

NEWSLETTER ISSUE #11 / APRIL 2025



Today, the Roma Women's Network consists of 33 Roma women's organizations, initiatives and activists who work to improve Roma women's activism, in the interest of Roma women in Serbia. The network does not have the status of a legal person. Members of the Network believe that the social inclusion of Roma women in all segments of society is extremely important for a community that thinks about its future and that investing in women is the safest investment for the development of democracy. That is why the priority task of our society should be to improve the position of Roma women, based on a clear and coherent policy, intersectoral cooperation, with the full participation of Roma women, civil society organizations, initiatives and individuals.



The Roma Women's Network of Serbia has been organizing the Roma Women's Activism Month campaign since 2010. Since then, every year from 8 March to 8 April, members of the Roma Women's Network gather around a common goal: to raise the visibility of the problems that Roma women are facing in our society. The International Women's Day, 8 March, is one of the occasions for the activists of the Roma Women's Network to address the public and representatives of the government and draw attention to the position of Roma women in Serbia. The second, but no less important occasion, 8 April, the International Romani Day, closes our campaign. Organizations and initiatives that make up the Roma Women's Network have a series of events and activities throughout Serbia by organizing public events in their communities at the local level – workshops, street performances, awareness-raising campaigns, round tables.

Through the campaign activities, we gathered over 10,000 people from the Roma community and held:

- Over 600 women's workshops and public panel discussions in more than 100 Roma settlements,
- 7 public performances in different cities,
- Marking of the International Day against Racism – street march and performance in several cities,
- over 80 round tables and public events in 30 local self-government units,



- 7 public hearings in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia on the topic "Position of Roma Women in Serbia",
- Participation in the women's organizations march on 8 March
- more than 10,000 printed materials, posters, coffee mugs, t-shirts, postcards distributed.

This year's campaign of the Roma Women's Network is dedicated to marking the 20th anniversary of the Network's work. We presented a film about the 20 years of the Network's work, a monograph "Power of Change", which also talks about our work, and the "Case Study Analysis – The Impact of Child, Early and Forced Marriage on the Reproductive and Sexual Health of Roma Women".

During the campaign, we organize meetings with representatives of local self-governments about the monitoring of the implementation of the Protocol for the improvement of cooperation and the development of integrative social protection intended for women victims of domestic and intimate partner violence and the prevention of child marriage in the local community.

This way, the Roma Women's Network of Serbia wants to achieve our common goal, which is to increase the visibility of Roma women in our society. We do this every day, but the campaign gives us the opportunity to be more visible and to talk about the problems faced by Roma women and girls with everyone who can change the lives of Roma women.

Slavica Vasić Mitrović

Chair of the Steering Committee of the Roma Women's Network of Serbia



This issue of the Coalition's Newsletter is dedicated to marking the month of Roma women's activism, which is a good occasion every year to talk about the rights of Roma women and shed light on the challenges and problems, but also the successes and results and the overall progress that Roma women's organizations have achieved in the previous period.

This year marks a special anniversary – 20 years since the establishment of the Roma Women's Network, and it is a unique opportunity to remember all those brave women – heroines who bore the burden and responsibility of the struggle for the achievement of the rights of Roma girls and women in our society.

At the Institute of Ethnography of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the 20th anniversary of the Roma Women's Network of Serbia was marked. The Network brings together Roma women's organizations and initiatives from across Serbia that work to improve the position of Roma women in the country. The gathering was also the occasion to present the first results of the project **"Heritage of Emancipation: Empowering Roma Women through Networks of Solidarity" (HEROINES)**.

The event included a film screening and the presentation of the monograph **"Power of Change"**, dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the Roma Women's Network of Serbia. (<https://rzm.rs/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Monografija-SNAGA-PROMENE.pdf>)

Also presented were the findings of research on the sexual and reproductive health of Roma women through a case study analysis titled **"The Impact of Child, Early and Forced Marriage on the Reproductive and Sexual Health of Roma Women"**. The research was conducted by the Roma Women's Network of Serbia as part of the project "Institutional Support for the Work of the Roma Women's Network of Serbia" implemented by the Roma Women's Centre Bibija with the support of the Trag Foundation. (<https://rzm.rs/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Analiza-studije-slucaja-Uticaj-decijih-ranijih-i-prinudnih-brakova-na-reproduktivno-i-seksualno-zdravlje-Romkinja.pdf>)

Also presented was the **"Manual for Mapping Women's Emancipation"**, developed as part of the HEROINES project implemented by the Institute of Ethnography of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the Roma Women's Centre Bibija and the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, which was supported by the Centre for the Promotion of Science within the Citizen Science Research programme.

The meeting gathered activists of the Roma Women's Network of Serbia, representatives of the academia, the independent institutions Commissioner for the Protection of Equality and the Protector of Citizens and numerous international organizations.



Below is the story of the Association Osvit, which has been an active member of the Roma Women's Network of Serbia since the very beginning. This year, the Association Osvit is also marking its 20th anniversary – two decades of committed work on empowering women, particularly Roma women, in the fight for their rights and the improvement of their status in society.

