



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# RESEARCH AND INTERGENERATIONAL AWARENESS ABOUT ROMA WOMEN SITUATION.

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF ROMA WOMEN ASSOCIATIONS

**KAMIRA**



*“We cannot make of youth marriages a Roma problem, when it has been a common practice of all cultures for long. We are at risk of making this phenomenon a stereotype”.*

Nicolae Gheorghe, leader and Roma activist, recently deceased.

#### Introduction:

In 50 years the Roma population in Spain has undergone a marked evolution, with a special emphasis on Roma women. We can mention important milestones such the virtually eradicated truancy in primary education, or an active participation of Roma women in associations. Despite this and regarding Roma women, in recent years we see a certain stagnation in their situation, even talking about a setback in some concrete matters, so, the associations that work with Roma women perceive a fall in the age of marriage and an increase in school leaving in the transition from primary to secondary education.

From the institutions, social services and NGOs, many things have been made, but this perceived stagnation leads us to wondering what has failed, and if the various initiatives actually answer to the interests and motivations of Roma women.

Therefore, from Kamira and in collaboration with the Human Rights Office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, we wanted to collect and study the current situation of Roma women in Spain, their expectations, obstacles and needs. All of this from an intergenerational approach to evaluate the trend in recent years, in order also to establish and propose new strategies and action lines, as well as properly plan our work as NGOs to achieve a full and effective equality of Roma women, this is our ultimate and primary goal. Specifically with this work we intended to:

- 1.- Know if life conditions of Roma Women have changed in recent years.
- 2.- Know if these changes are perceived by Roma women in a positive or negative way.
- 3.- Know what issues currently concern and interest Roma women of different generations.

- 4.- Analyse the differences between their reality and their expectations.
- 5.- Identify the key obstacles to move forward.
- 6.- Know if they are aware and make use of the public resources available in their area.

**The participants** of this project have been Roma women of the areas *Barrio del Guadalquivir* in Córdoba, *Las Tres Mil Viviendas* in Seville, *El Buen Pastor* in Barcelona, *Torrero/San José* in Zaragoza, *Colorines y Suerte de Saavedra* in Badajoz, and *Vallecas* in Madrid. A total of 210 women participated actively through self-administered questionnaires, of which 84 were under 30 years old, 71 were in the range of 31 to 45, and 55 were over 45. In addition, 120 women have participated in discussions talks with the methodology of "focus groups". Two focus groups per town, each one made of a number of 10 participants of different ages.

**The methodology** for the research was based on training and participatory research. This is a training method because it aims to generate critical thinking in the participants, tolerant and respectful listening, the awareness of themselves and their environment, reasoning, the generation of dialogue and debate. It also involves participatory research because in its main actions it uses "self-report questionnaire" and "focus group" to collect data and pre-set items.

The self-administered questionnaire is an economic and reliable method for gathering information that allows anonymity and no influence of the researcher in the answers. The focus group allows a full understanding of the phenomenon, searching the specificity of a group of women in a particular area, whose variables have been determined by age and socio-demographic situation.

The direct research activities have been conducted in depressed and with social exclusion areas with a high percentage of Roma population in six municipalities where Kamira has entities associated with the Federation. For the fieldwork, we had the collaboration of the following entities: Punjabi in Cordoba, Akherdi Tromipén in Seville, Asociación Alboreá in Madrid, Romis Calis Kamelan Nakerar in Badajoz, Mujeres Gitanas Romi in Zargoza and the Associació Gitana de Dones Drom Kotar Mestipen in Barcelona.

The actions of this project have allowed the collection of data that verify a reality as well as generate hypotheses on which we want to continue working with groups of women from different networks and participant locations, and the adhesion of new groups of women both in Spain and abroad.

#### **Main results of the research:**

Differing circumstances were observed in the following items analysed:

##### **1. Sociodemographic circumstances:**

Education: Between 17-30 years old, 8% of respondents did not finish primary education, 65% attained o finish it, and 27% completed high school. Between 30-

45 years, 16% did not finish primary school, compared to 76% who did obtain it, and 8% have higher education. As for over 45 years old, within the respondents, 13% did not finish primary school and none of them proceeded to secondary school.

Marital status. At this point it has been distinguished between civil marriage and/or ecclesiastical marriage and the traditional Roma marriage. Among those surveyed, none of them had been divorced since as a rule, Roma are separated without legal divorce. Between 17-30 years old, 60% are married by civil or religious marriage, 4% are married by the Roma traditional rite, and the rest of the group remain single. The number of separations in this strip is zero. In the age group ranging between 31-45 years, 56% are married by civil or religious marriage, 8% by the Roma rite, 32% are single and 4% separated. If we talk about over 45 years, 75% are married and 25% separated, no one is single in this strip.

