only get poorly paid jobs as cleaners, or road sweepers, and in many cases the salary will barely cover the cost of transport to and from the job. There are sewing factories, and a shoe-factory in the region, but Roma women report being systematically excluded from these jobs. Focus group participants from Cimislia, near the Gagauz region tell a similar story – of Roma women being systematically excluded from the brewery, the bakery, and even from smaller businesses. All of the focus group participants reported that Roma women are excluded from jobs in the service industry, where employees meet with customers - such as a shopkeeper, shop assistant, waitress, or hairdresser - even if they are qualified. And none were aware of any Roma woman practicing as a lawyer, doctor or in any highly paid profession. The only professional position held by a Roma woman that focus groups participants could recall was a teacher.

A further restriction on Roma women's access to decent work is the fact that husbands and the wider family network often won't allow women to leave the community to attend training schemes or to go to work. Such restrictions also apply to young women who wish to further their education or simply to work on a farm or at a market outside the community. Within Moldova, consistent with figures from most Central and European countries, 85 per cent of men and 90 per cent of women believing it acceptable for women to hold paid jobs outside of the home, according to the ILO-Gallup Survey.³⁴

Moldovan Roma women and men diverge strongly from this trend. Only 51 per cent of Roma women and 53 per cent of men agreed that it is acceptable for the women in their families to have paid jobs outside their home. Only two of the 142 countries surveyed had lower average rates.³⁵ It is noteworthy that marginally more Roma men than women agreed that it was acceptable for women to undertake paid work; a pattern that is not reflected in any country average around the world.³⁶

Overall Roma women's vulnerability and exclusion from the labour market is caused by several discriminatory factors, low support for their education, employment in low-paid jobs, and almost total exclusion from the formal labour market. They have little control over their working lives and struggle to get by. Indeed, there are reports of incidents of child labour among Roma in Moldova, and this is an alarming sign of extreme poverty. Research shows that only in situations of extreme need will women allow their children to work and contribute to family income.

Entrenched structural and cultural patterns of discrimination can often lead to people blaming the victim, and this is often the case for the Roma in Moldova. Despite considerable evidence that Roma value gainful employment, their exclusion from the labour market is often misguidedly characterized as a problem of their own making. The laws that ostensibly protect Roma from workplace discrimination are not fully implemented and consequently widespread structural inequality is left untouched.

³⁴ Gallup and ILO: *Towards a Better Future for women and work: Voices of women and men* p. 182, 2017

³⁵ Pakistan (26 per cent of men and 43 per cent of women agreed) and Yemen (43 per cent of men and 45 per cent of women agreed) (Gallup and ILO, 2017, pp. 174 and 217).

³⁶ The exception is in regions and countries with almost universal agreement on the acceptability of women working outside of the home, for example in Northern America which has 98 and 99 per cent agreement for surveyed men and women respectively).

4.2. The impact of care and domestic responsibility

As with women everywhere, a major obstacle to Roma women accessing work is their care responsibilities – and not just as mothers - but also as wives, sisters, and daughters. The focus group participants stressed in particular the cross-generational nature of unpaid care and domestic work: older daughters and even grandparents are often found contributing to the housework, helping in child care, cooking, cleaning and animal husbandry.

Roma communities tend to be isolated, and struggle with the absence of many facilities, such as public transport, access to heating materials, electricity, running water, and sewage facilities. Without all the “mod-cons” of wealthier societies, domestic and care responsibilities become more time consuming and must be done in difficult conditions in low-income households. The time-consuming and daily inevitability of these tasks makes accessing the paid labour force difficult if not impossible. Based on UNDP data, 80 per cent of Roma women reported that they don’t visit a doctor because of the high cost of health services and medicine.³⁷ And this is reflected in poor health outcomes. 24 per cent of Roma women suffer from pulmonary diseases, 42 per cent have hypertension, and 17 per cent have anxiety or chronic depression.³⁸

