

**BADANIA**

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**Barriers of Roma Women when Accessing  
into the Labour Market<sup>1</sup>**

**Bariery kobiet romskich w wejściu na rynek pracy**

**Introduction**

Economic independence is an inevitable condition for both men and women to have control over their lives and to have an opportunity for real decision making. It also plays a significant role in family stability. A specific, rather extensive EU legislation deals with discrimination based on gender (or sex). At the present, the secondary EU law is regulated by the application of the principles of equal treatment between men and women in the scope of employment and occupation, the access to and supply of goods and services, and self-employment (Directive 2006/54/EC, 2006; Directive 2004/113/EC, 2004; Directive 2010/41/EU, 2010). From the perspective of gender equality, the regulation of the social rights of pregnant workers and mothers is important, and the regulation on parental leave is important particularly in the context of reconciliation of work and family life (Directive 92/85/EEC, 1992; Direc-

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tive 2010/18/EU, 2010). The Slovak Republic has rather effective, even though not specifically focused, home legislation on gender equality. Equality between men and women in Slovakia is enshrined in the *Constitution of the Slovak Republic* and regulated by special legislation. From the perspective of the Slovak legislation, the so-called *Antidiscrimination Act* (2004), which bans discrimination based on gender, is relevant; the principle of equal treatment is not met by mere avoidance of discrimination but also by prevention of discrimination and taking preventive measures. The recent amendment increased the possibility of temporary equality measures based also on gender (or sex) for all subjects of the government, and legal persons. The ban on discrimination based on gender and the obligation of equal remuneration for both men and women for the same work or work of the same value are enshrined also in the *Labour Code* (2001) and other relevant legal acts (more in *Celoštátna stratégia rodovej rovnosti*, 2014).

### **Analysis of the current status of the issue in Slovakia**

In the work process, women are confronted with both horizontal and vertical gender segregations<sup>2</sup>. The work sphere is one of those spheres in which the need of strengthening gender equality is manifested the most significantly. The fact is that employment rates of women are significantly lower than employment rates of men, women suffer from higher and long-term unemployment and have unjustifiably lower wages than men, and there are disproportionately fewer women in management (Bahna et al., 2006). In the spheres such as health care, social assistance and education, there are more than four fifths of women, and in the government there are three fifths of women. In the private sector with higher average wages there are almost 41% of women of all

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<sup>2</sup> *Horizontal gender segregation* means a distribution (proportion, number) of men and women in specific economic sectors, departments, occupations in the labour market, while women and men tend towards different occupations (often belonging to different segments of economy – economic sectors, departments, occupations, etc.). *Vertical gender segregation* means a distribution (number) of men and women in various positions in one category of occupations, particularly related to the level of responsibility and significance of the work position, while one of the genders (usually men) has higher probability to achieve a higher position within the group/main class of occupations, etc. (*Glosár rodovej terminológie. Horizontálna a vertikálna rodová segregácia*, 2006).

the employed (Stratégia rodovej rovnosti, 2014). Gender differences<sup>3</sup> are the highest in the self-employment sphere where the men-women ratio is three to one. The gender segregation closely relates to generally lower wages in women as the significant differences in remuneration persist between women and men. Women more often belong to low-income groups of the employed, i.e. their hourly wage is lower than two thirds of the median of the hourly wage in the economy of the Slovak Republic. Despite the very good levels of education in women (in Slovakia even higher than in men), women do not have comparable wages to men because education in “typically female spheres” is evaluated lower. There are still significant barriers and shortcomings in the Slovak Republic related to reconciliation of family and work life. The most commonly applied and used measures for reconciliation of work and family are flexible working hours. Mostly women are responsible for care for children and other family members as a result of persisting gender stereotypes. As women in Slovakia are mostly responsible for care for dependent family members, their role in the world of paid work means that they are more and more confronted with a double burden. Many women provide care for older family members without adequate equipment or available services. Women and men experience poverty and social exclusion rather differently. The risk for poverty is higher in women, particularly in single mothers and older women. Differences in wages, along with other disadvantages of women related to the labour market, particularly a large proportion of women out of economic activity, more frequent and longer career breaks, low wages, and higher load of unpaid work, reduce life savings and pensions in women, which results in higher risks for poverty and feminisation of poverty in older age. According to Džambazovič (2006) poverty of women relates to their worse, even though improving, position in the labour market, as women have higher unemployment rates, higher dependence on social benefits, high employment in the low-paid secondary labour market, often seasonal work, a high proportion in part-time jobs, and a still low and persisting proportion in qualified and well-paid positions. In case of Roma women from marginalized Roma communities, geographic and ethnic differences are multiplied by rigid gender norms as another factor of their disadvantage. So, if there are deep long-term gender differences in the labour

