

Gender Dimension of Roma National Minority
Councils in the Republic of Croatia:
Case Study



BEST PRACTICES
for
ROMA INTEGRATION
in the Western Balkans

Author: Siniša-Senad Musić
Research adviser: Svetlana Đurđević-Lukić



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Author:

Siniša Senad Musić

Research adviser:

Svetlana Đurđević-Lukić

Translation:

Tatjana Čosović

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Author: Siniša Senad Musić
December 2013.



Born in Zagreb, **Siniša-Senad Musić** is a final year student at the Split University, finishing the programme for accounting and finance. He works at the Roma National Minority Council and is also a member of the Government Office for the Implementation of the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion, 2013-2020. He is the present of the Roma Youth Organization.

For **Svetlana Đurđević-Lukić**, the research adviser, working on this study was a rare opportunity to devote enough time to a young researcher. Siniša's enthusiasm, her willingness to both work in the field and accept advice on the structuring the study, made the work a true pleasure. The concept of mentoring a young person with roots in the Roma community and authentic interests in its progress, so as to show a visible result within a short period of time (i.e. a specific study available to the general public), should definitely continue to be used in the future.



Given the size of the Roma population in the settlement of **Capraške poljane** (around 1,700 inhabitants) and the compact nature of the community, the county council has always included only Roma councillors from this settlement. This segregated Roma settlement is located in the industrial zone of the City of Sisak. Capraške poljane is not a legalised settlement. Settlement inhabitants do not have access to public transport, though the transport of school children is ensured. Electricity was recently introduced and the majority of inhabitants live in brick houses. The representation of Roma women in the Roma county council is average for the Republic of Croatia, in terms of numbers at least.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rights of national minorities in the Republic of Croatia are guaranteed by the Constitution and the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities. One of the rights of national minorities is their participation in public life and administration of local affairs, through the establishment of national minority councils. Members of national minorities may elect national minority councils in those local or regional self-government units in which they account for at least 1.5% of the total population and/or in which they number 200 persons in a local self-government or 500 persons in a regional self-government unit.¹

According to available data, 18 Roma national councils – seven county, six municipal and five city councils were registered in Croatia in 2013. Roma women are not represented in one third of Roma councils. These councils also include the Roma national council of the Međimurska county – the only county council without a woman among its ranks, even though the largest number of Roma national minority members live in the Međimurska county. The Roma national minority council in the Darda municipality has the largest number of women – 40%, which represents the percentage ensuring equal representation of genders under the Gender Equality Act.

1 The Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities, III. National Minority Councils and Representatives in Self-Government Units, Article 24, paragraph 1; <http://www.zakon.hr/z/295/Ustavni-zakon-o-pravima-nacionalnih-manjina>.

As Roma national minority councils are the most accessible forums for the engagement of Roma community members, the participation of Roma women in their operation has been examined as an indicator of the degree of exclusion of Roma women from public life. The representation of women equals 9.43% in municipal Roma national minority councils, 12% in city councils, and 15.43% in county councils. The average representation of women in all Roma minority councils together equals 13.53%. Roma national minority councils number 303 members (the council of the Petrijanec municipality has only three members), of whom 262 men and 41 women. Chairpersons of Roma national minority councils are only men.²

The comparison of data has revealed a significantly lower average representation of women in Roma national minority councils than in other national minority councils. What is particularly worrying is that even six Roma minority councils do not have even one Roma woman among their ranks³, while this is not the case with councils of other national minorities⁴.

The present research is based on a case study. The field research was conducted in the Sisačko-moslavačka county – **the Roma national minority council of the Sisačko-moslavačka county** and **the Roma national minority council of the City of Sisak**. The representation of Roma women in the county council is average for Roma national minority councils in the Republic of Croatia, whilst their representation in the city council is somewhat above average.

Roma women are often subject to double discrimination – on national grounds by the majority population and on gender grounds by the Roma community.⁵ Their level of education is lower and they less frequently enter into employment compared to Roma men.⁶ Judging by available data, only 5.2% of Roma women completed secondary school or university.⁷ In regard to employment, mere

2 Marginal errors are possible as data on women represented in councils are determined based on councillors' names.

3 Women are not represented at all in Roma national minority councils of the Međimurska county, municipalities of Pribislavec, Orehovica, Subotica and Petrijanec, and the City of Čakovec.

4 The representation of women ranges between 18.18% and 40% in Serbian national minority councils, between 36% and 66.67% in Italian national minority councils, and between 32% and 40% in Bosniak national minority councils.

5 Perić, Tatjana: "Ljudska prava Romkinja u jugoistočnoj Europi" (*Human Rights of Roma Women in Southeastern Europe*), Journal for Politics, Gender, and Culture; Vol. 4 No.1/2, Summer/Winter 2005. The paper elaborates on double discrimination; http://www.academia.edu/3795383/At_the_crossroad_Human_rights_of_Romani_women_in_South_East_Europe.

6 Šikić-Mičanović, Lynette, "Romkinje i uvjeti njihova života" (*Roma Women and their Life Conditions*), Zagreb, 2005; and Baranović, Branislava, "Istraživanje žena Romkinja 'Bolja Budućnost', Život Romkinja u Hrvatskoj s naglaskom na pristup obrazovanju" (*Research of Roma Women 'Better Future', Life of Roma Women in Croatia, with Emphasis on Access to Education*), January 2009; http://www.ijf.hr/socijalna_ukljucenost/adminmax/files/lzvjestaj_ZivotiObrazRomkinja.pdf.

7 Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities: National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the 2013–2020 period; November 2011; "Romkinje zapošljavanje i uključivanje u gospodarski život" (*Employment and Inclusion of Roma Women into Economic Life*), p. 50; <http://www.ured-ravnopravnost.hr/site/images/pdf/64-16.pdf>.

7% of women enter into employment relative to 16% of men.⁸ However, being exposed to double discrimination, Roma women are not devoted sufficient attention as most measures are aimed at resolving problems regarding the entire community.

