



MULTIPLE DISCRIMINATION – GENDER CHALLENGES: THE SITUATION OF YOUNG EDUCATED ROMANI WOMEN

Tatjana Peric, PhD Cand.
Social Research Fellow of the ERSTE Foundation

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METHODOLOGY

- Research project “Expectations vis-à-vis exclusion: Young educated Roma in the labor markets of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina”.
- Project developed within the ERSTE Foundation Fellowship for Social Research 2013, and hosted by the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization.
- In-depth semi-structured interviews with young women and men from Roma communities in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- Focus on higher education and employment.
- University students, or young women and men who graduated no later than 2005.
- This presentation shows selected preliminary findings with regards to multiple discrimination of young educated women from Roma communities.
- To date, a total of 21 interviews with young women (9 from 8 locations in BiH and 12 from 8 locations in Serbia).



GENERAL RECOGNITION OF MULTIPLE DISCRIMINATION:

“It is definitely not easy, and many people in our society perceive women differently than men. If a man were in my place... If I were a man, with the capacity I have, I would have surely gotten somewhere. I definitely think that the fact that I am a woman blocks me a lot. Because, firstly, our society is less open to women. I am not talking about Romani women only, but about women in general, there are few women in any positions. Especially we, Romani women – because we are women, because we are Roma... In that sense, things are not easy or simple for me, but I am hoping, since I am a part of the feminist movement, that we will be able to do something about it.” *(Young woman from BiH)*



GENERAL RECOGNITION OF MULTIPLE
DISCRIMINATION:

“We do not have the kind of freedom, under quotation marks, that other people have, especially young women, girls. Love is forbidden for us. I do not know if you know that our girls marry young, however I simply had an attitude [against] it since I was a child, and I was also lucky because my brothers started going to school first.”

(Young woman from Bosnia)



PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROMA IDENTITY BY OUTSIDERS:

“Most people have a very stereotypical opinion about Roma, and it is definitely all the worst. So, when they meet someone who is eloquent, who knows about all the trends, and who is educated, and when you tell them you are a Romani woman, they stop and then they ask: ‘How come? You are probably not a real one. Someone in your family must be Bosniak, you must be from an interethnic marriage?’ No, I am not, I am a child of a Roma family.”

(Young woman from Bosnia)



PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROMA IDENTITY BY
OUTSIDERS:

”Recently we had a population census, and I was working as one of the interviewers. I was at a woman’s place, to interview her, we are about to sit down, and then she tells me: ‘I am just going to close the door, so that a Gypsy woman cannot come in.’ Then I told her, ‘Sorry, lady, but she is already in here.’”

(Young woman from Bosnia)



PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ROMA IDENTITY BY
OUTSIDERS:

“When the media talk about us, they say “Roma”, and when they talk about other artists they say only “artists”, and for that reason, from now on, I forbid the media but also anyone else to say “Romani artist” – no, I am XY, an artist. Isn’t that enough?”

(Young woman from Bosnia)



DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT:

”Then he told me: ‘You have a strange name. How come you have that first name and family name?’ and then he asked me about my ethnicity. I told him what I am, Roma. Then he said that he does not believe my CV and that he will check it all out, and at that moment I did not know what to say – whether I should get up and leave, whether I should have an argument with him, whether I should stay dignified... So after that, perhaps I made a mistake in other interviews, when I would tell them straight away: ‘You know what, I am a Romani woman. If you have a problem with that, perhaps we should not continue this conversation.’”

(Young woman from Serbia)



DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION:

“I tried to get a job as a promoter, however I came to the interview and I did not make it. Over the phone it all went well, all is great, they need to hire a lot of people, however I did not make it”.

(Young woman from Bosnia)

“I wanted to continue education in the field of tourism, or to get training as a flight attendant. That was something that I wanted to do. Nevertheless, I was hampered there, I have to stay, by my father, because he said: 'Then you will never be at home for your family.'”

(Young woman from Serbia)



DISCRIMINATION IN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT:

“I did not have any support because there were all sorts of stories going around about me: ‘X is not working,’ ‘X has not been to school,’ ‘X will just get married anyway’ and so on.”

