



**AMALIPE CENTER
FOR INTERETHNIC DIALOGUE
AND TOLERANCE**

PREVENTING EARLY MARRIAGES



Preventing Early Marriages



Amalipe Center



ΚΟΙΝΩΝΙΚΗ ΟΡΓΑΝΩΣΗ ΥΠΟΣΤΗΡΙΞΗΣ ΕΝΕΩΝ



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FOR INTERETHNIC DIALOGUE
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CONTENTS

INSTEAD OF A PREFACE. Preventing early/forced marriages in the Roma community – a mission possible?	7
PART ONE. Early marriages – an interdisciplinary problem	15
International studies on early marriages	16
Scope and spread	18
Legal, normative and the institutional framework for preventing early/forced marriages in Bulgaria	21
The Roma community in Bulgaria	21
The Bulgarian legislation on marriage, family and child protection issues	22
Administrative and institutional framework	24
Public policies for preventing early/forced marriages in the Roma community	26
Attitudes of social workers and field workers	27
Legal, normative and the institutional framework for Preventing Early/Forced Marriages in Romania	30
The Roma community in Romania	32
Romanian legislation governing marriage, family and child protection	34
Public policies and institutions at national level related to the prevention of forced/early marriages	36
Public policies related to forced/early marriages at regional and local level	43
Early and forced marriages from the perspective of traditional Roma communities – evaluation of the conducted interviews	51
Early/forced marriage patterns in the interviewed communities	52
Legal, normative and institutional framework related to early marriages in Greece	60
The Roma in Greece	60
The Greek legislation governing marriage, family and child protection	60
Public policies, surveys and institutions related to the prevention of forced/early marriages	69
PART TWO. Survey on the family attitudes of the Roma community	73
Methodology of research	73
Roma households	80
Living conditions	87
Marriages and partnerships	91
Attitude towards partnerships	102

PART THREE. Local campaigns for prevention of early marriages: motivated activists – organized groups and communities	111
Participants	111
Scope	112
Rakovski Municipality	113
Peshtera	116
Rakitovo	119
Kuklen and Perushtitsa	122
Kardam, Popovo Municipality	124
Peshtera	125
Rakitovo	126
Kuklen	127
Kardam	128
Vodoley, Municipality of Veliko Tarnovo	130
Tundja Municipality	132
Vratsa Municipality	134
Nadezhda neighbourhood, Sliven	135
Nov Pat neighbourhood, Vidin	138
Regional planning of social services, 2010: the Roma component and the prevention of early marriages in the new regional strategies	145
Social services and the interventions for the inclusion of vulnerable ethnic communities with focus on Roma	146
Access to existing service for the groups at risk from Roma community	148
Targeted measures: Centres for development of vulnerable ethnic communities and mediators	151
Employing mediators from the Roma community:	154
 PART FOUR. Preventing early marriages today: investing in the future of the Roma community	159
Early marriages in Bulgaria	160
Early marriages in Romania	162
Early marriages in Greece	163
Principles and models for the prevention of the early marriages	164
 Annex 1. DECLARATION TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE POLICY FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION OF ROMA WOMENI	169
 Abbreviations	172

INSTEAD OF A PREFACE

Preventing early/forced marriages in the Roma community – a mission possible?

Early marriages in the Roma community (the point is actually about cohabitation, family creation and not about “marriage”, because the legal act of marriage is not present or in most cases even not possible) is a topic, which is currently attracting the attention of the so called “general public” and “public opinion”. On the one hand, early marriages are often combined with “arranged marriages” and even “forced marriages”: usually it is the parents who initiate this form of cohabitation. Very frequently, this leads to “dropping out”, i.e. to early school leaving, which is related to limiting the further appropriate social realization of the person. Early marriages are usually followed by “early births”, because – at least with the traditional Roma families, as well as the marginalized ones) the married woman is expected to prove that she can give birth: she is highly appreciated as the continuer of the family and if she cannot fulfil this role, she has to bear one of the heaviest stigmas. Frequently, different forms of domestic violence, divorces, and diseases among these young mothers accompany early marriages, etc. Therefore, we could see a whole series of negative phenomena, to which any European society is (or at least should be) painfully sensitive. On the other hand, early Roma marriages seem out of the ordinary, exotic and inexplicable: a remainder of the “non-European marriage model” (typical for the people to the east of the Trieste – St. Petersburg line of John Hajnal). This “exotics” is often related to the stigmatization of the whole Roma community as a backward and unable for development generator of children. It is accompanied by the even more definite ignoring of the truth that, not so long ago, early marriages were typical for the majority of the nations to the east of Trieste – St. Petersburg line (and a little earlier – for all European nations), and by neglecting the fact that not all Roma groups, families and social strata practice early marriages.

As a result of the above, the public interest in early Roma marriages in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries (as well as the rest of the countries where Roma people live) is sustainably high. This is usually related with the generation of many myths and stereotypes (buying and selling of young Roma girls, common practice of giving birth at 12 years of age etc.): they often result from the lack of information

and the lack of surveys in this area; as well as by the acute lack of an adequate discussion (involving representatives of the Roma community). In all those situations, these myths and stereotypes do not help for the solution of the problem with early marriages.

The high public interest in a certain problem usually leads to the formation and implementation of a comprehensive policy for its overcoming, but this is not the case with early marriages in the Roma community: the relevant institutions are often passive and do not react because of the absurd excuse that this is “Roma tradition and Roma mentality”, and as a result a comprehensive policy on the issue is missing.

In contrast to the interest of the general public, a discussion on early marriages rarely takes place within the Roma community. Roma NGOs, formal and informal leaders and activists are avoiding this issue, because they are afraid that may enforce the stigma on the community, and often because of doubt, that they could oppose this practice. This is another barrier for overcoming early marriages and the accompanying negative effects of them.

In this context, Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance (Bulgaria), Liga Pro Europa (Romania) and the Association for Social Support of Europe – ARSIS (Greece), initiated in 2009 the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages”. The project was supported by DG Justice of the European Commission (within the frames of the Daphne Programme 2009) and was implemented in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece in 2010. The project did not have the ambition to fight windmills and to overcome completely the practice of early marriages: something which cannot be achieved in one year. Its goal was modest – to analyze the state-of-art of the problem and to table the question (in the Roma community and to the relevant institutions) and to check on field several types of activities for the prevention of early cohabitations. We believed that this could accelerate the objective process of overcoming early marriages and modernization of the Roma community, as well as to provoke a comprehensive policy in this area – at national and European level.

We approached the issue of early marriages with the idea that they are not a primeval and unchangeable part of the Roma culture, they are not a question of specific “Roma” tradition and its overcoming will not endanger the Roma identity. Early family creation is a patriarchal, not Roma tradition: all people in their pre-modern development have created families at early ages. The fact, which today is being called by many “Roma customs” related to the pre-marriage arrangements and the creation of family among some Roma groups in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece, were widespread among the ethnic Bulgarians, Romanians and Greeks only two or three generations ago. Moreover, the practice of early marriages has already disappeared

within some Roma groups in the mentioned countries and that did not lead to their assimilation or depersonalization.

We also approached the issue of early marriages with the idea that the Roma community should be an active participant in the efforts for overcoming this patriarchal tradition. Influencing the community only from “the outside” (through the relevant institutions, which remain “distant” and unrecognized by the community, through the law enforcement authorities etc.) is not sufficient and will not have any effect if the Roma community is not involved: through its informal leaders, through its educated representative, etc. This is not only an ethical and human rights issue but also a question of effectiveness.

Finally, we approached the issue of early marriages with the idea that overcoming them (where they still exist) will give a chance for the realization of the young Roma and will support the whole modernization of the Roma community. It is not the more severe administrative penalties that will solve the problem of early marriages, but the social work with the families and most of all, the support to the efforts of successful Roma people to change their local communities.

Therefore, for the implementation of the project we chose an approach combining:

- Differentiated impact: as the conducted survey showed, the problem with early marriages is not common for all Roma and has different place in different Roma groups, regions and social strata. The motivation of the different participants is also different: parents, young people, etc. This diversity of the conditions requires differentiated activities to achieve an impact, relevant to the specifics of the local community. Therefore, we supported local campaigns for preventing early/forced marriages that proposed activities corresponding to the local specifics;
- Innovation: the existing practice in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece shows that the activities of the institutions for preventing early/forced marriages are not effective within the Roma community and are needed innovative activities, services and approaches. For this reason, the project tested innovative activities, organized by successful Roma people in 10 local communities. The effect of these activities has been surveyed with the purpose to widen and apply them in other communities;
- Strengthening social work at the local level in the Roma community: the current trend in combating early marriages relies on administrative penalties, while social work with the Roma families is often formally organized and reduced to mere description of cases. Community-based services are organized rarely in the Roma neighbourhoods. For this reason we focused on stronger social work at the local level in the Roma community by supporting the organization of social work in 17 Roma neighbourhoods;

- Collaboration: a negative practice in the three countries is the lack of effective collaboration between the relevant institutions regarding the issue of early marriages (e.g. Departments for Child Protection, schools, municipalities, religious institutions), as well as between the institutions and the Roma community. Therefore, we tried to build local partnerships in those municipalities, where we held campaigns on preventing early/forced marriages by involving Roma leaders, social workers, teachers and etc.

Using this approach we implemented several types of activities:

1. SURVEY ON THE STATE-OF-ART OF THE PROBLEM “EARLY/ARRANGED MARRIAGES” IN BULGARIA, ROMANIA AND GREECE

As up to now no focused scientific research on early marriages in the Roma community has been conducted, as for the good planning of the prevention campaigns we needed a reliable information on this issue, during the first months of the project was conducted a survey on the phenomenon of “early marriages” in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece. It included several activities. The national representative sociological survey on family attitudes of the Roma in Bulgaria involved almost 3000 people from 595 households in segregated Roma neighbourhoods. The survey presented a clear picture of the state-of-art of the problem of early marriages among the main Roma groups in different regions in Bulgaria, dethroning many of the widespread myths in this area. It revealed the main trends in family attitudes of the modern Roma, the motivation of parents and young people and the ways for achieving an effective impact.

Another activity was the review on the legislative, normative and institutional framework, related with “early marriages” in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece. The review showed the strengths, but also the existing omissions in the three countries.

Extremely useful was the survey on the attitudes of the field workers (social workers, teachers etc.), conducted in the three countries. It revealed the views of the officers in the institutions who directly work on the field with the communities, where early marriages occur. More precisely: it showed the different views of the social workers, because it was found that the views of the social workers and the teachers are significantly different, and often there is no communication between them.

2. IMPLEMENTING LOCAL CAMPAIGNS FOR PREVENTING EARLY/FORCED MARRIAGES

Local Roma activists implemented coordinated campaigns in the relevant Roma communities in 10 municipalities in Bulgaria. They implemented a wide range of activities: community discussions, individual and family consultations, door-to-door campaigns, and a “community conference” (an adapted method for working in the

Roma community of the so called “family group conference”, etc.). The achieved results went far beyond the expectations. They clearly showed that social work, which is implemented inside the community by successful Roma representatives, could help not only to solve particular cases, but also to change attitudes. They showed that the discussion on early marriages could be and should be conducted even in the most conservative Roma groups.

An important additional result was the recognition of the activists, who conducted the local campaigns (most of them – young educated Roma boys and girls), as role models for the rest young people in the relevant communities and as authorities for the adults. This fact showed the necessity of targeted support for turning successful Roma into models for their communities: a state policy in this area is still needed. In particular – the achievements showed the necessity of institutionalizing a position “inside” the community, engaged with the organization of field social work in partnership with other institutions.

3. BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE INSTITUTIONS WORKING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

The municipal Departments for Child Protection, the schools, the community centres and the local municipal representatives, as well as the informal Roma leaders were informed about the carried out campaigns, and they actively participated in the activities at the local level. They participated in special trainings for working in the Roma community: it appeared that none of the universities or any other educational or training institution provided such knowledge, even though it was extremely necessary for effective fieldwork.

4. PUBLIC AWARENESS-RAISING

Awareness-raising campaigns on the phenomenon of “early marriages” and the necessity of overcoming it were organized in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece. The campaigns targeted the main actors, working in the Roma community – NGO activists, social workers, teachers, journalists, municipal administration officers – and their aim was to motivate them to implement activities for preventing early/forced marriages. For more successful implementation of these activities were prepared and printed educational materials, which were already used in more than 30 schools in Bulgaria and Romania.

Specific emphasis of this activity for Bulgaria was of the incorporation of the issue of early marriages in the process of social services planning. The elaboration of the regional strategies for social services coincided with the preparation of the local campaigns and the teams that organized them managed to propose and justify the need of incorporating the activities for preventing early/forced marriages in the relevant regional strategies. This has created preconditions for continuing these activities in the upcoming years.

An important feature of the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages” was that it was implemented in partnership with the main stakeholders in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece. The respective Ministries of Labour and Social Policies, the Agencies for Child Protection in Bulgaria and Greece, the State Agency on Roma in Romania, the National Council for Collaboration on Ethnic and Demographic Issues in Bulgaria, the Chief Prosecution and a number of other institutions actively participated in the work of the Steering Committee of the project and the implementation of the main activities. The preliminary conclusions of the present report were consulted with them and their comments were taken into account in the elaboration of the final version of the report. The established partnership and interaction between the above-mentioned key national institutions and non-governmental organisations from these countries show great promise for a sustainable and comprehensive policy, targeted at overcoming early marriages and supporting the modernization of the Roma community.

The present report presents the main conclusions of the activities that were implemented within the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages”. PART ONE reviews the legal, normative and the institutional framework for preventing early/forced marriages in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece. The attitudes of the different groups of field workers to the issue are also presented. PART TWO is about the national sociological survey on the family attitudes of the Roma in Bulgaria and its main outcomes. PART THREE presents the main activities, implemented within the local campaigns on preventing early/forced marriages and analyses the achievements. This part also describes the process of elaborating the regional strategies for social services (that took place in 2010) and the extent to which preventing early/forced marriages was incorporated in it: consistent efforts were undertaken within the project in that area, which has led to definite results. The main conclusions, recommendation and guidelines for further work – at the national and European level – are presented in PART FOUR.

The implementation of the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages” showed that currently within the Roma communities in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece, there is a favourable environment for overcoming early/forced cohabitations. The conducted surveys outlined several explicit interrelated processes: modern attitudes gradually start to dominate over the traditional ones in most Roma groups, the share of the modern Roma families is not a small one anymore, and even among the most conservative Roma groups there are young educated Roma, who would like to support the development of their communities. The implemented local campaigns proved that strengthening social work in the traditional and marginalized Roma communities, implemented by the educated representatives of those communities in collaboration with the main stakeholders, may resolve particular cases of early/forced marriages and even bring change to the attitudes.

In this favourable environment, it is necessary to pursue systematic policies, supporting the entire development (modernization) of the Roma community, the inclusion/integration and the empowerment of the Roma. Those policies would not be successful without the active participation of the Roma, and without the commitment of the national governments. The active support on behalf of the European Commission for implementing such policies is also imperative.

The authors of the present report, as well as every participant in the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages” truly believe that their modest work will contribute to the achievement of these results so eagerly expected by all of us!

PART ONE

Early marriages – an interdisciplinary problem

In the beginning of this research, the term “marriage” used for its purposes should be defined. Undoubtedly, the term “marriage” from a purely legal point of view does not encompass all situations of early and forced marriages, object of this research. The only “marriage” recognised by the law in the three countries included in the project, is the union concluded under the terms and procedure of the respective Family Code. The term “marriage”, however, is used in the research as married life in the Roma community is based on the willingness for creating a family, the common life of the spouses, the adherence to the established ethical norms in the community, the need of rites and rituals, which are part of the concept of “marriage” and represent in no way the cohabitation (concubinage) – a matter of personal and mutual choice, based on substantial agreements between the cohabitating people, characteristic for many segments of modern society (for example, among many young couples in Bulgaria and Romania).

Essentially, the creation of a family in the Roma community has most of the characteristics of a marriage (with the only – though of vital importance – difference, that it is not registered before the relevant institutions), and almost none of the features of cohabitation. A number of international documents (part of which mentioned below), treating the issue of early/child/forced marriages also underline that this is a marital union in essence, which is not registered before the law. This does not change its main characteristics and does not decrease the seriousness of its consequences: with regard to the development, the future social realisation and the rights of the child.

This part represents a brief review of some fundamental researches on the issue of early/forced marriages, an analysis of the legal and normative framework, related to these issues in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece, as well as undertaken/not undertaken activities so far for preventing and coping with the problem.

International studies on early marriages

The issue of early/forced marriages at global and European level is reflected in a number of studies and surveys conducted by the UN agencies (United Nations Population Fund, UNICEF, HABITAT), research centres and institutes, the Council of Europe, independent experts. The role of different institutions of the European Union in exploring and solving the problem with early/forced marriages becomes increasingly important. In the chapter is presented a brief review of conducted researches and studies¹. It shows that early and forced marriages are an interdisciplinary problem related to education, social environment, health, cultural practices and traditions, poverty, participation in public life and personal development. This problem should in no way be related only to the Roma community and should not be discussed as an integral part of the Roma culture.

A study conducted by the Directorate General of Human Rights, Strasbourg, 2005, prepared by Edwige, Rude-Antoine, Doctor of Law, Research Officer, CERES/CNRS – Forced Marriages in Council of Europe Member States, gives the following definitions in outlining the scope of the problem²:

- “Forced marriage” is an umbrella term covering marriage as slavery, arranged marriage, traditional marriage, marriage for reasons of custom, expediency or perceived respectability, child marriage, early marriage, fictitious, bogus or sham marriage, marriage of convenience, unconsummated marriage, putative marriage, marriage to acquire nationality and undesirable marriage – in all of which the concept of consent to marriage is at issue.
- Among the types of marriage listed there is considerable scope for overlap – hence the difficulty of defining precisely what is meant by “forced marriage”. It is not a term that has explicit legal content and it is defined differently in different countries.

This is probably because, in cases other than those where there is actual physical proof that a person’s freedom of consent has been denied by physical force or violence – eliminating any doubt that the marriage was forced – it is not always easy to ascertain the state of mind behind the explicit content of the marriage contract.

- Different types of marriage are arranged by family decision, determined by the cultural traditions and customs, and “arranged marriage” need not necessarily mean “forced marriage”. An arranged marriage depends on an “arran-

¹ For the purpose of this report, only a brief summary is presented here, and the whole text is available on the website of the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages”: www.romanibori.com.

² From here on the data are from the cited study, p. 7–11.

gement”, i.e. negotiation and conciliation between parents and children and between families and in-laws. In other words, in the tradition of arranged marriages, the families of the future spouses are understood to play a central role in arranging the marriage, but the choice of whether or not to marry rests with the spouses.

- In some parts of the world, traditional, custom-based and/or religious rules and practices may also play a significant role, so marriages continue to be celebrated according to established rituals and are not necessarily registered.
- In situations where marriage can take place between partners aged under 18, or indeed much younger, the question arises as to whether such young people are capable of taking an informed decision about a marriage partner and indeed about the implications of marriage. In that sense, matters little whether we refer to “child marriage” or “early marriage”, as in all such situations the definition of marriage involves at least one partner who has not attained physical, intellectual and emotional maturity, and has therefore been unable to express full consent to marriage.

A Report³ of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) takes a similar stand in determining the scope of the concept, by developing further the concept of “child marriages”. According to the document, child marriage is defined as the union of two persons at least one of whom is under eighteen years of age. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 20 November 1989, “a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”.

The report observes “that the whole issue of forced marriages hinges on the delicate balance between respect for cultural diversity and respect for human rights. In this instance however, considering the tragedies suffered by the victims, it is plain that human rights must not yield to the customs of a given community. Without stigmatising foreign communities, State authorities have an active duty to enforce human rights in their countries. It is a clear political issue of societal management and not a private matter confined within the family – or community – as might be claimed”. Suitable legislation is necessary though not sufficient to end these undesirable situations and the governments should make adequate efforts to guard against the marriages at issue, states the report.

Discussed as a whole, the analyzed international studies and surveys, as well as the relevant international legal instruments (of UN, Council of Europe, European Union), suggest a consolidation of the opinions and determining standards around the

³ Doc. 10590, 20 June 2005, Forced marriages and child marriages, Report, Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, Rapporteur: Mrs Rosmarie Zapfl-Helbling, Switzerland, Group of the European People’s Party. From here on the data are from the cited study, p. 11–15.

concept that every person has the right to marriage and children, that marriages between children (i.e. when one of the partners is under the legal age of marriage) cannot be allowed, as well as that marriage requires the parties to give free and informed consent in the presence of witnesses. It should in no way be considered, that the mere standardising of these conditions in the legislation is sufficient to guarantee effectively the freedom and choice related to marriage. The freedom to choose is especially threatened in the cases of early marriages due to the impossibility to guarantee whether the young person understands entirely the responsibility of marriage and family and is prepared for it.

Scope and spread

The practice of marrying girls at a young age is most common in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. However, in the Middle East, North Africa and other parts of Asia, marriage at or shortly after puberty is common among those living traditional lifestyles. There are also specific parts of West and East Africa and of South Asia where marriages much earlier than puberty are not unusual, while marriages of girls between the ages of 16 and 18 are common in parts of Latin America and in pockets of Eastern Europe.

In industrialized countries, few women marry before age 18; only 4% do so in the USA and 1% in Germany, for example. But in some parts of Central and Eastern Europe, early marriage survives; notably among Roma people and in Macedonia where 27% of the women who married in 1994 were aged between 15 and 19. Similar is the case in Albania, where families in rural areas, reduced to abject poverty by the post-Communist transition, encourage their daughters to marry early in order to catch potential husbands before they migrate to the cities in search of work, and to avoid the threat of kidnapping on the way to school. In most of Eastern Europe and the CIS, average age at marriage is in the low to mid-20s, implying some proportion in the teens⁴.

One problem in assessing the prevalence of early marriages is that so many are unregistered and unofficial and are not therefore counted as part of any standard data collection system. Very little country data exist about marriages under the age of 14, even less about those below age 10.

Globally, it is important to note that early marriage, and early childbearing, has been more or less abandoned by the wealthiest sections of society, even in poor and highly traditional countries. Virtually everywhere, poor women in rural areas tend to

⁴ UNICEF, *Innocenti Digest*, No 7 – Early Marriage, Child Spouses, March 2001, p. 5–8.

marry younger than those in urban areas, and educational levels also play a critical role⁵.

Customs surrounding marriage, including the desirable age and the way in which a spouse is selected, depend on a society's view of the family – its role, structure, pattern of life, and the individual and collective responsibilities of its members. The idea and function of “family” to the modern varies across the world and is in a state of constant evolution.

The basic difference in family patterns identified was between the traditional “familist” system and the modern “individualist” systems. The traditional system is characterized by extended families, communal households, plural mating, authoritarian exercise of power by the *paterfamilias*, young age at marriage, spouses chosen by elders, absorption of the newly-wed into an existing household, no non-household role or identity for women. In the familist model, fertility is deliberately maximized by marrying girls immediately after puberty. The family is the unit of economic production and is the only source of wealth, social status and security for its members. New children (especially boys) are needed to run the household and maintain the family's status.

In the “individualist” system, which is the norm in industrialized countries, the opposites generally apply. Societies eventually abandon the strategy of high fertility when mortality declines due to health improvements, and under the pressures of urbanization and modernization. The extended family begins to break up into nuclear components, and some couples leave for the towns. Individual wage labour replaces family-based production and instead of being an economic necessity, children become a “cost”. Women may join the labour force, and receive an education beyond that needed for household management. In these circumstances, marriage and childbearing may be postponed.

Many developing countries are part way through the “demographic transition”: witness recent declines in fertility. Parts of any national population – better-educated and better-off urban dwellers – may adopt the norms of the industrialized world, including later marriage and child bearing. However, other groups may continue in the old patterns. Extended and nuclear families may exist side by side, even in the same generation.

Old beliefs, customs and moral codes tend to persist during demographic transition, while new circumstances make only gradual inroads into actual practice. Since older women are more likely than men to be excluded from new ideas, they are often the last to abandon the ideas that framed their own lives.

Marriage patterns – alongside other aspects of family formation – are subject to acute “development” pressures such as declining incomes from the land, rapid

⁵ UNICEF, *Innocenti Digest*, No 7 – Early Marriage, Child Spouses, March 2001.

urbanization, population mobility, and the volatility of global markets, all of which are currently causing profound social upheaval and economic marginalization. The outcome for families is increasing fragmentation and the erosion of their extended structure. Families in the process of transition may, therefore, be caught between traditional and modern values. Men in search of work may join the individualist world in town; while the women they married in their teens, and their children, continue their traditional lives in the countryside⁶.

Currently, the Roma community in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece falls exactly in the above described situation. The national representative survey for Bulgaria, conducted under the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages”, showed significant differences in the prevailing family model, age and the way the family is created in different Roma groups, strata and generations. The conclusion, that the Roma community is in its transition from traditionality to modernity, respectively from the familist to the individualist family model, is substantiated in detail below in the report.

⁶ This subtheme as per UNICEF, *Innocenti Digest*, No 7 – Early Marriage, Child Spouses, March 2001, p. 5–8.

Legal, normative and the institutional framework for preventing early/forced marriages in Bulgaria

The Roma community in Bulgaria

Bulgaria is a country with a large Roma population, estimated between 400 000 and 900 000 people. The exact number of the Roma is difficult to determine, as many of them prefer to declare themselves to be Turks, Bulgarians or Vlachs. However, different sources suggest some estimates:

- According to the 2001 population Census, 370 908 people self-identify as Roma (4.8% of the population);
- According to a World Bank report from 2002, the Roma in Bulgaria are approximately 8.8% of the population, even a higher percentage is possible¹.
- According to Liègeois and other researchers the actual number of the Roma in our country is between 700 000 and 800 000 people².

These figures show that the Roma are about 10% of the population in the country and most probably are the largest minority. The Roma are the only ethnic group with positive population growth.

A characteristic feature of the Roma community is that it consists of several groups (and many subgroups) and strata, which suggest different approaches for intervention. The problems, main characteristics and the ways of interaction with one group are not necessarily the same with another. There are substantial differences between the different groups within the Roma community in two main areas: ethnic and social. From the perspective of ethnicity, the Roma community consists of four major groups:

YERLII (between 350 000 and 400 000 people)

They inhabit the whole territory of Bulgaria, living in various ethnic and social environments. A part of them lives in the big Roma ghettos (Fakulteta in Sofia, Nov Pat in Vidin, Nadezhda in Sliven, etc.). Another part of them lives in segregated Roma neighbourhoods (mahali) in smaller towns and villages. A third part is scattered

¹ Bulgaria: the Changing Profile of Poverty. Sofia: World Bank, 2002, 18.

² Liègeois, J.P. Roma, Gypsies, Travellers. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1994, 34.

among the rest of the population. The Yerlii speak Romanes. Part of them (mainly the younger generation) communicates mainly in Bulgarian. The Turkish speaking Yerlii quickly join the community of the Millet or are assimilated in the Turkish ethnic group. Most of the Yerlii are Orthodox Christians, and nearly one-third – Muslim. In the recent years, different Protestant Churches are especially active among them.

KALDARASHI (between 30 000 and 40 000 people)

They inhabit the whole territory of Bulgaria in scattered small groups. They live in Roma neighbourhoods in villages and smaller towns or scattered among the rest of the population, keeping the ties between them (i.e. preserving the local community). The Kaldarashi speak mainly Romanes and communicate in Romanes in the family. They are Orthodox Christians.

RUDARI (between 70 000 and 100 000 people)

They inhabit the whole territory of Bulgaria. They live in small segregated Roma neighbourhoods in villages and smaller towns or scattered among the rest of the population. The Rudari speak a variant of Romanian language, the younger generation communicating mainly in Bulgarian. Their religion is Orthodox Christianity.

MILLET (between 250 000 and 300 000 people)

They inhabit mainly Eastern Bulgaria and some regions of Central Bulgaria. Part of them lives in some of the big Roma ghettos (Stolipinovoin Plovdiv, Meden Rudnik in Bourgas, etc.). Another part lives in segregated Roma neighbourhoods in villages and smaller towns. The Roma of that group speak Turkish (some have limited knowledge of Romanes) and in family environment communicate mainly in Turkish. They are Muslims; among some of them some Protestant Churches have influence.

The Bulgarian legislation on marriage, family and child protection issues

The Bulgarian legislation prohibits marriage below the age of 16, and between the age of 16 and 18, marriage is allowed only with the consent of both adolescents and parents. In this respect, Bulgaria does not differ from most European countries.

LEGAL CAPACITY AND EXERCISE

Children under 14 years of age do not have legal capacity – a recognized by the law ability to express legally relevant will. Their actions or inactions do not bring forth legally valid result. For them and on their behalf legal actions are performed by their

legal representatives – parents or guardians and trustees. The law presumes that in this period a person has not reached the appropriate degree of maturity that enables him/her to realize and guide his/her actions through which he/she would obtain rights and undertake obligations.

Children aged 14–18 are minor. This period is a transitional age when mental and spiritual maturation takes place, which allows them to exercise rights and obligations in a limited way. The acts of minors are legally relevant if performed with the consent of their parents or guardians.

PENAL LAW

The Penal Code defines the legal age of consent for sexual intercourse – completed 14 years of age. Sexual intercourse with a girl under 14 years of age is considered a crime, regardless of whether the child has willingly participated or not. Upon completion of 14 years of age the law protects the child from unwilling sexual intercourse through the requirement to understand “the nature and meaning of the act”.

Crimes against youth are directly related to the tradition of arranged marriages. A person who, by abusing his parental power, compels a child of his, who has not accomplished 16 years of age, to live connubially with someone, is subject to punishment. Connubial life between an adult and a girl under the age of 16 is also considered as a crime. Inciting and facilitating such connubial cohabitation is also subject to punishment.

The marital ransom is considered a crime only if given for a girl under the age of 16. A parent or any other relative that received the ransom and allows his daughter or relative under the age of 16 to live connubially with someone is subject to punishment.

An important aspect is that, in case between the victim and the perpetrator is contracted marriage before the execution of the punishment or closing of the court investigation, no penal responsibility is borne. Thus, serious crimes are compensated if marriage is contracted between the perpetrator and the victim.

On the other hand, for every crime punished by imprisonment of less than 5 years, an agreement with the prosecution office may be contracted and then a punishment below the prescribed minimum will be imposed. Thus, the replacement of heavier punishments with much lighter ones becomes possible even in the absence of exclusive or multiple extenuating circumstances. Most of the crimes related to early/forced marriages fall into this category.

CIVIL LAW

The provisions of the Family Code stipulate that only civil marriage, contracted in the form prescribed by the Code, creates the effects which the law relates to marriage. Thus, not only the different religious and culturally determined rites and practices, but the newly established “cohabitation” does not bring forth any valid legal consequences. *Marriage can be contracted only under the mutual and free*

consent between an adult man and a woman, given in person and simultaneously before the appointed official in the given municipal administration.

By exception of the general rule, a legally recognized marriage is possible with a person at the age of 16³ only if important reasons impose this. In order to contract the marriage, a permission of the Regional Court is required.

According to the law, relations between spouses are built on the basis of mutual respect, common care for the family, understanding and fidelity. These personal relations between spouses are presumed to exist in the different forms of factual marriage, as these are the expected aspirations of two people who have decided to create a family. However, there are some peculiarities related to the consequences of legally recognized marriage, from the effects of which the couples, who have not contracted marriage, cannot benefit – privileges related to the order of inheritance, right to alimony, rights over the family residence, or on the belongings obtained during the marriage and others.

ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Law on Public Education require every child or adolescent aged between 7 and 16 to study in a school in the public education system, as for the indicated age attendance is only in the day form of education. For non-attendance of school are envisaged sanctions and penalties for the parents. The LPE prohibits married people or young mothers to study in the day form: they can study only in the evening or distance forms, provided they have completed 16 years of age. Thus, one of the first institutions that would establish the presence of an early marriage is the school: a situation that corresponds to the actual events, since almost in all cases an early marriage is related to leaving school (“dropping out”).

Every child (an individual under the age of 18 years) has the right to protection for his/her normal physical, mental, moral and social development and protection of his/her rights and interests. An obligation of every citizen, who becomes aware of a child in need of protection, is to report immediately to the Social Assistance Directorate, the State Agency for Child Protection or the Ministry of Interior. This obligation also applies when such information is obtained in the course of exercising a profession or occupation, which is bound by professional secret. The report may be submitted to the Social Assistance Directorate in an oral or written form or through gathering information by the social workers in the Directorate. The social worker examines and evaluates the reported case by collecting the necessary information from the family, the child, the school, nursery or kindergarten, the specialized institution, the

³ *De lege ferenda* in the part of the survey examining the theoretical treatments of the issue one could find a reasonable opinion that each marriage, where one of the parties is a person under 18, should be referred to as an early marriage, and often as a forced marriage.

relatives, friends and neighbours, other Social Assistance Directorates, the General Practitioner and any other sources as necessary. The term for the data collection and evaluation of the reported case is 10 days from its submission to the Social Assistance Directorate. In case there is sufficient information of threat to a child, the social worker opens a case. The term for the evaluation of the case is 4 weeks from receiving the report in the Social Assistance Directorate. Based on the information gathered on the case, an action plan is prepared, which includes a long-term aim and short-term objectives, activities for its implementation and measures for protection. This plan is implemented by the Social Assistance Directorate and is subject to monitoring through periodic meetings with the child and his/her parents.

THE FUNCTIONS OF CHILD PROTECTION, ASSIGNED TO THE MINISTER OF LABOUR AND SOCIAL POLICY are to direct, coordinate and control the implementation of the state social policy for families and children; to assist and encourage the collaboration with civil society organizations for their active participation in the process of formulation, implementation and monitoring of the policy on child protection; to direct, coordinate and control activities to encourage and support responsible parentage; to direct, coordinate and control the development of draft acts, strategies, programmes, action plans and reports in the area of demographic policy, family and children.

THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR is obliged to provide police protection of any child through the specialized bodies of the Ministry of Interior; to participate in the implementation and control of the specialized protection of children in public places; to exercise control with regard to children crossing the Bulgarian state border.

THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND SCIENCE has the responsibility to ensure the security of children in state schools, kindergartens and supporting units in the system of public education; through the regional inspectorates of education (RIEs) to ensure the interaction with the management of specialized institutions and social services – residential type, to establish the educational needs of each child and provide an adequate training; to implement activities for the prevention and solution of the problem with students not attending school; to participate in the implementation of the special protection of children with talents.

The functions with regard to child protection are assigned to most of the rest ministers: of culture, foreign affairs etc.

MAYORS OF MUNICIPALITIES ensure the application of the state policy for protection of the child in the municipality and coordinate the activities for child protection at the local level; provide the security of children in municipal schools, kindergartens and supporting units; undertake measures for ensuring the security of children in the structures and units on the territory of the respective municipality;

support and encourage the collaboration with local civil society organizations in order to ensure their active participation in the process of formulation, implementation and monitoring of child protection policies.

THE SOCIAL ASSISTANCE DIRECTORATE is responsible to implement the current practical activity related to child protection in the municipality and present proposals to the municipal council for a municipal child protection programme; determines and applies specific child protection measures and controls their implementation; to undertake checks on complaints and reports of children's right violations and present obligatory prescriptions for their removal under the conditions and procedure, established with the rules for the application of the law; to provide advices and consultations on the upbringing and raising of children; to provide information for the services offered and render support and assistance to families and parents of needy children; to compile and maintain up-to-date registers for several groups of children, among which:

- a) children in need of special protection;
- b) out-of-school children.

The Social Assistance Directorate (through the municipal Departments for Child Protection) should also receive direct reports of early marriages. Actually, often this is not happening: on one hand, there is resistance on behalf of the community towards bringing out such cases "in open", while the Social Assistance Directorate is not recognised as an "inside" for the community institution. On the other hand, the Social Assistance Directorate and Departments for Child Protection are not active in considering such issues on their own initiative. Their reaction to reported cases cannot always be defined as adequate: usually it includes only formal checks or a prescription for the child to be hosted in an institution, which is obviously not a proper solution for him.

Public policies for preventing early/forced marriages in the Roma community

Actually, in Bulgaria there are no specific public policies for the prevention of early marriages in the Roma community. This type of activities is considered mainly in the context of promoting the welfare of the child and the protection of the child: as described above. On the other hand, the issue is sometimes raised in the context of the whole policy for Roma integration.

The targeted policy for Roma integration in Bulgaria dates back to the late 90s and was strongly influenced by the efforts for the accession of Bulgaria to the EU and NATO. On 22 April 1999 the Council of Ministers adopted a *Framework programme*

for equal integration of Roma in Bulgarian society. It was followed by the *Strategy for educational integration of children and students from the ethnic minorities – 2004*, *Health strategy for disadvantaged people, belonging to ethnic minorities – 2005*, *National programme for improving the housing conditions of Roma – 2006*. In addition, Bulgaria was one of the co-founders of the initiative *Decade of Roma Inclusion* and in 2006 approved its Action Plan for the initiative. The documents related to Roma integration were partially updated in 2010: in May was adopted the updated *Framework programme for equal integration of Roma in Bulgarian society, 2010–2020*, and in March – the updated the *Strategy for educational integration of children and students from the ethnic minorities*.

The analysis of these documents strikes with the fact that the issue of early marriages is not explicitly included. It is even not discussed in the context of the topic of the Roma woman, which is not so popular either. Thus, a section on the Roma woman was included in the Framework Programme from 1999 without discussing the issue of early marriages. In the updated Framework Programme (May, 2010), this section dropped off entirely.

Against the background of the existing problem with early marriages among a considerable number of the Roma in Bulgaria, this fact is surprising and speaks of a lack of understanding on the part of the institutions of the necessity of targeted actions for solving the problem with early marriages, as well as of the lack of a comprehensive dialogue on the issue inside the Roma intelligence and community. The negative stereotypes, promoted by some of the most influential media, regarding the early-births rate of the Roma, emphasise in addition the unwillingness of many Roma activists to take up the issue of early marriages.

Attitudes of social workers and field workers

Within the framework of the project *Preventing Early/Forced Marriages* in Bulgaria was conducted a survey on the attitudes among social workers, representatives of the Social Assistance Directorates and Departments for Child Protection on the territory of the whole country. The survey was conducted with the active collaboration of the Agency for Social Assistance and the State Agency for Child Protection. Over 230 social workers filled in the questionnaire. The survey focused on the following main questions: How do social workers see the extent of spreading and causes for early marriages in the Roma community? How do they react in such cases? What should be done to overcome the problem with early marriages? How do they assess the existing programmes in that direction? A similar survey was conducted among teachers and school principals.

The results from the survey indicated that more than 50% of the social workers pointed out the problem of early marriages as “typical for Roma” and as “conditioned by the community”. Thus, they have justified the impossibility for effective intervention in these cases. In addition, many of them stated openly their negative, almost discriminative attitudes towards the Roma community: it is lead by “local chieftains” and “Roma women give birth as if having a bowel movement”⁴. It is hard to expect from a social worker with similar attitudes to work effectively in the community for solving or preventing this phenomenon.