There are two main reasons behind the insufficient representation of Roma women in councils and insufficient activity of those Roma women who are council members: (a) the patriarchal system in which Roma women are brought up, and (b) very low education. To ensure progress, further efforts should be invested in the field of education and criteria should be raised in regard to the councilors' degree of education (literacy must be required). Besides, incentive measures should be introduced for councils to meet gender representation requirements, and Roma women need to be informed about the councils' role and their possible engagement.

8 Baranović, Branislava, "Istraživanje žena Romkinja 'Bolja Budućnost', Život Romkinja u Hrvatskoj s naglaskom na pristup obrazovanju", (*Research of Roma Women 'Better Future, Life of Roma Women in Croatia, with Emphasis on Access to Education*), January 2009, p. 40; http://www.ijf.hr/socijalna_ukljucenost/adminmax/files/Izvjestaj_ZivotiObrazRomkinja.pdf.

2. METHODOLOGY

Prior to field work, available data and analyses were compiled about the status of the Roma community in the Republic of Croatia and the relevant legal framework. The documents examined include the Croatian Constitution, Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities, Act on Upbringing and Education in Primary and Secondary Schools, Gender Equality Act, National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the 2013–2020 period, Action Plan Implementing the National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the 2013–2020 period, and other studies and reports which provided a better insight into the status of Roma women and the Roma community in Croatia.

The research is based on a case study and the Sisačko-moslavačka county was chosen for the field research. The Roma national minority council of the Sisačko-moslavačka county and the Roma national minority council of the City of Sisak are active in the territory of the Sisačko-moslavačka county. The representation of Roma women in the Roma county council is average for Roma national minority councils in the Republic of Croatia, whilst their representation in the Roma city council is somewhat above average.

The research was implemented based on semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. All interviews contained questions relating to the representation of Roma women in Roma national minority councils, the operation of these councils, the status of Roma women in society and within the Roma community, and recommendations to raise representation and improve the councils' work. The diversity of female participants in two focus groups was ensured in terms

of education, age, employment, family status, and the narrow area of residence (city, Roma community).

The field research was conducted in October and November 2013 and involved interviews with 26 persons. Nine men and six women were interviewed. Only women – 15 of them, participated in focus groups. To ensure data crucial for understanding the work of councils and Roma women in them, including the councillors' view of Roma issues, we conducted interviews with chairmen of both councils, and with two male and two female council members.

Though the focus of the research was placed on the Sisačko-moslavačka county, to gain insight into a wider picture and compare different experiences, a smaller number of interviews was held with Roma representatives of both genders outside of this territory. For the sake of comparison, we interviewed the chairman of the Roma national minority council of the Darda municipality, which has the highest representation of Roma women in Croatia. Aiming to obtain the broadest possible picture about Roma women issues and the council work, we also interviewed an MP who represents the Roma national minority in Croatia. To identify specific problems of the Roma community in the Sisačko-moslavačka county, two female presidents of Roma associations were also interviewed, as well as a years-long Roma activist and president of the Roma humanitarian association "Nova sreća".⁹


Twenty two persons were interviewed in this county, which represents 1.50% of the Roma registered in this territory, or 4.78% of the number of registered Roma voters.¹⁰ The Roma population is young and the research focused on members with the voting right (18 years of age and above). The percentage of around 5% of interviewed members of the target group may be considered representative in terms of official records. According to official records, the Sisačko-moslavačka county ranks fourth in regard to the number of Roma in Croatia: it numbers 1,463 members of the Roma national minority, of whom 648 live in Sisak and make up 1.36% of total population of the City of Sisak.¹¹ The largest number of Roma – 1,700 of them, live in the segregated settlement of Capraške poljane, in the territory of the City of Sisak.¹² This number does not correspond to official statistics as numerous Roma do not declare themselves as such in population censuses.

9 The complete list of interviewed persons, with dates and locations, is contained in the Annex to this document. One interviewed person and one female focus group participant did not wish to have their names published in the paper.

10 The percentage of 1.5% was obtained based on data from the Croatian 2011 Census of the Population, Households and Dwellings. The percentage of 4.78% is based on the number of registered voters, specified in the decision of the County Election Commission of the Sisačko-moslavačka county, class: 013-01/11-01/02; No: 2167-01-01/01-11-184; Sisak, 11 July 2011.

11 The 2011 Census of the Population, Households and Dwellings: Population Census according to Nationality and Cities/Households – Excel table.

12 Interview with the chairman of the Roma national minority council of the Sisačko-moslavačka county. There are around 1,700 Roma in the settlement. The number does not correspond to data from the population census as many Roma did not declare themselves as such in the census.



This paper explores the exceptionally low visibility of Roma women in public life. The degree of exclusion of Roma women from public life was explored in terms of their participation in Roma national minority councils as the most accessible forums for the engagement of Roma community members. To gain insight into the gender dimension of Roma national minority councils, data on the representation of Roma women in councils and their committees were collected and presented. Afterwards, the qualitative research in the territory of one county was conducted to examine the degree of activity of Roma women in the councils, the reasons for their (in)sufficient representation in Roma national minority councils and their committees, and the awareness of Roma leaders, the Roma community and women themselves about Roma women as a specially vulnerable group within the Roma community in Croatia. The second objective of the research was to draft recommendations aimed at improving gender representation in Roma national minority councils.

3. LEGAL AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

3.1. Constitution and laws regulating the rights of national minorities and gender equality

The provisions on historical foundations of the Croatian Constitution define the Republic of Croatia as the nation state of the Croatian nation and the state of members of its national minorities: Serbs, Czechs, Slovaks, Italians, Hungarians, Jews, Germans, Austrians, Ukrainians, Rusyns, Bosniaks, Slovenians, Montenegrins, Macedonians, Russians, Bulgarians, Poles, Roma, Romanians, Turks, Vlachs, Albanians and others who are its citizens and who are guaranteed equality with citizens of Croatian nationality and the exercise of their national rights in compliance with the democratic norms of the United Nations and the countries of the free world.¹³ National and gender equality and other values are defined as the highest values of the constitutional order of the Republic of Croatia and serve as the basis for interpreting the Constitution.¹⁴ Furthermore, the Constitution guarantees rights and freedoms to all persons in the Republic of Croatia, regardless

13 Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, consolidated, historical foundations; <http://www.zakon.hr/z/94/Ustav-Republike-Hrvatske>.

