

Intersectional Exclusion of Roma Women in the Area of Economic Empowerment in Romania

Claudia Cerasela BĂNICĂ

Human Rights and Advocacy Centre

Abstract:

The paper focuses on the exclusion of Roma women from the economic development market in Romania which is explained through the interaction of the intersectional discrimination with other constraints which jointly deepens the situation. Thus, the analysis is centered on the main identities of Roma women, gender and race, throughout several levels from individual to state level and presents the changing position among these core identities in different contexts. The paper completes this analysis with several recommendations to tackle the identified constraints in Roma women road to economic empowerment.

Key words: *Roma women, intersectionality, labour market, discrimination, multiple exclusion.*

Introduction

The economic justice of Roma women remains an unsolved matter and a challenge due its multifaced dimensions, such as gender, ethnicity, economic and social status, compounded by an intergenerational exclusion, which jointly have created layers of inequality and disempowerment of Roma women giving way to further marginalization, poverty, oppression and denial of a better quality of life.

In Romania, this situation is mirrored by several statistical data which show that after three decades of state interventions in this area, merely 23% of Roma women aged 24-60 years in Romania are in paid work versus 64% Roma men and 77% are missing from education, work or



training¹. This status quo has led generally to high poverty of the Roma households, as more than 70% live in deep poverty², affecting particularly women, by having poor access to health care (47% of Roma women do not have medical insurance in comparison with 22% of non-Roma women aged 16 and above³) and inadequate housing (84% continue to live in poor housing conditions⁴).

1. Concept of intersectional discrimination

In the 90's Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced “intersectionality” as a concept to analyze the power relation between white and black women in USA⁵, and overtime it gained more attention within the international and political discourse, as it became the main tool to advocate for gender equality in feminism movements.

A Report of the UN Expert Group on "Gender and racial discrimination" in 2001, explained that “The idea of intersectionality seeks to capture both the structural and dynamic consequences of the interaction between two or more forms of discrimination or systems of subordination. It specifically addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, economic disadvantages and other discriminatory systems contribute to create layers of inequality that structures the relative positions of women and men, races and other groups. Moreover, it addresses the way that specific acts and policies create burdens that flow along these intersecting axes contributing actively to create a dynamic of disempowerment”⁶.

2. The narrative of intersectionality within economic participation of Roma women

The intersectional and pervasive discrimination of Roma women in the economic empowerment area, generates overlapping oppression as it occurs within the general construction

¹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, “Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey | Roma 2018, page 20, accessed June, 14, 2020, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings_en.pdf.

² European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, “Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey | Roma 2018, page 14.

³ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, “Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey | Roma 2018, page 28.

⁴ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, “Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey | Roma 2018, page 31.

⁵ Crenshaw, Kimberlé, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”, 1991, *Stanford Law Review*, 43 (6), pp.1241-1299.1989.

⁶ Presentation of the Expert Group on gender and racial discrimination, organised by the UN Division for the Advancement of Women in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UN Development Fund for Women in November 2000 in Zagreb, Croatia.

of gender inequality and feminization of non-Roma women epitomized through lower employment than men¹, occupational segregation in so called “traditional jobs” for women in the educational, health and social services areas which are lower paid², gender pay gap³ or lower rate in management positions, etc. Whereas for non-Roma women the employment inequalities are more related to the barriers to progression up the career ladder, diversified occupational opportunities, equal payment and recognition of the expertise, for Roma women inequalities are mainly related to their entry and retainment in the labour market in “dead-end” jobs which do not offer a career path.

This discrepancy is more a problem of under-inclusion from a gender discrimination perspective⁴ into the systemic intergenerational racial discrimination narratives of Roma which during five centuries built up the unbalanced power relationship between non-Roma and Roma, leading to a robust vicious circle of marginalization of Roma and inequality in the economic area. Thus, within this discrimination framework, the status quo of Roma women on the economic market naturally is more vulnerable versus Roma men and non-Roma women.

