



PREDLOZI ZA POBOLJŠANJE
DOSTUPNOSTI I KVALITETNOG
OSNOVNOG OBRAZOVANJA
ZA ROMSKE DEVOJČICE

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE
IMPROVEMENT OF ACCESSABILITY
AND QUALITY OF BASIC
EDUCATION FOR ROMA GIRLS



Project Summary

Project “Chances and Choices for Roma Girls” has been implemented by CARE Serbia office in Belgrade and Novi Sad Humanitarian Center, with financial support from the Foundation Patsy Collins. The project aims to contribute to the availability and quality education of Roma girls through improved institutional support to Roma girls, improved availability of educational institutions to the needs of Roma girls, and through increased awareness and knowledge about the importance of education for Roma girls in the Roma community. The project has many layers and includes various activities: a participatory research on the main reasons for which Roma girls are leaving school, making policy proposals for improving the availability of quality basic education for Roma girls, within which there are analysis of laws, strategies and conventions that regulate this area. A lobby group that represents and promotes the right to education of Roma girls was formed within the project. In addition, 12 Roma girls, high school age, have been strengthened through participation in the Forum theater workshops. Performing Forum theater play with girls is one of the activities designed for parents, teachers, peers and representatives of institutions and associations.

Projekat „Šanse i izbori za romske devojčice” sprovode kancelarija CARE Srbija u Beogradu i Novosadski humanitarni centar, uz finansijsku podršku fondacije Patsy Collins. Cilj projekta je da doprine dostupnosti i kvalitetnom obrazovanju romskih devojčica kroz poboljšanu podršku romskim devojčicama od strane institucija koje se bave obrazovanjem; poboljšanu dostupnost obrazovnih institucija potrebama romskih devojčica; i povećanje nivoa svesti i znanja o značaju obrazovanja kod romskih devojčica i u romskoj zajednici. Projekat je višestojan i obuhvata različite aktivnosti: participativno istraživanje glavnih razloga napuštanja škole od strane romskih devojčica, i izradu predloga praktične politike za poboljšanje dostupnosti kvalitetnog osnovnog obrazovanja za romske devojčice, u okviru koje je napravljena analiza zakona, strategija i konvencija koje regulišu ovu oblast. U okviru projekta formirana je lobi grupa koja zastupa i promovise pravo na obrazovanje romskih devojčica i koju sačinjavaju predstavnici institucija, NVOa, romske zajednice. Takođe, 12 romskih devojčica, srednjoškolski, osnaženo je kroz učesće u Forum teatar radionicama da progovori o preprekama u obrazovanju sa kojima se susreću romske devojčice kako u institucijama, tako i unutar same zajednice. Cilj predstave je da se pokrene dijalog među svim relevantnim akterima uključenim u ovu temu i podstakne rešavanje problema obrazovanja Romskih devojčica.

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Resume

Obstacles in access to quality education of Roma girls, whether related to their gender role, or generally to the barriers that affect both girls and boys, are deeply rooted and have many layers. Progress in better access to education can be achieved only by a systematic, planned and coordinated actions addressing all segments of society involved in education and position of Roma.

Adoption of laws, strategies, action plans, as well as the signing of international conventions, are all prerequisites on the way to system solutions. Serbia has adopted a series of regulations and strategic documents (strategies and action plans) that are seen as a framework for systematic solution of problems in access to education of Roma girls. These documents are related to improvement of the overall situation of Roma, education, gender equality, children rights and fight against discrimination. Adoption of the first strategic document by the Government of the Republic of Serbia related to improving the situation of Roma, which deals with the specific problems of Roma women, it is certainly a positive example, but it is not sufficient enough.