14 Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, consolidated, basic provisions, Article 3, <http://www.zakon.hr/z/94/Ustav-Republike-Hrvatske>.

of gender and national origin.¹⁵ The Constitution also guarantees a special right of national minorities to elect their representatives to the Croatian Parliament.¹⁶

The Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities defines the rights of national minorities. It guarantees the rights to upbringing and education in their language and script, self-organisation and association in pursuit of their common interests, participation in representative bodies at the national and local levels, and in administrative and judicial bodies, and participation in public life and management of local affairs through national minority councils and representatives.¹⁷

Under the Gender Equality Act, adopted on 15 July 2008, gender equality means that women and men are equally present in all spheres of public and private life, that they have equal status, equal opportunities to exercise all their rights, and equal benefit from the achieved results. The Act also prohibits discrimination based on marital and family status. Discrimination is also considered any unfavourable treatment of women based on pregnancy and motherhood.

The Act envisages special measures in cases when one gender is underrepresented in bodies of legislative, executive or judicial power, with a view to achieving its sufficient representation. Gender representation below 40% is considered insufficient. Though the Act does not explicitly relate to national minority councils, it may be applied to these bodies as well, particularly in the part prescribing the need for the implementation of measures in cases of underrepresentation of one gender.

15 Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, consolidated, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, common provisions, Article 14, <http://www.zakon.hr/z/94/Ustav-Republike-Hrvatske>.

16 Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, consolidated, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, common provisions, Article 15, <http://www.zakon.hr/z/94/Ustav-Republike-Hrvatske>.

17 Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities, basic provisions, Article 7, <http://www.zakon.hr/z/295/Ustavni-zakon-o-pravima-nacionalnih-manjina>.

3.2. Strategic framework

The Croatian Government recognised the Roma national minority as particularly vulnerable since its position is characterised by exclusion in terms of education, housing, healthcare, employment and participation in the economy. To improve the status of Roma, the National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the 2013–2020 period was adopted (hereinafter: the Strategy)¹⁸, followed by the Action Plan Implementing the Strategy¹⁹. These two documents prescribe the measures which guarantee to the Roma community additional rights, along with the rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities. The Republic of Croatia has ensured additional funds for the implementation of affirmative measures, envisaged by the Strategy in the fields of education, employment, inclusion into economic life, healthcare, social welfare, spatial planning, housing, environmental protection, inclusion into social and cultural life, status issues, curbing discrimination and providing aid in exercising rights by the Roma national minority.

The Roma civil sector is rather developed and numbers over two hundred of Roma associations.²⁰ In the Roma civil sector, there are associations dealing with the position of Roma women in Croatia, such as the association of Roma women in Croatia “Bolja Budućnost”, “Romkinja za Romkinju”, association for better life of Roma women “Traipe”, association of Roma women “Kašmir” etc.

Roma women are recognised as a group in a particularly difficult situation within the Roma community, which is described as an exceptionally patriarchal community.²¹ The unfavourable position of Roma women has been recognised by all countries in the region.²² With a view to promoting the issue of Roma women, it was proposed at the regional conference “Roma Women in the Decade” that all countries taking part in the Decade ensure the introduction of gender dimension in national strategic documents, involve Roma women in the development

18 Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities: National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the 2013–2020 period; November 2011; <http://www.ured-ravnopravnost.hr/site/images/pdf/64.-16.pdf>.

19 Croatian Government: Action Plan Implementing the National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the 2013–2020 period, April 2013; http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_hr_strategy_annex_hr.pdf.

20 Register of associations of the Republic of Croatia; <http://www.applpravna.hr/RegistarUdruga/login>. The names of over two hundred of associations contain the words such as “Rom” (*Roma man*), “Romkinja” (*Roma woman*), “romsko”, “romske”, “romski” (*Romani*) etc.

21 Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities: National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the 2013–2020 period; November 2011; <http://www.ured-ravnopravnost.hr/site/images/pdf/64.-16.pdf>; Baranović, Branislava, “Istraživanje žena Romkinja ‘Bolja Budućnost’, Život Romkinja u Hrvatskoj s naglaskom na pristup obrazovanju”, (*Research of Roma Women ‘Better Future’, Life of Roma Women in Croatia, with Emphasis on Access to Education*), January 2009. http://www.ijf.hr/socijalna_ukljucenost/adminmax/files/Izvjestaj_ZivotiObrazRomkinja.pdf.

22 Regional conference “Roma Women in the Decade”, held on 13 and 14 May 2010, with participation of 80 persons from Croatia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Hungary; http://www.romskosrce.hr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=97:zavrena-regionalna-konferencija-romkinje-u-dekadi&catid=43:projekti.

and implementation of strategic documents, and the establishment of conditions for equal political participation of Roma women.

Roma women are often subject to double discrimination – on national grounds by the majority population and on gender grounds by the Roma community.²³ Their level of education is lower and they less frequently enter into employment compared to Roma men.²⁴ Judging by available data, only 5.2% of Roma women completed secondary school or university.²⁵ In regard to employment, mere 7% of women enter into employment relative to 16% of men.²⁶ However, being exposed to double discrimination, Roma women are not devoted sufficient attention as most measures are aimed at resolving problems regarding the entire community.

The Action Plan Implementing the National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the 2013–2020 period envisages only three measures directly targeting Roma women. The first measure concerns the preparation and implementation of the workshop on active job seeking, tailored for Roma women.²⁷ The second measure envisages education and encouragement of Roma women to get involved in female entrepreneurship programmes and other programmes of competent bodies targeted at women.²⁸ The third measure relates to the implementation of programmes and projects aimed at organising medical check-ups for Roma women, and includes free transportation for these purposes.²⁹

23 Perić, Tatjana: "Ljudska prava Romkinja u jugoistočnoj Europi" (*Human Rights of Roma Women in Southeastern Europe*), *Journal for Politics, Gender, and Culture*; Vol. 4 No.1/2, Summer/Winter 2005. The paper elaborates on double discrimination; http://www.academia.edu/3795383/At_the_crossroad_Human_rights_of_Romani_women_in_South_East_Europe.

