

**EUROPEAN ROMA AND TRAVELLERS FORUM &  
ROMANI WOMEN INFORMAL PLATFORM “PHENJALIFE”**

**MAKING EARLY MARRIAGE  
IN ROMA COMMUNITIES A  
GLOBAL CONCERN**

**“WE CANNOT CREATE A ROMA PROBLEM, THE EARLY MARRIAGES, WHEN THEY HAVE BEEN PRACTICED FOR LONG IN THE OTHER CULTURES TOO. WE RISK CREATING A STEREOTYPE OUT OF THIS PHENOMENON”**

**NICOLAE GHEORGHE**

**INTRODUCTION**

At the CAHROM meeting in May 2013, CAHROM Experts agreed to address the issue of early and/forced marriage and its relation to human trafficking. The Resolution 1468 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe defines child marriage as “[...] the union of two persons at least one of whom is under 18 years of age”. In most of the reports, notably the ones from United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), which are covering child marriage in several South East European countries, the latest is defined as the “union of two persons, officially or unofficially”.

In the context of the CAHROM meeting on trafficking in Roma communities and its links to child marriage, the European Roma and Travellers Forum and the Informal Platform of Romani Women “Phenjalipe”, prepared a paper which aims to caution against the danger of further stereotyping and victimising Roma communities by labelling early or child marriage in Roma communities as a cultural specificity. In addition, this paper aims to raise awareness on the topic and the importance that the issue of child and early marriages be addressed in an adequate way, thus taking account of the specific realities it takes place as well as of the historic, socio and economic factors contributing to this practice and its perpetuation, while deconstructing the view according to which early and child marriage bear no responsibility for state authorities, since they are ‘internal Roma cultural practices’.

**What is early marriage and what is its present reality in Roma communities in Europe? What should be the adequate approach to it?**

**I. AVAILABILITY OF DATA**

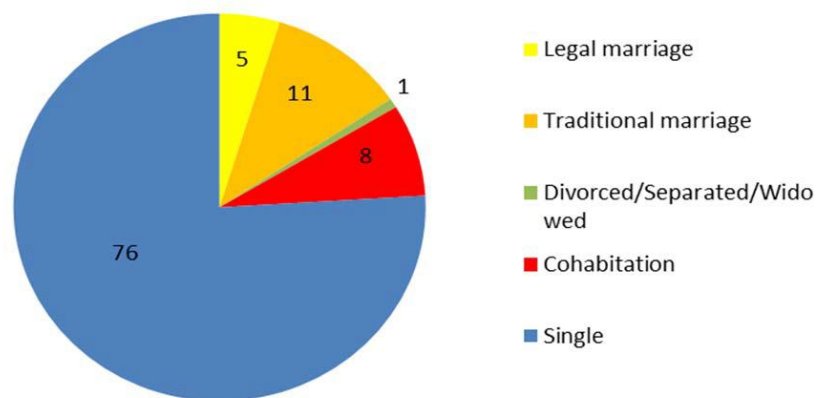
First of all, it is important to underline some the pitfalls faced by anyone trying to analyse the practice of early and child marriages:

- Statistical data on child marriages disaggregated according to ethnicity are not available in most member states of the Council of Europe;
- Lack of data on early and child marriages in general;
- Important number of unregistered marriages (due to the age of the spouses or the lack of personal documents).

Many surveys on the topic are not representative because of the reasons outlined above. Nonetheless, studies tend to presumptuously assign a certain behaviour or label to almost all Roma communities in Europe when situations in which early marriage takes place actually vary dramatically from one country to another, and more precisely, from one community to another. Although it is very difficult to hold a statement that would be valid for all European Roma communities, several reports generalise a local phenomenon specific to certain communities to Roma communities at large, thus misrepresenting the reality.

As a matter of fact, the 2011 FRA survey<sup>1</sup> has shown “that across all (EU) member states surveyed, only around 2% of Roma girls aged 10-15 were reported as ‘traditionally married’ or cohabitating with a partner. With regards to Roma, aged 16 and 17, the results show that on average around 16% of Roma men and women aged 16-17 were legally or traditionally married or cohabiting. When looking at gender differences in this age group we find that it is mostly young women rather than young men who are married or live together at this age and that among the Member States surveyed, this was reported more frequently by women in Greece, Portugal, Romania and Bulgaria”.