The most important recommendation to the existing structures of government - national, provincial and local – is to find mechanisms and provide adequate financial resources which would ensure implementation of laws, strategies and action plans. This is primarily related to implementation of the laws on compulsory primary education, action plans for Roma education, and implementation of those measures that are recognized as extremely important for improving the education of Roma children in general: creation of conditions for early inclusion of Roma children in preschool education; activities of constant awareness raising among the Roma community about the importance of education for all children, with special emphasis on the importance of education for Roma girls; sensitization of school staff and adaptation to the specific needs and problems that Roma children, especially girls, face in education; provision of free education; implementation of affirmative measures to promote education of Roma girls, etc. Also, it is necessary to give support and strengthen educated Roma women and Roma female activists and associations that advocate for a better position of Roma women.

Obstacles in Roma Education

One of the most important determinants of the educational system is its equal availability to all citizens. Constitution of the Republic of Serbia in Article 71 stipulates that education should be equally accessible to all persons under the same conditions, and that primary education is compulsory and free.

However, the practice shows that Roma children face a range of barriers in access to education. Some sources indicate that 35% of Roma children and youth (aged 7 to 20 years) is not enrolled in school, compared with a rate of 2% in the general population¹, and that primary school is completed by less than 30% of Roma children.

According to the REF² report, Roma in Serbia are faced with a discouraging line of barriers when it comes to education, and the inclusion of Roma in the educational system in Serbia is one of the lowest in Southeast Europe.

Problems and obstacles that Roma children face are numerous: from lack of basic resources for living and inadequate housing, lack of school supplies and textbooks, insufficient knowledge of the Serbian language (or another language of the majority), difficulties in understanding the school curriculum, lack of support and help in learning at home, to discrimination, both by other students and by individual teachers. Parents themselves have poor education; they are often illiterate, unemployed, struggling for a mere survival, which is often the reason for their lack of motivation for education of their children³.

Conditions for quality education of Roma children are, due to these circumstances, minimal. Representatives of the Roma and other organizations working with Roma emphasize that parents and children are mostly left alone, and that the majority of local communities is not interested in solving these problems⁴.

A significant number of parents recognize the need to support their children in learning, but they do not have adequate knowledge and skills to do that. On the other hand, lack of opportunities and lack of interest among large number of Roma parents for education of their children, as well as non-recognition of the importance of education for a successful life, leads to the same indifference to education among children themselves: they leave school early and they give priority to the family business against education⁵.

¹ World Bank Report "Poverty, Social Exclusion and Ethnicity in Serbia and Montenegro: The Case of the Roma", 2005
² Advancing Education of Roma in Serbia – Country Assessment and the Roma Education Fund's Strategic Directions, Roma Education Fund, 2007.
³ Summary of results of the Participatory Research on Needs, the Main Problems and Potentials in the Education of Roma in Vojvodina, NSHC, 2007
⁴ Ibid
⁵ Ibid

Specific Problems in Education of Roma Girls

In addition to all the above mentioned difficulties and obstacles Roma children face in the process of education, it is necessary to point out that there are specific problems when it comes to education of Roma girls which makes their access to education additionally burdened.

Roma women are the least educated group of women with the highest percentage of illiteracy - about 80% of Roma women are formally illiterate, with the upper limit of four grades of primary school completed, without any qualification⁶. In the Belgrade municipality only 10% of Roma girls complete primary school. In Vojvodina 22.6% of Roma women never attends primary school, 25.2% complete primary school only, while 16.3% of Roma women complete secondary school⁷. In most cases, Roma women do not have the right to independently decide on their education (44.4% of respondents in the research of the Office for Roma Inclusion in Vojvodina did not decide on their own schooling⁸). Although achieving better grades in school, girls in the puberty and early puberty period withdraw from school in order to preserve their virginity and become prepared for marriage. Higher levels of education are often inaccessible to them due to a difficult financial situation in which Roma live. Therefore the process, the length of further education, and the financial needs related to these affect Roma education in general, and especially education of Roma girls⁹.

Patriarchal tradition and stereotypes have contributed to the attitude of many of the Roma families that girls do not need education, especially not higher education, because it expected from them to marry early in puberty age, and to take care of the family and the household. Poverty and patriarchal tradition combined often result in giving priority to boys only when it comes to enrollment in school¹⁰.