24 Šikić-Mičanović, Lynette, "Romkinje i uvjeti njihova života" (*Roma Women and their Life Conditions*), Zagreb, 2005; and Baranović, Branislava, "Istraživanje žena Romkinja 'Bolja Budućnost', Život Romkinja u Hrvatskoj s naglaskom na pristup obrazovanju" (*Research of Roma Women 'Better Future', Life of Roma Women in Croatia, with Emphasis on Access to Education*), January 2009; http://www.ijf.hr/socijalna_ukljucenost/adminmax/files/lzvjestaj_ZivotiObrazRomkinja.pdf.

25 Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities: National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the 2013–2020 period; November 2011; "Romkinje zapošljavanje i uključivanje u gospodarski život" (*Employment and Inclusion of Roma Women into Economic Life*), p. 50; <http://www.ured-ravnopravnost.hr/site/images/pdf/64.-16.pdf>.

26 Baranović, Branislava, "Istraživanje žena Romkinja 'Bolja Budućnost', Život Romkinja u Hrvatskoj s naglaskom na pristup obrazovanju", (*Research of Roma Women 'Better Future', Life of Roma Women in Croatia, with Emphasis on Access to Education*), January 2009, p. 40; http://www.ijf.hr/socijalna_ukljucenost/adminmax/files/lzvjestaj_ZivotiObrazRomkinja.pdf.

27 Croatian Government: Action Plan Implementing the National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the 2013–2020 period, April 2013; p. 26; http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_hr_strategy_annex_hr.pdf.

28 Croatian Government: Action Plan Implementing the National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the 2013–2020 period, April 2013; p. 26–27; http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_hr_strategy_annex_hr.pdf.

29 Croatian Government: Action Plan Implementing the National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the 2013–2020 period, April 2013; p. 42; http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_hr_strategy_annex_hr.pdf.

The Action Plan envisages a number of measures focusing on women, but not exclusively tailored for women. Given the problems that Roma women face, the above three measures geared directly at Roma women cannot be sufficient to improve their situation. The problems of Roma women are often not visible to the majority community nor are they recognised within the Roma community. Most Roma women live in segregated Roma settlements, while only 3.54% of them spent the average number of years in education. These are, together with early parenthood (15–18 years of age), the main reasons behind the exclusion of Roma women from public, social and political life.³⁰

3.3. Conditions of establishment and powers of national minority councils

Members of national minorities establish councils to participate in public life and management of local affairs.³¹ Members of national minorities may elect national minority councils in those local or regional self-government units in which they account for at least 1.5% of the total population and/or in which they number 200 persons in a local self-government or 500 persons in a regional self-government unit. Ten members are elected to municipal national minority councils, 15 members to city, and 25 members to county national minority councils.³² A national minority council is a non-profit legal person.³³ National minority councils in self-government units are entitled to the following:

- propose to bodies of self-government units measures to improve the position of the respective national minority nationally or in a specific area, including proposals for general ordinances to regulate issues relevant to that national minority;
- nominate candidates for posts in the civil service and the bodies of self-government units;
- be informed of any issue to be discussed by the committees of the representative bodies of a self-government unit that are relevant to the status of that national minority;

30 Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities: National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the 2013–2020 period; November 2011. The position of Roma women and inequality within the Roma community are described in the Strategy by different fields (healthcare, employment, education etc).

31 Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities; Councils and Representatives in Self-Government Units, Article 23, <http://www.zakon.hr/z/295/Ustavni-zakon-o-pravima-nacionalnih-manjina>

32 Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities; Councils and Representatives in Self-Government Units, Article 24, <http://www.zakon.hr/z/295/Ustavni-zakon-o-pravima-nacionalnih-manjina>

33 Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities; Councils and Representatives in Self-Government Units, Article 25, <http://www.zakon.hr/z/295/Ustavni-zakon-o-pravima-nacionalnih-manjina>

- provide opinions and submit proposals pertaining to local and regional radio and television broadcasts intended for national minorities or addressing minority issues.³⁴

Roma national minority councils in the Sisačko-moslavačka county and the City of Sisak are not able to exercise these rights because the Roma population does not meet the required threshold. To guarantee representation in the bodies of a county/city, the national minority must account for more than 5% and less than 15% of its population.³⁵ In Croatia, there are no television and radio stations owned by the Roma minority or on which the Roma community may exert influence. National minorities are represented on national television only through the show “Prizma” and “Manjinski mozaik” (*Minority Mosaic*). The county and city Roma councils are thus able to exercise two of their four fundamental rights.

Candidates for membership of national minority councils may be nominated by national minority associations or at least 20 members of a national minority living in the territory of a municipality, 30 living in the territory of a city, and 50 in the territory of a county.³⁶ Members of national minority councils are elected by direct secret ballot for a four-year term. Members of a national minority council elect the chairman by secret vote. As a rule, members perform their duties on a voluntary basis and with diligence of a prudent businessman. However, council members may receive funds from national minority councils solely for the reimbursement of costs that they incur in the performance of their council-related duties and for rewards, on a monthly basis or otherwise, if approved by the minister in charge of general administrative affairs.³⁷ Self-government units must ensure funds for the work and administrative activities of the council, and may ensure funds also for other council activities.

34 Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities; Councils and Representatives in Self-Government Units, Article 31, <http://www.zakon.hr/z/295/Ustavni-zakon-o-pravima-nacionalnih-manjina>.

35 Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities; Councils and Representatives in Self-Government Units, Article 20, <http://www.zakon.hr/z/295/Ustavni-zakon-o-pravima-nacionalnih-manjina>.

36 Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities; Councils and Representatives in Self-Government Units, Article 24, <http://www.zakon.hr/z/295/Ustavni-zakon-o-pravima-nacionalnih-manjina>.