Marital status, Roma women aged 16–17 years, (%)



*FRA Roma pilot survey 2011: Marital status question, Roma children in the household aged 16 to 17.*

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<sup>1</sup>Analysis of FRA Roma survey results by gender, June 2013

Bearing in mind all the pitfalls underlined above, it is still possible to suggest that the conclusions of Duminica and Ivasiuc are fair, and that the prejudices against the Roma minority occult objective reality.

Below it is a brief overview of the situation for a few member states based on reports and survey, which used different methodologies, and can therefore not be properly compared.

### Albania

A World Bank report in which 661 Roma and Egyptian households were surveyed found that the average age of marriage among Romani youth is 15.5 years while for Romani men is 18.2 years old<sup>2</sup>. In 2011, according to the same study, 31% of 13-17 year old Roma girls were married or in union.

### Bulgaria

“A 2010 survey of 595 households in residential areas of Bulgaria, with predominantly Romani populations including 2.746 individuals from all regions and groups of Roma in the country, found that while the average age of marriage or matrimonial cohabitation among all Roma was 18 years, 50% of all 16-year-old Roma with only a primary education or less were already living with a permanent partner, at least a portion of whom likely began cohabitating with their partner before 16 when it is legally possible to enter marriage with parental consent<sup>3</sup>”.

### Bosnia and Herzegovina

“A survey conducted in 2010 by a group of Roma NGOs, on a sample of 527 Roma women, found that 44.21% of them entered marriage before reaching 18 years of age, in most cases between the age of 14 and 16 years<sup>4</sup>”. Statistical data for 2010 and the whole population show that “child marriages constituted 0.8 % of the total number of contracted marriages in 2010, and 70 girls aged 16 years or younger entered marriage”. 1.1% of the overall number of live births in 2010 was given by girls under 18. Some were as young as 13.

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2 H. De Soto, S. Beedies and. Gedeshi, Roma and Egyptians in Albania: From social exclusion to Social Inclusion, the World Bank, 2005

3 European Roma Rights Centre « ERRC submission to the joint CEDAW-CRC General Recommendation/ Comment on Harmful Practices: child marriages among Roma », 2011.

4 UNFPA fact sheet on Bosnia and Herzegovina, Child marriage, October 2012

## Italy

“ERRC field research among Romani women in Italy in 2011 found that 47 of 74 (64%) female Romani respondents entered marriage before the age of 18; 22 (30%) were below the age of 16 (the youngest were 12 at the time). (...) Of the respondents that married below the age of 18, five women stated that they were forced to marry against their will<sup>5</sup>”.

## Kosovo\*

“Altogether [the following applies to the whole population of Kosovo\* and not only Roma communities], 14 municipal courts reported 116 requests for early marriage in 2010 and 107 in 2011. No marriages involving minors aged 15 and under were recorded in 2010. The 108 officially registered child marriages in 2010 accounted for 0.59% of all marriages, and only involved 16- and 17-year-old girls<sup>6</sup>”. However, it must be noted that “immediate registration is particularly rare in child marriage in Kosovo\*<sup>7</sup>”.

## The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Of the total number of marriages in 2010 in FYROM, no bride got married before reaching 15 and 13.1% got married between 15- and 19-year-old. If we consider the total live births (which might be more relevant considering the current practice among Roma of not registering marriages officially) in 2011, 0.1% of the mothers were under 15, and 1.8% were between 15 and 18 year- old.

## Montenegro

A 2003 survey of refugees and internally displaced persons in Montenegro found that, of 850 Romani surveyed, 90% married before the age of 16, which is illegal in Montenegro.

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5 European Roma Rights Centre (2011), op. cit.

6 UNFPA fact sheet on Kosovo\*, Child marriage, October 2012

7 Ibid.

## Republic of Serbia

“According to the “Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2010” (UNICEF), 14% of the Roma girls in the age group 15-19 years were married before reaching 15 years of age, and one third had their first child before turning 18. Nearly half of young Roma women in the age group 15-19 years are currently married or in union (44 per cent). This proportion varies between the urban (40%) and the rural (52%)<sup>8</sup>”.