A similar survey and focus groups with teachers revealed a bit different motivation for non-intervention in the cases of early marriages. Many of the teachers stated their willingness to help in such cases: “Until yesterday we were teaching these children and we are emotionally bound with them”. However, the larger part of them considered that the solution of a case like that was practically impossible and their efforts were useless: “The parents are hypocritical. They tell us they won’t marry their children and on the next day they bargain them, take the money and nothing can be done.”⁵

Regarding the necessary steps to be taken for overcoming the problem with early marriages, the field workers (both social workers and teachers) expressly stressed upon the need of more serious administrative sanction. The survey conducted among representatives of the Departments for Child Protection and Social Assistance Directorates revealed that over 85% of the respondents point out that the legislation should be amended and cohabitation between an under-aged person and a minor (the common practice of Roma “marriages”) should be incriminated, i.e. to be deemed as crime. This has been pointed out as a key step in solving the problem.

We should again underline here, that a number of provisions in the Penal Code of the Republic of Bulgaria stipulate that cohabitation between an under-aged person and an adult is a criminal offence. This is a crime of general character and the lawsuit is lead by a prosecutor, without a need of formal complaint filed by the injured person. Facilitating and inciting to such cohabitation is prosecuted under the same procedure. Therefore, this measure was introduced long ago but its effect can be assessed as negligible.

Regarding the effectiveness of the public policies for preventing early/forced marriages, the majority of the field workers point out that these do not exist or fail due the poor interaction. More than 90% of the interviewed 230 representatives from the Departments for Child Protection and the Social Assistance Directorate indicate

⁴ The quotations are from the conducted interviews, pointing out the most indicative examples for the existing attitudes.

⁵ The used answers are from a school, teaching Roma children from a community, in which the practice for paying a dowry “babaak” has almost disappeared.

that there are no concrete programmes, action plans or activities targeted at the prevention of early and forced marriages. The most frequent answer of the representatives of the social institutions is that they face this problem, when early marriage is already a fact and most often the minor or under-aged Roma mother is looking for social assistance or child allowances from the Social Assistance Directorate. The interviewed teachers also emphasised the lack of interaction with other institutions, as well as the fact that representatives of the Roma community do not approach the institutions and do not provide assistance in solving the cases of early marriages.

Legal, normative and the institutional framework for Preventing Early/Forced Marriages in Romania

According to the *World Marriage Patterns 2000* of the Population Division and the Statistics Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, a 1994 survey shows that in Romania men's average age at marriage is 26.0% and the average age at marriage of women is 22.4%. The frequency of marriage of men at the age of 15–19 is 0.5%, while for the same age category of women it is 10.4%, a percentage twice higher than that in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, but lower than that in Bulgaria (16.5%) and the Republic of Moldova (12.5%). The statistics does not include data on child marriages under the age of 15.

Regretfully, such data are missing both in international and national statistics. Consequently, the estimations of the present survey are an approximation of official data and data provided by sociological research and resource persons. The absence of reliable data on early and forced marriages is, on the other hand, an irrefutable prove of the lack of commitment of the state institutions to identify, monitor, prevent and combat the harmful practice of early marriages and needs to be addressed in any further public national strategy.

Despite the international agreements and national laws adopted mainly after the fall of the totalitarian regime in Romania (1989), the practice of marrying girls below the age of 18 is prevalent in many parts of the country and affects the lives of hundreds of young girls. In Romania, a combination of tradition, poverty, and lack of opportunity, puts a large number of young people “at risk” of early marriage.

In many marginalized or/and traditional Roma grassroot communities still exist harmful traditional practices, such as child/forced/early/arranged marriages, that violate the rights of young people and strongly limit their opportunities for social realization. As a result, the personal development and realization of the victims is stopped.

Despite the fact that marriage is an important sociological and cultural phenomenon, the Romanian demographical studies on this issue are relatively rare. The existing ones show clearly that comparing marriage customs from the 19th century up to now, the motivation, age, conditions and importance of the marriages is highly dependent on factors such as cultural traditions, rural/urban differences, historical period of peace or war, degree of education and prosperity, the subjective feeling of security.

In historical sense, early marriage can be seen as a practice that existed in the tradition of almost all European nations, including Romania, but its incidence drastically decreased in the last century and especially in the modernization period, after World War II. Regarding the age of marriage, it has been constantly increasing for the last century. If in the 18th century, foreign visitors noted that in the Romanian Principalities girls married as young as 12 years old (in Banat) and boys around 19; today's statistics show that the average age of marriage for girls tends to be over 22 and for boys over 26.

However, several studies show that early marriage is still practiced in communities where it is seen as part of the traditions and the community internal rituals for unification, as well as in remote areas. In the big cities it occurs in slums, out of reasons of poverty, poor housing, low degree of education and the lack of personal development prospects.

There is no statistics available in Romania on the breakdown of early marriages by ethnicity, but assumptions, reports and interviews show that early marriages are much more frequent among the conservative traditional Roma communities than the rest of Roma population or the Romanian majority or the other national minorities.

Surveys published by the Institute for Research of the Quality of Life in 2002 reveal that 35% of the Roma women married before completing the age of 16; 31% of them married at the age of 17–18; 26% married the age of 19–22, and only 8% married after the age of 22. The proportion of Roma girls who marry before the age of 20 is increasing to 84% for the age group of women between 20 and 24 years of age. This trend is accompanied by that of marriage “without papers”, non-registered marriage. The same statistics show that 40% of Roma couples live in non-registered marriage. This percentage is even higher in the case of the girls married at the age of 15–19, i.e. it is 83%. As a consequence of early marriage, there is also a high rate of early birth-giving. 37% of Roma girls have babies before the age of maturity (18).

Romanian researchers make no clear distinction between early and forced marriage. Though insufficient, researches on early marriages exist, but there are no data or analyses on the issue of forced marriages. The researchers tend to consider early and forced marriage as one category. This approach is proper only partially: early marriages occur both under compulsion and under conditions, which can be described as “mutual consent”. However, according to the Romanian team of the project “Preventing Early/ Forced Marriages”, marriage between minor partners should be considered forced marriage, because the young persons, mainly girls, do not exercise fully the freedom of choice when entering into an early marriage union. Moreover, marriage consummated under the age of maturity, is defined by the Penal Code as rape.

Taking into consideration all these aspects, the present project identifies as early and forced marriage that under the minimum legal age (18) and examines the legal, administrative and civil ways for combating the violations of the rights of children

and minors of age that are perpetuated by maintaining in Roma communities of the traditional practices as a result of early marriages. The survey explores the attitudes of the Roma community towards this practice, the legal and institutional responsibilities, projects and actions taken by the Romanian NGOs for combating forced marriages and promoting the protection of human rights and the rights of the child.

The survey presents cases from different traditional Roma communities in Romania, results of interviews and questionnaires and ends with recommendations and proposals for reinforcing the legal, institutional and community approaches for combating the harmful practice of forced and early marriage. The conclusions of the survey are meant primarily to inspire innovative action for advocacy and educational campaigns in Roma communities by members of the community themselves.

The Roma community in Romania

According to the last 2002 Census¹, Romania has a total population of 21 680 974 people, among them the Roma are 535 140 or 2.46%. The Roma are registered as the second largest minority group in Romania among the 21 ethnic groups declared.

However, the opinion that official statistics does not reflect the actual number of Roma people is widespread. The low percent of self-identified as Roma in the 2002 Census is due to discrimination (one of the main reasons for many Roma people not to declare themselves as such), and in many cases – to the lack of identity documents or residence permits. According to surveys published by the Institute for Research of the Quality of Life, the share of Roma population in Romania is 6.7%. But the needs analysis, made by the Roma Education Fund upon the launch of the Decade for the Inclusion of Roma, as well as data of Roma NGOs, point out that the total number of Roma people is 2 500 000 people or 11.52%. After Romania's accession to the EU on January 1st 2007, around 1 million ethnic Roma live on the territory of other EU Member States.

According to data published by the Centre for Health Policies in 2004, the demographic structure of Roma population shows that 43.6% of Roma people are under the age of 18. This figure is important for our survey, because due to the underestimation of the size of Roma population in Romania, the rate of early and forced marriages is also underestimated.

The Roma community in Romania has an inner diversity that should be taken into consideration to avoid generalization. Roma from Romania are diverse from the

¹ Census of population and dwellings, 2002. Romanian National Institute of Statistics, March 18-27, 2002, Vol. I Demographic structure.

perspective of geographical dispersion, urban/rural residence, mother tongue and second preferred language, religion, political affiliation, observance of traditions/modernity, degree of education, prosperity and life expectations.

There is no specific definition of Roma traditional communities, but it is generally accepted in Romania that communities like the Kaldarashi, Lingurari, Laieti, Ursari and Gabor are seen as traditional. It means that the individuals belonging to those groups, mainly women, have to obey to group rules such as wearing of traditional clothes, speaking the Romani mother tongue and practicing intra-group arranged early marriages according to the traditions.

A traditional Roma community is identified by the following characteristics:

- Large families with several members;
- Common household of different generations;
- Reduced cultural needs (TV, radio, newspapers, books, theatre etc.);
- Patriarchal decision-making.
- Household generally maintained by women;
- Income and the leadership of the family provided by men.

Among the Roma groups and subgroups living in Romania there are: Aurari (Goldsmiths), Argintari (Silversmiths), Aramari (Tinker), Cocalari, Caramidari (Brick Makers), Covatari, Cositorari (Sieve Makers), Carbutari, Fierari (Blacksmiths), Florarii (Florists), Gunoieri (Garbage carriers), Cehara, Corturarii (Roma living in tents), Corsarii (Basket Makers), Cosarii (Chimney Sweepers), Lemnari (Carpenters), Lingurari, Laieti, Geambagii/Lovari, Maturarii (Sweepers), Pieptanari (Comb Makers), Penari (Add chicken feathers), Rudarii, Racarii (Catch crabs), Olanari (Tiles Makers), Telanii (Patavara), Ursari (Bear Leaders), Caldarari (Kaldarashi), Turkish Muslim Roma, Breastfeeders, Fortune-tellers, Healers, Whishes, Fiddlers, Zlatari, Silk Gypsies, Meseriasii (Crafts man), Romungre.

The geographical dispersion of the traditional communities is on the whole territory of Romania, with some local differences. For instance, the community of Gabors is concentrated mostly in Transylvania, in the regions where the Hungarian minority lives. The Gabors speak Hungarian as a second preferred language and generally have Hungarian first names. With regards to religious belief, the majority of the Roma are Greek Orthodox. However, mainly after the fall of communism, many Roma people have adopted several of the new Protestant faiths, becoming members of the Advent Church and Pentecostal Church. The preference for the new protestant churches is understandable, as these churches show respect and solidarity towards the Roma, far from the reserves of the classical historic Christian denominations (Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic).

Romanian legislation governing marriage, family and child protection

The Romanian legal system for protection of human rights and the rights of the child includes international treaties signed by Romania and a substantial list of domestic laws, adopted by the Romanian Parliament mainly after the fall of communism. The most relevant legislative documents referring to marriage, family and child protection are:

THE CONSTITUTION OF ROMANIA

ARTICLE 48 – Family

(1) The family is founded on the freely consented marriage of the spouses, their full equality, as well as the right and duty of the parents to ensure the upbringing, education and instruction of their children.

(2) The terms for entering into marriage dissolution and nullity of marriage shall be established by law. Religious wedding may be celebrated only after the civil marriage.

ARTICLE 49 – Protection of children and young people

(1) Children and young people shall enjoy special protection and assistance in the pursuit of their rights.

(2) The State shall grant allowances for children and benefits for the care of ill or disabled children. Other forms of social protection for children and young people shall be established by law.

(3) The exploitation of minors, their employment in activities that might be harmful to their health, or morals, or might endanger their life and normal development are prohibited. (...)

THE FAMILY CODE

The Romanian Family Code was adopted on 4 January 1954, and since then has been amended several times. The current version of the Family Code was adopted in 1993. It is divided into three parts: the first part defines marriage; the second part defines relatives and the third part defines legal representation, various degrees of incapacity and legal protection.

ARTICLE 1

In Romania the State protects the marriage and the family; it supports the development and consolidation of the family through economic and social measures. The state protects the interests of the mother and child and expresses its great

concern for the growth and education of the young generation. The family is based on free consenting marriage between spouses. In relations between spouses, as well as in the exercise of parental rights, the man and the woman have equal rights. Parental rights shall be exercised only in the child's interest.

ARTICLE 3 – The marriage

Only marriages contracted before the civil status officer give rise to rights and obligations of spouses under this code.

ARTICLE 4

The minimum age of marriage is 18 years. On reasonable grounds, the child who has attained the age of sixteen can marry based on a medical opinion, with the consent of his/her parents or, where appropriate, of his/her guardian, and with the permit of the general department for social care and child protection (...)

ARTICLE 101

The parents have the duty to care for the child. Their duties include raising the child, looking after its physical health and development, to educate the child, to monitor the schooling and occupational training of the child, according to his/her characteristics and according to the state's goals, in order to become a useful member of society.

ROMANIAN PENAL CODE of 16 April 1997 with subsequent amendments

ARTICLE 198 – Sexual intercourse with a minor

Sexual intercourse, of any nature, with a person of the other sex or of the same sex, who has not reached the age of 15, shall be punished by strict imprisonment from 3 to 10 years and the prohibition of certain rights.

ARTICLE 199 – Enticement

An act of a person, who, by promises of marriage, entices a female person under the age of 18 to have sexual intercourse with him, shall be punished by 1 to 5 years imprisonment.

LAW No. 272/2004 ON THE PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

ARTICLE 4

For the present law, the terms and expressions below have the following meanings:

a) child – a human being below the age of 18, who has not acquired full capacity of exercise, according to the law;

ARTICLE 24

(1) The child who has the capacity to discern has the right to freely express his/her opinion regarding any matter which involves him/her.

ARTICLE 85

(1) The child has the right to be protected against any forms of violence, neglect, abuse or maltreatment.

(2) Any natural or legal person, as well as the child, can notify the authorities empowered by the law to take appropriate measures, in order to protect the child against any forms of violence, including sexual violence, harm or physical or mental abuse, maltreatment or exploitation, abandonment or neglect.

ARTICLE 90

It is forbidden to enforce physical punishments of any kind or to deprive the child of his/her rights, which may result in the endangerment of the life, the physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, the bodily integrity, and the physical and mental health of the child, both within the family, as well as in any institution which ensures the protection, care and education of children.

Public policies and institutions at national level related to the prevention of forced/early marriages

Public policies directly targeted at preventing, detecting and combating forced marriages practically were missing in Romania before 2003. That year, the marriage of a young 13-year-old Roma girl, Ana Maria Cioaba, the daughter of a wealthy Roma religious and community leader, Florin Cioaba, “king of the Roma” in the Transylvanian city of Sibiu, attracted unprecedented media coverage. The Cioaba family, originating from South Romania (Vlachia) belongs to the traditional community of the Kaldarashi. The fact that the wedding ceremony, extremely luxurious and attended by high ranking guests (a former Minister of Interior), captured the Romanian media’s attention as never before and then invaded the international newspapers and televisions. The case was an opportunity for Emma Nicholson, MEP, well known for her constant advocacy and support for children’s rights in Romania, to express her legitimate outrage. Baroness Nicholson asked the Romanian authorities to take all necessary measures to stop Ana Maria Cioaba’s so-called marriage and to efficiently prevent such practices in the future.

After the case of Ana Maria Cioaba, and its international media coverage, the issue of forced marriage came to the attention of the Romanian Government, institutions, local authorities, churches and NGOs. However, this visibility has not necessarily resulted in the adoption of a coherent strategy for combating the practice of forced and early marriage.

The most surprising is that, despite the warnings by the European Commission following the case of the marriage of 13-year old of Ana Maria Cioaba, the relevant

Romanian institutions did not adopt the necessary specific programmes and strategies approaching the issue of forced marriages from the perspective of human rights. Forced and early marriages continue to occur and occupy the front page of the newspapers.

The interviews and questionnaires under the current survey revealed that the theme of forced marriages is still addressed in an indirect way, lost in strategies, programmes and projects related to reproductive health, dropping-out from school, and issuance of identity papers. Institutions and policy makers tend to address the consequences rather than the roots of the problem. Or, addressing only the consequences of early marriages, they do not impact the core of this harmful practice. As a proof that such an approach produces additional damages without solving the problem is the fact that meanwhile the number of early marriages has increased and seems to have been extended even to other groups. Early marriages became a solution to poverty or a new fashion in some not so traditional Roma communities.

In Romania there are several central and local institutions involved in child protection, prevention of sexual abuses, social assistance, education and healthcare. All of them implement public policies and specific programmes, which are indirectly targeted at the prevention of forced marriages. The project team in Romania used questionnaires and conducted interviews with the relevant institutions with regards to the problem of forced/early marriages to reveal the existing policy on this harmful practice.

National Authority for the Protection of the Family and Children's Rights

The Authority is functioning under the coordination of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection. Its mission is to monitor the respect of the rights of children and to take all necessary measures to contribute for the creation of a society of dignity for the children, by involving in this process both local and central public administrations, the civil society, the parents and the children themselves. The Authority is organized and functions as a specialized institution of the central public administration, subordinated to the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection. Although forced and early marriages are falling under the mandate of child protection, the Authority does not implement specific programmes to expressly prevent and combat early marriages. The Authority has not implemented programmes or projects specifically directed to tackle the issue of early marriages in the Roma community, although this type of children's rights violations occurs in compact communities and in well known areas.

In its report for 2008, the Authority mentions only once the issue of early marriage, in the context of an ordinance to be adopted in cooperation with the Ministry of Public Health, "regarding the approval of the procedures for intervention in the establishment of pregnancy of minors under the age of 15". Furthermore, the Authority's Report for 2007 includes measures for the protection of children in

Roma communities, but without mentioning the situation of violations with regards to early and forced marriages.

Responding to the questionnaire of the survey team, the Authority has formulated very clearly the essence of the harmful practice of forced marriages. It is that “forced and early marriages imply the violation of children’s rights as they are stated in Romanian Law 272/2004 regarding the protection and the promotion of children’s rights. According to the opinion of the Authority, practicing early and forced marriages means to violate the right of the child to enjoy life conditions that are guaranteeing his or her physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development, and, prevents the children from expressing their own opinions on facts influencing their life.

The Authority considers that in several cases the practice of forced marriages imply also additional abuses, physical, emotional, sexual, and consequently, violates the right of the child to be protected against all forms of violence, abuse, ill-treatments”.

The main strategic guideline of the Authority for the period 2008–2013 is the Programme *Responsible family for the care and education of their children*. This objective is included in the Operational Programme for the implementation of the *National strategy related to the protection and promotion of children’s rights*, approved by Government’s decision No. 860/2008.

In accordance with this objective, the Authority has initiated a comprehensive plan of action including: the introduction of an optional study subject focusing on the pre-marital education for teenagers and youngsters studying colleges, vocational schools and other types of schools; the legislative introduction of a compulsory pre-marital advice programme for adolescents approaching the minimum legal age of marriage and willing to marry; the development of a network of advisory centres for children and parents in municipalities and big cities; the extension of the Parents’ School Programme for all parents’ advice centres, mothers’ centres and day care centres.

An additional objective of the Operational Plan for the implementation of the National Strategy is meant to contribute to the prevention of the practice of forced marriages. It takes the form of an advocacy campaign for parents on their responsibilities for the care and education of their children and to inform them on the sanctions applied to those who do not respect these obligations. The Authority has already implemented an educational campaign targeting the parents and advocating for the respect of children’s rights under the title “*You can be a good parent, too!*”, involving parents, health care agencies and medical practitioners, teachers, representatives of the police, churches and the judiciary.

The Public Services for Social Assistance (SPAS) have the responsibility to prevent the separation of the child from its parents. Consequently, the local public administrations are obliged to identify the risk situations and cases of domestic violence. The SPAS have the following tasks: monitoring the situation of the children on the

territory of their authority, advice and information for the parents. In cases where the children cannot remain with their family, the responsibility for the protection of the children, temporarily or permanently separated from their parents, lies with the county directorates for social assistance and child protection. Currently in Romania there are 907 day-care centres for children.

Currently, the National Authority for the Protection of the Family and Children's Rights does not implement any activities particularly related to the issue of prevention of forced marriages and the protection of children abused during these practices, though the institution is open to partnerships and participation in interdisciplinary work.

National Agency for the Roma

The National Agency for the Roma (ANR) is a governmental structure representing the Roma at the national level. The institution functions as a part of the central public administration, subordinated to the Government and coordinated by the General Secretariat of the Government. The National Agency for the Roma has the responsibility to implement, coordinate, monitor and evaluate the measures included in the Strategy of the Romanian Government for the improvement of the situation of Roma No. 430/2000. The Agency coordinates 41 bureaus for the Roma, integrated in the Prefect's Offices of Romanian county capitals.

The Agency has implemented several projects and programmes targeting to prevent and combat the practice of forced marriages. In 2006 the Agency released the report *SOS – Traditional (Pre-modern) Roma communities confronted with the risks of European integration and (post) modernity – Inclusion policies implemented in the traditional (Semi) Nomadic Roma Communities* prepared by Georgeta Jurcan, commissioned by Mariaea Ionescu, President of the Agency at the time. The report constitutes an inventory of traditional practices of the Roma community from Sintesti. This includes express recommendations for the prevention of forced marriages. One chapter is devoted to the elaboration of complex programmes at the national level to prevent early marriages, refusal of vaccinations, school dropping out and exploitation of child labour.

Such provisions are to be found in other strategies and documents of the Agency as well, but there are no clear indications of comprehensive public policies directed specifically to the issue of early marriages. The position of the Agency on early marriages was observed in several situations, in particular, when the media presented cases of forced marriages. The reaction of the Agency was often limited to press releases (January 2007) and the adoption of several plans of actions, without clear feedback.

The National Agency for the Roma has conducted several case studies of forced marriages. Special attention has been given to the Roma community of Ramnicelu

(Buzau county) very often reflected in the media. Marriages are arranged here at very early age, for the girls between 8 and 12. The Ramnicelu case has urged the Authority to adopt an inter-institutional innovative cooperation model involving several social partners: the Buzau County Prefect Office, the Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection, the School Inspectorate, the Mayor's Office, the Public Health Directorate, the Prosecutor's Office, the National Council for Combating Discrimination, the National Agency for the Equality of Chances, the County Council Buzau and well-known Roma NGOs, such as Impreuna Agency for Community Development, the Civic Alliance of Roma, Amare Romentza Alliance for Unity, the Agency for Monitoring the Media.

Building upon the experience gained in the Ramnicelu case, monitored for several years, the Agency succeeded to elaborate action plans including measures designed for combating forced marriages, such as: evaluation of the local community, facilitation of the local development, elaboration of public policies directed towards the traditional communities focusing on the protection of children's rights and interests, education of the members of the community regarding their rights and obligations, organizing information campaigns, supporting the partnership between school and public administration and community; adopting projects and programmes facilitating the access to schools and education for the parents; setting up a centre to advise young mothers, to help carrier orientation of the young members of the Ramnicelu community.

For the time being this is one of the most successful initiatives of the Agency with respect to the public policies for combating forced marriages. Although the Agency's approach to forced marriages is interdisciplinary, the programmes and public policies remain modest, addressing merely the consequences of forced marriage (school dropping out, early birth-giving, non-registered babies). In addition, the Agency remains interested in evaluating the reproduction of the conservative traditions of traditional groups, the reproduction of power positions, limitations of individual rights and freedoms, discriminations patterns etc).

Currently, the Agency implements the project "**Roma Children's Education – the Way towards a Stable Working Place**" financed by the European Social Fund. The project stresses on the need for the authorities to guarantee full access to education, including for girls, mainly in communities practicing early marriage tradition. The Agency has recently attracted funds for financing grass root activities and campaigns encouraging the interest in education of Roma children and young women. The Agency actively participates in projects of Roma and human rights NGOs dealing with the issue of forced marriages and children's rights.

Despite its positive achievements, the National Agency for the Roma works on solving a wide range of problems and does not have enough resources to concentrate on the issue of forced marriages. The Agency is open to work in an interdisciplinary

group on the issues related to early marriages and to reserve budgetary funds for grassroots campaigns. As a result from the implementation of the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages” and the successful partnership with Liga ProEuropa, at the end of 2010 the Agency took a decision to allocate special funds from its budget to finance grassroots campaigns for preventing early/forced marriages.

Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports

The Ministry of Education elaborates, coordinates and implements the national policy on education. The Ministry of Education functions on the basis of Law No. 84/1995. According to the Law, in Romania there is a developed system of education in minority mother tongues, from kindergarten to university. The educational policies are implemented at the local level by the 41 county inspectorates of education, responsible for the coordination of the local educational system and programmes. In the majority of the inspectorates there are school inspectors from minority origin, in several cases there are Roma inspectors responsible for the implementation of targeted Roma programmes.

The Ministry has a General Directorate for Education in Minority Languages, coordinated by a Secretary of State and divided in several specialised divisions. The internal division of the work of the Ministry envisages that all issues related to minorities fall under the mandate of the Directorate for Education in Minority Languages.

The Annual Report on the activity of the State Secretary regarding minority education comprises extensive information on the measures adopted by the Ministry to lower the rate of dropping out in Roma communities. According to the report, Roma school inspectors have the responsibility to take all necessary measures to prevent the dropping out of Roma children aged between 6 and 16 and to initiate strong cooperation with the local community. Their activity is complementary to that of over 600 school mediators trained by the Ministry and various social partners since 2003. Their task is to contribute by any means to reduce the school dropping out.

The General Directorate for Education in the Languages of National Minorities is currently implementing the programme “**Everyone Goes to Kindergarten – Everyone Goes to School**”. The objective of the programme is to prevent early dropping out in 420 disadvantaged communities, with high percentage of Roma population, mainly in rural areas or small cities. The objective is to increase school attendance of Roma children. Activities are organized in the form of summer kindergartens, extra-curricular activities, parents’ schools. The initiative aims to include 8400 children at risk of dropping out from school, dissemination of information and advice for parents, mainly from the Roma community, training courses for 420 representatives of the disadvantaged communities. The programme is implemented in partnership with the local public administrations, parents’ associations and NGOs.

The Ministry has also adopted several programmes encouraging the inclusion in the public education system. The National Strategy for Community Action (SNAC) is a coherent and coordinated programme including regular actions, programmes and activities implemented at grassroots level mobilizing volunteers, children with special needs and children at risk, in difficult situation or in danger. The SNAC has mobilized in 2009 around 541 volunteers and has targeted 14 654 beneficiaries. A positive accomplishment to be mentioned is the integration in the programme of the issue of forced marriages or the potential victims of early marriages.

The Ministry pays special attention to the educational needs of the Roma community. The multi-annual Phare Programme “Access to education for the disadvantaged groups with focus on Roma” represents a comprehensive list of all educational needs of Roma children and constitutes the mandate for the work in this field. However, the programme does not contain specific and direct references to early and forced marriages.

The Ministry of Education, in partnership with UNICEF in Romania, organized a National Conference on the issue of the school dropping out, with the participation of the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, the National Agency for the Roma, the National Authority for the Protection of the Family and the Children’s Rights, the county school inspectorates, local administrations, county councils, the Institute for the Educational Science, the World Bank Mission in Romania. The National Conference was aimed to raise the awareness towards the increasing number of cases of school leaving, but early marriage as a reason for the Roma girls dropping out is not yet on the agenda of such events.

The constant efforts of the Ministry are rather concentrated on the effects than the roots of dropping out from school. The Ministry has invested significant budgetary resources in large-scale programmes such as the “School of the Second Chance”, “School after School”, “School of the Mothers-in-Law”. In many cases the beneficiaries of these programmes are namely Roma girls and boys potentially exposed to early marriages, those who abandoned school because of contracting such marriages, their parents and relatives. This type of education completion is organized in all counties of Romania, with variable attendance rates. The curriculum is targeted to complete the basic knowledge of the beneficiaries, but does not target specifically education for preventing and combating early marriages.

The statistics of the Ministry on dropout rates does not include ethnic or gender dimensions. Therefore, it is difficult to obtain a clear picture at the national level of the number of minors leaving compulsory education because of forced or early marriage. There are no specific programmes and projects targeting to address the issue of forced marriages; there are no specific subjects, training courses for teachers working in the communities, where forced marriages are practiced. The Ministry has

not elaborated yet a comprehensive policy focusing on the specific phenomenon of early/forced marriages.

Ministry of Public Health

The Ministry of Public Health implements the strategy and the policies of the Romanian Government for ensuring public health and is responsible for the implementation of the reform in the health sector. The Ministry organizes, coordinates and guides the activities to ensure the health of the population and to control health damaging practices. In each county the Ministry is legally represented by the so called Public Health Authority. These authorities implement policies and national public health programmes at the local level, identifying local priority health problems.

The Ministry and the subordinated county authorities approach the issue of early marriages from the perspective of reproductive health. Early pregnancies are in the centre of attention, but statistics does not reflect the ethnic background or the causes of early pregnancies.

Ministry of Administration and Interior

The Ministry coordinates the activity of the police and has branches in all the 41 counties. Police intervention in early marriage cases is frequently as a result of media information. In many cases, police intervention in wedding ceremonies (in cases of early marriages) is being shot by television teams. Usually, in such cases the perpetrators are arrested on charges of rape or sexual intercourse with a minor, but frequently these actions of the police result in light sentences. Generally, imprisonment does not take place and alternative punishment is preferred.

The Ministry has no statistics on the number of arrests related to early marriages.

Public policies related to forced/early marriages at regional and local level

In the framework of the project, Liga Pro Europa conducted 123 interviews by questionnaires, sent to all county general departments for social care and child protection, county school inspectorates and prefectures in order to obtain reliable information regarding the public policies, measures and activities carried out by these institutions in the field of early/forced marriages and/or in related fields that may influence this practice of traditional Roma communities.

The number of distributed questionnaires was 123 (41 counties x 3 institutions), and the readiness of the institutions to respond varied. The most transparent and

open institutions proved to be the general departments for social care and child protection (33 completed questionnaires, 80.49%), the county school inspectorates (21 completed questionnaires, 51.22%), and the prefectures being less responsive (20 completed questionnaires, 48.78%).

GENERAL DEPARTMENTS FOR SOCIAL CARE AND CHILD PROTECTION (GDSCCHP)

The GDSCChP are public institutions at the county level, which are legal entities established on the basis of county council decisions and subordinated to them.

The questionnaires sent to the county directorates contained 12 questions regarding public policies, the mandate of the institutions, the existence of preventive actions, projects regarding early/forced marriages, the issuance or the refusal of issuance of notice for marriages under the legal age of 18 years, the reasons, the statistics regarding pregnant minors under the age of 18.

From the 41 counties of Romania (100%) – without Bucharest municipality, 33 completed questionnaires have been returned (80.49%), 8 counties (19.51%) did not answer the request (Iasi, Brasov, Vrancea, Gorj, Olt, Teleorman, Ilfov and Calarasi).

Public Policies of the GDSCChP regarding the issue of forced/early marriages:

From the received answers is evident that 73.53% of the departments have no public policies targeting the issue of early/forced marriages and only 26.47% of the institutions carry out activities related to this question. These are:

- Counselling on issues such as: what is marriage, relations within the couple, rights and duties of spouses, necessary income sources, money management, conflict management in order to prevent domestic violence, parental responsibilities, family planning;
- Action plans for improvement of the situation of the Roma community: community development, communication and civic participation, protection and promotion of children's rights, preventing discrimination of Roma in social services; access to healthcare and education of Roma people; awareness-raising campaigns in order to prevent abuse, neglect or abandonment of children; debates on early/forced marriages;
- Buzau county: in 2005 were set up partnerships between the local authorities (with the task to monitor risk situations) and the police in order to stop the early engagements of minors and teenage pregnancy; in 2008 the police forces registered 30 penal cases (finalized with penal fines or convictions with suspended sentences); close monitoring of Râmnicelu community, where the majority of the Roma practise early marriage of children;
- Issuance of marriage permits for minors between 16 and 18;

- During the assessment of the application of the 16-year old minor for contracting a marriage the institutions – according to article 4 of the Family Code – examine the following:
 - the existence of duress of any kind on the minor applicant;
 - the level of awareness of the responsibilities in marriage and the roles in the family;
 - information and counselling (where appropriate) regarding the hormonal, physical, emotional changes occurring after childbirth;
 - information and advice on further school education of the minor applicant (where appropriate).
- In general, GDSCChP have no expressly defined public policies regarding early/forced marriages, only activities in related fields with effects on the issue:
 - health and well-being of the child;
 - special protection of the child temporarily or permanently deprived of his/her parental protection;
 - protecting the child against exploitation, abduction and trafficking;
 - protection of the child against abuse or neglect;
- The issue of early/forced marriages is not a priority in the county strategies for protecting and encouraging the rights of the child for 2009–2010.

In conclusion: there are no national public policies and/or programmes for preventing early/forced marriages, the major part of the developed activities are confined to assessing the applicants of marriage permits and advising and informing the minor applicants and their families. A small number of targeted activities is implemented in communities where early/forced marriages are often covered in the mass media (e.g. Râmnicelu, Buzau and Brateiu, Sibiu).

Preventive actions and measures of the county institutions:

With regard of the preventive measures and actions of the GDSCChP more than half (58.82%) of these institutions are not taking any measures and this problem is not a priority for them. The reported preventive actions are:

- periodical preventive activities consisting of distributing informational leaflets on the legal consequences of early/forced marriages;
- partnerships with local public institutions, Roma and non-Roma nongovernmental organisations;
- individual and group counselling meetings and debates with local Roma leaders on the protection and promotion of children rights;
- informational activities in Roma communities in order to harmonize the specific cultural and moral values with the legislative aspects of protection of children's rights (access to education, preventing poverty and labour exploitation;

- psychological evaluation of minor girls who have applied for a marriage permit; counselling on issues such as: conflict management, domestic violence, family planning, communication;
- mediation, information and public awareness-raising on children's rights;
- parental education, individual and family counselling.

The major part of the activities is case-specific and is not dealing with the entire phenomena of early/forced marriages. The General Departments of Social Care and Child Protection provide mostly counselling, information on children's rights through different materials (leaflets, posters etc.) with an emphasis on the right to education, and assess the applicants aged 16–18 to issue or refuse to issue the marriage permit. The marriage contracted by minors aged between 16 and 18 is considered by the county departments as an early marriage. Due to the fact that according to Romanian legislation the legal age for marriage is 18 and with parental consent – 16, a special attention is given only to specific cases extensively presented by the press and not generally to the phenomena of “engaging” children at a very early age still occurring in traditional Roma communities. It is considered by these institutions as a criminal offence that should be prosecuted.

Approaching the issue of early/forced marriages: prevention or punishment?

A major part of institutions (78.79%) consider that the issue of early/forced marriages should be approached by prevention and 18.18% of them consider that both prevention and punishment should be used depending on every specific situation.

Methods of prevention:

- professional intervention of local authorities (school, church, Mayor's Office, doctors, police) in offering advice regarding the legal, social, health and emotional aspects of early marriages for every category of persons (parents, children, grandparents, teachers, etc.) and in support of the families;
- close monitoring at local level and involvement of the local community in finding appropriate solutions for each case;
- counselling and protection of the minor involved in illegal cohabitation;
- educational activities; parental education (parents' schools); extracurricular activities involving multidisciplinary teams (school mediators, school principals, doctors, representatives of the GDSCChP, psychologists, social assistants, lawyers);
- awareness-raising campaigns on the effects and consequences of early marriages;
- programmes implemented by NGOs;
- promoting models of successful Roma women in different domains: education, family, career development;
- roundtables, debates, seminars with the participation of Roma leaders, representatives of churches, psychologists, doctors in order to debate how to respect

- traditions regarding marriage and the rights of children giving them a chance for education and social inclusion;
- keeping records of girls aged over 12;
 - planning family activities in schools;
 - monitoring school performance of children from the secondary school;
 - appointment of counsellors, social assistants, psychologists in every school;
 - compulsory education up to at least 10th grade.

Sanctions:

- introduction in the legislation of sanctions for parents, who for various reasons force their children to marry at a very early age;
- punishment for violating the existing legislation (Penal Code, Family Code, Law No. 272/2004, etc.);
- punishment for violating the right of the child to grow with his/her parents, the right to education, health, freedom of expression, private life;
- punishment for the major partner and the parents or legal guardians of the minor.

Regarding the **issuance of a marriage permit** at the age of 16, article 4 of Law No. 4/1953 – Family Code, stipulates: „*On reasonable grounds, the child who has attained the age of sixteen can marry based on a medical opinion, with the consent of his/her parents or, where appropriate, of his/her guardian and with the permission of the general department for social care and child protection, in which territorial jurisdiction has his/her domicile*”.

Due to the fact that the law does not specify the reasonable grounds on which this opinion may be issued, according to the legal literature and practice as reasonable grounds are considered pregnancy and childbirth by a minor mother.

In the period covered (2008–2009 and the first quarter of 2010) all the responding county level institutions issued marriage permits on the following grounds:

- pregnant minor or childbirth;
- children already born in the family;
- previous coexistence and common domicile;
- stable affective relationship and desire to start a family;
- school dropping out;
- religious reasons, e.g. in order to get married in the Pentecostal Church it is mandatory to obtain first an permit from the GDSCChP;
- moving abroad of the young family after marriage;
- poverty.

The highest number of issued permits (18) by the responsible institutions is in Botosani County. According to the institutions, there are no records on the applicant's ethnicity, so they do not have any statistics that shows the percentage of early/forced

marriages in Roma communities. Due to the fact that according to Romanian legislation marriage under 16 years of age is forbidden, the young Roma couples (between 12–15 years) are “married” only in the eyes of the community. The county offices are not aware of all the cases, but on the other hand, consider that the Police and the Prosecutor’s Office are competent to intervene, because one of the two sexual offenses under the Penal Code is committed: a sexual intercourse with a minor and/or rape.

In most cases the applications for the marriage permit have been requested for minors aged between 16 and 18, but there are 5 county institutions where the declared age was between 15 and 16, and two where the request was for minors aged between 13 and 15.

A very important observation came from Salaj County: the applicants usually come to the institution 5 or 10 days before the wedding date and in these cases a psychological counselling is already late; on the other hand, in these cases the age difference between men and women is between 6 and 10 years.

Reasons for refusal of issuance the permit:

- the minor mother is under the jurisdiction of another county;
- the juvenile’s immaturity, not being prepared for a family life;
- refusal of parental consent;
- violation of the provision regarding the minimum age of marriage (16 years);
- lack of reasonable ground (pregnancy or childbirth);
- dropping out from compulsory school;
- refusal of the minor;
- change of opinion of the minor girl after psychological counselling.

In four counties (Satu Mare, Maramures, Braila, Suceava) the issuance of marriage permit is requested on the ground of pregnancy under the age of 15. Measures taken by these institutions:

- refusal to grant the permit due to violation of legal conditions;
- legal, social and psychological counselling;
- the couple is encouraged to return after having the legal age;
- during 2009 the Braila County General Department was informed of 21 cases of pregnant girls under 15 years of age by the county Obstetrics and Gynaecology Hospital. In these cases protection measures were taken and the minor mothers were directed to day-care centres or in mother-child care centres.

At the GDSCChP there is no exhausting evidence on pregnant minors under 18 years of age but the cases are reported directly to these institutions. Such information is collected by the County Healthcare Departments and/or by the local social assistance and protection services at the local authorities.

