



WE OPPOSE THE CUSTOM, WE LOVE OURSELVES

**Early marriages of Roma girls:
The ticket for sexual violence**

**Association of Roma Novi Becej
Roma Women`s Center "Rromnjako Ilo" Zrenjanin
2017**

Authors:
*Association of Roma Novi Becej,
Roma Women`s Center “Rromnjako Ilo”- Zrenjanin*

Publisher:
*Roma Women`s Network of Banat,
Roma Women`s Network of Serbia*

Support:
Mama Cash, UNTF, OAK

Translation supported by:
UNDP Serbia

Translator:
Jasna Pantic

Serbian editing:
Veronika Mitro

Visuals and cover design: Hristina Piskulidis

Copies: 2000

**Translation is supported under the joint project
of the UN and the Government of the Republic of Serbia
“Integrated Response to Violence against Women
and Girls in Serbia II”
supported by the Sweden Government.**



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EARLY MARRIAGES

1. INTRODUCTION

Statistics

In Serbia most of half of Roma women (54%), aged 20 to 49, entered a marriage or some form of marital union before the 18 years of age and approximately 17% of them before the 15th birthday.

Almost a half (44%) of Roma girls aged 15 to 19 are in some form of marital union, approximately 14% of them had entered such arrangement before 15th birthday (some even before 12th) and one third of them became mothers before the 18th birthday.

(According to the records of the United Nations Fund for Population (UNFPA), Child Marriage in Serbia (Summary), 2014)

Among women from the Banat region in Vojvodina, who called for support of the SOS Helpline on minority languages, almost each Roma girl (average of 97%) had survived sexual violence.

(According to the records of the Association of Roma Novi Becej, 2016)

Approximately 70% of Roma women from the territory of the City of Krusevac gave birth to the first child before the 18th birthday.

(According to the research of the Association “Romani Cikna” on early and arranged marriages on the territory of the City of Krusevac, 2016)

In the world today, live 700 million of women who were married before the 18th birthday. If none world action against early marriages does not happen – total number of women married in their childhood until the 2050, will reach 1,2 billions.

(UNICEF, State of the World's Children, 2016)

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Constitution of the Republic of Serbia proclaims protection of a child from psychological, physical, economic and any other form of exploitation or abuse.

The Family Law proclaims that marriage can be made only on bases on the free will of future spouses, that marriages cannot be made by a person under the 18 years of age, but that the court can, due to justified reasons, approve marriages to a minor who is 16 years old and who had achieved bodily and mental maturity needed to accomplish rights and conducting marital duties.

Committee that conducts the implementation of the Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination of Women in 2007, gave to the Republic of Serbia the Final Comments on the periodic reports, where it calls the State to implement the minimum age limit for marriage of 18 years of age and to implement all measures for increasing the awareness on negative influences that early marriage has on accomplishment of women`s human rights.

Criminal Code proclaims sanctions for practicing early marriage. It proclaims the imprisonment sentences of 3 years for an adult person who lives in extramarital community with a minor (boy-girl), as well as a parent, or adoptive parent or guardian who allows or encourages a minor to live in the extramarital community with an adult person. The sentence of imprisonment is prescribed for person who unlawfully detains or deprives a minor from his/her parents, guardians or other person, or the intuitions to whom it was entrusted. The Criminal Code sanctions the perpetrators of the trafficking in minors by at least of 5 years of imprisonment, thereby, incriminating cases of early marriages with the acquisition of material gain, or the sale of girls to future spouses by the parents or guardian.

3. INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORK

The Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child of 1924, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989 clearly state that the child must be protected from all forms of exploitation and violence.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) from 1979 states that the engagement and entering into a marriage of a child can not have any legal consequences and that States parties must take all necessary measures, including legislative measures, to establish a minimum age for marriage at 18 years of age.

On December 19, 2016, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 71/175 on child, early and forced marriage recognizing gender inequality as the main cause of child, early and forced marriage and establishes the role and responsibility of UN member states in ending the practice of child, early and forced marriages.

Early marriages violate the basic right of children to be protected from violence.