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<sup>3</sup> *Gender differences* are differences between women and men in participation rates, access opportunities, rights, and outcomes in any areas of public and private spheres; it includes, e.g. inequality between women and men in their access to power, sources, social benefits, education, health protection, etc. (Stiegler, 2002).

market in Slovakia, in the Roma population the differences are even deeper. According to the report of the committee for elimination of discrimination of women, the disadvantageous position of Roma women in Slovakia is a result of discrimination based on sex and gender, and ethnic discrimination and social exclusion of the poor Roma communities (so-called marginalized Roma communities). Racial and ethnic discrimination causes that Roma women face also other qualitatively different forms of violation of their rights besides the forms of violation faced also by non-Roma women (Tieňová správa, 2008). As other ethnic minorities, Roma women have also bigger problems in the labour market than majority women, which suggests their higher inactivity and unemployment rates. Roma women usually represent a group of women with higher unemployment and inactivity rates because of their low levels of education because of their traditional home roles in the family, inadequate qualifications, and prejudice by employers (Kosová, 2012). The most usually, Roma women are employed in menial, nonqualified, physically demanding jobs and occasional jobs in services (such as cleaning). They are also employed in the black or grey economy with very low wages, which prevents them from the access to social welfare benefits (Corsi, 2008). Exact analysis on Roma women in the labour market is difficult because of a relative lack of data about this target group. This is due to the facts that the statistics about the labour market is not ethnically focused and that the Roma minority often declare themselves to belong to another, non-Roma nationality. Based on the data by the Statistical Office and on our experience, we know that the Roma population is concentrated mostly in Eastern and Central Slovakia (Kureková, 2012). As for employment rates of Roma women in Slovakia, the United Nations Development Programme (Human Development Report, 2010) states that differences between women in productive age from the majority and the Roma population are much more significant than in men. In Slovakia, the employment rates are only 4.6% in Roma women and 41.2% in the majority women. The Government of the Slovak Republic has adopted the measures to deal with the high unemployment of the Roma population. However, these measures, particularly in the form of activation works, are focused only on development and maintenance of work habits but they do not solve unemployment of Roma women and men in the long term. As the UNDP states, a Roma women's proportion in activation works was 22.3%. They include community services, i.e. cleaning, maintenance of public spaces, objects, roads, etc. Despite the fact

that the Programme resulted in rather significant participation rates of Roma men and women in comparison with other measures in the scope of increasing employment, such as requalification and training for the labour market, up to 50% of the respondents of the Roma origin said that activation works did not increase their chance for employment.

### **Research on the selected aspects of life of Roma women in Slovakia**

A very unfavourable situation of the Roma population in the labour market is only one of the dimensions of social exclusion which a significant part of the Roma in Slovakia faces. The persons excluded from the labour market are excluded also from good wages; they get to a group of poor people, often dependent on social transfers for long periods of time. They are socially excluded from the majority population, are typical for low levels of education, become helpless in this system, and are not able to get out of their situation on their own. The worst situation is in the persons living in the segregated Roma settlements, often found in the marginalised regions with high concentrations of the Roma (Jurásková, Kriglerová, Rybová, 2004). The authors of this paper are the investigators of the scientific project VEGA (Scientific Grant Agency) *Intimate Partner Violence against Roma Women* which partially deals with the barriers of Roma women when accessing the labour market. Therefore, we would like to state some partial study results which directly relate to the discussed topic.

### **Study methods, objectives, sample**

The scientific study focuses on description, analysis and interpretation of the course and consequences of intimate partner violence against Roma women. The research team maps the current status of the studied issue in the Slovak Republic. It is the first study on the issue as the sample consists of Roma women<sup>4</sup> from Western, Central and Eastern Slovakia. In the Atlas of Roma Communities, approximately 402,840 were identified in 2013 (in this case it was *credited* ethnicity – i.e. the persons who are considered Roma by other people). In our study, however, we worked explicitly with *self-declared* ethnicity, i.e.

