



SHADOW REPORT TO THE GREVIO COMMITTEE

VIOLENCE AGAINST ROMA WOMEN IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA

On behalf of the Roma Women's Network

Women Space and Roma Women's Centre Bibija

Belgrade, September 2018

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INTRODUCTION

Roma women are a group of women discriminated against in multiple ways, and the discrimination against them is present in all spheres of public and private life, within their own community and within the society in general. They are not adequately involved in public and political life, a small number of Roma girls get an education, there is a high percentage of unemployed women, they have a short life expectancy, they are exposed to early marriages and domestic violence.

In the Republic of Serbia, there are 147,604 male and female citizens of Roma ethnicity registered in 2011, accounting for 2.1% of the population in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. There is insufficient data on the socio-economic status of Roma women, and if they are collected, they are often not systematized and they are collected partially, mainly based on non-standardized and incomparable methodologies. The collection of data on the exercise of economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to work, to housing, social protection, education and employment, is essential for the process of improving access to these rights for all, especially for Roma women who are one of the most vulnerable social groups. There are concerns about the notable differences between the economic activity of Roma, especially Roma women and other types of population, because the changes in the economic structures of the Roma population in relation to the total population did not have the same direction and intensity. The increase of the share of inactive, above all dependent population, represents a negative component of economic prosperity, which also affects the determination of the social position of Roma women. In that sense, it should be noted that in 2011 in the Republic of Serbia the ratio was 100 active to 140 inactive residents, while amongst Roma men and women the ratio was 100 active to 257 inactive (primarily dependent) persons. Grouping according to occupations they perform provides also an overview of the professional structure of Roma men and women. The professional structure represents one of the basic economic as well as personal characteristics, since it most often determines the level of earnings, and therefore the economic and social status. It is obvious that the most frequent occupations are those that point to the professional and social inferiority of Roma men and women, directly conditioned by the educational structure. The sexual differentiation in active Roma men and women who are engaged in an occupation is notable, since men make up 77.5% and women 22.5%, which represents a significant difference compared to the national level, where men make up 57.9% and women 42.1% of total active residents.

Some of the most significant causes of this extremely unfavourable position of Roma women are certainly early marriage, giving birth and motherhood, as well as the level of education. Finally, according to the data on the economic activity of Roma men and women in the Republic of Serbia, it can be concluded that in the inter-census period the percentage

of employed Roma men and women dropped significantly by 5.95%. The economic weakness is also pointed out by data indicating that more than one fourth (27.6%) of the total number of Roma households earn their income through social benefits. The social and health vulnerability of Roma men and women, especially children and women, is indicated in the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey on the Position of Women and Children in the Republic of Serbia¹, which in 2014, with the technical and financial support of UNICEF, was carried out by the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia: the estimated infant mortality rate among children in Roma settlements is 13 per 1000 live-born children, which is double the rate of national average; 10% of children in Roma settlements are undernourished, and 19% are lagging behind in growth, which is about five times higher compared to children from other ethnic groups. Regarding the coverage of children by recommended vaccinations, 13% of Roma children received all vaccines on time, that is, by the end of the first year, and as regards the children from the general population, this coverage is 71%. Out of the total number of beneficiaries of services provided by Social Welfare Centres, 45,050 are members of Roma nationality, almost a third of the total number of Roma men and women registered by the 2011 census. This means that in the Roma population, the share of social protection beneficiaries is almost four times higher than in the total population in the Republic of Serbia. In the age structure of Roma men and women beneficiaries of the social welfare system, 47.2% are adults, 31.1% are elderly and children, and 21.7% are young people. Children aged under 17 make up 27.6% of all beneficiaries of social welfare centres, and together with young people (18-26 years old), who make up 9.8%, represent a total of 37.3% of all beneficiaries of Social Welfare Centres, and thus also the second largest group of beneficiaries of the centres. It is most often emphasized that education is the way in which Roma men and women will most effectively overcome the problem of poverty. However, the data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey on the Position of Women and Children indicate that the appropriate institutional conditions have not yet been created, since only 80% of Roma children who attended the first grade of primary school attended the pre-school preparatory program (in the general population, the coverage is 98%), and only 69% of Roma children started primary school first grade on time (97% in the general population), 64% of Roma children completed primary school (93% in the general population), and finally, only 22% of children of Roma origin attends high school (89% in the general population). The particular problem is that girls leave school and start a family between the ages of 15 and 19. As many as 43% of Roma girls this age interrupt their schooling in order to marry. For girls of the same age in the general population, this percentage is 4%. The consequences of exclusion from education affect the competitiveness of Roma women in the labour market - the share of illiterates in the total

¹ Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey on the Position of Women and Children in the Republic of Serbia 2014 and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey on the Position of Women and Children in Roma Settlements in the Republic of Serbia 2014, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, 2014.

Roma population older than nine years with 15.1% is still above the national average of 2%. The data indicating the level of professional qualifications acquired are disturbing: over a third of Roma men and women (34.2%) have not completed the eight-year long primary school, one third have primary education, while the share of Roma men and women with secondary education is 11.5% and with higher education only 0.7%. The Survey on the Prevalence of Violence against Roma Women,² realized in 2017, shows that violence against Roma women in the family and partnership relations is a serious social problem. Out of the total number of interviewed women in this survey, 91.9% of them were exposed to some form of physical and/or sexual violence after the age of 18. During the last incident, most of the interviewed women were exposed to combined physical and psychological violence - 57%. In the latest case of violence they described, interviewed women were most abused by the partner: husband (68,4%) or ex-husband (15,3%). The data obtained from the survey show that only 63 (27.6%) interviewed women after the last act of violence turned for help to an institution or organization (one or more institutions and/or organizations). Only 8.8% of interviewed women, after the last case of violence, contacted the police for help. In most cases, interviewed women did not turn to the police for fear of even greater violence (34.9%) and because of shame (31.5%). In addition, the reasons for not reporting to the police were: "I thought violence was not so serious that I would call the police (14.4%)"; "I do not believe that the police could help because I am a Roma woman (5%)"; "I know from the experience of others that the police will not intervene and provide assistance to Roma women (3%)"; "I know from my experience that the police will not intervene because I am a Roma woman (2%)" and "I did not know what to do (1%)". In addition, the interviewed women cited other reasons why they did not contact the police, such as they didn't want to have more problems after reporting violence, because they feared that the abuser would take their children away from them after the report, because they did not want the abuser to be punished with imprisonment, because they wanted to solve the problem on their own or because the reporting of violence to the police did not come to mind. Economic violence, too, is largely present in the surveyed sample: more than two thirds of interviewed women have been or are still exposed to this type of violence. The research has in addition shown that the link between economic violence, on one hand, and physical and sexual violence, on the other hand is not negligible. Therefore, interviewed women who are economically dependent on abusers and who suffer economic violence are at greater risk of being exposed to both physical and sexual violence. This speaks of the need to further work on the economic empowerment and independence of Roma women in order to act in the direction of preventing not only economic but also other forms of violence against them.

² Violence against Roma women in the family and partnership relations in Belgrade: Structure, characteristics and social reaction, Victimology Society of Serbia and Roma Women's Centre BIBIJA, 2018. Belgrade (project "For active inclusion and rights of Roma women in the Western Balkans II", CARE International Balkans, Sarajevo)

Organizations submitting the report

Roma Women's Centre Bibija from Belgrade and Women Citizens Association Women space from Nis, together with a group of Roma women activists from the territory of Serbia, are the founders of the Roma Women's Network (RWN). This informal network exists since 2004 and brings together Roma women's organizations and initiatives (unregistered women's groups) in order to work together for a better position of Roma women. RWN activists have so far encouraged and initiated the establishment of 30 organizations and initiatives in over 20 cities and municipalities in Serbia.

During 2017,³ as well as during 2013⁴ members of the Roma Women's Network published shadow reports on the situation of Roma women under the CEDAW Convention, and also promoted the recommendations of the UN CEDAW Committee addressed to the Republic of Serbia, to which important information about the lives of Roma women in the Republic of Serbia were provided by these shadow reports.

This report, intended for the GREVIO Committee as a document on violence against Roma women, is the first one that relates specifically to Roma women. It was created as part of the activities in the project *Roma Women Agents of Change*, with the support of UN Women in the framework of the regional program *End Violence Against Women: application of norms, change of awareness*, implemented in the Western Balkans and Turkey, in the period from February 2017 to January 2020. One of the objectives of the project is to raise the expert capacities of members of the Roma Women's Network for reporting on the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention and Action against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women (Istanbul Convention). In addition to reporting on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, the main activities include the preparation of shadow reports according to the CEDAW Convention, as well as the assessment of the capacity of the Roma Women's Network to monitor the implementation of the

³ Written comments of the European Centre for Roma Rights, Bibija, Eureka and Women Space regarding the Republic of Serbia for consideration by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on its 38th session, available at:

http://www.zenskiprostor.org/images/vesti2013/publikacije/izvetaj_u_senci_o_polozaju_romkinja_shadow_report_on_the_romani_women_position.pdf

⁴ *Roma women speak up*, Shadow report sent to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) for consideration on its 55th session (8-26 July 2013). The report was submitted by members of the Roma Women's Network of Serbia: Roma Women's Centre Bibija, Belgrade; Women space, Nis; Association of Roma women "Osvit" - SOS emergency phone in Roma and Serbian language, Nis; Roma Association Novi Bečej - SOS emergency phone in minority languages, Novi Becej; Roma Initiative Pirot; Roma Women's Initiative Bujanovac; Roma researchers, Zabalj; Sastipe, Vranje and Romnjako ilo, Zrenjanin. Available at:

http://www.zenskiprostor.org/images/vesti2014/PDF/Romkinje_Progovaraju.pdf

recommendations of the CEDAW and GREVIO Committees addressed to the Republic of Serbia relating to Roma women, as well as support in capacity development of individual organizations and initiatives of RWN.

Organizations Women's Roma Centre Bibija and Women space thank all the women who participated in focus groups and interviews and who shared their life stories with researchers. Without them, it would not be possible to produce this report.

Methodology

In the framework of the project mentioned above, a competition for members of the Roma Women's Network was launched for realization of data collection activities on the implementation of the Istanbul Convention. A total of 18 female researchers applied to the competition. The researchers were provided with training related to the research process, which was held on March 31 and April 1, 2018 in Belgrade, organized by the Roma Women's Centre Bibija from Belgrade and Women Space from Nis. During training, researchers got familiar with the obligations of the Republic of Serbia relating to the reporting to the GREVIO Committee on the basis of the obligations assumed by the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention and Action against Domestic Violence and Violence against Women. For research purposes, research instruments were developed - focus group guide, interview guide and case study guide. Field work and data collection lasted from April 10 to May 31, 2018. Each female researcher had the task of doing at least one focus group with Roma women in Roma settlements related to violence against women, at least one case study of Roma women with experience of violence and two interviews with representatives of state authorities.

This report consists of reports from 18 focus group discussions held in Roma settlements on violence against Roma women, from individual experiences that Roma women with experience of violence shared with researchers, as well as from more than 30 interviews with representatives of state authorities, most often Social Welfare Centres.

At the end of the report, there are key issues and recommendations highlighted by focus group participants. The report also contains two annexes containing case studies of Roma women who were in a situation of domestic violence.

CHAPTER I – Purposes, definitions, equality and non-discrimination, general obligations

Article 4. Fundamental rights, equality and non-discrimination

Current state

The provisions of Article 4 of the Istanbul Convention provide that the Parties shall take the necessary legislative and other measures to promote and protect the right for everyone, particularly women, to live free from violence in both the public and the private sphere. The Parties condemn all forms of discrimination against women and take, without delay, the necessary legislative and other measures to prevent it, in particular by: embodying in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation the principle of equality between women and men and ensuring the practical realisation of this principle; prohibiting discrimination against women, including through the use of sanctions, where appropriate, and abolishing laws and practices which discriminate against women. The implementation of the provisions of this Convention by the Parties, in particular measures to protect the rights of victims, shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, gender, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, association with a national minority, property, birth, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, state of health, disability, marital status, migrant or refugee status, or other status. Special measures that are necessary to prevent and protect women from gender-based violence shall not be considered discrimination under the terms of this Convention.

The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia⁵ prohibits any discrimination, direct or indirect, on any ground, and in particular based on race, gender, nationality, social origin, birth, religion, political or other belief, economic state, culture, language, age and mental or physical disability (Article 21). The Law on Prohibition of Discrimination⁶ provides that the discrimination and the discriminatory treatment mean any unjustified making of a difference or unequal treatment or omission (exclusion, limitation or giving priority) in relation to persons or groups as well as to members of their families, or persons close to them, in an open or covert manner, based on race, skin colour, ancestry, nationality, national affiliation or ethnic origin, language, religious or political beliefs, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, economic state, birth, genetic features, health status, disability, marital and family status, convictions, age, appearance, membership in political, trade

⁵ „Official Journal of the Republic of Serbia”, No 98/06

⁶ „Official Journal of the Republic of Serbia”, No 22/09

union and other organizations and other real or supposed personal qualities (Article 2, paragraph 1, point 1). In addition, it is forbidden [...] to express hatred, disdain, blackmail and harassment with regard to gender, as well as public advocacy, support and practices in accordance with prejudices, customs and other social patterns of behaviour based on the idea of gender subordination or superiority, or stereotypical gender roles (Article 20, paragraph 2), and also the discrimination of national minorities and their members on the grounds of national affiliation, ethnic origin, religious beliefs and languages is prohibited (Article 24, paragraph 1). Finally, the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination establishes severe forms of discrimination, including discrimination against persons on the basis of two or more personal qualities (multiple or cross-discrimination) (Article 13).

The Law on Gender Equality⁷ provides that discrimination on the basis of gender constitutes any unjustified making of a difference or unequal treatment or omission which has the purpose or effect of aggravating, endangering, disabling or denying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of human rights and freedoms in a political, economic, social, cultural, civic, family and other areas (Article 4).

Challenges

According to the Special Report on Discrimination Against Women of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality⁸ Roma women are a group of women discriminated against in multiple ways, and discrimination against them is present in all spheres of public and private life, within their own community and within the society in general. They are not adequately involved in public and political life, a small number of Roma girls gets an education, there is a high percentage of unemployed women, they have a short life expectancy, they are exposed to early marriages, domestic violence and similar.

Regarding discrimination, the majority of Roma women who participated in focus groups think that they are most often exposed to discriminatory treatment in the field of health care and employment. For example, all participants in the focus groups held in Roma settlements of Crvena Zvezda and Gabrovac stated that they had health insurance cards, both for themselves and for children and all other members of the household. However, they do not visit regularly the doctor, except in the case of an emergency, when they "really get very sick and cannot cure themselves at home". Their explanation for not going to the doctor's is that they do not like doctors, they have a lot of fear and that they can also treat themselves with teas and that they prefer to buy medicines in the pharmacy without consulting with the doctor. They declare that they treat themselves, with teas, balms, and home remedies (brandy, potatoes, onions ...), because they think that doctors only

⁷ „Official Journal of the Republic of Serbia”, No 104/09

⁸ “Special Report on Discrimination Against Women of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality”, Commissioner for Protection of Equality, Belgrade, 2015.

prescribe medicines without examining them completely or adequately. The participants said that often times the nurse sized them up, how they were dressed, and that they were looked at "differently" when they came to the doctor with children. Some of them sometimes waited longer, although they had arrived before other patients. They state that they received an invitation for breast screening from health mediators, but none of them responded. They think that the biggest problem of their general poor health condition is that they do not go to the doctor's on time, because sometimes it happens that starting with harmless symptoms the disease progresses, and women come too late. Health mediators occasionally visit them and remind them when to vaccinate their children. They do not consider that the Roma community, in which there is a health mediator, has a better access to health care. None of the participants have ever complained to the Protector of Citizens, the Protector of Patients' Rights and other institutions regarding the problems they face in terms of health care.