37 Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities; Councils and Representatives in Self-Government Units, Articles 24, 26 and 30, <http://www.zakon.hr/z/295/Ustavni-zakon-o-pravima-nacionalnih-manjina>.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1. Representation of women in councils of Roma and other national minorities in the Republic of Croatia

The National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the 2013–2020 period recognises the participation of Roma women in advisory bodies as a positive example of their political participation. It is even stated that Roma women are equally represented in these bodies.³⁸ The present research points to the contrary as gender imbalance is visible in Roma national minority councils. According to available data, 18 Roma national councils are currently registered: seven county, six municipal and five city councils. Roma women are not represented in one third of Roma councils. These councils also include the Roma national council of the Međimurska county – the only county council without a woman among its ranks, even though the largest number of Roma national minority members live in the Međimurska county. The Roma national minority council in the Darda municipality has the largest number of women – 40%, which represents the percentage ensuring equal representation of genders under the Gender Equality Act.

38 Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities: National Roma Inclusion Strategy for the 2013–2020 period; November 2011; Roma Women and Political Participation, p. 88; <http://www.ured-ravnopravnost.hr/site/images/pdf/64-16.pdf>.

The representation of women equals 9.43% in municipal Roma national minority councils, 12% in city councils, and 15.43% in county councils. The average representation of women in all Roma minority councils together equals 13.53%. Roma national minority councils number 303 members (the council of the Petrijanec municipality has only three members), of whom 262 men and 41 women. Chairpersons of Roma national minority councils are only men.³⁹

A random sampling method was applied to compare Roma national minority councils with councils of other national minorities – we chose eight councils of the Serbian national minority, seven councils of the Italian national minority and six councils of the Bosniak national minority. The lowest representation of women equals 18.18% in the Serbian national minority council in the town of Varaždin, while the highest representation of 60% was recorded in the Italian national minority council of the town of Poreč. The average representation of women equals 29.61% in Serbian national minority councils, 35.65% in Bosniak national minority councils, and 53.04% in Italian national minority councils.

The comparison of data has revealed a significantly lower average representation of women in Roma national minority councils than in other national minority councils in Croatia. What is particularly worrying is that even six Roma minority councils do not have even one Roma woman among their ranks, while this is not the case with councils of other national minorities.

4.2. Scope of work and characteristics of Roma national minority councils of the Sisačko-moslavačka county and the City of Sisak

At the time of the last elections for representative bodies of local and regional self-government units, held on 10 July 2011, there were 460 registered Roma voters in the Sisačko-moslavačka county, of whom 224 used their voting right⁴⁰. The City of Sisak had 283 Roma voters, of whom 188 used their voting right. On 11 July 2011, the city and county election commission published the results of elections for members of Roma national minority councils of the City of Sisak and the Sisačko-moslavačka county.⁴¹ At its first session, the Roma national minority council of the Sisačko-moslavačka county (hereinafter: the county council) elected Stanoje Nikolić for its chairman, by secret ballot of councillors, for the third term. Of total 25 members of the county council, there are four women, i.e. the representation of women in the county council equals 16%.

39 Marginal errors are possible as data on women represented in councils are determined based on councillors' names.

40 Decision of the county election commission of the Sisačko-moslavačka county, class: 013-01/11-01/02; No: 2167-01-01/01-11-184; Sisak, 11 July 2011.

41 The list of members of county and city councils is contained in Annex 1.

At its first session, the Roma national minority council of the City of Sisak (hereinafter: the city council) elected Dragoljub Nikolić for its chairman, by secret ballot of councillors.⁴² Of total 15 members, there are three women, i.e. the representation of women in the city council equals 20%. All members of both councils come from the settlement of Capraške poljane and are interrelated by family links.⁴³ Five persons are councillors of both councils.⁴⁴

Given the size of the Roma population in Capraške poljane (around 1,700 inhabitants) and the compact nature of the community, victory is ensured for candidates coming from Capraške poljane. In all three convocations, the county council has consisted only of councillors living in Capraške poljane⁴⁵. In light of this, the operation of councils is largely directed at inhabitants of Capraške poljane and the settlement itself.⁴⁶ Councillors and particularly council chairmen most often recognise problems within their micro-environment, which is why their work focuses on solving the detected problems. Due to such circumstances, the focus of councils and leading persons of the county and city council is less directed towards the problems outside of the councillors' micro-location. Consistent with this, the councils' work is recognised in asphaltting of a part of the settlement, introducing electricity and ensuring the financing of legalisation of a part of the settlement.

Capraške poljane is a segregated Roma settlement under the administration of the City of Sisak. It is located in the southern part of the City – in its industrial zone. Capraške poljane is not a legalised settlement. However, the legalisation of one part of the settlement began recently. The Croatian Government enabled owners to legalise their illegally built facilities by 30 June 2013. Some owners initiated the legalisation procedure, while some failed to do so in time. Settlement inhabitants do not have access to public transport, though the transport of school children is ensured. Electricity was recently introduced into the settlement, which improved the living conditions of all inhabitants. The majority of inhabitants live in brick houses. Most inhabitants of Capraške poljane are members of the Roma national minority of Orthodox faith. They belong to the subgroup of the Roma national minority called "Bajash Roma". The Bajash Roma make up the majority of Roma population in the territory of the Sisačko-moslavačka county and the City of Sisak.⁴⁷ They differ from the majority of other Roma from the

42 This is the first term of Dragoljub Nikolić as chairman of the council.

43 For instance, Stanoje Nikolić and Dragoljub Nikolić are brothers-in-law, Dragoljub Nikolić is the husband of Tatjana Nikolić, Tatjana Nikolić is a sister of Stanoje Nikolić, Danijel Nikolić is a nephew of Tatjana Nikolić and a son of Mira and Stanoje Nikolić etc.

44 These are: Dragoljub Nikolić, Stanoje Nikolić, Vid Nikolić, Drago Nikolić and Željko Mitrović.

45 Information was obtained from the chairmen of the county council and the city council.

46 In interviews with councillors we obtained information that the implemented and planned projects are targeted at inhabitants of Capraške poljane or the settlement itself. All female focus group respondents noticed the council's focus on the settlement.

47 Interview with the chairmen of the county and city councils, and president of the Roma humanitarian organisation "Nova sreća".

Sisačko-moslavačka county by their faith and language. They speak the so-called Bajash language, while most other Roma in this area speak Romani. The Bajash Roma are generally of Orthodox faith, while the majority of other Roma in this territory are Muslims.