The labour market creates unfavourable conditions for employment of poorly educated labour force. Low levels of education and qualification of Roma women affect their socio-economic status, reduce their chances for successful integration and contribute to their vulnerability and exposure to discrimination.

It is estimated that there are four times fewer Roma women than Roma men employed. In addition to this, only 29% of the total active Roma persons in the labour market are Roma women. The highest poverty rates are present among the inactive people, particularly those from vulnerable groups such

⁶ Challenges of the Decade of Roma, Bahtalo drom, Nis, 2005
⁷ Maja Brankovic, Provincial Secretariat for Labour, Employment and Gender Equality; comments from the public debate on the first draft of the National Plan of Activities for Improvement of the Position of Women and Gender Equality; available on: <http://209.85.129.132/search?q=cache:6Rnz-8MevJAJ:www.awin.org.yu/nap/files/komentari2.htm+akcioni+plan+za+specifican+polozaj+romkinja&cd=4&hl=en&ct=clnk>
⁸ Ibid
⁹ Ibid
¹⁰ Written comments of the European Roma Rights Center, Bibija and Women's Space related to the Republic of Serbia sent to the 38th session of the UN Committee for Elimination of Discrimination

as Roma, refugees and internally displaced persons. The largest percentage of Roma women has a monthly income less than 30 euros¹¹.

Opportunities for women are largely limited by their low education level, since they make the majority of the illiterate and those with lower education levels within the already negative educational structure of the Roma community. Women who work are mostly employed in agriculture and they perform basic occupations. Most women work in the household and care for their children and family, and only 4% of Roma women are employed (UNDP, 2006)¹². Work performed by Roma women is usually domestic work, collecting waste materials, and work in the gray market. Women develop different survival strategies due to the role they have in the community, which is focused on taking care of the household members. They remain in the “vicious circle of poverty”, because of early marriage and focus on taking care of their household either in their primary or secondary family, as well as because of the traditional division of gender roles in the Roma community¹³. Research shows that even those Roma women who enter 0,2% of highly educated Roma (where Roma women make 30%), and those Roma women who make 17% of Roma with a high school degree, due to discrimination performed by the majority, do not easily find an employment, or sometimes never do.

Roma girls may face additional difficulties in relation to education if their parents prevent them from going to school in order to preserve their virginity, to become prepared for a marriage, or to assume their duties at home. It is possible that these girls would never become literate nor they would acquire critical thinking skills that would enable them to care for themselves and their families, and to change their cultural practices that negatively affect their welfare¹⁴. The consequences of low educational levels are multiple, among others, ignorance of rights, which leads to exposure to discrimination, violence, health deterioration due to pregnancies before reproductive maturity, abortions, etc.

¹¹ At risk: The Social Vulnerability of Roma, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in Serbia, UNDP, Belgrade, June, 2006

¹² Ibid

¹³ Challenges of the Decade of Roma, Bahtalo drom, Nis, 2005

¹⁴ Draft Strategy for Integration and Empowerment of Roma

Focus Groups Research Results

The results of the research conducted by the Novi Sad Humanitarian Center (NSHC) in partnership with CARE Serbia¹⁵ in 2009 confirm the mentioned problems in education of Roma girls. For the research purpose, focus groups were implemented in Novi Sad and Beocin with various participants in order to identify the basic problems that Roma girls face in education and to obtain recommendations for solving these problems. Focus group participants were Roma girls who were attending school, Roma girls who dropout from school, their parents, and representatives of organizations and institutions involved in education of Roma.

The main problems which the focus group participants have identified as the cause for Roma girls are leaving school are:

- Tradition - in terms of early marriage of Roma girls and “preserving” the girls’ virginity. This reason is especially emphasized in the focus groups with representatives of schools and Roma activists;
- Help at home (girls help their parents in taking care of younger children);
- Poverty - bad financial situation, poor housing conditions, lack of opportunities to buy clothes, shoes, toiletries, textbooks, etc.;
- Inadequate education system that is not focused on the specific needs of all children;
- Laws on compulsory primary school education are not being implemented;
- Discrimination, everyday unpleasant situations (with teachers and other children in school) - this cause was mentioned in all groups, and it was emphasized by the Roma girls;
- Lack of motivation among Roma girls to learn and to go to school;
- Insufficient support from the parents and lack of encouragement for children to stay in school;
- Insufficient knowledge of the language spoken by the majority which makes it difficult to follow the school classes (this issue was particularly emphasized by parents and children).

