Ending violence
Empowering change

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Government
of the Republic of Serbia

NATIONAL
COALITION
TO END CHILD
MARRIAGE

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Numerous and diverse activities have been carried out in the previous period to raise awareness of the harmfulness of child marriage and human trafficking, as well as to improve the protection of children at risk.

In this issue of the newsletter, we present an overview of activities carried out by members of the Coalition to End Child Marriage – the Roma Women's Network, the Roma Women's Centre Bibija, the Roma Women's Association OSVIT and the Novi Svet Centre. We present initiatives that contribute to raising awareness in Roma communities and among the general public, as well as efforts to sensitise the media and promote more responsible reporting on child marriage and the position of Roma women and men in society.

We invite you to learn about the latest developments, experiences and messages that strengthen our joint efforts to prevent child marriage and uphold every child's right to a safe childhood, education and freedom of choice.

Enjoy reading!

Final Conference of the "Roma Women's Activism in Protecting Roma Girls from Violence Caused by Child Marriage" Project

The conference held in Belgrade on 17 September presented the results of three years of work by the Roma Women's Network in ten cities and municipalities across Serbia: Pirot, Bujanovac, Vranje, Kostolac, Zrenjanin, Pančevo, Žabalj, Leskovac, Kruševac and the Belgrade municipality of Zvezdara. The project was implemented from October 2023 to September 2026, with support from the UN Trust Fund, with the aim of helping reduce the prevalence of child marriage and improve the protection of Roma girls by empowering women and girls, working with parents and the wider community, as well as encouraging institutions to act more responsibly.

Empowering Girls and Changing Community Attitudes

During the project, **480 workshops were held with Roma women and girls**, alongside **480 panel discussions involving members of the Roma community**, gathering around 1,200 participants in total. The workshops focused on empowering women and girls, building self-confidence and providing information about their rights and protection from child marriage. The panel discussions provided opportunities to talk with mothers, fathers and other community members about the consequences of early marriage, the importance of education, reproductive health, child rights and available protection mechanisms.

> **The project was particularly valuable because it created space for conversations about topics that are often left unspoken or regarded as private family matters. By involving mothers and fathers, women activists encouraged participants to reconsider attitudes and customary practices that restrict girls' rights and their opportunities for education and independent living.**

Findings from the field highlighted the strong influence of patriarchal norms and family expectations on the lives of girls and young women. At the same time, the panel discussions demonstrated how important it is to discuss child marriage openly, with an understanding of

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the local context, while sending a clear message that tradition cannot justify violations of child rights.

From Field Experiences to Systemic Changes

Participants at the final conference emphasised the need to recognise the prevention of child marriage as a **permanent responsibility of institutions and local self-governments**, rather than only an outcome of time-limited projects.

> **The recommendations from the conference include a clear public message of zero tolerance for child marriage, unequivocally recognising it as a form of violence, allocating dedicated funding for prevention programmes and support for children at risk, as well as strengthening cooperation among institutions at the local level. Particularly emphasised was the need for professionals from different sectors to understand their legal obligations and respond promptly whenever there is a risk of child marriage.**

Another important priority for future work is the continued empowerment of Roma girls and women, the development of peer support and cooperation with the media and civil society organisations to raise awareness of the harmful consequences of child marriage.

The experience from the project shows that community-based activists play a key role in building trust, addressing sensitive topics and encouraging change. Their work helps ensure that child marriage is not seen as a private or exclusively traditional practice, but rather as an issue of child rights, gender equality and the responsibility of society as a whole.

Voices from the Community: What Do Men Think About the Position of Women?

Panel discussions also revealed attitudes showing that patriarchal beliefs and traditional expectations are still present in certain parts of the community.

"Why should they be [in the same position], a woman has to obey her husband."

"A woman is below a man."

"That is the tradition, it has been that way for a hundred years."

"A man and a woman must not have the same status, their statuses must not be equal, because then women would run wild, a man has to take care of the family, a woman belongs within the home, and a man belongs outside the home..."

Statements made by participants in panel discussions organised as part of the Roma Women's Network project.



Voices from the Community: Between Tradition and Girls' Rights

Older Women's Views: Traditional Expectations

Reports from the panel discussions indicate that some women over the age of 45 regarded early marriage, early childbearing and the traditional division of family roles as normal and even desirable.

"A woman must know how to manage the household and the family, be responsible for having children and the family must have many children."

Younger Women's Views: Questioning Customs

Some younger participants showed a greater willingness to question customs associated with proving virginity and the expectations placed on girls. Nevertheless, views were not uniform: some women continued to believe that these customs had positive aspects.

