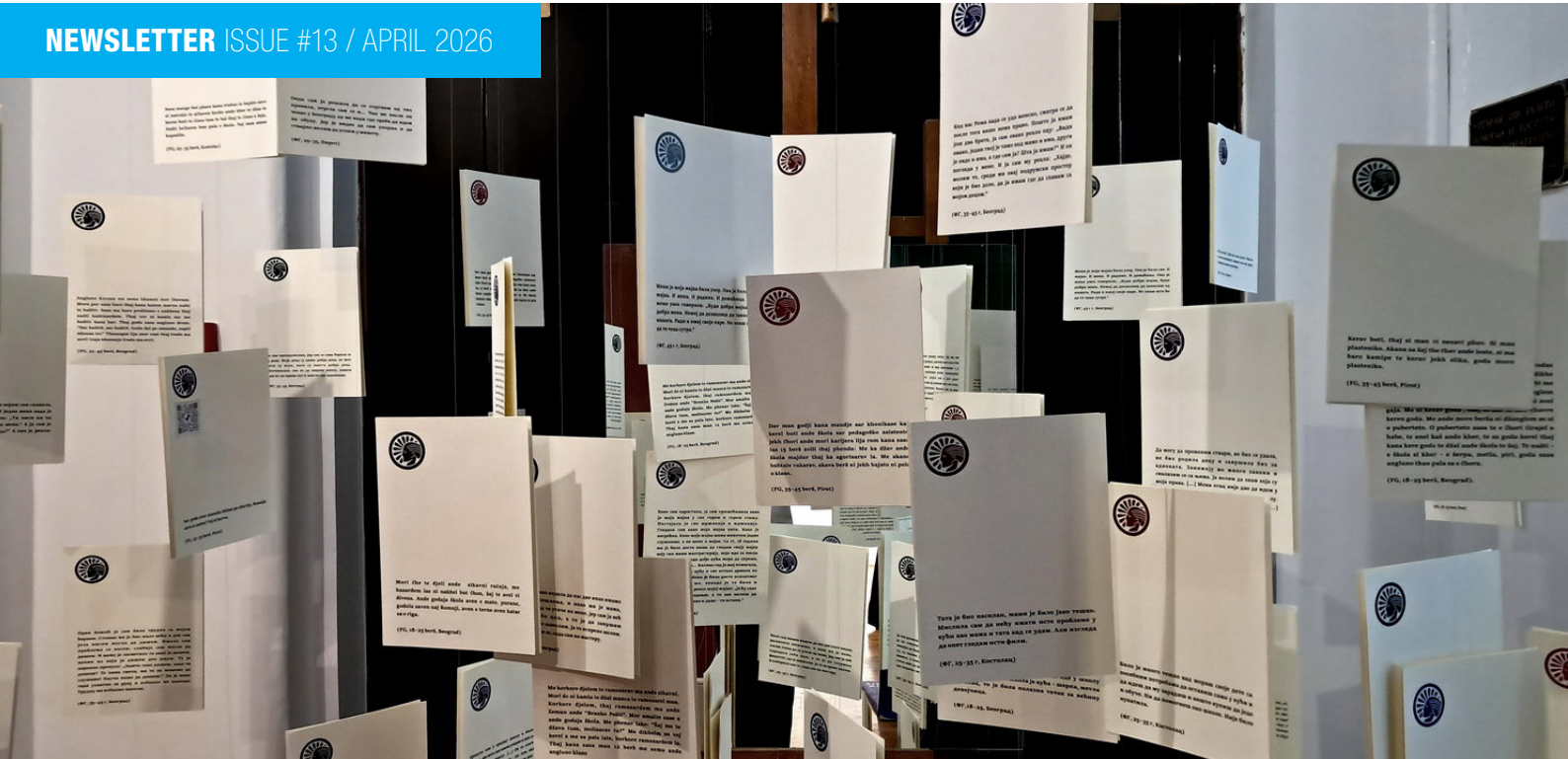


NEWSLETTER ISSUE #13 / APRIL 2026



In this issue of the Newsletter, we present an overview of key activities implemented during the Month of Roma Women's Activism.

The **Month of Roma Women's Activism** campaign was first held in 2010. Since then, every year, from 8 March to 8 April, members of the Roma Women's Network gather around a shared goal – to increase the visibility of Roma women in society and highlight the challenges they are facing. The campaign starts on International Women's Day, 8 March, when activists send messages to the public and decision-makers about the position of Roma women in Serbia, and ends on 8 April, International Roma Day.

This year as well, thanks to civil society organisations, the focus was on child marriage as a form of gender-based violence, but also on the importance of the economic empowerment of women and girls as an important step towards breaking the cycle of violence.

During the campaign, we had the opportunity to attend the **18<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Coalition to End Child Marriage**, which was attended by Tatjana Macura, Minister without portfolio in charge of gender equality, prevention of violence against women and economic and political empowerment of women. On that occasion, the Minister emphasised that Serbia is intensively working on improving the legislative framework, including amendments in the field of prevention of domestic violence and child protection, in order to further strengthen prevention and response mechanisms. She also pointed to the importance of combating child marriage and highlighted the significant role of civil society organisations in preventing violence against women and girls.

On 24 March 2026 at the Human Rights House, within the Month of Roma Women's Activism campaign, the civil society organisation **Bibija Roma Women's Centre** held a closing event as part of the project **"Roma Women Economically Empowered"**. On that occasion, certificates and equipment were distributed to training participants. The project is implemented with the support of UNWOMEN, within the **"PRO – Local Governance for People and Nature"** programme, jointly implemented by United Nations agencies in Serbia – UNOPS, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNEP, in cooperation with the Government of the Republic of Serbia and with financial support from the Government of Switzerland.

