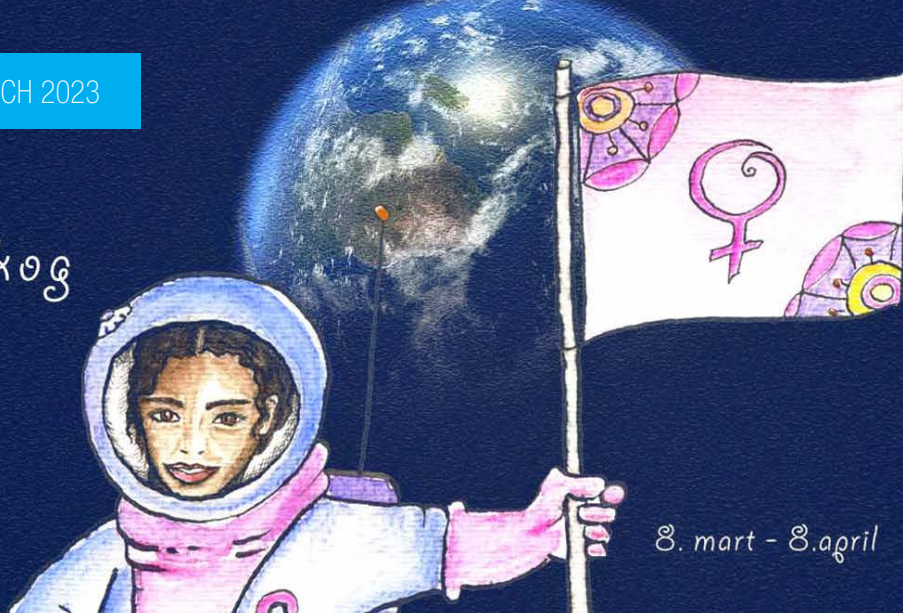


Mesec romsko-ženskog aktivizma



The Month of Roma Women's Activism was organized for the first time in 2010. Since then, every year from 8 March to 8 April, members of the Roma Women's Network gather around a common goal: to increase the visibility of Roma women in our society. 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, International Romani Day, closes our campaign. The organizations and initiatives comprising the Roma Women's Network organize a whole series of events and activities throughout Serbia.



This year's campaign of the Roma Women's Network is aimed at ending the practice of child marriage, which is present in the Roma community. It is a fact that child marriage is also present among the general population in Serbia, often among the poorer population and in rural areas, but this practice is still very prevalent in Roma communities, where, according to data from UNICEF's MICS survey, more than half of girls marry before the age of 18.

We started this year's campaign on 8 March. Our activists are participating in the March for women's labour rights and a living wage called *Dignity. Wage. Life.*

30 meetings with local self-governments are planned during the campaign in relation to 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. The Protocol was signed in 18 local self-governments in which Roma Women's Network activists are active. As for the 12 local self-governments where the Protocol has not been signed, we are lobbying the local institutions to sign it. The filming of the documentary film "Too Early" ("Prerano") is currently underway.

During the campaign, we will also have advocacy meetings with international organizations with the aim of initiating the idea of establishing a special fund for the education of Roma women and girls who are at risk or are victims of child marriage.

We will work with the community on the prevention of child marriage by collecting data for the preparation of a Case Study – early, forced and child marriage.

A public hearing is planned for the beginning of April in the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia with the aim of introducing the MPs to the problem of child marriage in the Roma population and the necessity to change the normative framework in order to prevent and sanction early, child and forced marriage (Initiative to amend the Family Law, the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, the Criminal Code, Initiative to amend the Law on Social Protection and to amend the Instructions on the manner of work of Centres for Social Work – guardianship authorities in the protection of children from child marriage).

This way, we want to achieve our common goal of increasing 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 decision-makers and those who can change the lives of Roma women. We are hoping for changes!

Slavica Vasic

Chairman of the board of directors Roma women network Serbia

From 1 November to 31 December, members of the National Coalition to End Child Marriage continued to implement their activities in the field of empowering women and girls, as well as combating child marriage. **The global campaign 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence** was another opportunity for our joint and loud advocacy for the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls, including child marriage, as one of the most serious forms of violation of child rights.

Here, we will present a part of the activities carried out within the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign.

The National Dialogue on the Protection of Children from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Conference

was organized on 29 November at the initiative of the Protector of Citizens and the Network of Organizations for Children. On that occasion, the Protector of Citizens said that it is very important to raise awareness of the fact that the most serious forms of abuse and exploitation of children (sexual exploitation and forced marriage) happen every day and in our immediate surroundings, as well as to influence the relevant institutions to increase their efforts to combat these phenomena, as well as to improve the protection of children. Of extreme importance in this process are the preventive actions of competent authorities and the education of members of vulnerable social groups so they can recognize these forms of abuse and exploitation, as well as the risk of becoming a victim.

The institution of the Protector of Citizens wants to work with competent institutions to improve cooperation in order to accelerate the initiated process of improving the legislative framework in this area and align it with ratified conventions and international standards for the prevention and protection of children from sexual abuse and exploitation.