Article 28 of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities envisages the possibility of financing councils' activities, as described in their programmes. The Act does not explicitly forbid or allow councils to implement projects. Besides, it does not stipulate the obligation to ensure funds for the implementation of activities. In view of this Article and the above mentioned Article 31 of the same Act, respondents have different opinions about the focus of work and the councils' right to perform some activities. According to one line of opinion, a council must serve as an information centre informing the Roma about its operation and helping them exercise their rights.⁴⁸ The MP Veljko Kajtazi believes that Roma national minority councils must focus on functions envisaged by Article 31 of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities, but he also believes that councils should implement projects. The city council chairman believes that the council made its greatest achievement by ensuring funds for the legalisation of a part of the Roma settlement Capraške poljane, while at the same time the county council chairman claims that councils may not implement projects. The second focus group believes that Roma national minority councils do not have a wide scope of activity. The president of the Roma humanitarian association "Nova sreća" believes that the councils' work is exceptionally important as it influences policy making at the local/regional level. Different opinions about councils' work often arise from uneven practice and uneven relations between the local/regional authorities and national minority councils.

To enhance the effectiveness of their work, national minority councils may establish committees. The city council has no committee – the chairman explained this by limited funds.⁴⁹ The county council has two committees (there were five committees in previous convocations), dealing with dance and folk costume.⁵⁰

The absence of working premises is also a barrier to the operation of both councils. Respondents believe that the local/regional self-government must provide premises for councils' work.⁵¹ Article 28 of the Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities commits self-government units to ensure funds for councils' operation, including funds for the performance of administrative activities. However, such formulation does not make it entirely clear whether the premises

48 Focus group I. A highly educated Roma woman and years-long activist has a similar opinion. She expects from Roma councils also to implement projects envisaged by their programmes.

49 Interview with the city council chairman Dragoljub Nikolić, Sisak, 27 October 2013.

50 Interview with the county council chairman Stanoje Nikolić, Sisak, 20 October 2013.

51 The obligation of the local/regional self-government to ensure premises for the work of national minority councils was recognised by all respondents who were asked this question (MP, Adaleta Stanzer, all respondents of focus group I, chairmen of both councils, chairman of the council of the Darda municipality).

where the council should work can be considered the councils' operation. The Roma national minority council of the City of Zagreb has an office provided by the City. Other Roma councils do not have premises.

In case of the county council subject to the present research, the self-government recognises overhead costs of private residential premises of the council chairman as he uses his own premises as an office for meetings and other activities relating to the council's operation.⁵² Such model compensates for real costs of the council chairman, but also diminishes the quality and transparency of council's work. Such situation is not satisfactory for the community outside of Capraške poljane as it disables them to avail of an institution that should offer them support in participation in public life and management of local affairs.⁵³ The model of the county council adversely affects the operation of the council itself, because it brings into question the regularity of councillors' meetings and equal participation in work. Councillors are not able to use the council's resources for their work in an equal way as the council chairman. It is almost unthinkable that a councillor enters a private house of a county council chairman and uses the available resources (the computer, internet etc) for the purpose of performing his tasks. The lack of offices diminishes communication between the community and councillors, negatively affects the quality work of councils, brings into question the county's representation, including its quality and regularity of work. Without premises, it is difficult to convene regular meetings of councillors, receive clients and hold meetings with representatives of local and regional authorities.

4.3. Method of electing councillors and representation of Roma women

Candidates for Roma national minority councils must meet the following criteria: each candidate must declare himself/herself as a member of the Roma national minority, must have registered permanent residence in the territory of the council that he/she runs for, and must be a Croatian citizen.⁵⁴ Furthermore, in an agreement with inhabitants of the settlement and with a view to upgrading the educational structure in councils, Roma leaders from the settlement (chairmen of county and city councils) defined informal candidate requirements: completed elementary school for a county council candidate, and literacy for a city council candidate. These criteria are very low, but were not fulfilled in case of the county council. However, it would be hard for the Roma from Capraške poljane, particularly Roma women from this settlement, to meet the requirements for county council candidates.

52 Interview with the county council chairman.

53 Conclusions of focus groups I and II.

54 Interview with the city council chairman.

A candidate runs for elections independently and is elected by the Roma electorate from a particular area. In practice, the way in which Roma women were elected for councillors in councils subject to this research is legitimate, but at the same time somewhat ethically problematic. There is an informal agreement among inhabitants of the Capraške poljane settlement, relating to voting for councillors of city and county councils. The agreement is implemented in two phases. In the first phase, council candidates are elected in mutual agreement, i.e. an informal list of candidates is drawn up. In the second phase, each person with a voting right from Capraške poljane votes for all candidates from the informal list, regardless of their competences.⁵⁵ Based on such agreement, all female councillors were elected for councillors. Accepting the candidacy depends on themselves and sometimes on their husbands.⁵⁶

As already mentioned, all female and male councillors of both councils come from Capraške poljane. What characterises both councils are family relations with one or more councillors. Wives of both interviewed councillors are members of the councils that they chair⁵⁷, and were placed on the list based on their husbands' decision. In case of the wife of the county council chairman, it was determined that she was not informed at all about the time when she became a councillor and about the duration of her function that far.⁵⁸

Women account for 16% of county council members, which is close to average of all county Roma councils (by 0.57 percentage points above average) and by 2.47 percentage points above average of all councils (county, city and municipal) of the Roma national minority in Croatia taken together. However, the percentage of women within councils is smaller than desirable under the Gender Equality Act (40%).

The city council numbers 15 councillors, three of whom are women – the percentage of female representation is 20%. Compared to other Roma national minority councils of cities, the city council has the largest representation, equal to the representation in the Roma national minority council of the City of Rijeka.

*Of all female councillors in both councils, only one woman who is a city councillor completed elementary school.*⁵⁹ The lack of educated staff among councillors is doubtless the largest obstacle to the efficient operation of councils.⁶⁰ The level of education within the Roma community is very low, which reflects on councils. Insufficient education of councillors affects the quality of councils' work to

55 Interview with chairmen of both councils.

56 It was specified in the interview with Dragoljub Nikolić that Roma women are insufficiently represented because their husbands sometimes do not want them to be councillors, but insist that they (husbands) be appointed.