This problem is attested by the individual stories shared by the participants of individual focus groups, who talked about discrimination experienced in medical institutions.

S.R. (21 years old): *I remember, as if it were yesterday. I had strong, intolerable pain. My sister told me that those were contractions and that I would soon go into delivery. She called for an ambulance and nervously explained what was going on, she said: „Please, come. My sister is going to give birth, I do not have money for a taxi or someone to take us to the hospital“. The nurse on call asked for the address, and when she realized that we lived in a Roma settlement, from the other side we heard her say: „Dirty Gipsy, well you just don't know how to do anything else except breed“ and she hung up. My sister ran out in exasperation and called our neighbour who drove me to the hospital. I gave birth shortly. After delivery, I was placed in the maternity ward, in a room with five more women, all of whom were Roma women. It was strange to me that the Roma women were in a separate room, while other Serbian women were divided in groups of two to three in other rooms. I knew very well that this was about discrimination, because I learned a lot of things by attending workshops, if anything, I learned to recognize discrimination. I have never reported this kind of discrimination and treatment which we had that day. Maybe I could have. I certainly know that if something similar happened again, I would react.*

A.B: *I got labour pains and I came to the admission infirmary of the gynaecology department. First childbirth, terrible pains, and even more fear of what I was about to go through. At the admission infirmary, a nurse came out and very unkindly asked me what was wrong with me, and I frightfully said that I had severe pain. She told me to wait. In the meantime, two other women, both Serbs, came in, who were immediately examined and placed in the ward. After a long wait, the doctor examined me and said I was ready and that they were to take me to the maternity ward. The delivery was very difficult, they after brought me in a wheelchair to a crowded room, where there was another Roma woman and placed me in the same bed. We*

asked why we were two in one bed, they said there was no place. We felt very bad because they only treated us in this manner, while all other women had their own bed. We barely made through that night somehow. In the morning, after rounds, one woman was discharged home and I went to that unmade bed without asking anybody. This event remained in my memory and whenever I remember it, I feel angry, sad and disappointed. How long will they treat us this way, as second-class citizens and do we deserve this?

V.G: I had a very difficult delivery and in the end I had to have stitches. It hurt so much that I screamed with pain. At one point, the nurse who attended the delivery, shouted at me and said: „Come on Cassandra⁹, don't shout so much, shut up!“ That made me quiet down momentarily. The doctor immediately reacted angrily: „Don't call her that, she has a very nice name and don't silence her, she is free to shout, this hurts terribly!“ The nurse's words deeply affected me, I felt miserable and labelled. The night passed, but I have never forgotten those words, they are deeply engraved in my memory. Why are we Roma women always labelled, regardless of whether we are literate, polite, neat or not? People are sometimes so inconsiderate that they make even the hardest moment even harder and the words they say can be more painful than severe childbirth pains. And most importantly, they will never admit that they discriminate against and humiliate us.

The circle that for a Roma woman begins with the abandonment of education, continues with the impossibility of employment, early marriage and maternity, which leads to economic dependence on the husband, so that women from groups marginalized in multiple ways make the economically weakest and socially the most extreme layer.¹⁰ Some Roma women spoke during the focus groups about the problem and difficulties in finding employment.

R.D: I'm 26 years old and I finished high school. Three years ago, through the National Employment Service, I got a job at a company that produces clogs. The first day at work I introduced myself to everyone, but when I gave my hand to the woman head of the group, she looked at me, said her name, and went to my place of work. I was stunned and I followed her. My job was to apply adhesives to processed clogs and put them on pallets. The first few days I was a little slower, but after that I managed to do everything. The workers talked very little with me and when I offered them something, nobody took anything. I felt very uncomfortable, but I went on, thinking that it would be better, I was new, although I knew it was because I was a Roma woman. They all whispered something, looking at me with disgust and hatred. One day, before the end of working hours, I packed a lot of pallets, and the woman head of the group passed by and deliberately pushed three pallets, under the pretence that it was by chance. I stayed longer to clean everything, because the dust stuck to the glue. The same thing happened several times. One day I was not well, one of the workers came to me to take me out,

⁹ Character of a Roma woman from the eponymous Latin American soap opera

¹⁰ “Special Report on Discrimination Against Women of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality“, Commissioner for Protection of Equality, Belgrade, 2015.

and her comment was: „Are you really gonna touch her, don't you feel disgusted?“. I suffered various insults and humiliations for 27 days, after which I went to the owner and told everything. The owner told me: „Come on, do not be annoyed, it will all be good, and you and I have something in common, you have the letter „c“ , and I also have the letter „c“ - you're a Gypsy (Ciganka) and I'm a Montenegrin (Crnogorac)“. After hearing these words, I asked him to pay me up, which of course he did not do, and I left. Very bad experience, just because I'm darker-skinned and I'm hurt by the fact that everyone saw my colour, but not the other features.

G.D: I graduated from the Secondary School of Economics, got registered in the National Employment Service and applied for all the competitions that were published. For four years I was rejected everywhere. I wanted to get a job, to work anywhere because my conditions were very poor when I got married. I was the only Roma woman with completed secondary school in economics, my schoolmates got better jobs as clerks without any problem, and I managed to find work in a textile factory and worked as a machine operator with women who were not qualified. They were the only ones who wanted to employ me, and in other places I got rejected because I was a dark-skinned Roma woman, although no one would ever admit it.

B.P: I came from a family that had never lived in Roma settlements and therefore I felt that discrimination is something that can never happen to me. Starting high school, I attracted attention because the question arose how someone who is Roma could enrol in the gymnasium, the most elite school in the city. Later in the course of my education I did not have major problems. I do not know, maybe people finally got to know me and saw that I did not differ in any way from the others. I managed to get a job in one primary school and I was over the moon. Everything was fine until one day when I was passing through the hallway and I heard a fifth grade student: „Lets go, here comes the Gypsy“. As never before, I felt very bad, so humiliated. How big was the negligence and impoliteness of this child... no respect, if not because I was a teacher, at least because I was older than him. Perhaps the child is not to blame, I think that parents are responsible for such an educational failure. I think that before then I had never felt what it meant to be discriminated against. We spent the whole lesson talking about it. Above all, I wanted to show them, through various examples, that it was only important to be a good man. That people should be divided into good and bad, not by skin colour, that we could all be equally successful, if we made enough effort. Although hurt, to the extent that I was on the verge of tears, I remained strong, in desire to contribute to the change of their thinking.

The results of the focus group discussion that took place in Cukarica show that Roma women stay with the abusers because they are mostly unemployed and economically dependent on their spouses and have no place to live with children. Employment Advisor at the NES branch office in Cukarica pointed out that around 95% of Roma living in the territory of the municipality are covered by records, equally women and men. All support

measures for difficultly employable groups are available to everyone, public works and trainings are the most current, but he also stated that very few Roma women use these measures. Although the Advisor did not know how many Roma women were employed in the last five years, he said that the number of employed Roma women is smaller compared to other women. He stated that Roma women often do not want to be employed when they are offered a job due to their family responsibilities, especially because of higher number of children who do not attend kindergartens. Also, he stated that Roma women get registered in the NES records in order to exercise the right to social assistance, and that those who are temporarily unable to work (pregnancy, illness) do not have individual employment plans. Employers have prejudices regarding the employment of the Roma population, and in particular do not want to employ Roma women in certain profiles of the food industry (cooks, waitresses, pastry cooks). Lastly, he stated that Roma women are not interested enough in self-employment programs, and that only one Roma woman has entered this program in the last five years and stated insufficient education and insufficient knowledge of language as reasons.

Focus group discussions have shown that Roma women consider that "Serbian women have more rights than them" when it comes to protection against violence. All participants in the focus group held in Cukarica believe that Roma women are in a worse position than women from the general population when it comes to protection from violence, and that institutions consider violence as something that is constantly happening amongst Roma (*husband hit his wife, she hit him back...*) and do not take violence against Roma women seriously. Participants in the focus group in Krusevac also consider that Roma women are in a worse position than women from the general population when it comes to violence because they think that it is how they are supposed to live, and also because they do not have the understanding of the surroundings. They also pointed out that women from the general population are more likely to be believed than Roma women. The focus group participants from Nis think alike and state *„that they are in a bad position because they are often misunderstood by the Social Welfare Centre and the police“*.

In the focus groups organized in Nis, Pirot, Pancevo, Leskovac and Vranje, regarding the question of whether they consider that Roma women are in a worse position than women from the general population when it comes to protection from violence, the following responses could be heard:

- *Of course, for the Serbian women it's different. They immediately get divorced when the husband harasses them, and we have to suffer, because we have no place to return to. Who is going to take you in with several children? When you do not even have a job, or anything ... stay silent and endure.*

- *They have an education and can get a job. They have their own houses and apartments. They have more money. I would like to be able to get a divorce and live alone with my children ... but where am I going to find resources for such a life ...*
- *We are somehow more patriarchal and we are taught to be silent and if we get beaten, we are guilty. And then it's kind of normal for us, and it should not be. And when we fight we do not consider it as violence, but it doesn't matter, it's normal.*
- *Well, it happens also to other women, I do not think there's any difference.*
- *Perhaps the Roma think that this is normal, that a woman is to be beaten, that she has to stay in the house, and not go anywhere. Well, that's probably also violence, because she does not have private time for herself, she is neglected.*
- *I think we are in a worse position because we are not self-sufficient enough to get away from violence.*
- *Somehow also the police and the Social Welfare Centre treat differently the Serbian women and us, and I think that they are more protected.*
- *The main thing is who reports violence, they first hear it on the phone that it's not a Roma woman, then when they come and see, they behave differently towards them and towards us, I think they have more respect.*

Focus group participants in Leskovac and Vranje think that Roma women are in a worse position because they are brought up to have to endure everything in a marriage. Women from the majority population are more educated, better informed, and more often report violence to the competent institutions. They also stated that Roma women, due to patriarchal upbringing, rarely decide to divorce and split up with their partner, while for women from the majority population this is a common occurrence in situations of violence.

As an illustrative example of the different treatment of Roma women in situations of violence, we suggest a case from the practice of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality, in which multiple forms of discrimination against a Roma woman were established due to the refusal of the City Social Welfare Centre - Zvezdara branch office to accept a report on domestic violence.¹¹

¹¹ Opinion No 07-00-00581/2016-02 from 12 April 2017 available in Serbian language on the website of the Commissioner for Protection of Equality: <http://ravnopravnost.gov.rs/prituzba-a-protiv-centra-za-socijalni-rad-zbog-diskriminacije-po-osnovu-pola-i-etnicke-pripadnosti-u-oblasti-pruzanja-usluga/>

The opinion was given in the procedure with regard to the complaint filed by a non-governmental organization against the City Social Welfare Centre in Belgrade - Zvezdara branch office, due to discrimination of R.K. and her juvenile daughter on the basis of gender and membership in the Roma national minority. The complaint states that the employees of the CSWC - Zvezdara branch office, on September 14, 2016, refused to take a statement from R.K. regarding domestic violence. The non-governmental organization made a report on domestic violence and submitted it to the competent authorities and institutions. The female representatives of NGO noticed during a conference of the case that the violence to which R.K. and her minor daughter were exposed was ignored and diminished, and that the behaviour of professionals was unprofessional and caused by stereotypical thinking about the roles and the behaviour of women and the prejudices that exist towards the Roma population, their customs and lifestyle. As a result, the violence against Roma women is minimized, and experts deterred from taking measures ex officio. In the statement of the CSWS - Zvezdara branch office, it is stated that "the statement from the mother was not taken due to pronounced agitation and anger, and the incoherence of sentences, but she was directed to a psychologist in the community-health centre and to this non-governmental organization to be provided with psychological and legal assistance." In the statement it is also alleged that the staff in charge of the RK's case made its assessment of the way of providing assistance and support precisely taking into account the marginalized position arising from her socio-economic and educational status, status of origin and gender, that very often, without any announcement and scheduling RK, was received, listened to and advisedly directed, both by the experts in charge and by emergency workers. The Commissioner for Protection of Equality determined that there were no objective reasons for refusing to accept the complaint of R.K. on domestic violence, as confirmed by the opinion of the Commission of the competent ministry in which were determined professional omissions. In the course of the procedure, it was established that the employees to whom R.K. turned for help knew that her former partner was convicted of domestic violence, but nevertheless did not accept her report on domestic violence, but she was sent to seek help in a non-governmental organization. The Commissioner delivered the opinion that R.K. was discriminated against on grounds of gender and national affiliation. To CSWC – Zvezdara branch office it was recommended to take all necessary measures in order to eliminate the consequences of discriminatory treatment towards R.K; to apologize in written form to R.K. due to discriminatory treatment towards her, as well as to organize training for all employees on the subject of discrimination, with the aim of sensitizing and educating employees for work with the Roma population and work with women victims of domestic violence and in partnership relations.

Article 5. State obligations and due diligence

Current state

The provisions of Article 5 of the Istanbul Convention provide that Parties shall refrain from engaging in any act of violence against women and ensure that State authorities, officials, agents, institutions and other actors acting on behalf of the State act in conformity with this obligation. Parties shall take the necessary legislative and other measures to exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate, punish and provide reparation for acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention that are perpetrated by non-State actors.

In accordance with this obligation, the Republic of Serbia in 2016 adopted the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence,¹² which regulates the prevention of domestic violence and the actions of State authorities and institutions in preventing domestic violence and providing protection and support to victims of domestic violence. The basic aim of the Law is to regulate the organization and actions of State authorities and institutions in a general and unified way, and thus enable the effective prevention of domestic violence and urgent, timely and effective protection and support for victims of domestic violence (Article 2). The same year the Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia was amended¹³ and new criminal acts of gender-based violence were prescribed, which had not been incriminated until then: mutilation of a female sexual organ, persecution, sexual harassment, and forced marriage.

Challenges

In practice, many Roma women lack confidence in the institutions of the system, because they feel that they would not help or they have had bad experiences, and therefore they decide not to seek help in order to protect themselves against domestic violence and violence against women. Participants in the focus group from Valjevo believe that a Roma woman victim of violence is aware that she will not get the right protection and support from institutions and therefore will not report violence. Many women, as an explanation of why a small number of women decide to report violence, cite poor institutional care and negative experiences of other women. Although they know that there are mechanisms of protection against violence and that protection is available to Roma women, participants in the focus group from Leskovac state that they rarely decide to report violence to the competent institutions because of their nationality and distrust in institutions. Similarly, participants in the focus group from Pancevo believe that the key problems are that institutions do not trust them when reporting violence, they downplay the problem and try

¹² „Official Journal of the Republic of Serbia”, No 94/16

¹³ „Official Journal of the Republic of Serbia”, No 85/05, 88/05 – amend, 107/05 – amend, 72/09, 111/09, 121/12, 104/13, 108/14 and 94/16

to reconcile them with the abusers. They also tell them „*that this is nothing and that they will reconcile again, that that's normal*“. Some participants in this focus group had the impression that workers at the Social Welfare Centre seemed unable to provide support to Roma women, which does not strengthen confidence in the institution considering that the institution does not have the power to fight this problem.