Data from the ILO-Gallup survey illustrates the large divide between Roma and non-Roma Moldovans in regard to women’s care responsibilities and paid work. Amongst the 150 Roma women surveyed, 51 per cent indicated a preference to stay at home and take care of their family and the housework, while 31 per cent would prefer to work in paid jobs, compared with 57 per cent of Moldovan women in general, and 88 per cent globally.³⁹ Interestingly, amongst Moldovan Roma women under 40, more indicated a preference to stay at home and take care of the family, while those over forty would either prefer to work in a paid job or do both – putting the Roma community in Moldova entirely at odds with the global, national and regional norm.

Amongst the 150 Roma men surveyed, 35 per cent responded that women in their families ought to stay at home and take care of your family and the housework, compared with 13 per cent of Moldovan men in general.⁴⁰ Age was also a factor amongst Roma men – albeit in the opposite sense to Roma women. For men under forty, the majority preferred women to undertake paid work, while those over forty prefer women to stay at home and take care of your family and the housework – more in line with the national and international norm.⁴¹

In the SWOT⁴² analysis many of the women reported their domestic role as a “strength” and Roma women take pride in being devoted to family, and being

37 UNDP-Moldova. 2007. *Roma in the Republic of Moldova*, pg. 82

38 UNDP-Moldova and the CIS Bratislava Regional Centre The health situation of Roma communities: *Analysis of the data from the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey*, 2012, pg. 19

39 Gallup and ILO. 2017. *Towards a Better Future for women and work: Voices of women and men*, p. 182.

40 Gallup and ILO. 2017. *Towards a Better Future for women and work: Voices of women and men* p. 182. Pg. 16

41 Gallup and ILO. 2017. *Towards a Better Future for women and work: Voices of women and men* p. 182, pg. 16

42 An exercise where a group creates a four-square matrix, and list what they perceive to be their group’s particular Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT).

good mothers who cook, clean and look after the children, but who also develop a tolerant, understanding nature and can therefore mediate and solve family problems. These behaviour patterns are instilled in young Roma girls from an early age, and may mitigate against the pursuit of a career outside the home.

Overall the women in the focus groups highlighted their dependency, or an acceptance of their dependency on the male family members. The focus groups and the SWOT analysis revealed a general consensus that Roma women should not work and make money; that a Roma woman is strong when there is a strong man behind her; that Roma women have a humble attitude, and are not assertive; and that most Roma women insist on keeping faith with tradition and not taking independent decisions. Many of the focus group participants did not themselves agree that women ought to behave in this way, but all agreed that this was the perception of the majority of Roma women in Moldova held.

Many of the participants agreed that the gender bias toward girls extends to the home. Mothers prefer to teach their daughters about housework, while for boys the emphasis is on getting a driver's license. Girls who do leave their home communities to study take courses to become cooks, waitresses, hairdressers, and beauticians. These are mostly organised in Chisinau, and employment agencies cover costs, accommodation of trainees and grant scholarships. Young Roma women in the focus groups reported that many of their parents are not convinced that it is in the family's interest for their daughters to attend such trainings.

The young Roma women reported that they could earn an independent income, but this would likely lead to their husband leaving (if married), or to them remaining single. The focus groups were clear that the Roma community does not respect single women, or women without children. As a result, Roma women often stay in oppressive relationships. It was reported that young girls who marry into wealthier families may effectively become servants.

Albeit illegal, early marriage, mostly in the form of arranged marriages, is prevalent in many Roma communities in Moldova. It is often propelled forward by a virginity culture, whereby girls are married off by their families while they remain virgins. Teenage pregnancy often leads to Roma couples getting married unofficially and starting a family. Besides the cultural aspects, poverty is a likely driving force behind child marriage. Roma families believe that a marriage will ease the economic stress on the family, despite many real-life examples proving the contrary. Consequently, instead of attending school, many teenage girls get married, with a life-long impact, the most notable being to curtail their potential employability, placing them at a high risk of poverty.