- Early marriages are a form of violence against girls and women with the "consent of a society" - and they put the girls` at risk of sexual, physical, economic and psychological violence that they will experience throughout their lives.
- We will not be able to stop violence against women until the girls are sold to future spouses.
- In many cases, parents believe that it is in the best interests of their daughters to marry them while they are young and that the marriage will protect them from sexual violence. This belief is wrong; because often a wedding day is a form of sexual violence, and as younger the girl is the greater is the risk of experiencing violence that will have devastating long-term consequences on her the development and health.
- In the early marriage, girls are at risk of partner's violence, physical violence, sexual violence, economic violence, emotional violence, and the psychological pressure of a secondary family that limits a girl to make personal decisions about her life and body.
- Girls who are married in childhood most often describe their first sexual experience as forcible.
- We have to fight against practices that are harmful to girls and do not represent the value of any culture.

(Release Statements from Girlfriends Day, Girls Not Brides, 2014)

4. CHARACTERISTICS

Insights from women's workshops

Early marriages in Serbia are present in Roma and non-Roma communities. In the common culture and literature they are called differently: forced marriages, contractual marriages, arranged marriages, child marriages, underage marriages and sometimes we call them too-early marriages. In the Roma community, early marriages are commonplace and they are considered an important part of the Roma culture and tradition. They are 'arranged' in a manner where parents of girls arrange a marriage with parents of future spouses, as well as the amount of money they will receive for their daughters. "Contracting" implies that a girl is sold, that she must leave her primary family and that she will soon bear a child.

With this text, the activists of Roma women's organizations of the Roma Women's Network of Serbia wants to dissociate themselves from this custom and to disclose what women with the experience of an early marriage are silent about - early marriages and marital life before maturity are full of sexual, physical, economic and emotional violence and, for the majority of Roma women, represents a series of traumatic experiences of male violence against women that starts with the first wedding night and lasts for the rest of their lives.

Roma Women's Center Rromnjako Ilo and Association of Roma Novi Becej had organized workshops during 2016 and 2017 in which Roma women with early marriage experience participated. During workshops, they discussed how early, arranged marriage of Roma girls is interpreted in Roma settlements and what activists and feminists think about it.

They said the following:

- MARRIAGE OF ROMA GIRLS IS THE CUSTOM THAT MUST BE RESPECTED IN THE ROMA COMMUNITY, AND WITH WHICH MANY ROMA GIRLS AND ACTIVISTS DO NOT AGREE – “That is abuse of girls, they are in the position of slaves when they have to marry as children. Instead to play with dolls, they breastfeed babies”.
- MALE HEAD COMMANDS - “Males as heads of families in Roma community dictate women and men to obey with this form of abuse of girls.”
- DAMAGING GIRLS – “They are forced to satisfy sexual needs of their husbands, give birth and do housework as maids. No one ask them what they want.”
- PRESSURE FOR GIRLS AND SOMETIMES FOR BOYS – “Many girls resist and say they do not want to marry, but their voice is not heard, they voice has no value.”
- GIRLS LEAVE EDUCATION – “That is great injustice because Roma girls are dropping out from schools and being said: Why do you need a school?! You are a female, you’ll get married”.
- UNLAWFULLY CONCLUDED MARITAL COMMUNITY – “We do not agree with the custom that Roma community is proud of. Men had invented it, they have benefits, women only must agree with it”.

- **INSTITUTIONS DO NOT PERFORM THEIR DUTIES** – “If a girl does not want to marry and if someone who takes her side calls the Police to prevent the marriage, the Police officers usually say: “This is how they do it”. And they do nothing, unless a girl is abducted and both parents want to prevent the wedding. Institutions do not care for our Roma girls!”
- **EARLY MARIAGES ARE PERMIT FOR RAPE** – “There are not arguments that at the age of 15 she can enjoy the sexual act. It is always painful for her and unwanted when she is soled against her will, and how she can have a free will at the age of 15 to make such a huge life decision? Even if she likes a groom, she does not know what is waiting her later (meaning sexual abuse).”
- **OUR BODY FOR HIS SEXUAL “ABUSE”** – “It seems to me that marriages are used as legal permission for them to sexually ‘misuse’ and abuse us. They have a permission to do it everyday and we cannot say NO, since he will beat us afterwards. I sorry ourselves”.
- **THEY DISTROY US SO THAT SOMEONE WOULD NOT “DISTROY” US** – “They had always told me: Stay at home not be ‘destroyed’ by someone! And later it was that I should get marry as soon as possible so not to be destroyed. Nobody knew to explain what does it mean “someone to destroy me” and that I should not shame them...When the time came for me to get married I hoped to be something the most beautiful. They dressed me in white and the boy was beautiful. But many years later I had realized that with this marriage they destroyed me.”