57 Interview with chairmen of both councils.

58 Interview with council chairman and female members of the council.

59 Interview with female councillors and chairmen of both councils.

60 All respondents recognised the lack of educated staff as one of the reasons for insufficient quality of councils' work.

such an extent that some councillors are not able to participate in councils' operation.⁶¹ The lack of education affects particularly Roma women. Up to three councillors perform the entire work of councils, which is not surprising given the manner in which councillors were elected, their civil-Roma activism and the degree of education.⁶²

4.4. Participation of Roma women in councils and councils' orientation to the issues of status of Roma women

As determined in interviews with them, female councillors are very poorly familiar with councils' work and importance.⁶³ Therefore, the contribution of Roma women to county and city councils may be assessed as very low. Only one of four Roma female councillors knew some details about the councils' work. Roma women very rarely participate in councils' work, partly due to the lack of premises⁶⁴, and partly due to the lack of interest in the operation of councils and insufficient education enabling them to engage more. In decision making, the form is always met, which is not the case with essence. Namely, female councillors make decisions, but often do not understand them and did not take part in drafting decisions.

The scope of working tasks of the county council is intended for 25 persons, and that of the city council for 15 persons. Each committee should comprise female/male councillors that are supposed to propose solutions within the remit of their respective committees, while each decision should be adopted by a majority vote. In case of councils covered by this research, all decisions are made unanimously (there is no constructive discussion of proposals as councillors are insufficiently knowledgeable about the matter on agenda), while only few councillors propose all activities. Only few persons manage the entire council operation, while female and male councillors confirm with their signature the work and decisions of these persons. Such situation exists for several reasons, including the degree of education, manner of electing councillors, gender inequality, lack of interest and insufficient knowledge of female councillors.

61 Three of four female councillors said they often do not understand the discussions at meetings. They did not know what a council is and what its powers are. Two of four female councillors did not know since when they have been discharging the function.

62 Interviews with all council members.

63 The female councillor who completed elementary school showed much more knowledge about the council's operation and the council itself than other female councillors of both councils.

64 The lack of premises affects the regularity of councillors' meetings and the number of councillors attending meetings.

All female councillors covered by the research, apart from the one with completed elementary school, believe they should not participate in councils' work as they lack education and often do not understand what men talk about at meetings.⁶⁵ It was determined that given a very low degree of education, some Roma women cannot constructively participate in councils' work.

The majority of respondents answered that the number of Roma women in councils should be raised.⁶⁶ However, older Roma women with a low educational level believe the position of councillors is after all reserved for men. Respondents without a high educational background find it harder to recognise the features of a patriarchal system. Recognition of such a system is almost impossible for older Roma women without high education and coming from segregated Roma settlements. Given the traditional gender division of labour, Roma women are engaged in everyday chores, such as cooking, household tasks, care for children, including additional activities (collecting acorns, hazelnuts, secondary raw materials...) serving to complement their household budgets. This is the most frequent reason why Roma women refuse to be councillors and why Roma female councillors are not sufficiently active.⁶⁷

One of the reasons why Roma women are not sufficiently active and visible in Roma national minority councils is also their lack of interest in councils' work. Activities of female Roma councillors in the county council are visible on occasions when they participate in national minority gatherings, presentations of folk costumes and Roma cuisine.⁶⁸ Meetings with local and regional authorities are attended only by the leading men in the council and there are no women among them.⁶⁹

What also represents a problem is that female councillors do not propose activities aimed at improving the situation of Roma women. There are many problems within the settlement calling for urgent solution to the benefit of the entire Roma community in Capraške poljane, such as the inaccessibility of public transport, unpaved roads, no playground for children. Therefore, problems affecting only Roma women are not topical and remain unrecognised by female councillors.⁷⁰

For the time being, the council has not implemented nor does it plan to implement activities targeting Roma women. There were initiatives that could have

65 All female councillors expressed this attitude, apart from the one with completed elementary school.

66 All respondents agreed with the need to increase the number of Roma women, apart from one councillor of the city council.

67 It was determined in interviews with council chairmen that Roma women refused to become councillors because of the lack of time. In interviews with female councillors, it was ascertained that they are insufficiently engaged in councils for the same reason. Roma female councillors link their difficult and unfavourable position within the Roma community to the performance of household and other chores.

68 Interview with the chairman and female councillors of the county council.

69 Interview with the chairman of the county council, city council, president of the Roma humanitarian association "Nova sreća".

70 Interview with female councillors.

benefited Roma women the most, but they were not developed due to the alleged lack of cooperation with local/regional authorities and institutions to be chosen as partners.⁷¹ For instance, an initiative was launched to open a kindergarten in the settlement as this would allow more time for mothers in Capraške poljane. There is a kindergarten outside of the settlement, but is very far away, which is why children from the settlement are not involved in pre-school education. Another initiative aimed at employing Roma woman by means of the public works measure. Socially useful work implied the cultivation of land and sanitation maintenance in the settlement.⁷² The county council developed a project consisting of a number of workshops aimed at educating Roma women about the importance of hygiene on residential premises. Another proposed project aimed at encouraging Roma women to work, for the sake of raising their degree of integration. Namely, social welfare benefits and child allowance often equal the funds that Roma women would earn with their independent work. As the financial aspect is not motivating, projects should be implemented to incite Roma women to work. This would, at the same time, encourage their integration.

According to the comparison with the Roma national minority council of the Darda municipality (40% of Roma women) and statements by the council chairman, raising the representation of Roma women does not change their contribution or the degree of council's focus on issues of Roma women. Such conclusion should certainly be taken with a reserve as it is based on a very small number of analysed councils.