## Romania

“While data from on Open society Foundation report indicates that the practice of child marriage among Roma in Romania is declining with every generation, the average ages of marriage and child birth among Romani women are still significantly lower than those of the general population. According to research for that study, 53% of Romani women surveyed, and 43% of their daughters, married before the age of 18. In addition, 43% of respondents were younger than 19 when their first child was born and the average age of childbirth for Romani women was 5 years younger than the national average age of 24, as reported by the 2003 Romanian Statistical Yearbook<sup>9</sup>”.

Unfortunately, no other data were found. The lack of data for western European countries is particularly interesting and can be questioned. Is the issue non-existent in the Roma communities of France, Spain, Portugal, Germany, the Netherlands? Is it a topic, which is neither tackled by NGOs nor by institutions, besides the legal aspects? What is the situation for Roma migrants in western European countries? Bosnjak and Acton describe that several examples have shown that migrants are “becoming ‘more conservative’ once they have left their home country which can be seen in American Amish and Mennonite communities, as well as in Turkish migrant communities in Germany and the Netherlands, where, for instance, traditional gender-role attitudes tend to be reinforced during the time of migration. (...) The attitudes of the male Chergashe participants [of the survey] in Germany were at times more restrictive towards women than the attitudes expressed by their counterparts from Serbia and Bosnia<sup>10</sup>”. This attitude is also mentioned in the Spanish reply to the CAHROM questionnaire on early/forced marriage.

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8 UNFPA fact sheet on the Republic of Serbia, Child marriage, October 2012

9 Open Society Foundations, Broadening the agenda: the status of Romani Women in Romania (March 2006) quoted in European Roma Rights Centre (2011), op. cit.

10 B. Bosnjak and T. Acton, “Virginity and early marriage customs in relation to children’s rights among Chergashe Roma from Serbia and Bosnia”, The International Journal of Human Rights (2013)

The lack of representative and gender and ethnically based data by country and even community lead us to question the objective reality of the phenomenon but also the accuracy and the relevance of policies and programmes to tackle this practice.

There seems to be however a general agreement between researchers working on the issue that the trend has changed in recent years, and that young Roma are generally dating and marrying at a later stage.

## II. CHILD/ EARLY MARRIAGE: A GLOBAL ONGOING CONCERN AGAINST A BACKDROP OF INEQUALITY AND MARGINALISATION

Child marriage is a practice that has persisted for centuries. Today, it is defined as a formal or customary union in which one or both parties are under the age of eighteen. This practice takes place across regions, cultures, and religions, and though it affects children of both sexes, girls are disproportionately affected.

Although the prevalence of child marriage is decreasing, progress in curbing this tradition has been slow, and in some places the problem remains challenging. The 2010 report by National Center for Health Statistics in the United States indicates that 2.1% of all girls in the 15-17 age group were in a child marriage. In the age group of 15-19, 7.6% of all girls in the United States were formally married or in an informal union<sup>11</sup>. United Nations estimates in 2011 shows that one in three women aged twenty to twenty-four—almost 70 million—had married under the age of eighteen<sup>12</sup>. Many of these women were far younger than eighteen at the time of their marriage; in fact, more than 23 million were married or in a union before the age of fifteen, which amounts to about thirteen thousand girls under fifteen being married every day. Given current trends, experts predict that by 2020, some 50 million girls will be married before they reach their fifteenth birthdays<sup>13</sup>.

The practice of child marriage is found in every region of the globe and is entrenched in many parts of the developing world<sup>14</sup>. South Asia is home to the largest number of married girls: almost half of women aged twenty to twenty-four (46 percent) were married before the age of eighteen, and nearly one-fifth (18 percent) were married by age fifteen. India has the largest number of married girls in the world, accounting for 40 percent of all child

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11 "Marriage and Cohabitation in the United States: A Statistical Portrait Based on Cycle 6 of the National Survey of Family Growth", US Department of Health and Human Services (2002)

12 See, for example, [http://www.childinfo.org/marriage\\_methodology.html](http://www.childinfo.org/marriage_methodology.html) (UNICEF)

13 UNFPA, "Marrying Too Young: End Child Marriage," 2012; Joint News Release, Every Woman Every Child/Girls Not Brides/PMNCH/United Nations Foundation/UNFPA/UNICEF/UN Women/WHO/World Vision/World YWCA, Child Marriages: 39,000 Every Day, March 7, 2013.