The aim of the project is to improve the socio-economic position of Roma women and girls from waste picker families in **Apatin, Bač, Valjevo, Kula, Loznica, Obrenovac, Odžaci, Prijepolje, Ruma, Sremska Mitrovica, Ub and Šid**, to strengthen their resilience to poverty, violence and discrimination, by increasing their employability through the acquisition of new skills, mentoring support, as well as through community mobilisation and the promotion of an integrative approach to labour market inclusion. Within this project, 22 workshops were held with the participation of 65 women.





International human rights organisations, such as the UN and the Council of Europe, say that the majority of the Roma population in Europe lives in poverty and social exclusion. Roma women are not only in a more disadvantaged position compared to women from the non-Roma population, but also compared to Roma men, because they are exposed to severe forms of discrimination even within their own communities. Girls are in a significantly worse position than boys when it comes to education, as they drop out of school early due to poverty, early and forced marriages, racial discrimination and domestic/peer violence. In addition, deeply rooted prejudices and stereotypes within the majority population prevent Roma women from having equal access to employment and self-employment, keeping them in a state of poverty and economic dependency.

*More than 1,200 women have participated so far in economic empowerment and employment programmes implemented by our organisation, and we are very proud of that. Because only an economically empowered woman can make decisions within her family, leave violent situations more easily, influence the education of her children, especially girls, and this is what such projects have shown us in practice in the Roma community.*

**Slavica Vasić Mitrović, Bibija Roma Women's Centre**

Cooperation has been established with local branches of the National Employment Service through various activities related to registering Roma women who have successfully completed training programmes in the NES database. Women also received information on the available active labour market policy measures and other support programmes.

Programme beneficiaries attended trainings of their choice at the Akademija Edukativa school, which issued them with certificates upon successful completion of courses, recognised and accredited by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia. During the process, Bibija provided mentoring support to all beneficiaries, and an individual support plan was prepared for each woman in cooperation with the National Employment Service.

**Round tables with local institutions within the project "Roma women's activism in the fight against child marriage"**



During this year's campaign, support was also provided to round tables with local institutions within the project **Roma Women's Activism in Protecting Roma Girls from Violence Caused by Child Marriage**, supported by the UN Trust Fund. The project is aimed at reducing the prevalence of child marriage in Serbia and protecting Roma girls.

The activity involved 20 activists from the Roma Women's Network from 10 cities: Pirot, Bujanovac, Vranje, Kostolac, Zrenjanin, Pančevo, Žabalj, Leskovac, Kruševac and Belgrade.

Cities and municipalities were selected due to the high prevalence of child marriage, as well as the existing capacities of local organisations and established cooperation protocols for the protection of women and girls from violence and the prevention of child marriage.

The **Child Marriage and Domestic Violence case study analysis**, prepared by the Roma Women's Network of Serbia with the support of the Trag Foundation, was presented at meetings with local institutions.

At the presentation of the analysis on 7 April at the Ethnographic Institute of the SASA, the Chair of the Steering Committee of the Roma Women's Network of Serbia, Slavica Vasić Mitrović, spoke about the position of Roma women in Serbia and the network's long-standing work on combating child marriage as a form of gender-based violence.

It was emphasised that child marriage is still often relativised as "tradition", with insufficient institutional response. Network activists shared field experiences and highlighted the importance of the trust that women from the Roma community have in their organisations.

Key research data:

- 51% of respondents entered into child marriage by the age of 15
- 49% did so between the ages of 16 and 17
- 5% of respondents were only 13 years old when entering the marriage
- 67% still live in violent unions
- 17% are divorced
- 14% are widows

The findings indicate that early marriage often means early assumption of traditional roles, pressure for girls to become mothers and a high risk of violence. The data indicate that women are almost completely unwilling to leave violent relationships

The analysis was also presented in several towns and cities across Serbia, including **Novi Sad, Kostolac, Pirot, Leskovac, Kragujevac, Vranje, Bujanovac, Belgrade, Žabalj, Kruševac, Aleksinac, Zaječar and Valjevo.**

Child marriage continues to have serious consequences for the lives and development of children, especially in places where support is lacking. To ensure earlier response to these situations and timely protection for children, the organisation **Praxis** implemented the project **"Support to the Prevention and Elimination of Child Marriage in the City Municipality of Obrenovac"**. The project is part of the broader **"Children's Rights are Human Rights"** initiative, implemented by the Užice Child Rights Centre with the support of the European Union.

In Obrenovac, as in other places, the problem is further aggravated by poverty, gender inequality, early school leaving and insufficiently coordinated work of institutions, which is why children at risk often remain invisible to the protection system.

The project focused on the education of children and parents, cooperation with schools and institutions, as well as strengthening intersectoral cooperation between education, social, health care and security services. A **Practical Policy Proposal** was also developed, with clear procedures for monitoring children at risk and rapid response.

Teachers and professional associates emphasise that the workshops were particularly important for children at increased risk, as they provided them with space to speak up and learn how to seek help. More than **80% of children** said that the workshops were extremely useful.



#### Key recommendations:

- Introducing child marriage prevention into school curricula (grades 5 to 8)
- Monitoring children at risk during critical periods, particularly during summer holidays
- Establishing a team for rapid response within 24 hours
- Working with parents and the community to change attitudes towards early marriage
- Mentoring and peer support for young people, along with career guidance