¹⁵ The research was conducted within the project “Chances and Choices for Roma Girls” whose goal is to contribute to the availability and quality education of Roma girls

► *Research shows that one part of the identified obstacles in education of Roma girls relates to the general obstacles when education of Roma children in question, whether they are girls or boys.*

The measures which are particularly important for the improvement of Roma education are: permanent motivating of Roma parents about the importance of education; early inclusion of Roma children in the preschool system; free all-day stay in pre-school institutions; provision of school meals, textbooks and stationary in all levels of education; introduction of Roma assistants in educational institutions; additional education of teachers and other school staff; promotion of additional work with children; provision of scholarships for Roma secondary school students and university students; and fight against all forms of discrimination¹⁶.

► *Specific barriers that affect only the Roma girls are connected with the gender roles of girls (women) in the Roma community: the traditional gender patterns that do not encourage women's education, lack of broader support for the continuation of education of girls, virginity preservation and early marriage, as well as specific tasks in the home (care of younger children).*

Obligation of the state is to provide quality education for all children, particularly for the vulnerable and marginalized ones. Authorities at all levels (national, regional and local) should implement laws and policies that were adopted, and provide wider social support to education of Roma girls which includes gender sensitization of the Roma community, teachers and other school staff, students, local government, etc.

The Systematic Approach as a Way of Improvement

Obstacles in access to quality education of Roma girls, whether related to their gender role, or generally to the same barriers that affect girls and boys, are deeply rooted and have many layers. Progress in better access to education can be seen only with systematic, planned and coordinated actions addressing all segments of society involved in Roma education.

Compulsory and free primary education is guaranteed to everyone under equal conditions by the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia and is governed by the *Law on Basic Education* and the *Law on the Primary School*. Since the school year 2006/2007 a compulsory pre-school education for six-year olds has been introduced, defined as an integral part of a compulsory nine years education (*the Law on Amendments to the Law on Basic Education*). The draft *Law on Preschool Education* is in preparation. Other laws and strategies that apply generally to education are: *Strategy of the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Serbia for the period 2005 - 2010*; *Law on Secondary Education, Policy and Strategic Development of Vocational Education, and Adult Education Development Strategy*.

Adoption of Law on Primary Education by the Assembly of the Republic of Serbia in August 2009 was one more step forward in efforts to ensure the country's legal framework for stimulating education for all children, especially vulnerable children. Updates to this law allow enrollment of all children in school, regardless of whether their parents have all the necessary documentation and proof of residence. The testing of a child prior to the enrolment is done by the school psychologist and teacher in the child's native language, using standard procedures and instruments recommended by a department in charge of testing, or an authorized professional organization. If there is no possibility for the testing to be performed on the child's native language, a school must hire a translator based on the proposal of the minority National Council. Further, amendments to this Law rely on the Law on Discrimination and much greater attention is paid to prevent any form of abuse and neglect. Law clearly defines procedures that schools must meet in case of irregular attendance of children. Also defined are the consequences that the school or the parents have to bear in case of disrespecting the procedures.

Since our country has become a part of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015 initiative, numerous strategic documents and action plans were made and adopted with aim to help in systematic solving of various problems of Roma, including access to education.

The Government of the Republic of Serbia in 2005 adopted a *Joint Action Plan for Improvement of Roma education in Serbia*, which represents the broadest political framework for the systematic solving of the Roma education problem. In addition to this, documents that are fully or partially aimed at improving the educational status of Roma and their living standards are: *Poverty Reduction Strategy in Serbia, the National Plan of Action for Children, Draft Strategy for Improvement of Roma Education in the Republic of Serbia, the Social Welfare Development Strategy*.