14 Council on Foreign Relation, "Ending Child Marriage. How evaluating the status of girls advances U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives", May 2013

marriages worldwide. Bangladesh has the highest prevalence of child marriage in South Asia, with 66 percent of young women married before age eighteen and 32 percent married before age fifteen<sup>15</sup>. The United Kingdom and the United States have the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in OECD developed countries. Teenage pregnancy is higher in more economically deprived areas. In 2002, a report on England and Wales found that around half of all conceptions to under 18s was concentrated among the 30% most deprived population, with only 14% occurring among the 30% least deprived<sup>16</sup>.

The origins of child marriage are multidimensional and deeply rooted. Historically, early marriage was used as a tool to maximize fertility in the context of high mortality rates. Child marriage was also employed to further economic, political, or social relationships. Today, this tradition is motivated by poverty, social marginalisation and cultural norms, and is perpetuated by gender inequalities and the low status of girls and women.

Economic concerns are fundamental to the practice of child marriage. In disadvantaged and rural areas, where the tradition of child marriage is most prevalent, limited educational and economic opportunities for girls increase the likelihood for early marriages. In addition, economic transactions related to marriage often place a value on youth, which pushes poor families to marry off their daughters to increase their own economic stability. Practices such as bride price or bride wealth, where the groom's family gives money or possessions to the bride's, also encourage early marriage on the account that younger brides have a higher value because they can contribute more over time to the groom and his family<sup>17</sup>. Ending marriages can leave girls trapped and exposed to violence.

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15 UNICEF, January 2013

16 "Teenage Conceptions By Small Area Deprivation In England and Wales 2001-2" Health Statistics Quarterly Volume 33, (Spring 2007)

17 Council on Foreign Relation, "Ending Child Marriage. How evaluating the status of girls advances U.S. Foreign Policy Objectives", May 2013



## EARLY MARRIAGE IN ROMA COMMUNITIES

As early marriage in Roma communities cannot be separated from the practices of early marriages globally, the same historic, contextual, economic and marginalization factors should apply. In times of Romania slavery, as a solution against potential sexual abuse by the slave owners, the Roma married their daughters off while they were still very young, as, once married, girls would not represent the same type of interest. At the same time, migrating from India, where child marriages have been established for centuries, and early marriage was a practice that may have well been perpetuated as a result of the Indian legacy.

Unfortunately, there is a lot of inconsistency when it comes to dealing with early marriage in Roma communities. A number of researchers have started to look at the issue of early marriage in Roma communities from a human rights perspective and have denounced it as a 'harmful cultural practice' that violates European norms and undermines the ability of Romani girls to lead fulfilling lives<sup>18</sup>. While child marriage is being condemned as a human rights violation, there is a lack of adequate responses to affectively address the issue by state actors and involving the communities and families affected themselves.

According to a research data in Roma, early marriages among Roma are depicted in a stereotypical manner, placing the Roma in a second-class blameable cultural alterity. Certain cultural traits specific to the Roma come out stronger than reality in a society where the Roma are portrayed negatively in the media. In societies where Roma have been more a cultural construction of media, politicians, state rather than an ethnic minority, whose complex identity should be valorised and promoted as such, and whose full participation in society should be equally and equitably promoted and supported, practices such as early marriages can be easily perceived, portrayed and dealt with as specific cultural traits, likely to fall out from state responsibility but which in turn are criticised and caricaturised as barbaric.

Thus, child/early marriage among Roma is addressed many times in a perverse manner: is either defined as a human rights violation, in which case state comprehensive response would apply according to a number of human rights standards and national instruments – but this does not take place almost at all, or it is portrayed as a Roma specific tradition, which needs to be dealt with within the Roma community – but in turn is ridiculised and criticised.

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18 D. Z. Scheffel, « Harmful Cultural Practices » in Central Europe: Adolescent Brides (and Grooms) among Slovak Roma, unpublished paper

At present early marriage in Roma communities takes place to a much lesser degree than 10 or 20 years ago. It takes place particularly in poor, marginalised and traditional communities. At the same time, various intertwined reasons may lead and contribute to early marriage: youth, love and early desire to form a family union, family pressure, financial insecurity of family, deep poverty, lack of perspectives, school dropout, placement in state care and lack of family reunification/adoption, sexual intercourse outside marriage, unplanned pregnancy, rape, peer pressure, community practices, etc.