Number of children. The number of children descends in younger generations and the average is now of 2 children in the group of women younger than 30, compared to 4 children in the women older than 45 years old.

Occupation, employment and salary. Most women in all age groups are unemployed (especially among the 17-30 years age group) and engaged in housework. Those who work outside home, work in street trade in a non regulated way or in family businesses. All of them agree on the amount of salary received, which is lower than 600€. Most of them receive the Minimum Insertion Income (REMI).

## 2. **Expectations:**

Studies. Between 17-30 years old, 27% wants to get the ESO (Secondary School), 35% would like to have an intermediate degree or professional training and 38% aims to reach university. In the range of 31-45 years old, 40% were satisfied with the basic studies, 28% with intermediate or professional training, but a high percentage (32%) aspires to university. Among these older than 45 years, 40% were satisfied with the level of basic education, and 60% would have liked to have a university degree.

Self-perception about the reasons for not achieving their educational expectations. It is noteworthy that among the three groups one of the important factors for the failure to achieve their expectations is the lack of financial resources, apart from family responsibilities and the traditional mind-set that the man should support the family. For this reason, it is more valued that men study as opposed to women. By age, women between 17-30 years old also attribute the reasons to employment context, women in strips between 31-45 and over 45 years old blame cognitive elements (lack of memory and attention).

Occupation and employment. A high percentage aspires to be a housewife, in all groups the most repeated answer is that they would accept any job, although the majority, in the three age groups, would prefer to be entrepreneur. Most women who do not work outside home, considered that it is due to: family responsibilities, discrimination, not being hired for Roma, lack of training or the situation of widespread economic crisis in Spain.

Marriage age: Among the women in the three age groups, 18% think they should get married before the age of 18, 50% believe that the ideal age for marriage is between 21-25 years old and between those older than 45 none of them thinks they should get married over 25 years. However, most of the respondents were married between 17-20, and even claim to have acquaintances who were married before that age. Many young women get married to become independent and they see marriage as the only solution, a way out. However, in recent years most women who got married have moved in to live with their in-laws, largely as a result of the financial crisis and the difficulty in access to housing, what reflects that the reality and the lack of resources force women to live unwanted situations.

Number of children. In the age group between 17-30 years old, 85% of women choose to have 2 to 4 children, the rest wanted more than 4 children. In the range between 31-45 years old, 70% wanted between 2-4 children, and 30% would like more than 4. Among the older of 45 years old, the proportion of women who deem desirable to have more than 4 children is 60%. The results reflect a desire of younger generations to reduce the number of children, mainly due to current living conditions. However, it is well above the average of the majority society, and many consider big families as being positive.

The age of the first child. Bearing mind that women who had their first child before 15 years old are in the range of women older than 45, as in the past young marriages were not so extraordinary, now it is common to have children between 18 and 25. However, most Roma women would want their first child between the age of 25 and 29.

### **3. Other familial and environmental circumstances of Roma women**

Ill-treatment. Although there seems to be a positive evolution in the treatment and communication between couples in the younger generation, it appears that situations of psychological, physical and sexual violence, including threats, insults, humiliation or control over friend and family relationships are more usual than desirable.

In the responses of the group of women over 45, we must take into account that, probably for cultural reasons, it is often more difficult to externalize situations such as abuse, a subject considered taboo, and that, in general, has to be solved at home and as a result often gets unreported. However, some of the women said

that they would report it to the police. Others say that asking for help, in any case, is useless.

Family planning. Although a priori might surprise, most of the participants of all ages believe that sex education and the use of contraception to avoid pregnancy at early ages are needed. This option is especially contemplated by those younger than 30. As age increases, so does their concern for that young people to receive sexual education. It is noteworthy that participants who are mothers and that have given birth at an early age, show concern about the limits posed by having a child at too an early age.

Health. An improvement in women health is seen, as well as higher attendance to clinics and health centres near their homes, largely thanks to mediation in health programs. The issues for which they attend the most are those related with gynaecological issues, sex education, or cardiovascular disease.

The need for increased psychological attention and therapeutic treatments to women in these exclusion areas is latent.