- **DISCREPANCY OF THE LAW IMPLEMENTATION IN THE SENSE OF A CHILD TERM** – “ In our law a child is until the age of 18. But when we have a Roma girl who got married, meaning early, she is not recognized by the law as a child. If she wants to report violence – for the system she is ‘a woman survivor of violence’. Then we have a problem to prove that she is a child instead, who gave a birth to a child and that a child is a victim of sexual and physical violence.”
- **ABORTION CONCERNS** – “If a girl does not want to give birth, and that is something that she cannot even think about it since she is pressured by the community, that she must have children after the wedding, in such case a parent needs to agree, usually the same one who forced her to get married.”
- **ROMA LEADERS ARE EQUALLY RESPONSIBLE** – “Roma leaders equally promote enslaving of girls practicing early marriages of their children. They must understand that this is a crime over girls` childhoods and even over boys who are forced to sexuality that is not suitable for their age too.”
- **MOTHERS MUST DO THE SAME EVEN THEY SUFFERED BECAUSE OF IT** – “We know many mothers who soled daughters because they personally had passed trough such torture, but they must do it. Some of them regret later saying: What did I think about doing it?!”.

- **FORCED HETEROSEXUALITY** – “With 14 years of age they marry me, I did not know then that I can love women. When I discovered this now I am 40. Now I am happy, but with 14 I did not have the opportunity to choose.”
- **FORCED TO LIFE WITHOUT LOVE** – “Like this they force you to marriage, sometimes some fall in love with her husbands, but I do not know what love is. They had sold me at the age of 15 and I only suffered, I had never loved anyone.”
- **SEPARATION OF SISTERS** – “They had separated me from my sister and married her against her will. They took her far away and I had never seen her until recently. I always feel pain when I remember it.”

*I gave birth at the 14 and a half, and they said to me:
“You need a doll, not a child!”*

During workshops we had talked and recorded how in Roma settlements early marriages are explained and justified:

- Parents do not have to take care of a daughter anymore and to expose themselves to costs – “She belong to the other house”.
- Parents do not have to preserve a daughter’s virginity – “A mother is relieving for her efforts because her duty is to lock her so she would not go out, to guard a daughter not to shame her family.”
- There are not risks from abduction – “ In some settlements families fear that daughters might be abducted”.
- A family that had married a daughter had financial gain – “From the money we will marry a son, make a house, return debts...”
- A family deals easier with the poverty – “One mouth less to feed.”
- A family is safe that their daughter entered a marriage as virgin – “In such manner there are less chance for pre-martial sex which in Roma community represents a great shame.”

- Parents believe that she will fit easier in a new family if she is younger – “Young tree is banded much easily.”
- A girl to be married wants to accommodate parents` wishes - “I had to agree because of parents. My marriage was accomplishment of all their dreams.”
- A girl to be married wants to free her spot for marriage to younger sister – “The custom is to respect the line, firstly the oldest is soled and married and then the next one.”
- If daughter is younger the gain is bigger – “As younger a girl the bigger is the value. Just like a new car.”

5. SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST GIRLS AND WOMEN

Women's experiences

The most difficult thing was to speak about sexual violence during workshops in which Roma women had participated. It was especially difficult for them to link sexual violence with an early marriage – a custom deeply rooted in Roma culture and tradition. Roma women, speaking about early marriage, spoke sincerely and from personal experiences the following:

“Our wedding night was sexual violence against us!”

“We all love our Roma culture, but we do not love marriage in which we had experienced the first humiliation on the day we had entered it, and since that day we had only suffered humiliation and we suffer it even today.”

“I was a girl, they marry me young, I did not know what sex is. Not on the wedding night nor ever I had experienced any pleasure. I remember how I thought all the time during the wedding night that I am coming out of the bedroom, my mother hugs me and quietly, right beside my ear, says: You made me proud, my dearest! And at the same time, all my neighbors approach, cheerful and smiling and applauding.”

Very understandable fantasy since a family and neighbors usually await the result of the violence act. From Roma girls who are sexually abused by their husbands in the Roma community the result expected– blooded sheets. During the first wedding night act (mostly forcible) she must to satisfy a male expectations, a family expectation and expectation of the whole community. That is why they cannot talk about it, while others brag about with an act that is humiliating for a woman. Usually that night for a girl is remembrance of a great fear and pain.

Suffered fear and pain bring to the feelings of great humiliations and feeling of a great humiliation brings to the long term feeling of lower self-esteem and feeling that we are not good enough.