Poverty nonetheless, remains one of the major factors underpinning early marriage, perpetuated and or exacerbated to some extent in the last years by the economic crisis and decentralisation in some countries. “Where poverty is acute, a young girl may be regarded as an economic burden and her marriage to an (...) older man (...) is a family survival strategy, and may even be seen as in her interest”<sup>19</sup>. As a matter of fact, several surveys demonstrate the impact of the economic aspect on the marriage age. In Bulgaria for instance, data collected among Roma population show that “the higher the net monthly income per person of the household is, the higher the age of concluding first marriage is. In other words, the risk of early start of family life in non-marital cohabitation or after contracted civil marriage is the highest in households with lower income”<sup>20</sup>.

A Macedonian Child protection NGO explains that “child marriages are most frequently found among Roma. In general, child marriages are associated with low economic and social standing of the family”<sup>21</sup>.

The same observation could apply to the majority in Europe until the middle of the 21st century. It is interesting to note that in Albania, for instance, the average age at birth for the first child, which is connected to the marriage age, has dropped from 18.9 to 16.9 after 1990 and the change of regime. Hypothetically, one might postulates that the passing from an economic situation to another, less favourable to Roma population, had an impact on their social behaviour, notably towards marriage.

Interestingly, the Spanish reply to the 2013 CAHROM questionnaire also mentions that in a context of greater exclusion, the age of marriage within Roma communities is earlier. “Due to the current economic and social situation, we are experiencing a return to engagements and weddings among teenagers due, among other things, to the resistance attitude of the Roma community to the “apayamiento” (i.e. being enrolled in secondary school, prepare professionally for careers that are not traditional among Roma)”<sup>22</sup>.

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19 UNICEF, 'Early marriage, Child spouses', Innocenti Digest (2001)

20 Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance , V. Tarnovo, Preventing Early Marriages, (2011)

21 UNFPA fact sheet on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Child marriage, October 2012

22 Reply received from Spain to the questionnaire on early/forced marriages in relation to trafficking of human beings. (CAHROM (2013)24prov)

In a lot of cases, the marriage age seems therefore to be connected to the economic situation of individuals and the way they perceive their future. The lack of opportunities for employment appears to have an impact on school-drop out and attitude towards marriage. “Although they tend to be blamed for being reluctant to participate in education because of their ‘culture’ and lack of appreciation of the benefits education could bring to their children, according to O’Higgins Roma are being severely discriminated against in the labour market where they have lower employment and wage returns to education. Since they have lower benefits from education, it is (from a purely economic point of view) rational for them to turn to alternative ways of living and earning. Amartya Sen argues that we make education decisions according to the extent to which we have reason to value education, both in terms of its costs and benefits now, and in terms of its ability to expand our capability set and enhance our well-being in the future. Clearly, not many Roma perceive educational pursuit as beneficial, at least from an economic point of view”<sup>23</sup>.

The lack of prospective and social marginalisation also affects early marriage directly. According to Oprea, “the state-sponsored structural marginalization contributes to the vulnerability of under-age Romani women to arranged marriages. The educational level of Romani parents affects their decisions regarding when and whether or not to marry off their daughters. In addition, the lack of educational and employment opportunities for Romani women in Romania also contributes to many Romani parents’ decisions – in other words saying ‘she’s not doing anything with her life anyway, might as well’. In addition, better educational and employment opportunities act to empower Romani women within their relative communities by increasing their options and social mobility”<sup>24</sup>.

Education is thus a key to fight early marriage, but it can be seen as a luxury more than a right that is guaranteed for many Roma living below the poverty line. Law guarantees access to education but the principle of equal opportunities needs to be supported and accompanied by social protection measures. Several member states of the Council of Europe are not effectively supporting school participation for disadvantaged children. Some researches show that it is more often economic reasons that lead to drop out than early marriage. “Still, it is interesting that the idea of early marriage as the root cause of dropping out for Roma is quite widespread and persistent, despite the fact that the phenomenon show statistically insignificant figures”<sup>25</sup>.

Moreover, quoting the example of Romania, Oprea suggests that: “Romania's segregation of Romani children in schools for the mentally handicapped, (...) the erasure of Roma from Romanian history books (...): these factors have affected child marriage practices directly as well as indirectly by limiting opportunities for Romani women while

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23 B. Bosnjak and T. Acton, op.cit.