The Association of Roma Novi Becej, in cooperation with the Cultural Centre in Novi Becej, organized the promotion of the film **It doesn't concern me – It concerns all of us**. This documentary film was filmed as part of the global campaign 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, with the support of the US Embassy, and aims to highlight the importance of reporting violence and the fact that violence is not a matter of the private sphere. Experts in the field of prevention of domestic violence, protection of victims and officials from institutions in charge of protecting all citizens from any type of violence, especially gender-based violence, speak in the film.



On the occasion of International Human Rights Day, the Roma Women's Network of Banat, which consists of the organizations Association of Roma Novi Becej, Roma Women's Centre "Rromnjako ilo" Zrenjanin, Association of Roma Women for Roma Women Novi Sad, Roma Association "Danica" Pancevo and Association "Roma Women of Palilula", organized a street march that aimed to draw attention to human rights, the fight against violence, femicide, arranged marriage, racism and discrimination. 25 roses were laid in memory of the murdered women. During the campaign, the Association of Roma Novi Becej put up 13 billboards in 9 cities in Vojvodina with messages aimed at drawing attention to the importance of reporting violence against women and girls and the importance of supporting women and girls who have experienced domestic violence and arranged, child marriages.



On the occasion of the end of the campaign 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, the **Roma Women's Association Osvit** organized a street campaign for the distribution of promotional material where they talked with the citizens of Nis on the topic of violence, its prevalence and ways to address it. This activity aimed to

raise awareness about this global problem, which is not only a problem for women and their families, but a huge social problem and the responsibility of all of us.



The members of the Coalition continued the active work to improve the position of women and girls from the most vulnerable categories, and therefore to combat and prevent child marriage.

With the adoption of the Employment Strategy and the accompanying **Action Plan 2021–2026 in the Republic of Serbia** the **National Employment Service (NES)** contributed to the members of the Roma nationality being recognized as a hard-to-employ category in the labour market, and having the priority for the inclusion in active labour market policy measures. In this regard, the NES is implementing a number of programmes and measures, which will lead to employment or increase the employability of these categories in the labour market. Some of the programmes intended for this category of the population are online trainings for active job search and online trainings for entrepreneurship, which can also be attended in the Roma language, and there is also a special programme of subsidies for self-employment.

Roma Women's Centre "Bibija" organized a conference on 16 December 2022 with the presentation of the results of the project **Tradition as a Challenge and Driving Force in the Roma Community** implemented from 1 July to 30 December 2022 with the support of the City Administration of the City of Belgrade. The overall goal of the project is to increase the visibility of the problem of early underage marriage and raise awareness of the negative consequences of traditional customary practices and early marriage on reproductive and mental health, primarily of women from the Roma community. Another goal of the project was to improve the level of awareness about human rights and the rights of women to choose a partner, to education, health care and participation in decision-making processes at the level of the family and broader social community. Project activities were implemented in the City of Belgrade in six settlements. The activities implemented within the project include informative and educational workshops, as well as public debates on traditional practices, customary law, gender equality, identity and culture.

Within the project **Legal Aid to Persons at Risk of Statelessness** in Serbia, the NGO Praxis is additionally carrying out activities aimed at the prevention and elimination of child, early and forced marriages. Within these activities, Praxis organized workshops for students of upper grades of primary schools in Apatin, Subotica, Pancevo, Smederevo, Nis, Sabac, Novi Sad and Kostolac aimed at raising awareness of the causes, potential risks and harmful consequences of child, early and forced marriages, through the lens of the importance of education. The workshops focus on the causes of dropping out of education,

The organized workshops confirmed once again that it is necessary to work continuously with children on this and other topics of importance for their awareness and empowerment, in order to avoid the established harmful patterns of behaviour.

“Children cannot learn how to take care of children, until they learn to take care of themselves” is one of the messages that the children underlined as a conclusion from the workshops held on the topic of child, early and forced marriage.



In November, the Roma Women's Association Osvit organized a **training* on violence against women for providers of *pro bono* support**. The goal of this accredited training was to train university students with mentoring on how to provide legal aid to women victims of domestic violence. This has an additional impact on the increase in the number of professionals engaged in the provision of free legal aid services.



The girl **Zorica Djordjevic**, who regularly attends PRAXIS activities, told us about the importance of preventive activities for girls. She learned about the activities carried out by PRAXIS from a teaching assistant who works as an associate on the project. This additionally highlights the importance of supporting teaching assistants in their important work. Zorica is in the first grade of secondary school in Backa Palanka and she emphasized that the biggest challenges faced by young girls are the challenges of poverty, acceptance in society, falling in love, respecting tradition, fear of the unknown and naivety.

How did you find out about the workshops organized by Praxis?

From the teaching assistant Seca, she invited me (she is an associate on the project)

Which of the topics at the workshops was particularly important to you?

A real woman and early marriage

Would you recommend these activities to other girls and young women and why?

Yes, because it is educational, they can hear and learn many useful things, and of course for socializing with others.

What is most important for young women and girls in your opinion?

The most important thing is that they complete their education and have a job in order to be independent.

What challenges in life do young women and girls encounter most often?

The challenges of poverty, acceptance in society, falling in love, respecting tradition, fear of the unknown and probably naivety.

If you were the president, what would be the first thing you would do to improve the lives of girls and women?

I would ban early marriage and provide every woman with a job, so they don't have to wait for men to give them money.

If you had to give a speech as the president to girls and women in Serbia, what would you tell them?

To be smart, to be themselves, to follow their dreams and not to depend on anyone.