The Mehedinti County General Department has a statistics of unmarried pregnant minors according to the data provided monthly by the county hospitals. The institution has data for the minor's domicile and on the basis of the recommendations from the report takes special protection measures for the minor mother and child. In the cases of minors under 16 years of age the local police are informed in order to investigate possible offences of sexual intercourse with a minor.

Who should perform actions to prevent early/forced marriages?

One of the questions asked was if the institutions consider that the obligation to perform actions to prevent early/forced marriages should be included or not in their mandate. The major part (23, meaning 69.70%) of the interviewed institutions consider it should not be mandatory for them to perform these actions, but the local social assistance service and local authorities should be responsible, doctors' offices and local police forces (according to the provisions of Law No. 272/2004), because the GDSCChP are institutions at the county level and do not have local structures.

According to the opinions expressed:

- the local community should develop and implement activities in order to prevent early/forced marriages, being the authority that knows best the issues related to ethnicity, tradition, religion, level of education, and material conditions of its members;
- marriage is based on the consent of both parties, so a marriage cannot be forced; the young Roma children live in cohabitation forced by their parents.
- the obligation for preventing early/forced marriages should be included in the mandate of the mayors' offices;
- the obligation should be imposed to the County Healthcare Department through the health mediators, as this is also a healthcare problem, which is very frequent in Roma communities;

The institutions that agreed about including this obligation in their mandate, consider that the activities should be developed in cooperation with the local authorities, educational institutions and with the active participation of the local communities.

County School Inspectorates

The County School Inspectorates (CSI) are specialised bodies at county level of the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports for the implementation of the educational objectives provided by the Law of Education in the field of pre-university education.

During the research questionnaires were sent to all inspectorates. Only (51.22%) of them responded. The questionnaires included 12 questions related to:

The existence of special classes or schools for Roma children: in 61.90% of the respondent institutions there are no classes or schools, and in the others education in Romani language is provided up to the 13 grade, depending on the needs of the community and the school system.

Major causes for dropping out from school of Roma children on the basis of the answers received:

- nomadic way of life of certain families; migration;
- the mentality of parents who consider education as not being important for their life; lack of parents' education;
- lack of interest in school;
- the tradition not to send children to school, or only up to 4th grade for the girls and 8th grade for the boys;
- poverty;
- long distance and high cost of transportation for further school attendance;
- early/forced marriages of girls, the attitude of the „mothers-in-law” to prohibit their school attendance;
- early pregnancy;
- dysfunctional families;
- leaving the country together with their parents; frequent change of work and residence of the parents;
- willingness to earn money at an young age;
- non-attendance of kindergarten, resulting in poor performance at school.

In the traditional Roma communities girls drop out at the age of 11–12 years (3rd – 4th grade) and boys at the age of 13–15 years (6th – 8th grades), very few of them finish high school and even less of them study at university.

The County School Inspectorates do not have any statistics which could reflect the percent of school dropouts as a result of early/forced marriages of children from traditional Roma communities.

Among the ordinary activities implemented by the school inspectorates there are no special measures for preventing early marriages.

County Offices for Roma Issues

The County Offices for Roma Issues (CORI) have been set up on the basis of Government Decision No. 430/2001 regarding the Romanian Government Strategy for the Improvement of the Roma Situation in Romania. There are internal structures of the Prefectures, not independent legal entities. They are subordinated to the Ministry of Administration and Interior and coordinated technically by the National Roma Agency.

Their major responsibilities include the organisation, planning and coordination of the activities at the county level for fulfilling the *General Plan of Measures for the*

implementation of the Strategy for the Improvement of the Roma Situation in Romania. In the composition of the CORI there are 3 or 4 experts included, one of them of Roma origin.

From the total of 41 distributed questionnaires to the prefectures, 20 were completed and sent back to the organisation. Mixed working groups were established in all prefectures, consisting of the representatives of County Roma Offices, county level institutions, experts in Roma issues from the local mayors' offices, health and school mediators, Roma informal leaders and NGOs dealing with Roma issues.

Only in 4 counties the issue of early/forced marriages in traditional Roma communities was discussed in the mixed working group's meetings. In the other respondent counties this issue was not discussed.

Early and forced marriages from the perspective of traditional Roma communities – evaluation of the conducted interviews

Within the frames of the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages” in Romania, a special survey among traditional Roma communities was conducted. The questions aimed at helping the project team to assess correctly how traditional Roma people perceive early marriage issue, how marriages are concluded, what the age of the children promised to each other is, who makes the decisions related to early marriages and on what grounds, and what the age of the children getting married is. Specific questions were directed to clarify if the marriage is consummated on the wedding night through a sexual intercourse.

The interviewers attempted to establish the school dropout rate of children involved in forced marriages and other consequences related to the group pressure against individual freedom, such as the place where the married couple lives, who administrates their resources and who leads the household. Questions were directed also to establish at what age occurs early birth-giving.

It was also important to find out details on the status of the young bride, what happens if the young girl refuses to marry or decides to leave her husband and what the attitude of the individuals towards the issue is.

The number of individuals questioned in Roma communities by the survey team is 59, persons belonging to several traditional Roma communities, women and men, elderly and young, urban and rural, Christian and Muslim. The interviewers were 26 men and 33 women. In the traditional Roma communities in the regions of Banat, Transylvania, Dobrogea and Muntenia the interviews were conducted by people of Roma or other minority origin.

In the region of Dobrogea, Constanta County, 20 interviews were carried out:

- In the **Turkish Muslim Roma** community 9 interviews were carried out. All respondents were men aged between 29 and 53;
- In the **Kaldarashi** community 6 interviews were carried out, three of them with women aged 16, 29 and 79; and three with men – one of undeclared age, the others at the age of 28 and 31;
- In the **Bear Leader's** group, 3 interviews were carried out, all of the respondents being men, aged 36, 38 and 68;
- In the **Rudari** community was conducted 1 interview with a woman respondent, aged 35;
- In the **Fiddler's (Lautari) community** was conducted 1 interview with a woman respondent, aged 44.

In the Region of Muntenia 10 interviews were conducted, 5 in the Galati County and 5 in Buzau:

- Galati County – 5 women aged between 14 and 29;
- Buzau County – 4 women, aged between 14 and 22 and one man aged 19.

In the Region of Banat, Timis County, 11 interviews were conducted:

- In the Gabor community interviewed were 5 women aged between 20 and 55 and 5 men aged between 20 and 58 and 1 girl (8 years old).

In the Region of Transylvania, a total of 18 interviews were conducted, 7 interviews in the County of Sibiu and 11 in the County of Mures:

- In the Kaldarashi community interviewed were 2 men aged 27 and 56, and 5 women aged between 28 and 53;
- In the Gabor community interviewed were 6 women aged between 15 and 58, and 2 men aged 28 and 59;
- In the Craftsmen community interviewed were 2 women, aged 38 and 17, and 1 man aged 23.

Early/forced marriage patterns in the interviewed communities

In the light of the questionnaires the Kaldarashi and Gabors (“Gypsies with hats”) groups are the most closed and traditional ones. They have a deep respect for their customs, being the only Roma groups where women still wear traditional clothes.

EARLY/FORCED MARRIAGES IN THE KALDARASHI COMMUNITY

Interviews which were carried out in the Kaldarashi community from **the region of Transylvania (Sibiu County)** show a high degree of unanimity of the respondents on the basic criteria for choosing a partner. The rituals, values, power relations are clearly defined and known by all the members of the community, regardless of their age, gender or position in the family.

Marriage is seen as a crucial event, a strong mechanism of reproduction of the group identity, a tool for preventing assimilation or dilution. Therefore, preparations

for the marriage start from the moment of birth. In the Kaldarashi community the custom of “promising” the children to each other involves families with children aged between 2 and 8.

The first and most important criterion for choosing the partner, is the group identity, marriage has to be concluded exclusively with a Kaldarashi person. In the Kaldarashi community from the Sibiu County, girls of the same group are brought from hundreds of kilometres to be married to local boys, as the county is more “westernized”.

The second criterion is the wealth and the status of the families, the highest priority being given to descendants of respected, wealthy families.

The third criterion is purity. The girl has to be virgin. Virginity has a mystic connotation and is fundamental for the marriage to take place. In many cases the amount paid for a girl is interpreted not as a price, but as an appreciation of her virginity by the family of the boy.

Unbalanced marriages might occur, when the children do not descend from families with the same wealth or status. However, even in such cases, strict rules are governing the choice: a girl from a wealthy family would not be allowed to marry a boy from a poorer descent. According to the Kaldarashi norms, a boy from a modest family might not be able to manage the wealth of the bride and then the young couple might face poverty.

The power relations are clearly determined. The father of the boy decides, with the help of the elders from the family, whom to ask for marriage. If the father of the girl agrees to the marriage, then an engagement will be organised, at which the boy gives the girl a “gold coin”, which means that from now on she is “taken”. Three members of the community in Sibiu confirmed that asking the children, if they like each other or if they want to get married, is a comparatively new custom, being practiced for three or four years.

The wedding ceremony takes place when the girls become 13 or 14 years old and the boys a little older, around 16 or 17. Five of the interviewed women in Sibiu believe that graduating 4th grade and marrying at the age of 13 or 14 is important. Only one woman thinks that the age for the marriages should be raised and the couple allowed to get to know each other better.

The boy’s parents pay for the wedding, but the girl’s dowry is also very important. On the wedding night the consumption of the marriage takes place. The bride will move to her parent’s in law who will teach and help her to be a good wife. If on the wedding night it occurs that the girl is not a virgin, then damages must be paid to the parents of the boy for the shame brought on their son (this usually is around the sum that the boy’s parents have spent for the wedding). The shame suffered by the girl’s parents is big; they will be punished and ridiculed in the community.

According to the interviewed the time between the engagement and the wedding is the period when the two have the chance to spend more time together and get to know each other better. If after the wedding the young couple cannot live together they may divorce.

The troubles related to early marriage are serious. The first consequence of an early marriage is the dropping out from school. The girls are the most affected; they will only finish 3rd, probably 4th grade. The boys have the chance to graduate 8th grade.

There are several cases, however, of members of the Kaldarashi community from Sibiu, who have finished secondary school and even obtained university diplomas. Among them are the religious leader and “king” of the community (56 years old) and his sister (53 years old), a well-known Roma poet and activist. Another member of the community of Sibiu is studying two majors at two universities (law and political sciences).

Early pregnancy in this community is due to the fact that girls get married at a very young age (13 or 14) and they usually have their first child in the first two years of marriage. The young mothers are supported by the families and the newborn children are cared of, protected and never abandoned. In the light of the above mentioned, child trafficking and prostitution are not risk factors in these communities.

In the opinion of the members of this community, early marriages can die out over time through prevention and counselling, and the target group should be the elders of the community. Punishment as an educational instrument is totally rejected.

The Kaldarashi communities in Dobrogea and Muntenia preserve nearly identical matrimonial patterns and rituals as the Kaldarashi from Transylvania. According to the respondents in these communities, *the traditional early marriage* is still the dominant practice. The age at which the girls marry is between 12 and 14, as for the boys it is between 15 and 17. The engagement is made much earlier, at the age between 2 and 8 (in some cases even at birth).

The power relations follow the traditional pattern. The parents are the ones to choose for their children and usually the children obey.

All respondents agree on the identity preserving role of marriage. In their opinion these matrimonial unions are important to happen at a young age, mainly because they keep their identity as a Kaldarashi Roma and as members of the community. The best way for the families to keep their identity is to protect their children from harmful knowledge and experiences. They consider that not marrying their children (mostly girls) at a young age and letting them attend school would bring them to “failure”, but if they marry young before gaining experience, they would already have a family and children to take care of. It is important to marry the children while they are young in order to teach them the well determined roles and traditions of the community. The dominance of the collective rights on the individual

freedom is perceived as a blessing, as a chance for the community to survive, to resist external pressure and assimilation.

The distribution of roles and the division of work are also clearly regulated. Men bring the money and work outside the family; women run the household and take care of the children. Material and financial wealth is a permanent ambition for the Kaldarashi. Many of the questioned individuals have their own private businesses.

Respect to women increases with their age. The girl obeys practically to everyone in the family, including the younger male brothers. The young bride has almost the same subordinated role as a girl, except for her children. Moreover, the bride has to take over and to respect all the customs of the husband's family. When the woman becomes a mother-in-law, she receives higher respect and influence in the family, sometimes superior than her husband's status.

All respondents stressed the importance of the family. They are proud of the fact that Kaldarashi do not abandon their children, which are "precious", "little gods", cherished as a symbol of purity. Members of the group who marry outside the community are to be banned for life.

The consequences of early marriages affect mostly the girls in this community. Due to the fact that these girls are promised at a very early age (2–8 years) sometimes even at birth, many of them do not attend school at all, as their only task is to learn to be a good wife. The first child of the young parents is born when the mother is 12–14 year old. Children are those who will carry on the traditions of the community, so they are not abandoned and not exposed to risk factors as prostitution and child trafficking.

The opinions on the abolishment of early marriages differ between the two regions. The members of the Kaldarashi community in Dobrogea consider that the abolishment of this practice should be achieved through prevention (counselling) targeting both youngsters and elders and the most qualified person to give the lead is the informal leader of the community. In the region of Muntenia the girls consider that penal punishment should be applied for the parents of the girls who promise and marry their children at very young age.

EARLY/FORCED MARRIAGES IN THE GABOR COMMUNITY

Interviews were carried out in the Gabor ("Gypsies with hats") the region of Banat, County Timis and the region of Transylvania, County Mures.

Early marriage is widely practiced in the community. Within the community of *Gabors* there are some differences in customs, depending on the wealth of the family, or how the wife is chosen for the boy. In wealthy Roma communities the father of the boy makes the agreement with the parents of the girl to marry their children, while in less wealthy communities the practice is to steal the girl. The most important criterion for choosing a wife is that she must be from the same Roma group.

For wealthy communities it is important for the girl to be a virgin and to descend from a respected and wealthy family. The children are engaged to each other at the age of 7 or 8 (in some cases 13–14, in the region of Banat). The act of marriage is performed in front of the community at the age of 14–16.

The consummation of marriage will take place on the wedding night and the virginity of the girl is the most important element, otherwise the father will have to pay the prize for the shame suffered. Many of the interviewed said that in the above mentioned cases Roma justice was applied, but it was not specified the nature of these punishments.

In communities where families have a modest income, the beauty of the girl is decisive when choosing the bride. Thus, the parents of the boy are not obliged to pay for the wedding expenses and for the girl to have dowry. The age when the “stealing” of the girl happens is the same as in other communities – 13 or 14.

In both communities, girls often drop out from school. They finish 4th, in best cases, 6th grade. In the first two years of the marriage the first child is born, the young mother, who lives with her parents-in-law, is helped by her mother-in-law. The children in this community are never abandoned; they are raised and educated within the family.

All interviewed in the wealthy communities consider that the tradition of early marriages is positive and should not be changed. Two women respondents consider that the only disadvantage is that girls cannot finish more than fourth grade.

The answers of the women from the communities with more modest means think that the tradition should be banned and the girls allowed to attend more classes and have the chance to experience more. In their opinion prevention is the best way to deal with the issue. Counselling and education should target the elders and the parents of the children. The most qualified person to talk about the issue is the informal leader of the community.

EARLY/FORCED MARRIAGES IN THE TURKISH MUSLIM ROMA COMMUNITY

It is known that in the region of Dobrogea (South Romania) a large group of traditionalist *Turkish Muslim Roma* can be found. 9 interviews were conducted there. All of the interviewed people were men (aged between 29 and 53).

In this community the children are promised to each other between the age of 12 and 14, and the father of the boy chooses the bride for his son, asking the permission of the girl’s parents. The criteria for choosing a daughter-in-law are for her to be from the same community, to be a virgin and to descend from a respected and wealthy family. The age of marriage is between 14 and 18.

After the wedding ceremony takes place the couple moves to the boy’s parent’s house. They are helped until they can cope on their own. The family roles are well

established in this community as well. Women stay at home, run the household, raise and educate the children, while men are providing for the family.

Early marriages affect mainly the girls – dropping out from school, as some of them do not go to school at all, while the boys are allowed to finish fifth or even eighth grade.

The girls usually have their first child between the age of 15 and 17. The family is very important for this community as well; the children are not abandoned, but raised in and by the family. The young mother is helped by her mother-in-law and all women in the family. Children are not a target for prostitution or child trafficking.

All interviewed in this community consider that this tradition is not useful and it should be changed through education and prevention. The target group should be the parents, but the adolescents as well; the most qualified person to raise the awareness is the local non informal leader.

EARLY/FORCED MARRIAGES IN THE BEAR LEADERS' COMMUNITY

Three men (aged 30, 36 and 68) from the *Bear Leaders'* community were interviewed about their traditions of marriage. In this community the children are promised to each other at the age of 13 and 14 (it has been raised from the age of 5 and 6). The father of the boy is the one who makes the choice for his son, considering whether the girl is from the same community and from a well-to-do family. After the marriage the young bride has to live in the house of her parents-in-law and has the first child as soon as possible. The children are raised in the family; none of them are abandoned.

The answers reveal that in this community the girls have more freedom, for example they are allowed to go to school and even finish high school, nevertheless they have to stay at home, take care of the children and run the household and do not have any opportunity to work.

None of the interviewed thinks that the tradition is a positive one. They all consider that this should be changed. One person thinks that the only way for these changes to take place is through legal punishment. Another one considers that prevention is the right way, by targeting the young and the elders through counselling and education. The most qualified person to do it is the informal leader.

EARLY/FORCED MARRIAGES IN OTHER ROMA COMMUNITIES

Five other interviews were conducted in communities where the tradition of early marriages is not practiced. One person is a member of the Rudari group (one woman aged 35), and the other one is part of the Fiddlers' group (one woman aged 44). The other three individuals named themselves as Roma, not specifying the group they belong to two (two women aged 17 and 37, one man aged 23).

According to the respondents children are not promised to each other. The criterion for choosing a partner in life is that he/she belongs to the same group. The

age of marriage is between 18 and 22 for girls and 22 and 23 for boys. After the marriage the young couple, depending of their income, lives in the home of the boy's parents or run their own household. Girls have more freedom in these communities – they are allowed to finish more grades at school, some of them even attend university.

The dropout rate in these communities is not related to early marriages, but more likely to poverty due to the fact that the income of these families is mostly from seasonal work.

None of the interviewed was married at an early age. The children born in these families are not abandoned either.

According to the respondents from these groups, the practice of early marriages should be banned; the children should be allowed to choose whomever they like for their partner in life. Counselling and prevention should be further developed and should target the elders of the families. The most qualified person for these activities is the informal leader of the community.

CONCLUSIONS ON ATTITUDE OF THE TRADITIONAL ROMA COMMUNITIES TOWARDS EARLY/FORCED MARRIAGES

The practice of early marriages is a custom in closed and traditional Roma groups (mainly Kaldarashi, Gabor and Turkish Muslim Roma). Children promised and married to each other at an early age have a chance to divorce, if they cannot live together, but there will be a pressure to marry again as soon as possible. Individuals who get married outside the group are considered traitors and are excluded.

The members of these groups have a very strong sense of identity. The roles and power relations are very well established, these groups are strongly patriarchal ones. In order to preserve their identity, thus their traditions, the children are taught the rules and roles of the community from a very early age.

The person who makes the decisions in the family is the father with the approval of the elders. The young bride or the mother has no decision making power within the family, her only role is running the household, raising the children and obeying her husband. Early marriage unions are a practice for keeping the group united and compact. Promising the children to each other at an early age (between 2 and 8) and marrying them between the age of 12 and 15 is important not only for the cohesion of the group, but also for the prosperity of the family and the community.

The main problems related to early marriages in traditional Roma groups are dropping out from school (for the girls, many of them not even attending school) and early pregnancies. The age at which these girls have their first child is between 12 and 14. The children are never abandoned and exposed to the risk of child trafficking. But the questions remains about the internal “trafficking” of children, related to the old rituals of “selling” them.

The interviews conducted in wealthy communities lead us to the conclusion that these people consider this tradition as a positive one and believe that this is a way for them to protect their children, mainly girls, from harmful experiences. It is believed that if they go to school, they might have harmful experiences leading to the loss of their identity as Roma people.

In less wealthy communities, it is mainly women who express certain willingness for raising the age of the brides, and in their opinion the best way to do that is through education and counselling. The target groups should be the young and the elders and the most qualified person to approach the issue is the informal leader of the community. It is only the Kaldarashi community in Muntenia who consider that the best way to abolish early marriages is legal punishment applied to the parents.

Legal, normative and institutional framework related to early marriages in Greece

The Roma in Greece

The Roma in Greece are between 300 000 and 350 000 people. Roma communities in Greece are scattered on the whole territory of the country, but there are compact groups in the bigger cities, mainly in Athens and Thessalonica.

As in all other Balkan countries, Roma in Greece are a diverse community and important differences among different Roma groups exist. For example, the vast majority of the Romas are Christians but in Trace the Horohane Romas (Roma Muslims) are majority. Most of the Roma in Greece speak Romani language. For others their mother tongue is Greek, and in Aegean Thrace – Turkish. Accordingly, parts of them have a preferred Greek or Turkish identity.

The main Roma groups in Greece are: *GIFTI* (Yifti), who are mainly Greek speaking and part of them is with a preferred Greek identity; *TURKO-GIFTI* (Turko-Yifti), who are predominantly Turkish speaking and have a Millet/Muslim identity; *RUDARI*, who speak old Rumanian language; and *KALPAZAYA*, *HANDURIYA*, *FILIPJIYA*, *FICHIRYA*, *ERLIDES*, *SEPECHIDES* and others who are Romani speaking, and identifies themselves as Roma.

The Greek legislation governing marriage, family and child protection

THE CONSTITUTION

As the constitution is above the national laws we shall refer below to some of its articles. **Article 28** is the foundation for the participation of Greece in the European Union. According to it, the acknowledged provisions of international law and international agreements become an integral part of domestic law upon their ratification and coming into effect, and they prevail over any other provision. Thus, Greece

approved the Convention for Human Rights (Legislative Decree 53/1974) and the International convention on the Rights of the Child (Law 2101/1992).

The value of human beings is protected by **article 2 of the Constitution, paragraph 1**, according to which: “Respect and protection of the value of the human being constitute the primary obligations of the State”.

Relevant restrictions are those in **articles 7, paragraph 2, and 106, paragraph 2**, of the Constitution that prohibit the humiliation of human dignity and developing of private economic initiative at the expense of it. This restriction is of great importance for the interpretation of other articles, mostly those of common law. The text is based on the stipulation that no human shall be reduced to an object, to a simple means for servicing any purpose. Holder of this right is every human being, regardless of his/her nationality, even the deceased and the unborn child. Concerning the user of this right, the principle of any human right does not depend only on the negative obligation of respect by the state, but also on its positive protection against its violation by others.

Another restriction, closer to the protection of children, is that in **article 21, paragraph 1 and 3**. Paragraph 1 refers to underage adolescents, up to the age of 18, and paragraph 3 to young people up to the age of 30. Finally, we can mention **article 25, paragraph 1**, which provides that the rights of every person, as an individual and as a member of society, are guaranteed by the state.

CIVIL CODE (C. C.)

(issues concerning marriage and relations between the parents and their children)

1. Requirements for a valid marriage

In order to conclude a valid marriage, there are certain requirements, which are divided into positive and negative conditions (constraints). Positive are the conditions that must exist to contract a valid marriage. These conditions are: different sex of the spouses, legal age for marriage (**C.C. 1350 Section 2**) and legal capacity (**C.C. 1351, 1352**) and refer to three individual physical or mental characteristics of a person. Instead, the negative conditions or prohibitions to marriage refer to the social characteristics of the individual and are related to the simultaneous existence of another marriage (**C.C. 1354**), relationship by blood (**1356**), relationship by affinity (**1357**) and adoption (**1360**).

Whether a marriage is valid or not it is only up to the Greek civil courts to decide, by applying the domestic law that is the Civil Code. If, for example, a religious worker performs a marriage ceremony under the rules of his religion but in violation of any of the rules of the Civil Code regulating the positive conditions and obstacles of marriage, the marriage would be void. In other words, the marriage will be void even

though not contrary to the rules of the religion, according to which the marriage was contracted. Finally, the rules of the Civil Code regulating the positive conditions and prohibitions to marriage shall apply to both civil and religious marriages.

2. Legal age for marriage

C.C. 1350 paragraph 2: the spouses must have reached the age of 18. The court may allow the marriage even before the age of 18, after a hearing of the spouses and the people representing the minors, if there is a valid reason for that.

The family law is in compliance with the current social reality and the need for families, consisted of equal and jointly responsible spouses; therefore, this requires the same minimum age for both sexes. Thus is established a legal age for marriage of 18 years for both spouses. Then both men and women will have completed their basic education and can acquire and exercise a profession. In addition, at the age of 18 years people acquire full legal capacity in any respect.

Certainly, the legislator is aware that marriage in specific cases should exceptionally be allowed to minors. Thus, article 1350 paragraph 2, section b, provides that a valid marriage with a minor is possible with the permission of the court, which may, after hearing the party to the marriage and persons representing the minor, permits the marriage even before the age of 18 if the marriage is necessary for a serious reason.

Since the application must be submitted by the child, it is obvious that this can be produced primarily by the legal representatives, engaged in the care. These are either their parents (**1510 C.C. § 1**) or guardians (**C.C. 1589, 1603**). As per **article 742 of the Code of Civil Procedure**, if the minor is at least 16 years of age, he/she may be present in court concerning him/her; therefore, the request may be filed by the minor him/herself, if he/she is 16. Minors under the age of 10 are completely incapable and cannot marry in any way whatsoever (**C.C. 1351**). In taking the decision the court takes into account first of all the interests of the child according to the general provision for the protection of children (**C.C. 1511**).

A valid reason in the meaning of article 1350, paragraph 2, section 2, can be considered a relevant to the marriage event associated with one of the persons intending to marry. The positive precondition, however, cannot be respected in case there exists any of the prohibitions to marriage. The permission of the court, therefore, concerns only the condition related to the legal age for marriage.

The request for a court permit is considered by a single magistrate (**Code of Civil Procedure 740**) according to the place of residence of the minor (**Code of Civil Procedure 797**). The request is filed before the marriage, so that, if it is rejected or even if a court permit is not taken, the marriage, nevertheless committed, is deemed void (**C.C. 1372 Section the 1st par. 1**). The nullity of the marriage may be revoked as per **article 1373 No. 2**, if the court revises its opinion subsequently or if the spouse

recognizes the marriage when he/she comes of age. It is therefore possible to file a request for a court permit and after concluding the marriage, and in case of a positive decision, it may transform from invalid into valid.

3. Legal capacity

As regards the specific legal capacity to marry, [article 1351 of the Civil Code](#) refers to [article 128 of the Civil Code](#) providing that a marriage of persons under the age of 10 (even with authorisation of the court) and, on the other hand, those who are under judicial disability. They cannot contract a valid civil marriage, neither can those who are not aware of their actions or are in emotional or mental impairment, which substantially limits their ability to realise the consequences of their actions. According to the correlation of [article 129 No 2 to article 1351](#), incapable of marriage are also those under guardianship having relation to marriage. For these categories the prohibition to marriage is in effect until the existence of the conditions for it. Thus, if the minor turns 10 and afterwards gets permission from the court ([1373 No. 2](#)) the void marriage will become valid retroactively.

Therefore, a valid marriage may be contracted by anyone who is over eighteen years of age or between ten and eighteen with the permission of the court if meeting certain conditions.

4. The act of marriage

The act of marriage as a contract of civil law has two elements: the consent of the spouses for the conclusion of the marriage and the ceremony.

The consent of the spouses is an essential element of marriage and does not necessarily consist of explicit statements of the willingness of the parties, as it is accepted that they can be made only in the presence of the spouses on the relevant ceremony. The validity of this consent and the statements made by the spouses is regulated according to the general provisions of the Civil Code.

If there is any information that one of the intending spouses is not aware of his/her acts, so [article 131, section 1 of C.C.](#) can be applied and the marriage shall be deemed invalid ([C.C. 1372 paragraph 1, section 1](#)).

The marriage is contracted by consent of the spouses (civil marriage) or with a ceremony conducted by a priest from the Orthodox Church or by an officer of another denomination or religion recognised in Greece. The conditions of the ritual and any other matter relating to it are determined by the rules of the religion in accordance with the respective ritual, if not contrary to public policy.

According to [article 1367, paragraph 3](#), the procedure of religious marriage is determined by the rules of the doctrine or religion if these rules are not contrary to the Greek public order. With the term “ritual” the Greek legislation refers to any form of religious marriage ceremony, regardless of having or not any ritual, as it is a

holy ceremony in the presence of a religious worker, who certifies how a matrimonial bond is created under the relevant religious law. A condition, however, for the existence of the marriage contracted in accordance with the rules of a doctrine or a religion, is that the religion or the doctrine is recognised in Greece.

According to [article 1367 paragraphs 2 and 3, and article 7 of Presidential Decree 391/1982](#), in both cases of civil and religious marriage, the responsible officer must issue after the ceremony an act of marriage as well as a marriage certificate. This marriage certificate is evidence of the marriage only, the existence or validity of which may not be affected by any omissions or inaccuracies. If a registrar's act of marriage is not registered, the marriage cannot be proved by any other evidence in accordance with the relevant rules of the Code of Civil Procedure. Finally, if the responsible officer for any reason does not issue an act of marriage, the marriage certificate may be issued by a court decision, which certifies that the marriage took place in a certain time ([Article 15 of Law 344/1976, Code of Civil Procedure article 782](#)).

5. Invalid marriage

When there is some irregularity in the marriage, related to any positive or negative conditions for its conclusion, the marriage is deemed void. There are three types of invalid marriage: non-existent, void and voidable marriage.

The marriage is considered *NON-EXISTENT* in two cases:

- a) when is missing one of the conditions related to the substance, namely the difference of sex;
- b) when an essential element of its existence is entirely missing, i.e. an element of its conclusion such as the consent of the spouses.

Regarding the cases of lack of consent of the spouses, the marriage is non-existent when the element of consent of the spouses is entirely missing, i.e. when there is no will to act. This occurs either when the marriage is contracted by employment of physical violence against one of the spouses (*vis absoluta*) or when the marriage takes place while one of the spouses is in a state of incapacity and does not understand the nature of his/her acts.

The marriage is non-existent also when it is performed by an officer of a doctrine or a religion which is not recognised in Greece, which belongs to a cult or another denomination.

The non-existent marriage has no legal effect and it is automatically declared void. Therefore, a court decision is not needed, but any person concerned may initiate litigation to investigate the non-existence ([Code of Civil Procedure 70](#)). This nonexistence, which cannot be cured, extends not only to the relations between the spouses (who have no rights or obligations in the non-existent marriage), but also towards their children, who are considered as born out of wedlock as far as the

husband is concerned. A registrar's act is not issued for a non-existent marriage and if issued it does not have the force of the act of marriage.

INVALID is a marriage contracted in breach of the [articles 1350–1352, 1354, 1356, 1357 and 1360](#). The cases of invalid marriage refer mainly to [article 1372 paragraph 1 of C.C.](#) and can be classified into three categories:

- a) cases in which are missing some of the positive conditions for contracting the marriage;
- b) when there is an impediment to marriage;
- c) where there is a problem with the data of the registrar's act of marriage, i.e. either the consent of the spouses or even when these data are not missing entirely, because in that case the marriage would be non-existent.

As far as the absence of positive preconditions for marriage, except for the lack of the requirement for the different sex, which would make the marriage non-existent, the lack of any other positive conditions determine the nullity of the marriage. These conditions are the legal age to marry and legal capacity. The law provides the option for correction of a void marriage retrospectively.

The marriage is *VOIDABLE* when it has been contracted as a result of fraud regarding the identity of one of the spouses ([C.C. 1374](#)) or illegal or unethical duress ([C.C. 1375](#)). The latter provides that the marriage that has been contracted may be annulled if one of the spouses (or both) was forced to contract it under duress, illegal or unethical. The cancellation is excluded if the respective spouse recognises the duress does not exist anymore.

6. Annulment of void and voidable marriage

In the case of invalid marriage, as well as in the case of marriage contracted under duress or fraud, is required a court order to cancel it. The claim for the marriage annulment may be lodged:

1. in the cases of [articles 1350–1352, 1354, 1356, 1357 and 1360](#), by the spouses and anyone who has a vested interest, as well as the public prosecutor *ex officio*;
2. in the cases of [articles 1374 and 1375](#) only by the spouse who is under duress, but not by his/her heirs. The claim for the marriage annulment may be lodged by a representative, providing he/she is expressly authorized.

Apart from the provision concerning marriage, there is a variety of norms in the Civil Code regulating the relations between the parents and the children ([articles 1505–1541](#)). [Article 1507](#), for instance, defines the obligation of both parties for reciprocal help, affection and respect, whereby their ethical obligation becomes a legal one, which implementation, however, cannot be imposed by a judge. This provi-

sion functions mostly as a rule that implies certain mutual behaviour with an educational role, despite the fact that there are indirect sanctions. This responsibility includes material and psychological support, in cases of daily problems, as much as in extraordinary situations. Furthermore, it involves the mutual respect of views, religious and political conceptions, and protection from actions that can harm them or others.

Also, according to [article 1510](#), parental care is both an obligation and a right of the parents. Its character is particularly substantial as, in combination with [article 1511](#) (about the protection of the interest of the child), it not only prohibits misuse of parental care, but also prohibits any form of it that may be contrary to the interest of the child.

The provision for the interest of the child constitutes the most important expression of the children's oriented tendency of the legislator. All decisions taken by the parents and the judge must be in the interest of the child. As the interest of the child is considered every physical, material, psychological, ethical and spiritual interest.

One of the main factors for analyzing the interest of the child is his/her personal opinion, explicitly defined in the Civil Code, which should be asked and taken into consideration when the relevant decisions are taken by the parents and by the court. Other requirements for taking into consideration the opinion of the child are the maturity of the child and the relevance of the decision to his/her interest. The Supreme Court interprets the maturity of the child as his/her ability to understand what is his interest and a child is mature when he/she has an understanding of the biological and social factors, has a rational and comprehensive point of view on a certain subject and, of course, an appropriate behaviour.

The age is not significant, but in very young age is emphasized on the influence of the parent upon the child. If, besides the maturity of the child, the judge does not take into consideration his opinion, there is a possibility of an appeal. Apart from the opinion of the child, there are other factors that affect and define the interest of the child, some of which are directly mentioned in the Civil Code and others are implied. Some examples are the relation of the child with his parents and his siblings and his personal inclinations. In addition to that, no discrimination based upon race, language, religion, political and any other conceptions is allowed.

With regard to the hierarchy of the criteria used to analyze the interest of the child, it is stated that they are of the same importance and that their significance depends on each situation. Also, concerning the comparison between the interest of the child and the interests of others, such as parents, siblings or other members of the family, the benefits for the child should be emphasized.

Finally, [articles 1531 and 1532](#) should be mentioned, which determine the responsibility of the parents and the consequences of misuse of parental care. More

specifically, article 1531 refers to cases, in which both parents has exercised this right, regardless whether only one of them actually has acted. Therefore, the child is protected more efficiently, as he/she can turn against any of them, demanding full recovery of damages sustained. As far as article 1532 is concerned, in case of maltreatment or violation of the right of the child, or incompetence to exercise this right, the court may order any suitable measure, upon the request of the other parent, or other persons related to the child, the prosecutor or even the child.

PENAL CODE

(minimal age of consent, rape, child molestation, kidnapping)

The Greek Penal Code has various provisions related to the minimal age of an abused child and crimes against children.

According to the **Penal Code (article 121)** as a minor is considered the person who at the time of the act is of age between 8 and 18 years. An act committed by a minor who is of age between 8 and 13 cannot be attributed to him (**article 126**). When a minor, who has not completed 13 years of age, commits a crime, only reformatory or curative measures may be applied, but when he completes 13 years, such measures are taken only if there no possibility of penal prosecution according to **article 127**, if the court investigating the conditions under which the act was committed and the whole personality of the child, who has completed 13 year, decides that his penal prosecution is necessary in order to restrict him/her from committing other crimes, it may rule for the child's confinement in a special facility for detention of young people.

Article 324 refers to the kidnapping of minors and according to it (**paragraph 1**) anyone who takes away a child from his parents or anyone entitled to take care of him/her, or anyone who supports the voluntary running away of a minor from his parents, is punished with imprisonment. If the life of the minor is threatened or serious damage in his health is inflicted, the offender is punished with at least one year of imprisonment. If the minor is under the age of 14 (**paragraph 2**), then imprisonment of up to 10 years is imposed, excepts when the crime is committed by an older relative; then the previous provision is applied (**article 324, paragraph 1**). In all cases, in which the offender commits a crime by means of speculation or manipulation of a minor in order to perform unethical actions or change his marital status, he is punished by imprisonment of up to 10 years (**article 324, paragraph 2**).

Articles 327 and 328 on involuntary and voluntary abduction respectively should be mentioned, too. According to article 327, anyone who with the intention of marriage or debauchery kidnaps or illegally detains a woman without her consent or a woman, who is mentally irresponsible or incapable of resisting because of loss of consciousness or mental deficiency, or for any other reason, is punished, in case of

contracted marriage, with imprisonment of at least 1 year and in case of debauchery, with imprisonment of up to 10 years.

Article 328 is related to our subject as it refers to the voluntary abduction of an unmarried and minor woman. Anyone who kidnaps or detains with the purpose of marriage or debauchery a minor and unmarried woman with her consent, but without the approval of the people who are her guardians or who the legal right to take care of her, is punished with imprisonment of up to 3 years, if he intended to marry the woman. If the marriage has taken place, the prosecution starts only after its annulment and, of course, if some of the main circumstances for fighting early marriages is established.

With regard to the seduction of minors, **article 339** defines that anyone who commits debauchery acts onto a minor person or below 15 years of age, or misleads him/her so that as a result the minor acts or suffers from such an act, is punished by imprisonment of up to 10 years, if not accused more seriously by the provisions of **article 351A**.

If a marriage has been contracted between the offender and the victim, prosecution cannot be initiated and if it has already been initiated, it may not be continued and is declared unacceptable. Only after the annulment of the marriage prosecution can be initiated or continued.

Other provisions relevant to crimes against children are those of **article 342** regarding the abuse of minors and debauchery, of **article 348A** regarding pornography with minors, of **article 349** regarding the incitement of minors to prostitution and of **article 351A** regarding debauchery with minors for payment.

THE APPLICATION OF THE MUSLIM LAW IN GREECE (Law 147/1914)

As far as it concerns the marriage, the jurisdiction of the mufti is incontestable according to the provisions of **article 1367 of the Greek Civil Code**, which we have already mentioned above. However, as we have already highlighted, every issue related to religious marriage is treated in accordance with the customs and the rules of the respective religion and only if they do not contradict the public order. Of course, the combined application of the Greek and the Muslim law may result in many contrasts, particularly related to the polygamy of Muslims, the legal age of consent to marriage (especially the woman's age, which in the Muslim law is 14) and the representation in the consent to marriage. According to the Muslim law, marriage is a political contract of private law, which is contracted with the proposal by the man and the acceptance by the woman in the name of Allah, in the presence of two witnesses and agreement of an amount that the husband has to give to his wife either as a donation or as bridal money. It is characteristic that the woman, even an adult

one, can be represented by her guardian, who is her father or her grandfather, or her father's brother or her grandfather's brother, without taking into consideration her opinion, as stipulated by **article 1350 of the Civil Code**.