The participants highlighted that many women who have been forced into early marriage get divorced, and after the separation, are left alone with the children. These marriages are usually not officially registered, and men easily shirk responsibility. These young mothers face many practical difficulties. They are poorly educated - most having left school early - and have little knowledge about child raising, nutrition and managing single-headed households. Often, they live with their parents, in crowded homes.

The numbers of Moldovan girls marrying young are declining: Between 2004 and 2014 decreased from 21 per cent of Moldovan women and girls under the age 20 getting married, to 10 per cent.⁴³ However it is unclear whether this decline is also evident in the Roma communities. According to the law, marriages under 18 years of age are only allowed in the case of pregnancy, must gain parental consent, and must be formally approved by the local authorities.

While the participants were critical of early marriage, and feel more ought to be done to outlaw it, they were not opposed to the virginity culture per se, and argued that girls should be encouraged to stay in school and not become sexually active as teenagers. They argued that the Community Mediators could play a role in this regard. They also cited the attendant health issues; that having many children at a young age can, and does, lead to physical and psychological health problems for the young mothers.

Box 4 Early marriage: What kind of legal disadvantages can occur when the couple is not officially registered “cohabitation”

The Republic of Moldova does not recognize cohabiting relationships in law. Consequently, certain disadvantages can arise when the couple is not legally registered. Usually, people choose to cohabit for personal and economic reasons. For example, a couple where one or both parties are under 18 may choose to cohabit due to the need for approval from the local public authorities and the consent of the parents for marriage (*Article 14 paragraph (2) of the Family Code of the Republic of Moldova*).

In the Republic of Moldova, cohabitation differs from marriage in the fact that the cohabiting partners do not have any legal rights or obligations to one another. The goods acquired by one partner in the relationship are personal property and belong uniquely to the person who obtained or purchased them, except when both partners jointly contributed to the acquisition of the asset. In this case both partners are entitled to a share, the size of which depends on the contribution of each partner. For example, if both partners contribute an equal share in buying an apartment, then both will have the same property rights in the case of the division of the property. However, if only one of the partners is included in the title deeds and the partners do not reach an agreement regarding the allocation of a share to his or her partner (whether they contributed to the purchase of the property or not) then the dispute will be settled by the courts (*Article 20 paragraph (1) of the Family Code of the Republic of Moldova*). Children born to unmarried couples are guaranteed the same rights and the same legal protections as children born to married couples.

Despite the fact that it is illegal, elements of the police view early marriage as “normal” in the Roma community, and without a formal request will not intervene. Many in positions of authority believe that all Roma girls aspire to marry young. And they often lose the attention of teachers, many of whom believe Roma girls will drop out after 6th grade. Consequently, girls who do not intend to drop out of school may be subject to this misguided assumption, and consequently the education system does not adequately engage them. This has clear implications for access to decent work later in life.

⁴³ UNFPA. 2016. *Population Situation Analysis in the Republic of Moldova*. pg.159.

4.3 Education and Skills

The educational paths of many Roma children reflect existing patterns of discrimination and lay the ground for continued discrimination in the world of work. Many Roma children attend

poor quality, segregated schools; and there are reports of some being placed in special-needs school for the mentally impaired, although they are not disabled. Some Roma children are denied access to education because of administrative requirements to provide official documentation such as a birth certificate or proof of residence, and most Roma youth do not make the transition into secondary and tertiary schooling. There is a quota for minorities' enrolment into higher education, but focus group participants reported that it was underused for years. Limited education relegates Roma to unskilled jobs in the informal economy or at the bottom of the formal labour market.

