 Romanian Society’s Perception On The Romani Woman

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Abstract

This paper proposes a brief analysis of the problems Romani women are facing when they want to access a job. It is a fact that, in Romania, Romani women who work are so few that we can even say that they are invisible. In order to be able to intervene on this status quo we believe it would be useful, beforehand, to know what exactly is causing this to happen.

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1. Introduction

The occupancy rate emerging from relatively recent studies shows that women in our country are employed at a rate of over 42%, whereas Romani women are employed at a rate of only up to 15% (Vino mai aproape. Incluziunea și excludenrea romilor”, Cosima Rughinși și Gabor, 2008) Analyzing the kind of work that Romani women do we can say that the work performed by them falls within the secondary segment of the labor market, an area where social protection of workers is low and worker abuse happens with high frequency. It is especially about temporary occupations, or even the so-called illegal work. Possible explanations are related to the low level of education and obtained qualifications, but also to the fact that the Romani mostly live in rural, economically underdeveloped areas and due to low incomes cannot afford getting hired in a neighboring settlement-a town. (Attitudes towards work”, Fundatia Soros România, 2008, p.170, www.soros.ro.) An alarming percentage of 34.6% can be found among

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Romani women who are stating that they do housework, living to a great extent in rural areas, and this high percentage is an indicative of the crucial role that self-consumption (eating what one breeds/produces) still holds in Romani households. Another source of data on the position of Romani women on the labor market is the RPP study which underlines the fact that largely Romani women self-declare as housewives or perform illegal, casual work or they even work by the day. (in agriculture, neighbors’ households, as domestic workers, etc.).(Broadening the agenda, the Status of Romani Women in Romania”, Romani Participation Program, OSI Budapest, 2006, p.56.) These sketchy data, the mere analysis of the types of activities they participate in, their low income, their difficult access to the labor market and, last, but not least, the differential treatment Romani women are subjected to, all these entitle us to say that gender and ethnic discrimination converge towards increasing vulnerability of Romani women on the labor market. (Multiple discrimination in Romania”, INCSMPS and Anna, 2007, Ed Mediaprint ). Constantly fueled by national and international news the negative response to the Romany ethnic and the Romani woman is still heavily tributary to stereotypes. Under these conditions, the presence of Romani women in the public space has always been a controversial topic, stressing the traditional elements of their lives and their antisocial acts, which ultimately led to an image that does not match the identity of the Romani woman. But this phenomenon is neither the result of last years, nor of Romania’s EU integration, but it rather originates in a much more remote period, having historical implications.(Tiganii în istoria României, Achim, 1998) Romanian society’s perception on the Romani woman must be analyzed in terms of how they built their image and precepts and the national context that lay behind the construction of these images. Among the contributions of the national literature of the 19th century which could have replicated or invented the reality we name the works of Radu Rosetti, Gheorghe Sion, Dimitrie Dan, Adalbert Ghebora etc. The various situations the Romani women appeared in, starting with witches, flower girls, beggars, servants etc, still appear today. Images of Romani women can also be found in paintings, photographs, illustrations, jokes reflecting personal views of the author in relation to the subject. All these images were passed on over time the same pattern of the Romani woman. Inherited through literature, newspapers of the time, images (paintings, pictures of famous authors, stamps, etc.), and these representations have created a series of stereotypes of the Romani woman. Relying on information only from the imaginary of those past times (an. the 19th century) without having access to records on these women’s experiences, the general perception has stayed the same as the one produces by the time’s literati. We pointed out at the beginning that Romani women’s invisibility in the public life and especially on the labor market has its roots in a Romanian historical time, namely the slavery, which left strong influences on the representation of the Romani women in the collective consciousness. Whether they were slaves or not, Romani women were assigned over time a number of essential features that became their social representations. “There are some typologies of Romani women who are represented in most of the works which influenced the way they are seen today. On the one hand, there are the slave women who do the landowners, humble, obedient, having no power of decision over their own lives, and on the other hand, the witches, the free/easy women who do not follow the social conventions. In all these works these images appeared as two extremes which are present today, too, in the collective consciousness. Romani women appear in various situations: future tellers, flower girls, artists full of erotism (playing various instruments) but also women overwhelmed with worries and responsibilities. An important role in the Romanian folklore is played by the witch”gipsy woman”. Witchcraft is, for that matter, the main occupation that has been attributed to the Romani woman for centuries. The literary works abound with some of the most picturesque and exotic descriptions to uncover an image of the Romani women in bound with the natural, with the evil.” If we take into account the context of that era, which required women in society moral conduct, chastity, virtue, obedience to permanently remind them about both the sin of disobedience, and their condition of women without reason, driven by feelings and who, therefore, must be controlled, these women who did not comply with social norms must have been severely punished. Moral conduct, considered a ”given” of women, was violated by the Romani women, who held the pipes in the corner of their lips, who were half naked (nursing their children in squares) and had occupations considered less moral or appropriate seen through the lenses of those times.