¹⁶ The above recommendations were made on the basis of the experience of the Novi Sad Humanitarian Center and of analysis of current reports and publications on the topic of improving Roma education, collected in a publication *Education against Poverty – Advocacy Initiative for Roma Inclusion in Education system*: http://www.nshc.org.rs/pdf/obrazovanjem_protiv_siromastva.pdf

The above regulations apply generally to the improvement of Roma education, while little attention is paid to the specific situation of Roma women.

► *The only strategic document that deals specifically with the issue of Roma women is The Strategy for Improving the Position of Roma in Serbia, within which there is an action plan for women that provides a variety of measures and affirmative actions in order to improve the position of Roma women. It includes education, health, housing, employment, combating discrimination against Roma women, participation in public and political life, the struggle against domestic violence, arranged juvenile marriages, bride selling and trafficking, and the systemic problem solving of children of the street. The Serbian government adopted this strategy in April 2009.*

Other international and domestic regulations, strategies and action plans that can be connected with the issue of improving access to education of Roma women, are related to the protection of child rights, gender equality and fight against discrimination.

The Article 32 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that the right of the child is to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that could be hazardous or that could interfere with the child's education or that could be harmful to the child's health or physical, spiritual, moral or social development.

Our country is a signatory of the *UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* which defines what constitutes discrimination against the women and prescribes what should be done at the national level to end this discrimination. The Convention defines discrimination against women as "making any distinction, exclusion or restriction based on sex which has the effect or purpose to reduce or deny women the recognition, enjoyment or practice of human rights and fundamental freedoms, regardless of marital status, and on the basis of equality between men and women in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other plan."

On the basis of a report on the implementation of the Convention, which our country has submitted, and based on reports of non-governmental organizations on the state of women's rights in Serbia, in 2007 the United Nations Committee issued the Guidelines for the promotion of women in different areas. Some of these requirements are directly related to improving the situation of Roma in education.

► **30. The Committee requests the State party to begin the process of collecting the data necessary to establish a clear basis for monitoring the actual realization of the rights of women and girls to education without discrimination. The Committee recommends undertaking urgent measures in order to ensure equal access to education for both sexes, at all levels of education. The Committee requests that special attention is focused on achieving equal access to education for marginalized groups of women and girls, especially from the Roma minority communities,**

with special emphasis on primary education. The Committee also recommends that literacy programs and vocational trainings are provided for Roma women, especially the elderly and illiterate ones, and for other marginalized groups of women who are in a similar situation¹⁷.

In the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals which the UN member states have signed, there are two targets that are related to the right to quality education for Roma girls: Achieving universal primary education and Promoting gender equality (elimination of gender inequality in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015).

The *Law on Prohibition of Discrimination* that exists in our country prohibits discrimination on gender basis. The *Law on Gender Equality*, which aims to promote full participation of women and men in a society, is being prepared. *National Strategy for Empowerment of Women and Improvement of Gender Equality (2008 - 2014)*, adopted in 2009, is a strategic document of the Government of the Republic of Serbia which defines the policy of equal opportunities.

However, despite the listed preconditions which are reflected in the existence of strategic documents that specifically treat or include Roma issues, and generally available budget and donor funds, individual projects, programs and measures have been implemented in the past three years in Serbia, as part of NAP's¹⁸, but a stable system has not yet been established that would include:

- Regular and transparent allocations for the implementation of NAP's from the budget of the Republic of Serbia;
- Allocations from the budget of local governments for financing local action plans (LAP);
- The existence of structures whose jurisdiction, as well as mechanisms for implementation of action plans at national and local level, are clearly defined, including clearly defined way of inter-sector cooperation;
- Existence of indicators for evaluating NAP implementation;
- Existence of structures for NAP monitoring and evaluation;
- Existence of mechanisms to review the documents adopted on the basis of indicators on implementation so far¹⁹.

¹⁷ Concluding Comments of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Serbia – 38th session, May 14th – Jun 1st, 2007.