Later, during the marriage, many Roma women are exposed to sexual violence by their husbands. They have no one to talk about it, since it is considered to be their “marital duty”.

Experiences of female activists of Roma women’s organization of Roma Women’s Network of Banat and Roma Women’s Network of Serbia, who started to deal with violence against Roma women since 1999, is devastating: almost there are not Roma woman who did not suffer physical and sexual violence in a marriage.

With this text we want to point on severity of sexual crimes against girls and to make clear for parents that if they love their girls then the most important thing is to send them to schools and to support them to choose their first loves. Girls should choose their own sympathies, to decide for themselves whether they will be boys or girls, whether they will marry them or not and whom they will marry at all. Girls should individually choose whether they will have children or not and how many of them.

During workshops we had concluded that early marriages give legitimacy to different forms of sexual violence:

- RAPE DURING THE FIRST WEDDING NIGHT BY THE SPOUSE
- SEXUAL ABUSE BY A SPOUSE AND MARITAL RAPE
- SEXUAL ABUSE AND RAPE BY OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS

6. RAPE DURING THE FIRST WEDDING NIGHT BY THE SPOUSE

“Among us Roma, there is a custom to prove if the girl who is married is respectful in a manner that during the first wedding night we spread out the bed sheet. If on the bed sheet there are traces of blood that is the proof that a girl entered the marriage as virgin and that she is respectful one. I was very young and I did not know what that was, nor I did know my obligations, I was only 14.

After the persistently insisting by my mother to prove that I am respectful, my husband insisted to have sex with me during the first night. I didn't want to do it, but he was violent and accomplished what his mind had set. He was persistent and I did not have a choice instead to let it go. It was horrible and painful, I suffered and I had felt bad afterwards. I cried. I had thrown the bed sheet in one whole, I was afraid when I saw a blood on it. Tomorrow morning my mother had come to our house and when she heard what had happened she was very satisfied. She took the bed sheet from the whole and showed it to everybody.”

“Marriage for me is a remembrance on sexual violence; I was young, 14 years of age. I did not know him; my parents had forced me to marriage. That night meant the end of my fortune. I told him that I do not want to do it, after that I had shut it up. Now I know it was a rape, then –I was horrified. Everything hurt me. The lower part of my body had stiffed and I did not feel anything anymore. Later, I stayed silent and cried. I had a feeling that I was betrayed by my family and by the whole world. The joy I had as a happy girl I did not gain back ever. There was nobody that I could tell what had happened to me because all shared the opinion that this is how it should be. When I grew up, despite everything, I had finished a high school and later I had read articles on sexual violence. Then it became clearer that I had experienced violence. I got divorced.”

“I also passed the same and I know that the first wedding night is a rape and that after that every woman who experiences the same will be forever sad. Then I did not know that women who love women exist. Now I freed myself from men and I feel much better. Now I love women.”

“I managed twice to save myself from a marriage since I attended a school. However, for the third time it was not possible anymore. They married me at the age of 14 for a boy that I somehow knew. They had sold me as a thing for small cash. They dressed me in a white wedding dress, all were happy and all drunk on my wedding... Only I was sitting sad and watching...don` t know what I was watching... When the midnight passed, my hell opened. They took me to the room, undressed me naked to see if I don` t have some item with me. When they became sure that I do not have anything with me, they told me to prepare for my husband. I will never forget that night. Like I got free out of my body and watched from aside what he is doing to me. And he did a lot. That night...he had sex with me nine times while all guests had waited for us to finish. I cried so he did too. I do not know why...After the ninth time he gave up... Went outside and then his ants, sisters and mother entered. They pulled the bed sheet underneath me and said: Where it is, where? Then my sister came in and said: There it is! They all started to cry, allegedly due to happiness. They took the bed sheet out and then the real celebration started. I stayed alone in the bed wanting to die. Not being aware what was happening I reconciled with destiny, I believed that this is how it should be.”

7. SEXUAL ABUSE BY A SPOUSE AND MARITAL RAPE

“I was girl aged 12 when I was given. I did not know what marriage is and what they will do to me. Afterwards was even worse then at the beginning. I was 14 when I gave birth to the first child and at the age of 18 I already had 4 of them. He did not ask me anything, I did not know when I had stayed pregnant.”

