

**Consultation of the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls
(WGDAWG) on the situation of Roma Women**

12 June 2019

Palais Wilson, Geneva

One of the areas in which the Working Group on discrimination against women and girls (WGDAWG) has decided to focus is the causes and consequences of cumulative, multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination against women, examining the social, economic and political factors that push particular groups of women to the margins.¹ In this context, the WGDAWG convened a consultation with Roma women from several countries in Central and Eastern Europe on 12 June 2019 in Geneva, during its 25th session. The consultation was aimed at informing the WGDAWG on the human rights situation of Roma women and girls and to engage with Roma experts and activists from regional and national organizations.²

The discussion among participants reflected the situation of Roma women and girls and the consequences of the intersectional discrimination they suffer, which in practice limits their access to adequate health service (including sexual and reproductive health services); housing and food; education; access to justice; heightens their vulnerability to gender based violence and limits their participation in the economic, social and political spheres.

The participants brought to the attention of the WGDAWG the difficulties encountered by Roma women and girls in accessing health, especially sexual and reproductive health, which is often connected to the problem of statelessness. During the discussion concerns were raised regarding discriminatory practices against Roma women and girls including segregation in maternity wards, costly health services, physical inaccessibility to health facilities and discrimination by health providers based on prejudices against Roma. Mention was made of the public statement of certain politicians to sterilize Roma women, which has in past been a practice in many of the countries in the region.

During the consultation reference was also made to the prevalence of practices that disproportionately affect Roma women and girls, including early marriages, bride kidnapping, and the lack of adequate state responses to such practices. The prevalence of domestic violence and the stereotyped role of women as the main care providers within the family was also mentioned. Moreover, the problem of sexual abuse of girls taken to state care (often due to poverty) and lack of accountability of state agents was also discussed.

These different discriminatory practices and forms of violence were considered to limit the participation of Roma women and girls in the economic, social, civil and political spheres. A lack of employment opportunities was considered a big impediment to the empowerment of Roma

¹ **A/HRC/38/46**, Thematic Report of the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice, Reasserting equality, countering rollbacks.

² **Carmen Gheorghe**; org **Natalia Duminica**, independent activist, Moldova, Independent activist, Moldova, – esp. youth reparation; **Senada Sali**, Lawyer, European Roma Rights Centre, North Macedonia; **Nataša Avdagić**, nurse; **Mariyana Borisova**, Attorney at law specialised in discrimination, Bulgaria; **Vivien Brassói**, European Roma Rights Centre.

women, together with limited educational opportunities, resulting from gender stereotypes and deep rooted anti-Gypsism which often result in segregated education of Roma children. Lack of political representation of Roma women (and men) has also been identified as an obstacle to the empowerment of Roma women, and some good practices for promoting political participation in some of the countries were mentioned.

Participants made recommendations which pointed to the need of targeted measures aimed at combating human rights violations suffered by Roma women and girls; they particularly recommended that States adopt specific programmes aimed at fostering the capacities and skills of Roma women and girls to ensure their access to education and participation in the social, economic and political spheres; and ensure that sexual and reproductive rights are promoted and respected. They further stressed the need to encounter 'anti-Gypsism' by providing training to judicial, health, social service and other state authorities on multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination to ensure access to justice and remedy to Roma people and prevent discrimination against Roma women and girls in law and in practice. Measures aimed at targeting socio-economic marginalization were also seen as necessary.

The WGDAWG appreciates this opportunity to listen to Roma women and remains committed to raising visibility of the human right violations they face and the challenging intersecting forms of discrimination against Roma women and girls.