Due to the interconnected and circumventable relationship between determinants of the poverty and exclusion of Roma, the lack of employment of Roma generates low participation of their children in education, poor access to health care and proper housing for the entire family, whereas lack of education connected with poor health care and housing lead to low participation in the employment market. Within this vicious circle of marginalization and discrimination, Roma women are disproportionately more vulnerable as the following data shows; even if 83% of Roma girls are enrolled in the compulsory education, towards the end of the lower secondary education 79% leave the school, less than 4% succeed to get enrolled in upper secondary education, and only 3% of Roma are actually participating in academic education⁵.

¹ National Institute of Statistics, “Women and Men, Working and Life Partnership”, 2017, page 11, accessed June 14, 2020. According to the NIS, in 2017, the women employment rate was lower (55.8%) than men (71.8%).

² National Institute of Statistics, page 9.

³ Eurofound- European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, “The gender employment gap: Challenges and solutions”, *Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg*, 2016, page 17, accessed June 14, 2020, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2016/labour-market/the-gender-employment-gap-challenges-and-solutions>. The study shows that the gap of earnings and pay is of 10% between women and men in Romania.

⁴ Patel, Pragana, “Notes on Gender and Racial Discrimination: An urgent need to integrate an intersectional perspective to the examination and development of policies, strategies and remedies for gender and racial equality”, accessed June 15, 2020, <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/Patel45.htm>.

⁵ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, “Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey | Roma 2014, pages 24-27, accessed June 14, 2020, https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings_en.pdf.

Several structural factors in Roma women's exclusion from employment are constructed at individual, community, labour market and state level which built up layers of inequality and disempowerment.

At individual and community level, commonly, Roma women have limited decision making due to unbalanced power between Roma women and men as a result of the patriarchal system¹ and of the financial power of men who are generally the main breadwinner. This situation is more severe in rural areas or traditional communities, where due to the gender conservative norms, early marriages and pregnancies are another determinant in preventing women from completing their education and entering the labour force. In this situation the gender discrimination overshoots the racial discrimination, by intensifying the individual vulnerabilities and inequalities of the Roma women within their families and communities, abating their self-esteem and, thus, their participation in the community and socio-economic life.

The solution is the empowerment of women to gain the power to reclaim their rights and of their children, to make their own decision, to balance the household power and get out of the harmful traditional gender norms through a comprehensive intervention which must contain measures to tackle inclusive the gender-ethnic discrimination. The empowerment of Roma women will trigger a positive ripple impact, which will lead to changes not only with their families but across their community and mainstream society.

At the level of labour market, several constraints impede the access of Roma women, such as lack or low qualifications, concentration of jobs in urban areas, lack of infrastructure such public transportation between the residence and the workplace, lack of childcare support measures or no flexible working time in case of mothers.

These constraints are affecting similarly non-Roma women with the only exception that in case of Roma women is an additional constraint, racial discrimination, which diminishes radically the probabilities to obtain a job if they are in competition with non-Roma women job seekers who possess similar or lower profile for so-called traditional women jobs. In case of other type of jobs, both Roma and non-Roma women are more likely to not be successful due to gender identity, the only difference being that Roma women would be the last choice. These scenarios are an

¹ Oprea, Alexandra, "Re-envisioning Social Justice from the Ground Up: Including the Experiences of Romani Women", *Essex Human Rights Review Vol. 1 No. 1*, page 2.

illustration of the power relationships between different groups and the impact of the deep-rooted stereotypes and prejudices.

The layers of exclusion of Roma women will grow as much as further identities such as disability, citizenship, sexual orientation, or other constraints would be added to their core identity: ethnicity and gender. There is possibility that other identities to dominate this core, depending on the hierarchical level of discrimination within the labour market or society. In Romania, the most discriminated group is represented by LGBT persons, thus, there is more likely that this group would be experiencing more discrimination and exclusion from job market than Roma women.