“After the wedding I had left to Vienna. My husband had lived there. When I came, I realized that he is already married and that I am tricked. It was a start of the life about which I do not want to think about. One woman was in one room and me in another. She was pregnant. He forced me and her to sex, but because she was pregnant she had an “excuse”. That is why he brought me. It was terrible; I don’t know how I survived a month.”

“He had raped me hundred times, it is hard to speak about it and he hit me whenever I did not want to have sex. Nobody asked me anything and I was raised to know that a girl must listen to older persons. This is how they stole me and marry and I did not know him at all. Rape and molesting was constant. Once I said NO and he hit me several times with a tick metal bar over my legs. Even today a carry scars. That was the end. Children already became old enough and then I said: Now it is the end! I had left him and said myself that is the last man in my life. There must be something more beautiful in life then this! Now I dress myself in such way not to draw men’s attention, just to leave me alone and to be more beautiful for women.”

“I know, I also spoke to myself: Just hold on for two minutes. A close my eyes so that I have peace, not to allow him to molest me. If you say NO, he says that you a slut, that you are cheating him with others and then the violence starts.”

“I am embarrassed to leave, I am not a girl anymore, but still not a woman. What I am now? I have to suffer, close my eyes and let him rape me, it will end fast...He is a man and I must please him, I am not important...”

“I am afraid of the night...When the night falls I die, every evening, because HE is coming – my death. When the night falls, that is like a black devil, you want to drink something to disappear. Every evening you are afraid of the night, fearing of what it will bring.”

“Many women run to their children, saying that they are ill, to have women’s things, to have a stomach pains...I do not know a woman who said that she enjoys in that.”

“Every night when he would come home he would rape me. We were poor, all three of us had lived in one room. At the evening a fear shakes my bones because I know what will happen. I told him: You cannot do it, our son is in a room. He did not mind. Every night he did this to me. I felt like I am his slave. Like a slave forced to the worse torture. Every time I wanted to leave, my mother said to me: You shouldn’t! You must suffer, I suffered it too. He abused me like this for eight years until I got enough strength to leave him. I cannot stand to look men after this.”

“When I was a small I saw women running through their yards at night. Running to their mothers or neighbors, sisters...just not to be in a house and in the morning they come back because of children.”

“I remember when I was a young girl in the middle of a night one cousin came to our place crying. I was afraid and did not understand what all was about.”

“Two months were great, I even fell in love with him, we could not be without each other. Both of us would cry when we had to separate from each other even for a single day. Then he had left to his parents abroad for several days to bring home some goods which sale would provide us some money to live. He returned and then the hell broke loose. He forced me to have sex with him every night knowing that this hurts me. Every time when I would reject he would board me, pulling my hair calling me bad words. I remember one night, he came home, he was sober, but was very jealous. He asked me whom I met today. I told him that I did not leave a house. He did not believe me. He stated to hit me with fists until I fainted, then he would pour a water on me to wake me up. When I would open my eyes he would be saying to me: Who hit you, what happened, why are you crying? And it was like that the whole night. I was very sick that night, my jaw started to stiff; he would give me medicines to make it pass. And when it all passed he placed me into the truck and went to kill us both. He was speeding with the truck and then suddenly pushed brakes to scare me. At the end he had left me at my mother's place and went to kill himself. He did not kill himself that night. I forgave him and returned to him. Violence increased from day to day and I was always returning to him. I loved him that is why. I had always blamed myself, I thought this is how it should be. Until one day I could not suffer anymore and left him. He threatened with a suicide and with killing my parents. I did not trust him anymore, I resented him. I wasn't aware of a violence that I was suffering, I stayed at my mother's place and she had sent me to another town to keep me away from him. I do not know how I saw the SOS Helpline number. I called and I was silent, I did not speak for a long time, did not know what to say. Somehow the communication started and only then I had realized what happened to me. I stated with different counseling which helped me to overcome what I was exposed to. Now I am empowered and I know my rights and I encourage women with similar experiences as mine not to suffer violence. I know that I did the best I could to survive and to stay normal”

8. SEXUAL ABUSE AND RAPE BY OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS

When a son is not ready for an intercourse, then father does it in his name. Often from this physical action a child is born and nobody should know whose child is that. All kept quiet; even if it is a public secret. And a girl has no rights to say anything.

One woman had told me that one of her relatives said when he got married: My daughter will not marry just like that, I will be with her first and then her husband.