¹⁸ NAPs - National action plans for improving the position of Roma in education, employment, housing and health adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia in 2005

¹⁹ Annual Report of the League for the Decade of Roma for 2007, Information Center for Minority Rights, 2008

As for the laws and conventions governing education, protecting the rights of children, women and other marginalized groups, there is still a gap between what is regulated and to what extent the existing regulations and recommendations are applied in practice. For example, although primary education (which includes preparatory pre-school period) is mandatory, we are still faced with the fact that a large percentage of children, especially Roma, are not covered by education or do not complete primary school. Also, although it is stated that the compulsory primary education is free, in practice it is not actually free for the parents.

To make the laws, strategies and action plans fulfill their purpose, it is necessary to implement them after their adoption.

And finally, from the above analysis of existing regulations that are associated with the issue of support for Roma girls in better access to education, it is to be noted that the issue of specific and vulnerable position of Roma women in various segments of society, including education, is underrepresented. It is therefore necessary to ensure the existing and future laws, regulations, strategies and action plans which regulate the issues of Roma to be gender sensitive in order to take into account the specific position of Roma women.

Recommendations

In order to increase the chances for Roma girls to finish primary school, and generally to improve educational level of Roma girls and later women, the basic directions in the field of public policy that Novi Sad Humanitarian Center recommends are:

- In the process of drafting regulations, policies and measures related to improving the situation of Roma, working groups and decision makers should take into account the specifics of the position of Roma women in order to provide regulations, policies and measures that are gender sensitive, and that are matching the needs and potentials of Roma girls hence contributing to the improvement of their position;
- During implementation of policies and measures at all levels it is necessary to carry out activities aimed at overcoming existing gender inequality, facilitating integration and promoting equal status of Roma men and women;
- It is necessary to regularly monitor and conduct evaluation of the effects of implemented measures and activities from the aspect of the benefits and impact on Roma women and men and, according to the needs, modify existing measures and activities so they could contribute to improving the position of both sexes to the best extent possible;
- Existing structures of government - national, provincial and local - need to find mechanisms and provide adequate financial resources which would ensure that the laws, strategies and action plans related to better position of Roma girls, and generally of Roma children in education, are implemented in practice. Special attention should be put on respecting the law on compulsory primary education.

When it comes to concrete measures to improve the educational level of Roma girls, NSHC proposes the following:

- Local actors involved with education or position of the Roma (representatives of educational institutions, Roma coordinators, assistants, Roma activists), together with the local, regional and republican governmental structures, should organize permanent activities with aim to raise awareness among the Roma about the importance of education for all children. Special emphasis should be put on the importance of education for Roma girls, the consequences of poor education to women, and on the benefits and opportunities that education provides, as well as the rights and duties of parents regarding the education of children. Awareness raising and motivating activities should be implemented with the older members of the Roma community especially parents) and with the children, i.e. girls who often

accept tradition and leaving school as something usual. It would be useful to include celebrities who enjoy the confidence of the Roma community in this campaign, especially prominent Roma women and men. Implementation of awareness campaigns needs to include the media, especially television, and use the “outreach” approach with as many activities in the Roma community itself.

- It is necessary to expand the capacities of preschool institutions and provide a free all-day stay for Roma children at earlier ages, not just during the mandatory preschool program. This is certainly considered one of the most important measures when it comes to improving the educational status of Roma as early involvement in educational programs can overcome the negative aspects of social deprivation, including poor language skills environment. In this way children would be more prepared for school and / or attending classes. For girls who attend primary school that would be of particular benefit because they would not have to stay away from school in order to look after younger brothers or sisters for which an educational institution would take care. Local, provincial and republican governments should provide funds for implementation of these measures, either from their budgets, or with the assistance from the donors.
- Local, provincial and republic governments, foreign and domestic donors, should support or continue supporting the programs that have proved to be successful in better preparing of Roma children for school and better monitoring of teaching, such as the methodology “Step by Step” and similar inclusive approaches. In these programs special emphasis should be put on support to Roma girls. These programs need to be implemented in educational institutions or, until that is achieved, they can be implemented by non-governmental organizations that already have experience in cooperation with educational institutions.
- Local, provincial and republic structures of government in cooperation with NGOs and with the support of donors should provide free textbooks, stationary and meals for the Roma children in primary school.
- The management, teaching and other school staff should be informed, educated and sensitized on specific problems the Roma children, especially girls, are facing in education and upbringing. They should also be informed on discrimination and gender equality issues with aim to decrease prejudices towards the Roma community and to create better respond to the educational and psychological needs of Roma girls. This should be done with support from the Ministry of Education and non-governmental organizations that already have years of experience in this area. It is particularly important to put adequate emphasis on the psychological support to Roma girls in overcoming adolescent and other crises, with the aim of reducing dropout of Roma girls from primary and secondary level education.