Tackling discrimination based on ethnicity is essential for securing effective entry of Roma women in the labour market by creating a practice of improving and adapting the national anti-discrimination legislation to European standards and efficiently enforce them and by increasing the level of awareness of Roma women about the legislation and mechanisms to combat discrimination and improve their reporting conduct as only 23% of Roma women aged 16 and above versus 34% Roma men have information about legislation against discrimination law in applying for a job¹.

At the state level, in spite of the thorough-going pro-discourse in the recent times on the necessity to reform European and national policies and legislations in order to incorporate measures to answer the intersectionality discrimination, states continue to use the approach of single axes discrimination and resist to enact integrated equality laws, establish single equality bodies for multiple discrimination, develop an integrated implementation, monitoring and evaluation system of the public policies from local to national level and collect disaggregated data by race gender and other identities.

Likewise, a quick review of the existing national policies on Roma social inclusion in Romania shows that there are solely focused on responding to the inequalities and exclusion as result of race identity, while gender is bonded as vertically approach than intersectional, steering to increase the gap of inequalities and discrimination of women minority within Roma minority. Thus, the proposal of post 2020 National Strategy on Roma Inclusion includes mainstreamed actions for Roma communities and overlooks the measures targeting Roma women, who are

¹ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, "Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey | Roma 2016, page 37.

becoming invisible within the framework ¹. In accordance with the intersectionality principle, the inequalities of Roma women must be part as well of the public discourse on gender equality, disability, youth, etc.

Contrary, the civil society already confirmed that the way ahead in order to tackle successfully and efficiently the complex and interconnected constraints regarding Romani women economic participation is not through a sole area intervention but through a multi-tier approach in several areas such as economic empowerment tied up with education, health care, women empowerment in public life, targeting not only women but as well as men and the decision-makers.

Further, to be sustainable and effective, the integration interventions should be up-scaled from grassroots to policy level, be on a long-term basis, flexible and multi-sectorial with concurrent entry points of economic empowerment and education supported by additional services in areas which are generating specific constraints such as access to family planning, childcare support measures, etc.

3. Conclusion

Currently, the gender and ethnicity are addressed separately by the policymakers and state enforcement actors in the area of economic empowerment, erasing the Roma women from the gender equality and Roma inclusion policies and state interventions. Therefore, for an effective tackling of exclusion of Roma women in this arena, the recognition of the intersectionality discrimination is essential, otherwise Roma women will continue to experience oppression and marginalization within their communities and the society at-large, costing Romanian economy averagely 2 million Euros per year per person.

Bibliography:

- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, “Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey | Roma 2018.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity, Politics, and Violence against Women of Color”, 1991, *Stanford Law Review*, 43 (6).

¹ National Agency for Roma, “Recommendation of the public policy in the area of social inclusion of members of Roma community from Romania for the period 2021-20217”, February 2020, available at <http://www.anr.gov.ro/images/Site2020/Documente/ANR---Text-prezentare-noua-viziune-a-viitoarei-SNIR-2021-2027---19.02.2020-FINAL-pentru-website.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3CIIlRtKYC9ee1g1Hvf-EHefldv2av0-YEJA9RYZmgJD7eLusUrvQgOfA>.

- National Institute of Statistics, “Women and Men, Working and Life Partnership”, 2017.
- Eurofound- European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, “The gender employment gap: Challenges and solutions”, *Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg*, 2016.
- Patel, Pragana, “Notes on Gender and Racial Discrimination: An urgent need to integrate an intersectional perspective to the examination and development of policies, strategies and remedies for gender and racial equality”.
- Oprea, Alexandra, “Re-envisioning Social Justice from the Ground Up: Including the Experiences of Romani Women”, *Essex Human Rights Review Vol. 1 No. 1*;
- National Agency for Roma, “Recommendation of the public policy in the area of social inclusion of members of Roma community from Romania for the period 2021-20217”, February 2020.