In support of this there are also experiences of two Roma women who contacted the competent State authorities demanding protection from domestic violence.

M.A. (44 years old): *I experienced violence from my own brother who lived with us and allowed himself to physically attack our mother, father, me and my daughter. I reported the case to the police, who did not do anything, except for patting him on the shoulder and saying: „Come on, don't cause problems“. Then I contacted the Social Welfare Centre where they scheduled my interview 15 days after that. The situation was tense with great fear what could happen at any moment. On the day when I had the scheduled interview, I could not get out of the house because we were exposed to intensified violence, and our mother and I had minor bodily injuries. I called the Social Welfare Centre, explained the situation, and they formed a team and came to us. They said that it was best for us to leave the apartment for security reasons, to take only the most important things, and to leave in 10 minutes, my daughter and I to a safe house, and our parents to a shelter. I protested why they were throwing us out, not him, our father was the owner of the apartment, they were sick and old, and my child was underage and went to school. The answer was that they were not throwing us out, but rather moving us to avoid major problems and if we hadn't wanted to accept the offer, they would have taken the child because she was underage. We did not have a choice and in agreement with them we went to our weekend cottage 30 km away. After two months, the abuser received the measure of restraining order that he violated countless times, to which the police did not react adequately and in accordance with the law. After eight months, we managed to get back in the apartment through court, and he was subjected to a psychiatric treatment that lasted for a month. This happened in 2016, and we still have not solved the problem. I am disappointed in the institutions, both in the police and the Social Welfare Centre, and I wonder what the purpose of reporting violence is.*

S.S. (51 years old): *I got married out of love when I was 18 years old with a boy of the same age. I gave birth to three girls. Problems began after a month of the common life. He started drinking, coming home late, mistreating me. I thought it would pass, that he was young. But I was wrong, he drank more and more and harassed me more and more. I left him several times, went to my parents and returned each time, thinking it would be better, it would change. I came back in vain, he continued to do the same, started to beat me, throw and break everything in the house. The children screamed, I tried to protect them so he wouldn't hurt them, and he continued to beat me. I was always in bruises. We often ended up on the streets several times, I asked my neighbours to take us overnight. In the morning, when we got back*

home, the house was always in a mess. He was asleep and we could not talk so not to wake him up. That's how my married life went on for 18 years. I did not dare to leave him out of fear and condemn of my surroundings, I did not work and I did not have the support of my parents. I repeatedly reported him to the police, but I did not get their understanding. With the support of my daughters who were all grown up and understood the situation I was in, I left him and freed myself from the painful life after 18 years and returned to my parents.

CHAPTER II – Integrated policies and data collection

Article 7. Comprehensive and coordinated policies

Current state

The provisions of Article 7 of the Istanbul Convention provide that the Parties shall take the necessary legislative and other measures to adopt and implement State-wide effective, comprehensive and co-ordinated policies encompassing all relevant measures to prevent and combat all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention and offer a holistic response to violence against women. Parties shall ensure that policies referred to in paragraph 1 place the rights of the victim at the centre of all measures and are implemented by way of effective co-operation among all relevant agencies, institutions and organisations. Measures taken pursuant to this article shall involve, where appropriate, all relevant actors, such as government agencies, the national, regional and local parliaments and authorities, national human rights institutions and civil society organisations.

The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, in the Chapter IV (Article 24-26) provides for the cooperation in preventing domestic violence. It is provided that the persons designated for liaison are appointed in the Police Directorates, the Basic and Higher Public Prosecutor's Offices, the basic and higher courts and the Social Welfare Centre. They are appointed by the Head of the Police Directorate, the Public Prosecutor, the President of the Court and the Head of the Social Welfare Centre, from among the competent police officers and judges and Deputy Public Prosecutors who have completed specialized training, as well as employees in the Social Welfare Centre. Persons designated for the purpose of liaison exchange daily notifications and data relevant for the prevention of domestic violence, detection, prosecution and trial for criminal offences established by this Law and for the provision of protection and support to victims of domestic violence and victims of criminal offences established by this Law. The Minister in charge of internal affairs, the Minister in charge of judicial affairs and the Minister responsible for family protection, shall mutually

prescribe the manner of exchanging information and data between the persons appointed for the purpose of liaison.

In the area of each Basic Public Prosecutor's Office, a coordination and cooperation group shall be formed, which examines every case of domestic violence that has not been completed by a final judicial decision in civil or criminal proceedings, cases when protection and support should be provided to victims of domestic violence and victims of criminal offences covered by this Law, develops an individual plan for protection and support of the victim and proposes to the competent Public Prosecutor's Office measures for the completion of court proceedings. The Coordination and Cooperation Group holds meetings at least once in 15 days, and the minutes of the meeting are kept. Meetings may, where necessary, be attended by representatives of educational, pedagogical and health institutions and the National Employment Service, representatives of other legal persons and associations and individuals providing protection and support to victims. The Coordination and Cooperation Group adopts the rules of procedure that regulate more closely its mode of operation and decision-making.

A Coordination and Cooperation Group consists of representatives of Basic Public Prosecutor's Offices, Police Directorates and Social Welfare Centres, from the area for which the group is formed. The members of a Coordination and Cooperation Group are appointed by the heads of the authorities, from amongst the Deputy Basic Public Prosecutors who completed specialized training and the competent police officers and employees of the Social Welfare Centres working on cases of domestic violence. A Coordination and Cooperation Group is chaired by a member of the group from amongst the Deputy Basic Public Prosecutors. If the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office is competent for prosecuting perpetrators of criminal offences determined by this law, the Higher Public Prosecutor appoints his Deputy, who completed specialized training, to participate in the work of the group and preside over it.

Although this is undoubtedly a positive step in protecting women from violence, there is still no information available as to how this form of coordinated cooperation affects the protection of Roma women from violence.

Representatives of the Social Welfare Centre in Novi Sad reported that at the beginning of December 2017, an internal team for prevention of violence in this centre was formed. The team has eight employees who work solely on cases of violence. *This means that all cases are involved, even in case of suspicion of violence, cases where emergency measures were issued, but also where the police reacted (there was an intervention, a complaint, or something else, but no urgent measures were imposed), because we assessed that there is a suspicion of the existence of violence. Two people make the team, take the cases and evaluate them together. Under the new law, the Prosecutor's Office has a coordinating role, and the*

SWC's role is to provide support and empowerment to victims of violence. We have drafted the internal team procedure, we call on the potential victim and potential perpetrator of violence and other family members. Of course not together, everyone is scheduled separately, to better evaluate and diagnose the problem itself. Sometimes the victim may not recognize the risk and is inclined to diminish it or resist, but if we see him, with his views, then we estimate whether the risk is large. That is when we see his behaviour. We make a report or a notification regarding each case which we send to the police and the Prosecutor's Office, so that everyone is informed about it.

Challenges

Representatives of the Social Welfare Centre in Novi Sad stated in an interview that the Prosecutor's Office is in charge of coordination and that they meet with the police and SWC representatives every 15 days. To those meetings "*victims and other institutions that are helpful or important in a particular case or the process of empowering the victim can be invited, for example if the victim is placed in the shelter, we can invite the representative of the shelter*". However, they emphasized that "*it is a rare practise to invite the victim at the level of Vojvodina, and also of the whole Serbia. Besides, the meetings do not follow that pace, there is a lack of space, people... Conditions are simply very problematic, but as far as SWC is concerned, interviews are conducted with and all information is provided to everyone who comes, responds to our call or is identified by field visit. We make a protection plan with the victim, where she declares what she needs - whether it is accommodation in the shelter or we inform her that if she does not want it at that moment, she can contact us when necessary, we empower her to report every form of violence, make her understand that it is a criminal offence, tell her the risks, opportunities. We check if she wants to file a lawsuit, explain that she has the right to protection measures in a civil procedure, ask her to consider them. In the following couple of months, we call her and check the situation. We also give her a phone number to call if something happens again, tell her to let us know of all important events or the way we can protect her.*

Notwithstanding the prescribed mandatory cooperation between the authorities in the prevention of domestic violence, a participant in the focus group held in Valjevo told the experience of her relative who reported her husband to the police because he came home drunk and harassed her and her child. However, as she said, the police came, talked to him and told her if it "happens again" to contact the Social Welfare Centre.

Article 11. Data collection and research

Current state

The provisions of Article 11 of the Istanbul Convention provide that for the purpose of the implementation of this Convention, Parties shall undertake to: a) collect disaggregated relevant statistical data at regular intervals on cases of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention; b) support research in the field of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention in order to study its root causes and effects, incidences and conviction rates, as well as the efficacy of measures taken to implement this Convention. Parties shall endeavour to conduct population-based surveys at regular intervals to assess the prevalence of and trends in all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention. Parties shall provide the group of experts, as referred to in Article 66 of this Convention, with the information collected pursuant to this article in order to stimulate international co-operation and enable international benchmarking. Parties shall ensure that the information collected pursuant to this article is available to the public.

The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence regulates the keeping of records of reported cases of domestic violence and stipulates that the competent Police Directorate keeps records of reported cases of domestic violence, on the imposition and the execution of urgent measures and the execution of protection measures against family violence (Article 32).

The Police Directorate records contain: 1) data on reported cases of domestic violence (participants of the event, time, place, collected statements, circumstances of the case, data on the possible victim etc.); 2) data on the reported possible perpetrator (name, surname, unique master citizen number, address of domicile or residence, data on previously specified measures of protection against domestic violence); 3) risk assessment data and the names of the authorities to whom the risk assessment was submitted; 4) data on the imposition of urgent measures (date and number of orders on the imposition of urgent measures, their duration and the time of commencement of their duration); 5) data on extension and the execution of urgent measures (number and date of decision of the Basic Court on the extension of urgent measures, data on execution of urgent measures) and 6) data on the execution of protection measures against domestic violence.

The Basic Court shall keep records of its decisions on proposals for the extension of urgent measures and on certain protection measures against domestic violence. Records of the Basic Court on proposals for the extension of emergency measures contain: 1) data about the person who is subject to the extension of the emergency measure (name, surname,

unique master citizen number, address of domicile or residence, data on previously determined protection measures against domestic violence); 2) number and date of the decision extending the emergency measure; 3) number and date of the decision rejecting the proposal to extend the emergency measure; 4) data about the appeal against the decision made on the proposal for the extension of urgent measures and 5) data about the decision made on appeal.

The records of the Basic Court on certain protection measures against domestic violence contain: 1) data on the person who a protection measure against domestic violence was imposed on (name, surname, unique master citizen number, address of domicile or residence, data on previously imposed protection measures against domestic violence); 2) data on the Court decision on the determination of protection measures against domestic violence (number and date of the decision, type of measure determined and duration); 3) data about the appeal to the Court's decision on the determination of the protection measures against domestic violence; 4) data about the decision made on appeal and 5) data on the extension or the termination of protection measures against domestic violence.

The Basic Public Prosecutor's Office keeps records of proposals for extending urgent measures and requirements for determining protection measures against domestic violence. The records of the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office contain: 1) data about the person for whom the extension of emergency measures was proposed (name, surname, unique master citizen number, address of domicile or residence, data on previously imposed protection measures against domestic violence); 2) data on the extension of urgent measures (date and number of requests for extension of urgent measures, name of the court to which the extension of emergency measures was proposed, court decision on proposal by the Public Prosecutor, data on the decision regarding the appeal); 3) data on filing a lawsuit for the determination of protection measures against domestic violence; 4) type of protection measures against domestic violence whose determination is sought; 5) data on the decision of the Court regarding the lawsuit for the determination of the protection measure against domestic violence (number and date of decision, type of measure determined and duration of the measure) and 6) data on the extension and the termination of the protection measure against domestic violence.

The competent Social Welfare Centre keeps records on the implementation of individual plans of victim protection and support. The Social Welfare Centre's records contain: 1) name, surname, unique master citizen number and address of domicile or residence of the victim; 2) data on the individual plan of victim protection and support; 3) data on planned victim protection measures; 4) data on planned victim support measures; 5) data on the executors of concrete measures of protection and support and deadlines for their

implementation and 6) data on the monitoring plan and the assessment of the effectiveness of planned and undertaken measures.

Records of Police Directorates, Basic Courts, Basic Public Prosecutors' Offices and Social Welfare Centres are kept in electronic form and comprise the Central Record of domestic violence cases, conducted by the Republic Public Prosecutor's Office. Data can be entered in the Central Record only using appropriate protected access codes. The data shall be kept in the records and in the Central Record for ten years and afterwards deleted.

Challenges

The data that should be kept in the records of State authorities do not contain data on national affiliation¹⁴ of women, nor on other personal characteristics of victims of domestic violence, and therefore they don't allow to determine the number of Roma women exposed to domestic violence. Also, electronic records, prescribed by the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, have not been established even after one year since the beginning of the implementation of this Law (June 2017), which further complicates the collection of reliable data from organizational units in an efficient manner, but also the direct work of competent State authorities. In the meantime, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has established electronic records.¹⁵

The sources of the data on family violence to which Roma women are exposed (prevalence, forms, manifestations, perpetrators, etc.) are still civil society organizations that directly provide assistance and support to Roma women in situations of domestic violence. Based on the results of the focus group discussions conducted throughout the territory of Serbia, we will present very rough data reflecting the peculiarities of domestic violence against Roma women.

The prevalence of domestic violence against Roma women

Violence against Roma women is largely present, but women cover it up and remain silent, because they fear provoking an even bigger problem and the fury of the abuser. Also, *they think it's normal to get a pair of slaps in the face and they do not consider it to be beatings*. All focus group participants in Cukarica agreed that violence against women is largely present.

¹⁴ Here Article 46 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia should be cited, which stipulates that the expression of national affiliation is on voluntary basis, and that no one is obliged to declare his/her nationality.

¹⁵ The sixth independent report on the implementation of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence for the period April-June 2018 and a review of the main annual findings and conclusions, Autonomous Women's Centre, 2018.

Three younger women say they have not experienced violence, but that they were "given a slap or two," which does not constitute violence for them and would never report their partners for such a thing. They think that some slaps by partners, father-in-law, mother-in-law, in some situations, are for their own good. Four participants state that they have experienced violence, but that they have solved it within the family and did not report the abusers. One of them suffered violence for years because her husband was an alcoholic, but she never took any measures.

Most participants of the focus group held in Valjevo agreed that the number of abusers has risen dramatically in the last couple of years, and that even children are violent, while a couple of women said that the abusers existed before, but it was never discussed, because „it was a disgrace to wash dirty laundry outside the home because the neighbours would laugh”.

Forms and manifestations of violence

The form of violence which Roma women, as they themselves state, are most often faced with is physical violence. At the same time, for many Roma women, physical violence is the only act that they consider to be violence. Many women do not recognize psychological violence as a form of violence, but those who recognize it consider it the most common and most severe form of violence. It is noticeable that most focus group participants do not recognize other types of violence, such as economic ones: *He is a man, of course he always holds the money, giving me as much as he decides is appropriate*. When it comes to sexual violence, some women recognize it, but do not consider it a form of violence, believing that sex in marriage and partnership relation is a woman's obligation.