Family. The family is still considered the core of Roma culture, and the role of Roma woman, still remains the main axis and transmitter of traditions and values that define it. This is in spite of men being the authority inside the family, and the ones who benefit from a greater freedom.

Affective relationships and sexism. Housework and family responsibilities still fall mainly on Roma women. However, although there seems to be some change regarding the assumption of housework by younger males, 50% of men who "collaborate" in housework and family care do so only sporadically .

Discrimination. In this item we evaluated the degree of discrimination, direct or indirect, perceived by Roma women, both in terms of gender and ethnic, and also other sectors of public life (employment, health, education, ...) in those in which they feel most discriminated and vulnerable and if they believe that there are effective measures to draw on. Indeed, a worrying percentage of Roma women has sometimes felt discrimination. Most of them believe that the Roma woman image significantly limits their lives and the normal access to resources, and above all, the access to employment. For example, a repeatedly negative image spread of Roma women has happened in the program of Cuatro "Palabra de Gitano".

Besides this, very little of the participants are able to identify a discriminatory situation as such, and almost none of them, if they do get to perceive it and consider themselves a victim of discrimination, are aware of the resources at their disposal. Those who have heard about them, doubt their effectiveness.

Generational change. When asked about their perception regarding generational change, Roma women feel that their quality of life and freedom has improved, although there is still much to be done, like work regarding self-esteem and self-appreciation, these women's participation in public life, awareness among Roma men, or delaying the age of marriage. On the other hand, an important sector of the participants estimated that there are some cultural aspects of their own community that are important to be maintained.

Culture. Roma women think that traditional life has change, women marry later in life and when they really want, nonetheless they believe that Roma wedding, respect, family unity and traditions must be kept. The existence of some fear to losing the most important values of culture is detected.

References or models. The results reflect a lack of knowledge of Roma women who could serve them as a reference. The effect that social exclusion has on the creation of references and expectations as well as the effect the image projected in media has in the show "Palabra de Gitano" has also been worked on.

#### **Information analysis and conclusions:**

We can therefore confirm that we Roma women are in a process of evolution and change, in that while the maintenance and protection of certain cultural aspects is defended, it is increasingly seen that issues such as personal freedom, adaptation to current times and quality of life must continue improving and evolving.

Concerns and expectations are centred around the family and the couple, work, studies and housing. We detect a lack of interest in individual themes, as can be personal development.

Regarding **education**, there are more wishes or expectations about studying than before, although we are concerned about the regression in resources in recent years, being some deficiencies in the education system perceived for not responding to the needs and motivations of Roma community.

About **employment**, the results reflect the lack of job opportunities for Roma women due to their lack of qualifications, which affects their **self-esteem** and their ability to visualize different **expectations**. The perception of **discrimination** is also particularly worrisome, both as women and as Roma. We have a generation of young women with insufficient skills to face the challenges of the twenty-first century; women are not considered qualified to undertake new challenges that allow them some independence, at least economically.

On a personal and family level, although the **marriage** age remains lower and the number of children average on Roma women regarding mainstream society, we see a widespread interest in increasing the first and decreasing the second.

In cases of **gender violence**, most women would resort to a relative rather than the standard resources to get a solution.

We find a breakthrough in **family planning**, as around 88% of participants have received sexual education and family planning.

Regarding **health**, greater self-care and more frequency in assistance to standard medical services is appreciated. Greater support in psychological issues is demanded, but they are insufficient.

The maintenance of **family** values is seen as a priority to which women are obliged. Older women refer how younger ones do not take the views, based on the experience of the relatives, into account; which attacks the basic pillars of Roma culture.

**Sexism** in performing household labour and family responsibilities is widespread, despite some progress among the younger generations.

Furthermore, we understand the **essential role of associations** as a work tool, which allows women to express themselves, share their concerns and fears, open up to new expectations, take challenges...

So, the **main causes of the lack of expectations** of Roma women are:

1. **The lack on training**, mainly driven by:
  - Discrimination in schools (segregation schools and lack of curricular inclusion of references to Roma culture)
  - Lack of measures to conciliate personal and work life especially considering family obligations supported by women.
  - Own cultural reasons, because education is not considered important for Roma women life.
2. **Discrimination:**

The discrimination caused by the diffusion of stereotypes in the mass media contributes on one hand to strengthen prejudicial ideas of mainstream society, and on the other hand means, in a intragroup way, that Roma women assume and fulfil roles and stereotypes held about them.
3. **Low self-esteem**, which prevents setting training or labour entrepreneur expectations which allows economical independence.
4. **A sexist division of roles**, which relegates women to inequality places.