With regard to the legal age, our law requires judicial permission. It can be argued that the above permission belongs to the jurisdiction of the Mufti, because apart from a religious authority, he is also a judicial one. Even though we accept that the legal age according to the Muslim law (of course, in cases of marriage where the child is minor but has completed 14 years), which is against the legal age according to the Greek law, if there is no consent of the people to be married, there is an outrageous violation of the individual right to freedom of consent to marriage, therefore, this marriage is invalid according to the laws.

In conclusion, it is worth mentioning that the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights (Vienna 1993) reaffirming the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, states that human rights and fundamental freedoms are above any historical, cultural, religious and other values.

Public policies, surveys and institutions related to the prevention of forced/early marriages

Public policies directly targeting to prevent, detect and combat forced marriages and bring to justice the perpetrators of rape within such marriages, as well as those who aid and abet the contracting of such marriages, was practically absent from Greek legislation before 1996 when the such document was approved. Even today the question of forced/early marriages is seldom raised and surveys on this issue are rather an exception; specific public policies for overcoming this phenomenon in fact are not implemented.

In June 1996, the Greek Government announced a **FRAMEWORK PROGRAMME** consisting of a series of measures aimed at alleviating the problems experienced by Roma communities in Greece. For its coordination a special **INTERMINISTERIAL POLICY COUNCIL FOR THE GREEK ROMA** was created. The Council included government officials from different ministries, local officials, while representatives from other organizations and authorities dealing with Roma issues were invited to take part in the proceedings. The Council was entrusted with advising the government on Roma-related issues and measures, as well as coordinating Roma-oriented policies, with a view to formulating a mid-term national policy for the Roma in Greece. The Programme was developed and realized in close collaboration with the Panhellenic Association of Greek Roma Associations (POSER), an association of different Roma NGOs from the whole country.

The programme was focused mainly on problems related to housing and education. In May 1997, a programme for the education of Roma children was initiated by the Department for Cross-cultural Education; it was planned that this would continue, within the framework of the Third Community Support Framework Programme by 2006. The programme was implemented at the University of Ioannina (Department of Education) under the academic responsibility of A. Gotovos, Professor of Education, and includes a network of local associates in 30 areas in the country with high concentration of Roma population.

Another programme for the Social Integration of the Greek Roma for the years 2002–2006 was the **INTEGRATED ACTION PROGRAMME** (IAP) which was implemented in coordination with the Ministry of Interior and the participation of all competent ministries, within the competent Ministerial Committees. The IAP belongs to the National Action Plan for Social Integration of Vulnerable Groups and was included in the effective fight against social exclusion and discrimination through affirmative actions against social exclusion. The Integrated Action Programme for Social Integration of the Greek Roma gave priority to positive actions and projects for improving the general welfare of the Greek Roma implemented with the respect of Human Rights.

The Integrated Action Programme aimed at the coordinated intervention of ministries in cooperation with local authorities, to reduce social inequalities, promote social justice and social integration of the Greek Roma. The IAP was based on specific objectives which were also prerequisites for its successful implementation at the national, regional and local level. For the implementation and monitoring of the progress of the Integrated Programme of Action, were established Committees at central and regional level with representatives of the Office of the Prime Minister, representatives of central and local agencies, representatives of the Network ROM, the Panhellenic Federation of Greek ROMA Associations (POSER), and experts.

Another major programme implemented in Greece in the frame of the Community Initiative EQUAL was the **“ACTION FOR EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN LABOUR”**. This is a research that was completed in 2006 aiming to trace the educational needs of vulnerable groups of the Roma with a view to “social inclusion” and ensure the smooth integration and accommodation of the Roma to quality jobs by taking into consideration every aspect of their lifestyle, culture and customs. The report of this programme states that marriage is an important event in which all relatives and friends participate; the bride should be “pure” (virgin) and her pureness is certified by the older Roma women, who after the wedding night check the bed sheets of the couple in order to prove it. The same report defines the age of marriage between 16 and 18 years. The percentages for men is 45–55% and for women 40–50%. Marriages of people above 30 years of age do not exist at all. The report refers to studies revealing a big gap between reality and aspiration. It points out that early

marriages (a large percentage) are due mainly to the fear of not being able to choose a partner later. Regarding the dowry, the report states that there are different traditions: in some places the husband takes as dowry from his wife's parents the basic things for their cohabitation such as furniture, tools etc; in other places the man offers money to his father-in-law depending on her beauty and other qualities related to her abilities to earn money. Finally, according to this report, the family plays an important role in the social structure. The couple with many descendants justifies in a better way its existence in the community in comparison to the couple with less or no descendants.

PART TWO

Survey on the family attitudes of the Roma community

Methodology of research

In his survey of the demographic development in Europe at the beginning of the 20th century, John Hajnal points out Bulgaria as a typical example of a country situated on the east from the line St. Petersburg – Trieste¹. His theory is that those countries differ with a “non-European” marriage model, characterized by the combination of low age at marriage and lower proportion of people who have never married (Hajnal 1965). One century later, Bulgaria is still one of the European countries with highest share of those who contracted marriages, lowest age at marriage and lowest age at first child birth (Pamporov 2008). The juvenile birth-rate is also a phenomenon, typical for the whole country and all ethnic groups. Research on the World Health Organization clearly underlines that, within the period 2000–2007, Bulgaria is the European country with the highest rate of adolescent fertility² – 38‰ (WHS 2009). Although the National Statistical Institute (NSI) does not officially publish such data, estimation indicates that the rate of adolescent fertility in Bulgaria in 2009 reached 50‰ (Pamporov 2010). However, during the last three years the media have become extremely sensitive to the juvenile birth-rate of Roma women. Early births among the Roma, however, could serve as a good starting point for research on the factual early marriages, as far as the surveys on the Roma life point out the fact that the first marriage and the community’s expectations of it, apply as a model the necessity of delivering the first child soon after the marriage (Пампоров 2003, Пампоров 2006, Пампоров 2009).

Exploring sensitive issues, like sexual and marriage behaviours and reproductive attitudes, is related to a number of ethic and methodological dilemmas that should be resolved before the beginning of the research itself. What type of research is admissible

¹ According to the principle of eponymy in science, later it receives the name “Hajnal line”

² The rate of adolescent fertility shows the number of births per 1000 women aged 15–19.

in a certain society and what is unacceptable to ask? To what extent it is acceptable to dig into the private life of the respondents? Is there not a danger if we cross the boundaries of the admissible and acceptable, to bring negative consequences into the life of the respondents? Is there not a danger, if we cross the boundaries of the admissible and acceptable, to receive false information or even not to receive any information about the social phenomena of interest for us? The use of questionnaires with regular closed or half-open questions in similar researches for similar researches shows low reliability of the results. When it comes to sensitive topics, the predefined answers often cannot describe the attitudes and the life experience adequately. From the perspective of the dilemma of “permissible” and “acceptable” standardized questions may give rise to formal attitude by the respondents and refusal to answer questions or to answer to what seems socially desirable (Пампоров 2009). Therefore, for the purposes of the survey under the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages”³, implemented by Amalipe Centre, a complex questionnaire was developed. Based on a modular principle it provides information from different persons who live in the same household, using different techniques for collection of information – from structured questions at the household level to fully opened questions at the individual level (Annex 1).

Module 1 is a standardized questionnaire on the composition and structure of the household. In addition to the usual questions about social characteristics (gender, age, education and social status), there is also a question for the relationship of the individual household members with the head of the household. The question is typical for international representative surveys (conducted by the UN, UNICEF and the World Bank) and for the Census of the population and housing in Bulgaria. Unlike the census sheet of the NSI (2001) in the category of “kin” is included the position of “nephew”, as there is a case for the presence of numerous extended and composite households in Roma communities. Although surveys were conducted in segregated residential areas with a predominantly Roma population, a question on ethnic identity is included. Unlike other surveys (including population census), except “Roma” the questionnaires explicitly specifies the responses “Rudari” and “Millet” – two groups that are labelled by the society as “Gypsies” and who, however, do not speak Romanes and do not identify themselves as Roma, although they live in the surveyed neighbourhoods. Due to the large diversity of subgroups in the Roma community, the individuals who indicated their identity as “Roma” were additionally asked with an open question about their group belonging.

Module 2 is a standardized questionnaire on the living conditions. The main part of the module describes the type and the infrastructure of the house, and a

³ Reference number JLS/2008/DAP3/AG/1298-30-CE-03124780080.

smaller part concerns the living condition of the household. The first part is a simplified version of the census questionnaires of the NSI for the housing (2001) and is comparable to similar modules in the researches of poverty, conducted by the World Bank. The second part of the module includes questions for different money transfers. On one hand, it examines the receipt of social benefits, and on the other hand – the borrowing of money, usage of bank credits and buying on tick.

Module 3 is a standardized questionnaire on the marriages and partnerships of each individual member of the household over 10 years of age⁴. Since the main goal of the survey is to detect the mechanism of the early “marriages”, i.e. partnerships that lead to early childbirth, the team chose the age of completion of basic education. Previous surveys show that within this age, a part of Roma women leave school because they become “maids” and come out on the marriage market (Томова 1995; Пампоров 2006, Тилкиджиев и др., 2009). The structure of this model is a simplified model of the panel surveys of the UN on the population in Europe – *Fertility and Family and Gender and Generation*⁵. A similar module allows a detailed research on the changes of the life cycle of individuals from several generations.

Module 4 is a standardized questionnaire on marriage, partnership and contraceptive culture. Unlike Module 3, where information is collected indirectly for each member of the household, Module 4 is representative at the individual level as the questions are asked to the person with the closest upcoming birthday. Module 7 is absolutely identical with Module 4, but here the questions are targeted at the youngest woman with a child in every household. The goal of **Module 7** is to provide better aggregate of women who gave birth to at least one child, with the purpose of more detailed research on reproductive and marriage practices among women, as long as they are the main suffering party in early marriages. On the other hand, the comparison of the data from the two additional samples allows the verification of indirect data from the main sample by overcoming the subjectivity of knowledge for the private lives of the members of the household.

Modules 5 and 8 are semi-standardized questionnaires with vignettes. The vignettes are “short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances” (Finch 1987: 105). Usually those hypothetic characters are facing a dilemma in their life and the respondents have to respond and justify their choice in the given situation. On one hand, the vignettes allow to avoid the direct questioning for beliefs, practices and values that would scare the surveyed individuals. They allow for achieving a certain level of depersonalization, which encourages the respondents to think beyond their social status (Schoenberg & Ravdal 2000). On the other hand, they are not

⁴ The share of children under the age of 10 in the segregated residential areas is 18.2%.

⁵ Known within the academic environment with the abbreviations FFS and GGS.

abstract as the simple standardized binomial, that are often being used in the surveys on values and attitudes where the respondents usually reply with “I cannot decide”, because the answer “depends” on the context (Alexander & Becker 1978). The vignettes allow for clearly contextualizing the social situation.

Under the form of short stories for Ivancho and Maryika (main players in the “salty” anecdote folklore), for the purposes of the previous research with quality methods, a row of six vignettes was constructed, outreaching six thematic fields and forming a tale about a risky sexual behaviour (Пампоров 2009). Three of those vignettes are included in the questionnaire of the current survey, and the proposed answers of semi-opened types are based on the results from the previous research. The aim of the three vignettes is to use the most unpretentious approach to explore the attitudes of early onset of sexual life, early marriage and early parenthood. Module 5 is representative for Roma communities, and Module 8 is targeted at the youngest women with a child.

After the more open form of questioning, **Modules 6 and 9** suggest standardized questionnaires on the values and attitudes towards marriage and family life. The modules are based on a model, tested in the *European Survey on Values* and *World Survey on the Values*⁶. However, in the module are included specific questions regarding the sexual relations before marriage, domestic violence and the selling of brides – topics that are directly related to early marriages and their possible prevention. The module involves open questions for the usual age of first partnership (“marriage”) in the given Roma community (in order to compare the real age with the perception of such), as well as for the usual criteria for reaching a readiness for marriage. The module includes an experimental question for the ideal and real life cycle, asked under the form of picture with pictograms for two reasons: on one hand, in order to be adequate for the individuals with lower education level and, on the other hand – to break the model of answering in accordance with the socially acceptable. The use of such a question with pictograms has been tested in previous research with in-depth interviews among 30 young Bulgarian couples, living in Sofia, and has shown high effectiveness (Pamporov 2008).

The survey on early marriages in the Roma communities in Bulgaria covers 595 households, living in segregated residential areas with predominant Roma population. Within the frames of the field-work, information for the marriages and the partnerships of 2746 individuals has been collected.

⁶ Known to the academic community with the abbreviations EVS and WVS

Depending on the social characteristics of the surveyed individuals, a representative sample for segregated neighbourhoods with predominant Roma population is as follows:

Gender	
Men	49,2%
Women	50,8%

Mother language	
Bulgarian	22.2%
Turkish	32.8%
Romani	39.8%
Romanian	3.6%
Other	1.6%

Religious identity	
Orthodox	32.8%
Islam	37.0%
Protestants	14.9%
Other	0.6%
Not religious	14.9%

Ethnic self-identification	
Bulgarian	9.8%
Turkish	18.8%
Roma	52.9%
Rudari	3.4%
Millet	14.3%
Other	0.9%

Education	
Without education and incomplete elementary education	17.9%
Elementary	26.2%
Basic	41.1%
Secondary – High School	8.3%
Secondary – Vocational school	6.1%
University	0.5%

Due to the existing differences in the religious identity and the mother tongue, the ethnographic and sociological researches on the Roma community in Bulgaria usually put an emphasis on its diversity. With regard to the internal division of the Roma ethnic group based on the spoken dialects, the Roma in Bulgaria belong to two main dialect communities of the Romani language, conditionally called in linguistic classifications “Balkan” and “Vlachian” (Matras 2005).

Depending on the traditional religious affiliation, the community of the Balkan Roma dialects in Bulgaria could be divided into two large groups: Dasikane Roma and Horahane Roma. Literally translated, “Dasikane Roma” today means Bulgarian/Christian Roma. The wide meaning of the word “das” means “slave”, “servant”, but with the time it is related with the Turkish word “giaur” – “infidel”, “non-Muslim”. With that summarizing term, approximately 26 subgroups are being identified, speaking different dialects of the Balkan type of Romani, with significant lexical influence from the local Bulgarian dialect. Dasikane Roma is the predominant Roma population in the North-West of Bulgaria and some regions of Central-North Bulgaria, and approximately half of Roma population in South-West Bulgaria. Literally translated,

today “Horahane Roma” means Turkish/Muslim Roma. With this general term are identified approximately 36 subgroups, speaking different dialects of the Balkan type with significant influence from the Turkish dialect. Horahane Roma is the predominant Roma population in North-East, South-East and Central South Bulgaria. In both of these two groups there are multiple subgroups, usually formed in accordance with some traditionally practiced craft: blacksmiths, basket makers, gridders, etc. (Пампов 2006, Томова 1995, Марушиакова и Попов 1993). In the regions, inhabited by Horahane Roma, there are groups of people who call themselves “Millet” (from the Turkish word “people”). Usually Bulgarians define them as “Turkish gypsies” or “Pro-Turkish gypsies”, and the Turkish call them “Millet chengenesi”. Roma have a twofold attitude and some perceive them as Roma, but others consider them as Turks. The mother tongue of the Millet is Turkish, but in some locations, the Romani language is being used as a “secret” language, and in some groups there is a small number of Romani words, preserved as slang (Колев & Крумова 2005). It should be highlighted that the coexistence of these two groups in the large urban ghettos, as well as in the widely spreading evangelical churches gradually reduces the differences; and is observed a phenomenon of losing the group identity, though the subgroup identity may be preserved. Because of this, with the opened questions for ethnic self-identification, a significant part of the Roma cannot indicate their group or subgroup belonging.

Following a classification of the Roma in Bulgaria, made by the British Vice Consul in Varna, Mr. Bernard Gilliat-Smith, in 1916, in the ethnography of Bulgaria was introduced the term “Yerlii”, in order to facilitate the designation of the Roma groups leading a settled life for a long time, opposed to the groups who were compelled to settle in the period of 1958–1976. The term is rooted in the Turkish word “Yerlii” [resident, native], and a reason for its use is the fact that in Sofia and South West Bulgaria a part of the Roma identify themselves as “Erlides”; and in Macedonia there is a group that call themselves “Arli”. In this case it is important to underline that the term has been introduced only with the purpose of academic comfort and such a group does not exist. In practice, the term mechanically combines the groups that call themselves “Dasikane” and “Horahane”, i.e. belonging to the Balkan dialect community of the Roma language.

The community of the so called “Vlachian” Roma is divided in three main groups: Kaldarashi, Kalajdjii and Rudari. The name of the Kaldarashi comes from the Romanian word “caldera” [caldron] and is directly related with the traditional craft of the group in the past – making copper caldrons and other pots. The term is summarizing for approximately 16 subgroups. The Kaldarashi speak Romanes which is a part of the so called “North” (or new) Vlachian dialects, who are strongly influenced by the Romanian language. In a global perspective, this type of dialects are the most widely spread because of the intensive migrations of the Kaldarashi

groups towards West Europe and the Americas at the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century in Bulgaria. However, this is the lowest represented dialect of the Romani language. In general, the Kaldarashi do not live in segregated ethnic neighbourhoods, but are spread amongst Bulgarian population and because of that they usually remain outside of the coverage of surveys that are representative for the segregated neighbourhoods.

In different classifications of Roma groups, the Kalaidjii are being classified differently – as part of the Dasikane Roma, the Horahane Roma or the Kaldarashi. The reason is that those subgroups that live in North-East Bulgaria are Muslim; those who live in South West and Central South Bulgaria (known also as Thracian Kalaidjii) are Orthodox Christians; and the Kalaidjii from North-West Bulgaria have some memories for their Muslim belonging, but in fact they do not perform Muslim customs and traditions. What unites the different Kalaidjii communities is, on one hand, the traditional male profession (where the endonim comes from), and on the other hand – the belonging of the regional dialects to the group of the South (or old) Vlachian dialects that keep a large number of words of Turkish origin. Despite the linguistic similarity, the Thracian and the other Kalaidjii do not marry each other because of the different religious backgrounds. In practice, they are a typical example of “pseudo” diaspora – a group that speaks the same language, with regional dialect differences, but do not have the self-consciousness of one community.

There are groups of people who live mainly in the regions of Plovdiv, Stara Zagora, Nova Zagora, Burgas, Varna, Dobrich, Veliko Tarnovo and Pleven who are being called by the surrounding population as “Romanian Roma”. The representatives of this community call themselves “Rudari” or “Ludari” (depending on the local dialect). Because of their typical crafts, they are known as “Kopanari” or “Mechkadari”. In censuses or sociological surveys the Rudari/Ludari usually identify themselves as Romanian, Vlachs or Bulgarian and they always insist on their differentiation from the Roma. Usually the older generations have accepted for themselves the name “Romanian Roma”, because the words “цуган” (tsigàn) and “цуганка” (tsigànka) mean “husband” and “spouse” in their dialect (same as “rom” and “romni” in the Romani language). The Rudari/Ludari use a dialect of the Romanian language. In Bulgaria there are two dialects – North, influenced more by the standard Romanian language, and South with tangible influence from Greek. The Rudari live in relatively segregated ethnic neighbourhoods.

As mentioned above, the respondents who identified themselves as Roma have additionally being asked an open question regarding their group belonging. Approximately 1/3 of the Roma in the segregated neighbourhoods do not indicate particular subgroup belonging. The following groups are highlighted among the rest of the Roma:

Table 1. *Distribution of the Roma subgroups in the sample*

Dasikane Roma	38.7%
Horahane Roma	13.2%
Fichiri ⁷	11.2%
Kalaidjii	10.7%
Laho	5.8%
Koshnichari	5.1%
Burgudjii	2.7%
Other	12.6%

Existing data from different ethnographic and sociological surveys show that forced traditional marriages among underage Roma are typical for the groups of the Kaldarashi and Burgudjii⁸, who are underrepresented in the main sample. Therefore, for the purpose of the survey were made two enhanced samples in these communities. The enhanced sample of the Kaldarashi covers 89 households or 431 people, and of the Burgudjii – 100 households or 423 people. Since the Kaldarashi and Burgudjii are scattered among the rest of the population, but at the same time are the most conservative and closed community, representatives from the respective communities were trained as interviewers. During the enhanced sampling the interviewers from a certain location were sent to a place in another region in order to preserve the principle of anonymity of the surveyed people and to provide maximum reliability of the information.

Roma households

The literature and analyses dedicated to the Roma in Bulgaria usually describe the Roma families as “large-sized”: “in one family there are at least three generations” (НУНЕВ 1998: 31) – the parents and one, two or three of the married sons with their

⁷ The Fichiri are classified in the ethnographic literature as Horahane Roma. In the present research they are purposely indicated out of the total number of the Muslim Roma because of their relatively large share.

⁸ There are several local Roma communities in Bulgaria who call themselves Burgudjii. The group of Burgudjii that is involved in the research is a subgroup of Dasikane Roma from an ethnographic point of view – they are East Orthodox and their language belongs to the so called Balkan group of dialects, type II, (Boretzky 2000), known in the literature since the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century as Drandarian.

children (Марушиакова & Попов 1993а: 1; Марушиакова & Попов 1993с: 1; Марушиакова & Попов 1993d: 1). The belief that the household is most often a large family, consisting of multiple nuclear families, is widely spread (Liegeois 1994:80).

For the purposes of the survey below, the analysis is based on the classification of households, which is proposed by Peter Laslett (Laslett 1983). According to this classification, the households may be divided in the following five types:

- 1) Single-person household – consisting of an unmarried, widowed or divorced⁹ person living alone;
- 2) Non-married households – consisting of cohabitating brothers and sisters; cohabitating other relatives; and cohabitating non-relatives¹⁰;
- 3) Simple family households – consisting of married without children; married with children; widows or widowers with children; divorced with children; or cohabitating partners with or without children;
- 4) Extended family households – consisting of a simple family household and another person or persons of close kinship to one of the family members (e.g. grandmother, parent, grandchild, and sibling). The extended family households may additionally be explored in four subtypes: a) extended upwards (to the ascending generations); b) extended downwards (to the descending generations); c) extended aside (to siblings and other relatives); and d) combined (if representatives of four generations live together; or extended upwards/downwards and aside household).
- 5) Compound (parallel) family households – which contain two couples of close kinship. The compound households may also be differentiated in four subtypes: a) second upward couple; b) second downwards couple; c) units on one level – widowed parent and two or more of his married children; d) phratry – cohabitation of married sibling but without a parent there.

Considered through the classification of Laslett, the Roma households, as described in the existing literature, should mostly be combined extended households or compound households. This survey, however, entirely refutes those assumptions. Half of the Roma in segregated areas with predominant Roma population lives in the so called

⁹ Since it is based on statistic data from the second half of the 19th c., the classification of Laslett does not include the status of the divorced people, because divorce was not possible in the countries of analyses at that time. Modern surveys, however, should not exclude such an opportunity and for that reason the classification below is supplemented with this status.

¹⁰ In the category “cohabiting non-relatives” are understood all dormitory-type households where people live together – military barracks, monasteries, workers who live together. From the point of view of Christian morality, the concubinage relations are also included here. This survey, however, gives an opportunity to distinguish a partners’ cohabitation without marriage from the real cohabitation of non-married people. In the analyses below the partnership cohabitation is classified as a family household, despite of the lack of legal marriage.

simple family households, based on the nuclear family – parents and their non-married children. It should be explicitly underlined that this is the main household type, regardless of the ethnic self-identity of the members of the household. Despite that the preferred ethnic identity is clearly highlighted as the main factor for the structure of the households. The small single-person households are significantly more typical for the people with Bulgarian and Millet identity. Meanwhile, it is rarely possible to meet them in the subgroup of the Rudari. The share of the extended families, however, that involves lineal relatives of three or more generations, is the largest within the Rudari themselves. The cumulative share of the extended and compound households within the Roma and the Rudari is almost identical. Within the Roma, however, the compound households are with a larger share. In fact, the number of compound families with cohabitation of at least two generations of family couples is the greatest within the persons with Turkish self-identification.

Table 2. *Structure of the households according to ethnic self-identification per member of the household*

	Total	Bulgarian	Turkish	Roma	Rudari	Millet
Single-person households	3,9%	9,1%	2,0%	1,4%	,0%	6,9%
Non-married households	1,7%	2,6%	1,0%	1,7%	,0%	2,9%
Simple family households	50,9%	63,6%	41,6%	49,5%	52,0%	54,9%
Extended households	18,0%	15,6%	16,8%	18,7%	28,0%	18,6%
Compound households	25,5%	9,1%	38,6%	28,7%	20,0%	16,7%

As mentioned in the methodological part of the report, the Roma community in Bulgaria is not homogenous. Within the community there are subgroup divisions with significant differences in social practices and cultural traditions. This theory is confirmed by the structure of the households too, looking through the prism of the different Roma subgroups. The structure of the households who identify themselves as *Horahane* (i.e. Turkish) is almost identical with the structure of the households of those citizens of segregated neighbourhoods who identify themselves as Turkish. It is in this group where the compound households are mainly represented in comparison with the other subgroups. However, the structure of the households of the Roma who identify themselves as *Dasikane* (i.e. Bulgarian) is significantly different from the structure of the households that identify themselves as Bulgarian. The *Dasikane* Roma is the subgroup where the extended families have the largest share in comparison with the rest of the subgroups. With the *Dasikane* Roma, however, the share of the compound families is smaller than the other subgroups, but is three times larger than the share of compound household with Bulgarians. It is interesting to note that there

is some similarity between the Kaldarashi and the Rudari. Likewise the Rudari, among the Kaldarashi there is no record of cases of single-person households and unmarried households. The Kaldarashi, however, have considerably less extended households, but significantly more compound households than the Rudari. Another interesting phenomenon is the fact that the structure of the households of the Burgudjii is absolutely identical with the average pattern of those who identify themselves as Roma.

Table 3. Household structure of the Roma subgroups¹¹

	Dasikane	Horahane	Kaldarashi	Burgudjii
Single-person households	2,5%	4,3%	,0%	1,0%
Non-married households	1,2%	,0%	,0%	1,0%
Simple family households	51,9%	43,5%	50,6%	52,0%
Extended households	21,0%	13,0%	14,6%	18,0%
Compound households	23,5%	39,1%	34,8%	28,0%

There are significant differences in the structure of the household with respect to the region of residence of the surveyed households. The regions of residence, for the stratification of the sample, are in compliance with the recommendations of Eurostat for zoning the country in accordance with the requirements for level 2 (NUTS-2). They repeat the planning regions from the Law on Regional Development¹² and involve the following regions:

- 1) North-West: Vidin, Vratsa, Lovech, Montana, and Pleven;
- 2) North Central: Veliko Tarnovo, Gabrovo, Razgrad, Ruse, Silistra
- 3) North-East: Varna, Dobrich, Targovishte, Shumen;
- 4) South-West: Blagoevgrad, Kyustendil, Pernik, Sofia, Sofia city;
- 5) South Central: Kardjali, Pazardjik, Plovdiv, Smolian, Haskovo;
- 6) Southeastern: Burgas, Sliven, Stara Zagora, Yambol

¹¹ The data for the four Roma subgroups will be presented below: Dasikane, Horahane, Burgudjii and Kalderashi. The reason is that only the number of the Dasikane and the Horahane Roma in the main sample allows additional analyses with reliable statistical significance. The possibility to analyse data for the Kalderashi and the Burgudjii comes from the correspondent additional samples.

¹² In force of 31.08.2008, publ. SG 50/30.05-2008, amend. SG. 93 of 24 November 2009. NSI uses the term “statistic regions” which corresponds to the planning regions from the Law on Regional Development.

The single-person families are most typical in North-West and North Central Bulgaria. The non-married families are represented mostly in North-West Bulgaria. The simple family households are most widely spread in South-West and North Central Bulgaria. The extended households are most common in North-West and North-East Bulgaria. The compound families have most expressed presence in Southeastern and South Central Bulgaria

Table 4. *Regional structure of the households*

	NW	NC	NE	SW	SC	SE
Single-person households	6,4%	10,0%	3,3%	3,4%	1,4%	1,6%
Non-married households	5,1%	2,9%	1,1%	,0%	2,2%	,8%
Simple family households	43,6%	57,1%	50,0%	58,4%	50,0%	49,6%
Extended households	25,6%	8,6%	25,6%	12,4%	16,7%	17,1%
Compound households	19,2%	21,4%	20,0%	25,8%	29,7%	31,0%

There are clearly expressed trends in the structure of the households depending on the age of the head of the household. The single-person households are more typical in the upper age group (over 57 years) where this share is 3.3% of all households. Single-person families under the age of 30 are not observed. In the age group 31–56 the share of the single person families is within 0.2-0.6%. The non-married households are most typical for the people up to 20 years of age (22.2%), and to some extent within the group of the oldest (3.4%) and in the age group 21-25 (2.9%). If the head of the household is in the rest of the age groups, then it would be an exception to observe this type of household. The share of the simple family households is in reverse proportion to the age of the household head. This is a clear sign that the authority and the respect of the household head are based on longer life experience. The young families establish their own independent household where one of the partners is the head, or they start living with the old ones, recognizing their authority. This conclusion is also supported by the share of the compound households – in case where younger and older couples live together – a person from the older couple is being indicated as a head of the household. From this point of view, the dependence in the extended households is of extreme curiosity. They are approximately 20% in all age groups over 21. This is probably due to the fact that, on one hand, the extended household may be composed by an older couple who have accommodated their grown-up or divorced child and the child of their child. On the other hand, it may be composed by a younger couple with children that have accommodated the parent of one of the partners after a widowhood or due to a health disease.

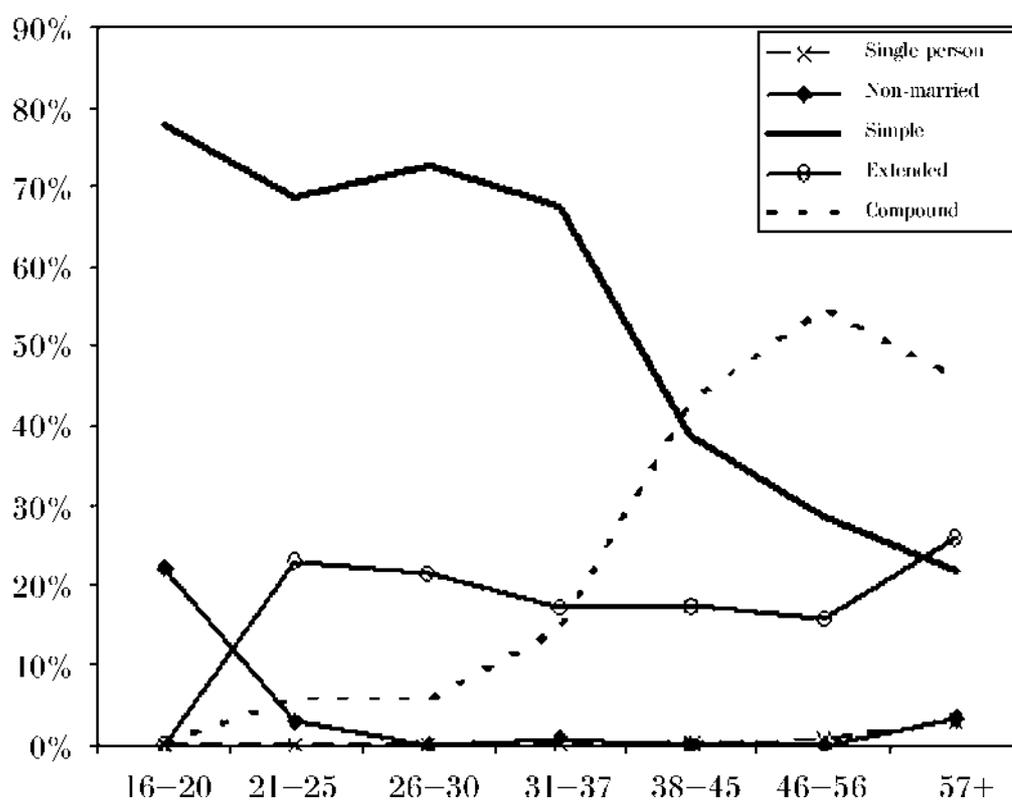
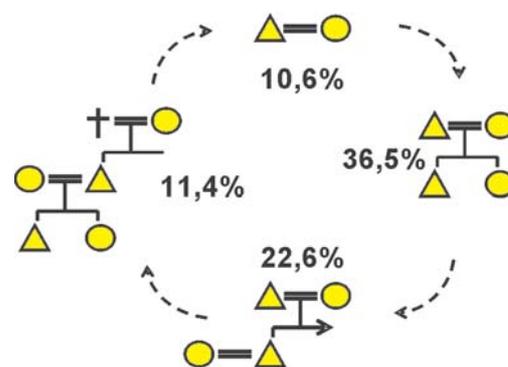


Table 5. Structure of the household subtypes

Single-person households	3,7%
Non-married households	1,9%
Simple – head and partner	10,6%
Simple – head, partner and children	36,5%
Simple – head and children	4,0%
Extended – head, partner and descending generations	3,5%
Extended – single parent, his child with a partner and a second descending generation	11,4%
Extended – head, partners and siblings	0,3%
Extended mixed	2,4%
Compound - second descending couple	20,7%
Compound – second ascending couple	1,9%
Compound – cohabitation between married siblings	0,2%
Compound – single person with two or more of his married children	2,5%
Compound – mixed/combined	0,3%

When observing the separate household subtypes, the extreme dependence of the nuclear family that is composed of parents and their children stands out. Of course, from the perspective of social anthropology, the significance of the nuclear family should not be surprising. The surveys of the Roma system of kinship in Bulgaria show that the Roma kinship terminology belongs to the so-called “Eskimo type”: the members of the nuclear family are classified through unique terms, while the more distant relatives are grouped together, depending on the level of collateral kinship. The relatives from the descending generations who do not come directly from the ego are being differentiated with one and the same term, and in the second ascending generation there is no difference made between the relatives on the mother’s and the father’s side. Similar structure of relative’s relationship, however, is a clear sign for a larger independence of the nuclear family and its larger significance in the functional mechanisms of society (Пампоров 2006, Pamporov 2008b).

The main groups of households that stand out are a result of the natural development of the family life cycle. Simple families, composed of 2 partners (10.6%), naturally transfer into simple households with two partners and their children (36.5%), when the children are born. In case of marriage of the child or one of the children, this form of household naturally turns into a compound household with two family couples related in direct line (22.6%), which naturally transfers into an extended household, where a parent from the ascending generation, the family couple from first descending generation and non-married people of second descending generation live (11.4%).



Life cycle of Roma family households

This survey allows concluding that in fact there are only 4% of single parents in Roma communities. On the other hand, the compound families with two and more couples in first descending generations – as is imposed by the academic literature stereotype – are only 2.8%. In other words, there is natural balance in the structure of Roma households, based on the nuclear family and the main living experiences (birth, marriage, death). Widowed or divorced people, however, are rarely being left to grow up their children alone by themselves. Meanwhile, it is more an exception to observe a structure, which is similar to the family fellowship, traditional for Bulgaria before the World War One, where two or more couples from one generation live together.

Living conditions

A study on the effects of the economic crisis in Bulgaria, elaborated by a team of the Open Society Institute – Sofia in February 2010, shows that the Roma live in worse conditions in comparison with the rest of the population in the country, and in a particularly vulnerable situation are the Roma in the segregated neighbourhoods. The area of the Roma houses in segregated neighbourhoods (58.2 sq. m) is close to the average area of Roma houses in the country (58.9 sq. m). The area of the housing is approximately 20 sq. m less than the average for the country, i.e. with approximately one room. The average number of the people inhabiting the same room (without the service premises), in average for the country is 1.09 people. The average number of the Roma who live in the same room is with approximately one person more – 1.96 for the Roma in the country and 2.12 for the Roma in the segregated neighbourhoods.

In addition to the smaller area, Roma dwellings, especially those in the Roma neighbourhoods, are characterized by poorer living conditions. Approximately 18% of Roma households in segregated neighbourhoods do not have running cold water at their homes, and 55% do not have sewerage. Despite the crisis, there is some improvement in the living conditions of the Roma in the country. Compared with June 2007, in February 2010 the share of Roma households with running water at home increased by 3% (with 88% in 2007), the share of the households with running hot water increased with approximately 22% (from 37,2% in 2007, and the share of the households with canalization increased with 6% (from 46,5% in 2007).

The present survey shows that the main type of housing, typical for the Roma families in the segregated neighbourhoods is the separate house. Usually this house is property of the household (92.4%), rented from the state or the municipality 2.7%; rented from private owners 2%, and 2.9% live in property, given without any requirements for rent. The average number of the rooms (without kitchens, bathrooms and storerooms) is 2.9. The average area of the houses in the Roma neighbourhoods is 67.8 sq. m. The average number of people living in the same room in the segregated neighbourhoods is 1.6.

Table 3. *Type of dwelling of the household*

Independent house	84,1%
Part of a house	10,5%
Flat in a building with less than 10 flats	1,4%
Flat in a building with 10 or more flats	3,4%
Frame-built, removable houses	0,7%

Table 4. *Property of the dwelling*

Own	92,4%
Rented from the State or the Municipality	2,7%
Rented from a private owner, company	2,0%
Provided for living without Rent	2,9%

Besides the type of housing, an important indicator of living conditions is the total area of the dwelling and the number of rooms that the household uses (without kitchens, bathrooms and service premises). As mentioned before, the average area of the houses in the segregated neighbourhoods, registered in this survey, is approximately 68 sq. m. The households use approximately 2.9 rooms without the service premises, which means that in the same room live 1.6 people on average.

Another important indicator for the living conditions, established by the research, is the provision of infrastructure and different household goods that are owned by the household. Although in many respects Roma households, especially those in the segregated quarters, live in dwellings with poor infrastructure and lack a number of necessities, it should be noted that in comparison with 10 years ago, and especially in comparison with the beginning of the transition period, Roma households today have much better living conditions. For example, with regard to the availability of infrastructure of Roma housing, the present survey registers the fact that 96.3% of Roma households have electricity at home. It should also be pointed out that 85% have sewerage and 80.4% are connected to the public sewerage system or to a septic tank. The fact that 47.9% of households do not have a bathroom in their home and must rely on available public baths stands out as a problem.

Table 5. *Access to services*

Electricity	96,3%
Sewerage	85,0%
Cable, satellite TV	71,2%
Bathroom	52,1%
Toilet with running water	43,4%
Sewerage, connected to the public sewerage system	41,4%
Hot running water	40,0%
Sewerage, connected to a septic tank	39,0%
Internet connection	14,5%
Central heating	0,2%

As regards the movable property of the households living in segregated neighbourhoods stands out the ownership of television sets and mobile phones. The ownership of landline phones, computers and freezers is still low. However, the fact that at every fifth Roma households have a computer already, speaks about improvement in this direction.