Over the years, through numerous initiatives, projects and campaigns, the Association Osvit has provided support to thousands of women – through trainings, legal and psychosocial assistance, empowerment for the labour market and employment promotion programmes. They worked on the ground, cooperated with institutions and organizations and built a support network that enabled many women to exercise their rights and become active members of society. On the occasion of the 20th anniversary, Osvit activists prepared the monograph **"20 years of the Roma Association Osvit"**, which testifies to the work, challenges and successes. This publication provides insight into the projects, results and personal stories of women who changed their lives with the support of the Association Osvit. (<https://osvit.rs/dvadeset-godina-udruzenja-osvit-snaga-zajednistva-i-borbe-za-ravnopravnost/>)

Here, we will highlight some of Osvit's activities from the previous period.

On the occasion of International Human Rights Day, 10 December, activist Zorica Saćipović from the Association Osvit spoke at the panel discussion titled **"Child Marriage – Our Reality"**, held on 9 December 2024, on the causes of the prevalence of this issue in Roma families, its consequences and prevention. This is one of the activities through which Osvit empowers male and female university students and professors to be sensitized for working with women marginalized on multiple grounds, as providers of legal support and assistance.



Between September and December 2024, Osvit activists conducted **awareness-raising and educational workshops** on two topics: 1. What is violence, the forms and the cycle of violence, and 2. The mandates of institutions for protection against violence and discrimination, and for the prevention of child marriage, held in Niš, Aleksinac, Vranje, Zaječar and Kostolac. In these workshops, a total of 100 Roma women and girls were empowered to recognize all forms of violence and become familiar with the mechanisms for protection against violence.

In November and December 2024, two accredited seminars **"Support for improving the position of Roma women"** were organized in Aleksinac and Požarevac. The seminars gathered representatives of various institutions who, through education about the consequences of prejudices, stereotypes towards minorities, learning about the history, customs and traditions of Roma men and women, the position of Roma women in society and family, will be able to provide better service within their competences. A total of 27 representatives of institutions attended the seminars.



In 2024, Osvit accredited the training programme **"Let's end child marriage"**, which aims to raise awareness about the problem of child marriage, provide information about the phenomenon itself and its harmfulness, and increase the competencies of professionals and associates in the social protection system. The ultimate goal is adequate record-keeping, action-taking in risk situations or in circumstances of child marriage, as well as the work on prevention. This seeks to develop a supportive and safe social environment and realization of the basic rights of multiply marginalized girls to health and healthcare, education, freedom from discrimination, violence and exploitation.



Osvit participated in the development of the **Local Action Plan of the City of Niš** for the inclusion of Roma men and women for the period 2024 to 2026, where all Osvit's proposals for measures and planned activities in the field of improving the position of Roma women and girls and prevention of child marriage were adopted. Niš was highlighted as a positive example in practice, because it allocates around RSD 15,000,000.00 annually from the local budget for the implementation of the LAP. The majority of funds are planned for providing scholarships to secondary school students, both boys and girls, which is extremely important for the further inclusion of young people, as well as for the continuation of their education, which is the most effective mechanism for preventing child marriage.



Campaigns **"16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence"** and **"Roma Women's Activism Month"** were marked by activists together with their colleagues in 5 cities of South-East Serbia – Niš, Aleksinac, Vranje, Kostolac and Zaječar. More than 20 activists and volunteers participated in the campaigns in each city. Over 10,000 citizens were reached with street actions and distribution of informative material, posts on social networks and media segments.

We would like to thank all members, associates, partners and friends who have been part of our story and supported us on this journey! We are continuing – together and stronger!

During the Roma Women's Activism Month, from March 8 to April 8, the Bibija Roma Women's Center and the Roma Student Initiative, in partnership with UNICEF, organized **local initiatives to promote education and Roma activism** across 10 cities and municipalities: Bujanovac, Stara Pazova, Kostolac, Žabalj, Kruševac, Kragujevac, Zemun, Čurug, Bela Palanka and Novi Sad. These activities aimed to strengthen Roma women's activism and highlight educated Roma women as role models for girls at risk of child marriage. The ultimate goal is to empower girls to become independent, continue their education, and improve their competitiveness in the labor market.

These efforts were part of the **"Support to the Leadership and Activism of Roma Girls"** project, which includes a carefully designed mentoring program for young Roma activists. It also features campaigns and local actions promoting education as a key element of the project's success. All activities are part of the larger "Ending Violence – Empowering Change" initiative, jointly implemented by UN agencies in Serbia – UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, and UN Women – in collaboration with the Government of the Republic of Serbia and supported by the Government of Sweden.

This project specifically targets a group of 25 highly educated Roma women who are motivated to actively fight against underage and child marriage. This group works within the Roma community to raise awareness about the importance of education and engages parents in discussions about the harm caused by child marriage. They also emphasize the importance of extended education for the health and well-being of their daughters. Through their personal examples, these women inspire other young Roma women and girls to recognize their potential and pursue their education despite the obstacles and societal pressures they may face. (<https://www.unicef.org/serbia/price/budi-uzor-budi-podrska>)

This newsletter was developed as part of the project "Ending Violence – Empowering Change", jointly implemented by UN agencies in Serbia, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, in partnership with the Government of the Republic of Serbia, with the support of the Government of Sweden.

The project contributes to creating an environment where gender-based discrimination and violence are unacceptable, women's rights are protected, and both women and men equally participate and contribute to all aspects of life.

The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations, the above-mentioned UN agencies, the Government of the Republic of Serbia, nor those of the Government of Sweden.