The violence manifestations mentioned during the focus group discussions are as follows: beatings; blows to the head; slaps in the face; cuts; burns; kicks; pulling by the hair; when he beats children; when he shouts at you; insults and humiliations; threats; curses; swearing; breaking things throughout the house; he tells you that you are less valuable, that you do nothing, and he works his tail off; when he does not give you money; when he takes your money and kicks you out of the house.

The most common abusers

The husbands are mostly those who are violent, but women cite as abusers also other family members: mother-in-law; father-in-law; brother-in-law; son; children; father and brother. Focus group participants from Valjevo say that children are more and more violent and a participant of the focus group held in Pancevo pointed out that the abuser can be

anyone from the family or neighbourhood. Statement by a focus group participant from Belgrade is very disturbing which states: It's everywhere. Someone does not want to admit, but there is violence. All women suffer mistreatment from their husband or mother-in-law.

Consequences of violence

As the most frequent consequences of violence, the participants of focus group discussions indicate: bruises; when a woman is so sad that it's obvious that she is suffering; this is evident in the woman's appearance, but some women know how to hide it, so nobody would ever think that she gets beaten; the woman is weak and sad; health problems, the woman is scared and similar.

CHAPTER III – Prevention

Article 13. Awareness-raising and Article 14 Education

Current state

According to the provisions of Articles 13 and 14 of the Istanbul Convention the Parties shall promote or conduct, on a regular basis and at all levels, awareness-raising campaigns or programmes, including in co-operation with national human rights institutions and equality bodies, civil society and non-governmental organisations, especially women's organisations, where appropriate, to increase awareness and understanding among the general public of the different manifestations of all forms of violence covered by the scope of the Convention, their consequences on children and the need to prevent such violence. Parties shall ensure the wide dissemination among the general public of information on measures available to prevent acts of violence, and, where appropriate, the Parties undertake to take the necessary steps for the introduction of teaching materials on issues such as equality between women and men, non-stereotyped gender roles, mutual respect, non-violent conflict resolution in interpersonal relationships, gender-based violence against women and the right to personal integrity, adapted to the evolving capacity of learners, in formal curricula and at all levels of education. The Parties undertake to take all necessary steps and promote the principles in informal educational institutions, as well as in sports, cultural and leisure facilities and the media.

The Law on Gender Equality prescribes that public authorities are obliged to plan, organize, implement and finance measures aimed at raising public awareness on the need to prevent domestic violence (Article 29, paragraph 3).

Challenges

Focus group participants generally say they know who to turn to when they want to report violence. They are informed by non-governmental organizations or they are informed via the media, although they feel that it should be talked about more on television, and not only when there is a case of violence.

Some participants in the focus groups pointed out that they are mostly informed through workshops and forums organized in the settlement where they live. They state that they know which institutions to contact and know that there are cases of restraining orders, but they are sceptical about the functioning of these orders. Although they have certain information, most women still believe that the abuser would find a way to reach the victim and that he would not respect the imposed measure/judgement. Some focus group participants say that adequate protection against violence consists in *agreeing with the husband and obeying him*, but they have indicated that if violence still does occur, it should immediately be reported.

In some focus groups, it could be noticed that to the question of how they can get informed about protection from violence, and how they know who to call, several participants answered that they do not know.

The employees of the Social Welfare Centre in Novi Sad indicated that Roma women who "go to asylum" change a lot, that they have noticed changes in their awareness raising, that they come from abroad more educated and expand their views. *From all sides, various organizations offer help and compete who will help more families, mothers and children. They work there with them, and I think it affects specifically these Roma women. But in Bangladesh that's not the situation, as the settlement is much poorer and rarely anyone goes to asylum. Even if somebody leaves, they remain briefly and return quickly, but the women who leave and return are evidently changed. They are dressed differently, groomed and confident.*

In support of everything mentioned above, K.G. tells her story: *I did not know I was victim of violence. I thought that was the way all women lived, suffering in silence, mostly because of the children. I was married when I was 16. I did not want that, my father sold me, now I'm 67. We all lived in the same house: I, my husband, his mother and father, his brother and his wife. We had to rooms. My husband and I slept on the floor. I was the youngest and my job was to bring firewood every day and prepare food. Once I woke up late. It had never happened before. My husband's mother said that I spent my days idling and she was going to kick me*

out. When my husband heard what had happened, he immediately came home. He found me lighting the fire and pushed me off the chair. He said to me: „You humiliate me, you do not want to wake up early“ and then he hit me for the first time. I didn't say anything. I did not know then, but I overslept because I was pregnant. They did not let me go to a doctor. During my pregnancy, my husband beat me and also my mother-in-law. I kept silent all the time. I thought it was normal. When my first son was born, we moved to another house, we were kicked out. Since there was no work, my husband was getting more and more drunk, and all his rage was redirected towards me. He often returned drunk home in the middle of the night and beat me. Days after that I did not go out. He often insulted me, but I did not know it was violence. When our second son was born, violence became daily. He told me that the child was not his and that I was cheating on him with whomever I met. Because of all the work I did, I had no time to think of myself, I took care of two children alone and cleaned the whole house. When I gave birth to the third child, a girl, he told me that he would sell her. That's when I first confronted him. I could stand all the beatings and the insults, but to sell my child, I did not allow it. That day, he beat me so hard that if the neighbours had not found me, I would have died. I wanted to leave him, but I had no place to go. I lived in violence until he died 10 years ago from alcohol. My children could not protect me from him, and I realized late that I was victim of violence.

Article 16. Preventive intervention and treatment programmes

According to the Istanbul Convention, the Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to set up or support programmes aimed at teaching perpetrators of domestic violence to adopt non-violent behaviour in interpersonal relationships with a view to preventing further violence and changing violent behavioural patterns. Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to set up or support treatment programmes aimed at preventing perpetrators, in particular sex offenders, from re-offending. In taking these measures, Parties shall ensure that the safety of, support for and the human rights of victims are of primary concern and that, where appropriate, these programmes are set up and implemented in close co-ordination with specialist support services for victims.

Current state and challenges

Experiences from shelters

The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence stipulates that after receiving a risk assessment that identifies a direct threat of domestic violence, the Coordination and Cooperation Group creates an individual plan for the protection and support of the victim,

which contains comprehensive and effective measures for the protection and support of the victim, and also members of the family in need of support (Article 31, paragraph 1).

In the continuation of this report, there will be more details about shelters for women, however, from talking to Roma women in focus groups, a general conclusion can be drawn that women know that there are shelters and what their purpose is, they even know several women from the settlements that were placed there, but all of them, as they pointed out, *after a while, returned to the settlement*. From all stated above, it can be concluded that women are generally familiar with services provided by shelters for women, but do not consider it a service that could help them escape the cycle of domestic violence.

Current state and challenges

Working with perpetrators of violence

In the Code of Criminal Procedure¹⁶ it is stipulated that the Public Prosecutor may postpone the prosecution of criminal offences for which a fine or a sentence of imprisonment of up to five years are foreseen, if the suspect accepts one or more obligations, among which the obligation to subjected himself to psychosocial treatment in order to eliminate the cause of violent behaviour. In the order to postpone the prosecution, the Public Prosecutor shall determine the deadline in which the suspect must execute the undertaken obligations, with the deadline not exceeding one year. The supervision over the execution of obligations shall be performed by a Commissioner from the administrative authority responsible for the execution of criminal sanctions, in accordance with the regulation issued by the Minister in charge of judicial affairs. If the suspect complies with the obligation within the deadline, the Public Prosecutor will reject the criminal charges and inform the injured party about it (Article 283).

As it can be seen from the above-mentioned legal provisions, the injured party (in this case, the victim of domestic violence) does not give her consent to postpone the prosecution, which can lead to her feeling completely helpless and unprotected, while for the perpetrator this is a very useful way to assume a certain obligation, and not be in fact held legally accountable for the act he committed.

Employees at the Social Welfare Centre in Novi Sad have shared their experiences in dealing with perpetrators of family violence. As they stated, work with perpetrators of violence is possible under certain conditions, if it is estimated that *there is some correction potential regarding the abuser, so that work with him is possible. Some people simply commit*

¹⁶ „Official Journal of the Republic of Serbia”, No 72/11, 101/11, 121/12, 32/13, 45/13, 45/13 i 55/14

violence in conflict and frustrating situations, that's a learned model of behaviour, they do not know differently in such situations. Our colleagues carried out some work with perpetrators of violence through one project. We could send them, the Prosecutor's Office could send them when the violence was of lower intensity and with the agreement that the proceeding would not be continued, the Prosecutor's Office stops it if abusers agree to join the program and under the condition that they would regularly go to meetings, for example, of anonymous alcoholics. All meetings are structured there, they can not have risky forms of behaviour, and have to come and not be under the influence of drugs or alcohol, and violence can not be repeated during that period while they go there. These are all conditions for criminal charges to be stopped in some way. They work with them first in groups, later also individually. At collective meetings, the perpetrators of violence exchanged experiences, so you hear others, someone else's story, advice, of course, with a professional moderator. Then they go to individual meetings to find out what their problem is, what they need as a kind of psychotherapy. Most of them were referred by Prosecutor's Office, and we sent, for example, one man whose wife was placed in a shelter two or three times due to violence. The children were assigned to him, and she constantly returned. A younger couple, of lower educational level, but not of Roma origin. There were problems both from her and his side. He enjoyed this experience very much, it gave him some new points of view of what he could do in such situations, how to behave specifically, what actions he should take when he gets upset, how the conflict can be resolved, that a problem can be viewed from another angle, to put himself into someone else's shoes... He was thrilled with this and after that the violence did not recur, although the wife repeated some forms of behaviour that had previously provoked him to act violently. They continued to live as a unit and interrupted it many times, but without violence. I am still in contact with them because of the children, but the violence did not recur. They emphasized that the work with the perpetrators was financed from a project that lasted for a while, after which funding was suspended, although they estimated that the program was beneficial.

CHAPTER IV – Protection and Support

Article 18 General obligations

Current state

In accordance with the provisions of Article 18 of the Istanbul Convention, Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to protect all victims from any further acts of violence. Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures, in accordance with internal law, to ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms to provide for effective

co-operation between all relevant state agencies, including the judiciary, public prosecutors, law enforcement agencies, local and regional authorities as well as non-governmental organisations and other relevant organisations and entities, in protecting and supporting victims and witnesses of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention, including by referring to general and specialist support services as detailed in Articles 20 and 22 of this Convention.

Parties shall ensure that measures taken pursuant to this chapter shall: be based on a gendered understanding of violence against women and domestic violence and shall focus on the human rights and safety of the victim; be based on an integrated approach which takes into account the relationship between victims, perpetrators, children and their wider social environment; aim at avoiding secondary victimisation; aim at the empowerment and economic independence of women victims of violence; allow, where appropriate, for a range of protection and support services to be located on the same premises; address the specific needs of vulnerable persons, including child victims, and be made available to them.

The provision of services shall not depend on the victim's willingness to press charges or testify against any perpetrator. Parties shall take the appropriate measures to provide consular and other protection and support to their nationals and other victims entitled to such protection in accordance with their obligations under international law.

The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence prescribes that upon receipt of the risk assessment that identified an immediate danger of domestic violence, the group for coordination and cooperation shall develop an individual plan of protection and support of victims, which contains comprehensive and effective measures to protect and support victims, but also other family members needing support (Article 31).

The victim also participates in the preparation of an individual plan of protection and support, if they wish so and if their emotional and physical condition allows. Measures of protection must ensure the safety of the victim, stop the violence, prevent it from happening again and protect the rights of victims, while support measures must provide the victim with psychosocial and other support for the sake of their recovery, empowerment and independence. The individualized plan of protection and support to the victim determines the executors of concrete measures and deadlines for their implementation, as well as the plan to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of planned and implemented measures.

Challenges

As already mentioned, Roma women often remain in violent marriages and in many cases return to the abuser after leaving home. There are many reasons for this, the same as with women from the majority population, and some of the reasons are: the family doesn't accept them, they have no place to return, they have no money, the children stay with their husbands and they cannot see them, and so on.

The employees of the Social Welfare Center in Novi Sad stated that they had not so far worked with Roma women particularly in connection with violence. They feel that there are situations in which work with Roma women would be useful since that is a *community with specific principles of functioning*. They suggest that the community is more patriarchal, that men are in charge of everything and that women are in a more vulnerable financial and economic status. On the other hand, they state that singling out Roma women could be an additional form of marginalization, which is not necessary, as the problem of violence also exists in other communities and they should be able to hear one another.

From their experience, Roma women often fail to recognize violence and they do not want to talk about it in a group. Because of that, they believe that they should work on "both fronts", that some of the mediators should work with Roma women and prepare them for inclusion in a broader group.

Article 19 Information

Current state

In accordance with the provisions of Article 19 of the Istanbul Convention, Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that victims receive adequate and timely information on available support services and legal measures in a language they understand.

The provision of Article 29 of the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence prescribes that state agencies and institutions responsible for implementation of this law shall be obliged, in the first contact with a victim of domestic violence or a victim of an offence under this Act, to give the victim a complete information about the authorities, legal entities and associations that provide protection and support, in a way and in a language the victim of violence understands.

Challenges

Borca focus group participants stated that they do not approach anyone for help and support. The obstacles are primarily their fear, poverty and discrimination. They do not approach anyone because they think they will be immediately rejected and that they will not be understood. A participant in the Pancevo focus group answered the following when asked if the mechanisms of protection against violence were available to them: *I think they are not, especially not to us, it takes us a while to report, it takes them a while to come, and when they do come they don't explain what our rights are, what we can or can not do, they even make us reconcile, they persuade us.*

Other Roma women, participants in the focus group discussion held in Pancevo, spoke about this problem and agreed that the protection mechanisms are not "very accessible", especially to Roma women, that no one is sufficiently informed about their rights when filing a report or staying in a shelter, and they also said that they are rarely or almost never asked about what they think or what they want at that moment. As one participant states: *Well, frankly, they are not very available, I can still manage, I've already been through it several times, but some women can't, and it's terrible when you do not know whom to call or what exactly you need to do.*

Article 23 Shelters

Current state

According to the Istanbul Convention, Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to provide for the setting-up of appropriate, easily accessible shelters in sufficient numbers to provide safe accommodation for and to reach out pro-actively to victims, especially women and their children.

The Special Protocol for Social Welfare Centers-the Custody Department for Handling the Cases of Domestic Violence and Violence in Intimate Partnership Relations¹⁷ prescribes that the safety of the victim of domestic violence can be ensured, among other things, by relocating the victim of domestic violence or potential victims of domestic violence from the shared family household (house, apartment) or from the immediate environment of the perpetrator or potential perpetrator of domestic violence and by the accommodation of the

¹⁷ Available at:

<https://www.minrzs.gov.rs/files/doc/porodica/nasilje/Posebni%20protokol%20MRZSP%20nasilje%20u%20porodici.pdf>, accessed on 14/8/2018.

victim in a safe environment (accommodation of a victim in a "safehouse" or social welfare institution - shelter, or a foster family providing accommodation for minors, or in a family providing family accommodation for adults, or in a family of relatives, or some other type of alternative accommodation). The selection and type of accommodation for the victim of domestic violence is based on the safety assessment, which also determines other elements that prevent the perpetrator of domestic violence from accessing the victim.