24 A. Oprea, The arranged marriage of Ana Maria Cioaba, intra-community oppression and Romani feminist ideals- Transcending the « primitive culture » argument. *European Journal of Women's Studies* (12)2 (2005)

25 G. Duminica, A. Ivasiuc, op.cit.

simultaneously making marriage seem like a sensible alternative to their parents (who are also education-deprived)”<sup>26</sup>.

Early marriage can hence be considered as a practice strongly connected to a state-sponsored structural marginalization. This marginalization has a real impact on the behaviour of a community. “In many cases the specific social existence of the Roma, characterised by spatial, social and cultural segregation often caused by the discriminatory attitude of the dominant population, but also by specific cultural practices, sometimes leads to self-ghettoization. (...)According to Habermas, in an attempt to preserve their integrity, members of discriminated groups insist on preserving the traditions and life forms in which they can recognise themselves”. Oprea carries on to say that, “another way in which racism contributes to the oppression of Romani women is through the

rigidification of Romani practices: since Roma live within hostile societies that threaten their way of life, efforts to maintain their identity often result in inflexible interpretations of certain practices. Ayelet Shachar refers to this as ‘reactive culturalism’, a force which ‘is not simply the expression of a pure unalloyed culture so much as a result of cross-cultural interaction that has already occurred, in which the state also played its role”<sup>27</sup>.

The role of the state is also very controversial when it comes to applying international or national legal protections when Romani women or girls are subjected to early marriage. To our knowledge, there is no serious governmental response to the issue of early marriage. Several researches denounce the unwillingness of a great part of the institutions to intervene in case of early marriage. “The most obvious way in which (...) racism promotes arranged marriages of Romani minors is by ‘turning a blind eye’ to them based on plain neglect or a flawed notion of cultural plurality ”<sup>28</sup>. This unwillingness is often justified with the argument that “this is a Roma tradition, their internal issue”. In a research made in Bulgaria, the Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance found out that “a great part of the teachers and social workers think that the problem of early marriages cannot be solved (both as an issue and a specific case) and do not intervene”<sup>29</sup>. The inertia of the institutions, the mistrust between them and the Roma communities are obstacles to the improvement of the situation regarding that matter.

It is also important to note that while state authorities have a major role in curbing early marriage while preventing and sanction child marriage (under the legal age), state response has to be a cooperative result of international human rights institutions, lawyers, Roma activists and Roma communities. Because the issue of child and early marriage has been neglected for so long, a blind legal response to child marriage, for instance, would not be

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26 A. Oprea, « Child Marriage a Cultural Problem, Educational Access a Race Issue? Deconstructing Uni-Dimensional Understanding of Romani Oppression », July 2005, ERRC: <http://www.errc.org/article/child-marriage-a-cultural-problem-educational-access-a-race-issue-deconstructing-uni-dimensional-understanding-of-romani-oppression/2295>

27 A. Oprea , *European Journal of Women's Studies* (12)2 (2005), op. cit.

28 A. Oprea, *ibid*

29 Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance, op.cit.

justified and would not lead to the prevention of both child marriages, but on the contrary, it can lead to further victimise Roma communities and those directly involved.

## CONCLUSION

The ERTF and Phenjalipe have tried through this paper to raise awareness on the issue of early and child marriages in the Roma communities and some of the major factors contributing to early marriage as well as to caution about the risks of further stigmatising and victimising Roma communities by failing to look at the issue in its complexity and also in its particular contexts.

As factors contributing to early marriage go far beyond those outlined in the paper, extensive research and data are needed to provide an adequate understanding on the causes and factors contributing and perpetuating early marriage, as well as on the incidence, impact, trends and ongoing challenges to prevent and end child marriages in Roma communities.

Finally, instead of denouncing early marriage as a practice specific to Roma communities, Council of Europe member states should learn from each other's experiences on preventing early and child marriages and work on suitable approaches that could be suitable for Roma communities, with the active involvement of the Roma communities themselves. Continuing to characterise early marriages in Roma communities as both oppressive and internal cultural practices would be disservice to societies, a good governance, the rule of law, citizenship, democracy and human rights.