Table 6. *Property owned by the household*

TV	99,0%
Mobile phone	82,0%
Refrigerator	75,9%
Washing machine	67,2%
Electric or gas cook stove	64,9%
Satellite dish	59,1%
Wood cook stove	57,7%
Video, DVD	44,5%
Vehicle	30,9%
Freezer	23,6%
Computer	20,4%
Landline phone	10,7%

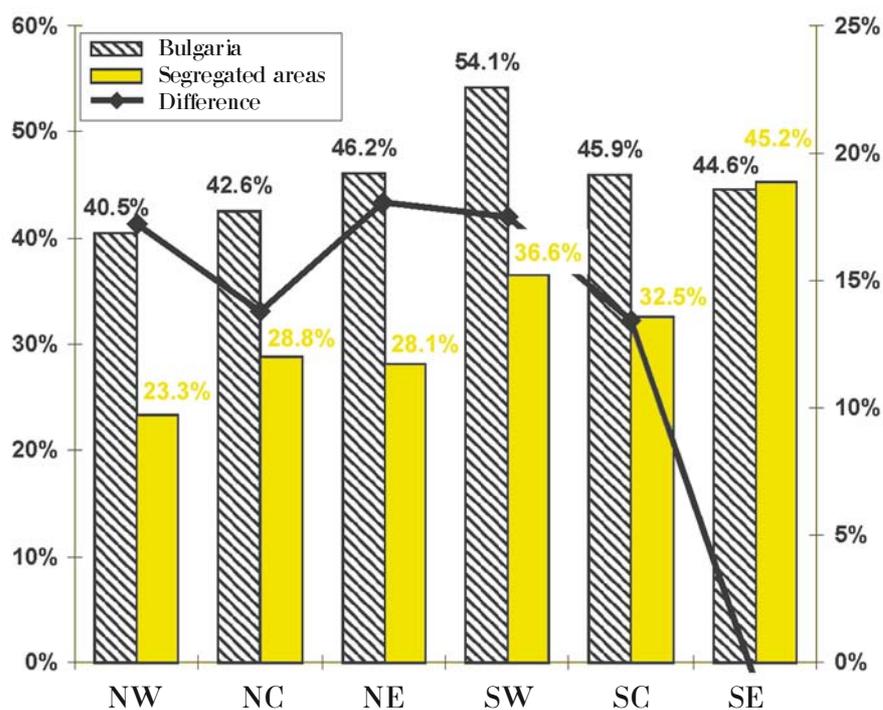
The most significant factor for the living conditions is the fact that only 25.8% of those living in the households in Roma neighbourhoods have permanent or seasonal employment. The share of the unemployed in the households is 21.9%. The average net monthly income in the households is BGN 422.9 and the median of the income is BGN 350. Taking into consideration that the average monthly household income for the country is BGN 805, and that Roma households are twice as many as the others, it is clear that Roma households have twice lower income, and the income of a person from a Roma household is four times lower than the income of a member of a household from the majority.

The survey highlights the presence of extremely large disparities in the social status of the members of the households, depending on the planning region (see Annex 5). If we compare the data for the employment of the population living in segregated neighbourhoods with the general employment of the population in Bulgaria, however, it comes out that the employment is regionally dependant, i.e. the differences in the employment of Roma from different regions are significantly dependant on the level of employment in the relative region. The difference in the employment of those who live in the segregated neighbourhoods and the common employment of the

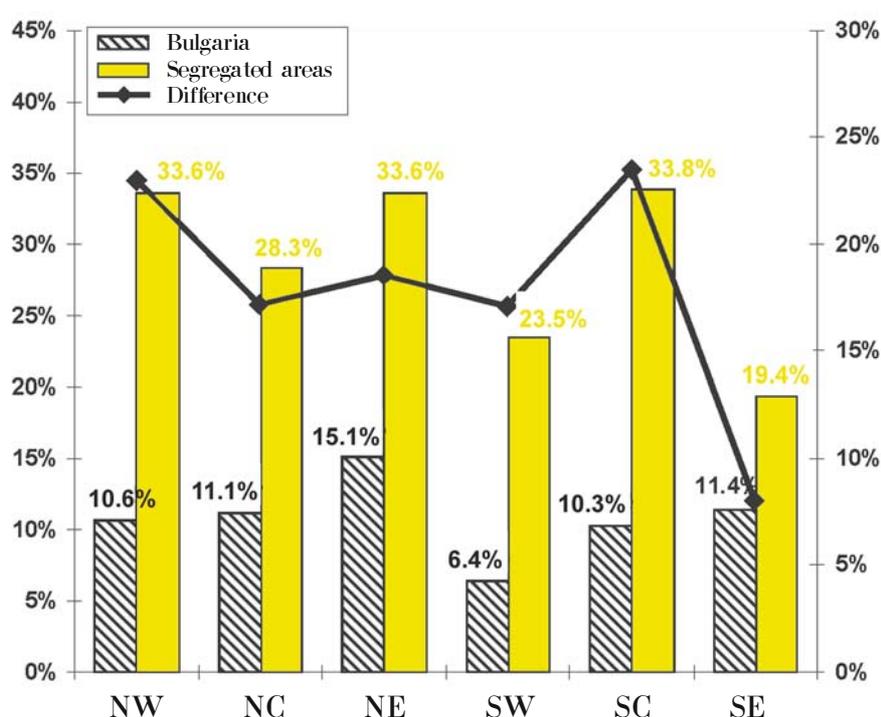
population is approximately 15–17%. An exception from this trend is observed only in South-East Bulgaria. The cumulative share of the permanently employed and the temporary employed Roma in this region is similar to and is even a bit over the common share of the employed people in the region, but it should be noted that for half of them this is temporary employment.

Table 7. *Social status of the members of Roma households*

Permanently employed	16,5%
Seasonal employment, accidental employment	16,8%
Studies	14,5%
Studies and works	0,4%
On maternity leave	2,0%
Housewife	8,7%
Unemployed	28,3%
Working pensioner	0,4%
Unemployed pensioner	10,7%
A child under 16 years of age, not enrolled at school	1,8%



Likewise with employment, significant differences between the regions are observed regarding unemployment as well. Unlike employment, unemployment among people from the segregated neighbourhoods with predominant Roma population is not strongly dependant on the common level of unemployment in the region. As it might be expected, unemployment among the Roma is the lowest where the employment rate is the highest – in South-East Bulgaria, although the overall level of unemployment in this region is one of the highest in the country. It could be said that unemployment is ethnically based, while the level of unemployment among the inhabitants of segregated neighbourhoods is approximately 20–25% higher than the average level of unemployment, which represents 2–3 higher levels of unemployment.



Marriages and partnerships

Studies on Roma life culture and way of life distinguish several types of traditional marriages amongst the Roma in Bulgaria. Although they are not legally recognized today, they have their historic parallels in a number of societies including the Roman law, as well as in the Bulgarian traditional culture until the mid-20th century. The custom of “bride-buying” is most typical for the Kaldarashi, Burgudjii and Thracian Kalaidjii; however, it is often seen in some of the subgroups of Horahane and Dasikane Roma. Despite the distorted idea of the syntagmas of “bride-buying” and “brides’ market”, from a scientific point of view it is not actually buying the girl, but

rather buying her “honour” – the right of the boy to take her virginity and the right of the boy’s family to associate the future children with his kin (Pamporov, 2006). According to the theoretic construction in sociology and social anthropology the “ransom for the bride” is payment given as compensation to the family for its loss, when she leaves her home to be married. And because amongst ethnic groups with patriarchal social organization the woman belongs to the kin of her father, the compensation has to be paid to that kin. One of the main functions of payment in marriage is to define the exact social status of the children of the marriage. The purpose of the payment is to guarantee the patrilineality, e.g. to put the children explicitly in the family and group of the father concerning all social matters, regardless of the marriage faith (Radcliffe– Brawn A. 1997:34-39). This could be easily observed with Roma groups where this custom is strongly preserved (as the ones indicated above): for example, in case of divorce with the Kaldarashi the child is usually kept with the father’s kin, and not the mother’s.

The results of number of ethnographic and sociological studies among Roma in Bulgaria indicate that the buying of brides has a negative effect in terms of marriage age and early/forced marriages as a whole. In some local communities after the onset of the first menstruation the girl is suspended from school in order not to “be deceived” to lose her virginity. The fear that the girl could meet a boy and have sexual intercourse before her marriage drives the parents to marry their daughters at a relatively early age. Since girls at this age are still children and do not know “what is good for them”, the parents choose the marital partner – usually amongst boys, whose parents have also decided that it is time to get them married (Pamporov 2003, Pamporov 2006, Pamporov 2009).

The custom of “elopement” or “bride-stealing” in the common case is typical for those Roma groups amongst which the custom of buying brides is in process of dying down or is already overcome. With that custom (elopement) the social legitimacy of marriage is achieved only through the consummation of the sexual relationship and a proof for this is the blood from the defloration. De facto, elopement is also spread in other groups in which bride-buying is a lead model. From this point of view some authors consider it as an attempt to avoid paying ransom (Liegeois 1994: 66; Marushiakova & Popov 1993: 182; Tomova 1995: 38). In some cases this hypothesis is valid, however, in other it is not, because the “ransom” can be demanded again. Usually, in this case the girl’s family, leaning on the official legislation of the country, blackmails the boy’s family for a certain amount by threats of trial and imprisonment (Pamporov 2003, Pamporov 2006). The cases when elopement is related to an attempt to avoid the contracted by the parents partner also affect early marriages, because the purpose is the first sexual intercourse (that legitimates this type of marriage) to take place before the first marital night (legitimated by the ransom, paid for the bride).

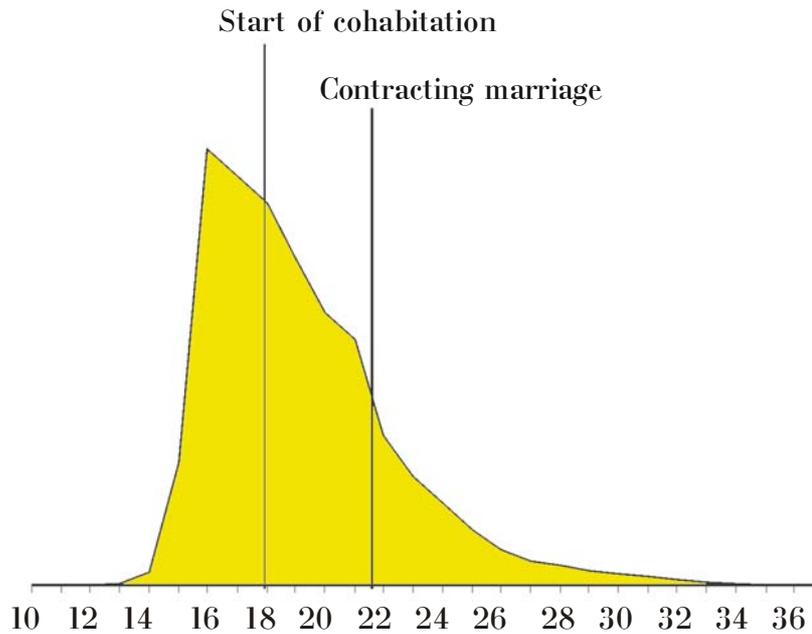
The third type of traditional marriage with Roma is related with a prior engagement. In this case the payment is rather symbolic (the same with filling the shoe of the bride before leaving her home in the contemporary wedding rituals of all ethnic groups in Bulgaria). An important “sign”, however, is the one that the boy’s family is giving (ring, bracelet, and earrings). With this type of marriages the parents again negotiate the conditions – when the young are going to get married, where they shall live, what will be the size of the dowry (Pamporov, 2006). Similarly to the previous two types of traditional marriages, this one also has the risk of forced marriage – especially for the girl; of course, this has a negative effect on the early age at first marriage as well.

The three typical forms of marriage amongst Roma are not legally recognized by the macro society without the presence of a civil act. In the years of the socialist regime, the unregistered cohabitation was constantly criticized. Nevertheless, after 1980 many of the Roma in Bulgaria contract civil marriage not because of external pressure, but because of the significantly high “wedding loan” granted, which gives them an opportunity for an independent start by buying a house, furniture and a car. The data from the conducted in 1992 and 2001 censuses of the population confirm this. In each age group of 25–39 years old about 86% of Roma women have contracted civil marriage, while in the age group of 30–39 years old approximately 90% of men have contracted civil marriage, i.e. despite the early factual start of family life in unregistered cohabitation in the middle age groups, is observed a significantly high level of legitimate matrimony, typical for the other ethnic groups in the country as well (Pamporov, 2006).

The present survey reveals that 74.1% of the Roma above 10 years of age have a permanent partner, with whom they live together. In the representative sample of the persons above 10 years of age (where one person per household reports data for the rest of the household), the average age for starting cohabitation with a partner is 18 years and 8 months. The most common age at start of cohabitation is 17. At the age of 16, 20% of Roma already are in cohabitation with a partner. At the age of 18, the share of persons in cohabitation with a partner is 50%, and at the age of 21 – 80% of those living in segregated neighbourhoods (mahali) have a partner. According to the data from the same sample, 52% of the persons above 10 years of age have contracted marriage, while 55.5% of them have lived with a partner as a family before concluding marriage.

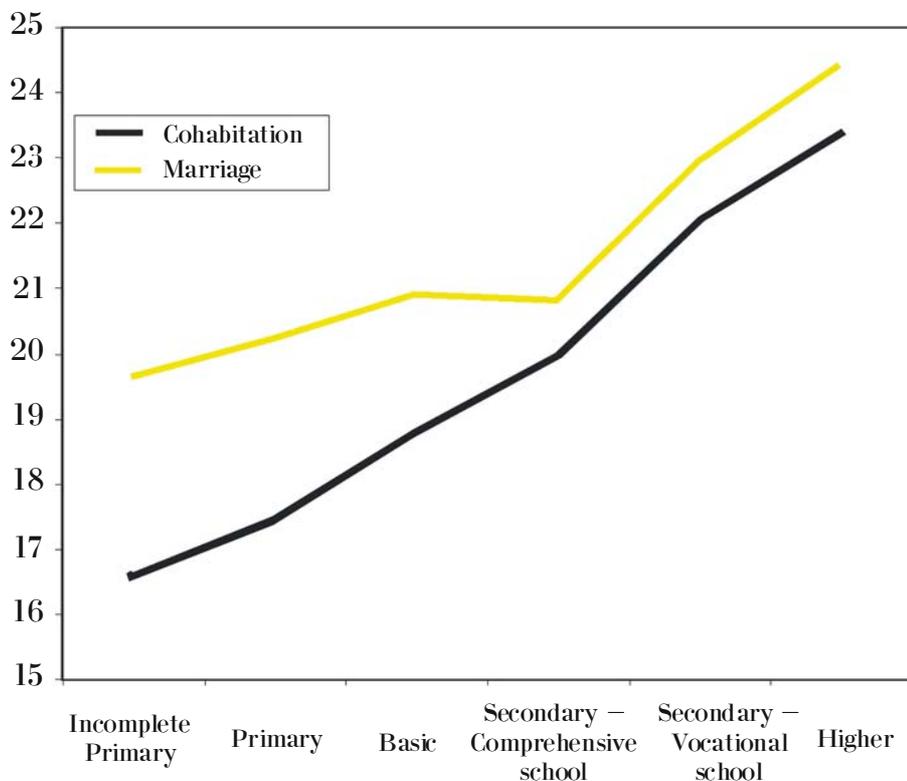
In the representative sample of the persons above 15 years of age (where the interviews were conducted face to face) the average age at start of cohabitation without marriage is 18 years and 4 months, the most common age at start of cohabitation, however, is 16 years, the earliest one is 12 years and the latest one is 37 years. The average number of cohabitating couples without marriage is 1.37 and the largest number of cohabitating couples without marriage registered during the survey

is 3. According to the data from the same sample the average age for concluding marriage is 21 years and 8 months, i.e. 3 years and 4 months after starting cohabitation. In the representative sample of the persons in the household above 10, the average length of cohabitation before marriage is 3 years and 2 months. The most common length of cohabitation before marriage is 1 year, and the longest cohabitation before marriage is 17 years. After a year in cohabitation 20% of the Roma have contracted civil marriage, after 2 years of cohabitation – 40% and after 5 years – 80%.



As the most significant and distinctive factor for the early start of informal cohabitation and marital life is the educational level of the respondents. The increase of the age of first cohabitation and first marriage is in direct correlation with the level of education. The higher the educational level is, the later marital and non-marital partnerships start (Graph 1). The average age of first cohabitation among persons with incomplete elementary education is 17 years old; however, the most common start age is 16 years as 50% of the Roma with the lowest educational level already have a partner. The average age of first cohabitation among persons with higher education is 23 years; however the most common start age is 28 years. At the age of 25 about 50% of Roma with higher education have partners already. It is interesting to note that the type of secondary education also has significant influence. The average age of first cohabitation (22) and marriage (23) of those who have graduated vocational schools is 2 years higher compared to the graduates of secondary comprehensive schools. A curious phenomenon is the fact that with raising the educational level, the average length of cohabitation before marriage decreases. Of course, this phenomenon is largely due to the fact that a greater part of the cohabitation

relationships of the persons in the lower education groups starts before the legal age of civil marriage.



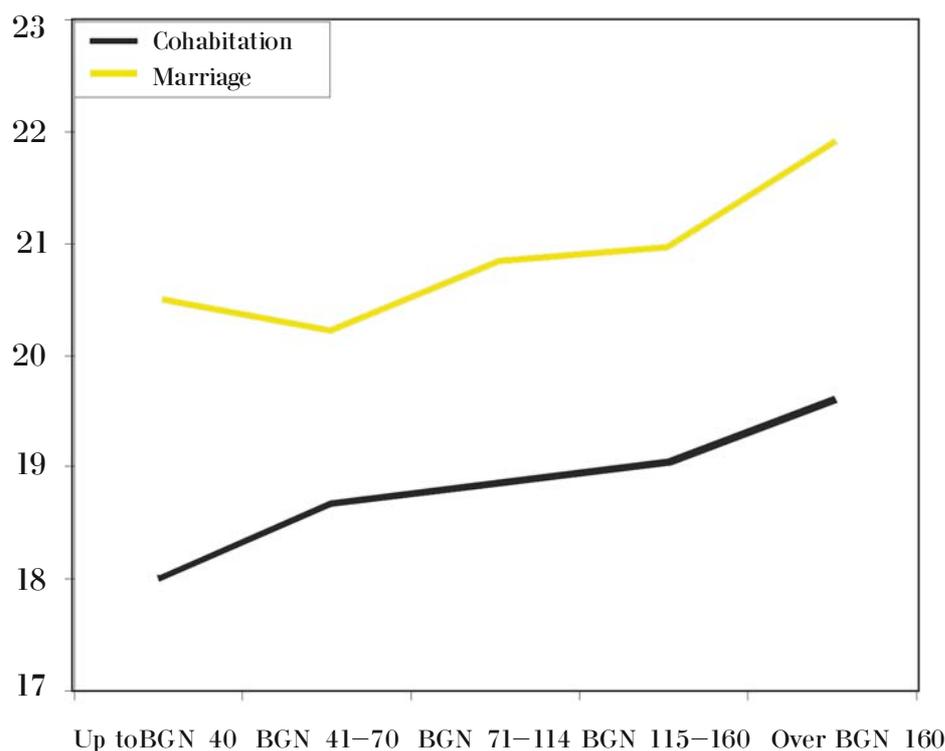
Graph 1. *Relation between age at first cohabitation and first marriage and level of education*

An important factor, though less significant, is the economic status of the household. The average net monthly income of households in the segregated neighbourhoods after taxation and repay of amounts due on loans is BGN 423. The poorest 20% of the households are living with an income below BGN 171, and the wealthiest 20% have income above BGN 600.

The median net monthly income is BGN 350 and, of course, the number of the members varies in the different households; therefore, the actual income status could be determined only by the division of average monthly income of the household to the number of its members in order to reach the net income per member of household.

For the purposes of this analysis, we will discuss below the income of the surveyed households in quintiles, i.e. five equal in size groups. Thus the groups are divided as follows: the poorest 20% of the households has income per person less than BGN 40 per month. The next group has income of between BGN 40 and BGN 70 per person monthly. The third group is with income of between BGN 71 to BGN 114, and the fourth group – from BGN 115 to 160 BGN monthly. The wealthiest 20% of the households live with monthly income above BGN 160 per

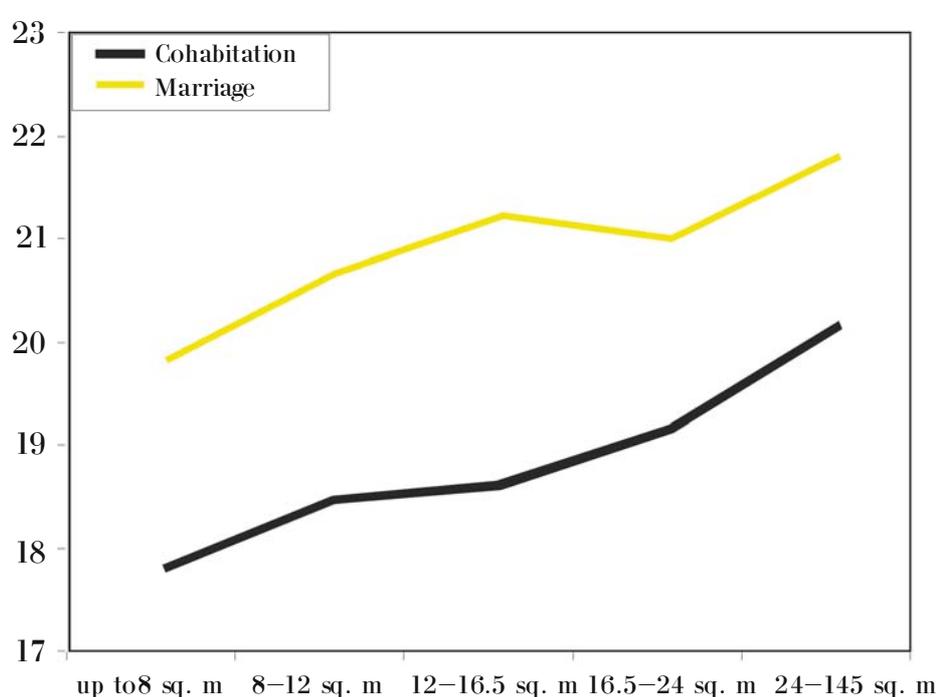
person. When comparing the age of first cohabitation and first marriage with the average monthly income per person of household, a directly proportional correlation is observed – the higher the net monthly income per person of household is, the higher the age of concluding first marriage is. In other words, the risk of early start of family life in non-marital cohabitation or after contracted civil marriage is the highest in households with lower income.



Graph 2. *Correlation between age of first cohabitation and first marriage and net monthly income per person of household*

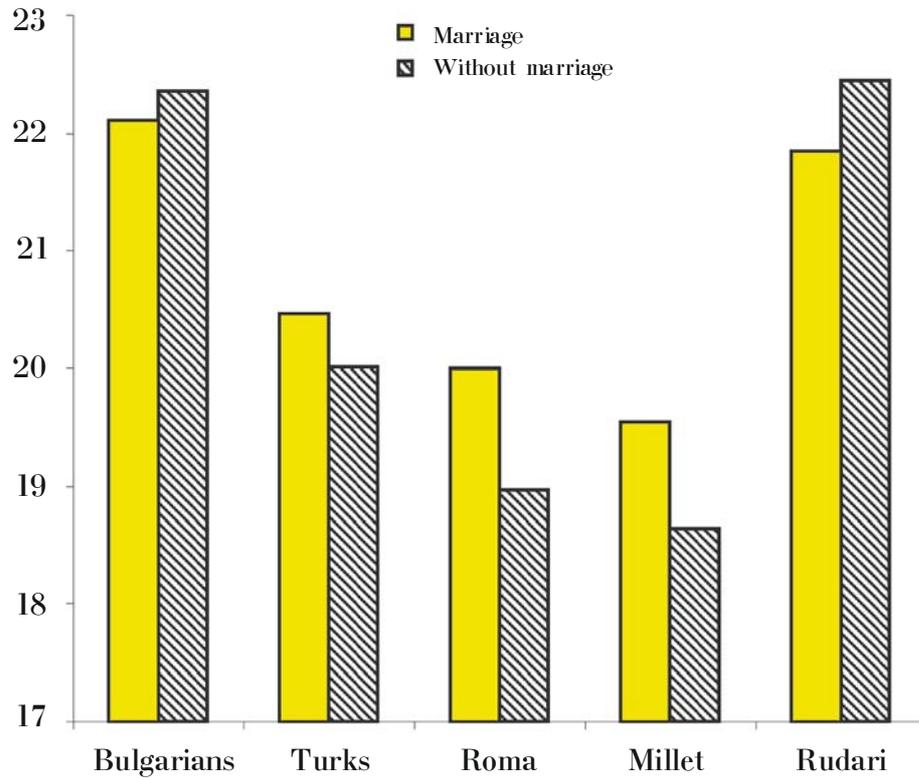
In addition to the net monthly income, another standard benchmark for the economic status of a certain household is the area of its dwelling. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the average dwelling area in the segregated areas with predominant Roma population is 67.8 sq. m. Of course, similarly to the net monthly income, the living conditions could be evaluated adequately by dividing the area of the house to the number of the household members. For the purposes of this analysis, the average dwelling area per person will be presented in five equal in size groups. They will be divided as follows: the dwelling area of the poorest 20% is below 8 sq. m per person. The next group of households lives in dwellings with an area of 8 to 12 sq. m/person. The dwelling area of the middle group is from 12 to 16, 5 sq. m. The fourth group has between 16.5 and 24 sq. m residential area. The wealthiest 20% of households live in dwellings with an area between 24 and 145 sq. m/person.

When comparing the age of first cohabitation and first marriage with the average dwelling area per person of household, a directly proportional correlation is observed again – the larger the dwelling area per person is, the higher the age of concluding civil marriage and first cohabitation is. Therefore, the risk of early start of non-marital cohabitation or conclusion of civil marriage is higher in the households with less average dwelling area per person. Of course, it is possible to observe the effect in the opposite direction – persons that are finding their partner at an early age, remain part of the household of their parents (forming composite households) and thus the average dwelling area per person is decreasing.



Graph 3. Correlation between the age at first cohabitation and first marriage and the average dwelling area per person of household

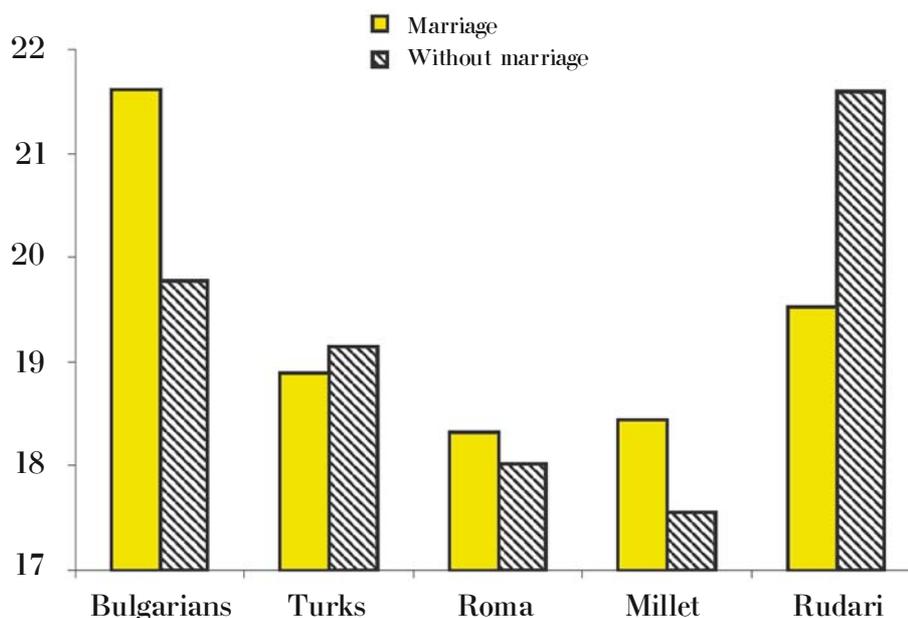
The ethnic self-identification of the surveyed persons is also of significance (Annex 2). The average age of first cohabitation is the lowest among those residents of the segregated neighbourhoods that have self-identified themselves as Millet. In this group, 50% of the people have started their first cohabitation at the age of 17, the most common age being 16 years. The highest average age is among those that have self-identified themselves as Bulgarians and Rudari. With the Rudari, unlike other communities, another interesting phenomenon is observed – the average age of first cohabitation is higher than the average age of first marriage. This could be explained by the smaller share of persons that cohabit before marriage, i.e. in contrast to other communities, where cohabitation occurs before marriage, with the Rudari more common is marriage without previous cohabitation.



This hypothesis is substantiated by the difference between the average age at first cohabitation, through the perspective of whether the persons have ever concluded marriage in their life. Therefore, the Rudari and the persons who self-identify as Bulgarians are contrast cases in terms of social practices. Those who self-identify as Bulgarians and have started their first cohabitation at an early age (19 years and 10 months) usually do not conclude marriage, while those who conclude marriage later, start their first cohabitation at a later age (21 years and 8 months), i.e. either starting their family life early and live without marriage, or cohabitation precedes marriage with a few months. Just the opposite is observed with the Rudari. Those who subsequently conclude marriage start their first cohabitation earlier (19 years and 6 months) in comparison to those that live in cohabitation without marriage (21 years and 8 months), i.e. either starting their family life early and legalize it officially, or create a family later and do not legalize their cohabitation.

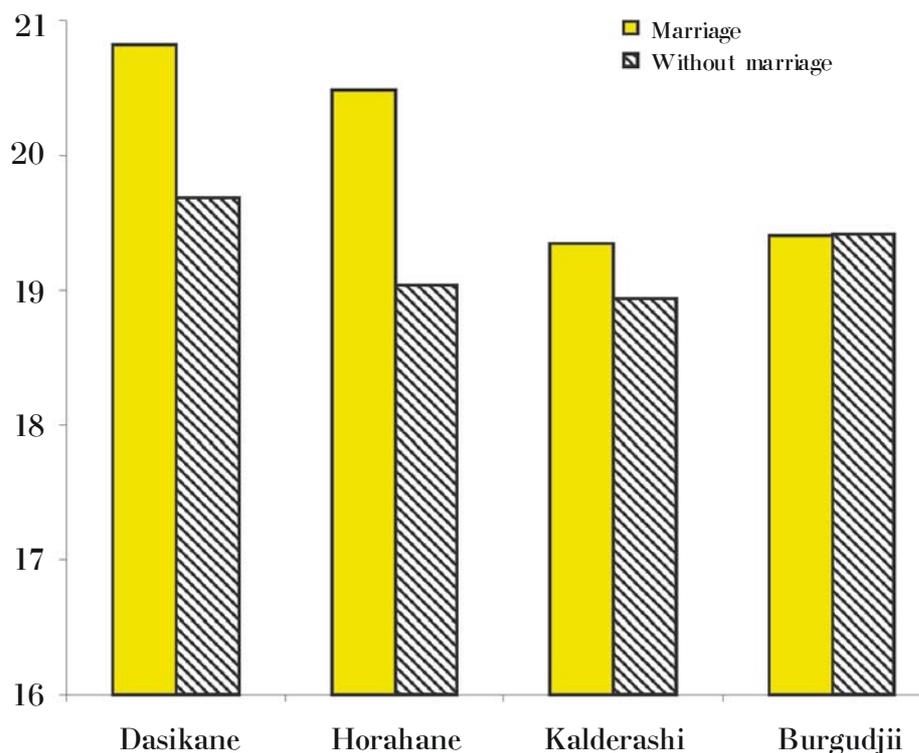
Despite they are Muslims and their mother tongue is Turkish, between the persons who self-identify as Turks and those who self-identify as Millet, are observed extremely great differences in social practices. The model of cohabitation in the group of Millet is similar to the model of those who self-identify as Bulgarians, although the average age of cohabitation is two years earlier both for the persons with legal marriage (18 years and 5 months) and the persons without marriage (17 years and 8 months). The model in the group of those who self-identify as Turks is similar to the model of the Rudari group. At the same time, it should be noted that with those

who self-identify as Turks and Roma the average ages of first cohabitation with marriage and without marriage are very close. With the Turks the persons that conclude marriage start cohabitation at the age of 18 years and 11 months, and those that do not – at the age of 19 years and 1 month. With the Roma those who live without marriage start cohabitation at the age of 18 years and those with marriage – at the age of 18 years and 4 months, i.e. the age of first cohabitation do not affect significantly marriage.



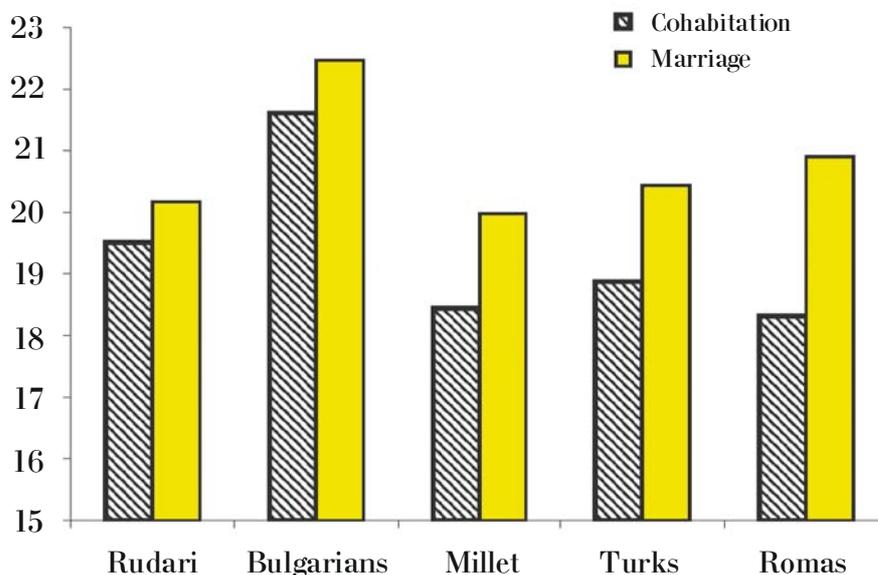
The groups of Dasikane and Horahane Roma have as a model the start of first cohabitation similarly to the group of Bulgarians and Millet. With the group of the Dasikane Roma cohabitation not leading to marriage starts at the age of 18 years and 6 months and that leading to marriage – at the age of 19 years. Within the group of Horahane Roma cohabitation leading to marriage starts at the age of 18 years and 9 months and that not resulting in marriage – at the age of 17 years and 7 months. With the Kaldarashi the age of the two types of cohabitation is almost the same. The age of concluding marriage is 18 years and those living without legal marriage are at the age of 17 years and 10 months. The model of cohabitation amongst the Burgudjii is similar to the one of the Rudari, although not that strongly distinguished. Cohabitation leading to marriage starts earlier (17 years and 3 months) in comparison to cohabitation not resulting in marriage (17 years and 8 months).

It is seen that the period of the start of first cohabitation and marriage is strongly dependent on ethnic self-identification, declared at the time of the survey. With the group of Rudari the average length of the period between the start of cohabitation and marriage is nine months. For the Bulgarians the same period is ten months. For the Turks and Millet this time continues for a year and seven months.



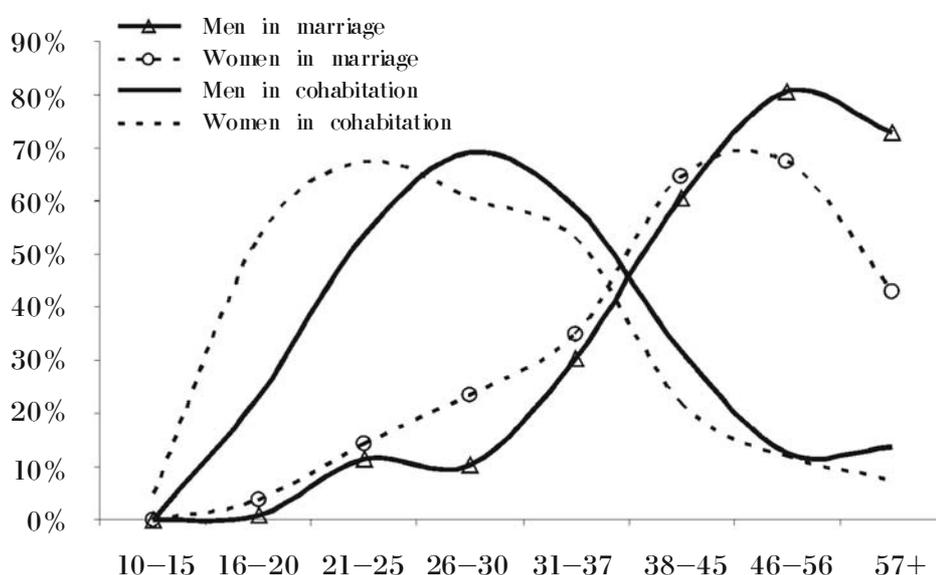
While with the Roma this period is longer than a year – i.e. about two years and seven months (Annex 3).

Last but not least, when it comes to basic human experiences and social practices, it is essential to identify the differences in the attitudes and behaviour of both sexes. Similarly to previous sociological surveys (Tomova 1995, Pamporov 2006) and data from the population censuses in the country, the present survey outlines significant disparities in the history of partnerships between women and men.



The average age at the start of cohabitation for women living in segregated neighbourhoods with predominant Roma population is 17 years and 5 months. For men this age is 20 years and 1 month, i.e. nearly three years later than women. The most common age at the start of cohabitation for women is 17 years, at which more than the half of them already live in cohabitation. The most common age at the start of cohabitation for men is 20 years, at which half of them already have their partner in cohabitation.

The average age of concluding legal marriage for women is 19 years and 9 months and for men – 22 years and 4 months. The most common marital age of men is 22 years and of women 18 years. The median for first marriage for men is 22 years and women – 19 years. The later age of men compared to women as regards marriage and cohabitation is shown in the chart below, presenting the distribution of men and women by age at the time of the survey if they were in cohabitation or marriage. Except for the temporal displacement with several years, the chart also presents the significantly higher share of married men above 46 years of aged in comparison to married women. The reason for that is in the lower life expectancy of men. Those who live up to 45 years are usually married. The widowers at the age of 46–56 are 2.8%, and those at the age of 57 and more are 6.4%. The widows in these age groups are respectively 8.3% and 39.5% (see Annex 4).



When it comes to marriage and cohabitation, it is important to note that 4.1% of the surveyed persons have a partner with whom they do not live together. For 72.7% of them this is due to different circumstance, while for the rest 27.3% one of the partners is willing to live separately. The major circumstance for living separately is the lack of a separate dwelling (50% of those living separately). The second significant reason is the fact that the partner is lives abroad (28.6%). It is curious to note that

16.7% of the separated families have contracted civil marriage and 54.2% have children together.