My uncles had sold me because I did not know my father. I was 13, he had 12. When we had entered the room, my mother in law had pushed me on the bed and asked me if I maybe have a menstruation. Then I did not know what that is. She had told me to lay down and to spread my legs. She came out of the room and then the father in law came. He said that since his son cannot sleep with me, he will do it instead. I stated to cry loud. Then the mother in law came in the room again and stated to hit me and screaming at me that they had paid my mother for this. They both stated to hit me until I lost consciousness. When I woke up I was in a hospital. There I had found out that my father in law had raped me.

My father was an alcoholic. Everyday he came home dead drunk and found millions of reasons to hit my mother and me. Mother had died from cancer early. My brother who was two years younger than me and me had stayed. We all had lived in a single room. One night the father came home dead drunk..., got naked and laid next to me. I started to push him away from him, begging him to leave. He had lied on me.

He closed my mouth with one hand and stated to rip my T-shirt and rape me. Then the brother appeared above him and hit him with a stick on the head. He made him lose consciousness and I stated to shake and cry. The brother just told me: Go, run away and do not ever come back.

I was only 15 when my cousins called my parents that they had found 'a good chance' for me. I did not want to get married, but I wanted to help my parents since the sum of 12.000 euro offered for me was very tempting for my father. He thought that this would save him from poverty and that they could buy a house for that sum of money. I saw my husband on the wedding day for the first time; he was a person with disability. He was in a wheelchair and we did not know that. When my father saw it he wanted to end the ceremony, but I did not let him. I knew that this money would mean a roof over their head. My life with this boy and his parents was a nightmare. Mother in law was beating me so hard that I was blue from the head to the toe. He told me that I am incompetent and all because I was not able to have sexual intercourse with her son. He had the problem, he was in a wheelchair and I was a child. One night she came to the room, undressed me, ordered me to undress him and assisted with the sexual act. She was present during it, I was so ashamed, felt like the most worthless being on the planet. I immediately stayed pregnant and physical and mental abuse continued even during pregnancy.

The UN Commission on the Status of Women in the document on the gender equality and progress of Women in 2013 had recognized that child marriage as a form of violence and required the ending of such a practice.

9. RECCOMENDATIONS FOR COMPLETE TERMINATION OF THE PRACTICE OF EARLY MARRIAGES

Message of the female activists of Roma women`s organizations of the Roma Women`s Network of Serbia is that early marriages are a form of violence against girls that must not be justified by the custom, tradition or culture. We believe that the practice of early marriages is not part of the culture; it is a form of violence. Girls, later women in such marriages do not recognize sexual pleasure. It is reserved only for men. There is the term "sexual slavery" that describes a crime in which women have no rights - women detained without their will, who can not leave imprisonment, while men sexually exploit them. We believe that lives of many women in early marriages are forms of sexual slavery because they are not asked to give approval. Beside that, early marriages are cruel form of forced heterosexuality- women, and men even, absolutely have no opportunity to choose their sexual orientation.

During meetings and workshops with Roma women during 2016 and 2017, organized by Association of Roma Novi Becej, many girls and women were angry that the custom of early marriage is still present in Roma community.

10. SUMMARIZING OUR VIEWS AND DEMANDS

Roma women activists say:

“Sexual violence and sexual abuse of minors is criminal act. There are no excuses!”

“Roma girls must be supported by the law and with its unconditional implementation.”

“Roma leaders must take the strong attitude that early marriages are not Roma tradition, but the criminal act.”

“Girls, victims of early marriages must be supported through psychological counseling, emotional support, medical assistance, safe spaces, returned to educational system, supported in self-employment and employment. That is responsibility of the State after so many years of tolerating such practice!”

“Women’s organizations in the country need to be educated on the issue of harmfulness of early marriages and to take clear attitude that it is ‘not normal’ to marry girls.”

“Activist of Roma women’s organizations will work on changing practice and creating the new future for Roma children. We are those who give power to children to end education, to accomplish themselves and then choose what they want to do in their lives.”

“We want to support mothers and daughters in activism with the goal to strengthen their will and change awareness on early marriages – to open them doors of different choices, other possibilities for their children.”

“Roma women’s organizations will work on mapping and presentation of positive examples as models of changing traditional patterns in Roma community.”

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Early marriages and marital lives made before adult age are full of sexual, physical, economical and emotional violence and for majority of Roma women represent a series of traumatic experiences of a male violence against women that start with the rape on the wedding night and last until the rest of their lives.

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Activists of Roma women`s organizations will work on changing the practice and creating the new future of Roma children.