ERTF and "Phenjalipe" propose that the Council of Europe draw up a draft recommendation/opinion on the basis of the following measures:

#### LEGISLATIVE MEASURES

1. Comply with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in the area of child marriages in Romani communities;
2. Develop and enforce measures against adults who facilitate and consent to sexual relations between minors;
3. Reinforce the legal protection in combating racist environment in schools against Roma students is one of the top priorities for both national and local authorities;

#### SUPPORTIVE MEASURES

##### *Social and economic measures*

4. Improve support for Romani girls who escape child marriages through the creation of safety nets, such as the provision of shelters, education and health services that can address the specific needs and fears of married children;
5. Provide support for economic and livelihood opportunities for Romani girls and young women in rural communities. This can help ensure that marriage is not seen as the only option available to poor families. Credit schemes should be considered such that they provide genuine alternatives to marriage and do not inadvertently encourage families to marry off girls in order to access credit schemes targeted only at married women;
6. Support awareness raising and public information programmes about the negative effects of child marriage, in particular targeting Romani parents. This may include organising campaigns in Romani communities to open discuss and debate child marriage practices and impact;

##### *Educational and anti-discrimination measures*

7. Roma school mediators should be appointed to transmit to the Roma communities the negative consequences of early marriages on education. They should encourage Roma women as mothers to be in the forefront in mobilising forces in favour of the education of their children, both boys and girls. Both girls and boys need to receive primary and secondary education and, whenever possible, university education;
8. Take measures to prevent and combat stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination experienced by Romani girls in schools and ensure that Romani children are educated in an inclusive educational environment,

- free of discrimination and harassment. Ensure that policies and programmes to improve school environments and the safety and retention of girls have full support from teachers;
9. Revise school curriculum to include elements of the Romani past and present history, culture and traditions for primary, secondary and higher education;
  10. Make a greater commitment to mainstream gender and Romani women and girls' educational priorities in the national and local integration strategies for Romani inclusion;
  11. Make available and use structural funds for promoting and supporting Romani girls' education;
  12. Improve cooperation with Romani communities; adopt a positive approach to change perceptions about Romani communities;
  13. Introduce scholarships and other incentives to enable girls from poor and vulnerable communities to access education. Review and amend school policies that discriminate against married and pregnant girls and ensure that the content of education is empowering and improves gender equality. In addition, train teachers to deal sensitively with at-risk girls and provide assertiveness advice for girls and support parents to send girls to school;
  14. Business companies, institutions, political parties, media and international organisations should support the employment and education of Roma women;
  15. Develop campaigns on anti-discrimination against Roma and anti-Gypsyism to prevent and address negative stereotypes and prejudices against Roma and early marriages in Roma communities;

### *Health measures*

16. Roma health mediators should be employed and health professionals should be supported to promote anti-child marriage messages and help them to mobilise at the community level;
17. Ensure universal access to reproductive health services for all young people, in particular Romani girls and young Romani women. Provide access to family planning and contraceptive services and information, and specialist services and care.

### *Empowerment and the role of civil society*

18. Empower young Romani women and girls, including married young women, and improve access to leadership programmes;
19. Strengthen the role of Romani community-based organizations, especially women's and young people's organizations, to enable them to engage better with community leaders in convincing Roma men that they should share decisions with them;
20. Increase collaboration between Roma civil society and national programmes to support, in particular, community-based efforts to reduce child marriage;
21. Invest in measures that support the establishment of young Romani women's/youth networks at regional and national level;

22. A comprehensive national and European policy for Roma integration should take into consideration the challenges Roma women face in achieving emancipation will diminish the social/inclusion gap;
23. The European Women's Lobby and the institutions responsible for formulating and implementing policies for gender equality, both national and international, should support efforts in changing traditional practices that are considered contradictory to fundamental human rights norms, standards and principle;
24. A European Roma Women Strategy should be drawn up to reinforce the efforts of the national and the European Roma integration strategies but at the same time could be considered as a possibility for introducing an intra-community related issues and with that challenging some of the "specific" customs;

#### *Improving data*

25. Strengthen research and data collection systems. Data should be up to date, reliable, and reflect the voices and needs of child brides. Research findings need to be disseminated at all levels to support policy and programme development;
26. Exchange of good practices on preventing and ending child and early marriages among Council of Europe member states should be actively supported.

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\* Any references to Kosovo in this text, whether to the territory, institutions or population, shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.