Attitude towards partnerships

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter, the Roma culture is characterized by attaching great importance to the girl's purity before marriage. Therefore in all Roma groups the first sexual intercourse *de facto* plays the role of social legitimacy of cohabitation. After the first sexual intercourse the partners are perceived as “married” regardless whether there is or not civil marriage. The vignette questions for the attitude towards early marriages were constructed and have to be interpreted from this point of view. The first vignette is aiming at referring toward the context of being neighbours in the Roma neighbourhood, where everyone knows everyone. It is directly related to the attitude of the Roma towards early sexual life and their reproductive culture. Behind the vignette practically is hidden the following question: Is the age of 14–15 years appropriate for starting sexual (and respectively marital) life?

Ivancho and Mariika live in two neighbouring houses and know each other since they were children. At the age of 14–15 they realize they have fallen in love with each other and would like to have sexual intercourse. What should they do?

The survey registered different attitudes in the different respondent groups, living in segregated neighbourhoods, depending on their ethnic self-identification. With the most patriarchal model is the group of Millet. It is the only one in which the parents' permission has a greater share than waiting. The share of those responding that Ivancho and Mariika must wait is the highest among those who self-identify as Bulgarians and Turks. The percentage of those who agree with the statement that they can have sex if in love is the highest among the Roma. However, it has to be noted that the differences between the groups are within the margins of the statistical error and even the difference between the Roma and the Turks is less significant.

	Total	Bulgarians	Turks	Roma	Millet	Rudari
Must take permission from their parents	30.1%	19.2%	23.2%	32.2%	41.6%	24.0%
Must wait for some time	47.3%	58.9%	57.6%	42.9%	39.6%	48.0%
They can have sex if in love	20.9%	20.5%	18.2%	22.7%	18.8%	20.0%
Other	1.7%	1.4%	1.0%	2.2%	0.0%	8.0%

When taking into account the subgroup differences in the community, however, extremely high and statistically significant differences are noted in all possible answers. It is obvious that for the group of the Horahane Roma sexual contacts at that age are totally unacceptable. Two-thirds of the representatives of this group have indicated the necessity to wait for some time, while scarcely 5% accept the sexual intercourse as a possible solution in this situation. At the other pole are the Dasikane Roma for who sexual life is acceptable for one quarter of the respondents. Although the included in this survey Burgudjii are a subgroup of the Dasikane Roma, the outlined attitude in the described situation is principally different. The Burgudjii are more conservative than the other Roma Christians. Among them the necessity of waiting and the need of parental agreement indicate higher values. The possibility of the sexual intercourse is admissible for only 7.1% or three times less than the group of the Dasikane Roma. Very similar with the attitudes of the Burgudjii is another targeted and surveyed group – that of the Kaldarashi. Therefore, the researcher’s hypothesis for the traditionalism and closeness of these groups is confirmed.

	Dasikane	Horahane	Kaldarashi	Burgudjii
Must take permission from their parents	27,8%	19,0%	39,8%	40,4%
Must wait for some time	44,3%	66,7%	50,0%	52,5%
They can have sex if in love	25,3%	4,8%	9,1%	7,1%
Other	2,5%	9,5%	1,1%	0,0%

The common attitude towards the patriarchal model of decision making in segregated settlements with predominant Roma population is confirmed by the distributions of the specifying question “*Who must take permission from whom?*” In 69.1% of the cases the responsibility for the decision is transferred to the boy’s parents. The understanding that it is the boy’s parents who should go and ask the girl if they agree with the choice of their son is strongly manifested with the *Roma* and *Millet*. However, we must acknowledge that the exit hypothesis for the potential risk of forced marriages in Roma communities – where parents decide regardless of their children’s will – in this case is rather rejected. Despite this it is to be noted that almost 14.4% of those living in segregated mahali are inclined to accept the decision of the two parental couples regardless the willingness of the young and that is not to be underestimated. What is curious in this case is that the most clearly expressed model as a precondition of forced marriages is registered among the persons who self-identify as Bulgarians.

The necessity for the boy to take his parents’ consent and for them to ask for the girl’s hand from her parents is the most spread attitude with all Roma subgroups. Nevertheless, this trend is much stronger with the Burgudjii than with the Kaldarashi

	Total	Bulgarian	Turkish	Roma	Millet	Rudari ¹³
Ivancho must take his parents' consent and then he can take Mariika for wife	27.1%	20.0%	20.8%	29.3%	21.4%	62.5%
Mariika must take her parents' consent and then she can live with him	5.5%	6.7%	8.3%	3.3%	4.8%	25.0%
Ivancho must ask for her parents' consent and then they must ask Mariika from her parents	42.0%	20.0%	33.3%	47.8%	47.6%	12.5%
Mariika must take her parents' consent and they must negotiate with Ivancho's parents	6.6%	6.7%	8.3%	6.5%	7.1%	0.0%
The parents should agree between themselves regardless of what Ivancho and Mariika want	14.4%	33.3%	16.7%	9.8%	19.0%	0.0%

and Dasikane Roma. With the Kaldarashi is registered a significantly higher value of the response that only the consent of the parent's boy is required and the girl can become the wife of their son. The formation of this attitude most probably is influenced by the fact that the traditional marriage with the Kaldarashi is based on bride-buying, while with the group of the Burgudjii this custom exists, however with significantly lower (sometimes – just symbolic) dowry.

The importance of the parents' consent is visible from the consensus between all groups: if the parents do not permit them, the young must wait for some time (78.2%). The definite need of the parents' consent is clearly seen with the Burgujii, Kaldarashi and Millet. For persons from segregated neighbourhoods who self-identify as Bulgarians, it is admissible to have a sexual intercourse with a condom. About 10% of the Roma indicate that young people can have sex; however, the girl must keep the bed sheet with the blood of virginity, which once again emphasizes the great significance of virginity in this community.

¹³ After dividing the respondents by ethnicity, for this response the aggregation of the Rudari is too small for a statistically significant analysis and this may distort the data. In a larger aggregation there might be other results. The data for the Rudari in this table should be taken into account only as estimates.

	Dasikane	Horahane ¹⁴	Kaldarashi	Burgudjii
Ivancho must take his parents' consent and then he can take Mariika for wife	27,3%	0,0%	37,1%	15,0%
Mariika must take her parents' consent and then she can live with him	4,5%	,0%	,0%	2,5%
Ivancho must ask for her parents' consent and then they must ask Mariika from her parents	45,5%	100,0%	51,4%	77,5%
Mariika must take her parents' consent and they must negotiate with Ivancho's parents	9,1%	,0%	5,7%	,0%
The parents should agree between themselves regardless of what Ivancho and Mariika want	13,6%	,0%	5,7%	5,0%
Other	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%

Keeping the bed sheet with the blood from the defloration stands out as the most spread attitude even among those who have answered to the first vignette as “They can have sex if in love”. The most traditionalistic one is the group of the Millet. An important clarification at this point is that the share of the Burgudjii and Kaldarashi in the strengthened sample who has indicated that answer is small, therefore, a subsequent statistical analysis is not possible.

Significant information for the attitudes in terms of partnership is provided by the distribution of responses of those respondents that have indicated as first answer “They have to wait for some time”. As a major reason for postponing the sexual intercourse stands the attitude that it has to be preceded by a wedding. As the most traditionalist community with this attitude is again the Millet. The *Rudari* and the *Bulgarians* living in segregated neighbourhoods indicated as an argument for postponing sexual relations the necessity of obtaining education. With the groups of the *Bulgarians* as a reason is also emphasised the low contraceptive culture at this age – “they would not know how to preserve themselves”. The answers of the *Roma* and the *Turks* are almost evenly distributed between the suggested four options.

¹⁴ After breaking the Roma into subgroups, for this answer the aggregation of the people from the Horahane Roma is insufficient for a statistically significant analysis and that explains the explicitness of the answer. In case of a larger aggregation there might be other results. The data for the Horahane Roma in the table should be perceived only as estimations.

	Bulgarians	Turks	Roma	Millet	Dasikane	Kaldarashi	Burgudjii
They have to wait for some time	71,4%	83,3%	71,7%	92,9%	77,3%	91,4%	97,4%
They can have sex, however, Mariika has to keep the bed sheet with her virginity	,0%	12,5%	10,9%	7,1%	9,1%	2,9%	2,6%
They can have only anal sex, so that Mariika will remain a virgin	,0%	,0%	2,2%	,0%	4,5%	2,9%	,0%
She has to try to get pregnant so that she can marry Ivancho	,0%	,0%	1,1%	,0%	,0%	,0%	,0%
They can have sex but only with a condom	14,3%	,0%	2,2%	,0%	,0%	,0%	,0%
If they are in love, they can have sex without any conditions	7,1%	,0%	5,4%	,0%	4,5%	2,9%	,0%
Other	7,1%	4,2%	6,5%	,0%	4,5%	,0%	,0%

	Total	Bulgarians	Turks	Roma	Millet
To preserve the bed sheet with her virginity	59,8%	26,7%	52,9%	62,3%	78,9%
To allow him only anal sex in order to remain a virgin	2,6%	,0%	,0%	4,9%	,0%
To use a condom or a single anti-baby pill (after sex)	10,3%	26,7%	5,9%	8,2%	5,3%
To use daily anti-baby pills, coil, diaphragm etc.	4,3%	20,0%	,0%	3,3%	,0%
If they are in love they can have sex without any conditions	16,2%	20,0%	29,4%	13,1%	15,8%
To try to get pregnant in order to marry Ivancho	4,3%	6,7%	5,9%	4,9%	,0%
Other	2,6%	,0%	5,9%	3,3%	,0%

In this question as well as the questions above, extremely large differences are noted in the answers of the different Roma subgroups. The *Dasikane Roma* put clear emphasis on that the boy and the girl “would not know how to preserve

	Total	Bulgarians	Turks	Roma	Millet	Rudari
They have to get married first	31,3%	17,0%	27,3%	24,7%	59,7%	35,3%
They have to graduate school	25,4%	37,7%	20,8%	27,5%	14,3%	41,2%
They are still young, do not know what to do in order to like it	14,7%	5,7%	22,1%	15,4%	13,0%	5,9%
They are still young and do not know how to preserve themselves	24,0%	32,1%	23,4%	29,1%	9,1%	17,6%
Other	4,6%	7,5%	6,5%	3,3%	3,9%	,0%

themselves”. In contrast to them, a stronger argument for the *Horahane Roma* for the boy and girl to wait for some time for sex (i.e. marriage) is the necessity to “graduate education” first. In order to understand properly the emphasis of this answer, it should be explicitly pointed out that in the most conservative Roma communities after reaching the age, which is considered normal for marriage, girls are stopped from going to school, because of the risk of being stolen or elopement. Stopping girls from school after 4th or 8th grade is typical for those subgroups in which the traditional marital model is bride-buying. The answers of the two subgroups in the strengthened sample – the *Burgudjii* and the *Kaldarashi*, must be considered in this light. Similarly to the *Millet* with these two groups marriage emerges as a necessary condition for the start of sexual and marital life. In both groups education is the next response.

	Dasikane	Horahane	Kaldarashi	Burgudjii
They have to get married first	21,2%	15,8%	46,1%	51,1%
They have to graduate school	17,3%	47,4%	32,9%	31,1%
They are still young, do not know what to do in order to like it	17,3%	15,8%	9,2%	7,8%
They are still young and do not know how to preserve themselves	42,3%	21,1%	9,2%	10,0%
Other	1,9%	,0%	2,6%	,0%

The second vignette is designed to examine the attitude towards the early unwanted pregnancy as a result of the early start of sex life. Behind the responses to this vignette are hidden three questions: 1) Should a girl at the age of 14 or 15 keep the child”; if “yes” then 2) Can the unwanted pregnancy become a reason for early marriage?; and if “no” then 3) Must she end her pregnancy secretly from her parents or they must be aware of her condition?

Finally, because they are not experienced they have something like sex on a bench in the park. However, in a month Mariika finds out that she is pregnant and because they thought that this would happen from the first time, they are very surprised. According to you, what should they do?

The answers of the vignette show the explicit consensus of the surveyed persons: despite their young age and unwanted pregnancy, the couple must keep the child and get married. This attitude is most strongly expressed among the *Rudari* and the *Millet* and less with those who self-identify as Bulgarian. In comparison to the other groups the *Bulgarians* and the *Turks* a slightly larger percentage of the respondents are likely to think the girl must make an abortion if this is happening with the knowledge of her parents. The attitude of keeping the child, but without marrying is most clearly expressed among the *Bulgarians* and the *Roma*.

	Total	Bulgarians	Turks	Roma	Millet	Rudari
To get married and keep the child	75,4%	63,0%	74,2%	72,5%	89,9%	92,0%
To keep the child without getting married	9,7%	11,0%	7,5%	11,8%	8,1%	,0%
To inform their parents, so that they can arrange the abortion	9,9%	17,8%	14,0%	9,5%	0,0%	8,0%
To make an abortion secretly from her parents	3,8%	4,1%	3,2%	5,0%	2,0%	0,0%
Other	1,3%	4,1%	1,1%	1,1%	0,0%	0,0%

With regard to the attitudes of the Roma the most significant differences are observed between the *Burgudjii* and the rest of the Roma subgroups. One could say that with the *Burgudjii*, similarly to the *Millet* and *the Rudari*, the early pregnancy would face a strong social pressure to be followed by marriage, in which the child would be raised. It must be noted that in this respect the existing data completely confirm the results of a previous survey, which had a fast and spontaneous consensus in all discussion groups. *De facto*, “the early pregnancy is accepted as a normal phenomenon in Roma communities and, therefore, young girls are exposed to a great risk” (Pamporov, 2008)

The major goal of the third vignette is to survey the attitude to single motherhood in a situation when marriage or cohabitation is not possible. In this case, as an alternative of the single motherhood at an early age, the standardized responses oppose the attitude to abortion, attitude for leaving a child in a home for adoption and finding a partner who could be misled that he is the father of the child.

Before finding courage to inform their parents, Ivancho’s family together with him left for Spain to work. What should Mariika do?

	Total	Bulgarians	Turks	Roma	Millet	Rudari
To give birth to the child and raise it as a single mother	47,1%	38,2%	44,2%	48,3%	55,9%	22,7%
To give birth to the child but leave it in a home for children without parents	1,5%	4,4%	2,1%	0,8%	1,0%	0,0%
To give birth in secret in another town and leave it in a home for children without parents	0,9%	1,5%	0,0%	1,5%	0,0%	0,0%
To tell her parents and they arrange the abortion	14,2%	19,1%	23,2%	11,5%	6,9%	9,1%
To make abortion secretly from her parents	4,6%	2,9%	6,3%	5,0%	2,9%	4,5%
To ask her mother to adopt the child	5,5%	4,4%	3,2%	9,2%	0,0%	0,0%
To marry another man and mislead him that it is his child	1,3%	0,0%	2,1%	1,9%	0,0%	0,0%
To give birth abroad and sell the child to a childless couple	0,4%	1,5%	0,0%	0,0%	1,0%	0,0%
Other	24,6%	27,9%	18,9%	21,8%	24,5%	63,6%

The major distribution of responses indicate that almost half of the inhabitants of segregated residential areas with predominant Roma population consider that in this situation the girl must give birth to the child and raise it as a single mother. Less inclined to similar development of the scenario are the *Rudari*. The single motherhood in similar situation is most acceptable in the group of the *Millet*. It is important to note that unlike the previous vignette, in the new context of the story (in which partnership is not possible) the attitude that the girl's parents must arrange eventual abortion significantly increases its share among the *Bulgarians* and the *Turks*.

This vignette also reveals a great difference in the attitude of the different Roma groups. *The Burgudjii* stands out as the most traditional one. More than the half of the surveyed Burgudjii would leave the girl to raise the child as a single mother, and another one fifth of them would engage the grandmother of the child with his adoption. In other words, according to 75.5% of the Burgudjii the child must be born and raised by the girl's family. The adoption – open, secret or abroad is socially non-acceptable for all of them who self-identify as Roma.

	Dasikane	Horahane	Kaldarashi	Burgudjii
To give birth to the child and raise it as a single mother	43,8%	21,7%	39,1%	53,5%
To give birth to the child but leave it in a home for children without parents	0,0%	4,3%	4,6%	0,0%
To give birth in secret in another town and leave it in a home for children without parents	0,0%	4,3%	1,1%	0,0%
To tell her parents and they arrange the abortion	12,5%	21,7%	21,8%	16,2%
To make abortion secretly from her parents	2,5%	,0%	14,9%	3,0%
To ask her mother to adopt the child	12,5%	34,8%	9,2%	20,2%
To marry another man and mislead him that it is his child	2,5%	,0%	2,3%	0,0%
To give birth abroad and sell the child to a childless couple	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%	0,0%
Other	25,0%	4,3%	6,9%	7,1%

PART THREE

Local campaigns for prevention of early marriages: motivated activists – organized groups and communities

In the period of June–August 2010 were conducted campaigns for the prevention of early marriages in local Roma communities in 10 municipalities on the territory of Bulgaria. The purpose of these campaigns was to approbate a few types of activities in Roma communities pertaining in general to social and community work and to examine the effect of these activities on the prevention of early marriages. The activities within these campaigns reached more than 3500 people, living in 18 villages and towns.

Participants

The campaigns were initiated and organized by local Roma activists, coming from or/and working in the relevant communities. This was in coherence with the major approach, undertaken with the implementation of the project “Prevention of Early/Forced Marriages” that focuses on the construction of an “internal community perspective” in the efforts for overcoming the traditional practices as early marriages, forced marriages etc. It turned out that even among the most conservative Roma groups in Bulgaria (such as the Burgudjii and the Kaldarashi) as well as in small and detached settlements in rural regions one can identify educated Roma boys and girls, that have not cut off their ties with their communities but on the contrary – are strongly motivated to work for change.

The engagement of this type of Roma activists, who are not social workers and are not part of the system of local institutions, in performing social and community work has its own challenges. On one hand, it requires the investment of efforts for increasing the knowledge and skills of these activists: at least in the sphere of community work, social activities, the specifics of interpersonal communication, etc. And on the other, it requires additional efforts to persuade the representatives of local institutions to “recognize” these activists as their reliable assistants and partners in

the Roma community. Furthermore, it requires a lot of efforts so that these activists can be recognized as an authority (i.e. “taken seriously”) by their communities. Despite these challenges, the involvement of local Roma activists is a necessary precondition for the establishment of an internal community perspective in the fight with early marriages and the accompanying negative practices. It turned out that educated boys and girls with the appropriate support and cooperation not only provoke a serious discussion in the community on delicate matters related to marriage and family, but also assist the organization of the community and its involvement in overcoming a whole spectrum of negative traditional practices.

The project team had its strategy how to meet these challenges. For increasing the skills in organizing social and community work, as well as for provision of needed assistance, within the framework of the campaigns were conducted three workshops with the activists, carrying out the local campaigns. In order to familiarize the local institutions and their involvement with the campaign activities were conducted trainings with social workers, teachers and Roma leaders from the municipalities involved in the project. Certainly, the pointed out challenges were overcome to a great extent by the activists, as within the campaign they had to reaffirm their authority in Roma communities, to win the trust of the institutions and attain new knowledge and skills.

Scope

The local campaigns were implemented in municipalities representing the three major types of settlements, inhabited by the Bulgarian Roma – a village, a small town and a large city. The campaigns were carried out in one of the largest and emblematic of Roma neighbourhoods – ghettos (Nov Pat in Vidin and Nadezhda in Sliven), in Roma neighbourhoods in the towns of Vratsa, Rakitovo, Rakovski, Kuklen, Perushtitza, as well as the villages Kardam (Popovo Municipality), Zavoy, Hadzhidimitrovo, Veselinovo (Tundzha Municipality), Momino Selo, Chalakovi, Belozem, Shishmantsi, Striama (Rakovski Municipality), Nefela (Vratsa Municipality), Vodoley (Veliko Tarnovo Municipality). This diversity allowed the examination of the effect of similar activities implemented under different conditions: it turned out that part of the activities were effective only in the conditions of a village or a small town, but not in a large Roma neighbourhood, etc.

According to data from the population Census conducted in 2001, self-identified as Roma/Gypsies in Bulgaria are 370 908 people. Many researchers indicate that the real number of the Bulgarian Roma is between 700 000 and 800 000 people¹. Almost

¹ Марушиакова, Елена, Веселин Попов. *Циганите в България*. София: Клуб 90, 1993; Liégeois, J.P. *Roma, Gypsies, Travellers*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1994.

half of the Roma (47%) live in rural areas, over 20% in small towns, and the other one-third – in large (regional) cities. This diversity of conditions is in contrast with other countries with predominant Roma population (Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary): the large number of the Roma in these countries lives in rural areas.

The local campaigns included also representatives of different Roma groups. From the most conservative and traditional (as the Kaldarashi in Popovomunicipality and the Burgudjii in Rakovski Municipality) through different groups and subgroups of the Yerlii Roma (as Christians and Muslims) to the Turkish Roma from the group of the Millet: in practice the campaigns were realized among all large Roma groups where early marriages still exist². This allowed taking into consideration the specifics in the application of a significant part of the activities in different Roma groups: it turned out that a part of these activities is not applicable to some of the Roma groups, while with others they have good results, etc.

Ethnologists differentiate many Roma groups and subgroups in Bulgaria as the major ones are: “Yerlii” (the term is introduced by researchers in order to designate the sedentary for centuries in Bulgarian lands Roma opposed to the Nomads) with its major groups “*Horahane Roma*” (Roma Muslims) and “*Dasikane Roma*” (Roma Christians) and many other subgroups; “*Kaldarashi*”, “*Rudari*” (Romanian speaking Roma) and “*Millet*” (Turkish speaking Roma). The conducted sociological survey indicated that early marriages are most often spread among the *Kaldarashi*, the *Millet* and part of the *Yerlii* (especially with those living in large urban ghettos and isolated villages).

In different settlements according to the local specifics the campaigns were implemented in a specific manner. The common thing for all of them were the applied approaches (that found their expression in different activities) and by the unifying belief that change is possible and needed for the better future of the Roma.

Rakovski Municipality

The campaign in Rakovski included not only the town of Rakovski but also the surrounding villages: **Momino Selo, Chalakovi, Belozem, Shishmantzi, Striama**. It was conducted under different conditions in each of these settlements. For example in the village of Striama the Roma girls shared that the parental control is so strong that they have never left the village and a great part of them have been stopped from going to from school before finishing elementary school, while in the town of Rakovski the young people convinced their parents to take part in the meetings. In the village of Belozem early marriages appear to be widely spread as well as the tradition of negotiating the marriage by the parents, while in Momino Selo these traditions are

² The local campaigns were not implemented only among Romanian speaking Roma – *rudari*, but as the conducted research showed, the early/forced marriages in this group are of a great rareness.

obsolete for years. The diversity of circumstances occurred as one of the key challenges faced by the team implementing the campaign.

„Other girls from the village said that elderly people are harassing them, they are not allowed to go to any public place in the neighbourhood, not even to mention about school. The boys shared that the girls are not even allowed to go out of the village to the village river”.

Participant in the Campaign in the village of Striama

The campaign in Rakovski Municipality was organized by a large team coordinated by Georgi Markov. In the team participated representatives of the Roma communities from the six settlements, involved in the campaign: Vladi Evtimov and Mitko Markov from the town of Rakovski, Lubka Hristiva and Dimitar Yordanov from the village of Chalakovi, Stoyan Veliev and Krassimir Veliev from the village of Belozem, Stoyan and Todor Todorovi from the village of Shishmatsi, Dimitar (Charlito) and Albena Russeva from the village of Striama and Atanas Dimov from the village of Momino Selo.

The campaign motto was **“I don’t want to get married, I want to study”**. It had two major target groups – Roma young people and their parents, and it reached 109 young people and 123 parents.

The key methods applied during the campaign were the community discussion, group discussion, group meeting and individual meeting. Within the campaign were organized 12 group discussions (7 of them with young people and 5 with parents), at which the team of the campaign and young people and parents talked on early marriages, their advantages and disadvantages are, the ways to overcome the problem and the alternatives. It appeared that the subject of early marriages can hardly be discussed without connecting it to other important themes like education, employment, the place of the child (in particular the girl) in the family, Roma integration. The team was persuaded that with that many parents (especially among the more traditional communities) early marriages are not perceived as an issue but as a tradition. They would abandon this tradition if they are convinced that their children will have better income and future. For the younger people the most important themes were better education and greater freedom in personal life. Many of them were seeking ways to attain higher education in order to achieve better fulfilment; however, often the existing conditions (unemployment, lack of employment in the villages) made the obtaining of a high school diploma impossible and early marriage – the only alternative.

„In the town of Rakovski it was very easy to conduct the meetings. In the quarter of General Nikolaevo Mitko Markov gathered the leaders of the young people. We introduced the campaign and its goals and our willingness to hear their opinion. On the next day – 25 July 2010, the meeting with the young people was conducted in the local disco. There were 21 young people. The young people were

divided in groups – the educated ones and the illiterate ones. There was tension between them all the time; however, both groups agreed that they should strive to exert greater pressure on their parents to diminish the control and to allow them to study. They would like to talk with their parents more often about their problems and not to look for spouses for them...”

Participant in the Campaign in the town of Rakovski

The discussed topics were similar at the 4 community discussions, in which parents and young people took part. The community discussion appeared to be an appropriate form for exchange of opinions between parents and young people for reaching joint decisions, however, similar discussions could not be organized everywhere. It is necessary for the community to have a certain degree of self-organization. An important fact for the conduct of similar discussions is the availability of authorities that can gather together the whole community: in most cases these were preachers from different churches that cooperated actively the team of the campaign. Another important factor appears to be the availability of a public place for a discussion like that: the church, the coffee shop, the local community centre (chitalishte).

The group meetings were also successful: in the places where the team had difficulties in organizing a community or group discussion the enthusiastic campaigners conducted spontaneous meetings with groups of young people or parents, while walking round the Roma neighbourhoods. The campaign had its difficulties and comic situations. For example, after the first group discussions with young people in the village of Shishmantsi, the parents gathered and expected impatiently the team to scold it for teaching “bad things” the young people. Thus, was conducted the most crowded and lively group discussion with parents, in the course of which they started changing their opinion and agreed that the Roma have to overcome the tradition of early marriages – especially when this could lead to better income and happier life of the young people.

„The meeting with representatives of the parents went full steam ahead! After they found out what we had discussed with their children the previous evening, the elders waited for us to scold us. Who was I to make them change traditions? Did I think that because I worked for the municipality I could work out new laws... I explained that this was not a law, but change that had been accepted by all Bulgarians, Turks, Pomaks; that this was a new era and we were lagging behind with a century. We still lived in shacks and drive horse carts while other people lived in palaces and flew in the sky. We, the Roma were mocked at and not wanted anywhere – even in the village, in which we were born. Therefore, we had to change in order to catch up with the Bulgarians for at least 50 years. The greater part of the present people were silent while we talked and suddenly a woman spoke and said it was true. And the discussion went the way we wanted. They were sharing that this cannot continue and that the young people need education in order to drive cars, to get more

attention in hospital. Some of the present people were also keen on continuing their education...”

Georgi Markov, Team Leader of the Campaign

Despite all challenges, the campaign in Rakovski Municipality has accomplished its objectives. It has provoked a discussion on the issue of early marriages and education among communities that perceived it as a “taboo”. It motivated the young people to look for better education and self-organization in youth clubs. It also urged the parents to realize the need of change of some of the traditions, the need of better education for their children so they could live in a better future. A large part of the conducted activities (especially the community and group discussions, and an important additional result was that two girls from the group of the the Burgudjii in Rakovski enrolled in secondary schools, and many young people showed readiness to continue their education.

“As a result of the campaign, the young people showed great initiative, desire for education and meetings. Marriage for many of them is not an option, because they want to study and after that to find a good job. Thanks to the campaign we found many young people that are not married and managed to make them a role model for the children...”

Georgi Markov, Team Leader of the Campaign

Peshtera

Peshtera is situated in south central part of the country (in the Region of Pazardjik) with compact Roma population, which is almost one fourth of the citizens in the town. The Roma belong to two main groups: Turkish speaking Roma – the Millet and the Horahane Roma (Romanes speaking Muslim Roma). For both groups early marriages are still a relevantly high percentage of all families.

In Peshtera the campaign was organized by a team with many members including young Roma boys and girls as well as Roma leaders from the town. The team was headed by Eshref Rustem – a female student in Economics and a health mediator, and by Yuksel Yahsarov – a municipal councillor. They managed to mobilize and involve in the team all young Roma, who were studying in different universities and were willing to change their community and make the better education a general rule and not an exception.

The team organized multiple activities, including a door-to-door campaign in the two Roma neighbourhoods, a number of individuals and group meetings. Three group meetings were organized and held in the premises of two schools – Lyuben Karavelov and Mihail Kumanov, and in the hall of the Municipal Council of Peshtera, with almost 130 participants: parents, young people, and students. There were also

two group discussions with students graduating basic education and with young people.

It turned out that the Roma in Peshtera are ready to leave behind the tradition of early marriages. Almost all young people expressed their disagreement with the idea to be married early, while many of them declared education as a better alternative. Eshref and the other university students were an example that they wanted to follow. On the other hand, the parents also agreed that early marriages are not a good choice: they did not deny that they keep the tradition, but justified this only with their fear that their children may become addicted to drugs (which seemed to be a serious problem in Peshtera), or victims of human trafficking.

It was not a surprise that the issue of early marriages was not to be discussed independently: the participants spontaneously addressed the questions of better and quality education, poverty and mass immigration abroad, the failing Roma integration. As in many other settlements, education was defined as the most important need of the Roma, together with an appropriate job: if those two things happen, early marriages would gradually die out – the participants were sure about that.

„During the first two weeks of the campaign we organized three meetings. At the first of them there were children from Lyuben Karavelov Basic School and their parents as well as teachers, the Principal of the school, the Roma health mediators and journalists. The participants approved the initiative for the implementation of the campaign. The feedback from the discussed topics was very good, but a major part of the audience mentioned another problem which was directly related to early marriages, namely the drugs in the town. The parents of the girls were trying to bind their children earlier with their relatives – close or far – thinking that thus they will be protected from drug addicted males. The second meeting was with students from 5th to 8th grade from the same school, who were provided with information by the health mediators about health issues, traditions and legislation. The topic of the second meeting were the main issues of early marriages, the risks of childbirth among underage girls, health problems of children born by underage mothers, nutrition problems of children born by underage mothers; some numbers about abandoned by underage mothers and an emphasis was put on education as a priority. We pointed out Eshref and other young people from the neighbourhood as good examples of students from the Roma community and their development in the field of education. We spoke with the children individually – with each of them – and we understood the problems existing in their families. Some girls mentioned their parents did not let them go to school because of fear that someone might “steal” them. Others were afraid they might be sold in Greece as “white slaves”...

The third meeting took place in Mihail Kumanov School – again with the participation of parents, teachers, students and mediators from the community. As a main problem they pointed out migration to other countries and leaving the children with their grandparents. Meanwhile, the elderly people shared that they could not let the child continue school after finishing 8th grade: they were afraid to take that risk

for the kid. Thus, they had to marry him/her or to send him/her to his/her parents abroad. The children, on the other hand, shared that they would like to continue their education, but the parents did not let them, because they saw no point of higher education and forced them to get married. The participants in the meetings wanted to have more meetings like this one in order to share their problems and were very satisfied with the attention they had received...”

Yuksel Yasharov, Leader of the Campaign in Peshtera

The team skilfully used the methods of the family group conference and the community conference to resolve cases of particular threat of early marriages. During the campaign (June–August), which is usually an active period for marriages and weddings – the team received 6 signals for intention of parents to marry their children. Thanks to the immediate active intervention and the individual conversations, supported by the method of the family group conference and the innovative method of the community conference, all 6 cases were successfully resolved.

This is one of the most important results of the campaign: this summer no marriage was concluded between underage Roma in Peshtera. Not less important, a change in the attitude of the participants in the campaign started taking place. The campaign itself became a centre of the community life and its activities will be continued.

„The conclusions from the meetings and the questionnaire show that the children and the families are informed about the problem of early marriages. They realize that the family has to make some efforts to overcome the issue. They all declared that they did not approve early marriages and education of the children was the main priority. Most of them shared that the traditions and the customs were the main barriers to the change of the situation.

The common opinion of the participants was that efforts should be made and care taken on the part of the parents and the schools. During the discussions were highlighted other problems existing in the segregated schools, e.g.: bad and not attractive environment, low quality education (children graduate without being able to read), lack of extracurricular activities, lack of sports and other events to keep the children at school. An example was given with Roma kids who study in mixed classes and do not drop out from school and finish their education, and continue studying.

It is indicative that the children were also aware of the problem, stating not only the barriers created by the parents and traditions, but also the segregated schools with low quality of education.

The young people and the parents approved the initiative of the campaign “Overcoming Early Marriages in the Roma Community” and requested more meetings regarding the problem. We were greatly impressed by the fact that the parents and the children were eager for attention; they shared that up to now no one had made any efforts to solve this issue”.

Eshref Rustem, Leader of the Campaign in Peshtera

Rakitovo

Rakitovo is a town, situated in the south central part of the country, in the Region of Pazardjik. There are many Roma people (Horahane Roma), living in: Zapad neighbourhood, but part of the Roma families are settled in other parts of the town among Bulgarian and Bulgarian Mohammedan population. Early marriages have been a regular practice among the older generations, but currently they are fewer in number, however, still happening. They are initiated by the young man, who “steals” the bride and consummates their relationship. After that, the parents almost always agree to approve the “marriage” and organize a wedding. There are also (though rarely now) early marriages that are initiated by the parents. In the same time, progressively increases the number of the young Roma (even young females) who do not establishing families, but graduate secondary school and even university: the town has given famous representatives of modern Roma intelligence and the number of the Roma from Rakitovo holding a university degree is growing, too.

The campaign for the prevention of early marriages in Rakitovo was implemented by a team of the local Badeshte Foundation and was coordinated by Anche Krivonozova. The most active participants were Maria Raykova, Maria Krivonozova, Valentina Makova and Angel Kochev. They initiated the formation of two informal groups – of Roma women and Roma youth, studying in secondary schools and universities. They actively supported the whole campaign.

In the beginning, the team organised 4 focus groups (with young Roma men and girls, adult men and adult women) in order to understand the attitudes of the participants towards early marriages and their arguments. The discussions in the focus groups revealed that reasons for early marriages in Rakitovo are complex: the parents’ influence (strong pressure or milder impact on the young people thus trying to prevent them from “getting into bad ways,”), the community’s influence (through the power of traditions, through the stigma on “old maids” and “old bachelors”, through the preserved requirement for virginity of girls before marriage), as well as the desire of the young people to get married (with the argument of “strong love” behind which lies the lack of well-defined opportunities for social realization). The discussions also showed that many of the young people and the adult Roma are informed about at least part of the negative consequences of early marriages, however, the power of inertia and the settled traditions combined with the lack of visible stimulus (“What will the young accomplish is they do not get married that early?”) is encouraging them to continue the practice of early marriages.

Based on the conducted focus groups the team elaborated its strategy for the campaign. It was bases on awareness-raising work with Roma youth and parents to help them realize all negative consequences from early marriages and to motivate them to overcome this practice. Motivating young people, graduating 8th grade to continue in secondary school, was one of the main accents, since the recognition of

education as a real perspective is one of the most certain means for preventing early marriages. Another emphasis was the presentation of successful young Roma from Rakitovo that have chosen education to an early marriage and their acknowledgement as authorities within the community.

The team focused on the individual work with vulnerable families as well as on group discussions with young Roma and Roma parents. These discussions were conducted in the form of seminars and trainings that included useful information and debates on it. A group discussion was organized with the parents of young boys and girls graduating 8th grade in order to motivate them to support the further schooling of their children in secondary schools. The team used the method of family group conference to motivate a young couple to continue their education regardless of the fact they got married. Within the campaign were organized a series of seminars and trainings in combination with group discussions. For example, the trainings “Consequences of Early Marriages” and “Gender equality” were conducted with a group of Roma youth and later with a group of Roma parents. The participants in the trainings were selected so that a relationship and dialogue between young people/families could be established, the ones at risk of early marriage and the ones that have prevented this risk. The participants received valuable information on the negative consequences of early marriages on the young people’s health, education and realization; they learned about the laws and normative acts that were breached by early marriages; they also discussed the rights of the child and the woman.

„At the meeting participated 14 children at risk and 6 children studying in secondary schools who had managed to cope with the problem of early marriages. These children told how they took the decision to continue their education, how they felt then in comparison to their peers that already had children. The meeting turned into a stormy discussion regarding the pros and cons of the chosen path – whether to continue studying and develop yourself or start a family, be unemployed with young kids living in a closed environment in the neighbourhood. The student Angel Kochev shared his internal contradictions when he was admitted as a student in Balkan Studies at the University of Plovdiv. For the children at risk this seemed only an illusion and a very hard and non-achievable thing. He told them “If I succeeded, you can, too”.

Participant in the Campaign

„On July 21 was conducted a training for parents on the “Consequences of early marriages”. It was attended by twenty (20) people from risky families in the Roma neighbourhood. The results from the conducted training were a discussion between the risky families and the families with a different status. In the beginning, the risky families did not agree that early marriages can harm our community. Later on, however, after the training itself they asked a lot of questions and realized how much they personally had lost and that they had to protect their own children”.

Anche Krivonozova, Campaign Coordinator

During the discussion with parents of Roma children, finishing 8th grade in Hristo Botev Basic School (close to the Roma neighbourhood) they were motivated to enrol their children in secondary school instead of getting them married.) As a result of the discussion and the following individual conversations with each family, 23 (out of 27) children graduated basic school and enrolled in secondary school. None of these young people married that summer.

Very intense and interesting was the **door-to-door campaign**. The volunteers in the team visited 47 families at risk in Rakitovo and spoke with more than 100 people regarding the reasons for early marriages, the negative consequences and the possibilities for overcoming those. The parents' leading attitude was that the main reason for their children to get married at a young age was the lack of alternatives for their realization in their closed environment. They expressed their readiness to cooperate for the better education of their children and pointed out that only a small number of people were aware of the possibilities in this direction. In most cases the necessity of further work in motivating the families was evident in order to support education and prevent early marriages of their children.

The method of family group conference was used in the case of one young couple in Rakitovo. A.K and N.A, both at the age of 16, started a family several months ago and both of them left school (before graduating 8th and 9th grade). Through the family group conference the campaign team succeeded in convincing both to continue their education.

„Thanks to the team of the local campaign, the “married” couple went in for the July session. The boy passed three of his exams, and another three were left for September. Currently, he is preparing for the exams in September and finishing basic education. The girl went in for the July session and passed all exams from the second term of 9th grade. She will continue in 10th grade next year. During the campaign we worked with the couple on preventing an early pregnancy and discussing alternatives for their future. They both are determined to graduate secondary education. In the family group conference took part the young couple, the boy's mother, the boy's grandmother, a Roma leader and me – Ani Krivonozova”.

Valentina Makova, Assistant to the Coordinator of the Campaign

The campaign in Rakitovo reached more than 200 local Roma people. The team of the campaign succeeded in accomplishing a number of results:

- Enrolled in secondary school 23 children (out of 27), that graduated basic education in the segregated Roma school;
- Informed more than 100 people – children and parents, about the consequences of early marriages and change of their attitude of reconciliation with this problem;

- Acquainted 31 people – children and parents from the Romani neighbourhood, with the Law on the Protection of the Child;
- Participated in the field work with families at risk more than 50 people (volunteers) through the campaign “From Door to Door” explaining the harms of early marriages and their prevention;
- One case solved through the method of family group conference. The problem of a young married couple with continuing education in secondary school was solved;
- Introducing good examples in the community: 3 students and 15 pupils in secondary school were presented and were recognised as authorities by the adults and young people. This became an inspiration for children from families at risk to continue education;
- Changed attitude of the Roma community in Zapad neighbourhood in the town of Rakitovo regarding early marriages: the change started with the launch of the campaign. Unquestionably, a sustainable change can be accomplished only by persistent further activities.