Challenges

All participants in the focus group in Nis know that the shelter exists, but they say that they would never dare to take such a step because they would be condemned by their relatives and others around them and that they do not have enough courage to do so. Similarly, participants in the focus group in Kragujevac know about the existence of the shelter, but they do not know what they would do after leaving it.

For example, the participants of the focus group held in Borca stated the following:

- *I don't think Roma women go to shelters. When we watch TV, we don't see our Roma women there.*
- *Nobody wants to protect us, they say it's just typical behaviour of the Gypsies.*
- *Well, our women don't report to the police, they don't go to a shelter, they stay silent and suffer until they die. They are afraid of where they will return afterwards...*

Article 27 Reporting

Current state

According to the Istanbul Convention, Parties shall take the necessary measures to encourage any person witness to the commission of acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention or who has reasonable grounds to believe that such an act may be committed, or that further acts of violence are to be expected, to report this to the competent organisations or authorities.

The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence prescribes that a person who has information on the criminal offence defined by this Law shall be obliged to report it to the police or public prosecutor (Article 22).

Challenges

As already mentioned, Roma women do not report violence sufficiently. When asked by the leader of the focus group held in Borca if women reported violence and if they did not report it or did not report it sufficiently, why it was so, the participants gave the following answers:

- *Not our women. As I said, they are afraid, because where would they return afterwards?*
- *Serbian women report immediately, even on television, while we, Roma women, do not. They are exaggerating a bit. There are problems everywhere. Imagine that we call the police every time ... What would that be like?*
- *We don't report, because our husbands would really beat us up if did.*

An employee at the Social Welfare Center believes that *in Roma and generally in all closed communities, getting out of a violent environment and reporting violence involves shame, disappointment, but also provokes the condemnation of the victim, as they report someone who is very close to them, so they are again experiencing pressure.*

Article 28 Reporting by professionals

Current state

In accordance with the provisions of Article 28 of the Istanbul Convention, Parties shall take the necessary measures to ensure that the confidentiality rules imposed by internal law on certain professionals do not constitute an obstacle to the possibility, under appropriate conditions, of their reporting to the competent organisations or authorities if they have reasonable grounds to believe that a serious act of violence covered by the scope of this Convention, has been committed and further serious acts of violence are to be expected.

The Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, under the provisions of Article 13, paragraphs 2-5, prescribes that state and other bodies, organizations and institutions shall be obliged to immediately report to the police or the public prosecutor any knowledge of domestic violence or immediate danger from it. The competent national authorities and centers for social work are obliged, within their regular activities, to recognize domestic violence or the threat of it. Recognition can arise from studying the report which was submitted by the victim of violence to anyone, from the detection of traces of physical or other violence on the victim, and from other circumstances indicating the existence of

domestic violence or imminent danger of it. A public prosecutor who has reported violence or imminent threat of it is obliged to immediately forward the report to the police officers, so that they notify the competent police officer. The provision of Article 36, paragraph 2 of this Law prescribes that a fine of 50,000 dinars to 150,000 dinars shall be imposed on the responsible person in the state and other authorities, organizations, and institutions that fails to immediately report or react to the police or the public prosecutor, or obstructs reporting or responding to any knowledge about domestic violence or immediate danger of it.

Challenges

Although there are no reliable data on whether and how many employees in state institutions report cases of violence that they are aware of or when there is a suspicion of violence, bearing in mind everything mentioned so far in this report, it can be assumed that there are not many reports of violence perpetrated against Roma women. The employees at the Social Welfare Center in Novi Sad said that when they see a woman with bruises, with a black eye, with bruises on her hands, they always ask her what happened, and the women usually say that they fell off a ladder or fell when they were hanging the curtains. They state that they check in the system to see if there was any previous violence, and then make an official note and report violence. They pointed out that now doctors, like anyone else, have an obligation to report violence. Even if a woman does not intend to report the abuser, if she goes to a doctor, the doctor is obliged to inform the social welfare center and the police. They add that Roma women are less likely to go to the doctor and that they have no knowledge of whether there are reports from the doctors for the violence perpetrated against Roma women.

CHAPTER V – Substantive Law

Article 33 Psychological violence

Current state

In accordance with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention, Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the intentional conduct of seriously impairing a person's psychological integrity through coercion or threats is criminalised.

Psychological violence in the family and in the intimate partnership is prohibited by the Criminal Code and the Family Law, as well as by the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence.

Criminal Code (article 194, paragraph 1): *Whoever[...] by use of violence, threat of attacks against life or body, insolent or ruthless behaviour endangers the tranquillity [...] or mental condition of a member of his family, shall be punished with imprisonment of three months to three years.*

The Family Law¹⁸ (article 197, paragraph 1): *Domestic violence, as defined by this Law, is behaviour which when conducted by one member of the family threatens [...], mental health or wellbeing of another member of the same family.*

Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence (article 3, paragraph 3): *Domestic violence, as defined by this Law, is any act of [...] psychological [...] violence of the perpetrator directed towards a person with whom the perpetrator is current or former spouse or intimate partner, or towards a person with whom the perpetrator is a lineal or up to second-degree collateral relative or with whom the perpetrator is in-law relative up to second degree, or towards a person to whom the perpetrator is an adoptive parent, adoptive child, foster parent or foster child, or towards other person with whom he or she lives or has lived in the same household.*

The definition of psychological violence is also provided in the Special Protocol for Social Welfare Centers - the Custody Department for Handling the Cases of Domestic Violence and Violence in Intimate Partnership Relations, in the following way: *Psychological violence is a disruption of the victim's tranquillity through behaviour, threats and the use of intimidation methods with or without the use of tools and weapons that can cause bodily injury. It includes humiliation of the victim, controlling her behaviour, withholding information, shaming and belittling, blaming, isolating from friends and family, manipulating children and degrading the victim in the parental role, preventing access to money and other goods that affect the mental and emotional state of the victim. The specific form of psychological violence is controlling the victim by following or pursuing them, where repeated harassment and intimidation is used, such as stalking of a person, showing up at workplace or residence, disturbing calls, letters and messages and destruction of the victim's property.*

Challenges

A general conclusion drawn from focus groups is that many Roma women do not recognize psychological violence, as some of them point out: *Well, it's normal that he sometimes insults me.* However, some participants in the focus groups, for example from Cukarica,

¹⁸ "Official Gazette of the RS", No. 18/05, 72/11 – other law and 6/15

consider that psychological violence is a more severe form of violence than a physical one. Also, in a focus group held in Valjevo, one participant described psychological violence and stated that for her this form of violence was much more severe than physical: *Threats and psychological harassment towards women are invisible to others, but especially harmful to women.* Focus group participants in Valjevo pointed out that verbal violence, along with psychological, is seen as a violence to which all women are exposed.

To illustrate this form of violence, which was followed by physical violence, we will present the stories of two Roma women.

D.K. *I am 42 years old, I'm married and have three daughters and a son, and recently my eldest daughter who got married at 20 years old had a daughter. It is of no use that I have all conditions for living a normal life when I have a husband that abuses me psychologically all the time. We lived on good terms until he became jealous, that is, until he began to fabricate the story that, once during a celebration at our relatives' place, one married man and I made eye contact. And all the time there he was sitting and drinking with that man. That is when he started calling me a whore and telling me that everybody is talking about me being with that man. He drinks almost every day and he beat me up several times. He even took me to some churches to swear I had nothing to do with that man. It's like he became mentally disturbed. He has destroyed my health, I have heart problems, I lose consciousness, my nerves are frayed. And he continues to terrorize me, I never go out alone, always with him, and he still claims that I have somebody else and that I'm humiliating him. He doesn't choose a right place or time to argue with me. And all this in the presence of our seven-year-old son who stays silent and won't go to school, he is in first grade, so that he wouldn't have to leave me alone with his father. Several times I went with my children to my mother, however, he won't leave me alone even then, he can't live with or without me. I once dared to call the police, it happened last year. I ran away from him to my mother, he came after me and I was afraid that he would beat me again and I called the police. I did not say he had beaten me, but only to had psychologically abused me for months and to had been calling me a whore. The police immediately filed a report. He was summoned to attend the hearing and got an order to move away from home and from me, that he should not come close to me. He even paid the fine because the police found him in the house during the inspection. But I have reconciled with him. I have to put up with it for the sake of my children, I am ashamed what people around me might think, but the violence continues and I do not know how much longer I will be able to endure this way.*

J.N: *I am 21 and I live in the Roma settlement of Korman. I have five kids and I live with my husband and my father-in-law. I live in one room and receive social assistance and child benefit. My story is that I do not want to have any more children, but when I mention that to my husband, I often get beaten, he frequently calls me all sorts of names, I'm trash, I'm a whore, I have a lover. One day, I decided to change my life and to go and consult a*

gynaecologist. She recommended birth control pills, so I decided that I would use them. To this day my husband doesn't know I am using the pills, I have not been pregnant for five years. He is still calling me all sorts of names, now he is telling me I am unable to have more children, but I don't care, they violated my rights, my feelings, and I'm thinking of getting out of this house.

Article 34 Stalking

Current state

In accordance with the provisions of Article 34 of the Istanbul Convention, Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the intentional conduct of repeatedly engaging in threatening conduct directed at another person, causing her or him to fear for her or his safety, is criminalised.

The latest amendments to the Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia criminalize the offence of stalking, which is committed by a person who during a certain period of time: 1) follows without authorization another person or takes other actions to physically approach that person contrary to her or his will; 2) attempts to establish unsolicited contact with another person, directly or through a third person or through means of communications; 3) misuses the personal data of another person or of any other person close to her or him, for the purpose of offering goods or services; 4) threatens another person or any other person close to her or him with attack on her or his life, body or freedom; 5) undertakes other similar actions in a manner that can significantly jeopardize the personal life of the person to whom these actions are directed. For committing the basic form of this criminal offence, the perpetrator shall be punished with a fine or imprisonment of up to three years.

Challenges

Considering that this is a new criminal offence, the participants in the focus groups throughout Serbia were asked if they knew that stalking was criminalized. The results show that participants are generally not aware that new criminal offences of gender-based violence have been constituted, indicating that women would not know they have the possibility to seek protection if they were subjected to stalking.

For example, all participants of the focus group held in Kragujevac heard for the first time of the existence of this criminal offence during the focus group discussion and stated that they would like to have somebody explain it to them. In a focus group held in Nis, five

women heard of the new Criminal Code via television and the Internet, while other five women heard about this law, i.e. about the changes to the law for the first time.

During the focus group discussion in Pirot, the group leader explained to participants what was prohibited by new criminal offences, including stalking, considering that no participants had heard about new crimes of gender-based violence. Participants' comments on this were: *Well the State should get involved; For how long women should continue to suffer... I am really glad they will be punished.*

Article 35 Physical violence

Current state

In accordance with the Istanbul Convention, Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the intentional conduct of committing acts of physical violence against another person is criminalised.

Physical violence in the family and in the intimate partnership is prohibited by the Criminal Code and the Family Law, as well as by Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence.

Criminal Code (article 194, paragraph 1): *Whoever by use of violence [...] endangers the tranquillity, physical integrity or mental condition of a member of his family, shall be punished with a fine or imprisonment from three months to three years.*

The Family Law (article 197, paragraph 1): *Domestic violence, as defined by this Law, is behaviour which when conducted by one member of the family threatens bodily integrity, mental health or wellbeing of another member of the same family. It is especially considered to be domestic violence: Inflicting or attempting to afflict bodily injury [...]*

Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence (article 3, paragraph 3): *Domestic violence, as defined by this Law, is any act of physical [...] violence of the perpetrator directed towards a person with whom the perpetrator is current or former spouse or intimate partner, or towards a person with whom the perpetrator is a lineal or a second-degree collateral relative or with whom the perpetrator is in-law relative up to second degree, or towards a person to whom the perpetrator is an adoptive parent, adoptive child, foster parent or foster child, or towards other person with whom he lives or has lived in the same household.*

The definition of physical violence is also provided in the Special Protocol for Social Welfare Centers-the Custody Department for Handling the Cases of Domestic Violence and Violence in Intimate Partnership Relations, in the following way: *Physical violence is an intentional use of physical force that can cause pain, injury, disability or death. It includes behaviours such as scratching, pushing, hair pulling, shaking, slapping, punching, kicking, biting, strangling, stabbing, burning, physical restraint, beating and killing, but does not exclude other manifestations.*

Challenges

Physical violence against Roma women is largely present, but women cover it up and stay silent because they are afraid that they could cause an even greater problem and provoke the rage of the abuser. They also feel that it is normal to get several slaps in the face and they do not consider it to be violence. As one participant says: *Well, it happens, but only when I do something wrong*, which is a way they justify the behaviour of their husbands.

The focus group held in Vozdovac showed that participants believe that slap is not an act of violence, although it is one of its most common manifestations. To illustrate this form of violence, we will present a story of one Roma woman.

D.R. married at age of 25 into a good and financially stable family. Her husband and her father-in-law were employed. She had a nice life, she could help her mother and sister out. After the first year of marriage, her mother-in-law started to call her out and say that she needed grandchildren. She needs a daughter-in-law who will give her grandchildren, and not a barren one. The husband did not know anything about this because he worked and she didn't want to disturb peace at home. The mother-in-law took her to see a doctor and after a few months she became pregnant. After the birth of the child, the mother-in-law started to psychologically maltreat her again, she was taking her baby away, telling her that she knew nothing, that she had grown up in a shed, and similar. Of course, she was silent because she loved her husband and did not want her child to grow up without a father. After the child's second birthday, the mother-in-law continued to abuse her psychologically and urged the son (her husband) to kick her out of the house, because she did nothing all day, did not take care of the child and talked with her mother on the phone all day long. Then, an even bigger problem arose when the husband started to argue with her, slapped her in the face for no reason in front of his mother, believing the mother that his wife really wasn't doing anything and wasn't taking care of the child. It continued like this for couple of months, when she decided she wouldn't be able to stand it anymore mentally and that she would soon need to see a psychiatrist, so she decided to leave her husband. When she told them that she wanted to return to her mother and take the child with her, the mother-in-law continued to insult her, not wanting to give her the child and then her husband beat her up. In the meantime, she telephoned her mother, which soon came to

pick her up. Since they did not let her take the child, she decided to go and report him to the police. In the police station they told her that they did not see any evidence of battery, but that she could go to the social welfare center and make a report for the child. A few days later a call came from her husband who threatened her for reporting, she reported back to the police, and only then the proceedings against him were launched. The social welfare center allowed her to see the child only in the premises of the center for two hours twice a month. After a few months, she appealed to the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Affairs because of the very short time for which she was allowed to see the child, the Ministry accepted the appeal and she is now allowed to spend two weekends a month with the child. The court proceedings are still ongoing for more than a year. She doesn't have enough money to hire a lawyer, although she has found a job in the meantime. They tell her that he can provide better conditions for the child than she can, but she will not give up, she will fight for her child and will never return to the abuser.

Article 36 Sexual violence, including rape

Current state

In accordance with the provisions of Article 36 of the Istanbul Convention, Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the following intentional conducts are criminalised: a) engaging in non-consensual vaginal, anal or oral penetration of a sexual nature of the body of another person with any bodily part or object; b) engaging in other non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a person; c) causing another person to engage in non-consensual acts of a sexual nature with a third person. Consent must be given voluntarily as the result of the person's free will assessed in the context of the surrounding circumstances. Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the provisions of paragraph 1 also apply to acts committed against former or current spouses or partners as recognised by internal law.