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<sup>4</sup> Roma women who have faced violence living in the environment where no adequate help is available, or Roma women who have faced violence and sought/were provided with adequate help.

each of the female informants considered themselves Roma. In the study, there were 32 Roma women living in the segregated localities or scattered among the majority. The participants could communicate in their mother tongue, i.e. the women living in the south-west of Slovakia communicated in Hungarian and the women living in the east of Slovakia communicated in Romani. The study was conducted in the given localities by interviews which were preceded by contacting the women and explaining them the study purpose, which is one of the aspects to maintain the ethics in research. In the study, we used semi-structured interviews<sup>5</sup> and participant observation focused on selected areas of life of Roma women, leading to disclosure of partial aspects of the studied problems. The basic methodologic approach to obtain relevant data was the qualitative content analysis. In implementation of the content analysis, we followed the steps suggested by Plichtová (Miovský, 2006):

- 1) Definition and identification of adequate documents for the planned content analysis (or informants – data are produced by the method of an interview);
- 2) Data collection (or their transcript) and sorting;
- 3) Definition of the basic units and development of the system of categories with a coding system;
- 4) Coding of the text/transcript;
- 5) Data analysis and interpretation;
- 6) Final reporting.

The thematic analysis is the basic technique of analysis of the collected data. This technique was elaborated on in the publications by Plichtová (2002) and Hendl (1999); it can be included among the techniques of qualitative content analysis.

## Results

In the interviews, the study participants talked particularly about the course and consequences of intimate partner violence. One of the analysed

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<sup>5</sup> In the interviews, we paid attention to contacting the participants and developing trust. All the time we fully accepted participants' particularities and current status; we asked the prepared questions whose order was not given or definite. Related to the sample type, we used simple and apposite questions so that the participants could understand them. A disadvantage of this technique is a small number of communication partners, which hinders generalization of the results related to the whole population (Hendl, 2005).

parts of the transcripts, however, was the issue of their status in their families and communities. Based on the interview analyses we found that the most common barrier when accessing the labour market were persisting gender myths and stereotypes about their roles and functions in the family and society (see Porubánová, Filadelfiová, 2012). One of the reasons why the study participants could not participate in public affairs was intimate partner violence against them, which allowed no space for them to be able to get involved in the labour market. Violence was manifested by isolation (identified in all the interviews); particularly deliberate isolation from normal social interactions and relationships with family and friends of women facing violence. Several transcripts follow:

“...I didn’t go anywhere, wasn’t interested in anything, and even didn’t talk to my sister. He didn’t want me to talk to my own sister. And I didn’t talk to her just because of him so that everything’s fine but everything was wrong, nevertheless. So many times he broke my phone to prevent me from calling my own family” (30 years, 2015; translated by the authors).

“We live in the same house with the mother, but I also meet the family; not often, when there’s time. He doesn’t like it when I go to my family, he likes only when I do the housework. I should toil from morning till evening, according to him. You know, only he can slob around with his friends” (42 years, 2016; translated by the authors).

“I didn’t like that he didn’t allow me to meet my friends and that’s why I’ve lost them. He chased everyone away from me; he insulted them that they are idiots. That’s why we used to argue. And I didn’t like that when I wanted to have a part-time job, he didn’t let me go. I only went there a couple of times, but then he argued with me, wanted to know what I went there for. He argued with me that I went there in my shorts in front of other men; he wanted to know what I wanted to go there for. When I was on maternity leave, he didn’t argue with me because he liked that I was at home. At first, he only argued with me, but then he started to be aggressive towards me. He also had some part-time jobs, at first in our neighbourhoods but later he went abroad. They came home only for the weekends. He was annoyed because he didn’t know where I was and what I was doing, whether I didn’t work or meet my friends. That was when he started to be arrogant and started to abuse me” (35 years, 2016; translated by the authors).

“Yes, he controlled me, was able to follow me secretly during the day when he was unemployed. He was curious where I went and who I met, whether I was telling the truth about my whereabouts; I couldn’t go anywhere without him knowing. If he wasn’t able to follow me, he phoned my friend if I was at her

place or even when I went to my parents, he phoned with an excuse that he was phoning just because he couldn't contact me on my phone that it was probably broken, and he did other similar things to me" (51 years, 2016; translated by the authors).