Several studies point to severe inequalities in access to education for Roma girls. Roma children spend fewer years in schooling than non-Roma: entering later, and leaving earlier. Mothers among the focus group participants highlighted bullying of Roma children as a perennial problem to the extent that in extreme situations children had to transfer to new schools, and could not graduate to the next grade. On average 76 per cent of Roma girls attend school every day, compared to 96 per cent of non-Roma girls. Only 63 per cent Roma women aged 16 or over can read and write, compared to 77 per cent of Roma men, and almost 100 per cent of non-Roma women. 45 per cent of Roma women, and 33 per cent of Roma men have no education compared to 2 per cent of non-Roma women.⁴⁴

The extreme poverty of many Roma parents' is a barrier to affording education.⁴⁵ Child labour is a long-standing problem among impoverished families.⁴⁶ Their financial conditions can put them in situations where their children are forced to work, such as harvesting on farms, and accompanying their parents for seasonal work. These children often risk their health by collecting metal, and other waste materials, taking care of sick parents, doing domestic work and in extreme cases begging. This leads to a high rate of school drop-outs, as evidenced by the attendance rates outlined above, and further contributes to the cycle of poverty.⁴⁷

The Community Mediators at the focus groups outlined the difficulties they had in communicating with Roma families regarding their children's education. They suggested that Roma parents are often uneducated and therefore have limited understanding of the value of education; some argued that, for Roma people, the education of their children was secondary to other cultural concerns; there was a feeling that Roma parents do not feel responsible for the education of their children, and do not plan for their future outside their family. The discriminatory attitudes of teachers against Roma girls were mentioned several times during the discussions.

⁴⁴ UNDP-Moldova: *Roma in the Republic of Moldova*, 2007

⁴⁵ UNDP-Moldova: *Roma in the Republic of Moldova*, 2007, p.30.

⁴⁶ European Roma Rights Centre (supported by the UNICEF Moldova). 2010: *The Situation of Roma Children in Moldova*, p. 16.

⁴⁷ UN Women, OHCHR and UNDP Moldova. 2014. *Study on the Situation of Romani Women and Girls, in the Republic of Moldova*, p. 30.

They believe that teachers do not devote the necessary level of attention to their school performance. The prejudiced thinking of teachers predetermines the high drop-out rate of Roma girls, which means they do not provide them with quality education.

The impact of education is long lasting, and has an effect on future generations. Some studies suggest that educated parents are more concerned with their own children's education and are therefore more committed to keeping their children in school. There tends to be a clear correlation between the level of education of the head of household and the level of family income. And this general rule is as true for Moldovan Roma as it is elsewhere; indeed, quite possibly exacerbated by ongoing discrimination. A UNDP survey indicates that case of uneducated heads of household in Moldova, 70 per cent of Roma and 33 per cent of non-Roma families suffer from poverty.⁴⁸

The first-hand experience of difficulties in the labour market are direct consequences of a lack of qualifications and low educational levels among Roma women. Irrespective of how motivated an individual Roma family may be to overcome such disadvantage – and the focus groups showed that Roma do value the importance of education – they are faced with many obstacles. Sending one child to school may force a family to reduce the food expenditures on other children and dependents. In principle meals and books are free up until 4th grade. However, focus group participants reported that many schools in Moldova still demand monthly class fees, paid by parents; despite being prohibited by law.

Box 4 OHCHR and Roma Women in Moldova

For a decade the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has recommended to all countries with Roma populations, Moldova included, to support actions that promote the importance of education within the Roma communities. It calls for them to be proactive in supporting scholarships, pre-school education, language classes and financial support for school books and transportation to facilitate better access to education for Roma. There has been very little progress. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2013 pointed out that anti-Roma sentiments in the education system are ever-present, and suggests the necessity for re-entry policies to support Roma girls return to school, and to raise awareness about the importance of education as an empowerment tool for women.

The expenses of schooling often generate debt for low income families. Focus group participants estimated that the costs of the books, clothes, transport, and meals to send a child to school to be circa. 4000 lei for the first month and additional monthly cost per child of 2000-2500 lei thereafter. They must take loans, or borrow money, and pay back with interest during the year. As is often the case, since they can't afford these expenses, the Roma children often end up humiliated and facing discrimination even at this young age. Sending a child to high school is even more expensive. As the schools are further away travel costs are higher, and the books more expensive.