According to Article 178, paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Criminal Code, the criminal offence of rape is committed by whoever forces another to sexual intercourse or an equal act by use of force or threat of direct attack against the body of such or other person, and the offender shall be punished by imprisonment from five to twelve years. If the offence specified in paragraph 1 of this Article is committed under threat of disclosure of information against such person or another that would discredit such person's reputation or honour, or by threat of other grave evil, the offender shall be punished with imprisonment from two to ten years. These provisions also apply to the rape of current and former spouses and extramarital partners. Also, the latest amendments to the Criminal Code increased the

minimum prescribed imprisonment for the perpetrators of this criminal offence from three to five years in prison.

Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence (article 3, paragraph 3): *Domestic violence, as defined by this Law, is any act of [...] sexual [...] violence of the perpetrator directed towards a person with whom the perpetrator is current or former spouse or intimate partner, or towards a person with whom the perpetrator is a lineal or up to a second-degree collateral relative or with whom the perpetrator is in-law relative up to second degree, or towards a person to whom the perpetrator is an adoptive parent, adoptive child, foster parent or foster child, or towards other person with whom he lives or has lived in the same household.*

The definition of sexual violence is also provided in the Special Protocol for Social Welfare Centers-the Custody Department for Handling the Cases of Domestic Violence and Violence in Intimate Partnership Relations, in the following way: *Sexual violence is a sexual act without the consent or without the possibility for a victim to choose to give consent, irrespective of whether the act has taken place, a sexual act or an attempt of such act when a person is unable to agree or refuse to participate due to illness, disability, the influence of psychoactive substances, age, or due to intimidation, blackmail or pressure; a painful and humiliating sexual act. Intimidation, blackmail or pressure to engage in an unwanted sexual act include the use of words, gestures, objects or weapons to show the intention to cause pain, injury, or death.*

Challenges

As can be seen, the legal definition of criminal offence of rape prescribed in the Criminal Code of the Republic of Serbia is still not in line with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention, bearing in mind that in Serbia, for the commission of the criminal offence of rape, it is still required that the offender applied sexual coercion using force or by threatening to directly attack the life or body of another person or any person close to her or him or threatened to disclose information against such person or another that would discredit such person's reputation or honour, or by threat of other grave evil.

Roma women who participated in focus groups did not talk much about sexual violence, and some of them do not consider it as violence. As one focus group participant in Nis states: *Well, he is my husband, that is how it should be. There are days when I don't want to, but what can I do...* During the focus group in Valjevo, a participant (55 years old) asked whether it was violence when her partner sexually harassed her. Other participants stated that sexual violence is a very frequent form of domestic violence and that many women think that sexual intercourse is a responsibility of every woman and that they not see it as a type of

violence. The results of the focus groups show that Roma women consider sex in marriage to be their marital duty or use it as a means of *making peace at home*.

Similarly, in the focus group held in Pancevo, the participants said:

- *I recently learned that sexual violence exists as well, we learned about this when we talked about early marriages and about how we are forced to get married as young girls and then to have sex.*
- *I think that we all have this experience (sexual violence through an early marriage), but it is not easy to talk about it, and many of us do not realize that it doesn't have to be that way.*

Article 37 Forced marriage

Current state

In accordance with the Istanbul Convention, Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the intentional conduct of forcing an adult or a child to enter into a marriage is criminalised. Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the intentional conduct of luring an adult or a child to the territory of a Party or State other than the one she or he resides in with the purpose of forcing this adult or child to enter into a marriage is criminalised.

The latest amendments to the Criminal Code criminalize the criminal offence of forced marriage, and prescribe that, whoever uses force or threat to coerce another person to enter into marriage, shall be punished by imprisonment from three months to three years. It is also prescribed that whoever for the purpose of committing the offence referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article, takes another person abroad or induces her or him to go abroad for the same purpose, shall be punished by imprisonment up to two years. Also, it is stipulated that an adult who cohabits with a minor shall be punished with imprisonment up to three years (Article 190), and the same penalty shall be imposed on a parent, adoptive parent or guardian who enables or induces a minor to cohabit with an adult. If the offence specified in paragraph 2 of this Article is committed for gain, the offender shall be punished with imprisonment from six months to five years. If a marriage is concluded, prosecution shall not be undertaken, and if undertaken it shall be discontinued.

Challenges

During a focus group discussion held in Pancevo, most women confirmed the early marriage situation, and the participants in the focus group from Kostolac stated that forced marriages were still happening. Participants in the focus group from Valjevo believe that the most common reasons why Roma women do not report violence are their economic dependence on men, lack of information about their rights, illiteracy and early marriages.

Below we will present the stories of two Roma women about the problem of early and forced marriage, from which can be noted the attitude of the authorities in relation to this problem, as a link between early and forced marriage and the subsequent experiences of other forms of domestic violence.

J.J: I grew up in a family where men always had to have the last word. I was raised by my parents to respect the elders and to obey my husband when I get married, that I can only get married once and that it is shameful to get divorce and remarry. They married me off when I was 15 years old. I didn't even know my husband and he was ten years older than me. There was no love between us. We lived alone. The very first day he told me that I should never go anywhere without him, not even to the grocery store. I was not allowed to receive any male guests when he wasn't home. I kept quiet because I was young and I thought that was how it should be. I got my first beating when I went to the grocery store to buy some bread without first telling him. I complained to my parents, but they offered no support. They thought he was right to do so, because I disobeyed. When we had children, the beatings became more frequent. He thought I wasn't raising the kids right. He said that the kids were men so they should know how to fight, how to swear, etc. I didn't raise them that way, so he kept on beating me all the time. I couldn't find a way to please him. He was very jealous. If I ever even looked at another man while we were walking through the city, he would beat me up so much at home that I even lost consciousness a couple of times. I didn't know how to behave towards him. I had no girlfriends and no support from my parents. The abuse was becoming more and more severe, both physically and psychologically. Once my brother came to visit us. When he got back from work, we had lunch together and then my brother left. Five minutes later he was beating me up so badly that I couldn't open one eye and my brow ridge was busted. I had to go to the hospital to have it stitched. In the hospital, I told them everything and they called the police. The police detained him immediately and he was sentenced to a six-month jail term. In the meantime, I got a divorce and I went abroad with my children. My parents didn't want to hear from me anymore because I reported my husband. After he got out of jail he stopped bothering me. He remarried and now has another family. I had lived abroad for 15 years and later I built my own home in Nis. Now I live a peaceful and tranquil life and I always wonder how my life and life of my children would be had I stayed with a husband like him.

T.Dj is sixteen years old, she is a daughter of D.Dj. and she is a high school student. For a year now, she has been in a relationship with an older man who used to come to their house to visit her, even though D.Dj. was forbidding it and she clearly disapproved of that relationship. One day T. Dj. didn't come home after her morning classes. Her mother tried to reach her on the phone, but she wasn't answering. Only that evening, her elder daughter told her that T.Dj. went to her boyfriend's house. When the mother called the police and asked for their assistance, because her daughter was in a relationship with a much older man, they told her to wait a little longer and to be patient, and that her daughter would probably be back the following morning. Tomorrow D.Dj. tried calling her daughter again, but she still wasn't answering the phone. She also called the police, but they did not react, saying that the girl would most likely return home by the evening. The mother decided to start her own search for her daughter and to bring her back home. She found out where the man her daughter was with lived. When she knocked on the door of that house, a man came out and said that T.Dj. wasn't there. D.Dj. was insisting to see her daughter, so he pushed her and hit her. The girl heard that her mother fell and she wanted to come out and help her up, but the man hit her as well and shoved her back into the house. The mother called the police again, she explained what had happened and where she was. When two police officers came, they asked who would treat because the girl got married. The mother said that the girl was only sixteen and that the boy was much older than her and that he beat them both. The police officers asked the girl if that was true and the girl stayed silent, because she was afraid to say what had happened. There were visible injuries on the girl's face, but they did not react, instead they asked again who would treat because the girl got married. As they were leaving, they told the mother to accept that her daughter got married and that they found it strange that she called them, as it is normal for Roma girls to marry at such a young age. They did not react to violence that was visible on the girl's face.

Article 40 Sexual harassment

Current state

In accordance with the Istanbul Convention, Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that any form of unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature with the purpose or effect of violating the dignity of a person, in particular when creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment, is subject to criminal or other legal sanction.

The latest amendments to the Criminal Code prescribe the criminal offence of sexual harassment (Article 182a), which is defined as any verbal, non-verbal or physical behaviour aiming at or constituting violation of his/her or their dignity, especially if it

induces fear or creates a hostile, humiliating or offensive environment. The prescribed punishment for the basic form of this offence is a fine or imprisonment up to six months.

In accordance with the Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination, it is forbidden to expose an individual or a group of persons, on the basis of his/her or their personal characteristics, to harassment and humiliating treatment aiming at or constituting violation of his/her or their dignity, especially if it induces fear or creates a hostile, humiliating or offensive environment. Also, in accordance with the Law on Gender Equality¹⁹, sexual harassment means any unwanted verbal, non-verbal or physical act of sexual nature, committed with the aim or which has as the consequence a violation of personal dignity, establishment of intimidating, unfriendly, humiliating, degrading or insulting environment, gender-based (Article 10, paragraph 1, point 7).

Challenges

During the focus groups, when asked by the group leaders if they had heard that a new criminal offence had been prescribed - sexual harassment, the participants gave different answers. For example, Roma women from Borca did not have information about this, while participants in the focus group from Cukarica were familiar with this criminal offence, they knew to some extent what was forbidden, but not sufficiently. On the other hand, Roma women from Valjevo recently learned about sexual harassment and exploitation because they had had such a case in their settlement. As they stated: *We heard that women are now more protected, that a man can't look at her sideways, let alone slap her, but it's a long road to justice.*

Sexual harassment of Roma women also occurs in state institutions. As an example, we will present the case that was conducted before the Commissioner for the Protection of Equality in relation to sexual harassment of Roma women.²⁰

An organization dealing with the protection of the rights of the Roma filed a complaint on behalf of five women, inhabitants of an informal Roma settlement, because of non-professional and discriminatory behaviour of a Centre for Social Work employee, and stated that they were threatened, offended, sexually harassed and physically attacked by the social worker. The social worker denied all the statements in the complaint, saying that he did not know some of the women who filed the complaint. However, he did not offer any evidence to support his statement on the case, and the analysis of the statements made by the complainants showed that they all referred to the same or similar behaviour of the social

¹⁹ "Official Gazette of the RS", No. 104/2009

²⁰ Regular Annual Report of the Commissioner for Protection and Equality for 2013, Belgrade, 2014

worker, in situations when they addressed him with a request to exercise certain rights from the field of social protection, and the events occurred over a period of several months. There are also evident similarities in his statements referred to the women, in terms of complainants' gender – statements he would not have said if a male had been in their place (invitation for a coffee, inappropriate comments on their physical appearance with sexual connotations), and referring to their Roma national affiliation. In the course of the procedure it was established that the social worker did

not provide any evidence that would confute the statements of the complaint.

The Commissioner for the Protection of Equality issued the opinion that the social worker committed an act of discrimination – harassment and degrading treatment, by behaving inappropriately and by statements directed to his fellow citizens on the grounds of their national affiliation and gender. He was recommended to send an apology in writing to the discriminated persons for discriminatory treatment based on their Roma national affiliation and female gender, as well as to abstain from harassment and degrading behaviour in the future and to abstain from statements that offend the dignity of members of national minorities and create a hostile, degrading and offensive environment. In addition, the director of the Centre for Social work was recommended to make public on the notice board or some other visible place on the premises of the Centre for Social Work the opinion and recommendation issued by the Commissioner for Protection of Equality together with the social worker's apology in writing.

Article 42 Unacceptable justifications for crimes, including crimes committed in the name of so-called "honour"

Current state

In accordance with the Istanbul Convention, Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that, in criminal proceedings initiated following the commission of any of the acts of violence covered by the scope of this Convention, culture, custom, religion, tradition or so-called "honour" shall not be regarded as justification for such acts. This covers, in particular, claims that the victim has transgressed cultural, religious, social or traditional norms or customs of appropriate behaviour. Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that incitement by any person of a child to commit any of the acts referred to in paragraph 1 shall not diminish the criminal liability of that person for the acts committed.

Challenges

Focus group participants often emphasized that because of the tradition they felt it was disgraceful for a woman to report her husband and to humiliate him, and even if they did it, they would be condemned by the people around them, as the participants from Kragujevac agreed. One participant in the focus group in Valjevo considers it particularly worrying that officials in the relevant institutions believe that it is normal in the "Roma tradition" for a husband to beat his wife and that they would soon reconcile. The participants in the Pancevo focus group point out that one of the key problems is that when they report violence, the institutions usually don't believe them, they don't acknowledge the real size of the problem and try to reconcile them with their abusers. They tell them it's nothing and that they will reconcile, that it is all normal.

Three participants in the Valjevo focus group stated that they were in a worse situation compared to women from the majority population, because even when they report violence, the officials in the social welfare center and the police *do not react so quickly when it comes to Roma women, because they attribute male dominance to the Roma tradition*. An example to support the above mentioned is the story of the Roma women D.Dj. and her underage daughter T.Dj. that was presented in the chapter about forced marriages. As already mentioned, after D.Dj. called the police and pointed out that her 16 years old daughter entered into an extramarital union with an older man, police officers who responded to the call just asked who would treat because the girl got married and that they found it strange that she even called them in the first place, as it is normal for Roma girls to marry at such a young age.

CHAPTER VI – Investigation, prosecution, procedural law and protective measures

Article 49 General obligations

Current state

In accordance with the provision of Article 49. of the Istanbul Convention, parties shall take necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that investigations and judicial proceedings in relation to all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention are carried out without undue delay while taking into consideration the rights of the victim

during all stages of the criminal proceedings. Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures, in conformity with the fundamental principles of human rights and having regard to the gendered understanding of violence, to ensure the effective investigation and prosecution of offences established in accordance with his Convention.

The Family act stipulates that the proceedings during the dispute for the protection against domestic violence are particularly urgent (Article 285, paragraph 1). The Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence stipulates that the failure of the judges, public prosecutors and deputy public prosecutors to act within the time limits determined by this law constitutes a disciplinary offense (Article 6).

Challenges

At the focus group held in Borca, the female participants pointed out that the Roma women lack adequate protection by the police and the state. When asked what was, in their opinion, an adequate protection from violence, the participants replied: *When you have a brother or father who protects you; when you do not allow your husband to raise his hand on you.* Other female participants agreed that the police were the most adequate protection against violence.

However, whether and to what extent the investigation and protection against domestic violence when it comes to Roma women is effective, illustrates the story of K.B.