Strengthening Professional Standards: Workshop on Media Reporting on the Roma

The Roma Media Service organised the workshop **Media Literacy and Media Reporting on the Roma Population** on 16 July 2026 at the Belgrade City Assembly. The workshop was organised as part of the project "Empowered Voices of Roma Men and Women", with the support of the City of Belgrade and the Secretariat for Social Protection, with the aim to improve media literacy and promote responsible, professional and objective reporting on the Roma community.

The discussions in the workshop included the role of the media in combating discrimination, stereotypes and sensationalism, as well as the importance of ethical reporting that contributes to equality and a better understanding of the position of Roma women and men in society.

Ilija Stojanović, editor-in-chief of the Roma Media Service, emphasised that education is crucial for changes and that **young Roma women and men should be represented in all spheres of public life – from the media and institutions to universities, economy and culture.** The responsibility of the media to help combat prejudice and create a society of equal opportunities through professional reporting and positive stories was also highlighted.

The Roma Women's Association Osvit successfully carried out a series of activities as part of **Human Trafficking Prevention Week**, marked from 11 to 18 October 2026. Some activities were implemented in cooperation with other members of the Local Anti-Trafficking Team of the City of Niš, of which Osvit is a member. The activities aimed to raise public awareness of human trafficking, highlight the risks and ways of identifying potential cases of exploitation, as well as to emphasise the importance of prevention, timely access to information and victim protection.

Human Trafficking Prevention Week **began on 11 October, on the International Day of the Girl**, with an event at the City Hall in Niš, and this event highlighted the importance of protecting children and young people from all forms of violence and exploitation, with particular emphasis on girls' rights to a safe childhood, education, freedom of choice and growing up without fear. It was emphasised that access to information, prevention, timely identification of risks and access to support are crucial to preventing human trafficking and protecting potential victims.



To mark the International Day of the Girl, the Roma Women's Association Osvit also organised a **study visit to the Centre for Roma Initiatives in Nikšić**. The visit was an opportunity to exchange experiences, knowledge and good practices in the field of protecting and advancing the rights of women and girls. The challenges of achieving gender equality, empowering women and girls and preventing child marriage were discussed. Participants highlighted the **importance of mutual cooperation, solidarity and collective action** in building a society in which every girl has the right to education, safety, freedom of choice and a dignified life.



In cooperation with other members of the Local Anti-Trafficking Team of the City of Niš, the association also organised the **opening of the exhibition "Twilight of Civilisation"**. Through artistic expression, the exhibition aimed to bring this complex social issue closer to the wider public, encourage discussion about human trafficking and highlight the risks, ways of recognising danger and the importance of protecting potential victims. This activity contributed to raising awareness of human trafficking as a serious violation of human rights and the need for society to take an active role in preventing it.



Ana Saćipović, a representative of the Roma Women's Association Osvit, appeared on TV KCN, where she talked about human trafficking, the importance of prevention and the activities carried out by our association to protect the rights and safety of women and girls.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaiUajLD3N8ž

The campaign concluded on **18 October, on the European Anti-Trafficking Day, with a street outreach activity in Niš**, near the Niš Fortress and the City Farmers' Market. During the activity, promotional materials were distributed to citizens, while direct conversations highlighted the importance of prevention, access to information and recognising possible signs of human trafficking and exploitation.



Particularly emphasised was the fact that human trafficking can affect people of different ages, sexes and social backgrounds, making it important for everyone to be informed about the risks, available protection measures and ways to seek help. The interest and participation of male and female citizens demonstrated the importance of direct communication and access to information in raising awareness of this issue.

By implementing these activities, the Roma Women's Association Osvit continued to contribute to the prevention of human trafficking, the protection of women's and girls' rights and stronger cooperation with organisations and institutions working in this field. **The activities once again confirmed that joint action, education, solidarity and timely access to information are essential for building a society that respects human rights and enables everyone to live free from violence, discrimination and exploitation.**

Prevention starts with knowledge, and protecting people from human trafficking is the responsibility of all of us. Together, we protect the rights of women and girls and build a society in which every child has the right to a safe childhood, education and a free future.

On the occasion of the International Day of the Girl, 11 October, the Coalition to End Child Marriage, in partnership with the national platform "Čuvam te" (I Protect You), produced an **animated video highlighting the issue of child marriage** and its harmful consequences for girls' lives, rights and future, as well as the importance of shared responsibility in protecting every child. The video particularly emphasizes the role of the education system, as well as the importance of timely identification of risks, appropriate response and intersectoral cooperation in providing support to girls at risk.

The production of the video was supported through the project "Ending Violence – Empowering Change", jointly implemented by UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, in partnership with the Government of the Republic of Serbia, with the support of the Government of Sweden.

Watch the animated video:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwFBgissmYc