Ending violence
Empowering change

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Government
of the Republic of Serbia

NATIONAL COALITION TO END CHILD MARRIAGE

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In this issue of the newsletter, we report on the activities of our member organizations within the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign, including the results of the project Heritage of Emancipation: Empowering Roma Women through Networks of Solidarity (HEROINES), the participation of representatives of Serbia at the international Conference of Roma Women held in Zagreb and the 17th meeting of the National Coalition to End Child Marriage.

17th meeting of the National Coalition to End Child Marriage

The meeting was held on 27 November in Belgrade and was organized by the Office of the Minister without portfolio in charge of gender equality, prevention of violence against women and economic and political empowerment of women, Tatjana Macura, and UNICEF.

At the meeting, the findings of the Analysis of the Functionality of the System in Response to Child Marriage and Adolescent Pregnancies with recommendations for improvement (here) were presented, along with the experiences of Roma women from the Case Study Analysis – The Impact of Child, Early and Forced Marriage on the Reproductive and Sexual Health of Roma Women (here).

"Having in mind that during these 16 days we are effectively marking a global campaign focused on the prevention of violence against women and girls, we can freely say that this social phenomenon is another form of violence against girls", emphasized Minister Macura.

"Research shows that 56 per cent of girls in the Roma community are married before the age of 18, and that one in three girls becomes pregnant and becomes a mother between the ages of 15 and 19", emphasized Deyana Kostadinova, UNICEF Representative.

According to her, child marriage affects not only the Roma community but the entire country, girls of all ethnic backgrounds, and what they have in common is living in poverty.

Assistant Minister for Family Welfare and Demography Radoš Pejović emphasized that child marriage is a traditional practice that represents a gross violation of the rights of the child, particularly girls.

"There is a significantly higher number of girls, compared to boys, who are victims of child marriage, which clearly indicates that this is a form of gender-based violence. Child marriage represents a serious social problem that requires joint action by all relevant stakeholders", Mr Pejović stated.

Assistant Minister of Justice Branislav Stojanović emphasized that a series of normative activities have been undertaken with regard to all laws within the competence of that ministry.

"Through amendments to the Criminal Code, we have tightened the penal policy for groups of criminal offences against sexual freedom and domestic violence. We have prepared the amendments to the Law on the Prevention of Domestic Violence and have been continuously cooperating with our partners from UNICEF", said Mr Stojanović.



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The Digital Safety of Young Roma Women training, 7-8 November 2025

In the lead-up to the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign, the Roma Women's Network of Serbia organized a two-day workshop dedicated to **recognizing and preventing digital violence, as well as strengthening the digital safety** of girls and young women. The workshop was facilitated by activists of the Roma Women's Network of Serbia, Katarina Mitrović (Roma Women's Centre "Bibija") and Maja Simić (Roma Youth Organization of Serbia). The training was held in Belgrade on the premises of ERIAC.

The training gathered 13 participants from Belgrade, Pirot, Kragujevac, Žabalj and Kostolac.

The two-day workshop in Belgrade successfully encouraged the empowerment of young girls in the field of digital safety and the fight against violence against women. In addition to acquiring practical knowledge, the participants had the opportunity to connect, exchange experiences and become empowered for further activist work in their communities. This event represents an important step in strengthening the Roma Women's Network of Serbia and improving the position of Roma women in both the digital and real world.

In the continuation of the project, the training participants were active carriers of knowledge in their communities. On the occasion of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, each of them organized **local workshops for girls from their communities**, passing on information about digital safety and mechanisms for protection against violence. A total of 20 workshops with young Roma women were held in local communities. This ensures the dissemination of knowledge, the development of local capacities and the strengthening of the role of young Roma women as educators and activists.





Exhibition Heroines: The Strength of Roma Women – Romnjangi zor

On 17 November, in the lead-up to the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign, the Roma Women's Centre "Bibija" and the Roma Women's Network of Serbia, in cooperation with the Institute of Ethnography of the SASA, the Roma Women's Centre "Bibija" and the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade, opened the exhibition **HEROINES: THE STRENGTH OF ROMA WOMEN!** The exhibition is one of the results of the project *Heritage of Emancipation: Empowering Roma Women through Networks of Solidarity (HEROINES)*, supported by the Centre for the Promotion of Science of the Republic of Serbia, a recipient of the European Union Prize for Citizen Science in 2025. The exhibition sheds light on the heritage of women's emancipation through stories, objects and maps shaped by Roma women themselves. Using a participatory community mapping methodology, the exhibition **reveals everyday practices of resistance, solidarity and creativity of women** who, despite multiple challenges, create spaces of empowerment and unity.









Conference of Roma Women – Adopted conclusions for their political, economic and social empowerment, 25-29 November 2025

The **Conference of Roma Women** was held in Zagreb from 25 to 28 November 2025, organized by the Roma Union in the Republic of Croatia "KALI SARA". This was the first Conference of Roma Women held in Croatia. What makes it different from other international conferences of Roma women organized so far is the initiative and organization that emerged from Roma joining forces. The conclusions adopted by 50 Roma women from 19 European countries over two days of working panels were divided into four themes – **political participation, economic empowerment, education and anti-discrimination measures**, and during the closing part of the Conference, open to the public, Roma women read them in three languages – Roma, Croatian and English. Representatives of the Roma Women's Network of Serbia participated in the conference.