All those result in the following **effects**:

1. **Early marriages:**

In a situation that disables Roma women to establish a system of individual expectations, early marriage is used as a coping strategy.
2. **Poverty:**

A woman with low skills to access employment, with medium and high qualification, with family responsibilities and lack of expectations is in the boundary of exclusion and poverty.

### **3. Feedback:**

All causes and effects described here feed off each other, generating an increase in geometric progression of the lack of expectations: the sooner women marry, the sooner they will bear more family responsibilities, will have less training, and endure a higher poverty and, of course, their expectations will be reduced, causing their self-esteem and motivation to fall.

Given all that has been exposed here, from National Federation of Roma Women Associations Kamira we **propose**:

#### **1. Goal 1: Promote the access to information and training as a mean of personal, social and economical development at the same level as men. Enhancing self-esteem of Roma women like a tool to improve their situation.**

##### **ACTIONS:**

- Development of research and knowledge about Roma women and their environment: problems and analysis of their reality.
- Promotion of co-educational projects to help overcome discriminatory attitudes both in the family and in the school environment, taking the cultural peculiarities into account, trying to overcome barriers which interfere with the basic rights for personal development.
- Incentives for Roma women to study and access the school environment by providing grants and specific aids. Contemplating in centre projects, features of its own idiosyncrasies, with the aim of finding cultural references in them.
- Promoting identity and Roma women image campaigns as a key element in the development and evolution for future generations.
- Adaptation of existing resources to the idiosyncrasies of this group, through the spread of educational material is aimed particularly to young Roma women.

#### **2. Goal 2: Development of education for health programs.**

##### **ACTIONS:**

- Better information and participation of Roma women in health care during pregnancy, childbirth and postpartum.
- Improvement of life quality, prevention of diseases and specific care in the most disadvantaged or with a higher risk, sectors in Roma women population.
- Convert Roma women themselves in health agents, so that they become spokespersons who serve the rest of their community, informing and advising about the reality of fundamental and basic sanitary issues from their own knowledge.
- Adequacy of family planning centres to the cultural traits of this group.

**3. Goal 3: Promote the full incorporation into the labour market with an adequate training.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Development of specific information and job counselling programs for Roma women, always taking advantage of the skills they have and from what they can do, easing their access to vocational training or other innovative work opportunities.
- Deepening the knowledge on the actual working conditions of Roma women.
- Coordination of support for projects that create work for Roma women, as well as aids and incentives to the sectors that hire these women.
- Development of financial assistance instruments for the creation of entrepreneurial activities or their improvement, or aimed to the insertion of women.
- Information, guidance, training and counselling targeted at women who want to start any kind of business.
- Organization of specific actions aimed at eliminating occupational segregation by gender and ethnicity.
- Establishment of measures to facilitate the temporary recruitment of women to replace disease licenses or leaves.
- Adequacy of childcare to working hours.

**4. Goal 4: Development of specific programs for Roma women.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Promote projects that allow the creation of groups aimed to improve Roma women self-esteem.
- Promote projects aimed at improving Roma women empowerment and emancipation.
- Recognize the contribution of Roma women to Roma culture and overall society, considering the diversity on the female gender as cross-cutting issues.
- Promote the creation of spaces shared by Roma women and men to analyse and deepen in the sexist relation that exist in the Roma community, with a special attention to youth.
- Analyse and study the current Roma women situation, establishing priorities and intervention models.
- Disclosure of all measures adopted on the various social levels, economic, health, etc., in those entities that provide resources and facilities to women in general, and particularly to those who are part of disadvantages groups.
- Public aids specific for Roma women.

**5. Goal 5: Support and promote the creation and development of Roma women associations.**

**ACTIONS:**

- Disclosure of entities or institutional channels that offer resources so that Roma women get to know the instruments at their disposal to get ahead and claim for their rights.
- Free use of premises used to headquarters, so that location does not constitute an obstacle to starting an association or meeting for problems and solutions sharing, or to share points of view.
- Technical support for the consolidation and development of projects, with the aim of finding maximum facilities to implement their ideas.
- Workshops and information campaigns to encourage the participation and creation of a network of associations of Roma women, so that they join criteria, becoming the fight for achieving specific targets stronger.
- Budget provision for the implementation of projects based on researches whose objective is to achieve equal opportunities for Roma women.
- Creation of an agency to ensure the decent treatment of minorities in media, giving priority to Roma community, with special attention to the treatment of Roma women (especially young women).