Kuklen and Perushtitsa

Kuklen and Perushtitsa are small towns, situated in South Central Bulgaria, in the Region of Plovdiv. Currently, in the town of Kuklen early marriages are rare, while in the town of Perushtitsa it is a predominant trend. Therefore, the team of the campaign decided to facilitate the contacts between successful Roma people from the town of Kuklen and the Roma from the town of Perushtitsa. The campaign was coordinated by Albena Kostadinova, Yana Uzunova and Radka Tsonkova, activists of the local Roma organization Indi – Roma 97. As a first step they conducted training in mentoring skills of 16 young girls from the town of Kuklen. The trained were introduced to the concept of mentoring, how to support, partner, listen and provide emotional support, building a trust relationship and also were acquainted with primary information about the structure of family systems. Later on, the trained team organized the activities of the campaign in the town of Perushtitsa.

One of the major methods used was the interactive discussion. Movies were shown to women from the town of Perushtitsa related to trafficking of people and women’s rights, as the shows were followed by lively discussions. Watching the stories of women from other nations, the women from the Roma ethnic group without any resistance commented on the role of the woman in the Roma family, the sexual culture, the attitude towards children, the causes for the risk of early marriages and the alternatives options for their children.

“Women acknowledged that in the town of Perushtitsa it is a common practice the parents of the young people to negotiate the “deal” – often without asking their children. The opposite cases are not rare either – the young people like each other

and “elope” too young, and then the parents do not have any choice but to agree with the marriage. After a long discussion they agreed that early marriage is an obstacle for the realization of both young people, doom them to be uneducated, unemployed and to look for income abroad. They needed to talk about these things, to realize that they have to stop with these settled marriages: most probably each of them has thought about it; however, they realized it then. I think that in a few days their life and the old practice will “swallow” them again, therefore, similar discussions have to take place often, regularly”.

Participant in the Campaign in Kuklen – Perushtitsa

Another method was the **individual discussion**: tens of them were conducted during the door-to-door campaign, undertaken in the Roma neighbourhood in Perushtitsa. The two trainings with Roma girls in Perushtitsa were very important: through role games and solution of particular cases the female mentor from Kuklen assisted the girls from Perushtitsa to develop attitudes towards themselves as persons with dignity; to realize their role in life, to understand and follow their values and link their life plans with better education not marriage. The team conducted a large group discussion with women from Perushtitsa, where Roma girls who did not marry at an early age and enrolled in different universities, as well as Roma women who married earlier, but found a way to achieve better realisation in life. They shared the difficulties that they had to overcome and called upon the Roma women from Perushtitsa to save those difficulties to their children by not marrying them early, and not give up the opportunities for a better realization in their life.

Thus, within the campaign were reached 240 Roma people from Perushtitsa and Kuklen. The team of the campaign considers that the main result was the changed attitude of the parents and especially of the young people towards early marriages. This change is still not permanent, but a successful beginning has been made. A reliable indicator is the fact that three girls from Perushtitsa, involved in the campaign, enrolled in a secondary school to obtain a high school degree.

„Early marriages in the Roma community are a usual practice. Perushtitsa is not an exception. But I could say that with our campaign we initiated an important change in the attitudes and the traditions in our community and that a priority for the Roma will become education, not an early marriage...”

The implementation of the whole campaign had the following results: dropping out from school is a precondition for an early marriage. The age of 14–15 is considered as normal a age for marriage in the Roma community. Thus, the attention of the institutions and the parents should be targeted at completing at least secondary school – by the boys and by the girls. If education becomes a priority for the Roma, they will not need to marry early and their parents will think only of their professional realization”.

Albena Kostadinova, Leader of the Campaign in Kuklen – Perushtitsa

Kardam, Popovo Municipality

Kardam is the largest village in the Region of Targovishte, North-East Bulgaria. Out of 1600 inhabitants, 815 are Roma from the groups of the Kaldarashi and Horahane. Early and arranged marriages are the main approach for starting a family among the Kaldarashi, who appeared to be one of the most conservative Roma groups in Bulgaria; the village of Kardam is not an exception from this rule. The tradition of paying dowry for the honor of the bride (known as “buying”) is also an integral part of the wedding customs of the Kaldarashi in Kardam. Relatively early marriages still exist (though not so many) among the Muslim Roma too.

In Kardam, the campaign was organized by a team of young Roma boys and girls with a leader Maria Ivanova – a university student in Public Administration. Maria is also from the group of the Kaldarashi, but unlike her peers she is not married, and she is even the first Roma girl from the village who studies at university.

The main goal of the campaign was to provoke a discussion on early marriages and their harmful effects, as well as on the value of education among the conservative Kaldarashi. The team was challenged by the fact that in this explicitly patriarchal community where the man has the leading role³, and the age is an important factor, this debate was initiated by a young girl.

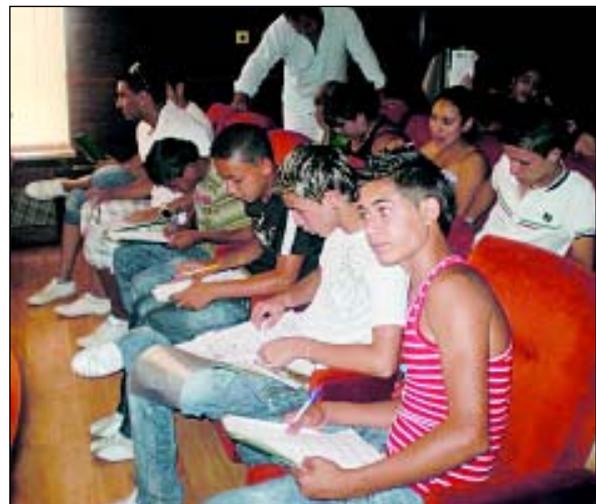
The main methods of the campaign were the **community and group discussions** with Roma young people. 5 community discussions were organized and took place within the premises of Ivan Bratanov Chitalishte – the local community centre. Participants were young people, adult men and women, including the informal leaders of the community (the so called “mesheredjii”)⁴. During the discussions it became clear that the largest part of the Kaldarashi already realize the necessity of leaving at least part of the traditions related with early marriages. The parents were unanimous that it was better for the young people to decide whom to marry, however, they insisted on considering the permission of the parents. The community was still not ready to leave the tradition of paying dowry for the bride: paying for her honour, her virginity – explained the adults – and the requirement for the honour of the bride was very strong in the tradition of the Roma. It also became clear that education was slowly becoming a value and even the adults had to listen to educated girls.

Beyond the topic of early marriages, many other issues related to the Roma in the village were discussed – the integration of the Roma in Bulgaria, health issues, social services, but most of all – employment. Everybody shared that if there was enough work for them – more and more Roma children would study.

³ A fact worth mentioning is that in the Kalderashi family, the children are part of the father’s family and in case of divorce, they remain with him.

⁴ The community of the Kalderashi is the only one in Bulgaria with a preserved potestal form, known as “meshere” or “Gypsy court”. The elders in the meshere are known as “mesheredjii” and are the informal leaders of their communities.

Peshtera





Rakitovo





Kuklen



Kardam



Instrumental for the success of the campaign was also the fact that representatives of the local institutions took part in the discussions, too: teachers, doctors, servants from the Department for Child Protection, the Mayor of the village. They presented to the participants information on the issues related to them.

There was a high interest in the group discussions with the Roma young girls and boys. They discussed the issues of early marriages, the right of young people to choice, education. The team used effectively multiple interactive games to help the young people to clarify their positions and to develop a strategy for defending them. It was not a surprise that they did not accept that much the tradition of early and arranged marriages; that they wanted to study and to achieve better realization than just being mothers and housewives.

”During the meetings we played two role games with the young people. In one of them, each of the participants had to write on paper the associations with “marriage”. The young unmarried girls associated marriage with the family, and for them it was something “sacred and priceless”. They shared that marriage was extremely complex and difficult, because it was accompanied with great responsibilities, not only towards the wife and children, but to the parents (of the boy). One of the women (who had got married very young) wrote that for her the word “marriage” meant many problems and tears, as result of keeping the Roma traditions.

The second role game was related to realizing/admitting the problem. I divided the participants in four groups, and each of them had to decide if early marriages were a problem and how it could be resolved. I was surprised that everybody declared that early marriages were a problem for the community, but wrote down the reasons that keep them alive, rather than the ways for its solving. Everybody wrote down that the children should first receive good education, to start a good job and after that they could start thinking of family.”

Maria Ivanova, Campaign Coordinator

Thus, the campaign reached 45 young people and adults from the group of the Kaldarashi in Kardam. It managed to initiate a serious discussion on early marriages and the related issue of better education in a community, where those topics are a taboo. As a result of the campaign, the young people in the village established a club that is still working on different activities of the campaign, even after its official finalization.

“The campaign gave a good basis for work with the Roma community in the village of Kardam. I am sure that the discussion on the problem with early marriages will lead to positive change among all Roma. This change won’t probably be seen today or tomorrow, but in the future each of the participants in the meetings within the campaign, will think of the issues that were discussed and will probably make the right decision. I am confident in that, because each parent strives for the best of his/

her kids, and since we already know that the people started realizing that early marriages are not the best, then there will be change for sure.”

Participant in the Campaign

As an additional important result, it could be shown that the image of Maria Ivanova has increased in the community and turned her into a role model for the rest of the young people. A fact worth mentioning is that 4 young people, involved in the campaign decided to continue their education in secondary schools.

“First and foremost, I could say that I managed to attract the people to take part in the campaign, because this is the first activity, implemented in Kardam related to the Roma. Our people accepted me and took me seriously – a 23-year-old girl saying that they are wrong marrying their children at an early age. This would not have been possible some years ago, but it is now.”

Maria Ivanova, Campaign Coordinator

Vodoley, Municipality of Veliko Tarnovo

Vodoley is situated in the Region of Veliko Tarnovo, Central-North Bulgaria. It has the highest concentration of Roma population in Veliko Tarnovo Municipality: 340 out of 798 inhabitants are Roma people⁵ from the group of the Horahane Roma (Muslim Roma). Early marriages are a regular practice, where usually girls at the age of 14–15 years and boys at 17–18 create a family.

The campaign in Vodoley was organized by the youngest coordinator – Angel Angelov, who is a student in the elite Vocational High School of Architecture in Veliko Tarnovo. He quickly formed a team of volunteers – Roma youth and their parents, who worked actively in the village.

The main target group of the campaign were the Roma youth: it appeared that currently in Vodoley early marriages exist more because of the willingness of the young people and not that much due to the pressure or arrangement by the parents. For this reason the team decided to influence mainly the young people and less the parents.

„A year ago my ex-schoolmates got married within just one week. They were not forced by the parents – and their parents were not even happy. In our community if two young people like each other they just run away together. Then a wedding is being done, because for us the first sexual intercourse is equal to marriage. My schoolmates liked some boys. The first one ran away, and after that this spread with the speed of the pig flu... Now they are already sorry – instead of studying at high school in Veliko Tarnovo, they stay at home with their mothers-in-law and some of

⁵ Data from the National Census of 2001

them are already mothers. Two of my schoolmates did not marry – they enrolled in secondary schools and the others envy them.”

A.A., young person from Vodoley

“My daughter ran away with a boy: she was still in 8th grade! I was telling her to wait, she was still young, but she told me “*Baba, (father) I love him!*” *What does she know at that age about love..*”

Y. Y., parent from Vodoley

4 group discussions with Roma youth were held, one community discussion and multiple meetings within the frames of the door-to-door campaign.

The group discussions took place in the hall of the local community centre – chitalishte. The topics of discussion were early marriages, education and the better opportunities, provided by better education. They discussed actively the issues of the Roma identity and the place of the Roma into Bulgarian society. The discussion was facilitated by Deyan Kolev – Chair of Center Amalipe. Sexual and reproductive health, ways for contraception and sexually transmitted diseases were a matter of separate discussion, in which gynaecologists from Veliko Tarnovo participated.

It appeared that most of the Roma youth in Vodoley strived for a better life, going beyond the starting a family at an early age. In the same time it seems too abstract and unachievable: good education could be received in Veliko Tarnovo, but the transportation to the town was not an affordable expense for most of the families. The unemployment among the Roma also broke the dreams of the young people. Marriage looked much easier, and with the lack of alternatives, the young people established families to make their life meaningful. The participants in the discussions agreed that at the age of 14–15 they cannot raise and educate children, and were certain that those issues had to be discussed openly. It appeared that there were many topics of interest for discussion by the Roma youth. Until this moment they did not have a floor for this.

The community discussion took place in the school. Part of the participants justified early marriages with the care to prevent “the children from choosing a bad road”, but even they did not agree that in the 21st century this tradition should continue. Thus, they supported the activities of the project “Prevention of Early/ Forced Marriages” and declared their will for more activities for the Roma in Vodoley.

The campaign reached 54 people – youth and their parents. As a result, the young people decided to establish their club, to work with everybody finishing 8th grade: to encourage them to continue their education in high schools and not marry at that age. As an additional result it should be mentioned that 4 young people were motivated and enrolled in professional high schools: “If they hadn’t done it, they

would most probably have got married in the autumn”, was positive the Coordinator of the Campaign Angel Angelov.

Additionally, the Campaign in Vodoley (Kardam and other locations) outlined another important necessity: the Roma youth in the rural villages do not have any options for organized youth life. Their spare time is “filled with” hard work, marriage/family life or public nuisance. They need forms of organization that would enable them to develop their abilities: this would decrease the rate of early marriages among rural Roma communities.

Tundja Municipality

Tundja Municipality is situated in South-East Bulgaria, covering 44 villages around the town of Yambol. In many of them the Roma are a large percentage of the population. Early marriages are regular practice in the whole region: the conducted sociological survey shows that South-East Bulgaria is the region with the lowest age for the establishment of family.

The activities of the campaign were implemented by a team with a solid experience in working on the issues of the Roma community, led by Kina Asenova, who is also a health mediator in the municipality. The campaign covered the Roma in **Veselinovo, Zavoy** and **Hadzhidimitrovo**. The main methods were group discussions and conversations with the young people from the covered villages. The method of community conference was also applied for solution of individual cases.

The organisation of the group discussions took into consideration the needs and the specifics of the target group – Roma young boys and girls from the three villages. As through the summer months most of them are busy with agricultural activities, the discussions were implemented early in the evening, after they finish their work. The places for the discussions were the local caffs, as the young people usually go there.

Apart from early marriages, the main topic of discussion was sexual and reproductive health. The team showed movies that incited lively discussions.

AGENDA OF THE CAMPAIGN:

18, 19 and 20.06.2010: start of the Campaign in the three villages – Veselinovo, Zavoy and Hadzhidimitrovo, introduction with the project “Prevention of early marriages” and structuring of the target groups.

22–24.06.2010: Group discussion on the “Benefits and Risks of Early Marriages” and “Sexually Transmitted Diseases”.

30.06 and 02.07.2010: Presentation of the survey “Family Attitudes of the Roma in Bulgaria”

08.09 and 10.07.2010: Showing of a film about breast cancer and discussions in the three villages

22, 23 and 24.07.2010: Showing of the film “Two in Private” and a discussion

29, 30 and 31.07.2010: Showing of the film „You should know what you are doing” and a discussion

05–07.08.2010: Showing of the films “AIDS” and “Letter from Brian”, a discussion

During the discussions, the young people from the three villages said that early marriages had become the most probable perspective for the Roma youth in the rural villages. The parents accepted them as a tradition and a way to take care of their children, to “protect” them from the temptations of the big city. The young people did not see any other alternatives: many of them wanted to study in Yambol, but because of financial difficulties they could not afford that. They also said that promoting education as a realistic alternative would decrease the percentage of early marriages.

The meetings with representatives of the local Roma community, who had chosen to study and develop professionally, were organized for the inhabitants of the three villages. Those meetings were attended by young people, but by many parents, too. They expressed surprise and satisfaction that Roma people from the region had not only graduated university, but worked in the administration and on other important positions.

The team reacted to 4 signals for upcoming early marriages: one of them was a case of an 11-year-old girl. The method of community conference was used, as well as individual conversations with the parents. The volunteers were very proud that all 4 cases were successfully resolved, and early marriages did not take place.

“We received a signal that K.G., a very good school student, has been kidnapped just before the end of the school year by a boy from the famous block No. 20 in Yambol. It was striking that the girl was only 11 years old – something which is unusual even for our region. We reacted immediately. The parents of the girl have already overcome it, and the parents of the boy did not object. We spoke with them, and finally we organized a community conference with the participation of respected representatives from the village of the girl. At the end, we managed to convince the parents that this is a crime and it is a big mistake, which will harm the future both of the girl and the boy. They agreed and allowed the girl to go back to her parents and she did so. We are very proud that we made it!”

Participant in the Campaign in the Municipality of Tundja

The campaign covered more than 240 young people and their parents from the three villages. Among the achieved results the team points out not only the resolved cases of early marriages, but also the changed attitudes of many of the young people: they already started to look at education as a possible alternative, not marriage. In addition, the team managed to motivate 30 Roma young people from Zavoy and Veselinovo to enrol in secondary schools in Yambol and arranged with the Mayor of Tundja Municipality to provide them with free transportation. Thus, from September 2010 they will start their secondary education.

Vratsa Municipality

Vratsa is a regional centre in North-West Bulgaria. The region has a relatively high percentage of Roma population. A bigger part of them belongs to different groups of the Dasikane Roma (Christian Roma or “Bulgarian Roma”). The region (and the whole North-West region) is characterized with a relatively high age for establishing the first family, but still, “early marriages” are practiced in many of the traditional rural Roma communities, as well as among a part of the urban families – usually those are the poorest and marginalized Roma families.

The campaign in Vratsa was realized by a team with the Coordinators Albena Kisiova, Galina Kolcheva and Maya Metodieva from the local Roma NGO – For a New World. They were supported by Youth Group called Detelina and the Club – Roma Students from Vratsa. The team asked for the collaboration from the local institutions, but it was received mainly from the Regional Inspectorate for the Preservation and Control of Public Health – Vratsa. The campaign was carried out in the town of **Vratsa, the village of Nefela and Kulata** neighbourhood.

The main methods included **community discussions and individual meetings**. Within the campaign were held 4 community discussions in the town of Vratsa with the participation of Roma youth and Roma parents (2 discussions), in Kulata neighbourhood and the village of Nefela. During the meetings, the participants had lively discussions on issues like unemployment, discrimination against Roma and the required steps towards full Roma integration. Many of the participants asked questions related to solving of particular cases and the getting assistance from the relevant institutions. Another topic of discussion in Nefela and Kulata was sexual and reproductive health.

The participants from the villages (Nefela and Kulata) and the participants from Vratsa gave different reasons for the existence of early marriages. Today, there are no early marriages arranged by parents. They were practiced two or three generations ago. If the problem still exists somewhere, it is a result of conservatism and still alive tradition in some families. Often it is related with dropping out from school – the school students, who have discontinued their education, establish their families much earlier than the rest of the young Roma. In the town of Vratsa, early marriages are more a result of the desire of the young people. The participants from the town were certain that the high level of unemployment and the economic difficulties faced by the Roma facilitate this vicious practice, because they deprive the young people from achieving something meaningful.

”Most of the participants in the meetings were young Roma people, and not that much – their parents. Among the participants, there were men and women who had concluded early marriages. But in one way or another, they had managed to preserve their families; however, there had a lot of difficulties. During the meetings they insisted to share with the young people, that it was very difficult for them to

manage with life, because of early marriage and because of the lack of education. They were also giving advice on how to avoid early cohabitation.”

Albena Kisiova, Coordinator of the Campaign

The campaign covered 104 Roma people from Vratsa and the surrounding villages: 64 people participated in the community discussions, with 40 people there were individual discussions. The impact among the adult Roma was mainly related with their awareness of the fact that early marriage is a problem and specific and concrete measures are needed; and it would not disappear by itself. The success of the campaign was most visible among the involved young people. They understood not only the negative sides of the early family establishment, but also had the ambition to conduct a campaign among their peers on that issue. The young people from Vratsa decided to establish their own association and to conduct such and similar campaigns each year.

„We attracted the interest of the local people on the issue of early marriages. We managed to make them think on it and on the reasons for the problem, which has never happened before. We have motivated a part of the young people from the local urban Roma neighbourhood and they decided to establish an informal youth group, similar to Detelina from Kulata, and to organize discussions and conversations with the Roma community on other topics, too”.

Albena Kisiova, Coordinator of the Campaign

Nadezhda neighbourhood, Sliven

Sliven is a town in South-East Bulgaria. It is one of the regional towns with the largest Roma population. For decades it is known as the “Roma spiritual capital”, because of the relatively numerous Roma intellectuals⁶, that have contributed for the development not only of the Roma culture, but also of the national Bulgarian literature, music, etc. But this picture is not the same for all Roma and all Roma neighbourhoods in Sliven: Nadezhda neighbourhood is in a sharp contrast with the examples of integrated Roma people and Roma intellectuals. It is famous as one of the ghettos with the most serious problems in Bulgaria. One of these problems is early marriages, which are currently the most common form of “marriage”. Since in the other locations of the campaign early marriages are being practiced among traditional (patriarchal) Roma families, in Nadezhda it is mainly for the marginalized families.

The campaign in Nadezhda was organized by Radost Zaharieva and Veneta Zaharieva. They attracted a team of 12 volunteers at school age, health mediators, and leaders of local protestant churches.

⁶ Almost one-third of the Roma with university degree in 2001 lived in Sliven (according to the last national census from 2001)

“The volunteers were not randomly selected. Three of them are school students in 9th and 12th grade, and the third one will be 6th grade. One of the volunteers is a 29-year old woman, married with 2 children, who was NOT married at an early age. Therefore, she was especially useful in motivating the girls. Everybody realizes the seriousness of the problem with early marriages and they willingly participated in the campaign”.

Radost Zaharieva, Coordinator of the Campaign

The team tried to establish communication with all possible actors in the neighbourhood: the different protestant churches, the local GPs (also of Roma origin, who have been involved for years in the Roma civic movement) Dr. Stefan Panayotov and Dr. Manolov, the health mediators from the neighbourhood, the Roma youth organization – led by Mrs. Stela Kostova, etc. Contacts were established with the institutions in the neighbourhood, too.

The main method during the campaign was the group discussion. Group discussions were organized with young people at school age, young Roma who have dropped out from school, young mothers, and representatives of the different protestant churches. In addition, there were tens of individual conversations within the door-to-door campaign, when the information materials – leaflets and brochures, posters, postcards – were distributed. The team did not organize a pure community discussion, because the coordinators of the campaign decided that it will be difficult to be organized due to the diversity of the Roma groups (Drandari, Laho, Millet) and currently there were no common leaders that could unite them. The role of the community discussion played the group discussions with representatives of the different protestant churches, as long as there were Roma from different strata and groups, as well as their religious leaders – the ministers.

The topic of early marriages was the main one during the discussions. According to the participants in the past early marriages were concluded under the parents' pressure, but today they more often result from the imprudence of the young people. Dropping out from school is common practice for the poor and marginalized families: many of the children do not finish even 8th grade. And after leaving school, the marriage comes by itself: to establish a family and to start managing it is the only alternative in front of the dropout. The parents, on their part, think that establishing a family at that age (after leaving school) is a part of the normal development of the children and they do not object it, but often fully assist them.

“Most participants in the discussions were married at a young age and left school. Only four of them married after 18 years of age. Most of the adults were married by their parents and had no contact with their partner before the marriage. Others (regarding only the women) were forced to marry at an early age. For the next generation the marriages were rather due to the young couple decision, even when the parents disagreed with the marriage. During the socialist regime, the wed-

dings were concluded not earlier than 16 years of age, while now, the young people from the neighbourhood conclude marriages under this age. Though they all regret their actions, their lost childhood and youth, very few postpone the marriage of their children. Even the minister has married his daughter – in order to preserve her from being stolen by a “bad” family. There was a young 23-year-old man, who already had 2 marriages, and at the moment he did not live with his second wife. He had left school and he could not finish even 2nd grade. Now he realized his mistake and wanted to change his life at least a bit. He was taking steps to continue his education”.

Radost Zaharieva, Coordinator of the Campaign

Early marriages were discussed actively during the group discussions in the protestant churches, too. It was a pleasant surprise for the campaign team to find out that a great part of the participants clearly realized the harm of early marriages. What appeared to be problematic was the transition from realization to action in order to put an end to this practice. Most participants declared as the first and most important step not leaving school and obtaining better education.

“Contrary to the popular belief that this is a Roma tradition, all participants expressed negative attitudes towards early marriage, even those who had been married at an early age. Some of them even insisted that there should be strict legislation and normative measures for the parents who allow their children to marry early.”

Participant in the Campaign

The topic of education was also discussed. It turned out that many of the young people had quit school and now they wanted to continue it again – at lower secondary or secondary level. As obstacles they mentioned the lack of information on how they could do that, as well as financial difficulties, and the lack of support and motivation by the family. The team of the campaign decided to assist the young people with information, motivation and mentoring. For that purpose, during the discussions and the individual meetings they were informed about the different opportunities for education. A special tour into the secondary schools in Sliven was organized, which appeared to be a powerful motivation factor.

Some additional activities were also implemented. For instance, during the door-to-door campaign an idea for cleaning the tunnel between Nadezhda and the train station was suggested. It grew up into a voluntary campaign and many of the citizens of the neighbourhood were involved. This activity showed that despite the heavy situation of the neighbourhood, there is a number of Roma people who are in need of community life. This new spirit would change also the attitude towards education and towards early marriages.

“During the meeting, the young people suggested that we organize a cleaning of the neighbourhood. For that purpose on 28th of July, young and adult people got

together to organize the activities for cleaning the tunnel between the ghetto and the town and the square of the neighbourhood. Everything was organized and managed by Veneta Zaharieva. I think that in this way, we gave a good example to the people from the neighbourhood and we reminded them that the hygiene in the neighbourhood depends on them.

At first sight, there is no direct relation with the campaign for the prevention of early marriages; the team decided that if we want results – we have to work for changing people’s mentality. The activity for cleaning the neighbourhood is a nice way for uniting the people around a single idea – first change the exterior of the neighbourhood, and slowly the mentality of the community. We should also mention the fact that every day the number of the volunteers for the cleaning was increasing”.

Radost Zaharieva, Coordinator of the Campaign

Thus, in the activities of the campaign in Nadezhda, Sliven, were involved about 50 people, and over 100 more during the door-to-door campaign. As main results achieved could be pointed out not only two particular cases of prevented early marriages, but above all – the fact that many of the people in the neighbourhood started perceiving early marriages as a problem. The motivation for education increased among a large part of the young people that were involved in the campaign. The initiative of the young Roma changed, which is the most important prerequisite for sustainable solution in early marriages.

“Given the short duration of the local campaign, I could say that it has set the basis of a targeted work in the Roma community, with the purpose to decrease the number of early marriages and to encourage the motivation of the young Roma. Within the frames of the local campaign, the people who participated in our meetings received information for the opportunities for re-integration in the school as well as individual consultations, related with education issues..

The inventiveness of the people in the neighbourhood was changed. During the campaign the participants started to give ideas of what they could do and to initiate activities – e.g. the cleaning of the tunnel and the forestation of the neighbourhood, which will take place in the autumn as an appropriate time for planting trees.

The attitudes and the awareness of the people changed. The discussions helped them to realize the seriousness of a problem which has never before been perceived as such..”

Radost Zaharieva, Coordinator of the Campaign

Nov Pat neighbourhood, Vidin

Vidin is a regional centre in North-West Bulgaria. The town has a large percentage of Roma population and a significant part of them live in Nov Pat neighbourhood: one of the largest ghettos in Bulgaria – by different estimations the

number of its inhabitants is over 15 000 people. Early marriages are often practiced, mainly by decision of the young couple (“elopement”, “stealing the girl”) and not by pressure from the parents. The early starting a family is typical for the previous generations and among the current generation the age for marriage is getting higher, however the different practices of early marriage are still regular.

“During the door-to-door campaign we visited more than 200 households. In 90% of them there was an early marriage. Typical for the Roma in Nov Pat is that the boy steals the girl – with or without her agreement. That blocks the parents of the girl, because of her lost virginity. This is the story of most of those 90% from the above mentioned – grandparents and parents. Today, this vicious practice is not that massively expressed among the Roma community in Vidin – more and more parents and young people realize and accept education as a value. But it still often exists.

Radoslav Kuzmanov, Coordinator of the Campaign

The campaign in Nov Pat was organized by volunteers of the local organization Drom, coordinated by Radoslav Kuzmanov. They quickly attracted 25 young people who realized the main activities of the campaign.

The team used two main approaches: group discussions (with young people and adults) and individual conversations during the door-to-door campaign. The group discussions were organized as coffee discussions. There were two coffee discussions: one with Roma youth and one with Roma parents. They took place in a caffè in the neighbourhood. The Department of Child Protection and the Regional Health Centre also took part.

During the two meetings, early marriage and other topics of interest were discussed. For instance, at the request of the young people, they were provided with information on sexual and reproductive health: the harmful effects of early births, the most appropriate age for pregnancy and start of sexual life, medical facts about sexual maturing and sexually transmitted diseases. With the adults, the discussions were focused on employment and perspectives for the young people.

The participants were not on the same opinion regarding early marriages. Part of the adults and also of the young people had arguments in favour of early marriages – to protect the girls from kidnapping, trafficking, etc. Another part of the parents and most of the young people were against early marriages saying that they needed better realization, better education and better employment. Many of the participants stated that the quality of education in the Roma School was insufficient, and the kids often dropped out and became victims of early marriages. The necessity of desegregation of the Roma education is obvious – i.e. taking out the school students to ethnically mixed schools in the town⁷.

⁷ Since 2007, in the town of Vidin the process of desegregation has been implemented by Drom Foundation.

“The team of the campaign provoked the Roma parents with particular cases related with early marriages. There was a lively discussion on the positive and negative sides of early marriages. Part of the participants supported early marriages, but another part was totally against them. During the discussion, there was also a third group with a different opinion – they did not agree with early marriages, but if it happened to their child – if their daughter was “taken” and lost her virginity, they would accept.

The conclusions of this meeting were that the problem existed among the Roma in Vidin and we should work on it seriously”.

Participant in the Campaign

The **door-to-door campaign** was very intensive. The volunteers distributed the printed materials and conducted more than 200 meetings and conversations with Roma families from the neighbourhood. The topics were the harms of early marriages and the approaches to overcome this practice.

The Campaign reached over 400 people: almost 100 Roma young people and parents participated in 2 group discussions, and more than 300 were approached during the door-to-door campaign. It provoked an active discussion among the Roma in the neighbourhood on the issue of early marriages: many of them started thinking about the harms of the practice and that the life of the young Roma may go into a different and a better way. The change was visible in the young Roma. “This conversation should be systematically continued”, insists the team of the Campaign.

“It will be too daring to say that we have changed totally or partially the opinion of the Roma in Nov Pat, Vidin. It cannot happen in a short-term perspective. The important is that there was a start of this initiative; we made these people think on that issue for the first time in their life. Our team, working with young people from the community, transferring to them the idea to change the stereotype and transforming them into followers, believes they are the bearers of the hope for change.”

Radoslav Kuzmanov, Coordinator of the Campaign

Vodoley



Yambol



Vratsa



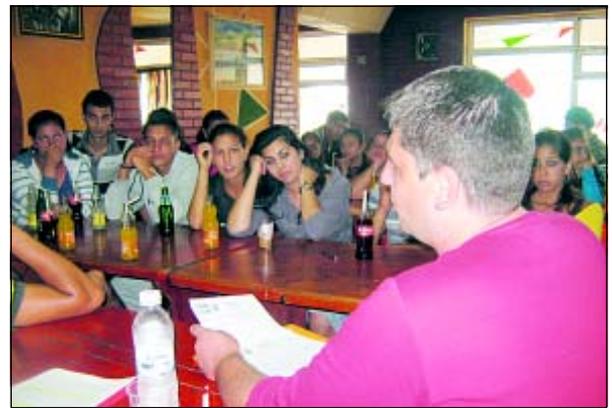


Sliven



Vidin





Regional planning of social services, 2010: the Roma component and the prevention of early marriages in the new regional strategies

In 2010 in Bulgaria was undertaken a strategic planning exercises of social services for the next 5 years (2011 – 2015) in accordance with the new requirements of the Law on Social Assistance (LSA) and in the Regulations for its application (RALSA). The changes obliged all regional administrations to develop and approve regional strategies for the development of social services by involving in the process all stakeholders that are relevant to social services and/or the policies for social inclusion.

With the methodical and technical assistance of UNICEF, the process applied the model of planning with participation, tested by UNICEF in 2009 in three pilot regions – **Ruse**, **Vidin** and **Pernik** – where the regional strategies were adopted by the end of March 2010. For this reason the scope of the participants was significantly wider than the regular practice – both in profile and number of people. Participants in the process were regional administrations, municipalities, local structures of Agency for social assistance (RDSA and DSA), service providers, NGO, organizations and structures of the state power in the other sectors that are related with the social policy (e.g. education, healthcare, employment, housing, infrastructure). Participants in the planning process were also representatives of the Roma community from local and national NGOs, health mediators, Roma experts in municipal and regional administration.

The team of the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages” supported the incorporation of the topic for the social services in the Roma community and early marriages into the regional strategies in three ways. First, the issue was raised during a meeting of the National Coordination Council of the project. It was also raised in front of the partners from the National Association of Municipalities. Second, the team encouraged the coordinators that organize local campaigns for the prevention of early marriages to take an active part in the elaboration of the regional strategies and to envisage activities with proven effect during the local campaigns. Third, concrete recommendations were developed (applicable at national level). The recommendations

were sent to the team of UNICEF which supports and coordinates the elaboration of all regional strategies.

On a national scale, the process of regional planning in the remaining 25 regions began in the middle of April 2010 and went through the **following phases**:

- **Phase 1** (April–May 2010): Provision of logistics for planning, building of partnerships, preparation;
- **Phase 2** (May–June 2010): Research on the needs and analyses of the situation;
- **Phase 3** (July–September 2010): Genuine strategic planning of social services and measures for social inclusion;
- **Phase 4** (October–November 2010): Discussion, agreement and approval of regional strategies.

For the first time in Bulgaria was carried out such a major strategic planning process with broad participation countrywide: the 25 regional operational teams involved 211 people; in the planning process in these 25 areas under one form or another were involved about 2100 people, out of whom 1388 are participants in major regional working groups and more than 700 participated only at municipal level (the established regional groups in 229 municipalities involve about 1570 participants) or thematic groups in the areas of the strategy.

Finally, the quantity indicators for achieved results are entirely satisfactory. To December 2010, in 26 of the 28 regions, regional strategies for the development of social services for 5 years (2011– 2015) were approved – in those three pilot regions and 23 strategies in the remaining regions. In one region (Kardjali) the adoption of the prepared strategy was postponed because of political contradictions between the regional administration and the mayors of the municipalities, and in another region – Razgrad, the strategy is to be finalized and adopted.

For the findings and conclusions of this report, all regional strategies are taken into account, including those which are to be approved yet.

Social services and the interventions for the inclusion of vulnerable ethnic communities with focus on Roma

During the analyses of the situation and the assessment of the needs, the regional teams in the whole country recognized the ethnic communities in disadvantaged situation as a priority target group to whom services and measures should be addressed. Efforts were undertaken to set a special focus in the regional strategies, on the risky groups of the Roma community that live in social isolation and structural poverty in segregated neighbourhoods, where constant problems and risks are being generated. In the handbook on planning with participation (Roll 3)

were included analytical materials of Amalipe Centre for the specifics of the problems on early and forced marriages among Roma community and particular recommendations for adequate services/activities for prevention. Here we will point out some specifics of the groups at risk in the Roma community to whom the attention of local partner was directed by the national consultancy team:

First, with regard to the share of Roma among the groups and people at risk it is logical that the Roma community is not taken into account during the planning process, but the people of Roma origin who are part of the identified groups at risk. Several types of options are observed here:

- For a large part of the groups at risk, identified during the analyses of the situation, Roma are a significantly higher percentage than the average for the country – e.g. among the children and families at risk living in extreme poverty, the children in special institutions (although for many of them have no Roma identity), the dropout children from school or at risk of dropping out, children with risky behavior, long-term unemployed people, large families, etc;
- In other groups at risk (e.g. children and people with disabilities) the share of Roma is a relatively equal percentage which does not differ significantly from the average data for the country;
- Some specific groups at risk are only or mainly among the Roma community and the other ethnic minorities in disadvantaged situation. For instance – the families at risk, established through early or forced marriage, their children and accordingly – the underage parents who also need support for personal development and good parenthood;
- There are also groups at risk where the share of Roma is relatively lower than the average for the country – lonely living elderly people, elderly people or adults with disabilities in institutions – among the Roma those cases are exception.

Second, with regard to the planned intervention it is necessary to search solutions for at least two big problems, which to some extent are verbalized and understood by the participants in the planning exercise and are partially addressed by the regional strategies:

- **Limited access to existing services** for the Roma people that are part of the groups at risk. The problems with the access to services are multisided and include the aspects of the awareness/trust of the Roma in the existing social services on one hand, and on the other hand – the skills and the readiness of the social workers for social work in the Roma community that often result from the accumulated over time prejudices and dominating attitudes of the majority towards the Roma.
- **Adequacy of the social services** in the sense of methods and practices of social work for solving the “Roma dimensions” of the common problems of the

groups at risk, and for specific “Roma problems” which are typical mainly for a certain ethnic community. A key indicator are the flexible approaches for impact and change of attitudes among groups at risk with Roma background, especially in intervention/reaction at specific problems and groups at risk like the early marriages in the Roma community, high dropout rate from school, etc.

Third, with regard to the principles of the planning of social services and support for the Roma community. The main principle that is followed (consciously or not) in the strategic planning of the intervention towards the Roma community is the **combination of horizontal with targeted** measures, focused on impact for overcoming of deficits of the Roma community¹. Such intervention is incorporated in the planned social services that have to reach the Roma community and cover its groups at risk.

- **The horizontal measures** envisage guaranteeing the access and outreaching the groups at risk with Roma background in the “standard” and the innovative social services, mixed and cross-sectoral services and measures for everybody from a certain group at risk;
- **The targeted measures** addressing mainly the Roma community are intended not just to improve the access to existing services, but to provide wider impact for community development.

Access to existing service for the groups at risk from Roma community

In the analysis of the situation, the participants in the planning exercise shared a common observation that the social services in the community in fact do not reach the vulnerable ethnic minorities, and especially the Roma. That was also one of the main findings of all participants in the local campaigns for prevention of early marriages². Therefore, the provision of access to services for the groups at risk from the Roma community was highlighted as a factor with crucial importance for the successful prevention of the risks and for the effectiveness of the regional strategies in the overcoming of the consequences from the social exclusion.

¹ In professional language the English terms “mainstreaming” and “targeting” are being used.