(Young woman from Bosnia)

“I want to tell you about a strange reaction people had when I started working at the municipality. I used to be quite skinny before, and then I gained some weight, and the first thing people [at work] asked me was: ‘Are you pregnant?’, after that: ‘And you are not married yet?’ Nope. ‘And you are going to university?’ I do.”

(Young woman from Bosnia)



DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT:

“Our municipality is bragging about hiring a Romani woman – who works as a cleaner....”

(Young woman from Bosnia)

“I had to serve coffee all the time. I was always asked to do so, even though there was a person whose job was to do that. It was a problem for me, because at first I also did not know how to carry cups of coffee on a tray. Eventually I said to myself – well, isn’t that great, I made progress, I learnt something with this job – now I can serve coffee without spilling it!”

(Young woman from Serbia)



FINDING EMPLOYMENT PRIMARILY ON ROMA ISSUES:

“If there is any work, it is on Roma issues. I work with Romani children. Though I study pre-school education, like any of the other girls working with me, it is me who works with Romani children, and my salary is lower, because I am a Roma assistant, and they are pre-school teachers, and my salary is half of theirs.”

(Young woman from Bosnia)



LACK OF OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUNG WOMEN:

“I feel really used by many Roma leaders who treat me like ‘You are a little girl, you know nothing, just sit there and type, translate and write projects, while I will reap all the benefits... and why should you complain, your name will be there, isn’t that great!’ OK, it is, but I do not want to do that any more.”

(Young woman from Serbia)

“You know how it goes, Romani male leaders keep information for themselves. In that way, I never found out about scholarships [for Roma university students].”

(Young woman from Bosnia)



LACK OF OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUNG WOMEN:

“I have much more knowledge, compared to male presidents and leaders in our canton. Some of them did not even complete primary school, or at best they have a three-year high school. I consider myself more competent compared to them. I know how to write formal requests, send emails, and they cannot even spell properly. I do not want to underestimate anyone, but I am just being honest.”

(Young woman from Bosnia)



GENDER AND CAREER:

“So they talk about my age and how I am not yet married... Not just the Roma community, but generally the overall community looks at it differently: ‘Well, isn’t it time for marriage and family?’ But I do not know yet... Of course I want that, but I also want to finish these things that I started, and I want to have a career.”

(Young woman from Bosnia



LACK OF ROLE MODELS:

“My mother was my role model, because I kept saying to myself: ‘I do not want to suffer like my mother.’”

(Young woman from Bosnia)

“For me it was really difficult that there was no one in my family whom I could look up to, as no one in my family was a university graduate. That made everything more difficult for me, because in my case it was never taken for granted that I would graduate, it was not even taken for granted that I would enroll university at all.”

(Young woman from Serbia)



EMERGING ROLE MODELS:

“Mrs XY made it in life. She is the author of many books and dictionaries, and I hope that she will start teaching at the Faculty of Philosophy. And if she even gets that state job [she applied for]... I think that there should also be a Romani woman working for the Ministry of Education, that would be fair, because whom can I talk to, as a Romani woman, if I have any problems at the university?”

(Young woman from Bosnia)



BEING ROLE MODELS THEMSELVES:

“At that point it had already started, with the newspapers and interviews, everyone knew who I was and what I was doing. Then a journalist came into my Roma mahala and asked the little girls there what they would like to be when they grew up, and they all said they would like to be painters like me. I did not do anything special, I only had an exhibition, but the girls saw me as successful, and then they said themselves: ‘Look, X made it, so can I.’”

(Young woman from Bosnia)



BEING ROLE MODELS THEMSELVES:

“There was a situation here in the settlement where I live. There is no water there in the summer, and we have to go elsewhere to collect water from a public tap. There was this man who once made fun of me, ‘Look at you, you cannot even lift a pail of water – not everything in life will be light as paper!’ But today, this man says to his daughter: ‘Look where X is and how she made it that far? Now you have to do it too!’”

(Young woman from Bosnia)