In late afternoon K.B. came to the premises of the association accompanied by her cousin. She is 20 years old, she looks neat, she is modest and reticent, heavily pregnant. Her childhood was very difficult, after her father's death she lived with her mother, brothers and sisters in great poverty. She never went to school, she helped her mother with chores. Without her knowledge, the mother contracted a marriage and in return received a certain sum of money. Life with her mother was difficult, but in a new home it turned into a living hell. When she was 11, her mother sold her to a man she lived with for eight years and gave birth to four children. In the unit with her partner, it was hard for her from the beginning, first she was raped by him, and then she was exposed daily to his violence. As a long-time drug addict, he beat both her and children, and when he did not have the money to buy drugs, he forced her to beg. She did not have anybody's support, nor did she have anyone to turn to help, and she thought that she had to suffer because these things were normal. Violence was becoming more and more frequent, and once, when the husband attacked her in the kitchen, she used a knife to protect herself.

After grievous bodily harm inflicted upon her husband, a procedure was initiated against her. She failed to defend herself at trial. Afraid, confused and still unaware that she had been living in violence for a long time, she kept silent all the time. During the trial, no violence towards her was mentioned, not for a moment. She was sentenced to a year in prison for attempted

murder. Having served the prison sentence, she left the community with the youngest child, while the other three children remained with their father. Since she did not have anywhere to go, she went to her aunt's in another city, and met there a young man who had accepted her child and she continued to live with him in a village in a small Roma settlement without electricity, running water and sewage. She came to a multi-generation family with over 10 members. Soon she became pregnant. In the meantime, she was informed that she had been sentenced to three years' imprisonment by the Court of Appeal on appeal against sentence. A female mediator and a female lawyer from the association managed to suspend sentence for one year.

Article 50 Immediate response, prevention and protection

Current state

In accordance with the provisions of Article 50 of the Istanbul Convention, parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the responsible law enforcement agencies respond to all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention promptly and appropriately by offering adequate and immediate protection to victims. Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the responsible law enforcement agencies engage promptly and appropriately in the prevention and protection against all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention, including the employment of preventive operational measures and the collection of evidence.

The Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence stipulates that the police are one of the competent authorities responsible for preventing domestic violence and providing protection and support to victims of domestic violence and victims of criminal offenses established by this Law (Article 7, paragraph 1). It is stipulated that the head of the regional police administration designate police officers who have completed specialised training to prevent domestic violence and provide protection to victims of violence (Article 8). Furthermore, it is stipulated that state bodies and institutions responsible for the implementation of this law shall prevent promptly, effectively and co-ordinately domestic violence and the commission of criminal offenses established by this Law, and provide victim protection, legal assistance and psychosocial assistance and other support for their recovery, empowerment and independence (Article 12), and that police officers shall promptly inform the competent police officer of any domestic violence or immediate threat of violence, regardless of how they have learned about it, and shall be entitled, either on their own or at the request of the competent police officer, to detain the possible

perpetrator in the competent organisational unit of the police in order to conduct the proceedings (Article 14, paragraph 1).

The Law on the Police²¹ stipulates that employees of the Ministry of the Interior and the Police shall treat everyone equally, regardless of their race, gender or nationality, their differences stemming from social origin, birth, religion, political or other belief or orientation, gender and gender identity, property, culture, language, age and mental or physical disability (Article 5).

Challenges

When they suffer domestic abuse, most Roma women participants of focus groups say that they first turn to the police. However, they believe that the response of the police following their applications is often not adequate, that is, they do not receive the expected and necessary protection.

The participants to the focus group from Vozdovac think that the reason women do not report violence sufficiently is that the police do not respond to their calls, but *calm the things down* over the phone, while the participants to the focus group held in Vranje pointed out that they are often not understood and thus postpone solving their problem. Similarly, participants to focus group from Valjevo have identified the police as an institution responsible for resolving the problem of domestic violence, but stressed the insensitivity of officials in the relevant institutions for the victims of violence. The same was pointed out by the participants of the focus groups from Nis and Kragujevac, stating that the cases of domestic violence they reported were not taken *seriously*.

A participant to the focus group held in Borca stated: *Serbian women have more rights than us. They are protected by the police, and for us they say it is typical of Gypsies.*

All participants to the focus group held in Pancevo stated that if they have any doubts about domestic violence, they first contact the NGO members or call the SOS telephone lines or some women's organisation they heard of. They often consult women who were in a similar situation as well or those who had some experience with institutions. Only after this consultation do most of them go further, they possibly turn to the social welfare centre and the police. It is particularly worrying that almost all the participants of this focus group expressed a great fear from the police, based on their own experience or on the experience of other women.

²¹ "Official Gazette of RoS", No 6/16 and 24/18

Article 52 Emergency barring orders

Current state

In accordance with the provisions of Article 52 of the Istanbul Convention, parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the competent authorities are granted the power to order, in situations of immediate danger, a perpetrator of domestic violence to vacate the residence of the victim or person at risk for a sufficient period of time and to prohibit the perpetrator from entering the residence of or contacting the victim or person at risk.

The Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence stipulates that if, following the risk assessment, an imminent threat of domestic violence is established, the competent police officer shall issue an order imposing emergency barring order to the perpetrator detained in the competent organisational unit of the police (Articles 17-19). Emergency barring orders are: the measure of temporary removal of the perpetrator from the apartment and the measure of temporary prohibition for the perpetrator to contact the victim of the violence and approach them. Both emergency barring orders can be imposed with an order. The order includes: the name of the authority issuing it, the information on the person to whom the emergency barring order is imposed, the type of emergency barring order to be imposed and its duration, the day and time of the imposition of the emergency barring order and the obligation of the person to whom the emergency barring order is imposed to contact the police officer who imposed it after its termination. The order is delivered to the person to whom the emergency barring order has been imposed. If the person refuses the receipt of an order, the competent police officer shall draw up a note thereof, by which the order shall be deemed to have been delivered. The competent police officer shall present the order, immediately after its delivery, to the Basic Public Prosecutor in whose area the victim is residing, or domiciled, to the social welfare centre and to the coordination and co-operation group, and the victim of violence shall be informed in writing about the type of emergency barring order imposed.

After receiving notification, risk assessment and order, the Basic Public Prosecutor examines the notifications and evaluates the risk assessment of the competent police officer. If he or she subsequently establishes an imminent threat of domestic violence, he or she shall submit a motion to the court to extend the emergency barring order, within 24 hours from the delivery of the order to the person to whom the emergency barring order was imposed. In addition to the motion the Basic Public Prosecutor shall also submit to the court the risk assessment of the competent police officer, his evaluation of his risk assessment and other evidence indicating an imminent threat of domestic violence. The motion to extend the emergency barring order shall be submitted to the basic court in

whose area the victim is residing, or domiciled, and a single judge shall decide on the motion.

The court extends the emergency barring order should it establish an imminent threat of domestic violence after evaluating the risk assessment of the competent police officer, the evaluation of the risk assessment made by the basic public prosecutor, the assessments of the submitted evidence and claims from the motion of the basic public prosecutor and the assessment of the statement of the person to whom the emergency barring order was imposed, otherwise it rejects the motion as unfounded. The resolution on the motion shall be passed without the hearing, within 24 hours from the receipt of the motion to extend the emergency barring order.

Challenges

Participants to all focus groups were asked whether they knew that new regulations were put in place related to the protection against violence, that is, whether they were informed that the new system of protection implied that the police could impose emergency barring orders to the perpetrator – removal from the house/apartment and restraining orders. Their responses point to the conclusion that most of the participants were informed about these new regulations, but there were also participants who heard about the possibility of imposition of emergency barring orders to the perpetrator for the first time at the focus group. For example, five participants to the focus group held in Nis knew about the existence of new emergency barring orders, while another five participants wanted to get acquainted with new legal measures.

On the other hand, participants to the focus group held in Vozdovac knew that emergency barring orders could be imposed on the perpetrator, but they did not know about any such a case. Also, all participants to the focus group held in Pancevo were familiar with the authority of the police to impose emergency barring orders for the protection against domestic violence, but indicated that this is *less applied in practice*. As they indicated, *institutions usually try to downplay the problem and make it seem less important*. One of the participants asked: *How to remove him, and make me stay with my father-in-law in that house? What will he do to me when his son was taken away and arrested because of me?* Most of the participants to this focus group agreed that these measures would be difficult to apply in Roma settlements and that in the village the ownership of the house/apartment is often not determined, and that their husbands were mostly not owners, but their fathers-in-law, even the grandparents of their husbands.

One participant to the focus group from Valjevo cited the case of a work colleague whose husband was removed from the house for 48 hours due to violence, because he *literally*

battered her. When the violence took place, he was intoxicated, he came home and asked for money from her to continue drinking with his buddies. After imposing the order, since he had no place to go to, because the house was shared, he returned home after two days. Now they live in the same house, but they do not speak to each other, and now he has succumbed to drink even more, he is abusing her psychologically and cursing. The woman contacted the Social Welfare Centre, and the clerk told her that they did not have any evidence, but if he tried to hit her again, she should immediately call the police.

Participants to the focus group from Pirot did not know about the possibility of imposing emergency barring orders, but after the workshop leader's explanation, the comments were as follows:

- *I don't think it will do any good.*
- *It has to, because that way at least some problems with violence will be solved.*
- *Well, it's great they enforced it to daunt men a bit.*

Article 53 Restraining or protection orders

Current state

In accordance with the provision of Article 53 of the Istanbul Convention, parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that appropriate restraining or protection orders are available to victims of all forms of violence covered by the scope of this Convention. Parties shall take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that the restraining or protection order are: available for immediate protection and without unnecessary financial or administrative burdens for the victim; adopted for a certain period or until they are amended or terminated; where necessary, issued on an *ex parte* basis with immediate effect; available irrespective of court proceedings or with other court proceedings and may be included in further court proceedings. Parties shall also take the necessary legislative or other measures to ensure that breaches of restraining or protection orders shall be subject to effective, proportionate and dissuasive criminal or other legal sanctions.

Family law prescribes that the court may enforce one or more measures to protect against domestic violence against family member, that temporarily prohibit or restrict access to another family member. Measures of protection against domestic violence are: 1) issuing an eviction order from a family home or apartment, regardless of the right of the property ownership or lease of immovable property; 2) issuing an order for moving into a family apartment or house, regardless of the right of ownership or lease of immovable property; 3) a restraining order towards a family member at a certain distance; 4) prohibition of

access to the place of residence or to the place of work of a family member and 5) prohibition of further harassment of a family member (Article 198). A protection order against domestic violence can last up to a year. Time spent in detention as well as any deprivation of liberty in connection with crime or offense shall be included in the duration of the protection order against domestic violence. Whoever violates a measure against domestic violence that was imposed on them by the court in accordance with the law shall be punished with imprisonment from three months to three years and a fine (Article 194, paragraph 5 of Criminal Code).

Challenges

From the focus group discussions with Roma women, it can be concluded that they are very sceptical in terms of the imposition of protection orders against domestic violence, including the restraining order. For example, the majority of the participants in the focus group from Nis thinks that the abuser will find a way to reach the victim and not to respect the pronounced verdict, while participants in the focus group from Cukarica consider that the restraining order is a good measure, but for some abusers it is not enough to stop them from committing violence. Roma women from Valjevo believe that imposing the restraining order to protect the victim is not a true and long-term solution, since the abuser returns again after the restraining order and *continues to commit violence driven by anger even more*.

CHAPTER VII – Conclusion and recommendations

At the focus groups held throughout Serbia, during the discussions Roma women identified certain problems they consider to be key obstacles to overcoming the problem of domestic violence, that is, to the prevention of violence and to leaving the cycle of violence for women who are currently exposed to violence. Below we will present some of the key issues that were highlighted during the focus of group discussions:

- Failure to recognise violence;
- Different treatment of the Roma by the institutional officials, they think that it is normal in Roma tradition for a husband to beat wife and that they would soon reconcile, that is, the law does not apply to Roma women as to the majority of the population;
- Distrust in institutions;
- Roma women are not sufficiently informed about their rights, they do not know the law;

- Roma women do not have the courage to leave the cycle of violence, for fear of what the abuser will do afterwards, they have no place to go with their children, they have no financial stability;
- Poverty, unemployment and/or economic dependence on a spouse;
- Fear that their children will be taken away;
- The received opinion that a woman must suffer, misunderstanding and lack of support from their parents and the environment;
- Unequal rights in marriage;
- Lack of self-esteem, self-confidence and courage among Roma women, as well as patriarchy;
- They blame themselves or justify the abusers, believing that it is normal to endure violence;
- Most abusers are quickly released from prison or *no legal actions are applied to them for committed acts of violence the way it should be*;
- Some measures are not carried out, even though they may, and *others cannot be equally carried out with every woman*.

In addition to the key issues, during the focus groups Roma women also made recommendations on measures that, in their opinion, should be undertaken in order to solve these problems. Recommendations are as follows:

- Abusers sentenced to imprisonment;
- Education of Roma women on violence, including working with girls who are yet to marry. It is necessary to explain to women what is violence and that they are not obliged to suffer it;
- To educate also men, to make them acquainted with regulations that prohibit domestic violence, that is, what is allowed, and what not;
- To educate clerks in Social Welfare Centres, in the Police department police and in the Prosecutor's office;
- That the clerks from the social welfare centre and other institutions come to the settlement and hold a lecture on their rights and that during these lectures they may be allowed to ask them what they want to know, because when Roma women turn to the institution they do not listen to them because they have prejudices about the Roma;
- Every woman should know her rights, should be informed, know that there is someone who will protect her and support her in reporting violence;
- To understand that they are not guilty, that they should file a report to the police, and that they should not be afraid, that they are not alone;

- To provide women with support to report violence, and institutions should open their doors to Roma women, and respond in accordance with their responsibilities;
- For institutions to act better towards beneficiaries, that is, that there should not be such discrimination against Roma women, poor and elderly women;
- To take Roma women more seriously when it comes to violence, because they often feel rejected and misunderstood;
- Faster response of all institutions, if a woman already reports violence;
- The Social Welfare Centre needs to help a woman who is a victim of violence in every possible way (accommodation with children, financial assistance or employment, and provide support in every sense to her and to her children);
- The social workers, in charge of their field, should visit them more often and help them when they notice that domestic violence takes place;
- Laws should be followed more;
- Education and employment of Roma women in order to be financially independent of the partner;
- Ending the poverty in the Roma community in general (for example, some women were saying that *men do not work, so they spend the entire day at home, nervous, they drink and in these situations they commit violence*).

Annex – two case studies

Case study No 1

Interview conducted in the Roma settlement VR (27.5.2018)

R is 14, she was a victim of violence and she is currently „married“. The interview was attended by her mother-in-law, who occasionally gave answers and supplemented the story, in the parts she had information about and on the events she was attending.

I had some problems back home. The Social Welfare Centre had already known that my dad was abusing my mom - beatings, threats and so on. My mother did not want to leave him just because of us, because she had no place to return to with us, she no longer had her mom and dad because they died. So she kept quiet about it. When you have a friend, you can at least commiserate, but my mom did not even have a friend. And so – we all kept quiet. There are four of us children, three sisters and one brother, I am the eldest one. Mom kept quiet, kept quiet and suddenly fell ill. They were going to put her bypass, but the doctors said she could not stand it, that she was weak and that she probably would not survive. I did not even let her go to the hospital, I knew she would not survive.