² Factual lack of social services in Roma community (including the innovative “community based services”) was highlighted by all participants on a meeting which took place on August 29th – September 1st with regard to the end of the local campaigns.

See at: <http://amali.pe.com/index.php?nav=news&id=313>

Along with the general desire for improvement of the access, the regional strategies envisage more concrete measures for coverage of the Roma with regard to the following services, where a significant part of the target groups are Roma:

The launch of the Programme “Early prevention for “closing the entrance” for abandoning newborns at maternity hospital level”. Such programmes or centres for early prevention of abandoning are envisaged under different options as mixed intersectoral innovative services at regional level in most of the regional strategies. A key goal of such a programme is to provide support for the children and the families from communities at high risk, prevention of early marriages and early motherhood, improvement of the skills for good parenting. In their action plans, especially is provided the organization of a network for the coverage of the prospective mothers at risk from all municipalities in a programme for early prevention. A special attention will be paid to the mobile work for active search of prospective mothers in communities at high risk in order to conclude, register and observe the pregnancy, and in case of a risk of abandoning – social activities and on-site consultation for the prevention of child’s abandoning. The involvement of the health mediators and the centres for development of vulnerable communities for collaboration and mediation in the search and consultation of young Roma mothers is envisaged.

In those strategies that do not plan a particular programme/centre for early prevention of abandoning (as Veliko Tarnovo and Varna), those activities are assigned to the centres for public support or to the centres for family consultations.

The Centres for Public Support (CPS) have to cover as a network all municipalities/villages. For this purpose, almost all regional strategies intend to build a mobile component of the activity – mobile teams of CPS, which could deliver the service directly to the children and the families at risk who live in remote villages, including the Roma neighbourhoods.

Establishment of CPS and family consultation centres inside the Roma neighbourhoods is envisaged in some of the regional strategies – e.g. Varna (two new CPS in the Roma neighbourhoods of Varna and Provadia). In the region of Shumen is envisaged to open a new CPS in the municipality of Veliki Preslav that would have a special focus on vulnerable ethnic communities in the neighbouring 2 municipalities.

Involvement of specialists with Roma background as staff in providing the social services. Many of the regional strategies put an emphasis on the necessity for attracting and employing social workers and specialists of Roma background in the existing and the newly opened CPSs in order to facilitate the work with Roma children and their families (Pernik, Haskovo, Plovdiv, etc.).

Offices or programmes for family planning for covering the Roma communities are planned as a mixed health and social service in almost all of the regional strategies.

School for teachers and family consultation, activities for the development of skills for responsible parenting among Roma youth before setting a family (e.g. in the regions of Sofia-city, Ruse, Plovdiv, Kardjali, Lovech, Pleven, etc.).

The Social Educational Professional Centre (SEPC) is another service that is planned in some of the strategies (Burgas – continuation of the activities of the SEPC in the village of Bata and opening a new SEPC in Pobeda neighbourhood, Bourgas; Kyustendil – Opening of 2 new SEPCs). According to the RALSA, the SEPC is a complex of social services, targeted at professional training of people with certain level of decreased labour ability, aged 16 or more, and for children at risk who are 16 years of age or more. The local partners in the regional planning are looking for options for integration and provision of professional qualification of the young Roma, but they have to be careful for overcoming/decreasing the risk of institutionalization through accommodation in SEPC.

The review of the regional strategies through the lens of the access to services for the Roma community shows that there are social services that are important for the excluded from the Roma community groups, but no particular measures have been discussed for covering the Roma groups at risk. This is a situation in the services for children and people with disabilities such as the centres for social rehabilitation and integration (CSRI), day centres for children and people with disabilities. Obviously such steps have to be planned during the implementation phase of the regional strategies and in the action plans on municipal level. An exception are the centres for early intervention in case of disabling, planned in almost all regional strategies where a significant mobile component is envisaged, also for covering the segregated Roma neighbourhoods.

Within the **horizontal policies and measures for social inclusion in the relevant sectors** (education, healthcare, employment, infrastructure) is also intended to cover the groups at risk from the Roma community. Taking this fact into consideration, we should bear in mind that large part of the Roma activists and leaders have some knowledge mainly in the areas of the targeted horizontal policies and are not very familiar with social services. For example, most of the activists that have conducted local campaigns for the prevention of early marriages put an emphasis on the measures related to education (prevention of dropping out, literacy, “second chance” schools, improving the access to secondary school, etc.), and healthcare (sexual and reproductive health, drug prevention, etc.). It is not a coincidence that most detailed and concrete are those measures in the area of education and to some extent in the area of the healthcare:

- In the programs for prevention of dropping out from school and reintegration in the educational system of dropped out children and young people are described in almost all regional strategies;
- In the initiatives for literacy and education for adults as the “second chance” school, intended in the strategies in some regions (as Sofia-city, Veliko Tarnovo, Vratsa, etc.);
- In the municipal and regional programmes for health prophylaxis of motherhood, family planning, support for improvement of healthcare for children from families at risk.

Targeted measures: Centres for development of vulnerable ethnic communities and mediators

The targeted measures and activities for social inclusion and developing vulnerable ethnic communities, envisaged in the regional strategies include the following:

- Centres for development of vulnerable ethnic communities with special focus on the Roma, planned as partnership activities between municipalities, NGOs, providers of social services.
- Mediators from the Roma community – health mediators, labour mediators and/or teacher assistants.

After the example of the pilot 16 out of 28 regional strategies is planned the establishment of **Centres for development of vulnerable ethnic communities** for work mainly for the improvement of the access of the Roma to social, educational, health and other services. We have to underline that this is barely enough: a necessity of similar centre is obvious in almost all regions; moreover, even in the mentioned 16 regions the centres cover just some of the municipalities. The innovative character of this service and the fact that it is unknown for the wide circle of specialists, and especially for the Roma activists, are among the reasons such Centres not to be included in the planning the in the rest of the regions. Hopefully, over time, once those Centres are established and show their effectiveness, similar centres will be opened in the other regions.

How will the centres function? The centres for development of vulnerable communities with special focus on excluded groups from the Roma community are intended to be a municipal activity, implemented through public-private partnership between municipalities, NGOs, local leaders. The centres could be established as an NGO activity in collaboration with the municipalities and to begin their functioning with project-based funding from the operational programmes. Those centres will work with the direct participation of local NGOs or/and initiative groups, informal

leaders – representatives of the local Roma communities, employed experts in ethnic and demographic issues at municipal and regional level, health mediators and teacher assistants for the Roma community. The form and the structure of the centres will be chosen depending on the local conditions and the existing experience in municipal administration and civil sector. The options for functioning are different:

- Municipal activity with the support of local NGOs, local formal and informal leaders, initiative groups from the Roma community;
- Roma or non-Roma NGO initiative/project – for development of marginalized communities with the support of the municipality;
- Within the frames of a social service, envisaged in the RALSA, which is not an activity delegated by the state and is being realized with the support of the municipality and an NGO such as the service of family and consultative centre.

Activities and role: The centres will work with vulnerable communities and groups mainly in the segregated neighbourhoods in the urban areas and in rural villages with compact Roma population where the access to social services, healthcare, education and employment is difficult. Special input for prevention of early marriages and improvement of the child care in the families with underage parents is expected by the teams of these centres, as well as the initiation of a wide range of activities and functions, targeted at social inclusion.

Preparatory activities include the establishment of teams, premises and equipment, training of the teams implemented by an NGO with experience gained from programmes for development of Roma community and programmes for social inclusion. The centres will be set close to the segregated Roma neighbourhoods, but out of them, in order to prevent secondary isolation/segregation of the Roma community and to encourage the integration processes and social inclusion. (It is possible to use premises in municipal buildings, chitalishte, centres for work with children, etc.).

The “full” range of activities and tasks for such centres (as described in the regional strategy of Vidin and approved during the pilot stage) includes:

- Each centre will start its activity with a survey on the concrete problems and needs of the Roma communities where it will use the door-to-door approach for the collection of data for the situation and the social status of the vulnerable families and the children that live in segregated Roma neighbourhoods, as well as living in mixed areas.
- Mediation between Roma people at risk and the institutions (such as the local authorities, Labour Offices, Social Assistance Directorates, etc.), provision of information and support for access to employment, education, social services, health care, administrative services and etc.;
- Assisting the Centres for Public Support in working with vulnerable Roma families and children at risk,

- Implementation of integrated programmes for community development through stimulation of initiative, participation and self-support, funded on a project principle;
- Educational programmes for overcoming the functional illiteracy among the adult population in the Roma community and professional qualification;
- Health education, prevention of addictions for children and adults.

For the final design and the initiation of such centres, the local partners in the regional planning rely mainly on the active participation of Roma and non-Roma NGOs that have experience in community development.

The regional strategies that were approved on a later stage include additional elements. The Region of Montana envisages the establishment of a centre for prevention of dropping out from school that will work mainly among the Roma communities in the region. The strategies also include the existing Centres for Community Development, initiated by NGOs and working with direct project funding – such as the Centre in the town of Lom (Center of Roma-Lom foundation) and the intergenerational house for children and families in Stara Zagora (managed by World without Borders Foundation).

Health and social centres for the Roma community: In some of the regions (Varna, Sofia, Plovdiv, etc.) this range of tasks and impact is being assigned to the health social centres for the Roma community that are established and functioning under the Programme of the Global Fund and the Ministry of Health for Prevention and Control of HIV/AIDS.

Initiatives and projects for social inclusion, targeted at children at age 0 to 7 and their families from communities at high risk, planned for opening under the project of the World Bank and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Implementation of complex programmes for early childhood education from the vulnerable families and children from compact Roma communities – the Region of Sofia-city. This measure will target the implementation of activities for encouraging the development of children between 0 and 6 years. They are targeted at the development and improvement of parental skills of parents with small children, stimulation the development of the children at this age (in accordance with the standards for early childhood development) and inclusion in pre-school preparation. The activities will also include partnership between the social, educational and health sectors. It is also envisaged to conduct training for prevention of unwanted and early pregnancy. Starting activities for development of social skills and health education for adolescents aged 12–16. The services will be based in the community in the three large Roma neighbourhoods (Fakulteta, Filipovtsi and HristoBotev) and will be implemented by experts (psychologists, social workers) and social assistants from the

Roma community. The training will be conducted in a small group following adapted methods for development of social skills.

Employing mediators from the Roma community

Health mediators:

A shared opinion of the participants in the regional planning exercise was that the most important problem that should be resolved with priority is the appointment of health mediators. 25 out of the 28 regional strategies envisage employing health mediators for improving the access to healthcare in the Roma communities at high risk, and in the segregated neighbourhoods in particular. As shown in the table below, the number of 115 health mediators – existing and new ones – is far from addressing adequately the real needs, because in 8 of the regions this activity is justified but without mentioning the necessary number of health mediators. The health mediators will have specific tasks for access to information, consultation and mediation for access to health care. However, it is necessary to develop their potential for working on prevention of child abandoning and neglecting of children from the Roma community, as well as on the issues of prevention of early marriages: it is not a coincidence that some of the most successful campaigns within the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages” were implemented by health mediators (Peshtera, Tundja, etc.).

- Selection and appointment of health mediators in the municipalities with compact Roma neighbourhoods – continuation of the activities of the health mediator in the municipality of Vidin and employment of at least 6 new health mediators in the region.
- Provision of basic training for the health mediators, follow-up consultation, training through practice and supervision.
- Provision of health and mediation services and consultation by the health mediators; involvement in the work of the CPS with the families at risk for prevention of child abandoning and neglecting of children.
- Organizing immunization campaigns for full coverage of children from vulnerable communities in the compulsory measures for immunization. The campaigns may be organized at municipal level (locally) by the health mediators, the centres for development of vulnerable communities and NGOs, with the support of the GPs, Regional Healthcare Centres, hospitals. The campaigns include: review of the situation of the compulsory immunization of children from Roma communities; meetings of health mediators with parents for provision of information and overcoming the distrust towards the requirements for mandatory immunizations; additional immunization by the GPs in accordance with the age and the health condition of the children. Regular immunizations are a precondition for improving the health status of Roma children and for their access to early education through enrolment in kindergarten.

Labour mediators are planned in half of the regional strategies, but their number is not specified in all of them.

Targeted measures for **employment of teacher assistants**, especially in mixed municipal schools (with complementary targeted support from the municipalities). The list of those schools and the concrete needs of complementary support will be clarified by the municipalities and Regional Inspectorates of Education with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science in the first half of 2011, for initiating the measures in 2011–2012 school year. (Such targeted measures are planned in the regional strategies of Vidin, Kyustendil, Yambol, Sofia-city etc.). The strategy of Plovdiv plans to continue the programme for desegregation of the education and enrolling the children from vulnerable ethnic communities in mainstream schools and kindergartens out of the segregated neighbourhoods.

The regional strategies are far from including all opportunities and options for integration of the Roma community through social services and support. However, compared with previous strategies and action plans, those strategies envisage more services and measures for coverage of the groups at risk from the Roma community in the social services – more as quantity/capacity and as profile and diversity. A lot of the new services and municipal activities are planned in a wishful way and without clear bounding with sources of funding, clearer than the future operational programmes and the European social fund. On the other hand, significant part of the needed intervention is a real part of the activities of the existing social services that are already provided with budget from the state or from projects and the realization depends only on subjective factors – the skills and the attitudes of the staff and the management of the existing social services.

Early marriages are identified as a problem in most of the regions: and it is consistent with the conclusions of a national representative sociological survey conducted under the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages”. Generally, there is no a clear vision of how this problem may be solved and what social services might be of use. During the project’s local advocacy campaigns, the preventive actions that proved to be successful were included in many of the regional strategies. This is a good start, while the necessity of serious follow-up work for search and selection of appropriate social services that will contribute to the prevention of early and forced marriages is obvious.

In conclusion, it could be summarized that in the adopted strategies for development of the social services in the next 5 years (2011–2015), the basis for initiating adequate interventions in the area of social services and measures for integration and support of excluded groups from the Roma community, has been set. The transformation of the declared intentions into practical action for overcoming the gap between vulnerable ethnic minorities and the system of social services will again depend significantly on the participation and the initiative of the civil sector and the representatives of the Roma community to offer good practices and approaches for solving the problems, as well as to sustain a political will for change.

Table 1.

Planned targeted services for integration of vulnerable ethnic communities and improving the access to social services and support

Region	Number of planned centres		Location	Geographical scope	Number of health mediators ³		Number of employment mediators	
	Health and social ⁴	Community development			existing	new	existing	new
Blagoevgrad		1	Blagoevgrad	Regional level	–	3		
Burgas		1	Burgas	Regional level		3		yes ⁵
Varna	1		Varna	Maxuda		yes		
Veliko Tarnovo	–	–			–	–	yes	yes
Vidin		5	Vidin	Vidin, Dunavtsi	1	8	3	1
			Belogradchik	Belogradchik				
			Dimovo, with branch in Archar	Archar, Dimovo, Drenovets, Medovnitsa				
			Chuprene	Gorni Lom and Dolni Lom				
			Bregovo	Bregovo, Kosovo				

³ The planned number of health and labour mediators to work with vulnerable ethnic communities is divided by the existing at the moment of planning, who will continue their activities; and new mediators who are to be appointed during the process of implementation of the regional strategy.

⁴ The table includes only those health and social centres that are explicitly mentioned in the relevant regional strategy, therefore, some gaps are possible in comparison with the full range of activities, funded under the programme of the Global Fund and the Ministry of Health.

⁵ Thus are marked the strategies that underline the role and the expected contribution of the mediators, but do not mention the existing or planned number of mediators – health, labour, social and etc.

Vratsa		2	Vratsa-city	Vratsa, surrounding villages, Krivodol	yes	3	yes	yes
			Oriahovo	Oriahovo				
Gabrovo	–	–				yes		–
Dobrich		1	Dobrich	Regional level	yes	yes		yes
Kardjali	–	–			yes	yes		yes
Kyustendil		3	Kyustendil	Kyustendil	13	2	2	3
			Dupnitsa	Dupnitsa				
			Kocherinovo	Kocherinovo				
Lovech	–	–			1	2	2	2
Montana		2	Montana-city	Municipality of Montana	yes	yes	yes	yes
			Lom	Municipality of Lom				
Pazardjik	–	–			–	–	–	–
Pernik		1	Pernik	Pernik, Tran, Breznik, Radomir	0	4	3	0
Pleven	–	1	Pleven	Regional level		yes		
Plovdiv	1	1	Plovdiv	Regional level	yes	7		
Razgrad	–	2	Jelyazkovets	Loznitsa	1	3		
			Zavet	Municipality of Zavet				
Ruse	–	–			yes	yes	–	–
Silistra Sliven	–	4	Sliven	Sliven	yes yes	yes 6		
			Kotel	Kotel				
			Nova Zagora	Nova Zagora				
			Tvardica	Tvardica				
Smolian	–	1	Smolian	Regional level	–	4	–	9
Sofia-city	2		Sofia	In segregated neighborhoods	2	23		
Sofia		0				4 ⁶		3
Stara Zagora		1	Stara Zagora	Stara Zagora	3	4		1

⁶ The number of the existing health mediators in Sofia-city is not indicated

Targovishte	—	4	Targovishte	Targovishte		2		4
			Popovo	Popovo and municipality of Opaka		3		3
			Omurtag	Omurtag		2		2
			Antonovo	Antonovo		3		3
Haskovo	—	—				4		
Shumen	—	—			—	—	—	—
Yambol		3	Yambol	Yambol and the region	4	2		
			Veselinovo, Tundja	Veselinovo and Zavoi				
			Kukorevo, Tundja	Kukorevo, Tundja				
<i>Total</i>	4	34			25	90	10	33

PART FOUR

Preventing early marriages today: investing in the future of the Roma community

A multidimensional phenomenon like early marriages cannot be overcome through a single campaign, no matter how successful it is. As we have mentioned in the preface, the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages” did not have the ambition to overcome completely the practice of early marriages in the Roma community in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece. It had the modest but important goal to analyze the state-of-art of the problem and to table the question (in the Roma community and to the relevant institutions) and to check on field several types of activities for the prevention of early marriages.

The previous chapters of the report described the state-of-art of the problem, the ways it was raised in the local communities and institutions related to its solving as well as the approbated types of activities for its solving. This chapter represents the main conclusions reached in the course of the project implementation. They are accompanied by the proposals summarised during the final conference that took part on 29 November in Sofia in the Declaration towards a comprehensive policy for social inclusion of Roma women.

As any other product of human thought, the conclusions and proposals set out in this report may be disputed. What cannot be disputed, however, is the necessity of a serious discussion and similarly serious specific actions for overcoming early marriages among the Roma in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece, as well as in other European countries! This issue is related not only to the rights of the child and equality of women, this is a matter of investing in the future of the Roma community. Overcoming the remains of patriarchal practices, hindering the development and realisation of the individual Roma is an investment in transforming the Roma community into a modern and equal part of the nation in the respective countries. And this, on its part, is one of the most important and sustainable investments in the welfare of these nations and states as well as in the prosperity of the whole European Union!

Early marriages in Bulgaria

Early/arranged/forced marriages in Bulgaria exist among many Roma people today. At the same time, this problem exists to a different extent among different Roma groups and social strata in the different regions: early marriages are not characteristic for all Roma communities in Bulgaria! In addition, there is a clear trend for overcoming early marriages, which takes place together with the process of modernization of the community.

Family and marital attitudes of the Roma in Bulgaria are presently characterised by several main trends:

1. The age of early cohabitation and marriage is being raised: presently the average age of the start of cohabitation in the Roma community is 18 years and 4 months – 18 years and 8 months. The Roma that reject early cohabitation (under the age of 16) are now much more than those who accept it. The percentage of the Roma, for who cohabitation under the age of 14 is acceptable, is very small: 13%, as this age is not considered appropriate.

2. Education proves to be the most important factor, influencing the raised age of early cohabitation: the higher the education level is, the later the family is created.

Other important factors are the **economic status** and the **living conditions**: poor Roma people and those living in bad conditions create families earlier.

3. It is becoming a more common trend for the family to be created by the young people, not by the parents: the idea that the parents should decide who their children will marry is becoming increasingly unacceptable: 52.2% of the respondents do not approve of this idea. However, 34.5% still approve of it, which is evidence of the patriarchal mentality of a considerable part of the Roma community.

The practice of the girl to run away with the boy if the parents do not give their consent may be defined today as acceptable. The payment of dowry (babaak) today is widely disapproved by the Roma even when the girl is virgin: in this respect there is a substantial difference between the Roma groups, as in some of them (Kaldarashi, Thracian Kalajdjii, Burgudjii) this practice is still very common.

4. Today simple family households unquestionably prevail over extended families: similarly to the other ethnic groups in Bulgaria, today the Roma live in a nuclear, not extended family, as was the case not so long ago.

5. There is a trend of overcoming the traditional family and marital attitudes and acceptance of modern ones: this has been confirmed by all major trends, described above. The Roma community is on the way from patriarchy to modernity, and still large strata of it have traditional family attitudes but the share of Roma people with more liberal and modern attitudes is increasing and is already prevailing.

The Bulgarian legislation regarding family, marriage and child protection, is in compliance to the European and international standards. There is a well-developed – though in certain sense too complicated – system of institutions in that respect.

The whole system, provided it functions well, should solve a case of early marriage through the interaction of three (or even two) institution: the school, the Social Assistance Directorate (through the municipal Department for Child Protection), the municipal administration or the police. The school is the first that may have indications of an early marriage because of the child dropping out, i.e. he/she stops attending school. In that case the principal should report to the municipal Department for Child Protection, which should investigate the case and suggest a solution. The municipal administration or the police may be informed for the implementation of this decision. This procedure may be accelerated if the Department for Child Protection considers the case on its own initiative.

Three are the **main problems** today that in practice impede the functioning of this chain. The first of them is the **unwillingness of a great part of the officers in the three mentioned institutions to intervene in case of early marriages**. This unwillingness is often justified with the argument that “this is a Roma tradition, their internal issue”. A great part of the teachers and social workers think that the problem of early marriages cannot be solved (both as an issue and as a specific case) and do not intervene.

We should emphasise here that the Bulgarian legislation apply to all Bulgarian citizens and common law has practically no legal value. The representatives of the Roma community, in particular – of Roma NGOs, have never put the legalisation of traditional practices as early marriage as an issue and such debate has never been part of the public discourse. Therefore, in most cases behind the mentioned argument can be seen unwillingness to work, and sometimes – open discriminative attitudes against the Roma.

The second problem is the **mutual distrust between the institutions that should interact at the local level in solving the cases of early marriages**. The mutual accusations between teachers and social workers for not reacting adequately are a common practice in many municipalities, and the effective interaction is rather an exception. An indicator for this is the small number of reports by teachers and principals to the Departments for Child Protection. The State Agency for Child Protection makes efforts to achieve better coordination between the mentioned institutions, which in some places give results, but is obvious that a lot more need to be done in this respect.

The third, extremely important problem is that **none of the mentioned institutions has been recognised by the endangered strata of the Roma community**. The reasons for that can be searched in several directions. Roma people working in the Departments for Child Protection or in schools are exceptions. Moreover, the cases

of clearly expressed discriminatory attitudes of social workers or teachers are not unusual. The approaches used (particularly by the Departments for Child Protection) often are purely administrative and formal, relying on more serious sanctions as a key measure for overcoming the problem. This approach is more likely to capsule the Roma community and make it resistant to any external intervention regarding these cases.

In addition, as the fourth important problem may be pointed out that the **activities for the prevention of early marriages are not effectively regulated**: the issues related with early marriages are not discussed at school. Though in the syllabus of some basic school subjects are included topics related to the issue (e.g. the family), no discussion is held on early marriages – the teachers in most cases do not have the knowledge or attitude to organise such a discussion, this is not included in the respective textbooks either. The only exception is some topics included in the school aids for the optional subject Folklore of Ethnic Groups¹. Neither the Departments for Child Protection, nor the police or the prosecution implement any prevention campaigns.

Early marriages in Romania

Child/forced/early marriages are still a reality in present-day Romania. The practice is deeply rooted in the identity reproduction mechanisms of internal solidarity of the traditional Roma communities. Practically, these are not more than 5–15% of Romanian Roma, but this fact does not undervalue the significance of the problem and the necessity of targeted actions for its solving.

Forced marriages constitute a serious violation of fundamental human rights and freedoms, particularly of children's rights.

Romania has adopted practically all relevant international treaties and conventions for the protection of human rights. After the fall of communism and the EU accession, Romania has reformed its domestic legislation to bring it into compliance with European standards. There is in place a coherent institutional system at national, regional and local level able to implement the legislation for the protection of children's rights.

However, public policies directed specifically to prevent, detect and combat forced marriages are rather rare and incoherent.

Roma associations and human rights groups have already produced extensive studies and surveys with recommendations for public policies, but the state institutions are inert in implementing those propositions and recommendations.

¹ Topics related to early marriages and family creation models can be found in the Workbook "Roads Retold" by D. Kolev and T. Krumova, used in teaching Folklore of Ethnic Groups – Roma Folklore as an optional subject in 5th – 8th grades.

The traditional Roma community leaders and members are aware of the fact that the practice of early marriage has to change. They are willing to open a dialogue on the issue, but they do not accept external interventions.

The media play a crucial role in presenting cases of forced marriages. The media perspective helps on one hand to detect such cases, but on the other hand, it strengthens the anti-Roma racism, which leads to further “closing” of the community.

A new phenomenon is the emergence of a “fashion” of early marriages in the non-traditional wealthy Roma groups. Moreover, early marriages appear in urban ghettos as a consequence of poverty and exclusion.

The harmful effects of forced marriages are affecting all traditional Roma communities. Mostly girls and women are the victims of such practices. Cases of child abandoning, child trafficking and child prostitution are, however, rarer in these wealthy communities in comparison with the modernized urban Roma communities.

The main task in Romania should be to create a synergy of NGOs and state institution public policies and to implement at all levels public policies specifically directed to prevent, detect and combat the harmful practice of early marriages.

Prevention and education campaigns should take place with the equal involvement of all stakeholders and the ownership of the process should remain with the targeted traditional Roma communities. The above mentioned in no way releases the commitment of the state institutions, which should create the mechanisms for institutionalising and financial provision for these activities.

Early marriages in Greece

The legislation governing marriage, family and child protection in Greece is well developed and covers the EU and international standards for human rights protection. In an ideal situation this legislation prevents forced/early marriage and contains the necessary preconditions for invalidating such a marriage.

At the same time the practice of forced/early marriages is still existent among many Roma groups in Greece. The lack of national representative surveys does not allow elucidating the picture: how common and among which groups and strata this phenomenon still exists. Nevertheless, all the interviews and focus groups organized within the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages” in Greece showed that this practice affects a significant percentage of Roma in Thessaloniki. There is no significant public policy for coping with forced/early marriages in the Roma community implemented by the Government. Roma targeted strategies and programs are few, with a low normative status and focus mainly on the issues of living conditions and

education. They touch the issues of Roma women and forced/early marriages only indirectly.

Different kinds of public institutions deal with family and child protection. At the same time the capacity of public institutions to work in the Roma community on solving forced/early marriages is very low. The practice to cooperate with Roma leaders, activists and NGOs on these issues is almost inexistent.

PRINCIPLES AND MODELS FOR THE PREVENTION OF THE EARLY MARRIAGES

Summarizing the results, achieved during the implementation of the ten local campaigns carried out within the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages”, several principles and models for intervention were outlined that could influence the attitudes towards early marriages in the community.

Firstly, the **personal example of successful Roma people** should be emphasised: the young, educated and coping with the challenges of life Roma that have left a particular community, and have grown up before the eyes of the others and managed to achieve more than the rest without forgetting their Roma origin and without neglecting their private life and family, can influence significantly the others. The personal example of those Roma may be influential in two ways. The first is by inviting successful Roma to participate in public meetings, hearings, etc. The other, more effective approach is with empowerment of those Roma and engaging them on certain positions to work for the prevention of early marriages in the community: among their group or among other Roma. Transformation of those Roma into role models, i.e. the validation of their authority is a particular guarantee for success.

There is a close link between the quality of education in the relevant settlements, **building motivation for continuation of the education** and the distribution of early/forced marriages. In this respect, the transformation of the schools – where a problem with dropouts exist – in attractive and adequate to the modern requirements educational centres, inevitably would influence positively the prevention of early marriages and births. The increasing of the motivation for studying would happen in many ways – through the measures specified above (personal example from successful Roma, community discussions, etc), and also through activities for improving the quality of the educational process in the existing schools, activities for introducing different forms of intercultural education (e.g. elective subjects on Roma folklore, celebration of the calendar holidays at school, etc.) and for involving the Roma parents in the educational process (through trainings for parents, involving the parents in the classes on Roma folklore, involving the Roma parents into the school

Board, etc.²). Increasing the motivation for continuing education influences significantly the communities, where the process of overcoming the traditions is on the way and early, but not forced marriages occur. In these communities early marriages most often are initiated by the young people themselves and increasing the motivation for education directly leads to overcoming early marriages.

Support for community development is another important principle that should be applied in the efforts for prevention of the early marriages. The community and the different communal mechanisms for influence are very important for the life of the individual Roma. Thus, it is necessary for the community to participate actively in the efforts for overcoming different negative practices. Even more – the entire community development has to be supported. That may occur through different community discussions, activities for support of individual members of the community, etc. The sustainable frame, where the community development may be supported, is the establishment of community centres that should systematically organize the indicated activities.

The principle of **interaction between all institutions**, which are relevant to the existence of the problem with early/forced marriages, is of a high importance for its limitation. The structures of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Ministry of Justice that are situated in the problematic settlements should be motivated and encouraged to be informed about the problem and to take their responsibilities for its prevention. They should overcome their passiveness on the issue, which is usually excused with the argument that “this is a Roma tradition and we do not want to get involved”. It appears that the image of the representatives of those institutions has a positive impact within the community regarding the knowledge and observance of the existing rules.

Meanwhile, it should be taken into consideration that this is not enough. **The institutionalization of a position within the community** is needed. The influence of the institutions on the Roma community from the “outside” (especially with the more traditional Roma groups) is limited. The influence has to be supported by activities of people inside the community, who are doing the social work by working for solving certain problems (like the one with early marriages, dropping out from school) and at the same time they support the development of the community itself. This position should be institutionalized.

Another successful model could be the **community discussions**, where participants are the significant people from the community – the external significant persons (e.g. the spiritual leader, the mayor of the village, the teacher, etc.³), as well

² Similar activities were tested within the project “Decreasing the Dropout Rate of Roma Children”, which have shown the possibility to involve actively the parents.

³ NB! It should be judged who from the external environment is actually known and trusted. Often the social worker is not among the recognized authorities.

as the people with internal significance (e.g. informal leaders, who are usually wise people and their advice is accepted). In some Roma groups the internal authorities have some level of institutionalization: e.g. the so called “meshere” – among the group of the Kaldarashi. Usually among the other groups there is no such institutionalization, but the informal leaders are very well-known (“cheribashii”, “patroni”, etc.) and should definitely be involved in the community discussions.

The implemented campaigns clearly showed the necessity of such discussions. The discussed topics cannot be limited only to early marriages: other topics of importance for the local community are also a part of the discussed issues – employment, education, received services.

Another effective method appeared to be the **group discussion** where participants are not the whole community, but representatives of a certain group: e.g. young people, women and etc. The group discussion gives opportunity to the participants to debate the issues in depth, as long as there are no hesitations for speaking in front of the older people. The topics for these discussions cannot be limited only to early marriages either, but to many others as well.

With a view of the fact that there is a lack of information within the pilot municipalities among the young people with respect to **reproductive health and family planning**, obviously there is a necessity of organizing conversations and discussions on this topic that should be presented in the best way with regard to the audience. It should be taken in consideration that there are serious differences in the approach of presenting this information in the Roma community: depending on the different Roma groups, on the level of modernization of the local community and on the age (the generation) of the audience. For example, the usual measures for distribution of information on reproductive health and family planning could have a contra-indicated effect in the groups of the Kaldarashi, Burgudjii (especially those in North-East Bulgaria, the Thracian Kalajdjii, etc.: absolutely different information materials are needed there, that are relevant to the cultural norms of the group.

The method of the **family-group conference** could be briefly defined as a method, which aim is to make the family a generator of positive social change and is based on the understanding that the families could find solutions for their problems by themselves, they have enough resources to manage with the problems of their children, as well as the right to participate in the decision making in their plans for the future. This method proved to be extremely suitable for working with the Roma families that quite often refuse any external intervention in managing their family issues, but have enough capacity to make the best decision for their children, if they receive a minimal support and realize the responsibility which they have for this decision. In most cases, it is relevant to transform the method into a **community conference** through the involvement of internal authorities from the community: often, it is the influence of the community that is decisive for an early marriage (e.g.

through the power of tradition) and in such cases it is important to engage the community authorities in the prevention of early marriages through the model of the **community conference**.

Many of the implemented campaigns showed the necessity of **door-to-door** campaigns in the Roma neighbourhoods. Individual conversations or family discussions within the frames of such campaigns appear to be an effective measure for increasing the awareness on the issue of early marriages, which is a necessary step for its solution.

The described methods are not a “magic wand” guaranteeing immediate success. Their application depends very much on the skills of those who realize the activities for preventing early marriages: one and the same approach could be very effective or bring opposite results. The different methods should be in accordance with the specifics of the local community: some of them may be applied among all Roma, while others will influence effectively certain groups. In any case, it should be taken into consideration that solving the issue of early marriages cannot be achieved in a short time: continuous and systematic efforts are needed so that the described methods and principles may bring sustainable results.

DECLARATION TOWARDS A COMPREHENSIVE POLICY FOR SOCIAL INCLUSION OF ROMA WOMEN¹

We, representatives of NGOs, independent experts and institutions working for the social inclusion of the Roma,

Having regard to the fact that:

– Protection of human rights and social inclusion of vulnerable groups are among the basic principles of the European Union;

– The Roma are Europe’s largest minority, and integration and social inclusion of the Roma community is one of the main challenges facing Member States and the Union as a whole;

– Successful integration and social inclusion of the Roma face many challenges at national and European levels. Among them at national level is highlighted the need for greater commitment to targeted action for Roma integration (including the use of EU funds in this respect), for investing the necessary financial resources in activities for social inclusion of the Roma, for development of appropriate administrative infrastructure of the process of Roma integration in most European countries, for real participation of Roma organizations and the Roma community as a whole in the planning, implementation and evaluation of policies targeting the Roma. Among the challenges at European level are highlighted the need for faster progress on the preparation of a European Roma Strategy, for establishing an appropriate administrative infrastructure (including increasing the competences of the European Roma Platform), for increasing the constituency of European Roma organizations and others. These challenges should be addressed through appropriate actions by national governments, European institutions and civil society (including Roma organizations);

– Roma women form one of the most vulnerable groups among European Union citizens and often face multiple discrimination: once as Roma, the second time as women;

– Achieving substantive equality and social inclusion of Romani women face multiple challenges – in the mainstream society, within the Roma community and so on. Some of these challenges relate to achieving faster progress in policies for Roma integration, increasing effectiveness of institutions working in the Roma community, strengthening the participation

¹ The Declaration was adopted unanimously by the participants in the International conference “Policies for the empowerment of Roma women in the context of European programme for Social Inclusion”, held in Sofia on 29 November 2010 as the closing event of the project “Preventing Early/Forced Marriages”.

of successful Roma women in the administration, political and public life, etc. Modernization and overcoming patriarchal practices like early marriages, forced marriages, stopping girls from school, etc. that still exist among some Roma groups and classes (not including all the Roma) are another important challenge that must be properly addressed;

Considering also that the project “Preventing Early/ Forced Marriages” in Bulgaria, Greece and Romania clearly demonstrates that to overcome the traditional (patriarchal) practices such as early and forced marriage, to support the modernization processes in the Roma community and to achieve equality and social inclusion of Roma women is necessary:

- Promoting social work in the Roma community, including the provision of specific community-based services;
- Promoting innovative approaches for mobilizing and involving local Roma communities, incl. support for the educated and successful Roma and their commitment to community work;
- Cooperation and joint actions of the institutions working in the Roma community at the local level (social, educational, health and other institutions), NGOs, Roma authority (formal and informal),

WE CALL UPON all stakeholders: national and European institutions, intergovernmental organizations, civil society and the Roma community **FOR:**

1. Strong and comprehensive national policy for Roma integration that takes into consideration the challenges for Roma women emancipation

Most countries with large Roma population in the EU have approved national documents for Roma integration. However, there is *strong need of concrete and forward-looking measures to implement these documents: with clearly defined financing, proper administrative infrastructure and mechanisms for engaging the civil society and Roma community itself.* It is also necessary these documents, as well as the overall national policy for the Roma to take into account the unequal situation of Roma women and to include specific measures to achieve equality and social inclusion of Roma women;

2. Strong and comprehensive European policy on Roma integration that takes into consideration the challenges for Roma women emancipation

Sofar, the European policy for Roma inclusion has defined 10 Common Basic Principles and has been seen mainly as a process of exchange of good practices among the member-states through the European Roma Platform. These are important founding steps. Nevertheless, the recent events have outlined that these steps are not enough and should be further developed towards stronger European Roma Strategy that defines common *European standards for Roma inclusion and mechanisms for monitoring the implementation* of these standards at national and regional levels. The European Roma Platform should go beyond the exchange of experience and to appropriate stronger policy development, consultation and monitoring functions. The usage of European funds for Roma inclusion should become stronger obligation for the Member States;

3. Linking the overall European gender policy to take account of the challenges Roma women meets

Mainstreaming the issue of Romani women emancipation in the agenda of all institutions involved in formulating and implementing policies for equality of women and the agenda of European Women's Lobby should be encouraged;

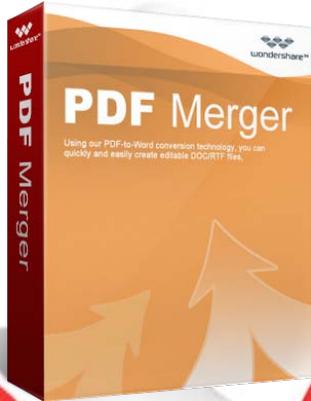
4. Promoting the widespread application of an innovative approach for supporting the modernization of the Roma community and overcoming the patriarchal practices hampering the realization of the Roma woman

This approach should be based on activation of local Roma communities (including by supporting the efforts of successful Roma and their engagement with the modernization of Roma community), promotion of social work in Roma communities (including through the development of innovative community-based services) and cooperative action among the institutions working with Roma communities, NGOs and Roma authorities. Applying this approach should become a priority in the overall policy for Roma integration and emancipation of Roma women.

Abbreviations

ANR	National Agency for the Roma
CORI	County Offices for Roma Issues
CPS	Centres for Public Support
DCH	Departments for Child Protection
GDSCCHP	General Departments for Social Care and Child Protection
IAP	Integrated Action Programme for Social Integration of the Greek Roma
LSA	Law on Social Assistance
NSI	National Statistical Institute
NUTS	Nomenclature of Territorial Units for Statistics
RALSA	Regulations for the Application of the Law on Social Assistance
RIE	Regional Inspectorates of Education
SAD	Social Assistance Directorate
SEPC	Social Educational Professional Centres
SNAC	National Strategy for Community Action
SPAS	Public Services for Social Assistance

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