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Analyses of national documents of European countries and the working panels at the conference showed that Roma women continue to live without basic social security, with very limited access to services and insufficient funding for programmes that should specifically empower women. Without long-term solutions and stable support, the community is left to fend for itself. It was emphasized that disparities in financial resources also create disparities in opportunities, because there can be no real change without high-quality social services. Providing support alone is not enough. Women need to feel that they have the power and the right to take control of their own lives. The anti-Roma narrative was recognized as a major problem, and political will is needed to clearly condemn discrimination and send a message to society that such treatment of the Roma community is unacceptable and harmful. Roma men and women are equal citizens, and this must be reflected in everyday measures of support and empowerment of the Roma community.

Nathalie Rayes, the former Ambassador of the United States of America to Croatia, also addressed Roma women with a powerful video message during the closing part of the Conference. *"What makes this Conference so important is your shift in focus – from debate to change. Many strategies and reports analysed the challenges faced by Roma women. However, as your overview of national and European frameworks shows, too many commitments still remain only on paper"*, Ms Rayes noted, adding: *"Your insistence on life after the Conference is precisely the leadership Europe needs"*.

During the closing part of the Conference, **Roma women strongly condemned the actions of state authorities towards the Roma community in Slovenia** and the adoption of the *so-called Šutar Law*, which violates human rights and fundamental freedoms. They addressed national and European institutions with a request to condemn discriminatory provisions that treat an entire minority as a security problem, emphasizing that this is a matter of protecting international standards and legal commitments that states themselves have voluntarily undertaken by signing international documents that clearly define human rights.





Round table: The Position of Roma Women in Serbia with a Special Focus on Gender-Based Violence against Roma Women

On 24 November 2025, in the lead-up to the **16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign**, Roma Women's Centre "Bibija" and the Roma Women's Network of Serbia, in cooperation with the Board for the Study of Life and Customs of the Roma of the Institute of Ethnography of the SASA organized a round table **The Position of Roma Women in Serbia with a Special Focus on Gender-Based Violence against Roma Women**.

The round table was part of the project ***HEROINES, Heritage of Emancipation: Empowering Roma Women through Networks of Solidarity***, which was organized by the Institute of Ethnography of the SASA, in cooperation with the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade and the Roma Women's Centre "Bibija".

The aim of the event was to present the results of research conducted by Roma Women's Centre "Bibija" on a sample of 120 Roma women from 12 Roma settlements in Belgrade, Pirot, Šabac and Kostolac, and to discuss the position of Roma women in Serbia in order to define recommendations for improving their position and combating discrimination and violence.

Speakers at the round table included an expert and "Bibija" associate Gordana Stevanović Govedarica, the author of the analysis, Dr Biljana Sikimić, a member of the Board for the Study of Life and Customs of the Roma of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, activists of the Roma Women's Centre "Bibija" Slavica Vasić Mitrović, Svetlana Ilić, Svetlana Marinković, Zorica Stanojević and Katarina Mitrović, activists of the Roma Women's Network of Serbia Sofka Vasiljković, Radmila Nešić and Tanja Grgić, who shared experiences from the field, while the moderator of the event was Dr Ivan Đorđević from the Institute of Ethnography.





Intergenerational Mentoring in the Roma Women's Movement "WE SHARE"

The final event of the project **Supporting Leadership and Activism of Roma Girls and Young Women**, entitled "WE SHARE", was held on 15 December at the Europe House in Belgrade. The project was implemented in 2024 and 2025 by the Roma Women's Centre "Bibija" and the Roma Female Student Initiative, with the support of UNICEF. Panel participants reflected on the project results, which included 25 empowered Roma women activists through intergenerational mentoring and 30 local actions carried out during the month of Roma women's activism, involving 416 children from 10 local communities. Local actions were carried out with the aim of promoting education and empowering girls to continue their formal education, with particularly significant participation and support from successful and educated young Roma women.

Activists of the Roma Women's Centre "Bibija" have been working for years through field activities in Roma settlements on the inclusion and empowerment of Roma girls and young women.

"**Empowerment is one of the most important tasks**", said Slavica Vasić from the RWC "Bibija". "It is the only way **to step out of the existing statistics**, which show that only 27 per cent of Roma girls attend secondary school, compared to around 50 per cent of Roma boys. 64 per cent of Roma children completed primary school." Many children have never left their settlements, as shown by the experiences of mentors who worked with them.

"What we identified as particularly important was the need to provide these girls with role models. They don't have them in their community, they don't have an example of a young woman who completed secondary school or university education. That is why it is crucial to show them that education is possible and that dreams can come true", emphasized Marina Bogdanović from UNICEF Serbia.

One of the striking testimonies shown during the presentation at the Europe House shows the extent to which Roma girls and women are unfamiliar with their rights.

"Girl H. used to think it was normal for girls in her surroundings to marry early, because that way they 'help their family'. After the workshop, she said this was the first time she ever heard that girls have the right to decide about their own lives" – this is one of the testimonies from the field.

The brochure "We Share" on intergenerational mentoring in the Roma women's movement and the experiences of activists and programme beneficiaries was developed as part of the project ("We Share" brochure).