My mother suffered in silence the whole time, just for us. She did not tell anyone. Her brother called, the older one, he asked her how she was, she said she was fine, he asked her if she had some problems, and she said no. And my brother said this to him: *My dad beats my mom*. Mom said it wasn't true. Once she just dropped, she had another stroke. I asked her: *Mom what's wrong?*, there was no response and I saw that my mom couldn't get up. *Mom, bring me the juice* – still nothing. She was doing some cooking and baking bread, and I was supposed to go to school. I was running down where the cement factory was, and from there you have to go four stops to the medical centre. I called my dad and told him, and he did not want to come. I took my mother to the doctor and they wanted to put her in that wheelchair, they were taking her away, but they told me she would not go into surgery immediately until she recovered a bit. They took her to the room and they were preparing her for surgery three days. after that. Social Welfare Centre called me, they said I should bring a towel, a soap and everything else required for the surgery. The surgery was supposed to start on Thursday. On Wednesday, I was already not feeling well, I was crying, I knew it wouldn't go well and I cried next to her. Dad entered the room drunk and just told me to get out. I did not want to, and he grabbed me by the hand and wanted to throw me out. My mom just said: *Don't cause any trouble*. The third day they told me that my mom passed away. Then I went crazy, I started crying, I went to Social Welfare Centre and I told them I would report them when the time came and that it was their fault for my mother's death, because they knew that my father was beating my mother and nobody did anything. They wanted to place my sisters and my brother in a foster family, but I said No. They said it had to be done. Then they took us to the Social Welfare Centre. It hasn't been six months, they picked up my sisters and took them away. I did not know about it, because I ran away at my friend's, I had nowhere else to go. I had problems there because I was hungry and they did not want to give me any food. My brother felt bad and he punched the TV that cracked. The police arrived at the centre and beat him, they slapped him two or three times, because he was not allowed to do that and they said that my brother should buy a new television, in other words, to give money to the Social Welfare Centre. And so, after 6 months, the people from Social Welfare Centre came, they brought the police that was holding me down, and my two sisters were taken to the foster family. There I started crying, screaming, they did not even let me hug them. Every time I wanted to move, the guy held me still. I told them to leave me alone and that they could not take them anywhere. I told them: *You are separating us because you have a heart of stone*. They told me: *My my, you are so witty*. I responded: *I'm not witty, I just don't want to protect my brother and my sisters. Because we are the Roma, you do whatever you want with us, well you can't*.

Dad is in jail for rape. They wanted to take me to a home for orphaned children in Krusevac, they did not want to put me together with my siblings because for them I was problematic. Mother-in-law adds that they wanted to take her to a home for orphaned children, but she did not agree and went to the social welfare centre where she knew a woman.

I do not argue with anyone at home, and when I go to the social welfare centre they provoke me, I can't tolerate that. When I complain to them about anything, they do nothing. My mom could still be alive, it's their fault. They said: *If you do not calm down, we'll call the police to take you away.* Once I really left the children's shelter and they called the police. There we have to do exactly as teacher says, you either eat or not, if she says to go to bed, you have to go to bed. But I did not behave that way. And when I escaped from a shelter, I met him. He was free and I was in a shelter. Then we ran to his house and hid at their attic. Mother-in-law added that she did not know that, that the neighbour had told her that her son was hiding the girl in the attic. She said she did not allow her son to marry because he was young, only 17 years old. She stated that with the help of her aunt she managed to stop being a "welfare case" and that she did not treat her as daughter-in-law, but as her own daughter.

I met the boy at the moment I had heard some terrible news – my youngest sister was raped at school and her innocence was taken away from her. She was 10 years old then, it happened at the school where her foster parents got her into. Two boys from the 8th grade. My sister was in the bathroom. While she was taking a tinkle, she did not close the door. They entered, they just did that to her, and she fainted. The foster mother reported them to the police. These two guys were caught by the police, because the police saw on the school camera who they were and they told their parents they had to take them away. They caught them, put them in the car and took them in. Then their parents called a lawyer and said that it was neither accidental nor unintentional, it just happened. But it could be seen on the camera that it was not accidental, but that she was physically and emotionally... that it was rape. When she regained consciousness, she saw that she was in the hospital and they put her on a drip. When she got up, she was constantly calling out to me. And they did not even let me hear her. I threatened them that I would report them all when I turned 18 and that I would set them on fire one day, and they told me they would get me admitted to psychiatric unit. I ran away from there and went to my friend's to cry. And then I met him.

I will never forgive my father for what he did to me. He... how can I tell you ... he raped me. He raped me while he was drunk when I was sleeping. I took two Valium pills because of my headache and toothache, and so I fell asleep wearing jeans, a t-shirt and short socks. There were two beds, I took my brother and my sisters and brought them to the room with me. I called them all to sleep with me, and my dad was not moving away from my room, and he was drunk. I told him clearly: *Turn off the music, you have your own music, you have your own room, go there, leave me alone to sleep. Leave us alone. Did you eat? Did you drink? You did? You have your own music, pick up and get out of our room.* So, when I fell asleep... That's when it happened, it's been one year now. I went to sleep. All of a sudden, I felt a stomach ache. I got up, I saw him on top of me. I looked at myself, I looked at him.

I took him and pushed him away, and my brother and my sisters were witnessing it all. They held my hands and were trying to wake me up, but I did not hear anything. All of a sudden I just felt my belly hurt there, I did not know what happened to me. I pushed him, I got up, but I did not have any strength, my head was spinning. I looked at myself, I saw that I was bleeding. I looked at him - he was completely naked, I looked at myself, I was naked too. I was searching for my clothes, they are all torn. As I wanted to get up and away from him, he hit me twice with a fist. There I fell. I said: *Leave me alone, I'm just going to wash my face.* I only took my leather jacket, my sister followed to the bathroom crying. I was looking at her crying. I was embarrassed, there was also my brother. They were watching it, and it was your father who did it. I wasn't expecting that from anyone, imagine from your father... who created you. He should not have done that to me. And then my sister embraced me and said: *Calm down, do not be afraid, let us escape.* And I wanted to escape and report him. My brother told me: *Do not report him, please, he'll kill you.* Let him kill me. He is already drunk. The phone rang, he didn't want to get up, didn't want to move. I took the axe I wanted to hit him, but the brother grabbed my hand and told me NO! I looked at my sisters, they were crying. I left the axe and hid in the bathroom, the sisters followed me and we cried, and I was ashamed that my brother saw me naked. I told my sister to keep the phone next to her. I put that jacket on and said I was just going to close the door, and the door was already closed. I unlocked the door and ran. And naked, only wearing a leather jacket. And the junkies were sitting in the park and looking at me. I was running, they began running after me. I ran and I ran, and somehow I managed to get to my aunt's, and I only knocked twice and I just fell down, I fainted because I did not have the strength.

My uncle opened the door and tried to wake me up. When I got myself together I saw my legs all bloody and I was still bleeding. He asked me what happened to me, I said: Dad!, he asked me if I was sure, and I said that I was. He put me in the bathroom, and my aunt knew that it was me and did not get up. My uncle looked at her: *The hell with you, get up or I'll fu*king mess you up. Your brother damaged the child without mother.* He brought me her clothes to the bathroom, and my aunt did not do anything, she was chatting with her neighbour and calling her. He went crazy and broke her phone. He called the police and said that the rape took place and that a father raped his daughter. He told them my name. The police came. I was all pale from crying and I was still bleeding. The policeman asked to bring me some clothes, he told them not to shower me, not to do anything, just to give me some clothes. The police called the ambulance and they took me to the hospital. It wasn't all the same to me when I looked at myself and saw blood, when your father does that to you... The only thing I know for sure is that I told him: *You'll remember this, not even God can save you now, no one can. I'll come to my senses now.* He told me that if I told anyone what happened, he would kill me with an axe. I said: *Kill me, you have killed me now, you have killed me.*

And I was with the boy before that. He asked me to escape together but I did not want to, I said I was still young. I wanted him to take my innocence away, I wanted us to escape together when we turned 18 or 19. Then I heard him, he told me he would come for me, and I told him not to come. When I got there, they put me in a wheelchair, a doctor came, they wiped off blood and told me not to be afraid. They gave me a shot that had already stunned me. I remember when the doctor came to move me, I pushed him, I said: *Not you too*. He said: *Do not be afraid, honey, we will not do it*. There was one female doctor and one male doctor, they were holding my arms and a woman came, she caressed my hair and said: *Do not be afraid, we have to do this to you*. They took a pencil and they examined me, and they pulled it out, they found a male hair. My uncle brought my sisters and my brother, and my other cousins, from my mother's side, they all went together with knives to kill him, but as they arrived, the special forces already took him away, everything was bloody in the house, my clothes were torn, they put all those numbers around the house.

Immediately after that they took me to a police station. They put me in front of a wall and they took photos. The doctor said: *We need to examine you once more*. As the doctor began undressing me, he saw the bruises. Then he put some gloves and we were looking at my arms and he said: *There are plenty of prints here, everything was red from handprints*. He said: *This was terrible, God to will punish him for this*. He insulted God and everything. Since I was bleeding a lot, they gave me sanitary napkins. The female doctor took a lot of napkins, she just stick them and put them in place and told me not to get up suddenly. They told my aunt to go immediately to the pharmacy and buy the medicine they prescribed so I wouldn't get pregnant. My aunt went to borrow some money, she had no money. She borrowed money, 2,500 dinars from her neighbour and I took that medicine. I was crying, I was praying to God not to make bad things happen to me. And what was I going to do then? I cried and I did not know what to do. My life was ruined. Who is going to believe this?

Before he did this to me, there was one boy, a drug addict, from Zrenjanin. My father wanted to give me to him, and I did not want because ... I do not know how to tell you ... I was afraid of him. I was 12-13 years old then. I was afraid. I did not want to marry. He said: *Or you will marry or you amount to something*. I said: *I'll amount to nothing, nor will I marry, I am still young, I am still a child, and I will tell my brother about this, you'll see. You want me to marry to make money*. And then the boy said that they would come to propose. Dad told them to come. My dad went to sleep, I took the phone, I took the number and I called that boy. He picked up. I said that he would have problems, that he was an adult, and I was a minor, that I was still a child. And I told that to my cousin from my mother's side who was abroad, who always helped us. He told me: *When I get there, I'll make him become a drug addict. What is he thinking? Since he is your father, and a stepfather to me, he thinks he can do whatever he wants with you*.

Frankly, I want to forget about everything, but I think of it again. And every night I start crying. I remember my brother, sisters, my mother ... I miss her... How can I explain it ... I want her to caress me, to kiss me, to hug me. To goof around with her... I was used to that. A mother is a mother! Now my husband says – don't cry, I'll call my mom. All right, I said, and when your mom comes, I'll lie down next to her. My mother-in-law is good, she's not a rough person. Since I came to their house, she was teaching me how to clean, cook, take care of the house and so on. It's never boring with her, but I'm accustomed to being pampered by my mother when I go to bed. The mother-in-law adds that she is trying to be by her side when she has a tough time. Sometimes her husband yells at her, and then she tells him to go out and not to yell at her. They support each other.

Case study No 2

Interview conducted in the settlement Grabovac (12/05/2018)

My name is NM. I am 23 years old and I am happy. I work, I am my own person. My story is not that unusual and it does not differ from other stories of women who are abused, but I have experienced it - in a very, very difficult way. I was 14 when I met him, I was then in the 8th grade in the elementary school. Full of myself, beautiful to myself, beautiful to others too. I was smiling, cheerful, eager to find love, that long-awaited, true love. I met him at my aunt's celebration party. I will never forget the day I became his girlfriend. I dreamed of becoming his wife because there is no period of girlhood in "our world", but immediately after falling in love, a girl is getting married. We started see each other in secret, and then we announced that we would become husband and wife. I thought my whole world was mine, I loved him and that my fairy tale began.

We "married" in September, only after the beginning of the school year. I enrolled in high school and left it immediately, and I started the school with the enthusiasm and the will to become a nurse, it was my mother's dream. I never saw more sorrow and disappointment in the eyes of my parents, as on the day of my wedding. That very day, I faced a series of unacceptable customs for me. Given that before the wedding I gave my husband my proof of love – my innocence, on the wedding day, my mother-in-law was strutting carrying bloody sheets. I cannot get rid of that feeling of shame even today. His family was of other religion, I was asked to kiss the hands of the guests, to wash my mother-in-law's and my father-in-law's feet, to dance on the table while his relatives were watching me, because for them I was a trophy to show off. I thought that everything would get better and that I would live in paradise. As a matter of fact, my life was made hell.

I got the first beating right after the wedding, because I did not wash a bowl very well. I remember it well, the mother-in-law gave her son a sign, gave him a piercing look and said:

"Deal with your wife". I got such a slap that I got dizzy, and I did not even know why. Later it became an everyday occurrence: lunch is not salty enough - beating, I did not hang the curtain well - beating, I went out into the yard - beating. And not only from husband, but also from my father-in-law and from my mother-in-law. I did not go to visit my parents, I did not dare and did not allow me. I did not have any friends. I lost my life and myself. I tried to talk to my husband, but it would just get even worse. I spent the evenings and nights crying, after he would "take me" by force he would fall asleep, and I would cry until the morning. When my family called, I had to act as if everything was order, and my soul cried. I did not see them for three months, neither them, nor my brother. They called and expressed their desire to come to see me. The mother-in-law snapped and said: "Let them come, let them see that their daughter is barren she is here for three months and she does not conceive."

I was delighted she allowed them a visit. The night before their visit, I got a terrible beating from which I lost consciousness, just because I said that my father did not eat the salad that his mother-in-law was going to make. That night I decided, I was going to write a letter and give it to my mother in secret for them to try to save me from the hell I was living in. And that's how it was. My family noticed my bruises, my thinness and a great sadness on my face as soon they entered their house. Everything was clear to them. When I took my mother's jacket, I put the letter in her pocket. I prayed to God not to get caught because it would mean the end of me. I lived in agony for the next few days. I lost my voice, I was moping around the house, in the corners, waiting for salvation. These were the longest days in my life. I assumed that my mother did not find a letter or that it fell out of her pocket. I was dying inside. I no longer reacted to swearing, insults, being given names, but my husband's "Whore" always echoed in my ears.

I remembered it was Monday morning, I was cleaning a stain on the rug on my knees that my mother-in-law noticed. We heard a loud knocking on the door, and the father-in-law opened them. There were several of them, my parents behind. I do not remember anything else, I had a blackout. I know there was yelling, shouting, arguments. My next memory is of the hospital and the police station. Visits, determination of my physical and psychological state, giving statements to the police followed. I was diagnosed with depression and administered therapy. They forcefully took me out of their house. They received a restraining order and fines. I spent two years in therapy. My mind was just blank. I did not know what day it was, which year it was, anything. I slept, ate, took medicines. And then I woke up. I enrolled in a Secondary medical school independently and finished it. After that, I enrolled in the School for vocational studies, and I'll be graduating soon. I got back to life, slowly, cautiously, shyly, but also stronger than ever. My family was providing me immense support in everything, all these years.

I had no contact with them since then. I heard that he married, that they were saying that I cheated on him, that I was a bad housewife. For a very, very long time, I suffered, cried and

blamed myself. Now I'm busy, I have my own life. I hang out and go out. I do not have a boyfriend, I had no one since then. I can't, because I'm afraid, I'm waiting for something, what, I do not know. I'm afraid of being beaten, insulted, humiliated. But I've put that part aside. My message to all the girls is as follows: *To think well about who they are marrying, to finish school and not to suffer violence. I was lucky to have a support from my family, and I can't even think about all those who do not have a family. We have only one life, do not let others ruin it.*