2. Conclusion

In conclusion we can assert that the problems of Romani women do not end with getting upper education and qualifications or by accessing a job, but become a new source of marginalization and disadvantage, of differential
Treatment from school and work mates, heads, beneficiaries, clients etc. In order to change the perception of the majority as far as the Romani ethnic is concerned, and particularly the Romani woman, it is necessary on the one hand to promote the values and household work performed by Romani women within the ethnic and, secondly, to promote Roma women in mass media - professionally successful models. The image of Romani women in the Romanian society must change and promoting models of Romani women as successful professional, will contribute to building a positive image, leading ultimately to the creation of a dignifying working environment for all employees. Carrying out the assumed role requires involvement of trade unions structures, civil society and the media in promoting equality between women and men on the labor market and supporting the legitimate interests of many Romani women. (http://www.privestemaasacumsunt.ro/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/femei-rome-pe-piata-muncii.pdf) Some of the steps taken to fight discrimination and also to support Romanies, Romanian citizens, are the allocation in pre-university and university level education of positions for Romani students, or the allocation of special grants to facilitate them schooling. Among the projects and activities that the "1 Decembrie 1918" University - as beneficiary or partner- has developed and in which there have been promoted or involved the Romani communities, we enlist a few, as presented to the community by the local media. The event was attended by over 100 Romani women in Alba County who have successfully completed integrated professional training programs or benefitted from the services of employment workshop and were looking forward to be given the opportunity to show their desire to work, their efficiency and competitiveness on the labor market. With the hope that in our University we can prepare young professionals (sociologists, social workers, school and pre-school teachers, magistrates and lawyers, economists, etc.) to promote the principles of non-discrimination and social inclusion policies for all types of disadvantaged categories, we express our confidence that a society in which the Romani woman to be appreciated at her true value can be built in a reasonable time if you are willing to make a common effort. Membership’s ethnicity has a significant influence: being Roma cause an increase in the probability of non-attendance. (Bara, 2008, p.411). "Lobby and advocacy at the local level to promote the Romani woman in the public life with active participation in the electoral process, prevention and control over gender discrimination and competition in terms of equality between men and women, Europeanization of gender policies in the Roma movement will have as major outcomes introducing the issue of Romanies women on the agendas of local institutions and their empowerment to provide equal opportunities to access public services and in the same time increase self-esteem and self-confidence of the representatives of the Romani minority. On the medium and long term it will result in having Romani women who will be referred to as positive models. The Romani woman is an important factor in the mobilization of Romani communities in order to implement public policies focused on Romanies. The functional model of involvement of the Romani woman in public policies at the local level multiplied regionally, centralized and adapted in national strategies for the Romani can become the interested centralizing factor for implementing and monitoring policies focused on Romani communities. (http://ongadciabt.wordpress.com/2010/02/17/femeia-roma-in-societatea-romaneasca) Access to education for children from Roma families is a problem so kind educational and socioeconomic status. (Bara, 2008, p.409).

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