⁴⁸ UN Women, OHCHR and UNDP Moldova. 2014. *Study on the Situation of Romani Women and Girls, in the Republic of Moldova*. p. 30.

High school and university student focus group participants stated that discrimination is more prevalent in the lower grades; and as the children age, the discrimination lessens. There is a clear need for adult schooling for mothers, and young couples. This could compensate for the damage caused by early marriages and enable Roma women and men to gain access to vocational and skills development courses, for which there is a lower threshold entry. Other practical needs include providing scholarships for women students to access higher education, and once these women become lawyers, doctors and other professionals, they would provide important role models for young Roma women.

4.4 Violence against Women

Focus group participants reported that both physical and psychological violence against women were not uncommon in Roma communities, including violence from within the family. As with domestic violence across the globe, Roma women fear the financial and other consequences of reporting the crime, and often silent about their experiences, making it difficult to provide help.

Domestic violence does not exist in isolation, but is rooted in a patriarchal family structure. Women must accept male dominated power relations, and the gender imbalance within the relationship. For Roma women giving an opinion or making their voices heard can be considered as going against the traditional structure of Roma households. Moreover, virginity culture is highly promoted in Roma communities, and consequently young Roma women are reluctant to discuss rape and sexual assault, for fear of ostracization.

There is a restorative and mediation process with regard to domestic violence in Moldova. Local government holds a registry of domestic violence cases, and mediation between the couple starts with the involvement of a doctor, a mediator and the victim, and later with the alleged perpetrator. In principle the police get involved only when such mediation fails. However, the mediation process is largely unused by Roma victims of domestic violence.

There were quite heated exchanges on the subject of violence in the focus groups. Some participants - notably the older women - thought it best that these issues were resolved within the community with outside mediation or the involvement of the police, although many women (mainly younger, but not exclusively so) were adamant that rape was a crime that ought to be reported. Most of women in the focus groups agreed that domestic violence (both sexual and otherwise) was connected to early marriage, but overall there was a reluctance to discuss this topic, even among the Community Mediators. Education about violence is very important, even if they consider it as a private issue. While clearly a major human rights violation in and of itself, it has many negative socio-economic consequences, not least of which is to exacerbate the challenges faced by Roma women in accessing decent work and social justice.

Conclusions

As in other countries with Roma populations, Moldovan Roma, and Moldovan Roma women in particular experience lack of education, financial independence, employment, and housing – all of which combine to create an ongoing poverty cycle. Focus group participants described, often in emotive terms, their perception of how others treat them and described how they internalise stereotypes and feel undervalued, disrespected, and easily influenced.

The ongoing social and economic separation affects both Roma and non-Roma populations. The generates mistrust and further compounds the division. When people do not interact, their stereotypical impressions of one another tend to be reinforced. Policy interventions must target entire communities, and their scale and scope must be commensurate with the challenge: preventing the residential and social segregation that engenders multiple inequalities; addressing the intergenerational transmission of poverty and the systemic disadvantages of Roma children and their parents; and ensuring equal treatment in the labour market.⁴⁹ Affirmative action policies, such as a quotas in education and training, and direct outreach to Roma communities to promote employment, are required. The policies must also work on transforming attitudes toward Roma among the Moldovan population at large through positive messaging and education.

Roma engage primarily in seasonal agricultural work, both within Moldova, and abroad, often without a contract, in difficult and non-negotiable working conditions. These conditions suggest a practical need for a legal entity, to help formulate social cooperatives, or other business organizations that ensure a legal framework for the enforcement of their rights as workers. Social cooperatives can provide a great framework for turning reproductive activities into productive ones, and finding markets for the products of income generating opportunities. In addition to providing employment, being part of a social cooperative or other community based economic entity can accomplish many practical and strategic needs, such as learning democratic processes, gaining experience in decision making, access to resources, credits, and skills development options.