Based on these manifestations of social violence, our participants did not have opportunities to go to work, to be more engaged in public affairs and prefer them to housework and child care. Largely, the "home sphere" was typical for women whose life was the same every day – taking care of husband and children, cleaning, cooking and all related housework. This image of a woman (not only Roma) is an assumption of the existence of patriarchal stereotypes about dividing gender roles (see Hradiská, 2009; Kiczková, 2011; Mesochoritsová, 2011). Even if our participants had ideas about studying or working, these ideas were eliminated by a violent partner and his family or friends.

"Where he comes from, it is normal that men beat their women in every other marriage and nobody says a word. Those women even conceal it, say it's not truth but they are all covered in bruises, heartbroken and skinny and sick, use various medicaments for nerves..." (39 years, 2015; translated by the authors).

The study participants coped with violence used against them in various ways. The most commonly identified strategies of "coping" with violence included *downplaying violence*, *denying violence*, and *making women responsible for violence*. Violence, however, was downplayed by the participants themselves, which can be interpreted through prevailing gender stereotypes and myths which are "shrouded" by this issue. Or they downplayed their partner's violence because of fear what might happen if he was released:

"If I did something like that, I would be very scared to come back home...it would be a real bummer for me...if a Roma woman went for treatment because she was attacked by her man, probably she wouldn't be able to get over it on the following day, and that would be completely worse...every time he hit me, I always said that I hit something or that I bumped against something accidentally...sure enough I would never say that my man hit me..." (31 years, 2015; translated by the authors).

"...it's not possible at all; the family does not interfere in such things. Because I am to take care of children and he is to get drunk and beat his wife" (30 years, 2015; translated by the authors).

Downplaying was present also in families, friends and other people close to the participants who were significantly affected by them. It is necessary to



mention the influence of a *mother-in-law* on possible dealing with the situation after a violent incident. If the woman “confessed” what she was experiencing, her mother-in-law or her mother said very often: “It is absolutely normal, get used to it; I had to get used to that too”. We assume that it relates to prevailing, transgenerationally transferred stereotypes which “allow” the perpetrators to “commit” violence in the families of our participants.

“I just screamed, we lived at his mother’s and his mother was on his side and she saw he was beating me, this, and she encouraged him...” (27 years, 2015; translated by the authors).

The neighbourhood and family very often downplayed partner’s violent behaviour, which again appears as a rather “dangerous” strategy which allows men to commit violence, and women gradually start to perceive it as a “usual, normal thing” because if it was not like that, somebody would have already done something about it:

“...and as for the family, deaf and blind...I cannot say anything else about it... they try to see nothing...it is always easier when I do not see, feel...” (31 years, 2015; translated by the authors).

“Those neighbours were always on their side because they thought I was stupid, they made me stupid” (27 years, 2015; translated by the authors).

“But she (mother) never stood up for me; she even said “just beat her”, maybe she was afraid of him, don’t know, she never stood up for me” (42 years, 2015; translated by the authors).

## Conclusion

In the paper, the authors’ ambition was to show the barriers of Roma women when accessing the labour market. The current status in the issue defines the limitations Roma women are not able, cannot get over to obtain higher levels of education or find a job. Our study, whose primary objective was to interpret the course and consequences of violence against Roma women, shows a rather significant barrier which does not allow women to participate in public affairs. It is violence whose victim they are. Particularly social violence committed by their intimate partners was one of the key manifestations of behaviour which, under the influence of transgenerational gender myths and stereotypes, did not allow women to get involved in the labour market.

**Streszczenie:** W artykule podjęto zagadnienie barier, na które napotykały romskie kobiety na rynku pracy. Autorka analizuje częściowe wyniki VEGA Project – przemoc wobec kobiet romskich w związkach, a także interpretuje granice wejścia romskich kobiet na rynek pracy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kobiety romskie, marginalizacja, nagromadzenie wad, barier, rynek pracy

**Abstract:** The article provides information about barriers of Roma women in the labour market. It analyses the partial results of the project VEGA – Intimate Partner Violence against Roma Women. Most often interpret the entry limits of Roma women in the labour market.

**Keywords:** Roma women, marginalization, accumulation of disadvantages, barriers, labour market

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