- Schools should adequately and timely respond to any occurrence of discrimination and promote tolerance among all students (both Roma and non-Roma) through various activities: peer educations on tolerance, prejudices, stereotypes and gender equality, provision of conditions and motivation to Roma girls and boys to participate in extracurricular school activities, etc.
- Local, provincial and republic structures of government should provide scholarships for elementary and secondary school education of Roma girls and boys, in which the special quota would be provided for Roma girls, with aim of reducing the difference in level of education of Roma women, compared both to Roma men and to women from the majority population.
- Local, provincial and republic governments should provide support to Roma activists and organizations that advocate for better position of Roma (financial support, political, support in education and the like). In addition to support for the formation of new ones, it is necessary to encourage networking and connections among the existing Roma women’s associations in Serbia, and their connections with regional networks to exchange experience.
- The state should open the issue of adolescent and contracted marriages and adopt clearly defined procedures that would reduce this phenomenon to a minimum, and provide mechanisms to protect the basic human rights of Roma girls.
- Affirmative action should be introduced for educated Roma women through provision of employment or other support by a local community as a positive example for the Roma community.
- Authorities at all levels should take measures that aim at overcoming prejudices of the majority population towards Roma and decrease their isolation, thus contributing to the successful integration of Roma women and men in building of a tolerant society.

About NSHC

Novi Sad Humanitarian Center (NSHC) is a nonprofit, charitable organization founded in 1998. in Novi Sad. NSHC's mission is to contribute to the creation of humane society through provision of assistance to vulnerable and marginalized groups, development of civil society, research and education. In cooperation with governmental and non-governmental sector NSHC contributes to poverty reduction, health promotion, the development of informal education, improvement of social policy and employment policy in Serbia.

Since its foundation NSHC implemented various projects to support the Roma population in Serbia, with the aim of improving their education, living standards and social integration. Activities which NSHC is most involved in are literacy improvement, inclusion of Roma children in regular school system, support in education, psychosocial assistance and support in the economic empowerment of Roma families, and health education.

In the last four years NSHC is active in the field of advocacy for the education of Roma children in Vojvodina. Through various projects, NSHC facilitated the development of local action plans for improvement of Roma education in 11 municipalities in Vojvodina. NSHC also engages volunteers who help the group of children from the RAE' population in education and social integration.

About CARE

CARE is international organization has more than decade of experience in implementing community-based programming throughout the North West Balkans region. CARE works to enhance citizen empowerment through programs in income generation, civil society strengthening, peace building. In designing and implementing its programming, CARE integrates an emphasis on advocacy, rights-based approaches (RBA), commitment to civil society strengthening and gender and diversity. Care's programming approaches are based on principles of partnership, empowerment and participation in addressing poverty and social injustice.

CARE's projects in Serbia started in 1994, and were related to emergency response and reconstruction assistance. Since 2000, CARE have been implemented various developmental projects such as projects which contribute to empowerment and integration of the Roma in the area of education, employment and development of Roma communities, antitrafficking projects, projects with the purpose of improvement of reproductive health, youth projects - aimed to develop tolerance and activism, and reduce xenophobia, and projects which promote the norms of gender equality, healthy life styles and prevention of violence.