In contrast with global, regional or national data, almost half of Roma women and men respondents do not agree that women should take up paid work working outside of the home, with younger women expressing more conservative views than older women. Their views in this regard are even more restrictive than countries that legally restrict women's access to the labour market. However, there is a mismatch between their views and the reality as Roma women are more likely than the global, regional and national average to be the main source of income for the household.

The system of Community Mediators, while underfunded and largely reliant on volunteers, does provide a framework for the Moldovan state to advance the rights of Roma women. Importantly it provides a conduit between Roma communities

⁴⁹ ILO. 2016 *Promoting decent work opportunities for Roma youth in Central and Eastern Europe*

and state agencies of that organize healthcare, education and vocational training, all of which are vital to advancing Roma women's participation in the workplace. An expansion of the numbers of Community Mediators, along with increased resources and guaranteed pay, would go a long way in improving the system and ultimately in combatting the severe forms of discrimination and exclusion being experienced by Roma women in Moldova.

While, as mentioned at various points, empirical data is scarce, the statistics that do exist from the UN, the EU and other bodies, show that discrimination in the labour market is a deeply embedded, systemic problem that affects Roma women across the country. Legal and policy protections have led to some positive changes, such as the system of Community Mediators. Concerted efforts must be made to ensure enforcement of anti-discrimination protections, and a more rigorous approach to combatting the social problem of discrimination against Roma is needed. Roma women are trapped in a cycle where poor access to education and training limits potential to participate in the labour market, which in turn embeds them in poverty. Consequently, promoting equal access and treatment at work requires the government to address all aspects of life for Roma to adequately address discrimination in accessing employment. Moldovan trade unions are keen to promote programmes to inform Roma women about their rights and responsibilities and to expand Roma women's access to the labour market be instituted.⁵⁰

The support for Roma women's rights and empowerment should be explicit in its support for Roma people's culture, customs and institutions as well. It is important that Roma women and men do not feel that gender equality is being imposed upon them from outside. Forcing people to do things tends to lead to resistance. In this respect in addition to specific women-focused programmes, both gender sensitive policies, and strategies need to be promoted, and specific efforts must be made to ensure that men feel part of the process – that gender equality is not a threat to them.

50 from *Confederata Nationala A Sindicatelor*: Submission on this paper, January, 2018

Annex: Participatory Gender Audit Methodology

The Participatory Gender Audit methodology was developed by the ILO in 2001. It assesses how a unit, organization or, in this case, an Action Plan is performing on gender equality, in relation to international norms, but also in relation to its own commitments and obligations. This report is fully owned by the audited unit. PGAs take place over a two-week period. The PGA has three elements:

1. A global desk review of key policy documents, major publications and programming, budget, and monitoring and evaluation processes.
2. Individual interviews and/or focus groups of selected individuals (managers, technical and support), and of selected and partners.
3. A one-day participatory workshop

Following this research and analysis, the audit facilitator draws up a succinct, results oriented report with recommendations on how to improve performance on promoting gender equality. The methodology, and the report is structured around 10 key focus areas:

1. Current national/international gender issues and gender debate affecting the audited unit, and unit's interaction with national gender institutions and women's organizations
2. Organization's mainstreamed strategy on gender equality as reflected in the work unit's objectives, programme and budget
3. Mainstreaming of gender equality in the implementation of programmes and technical cooperation activities
4. Existing gender expertise, decision making and strategy for building gender competence
5. Information and knowledge management
6. Systems and instruments in use for monitoring and evaluation
7. Choice of partner organizations
8. Products and public image
9. Staffing and human resources
10. Organizational culture

The PGA is undertaken by a trained gender audit facilitator with the assistance of a Gender Focal Point (GFP) from within the organization. The GFP provides the audit facilitator with the relevant documents, assists in arranging interviews, and co-facilitates the participatory workshop.

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