Council chairmen and male members believe Roma women are not in a particularly difficult situation. They believe that Roma women have equal rights as men. They state that Roma women are not discriminated against by the Roma community and they interpret their difficult position through the prism of the difficult position of the entire Roma community.⁷³ This could be the reason for councils' inadequate orientation towards Roma women. Though they have such an opinion, council chairmen would be ready to implement projects aimed at improving the position of Roma women.⁷⁴

The county council chairman highlighted the need for implementing a project aimed at achieving functional and computer literacy of Roma women from the settlement. Computer literacy is at an exceptionally low level – 1,700 persons from the settlement have around eight computers in total.⁷⁵ The project, targeting both female and male Roma members of the community, would enable the procurement of computer equipment serving as an educational tool. The contribution of the project would be twofold: the community would gain computer literacy, and as a

71 Interview with the chairman of the county council.

72 Interview with a female councillor of the city council.

73 Interviews with female councillors and chairmen of county and city councils.

74 Interview with the chairman of the county council.

75 Interview with the chairman of the county council.

result, the labour competitiveness and awareness of its members would increase. At the same time, there would be more computers in the settlement, serving for further education. However, such projects are hampered by the lack of space – as councils do not possess their own official premises, computer training should be held on residential premises, which implies its unequal accessibility to all.

Respondents expressed dissatisfaction with councils' work.⁷⁶ Different reasons are mentioned, depending on the group of respondents. Respondents who are councillors of both councils believe that the councils' work could be better. They underscore that bad cooperation with local/regional self-government is the reason why councils do not operate more effectively.⁷⁷ The dissatisfaction with councils' work is expressed in a rather general way in case of respondents who gave a wider overview of councils' work.⁷⁸ The remarks concern the councils' lack of focus on their core function (as mentioned above, respondents differently experience the councils' core function), while the lack of competence of some councillors in regard to their education, knowledge about the subject matter etc. are considered the reasons for the councils' insufficiently good work.⁷⁹ The highest degree of dissatisfaction was observed with respondents representing the Roma community of the Sisačko-moslavačka county and the City of Sisak, and living outside of Capraške poljane. According to their comments, the council focuses most on problems of the Roma from Capraške poljane, the council's work is insufficiently transparent, services are not available as the council's office is inaccessible, the flow of information between the council and the Roma community outside of Capraške poljane is very bad, the manner of electing councillors shows that the council does not care about the welfare of the Roma community of the Sisačko-moslavačka county, but only of Capraške poljane.⁸⁰

Nonetheless, there are also tangible results, such as the obtainment of funds for legalisation of a part of the Roma settlement of Capraške poljane, asphaltting a part of the settlement, introducing electricity into the settlement, and a number of activities implemented within the council's programme, such as the marking of days important for the Roma national minority (the International Roma Day, St George's Day, gatherings of national minorities etc).⁸¹

76 All respondents expressed dissatisfaction with councils' operation, to a higher or lesser degree.

77 Interviews with council members.

78 The MP, a university-educated Roma female activist and president of an association, female president of the Roma association "Traipe" and chairman of the Roma national minority council of the Darda municipality.

79 Interviews with an MP, a university-educated Roma female activist and president of an association, female president of the Roma association "Traipe" and chairman of the Roma national minority council of the Darda municipality.

80 Attitudes and opinions expressed by focus groups I and II, and an interview with the chairman of the Roma humanitarian association "Nova sreća".

81 Interviews with chairmen of councils and president of the Roma humanitarian association "Nova sreća". Larger projects, which illustrate the functioning of councils, were implemented within the settlement of Capraške poljane. However, Capraške poljane did not have electricity, was not asphalted, and is not legalised, while Roma persons from the city and segregated areas did not and do not face such problems.

4.5. Obstacles to more active participation of Roma women in councils

The first obstacle to more active participation of female councillors is reflected in the creation of unofficial candidacy lists. Only men decide on these lists. Therefore, whether and how many women will be proposed for candidates generally depends on men's good will. The system is organised in such a way that candidacy lists need not represent as many as possible Roma settlements, i.e. parts of the county/city where Roma live, or the minimum number of women. The very manner of running for councillors represents an obstacle, as this is done within a narrow circle of several leading men in the local community.

The next obstacle relates to the way of conducting elections. Roma women are largely uninformed about elections. There is no information or a wider public campaign that would precede elections. Furthermore, particularly important in the creation of lists where family relations prevail over criteria such as education. What is especially worrisome is that husbands are those who decide on whether their wives will run for candidacy. Such decisions are often financially motivated, i.e. they are linked to the status of the person receiving social benefits.⁸² Complete absence of highly educated persons in the councils is a direct consequence of informal lists as highly educated male and female Roma from the Sisačko-moslavačka county are not able to collect a sufficient number of votes to become councillors.⁸³

Obstacles persist even after a Roma woman becomes a councillor. There is the impression that the membership of Roma women in the councils covered by the research is extremely formal. It is not expected from these women to regularly attend meetings, no tasks are delegated to them⁸⁴, and the councils' work is generally managed by several leading persons. This is particularly pronounced in view of the fact that councils do not have their own work premises, i.e. they do not represent small information centres. Instead, meetings are held in the chairman's private house.

Together with such an exceptionally patriarchal and leadership-based system of election and councils' operation, the key obstacle to more active participation of Roma women is reflected in their extremely low educational background. This is one of the problems affecting the councils' operation and is particularly manifest with female councillors. Female councillors often say themselves that they do not understand the meeting proceedings and the council's work, functions and importance. Due to insufficient education, there are no proposals for

82 Social contributions of a person who receives earnings will be reduced by the amount of such earnings. If earnings exceed the amount of social welfare, the social welfare is abolished.

83 Attitude expressed by female respondents in focus group II.

84 Council members elect among themselves the members of each council committee. As leading people in the council decide on everything, the position of a female councillor is therefore only formal – she only signs the documents prepared in advance by council leaders.

improving the status of Roma women, while at the same time Roma women are utterly blind to gender-related irregularities in the community and council.

Respondents outside of the community, whose opinions carry weight given their experiences and position, recognise two reasons for the insufficient representation of Roma women and their marginal role in Roma councils.⁸⁵ The reasons are interrelated and cannot be easily solved. The first and foremost reason concerns the patriarchal system in which Roma women are brought up. Such a system makes it impossible for Roma women to gain sufficient education, which leads to the second barrier to the activity of Roma women in councils. The second barrier concerns exceptionally low education. Roma women often do not decide on their own behalf. Accepting such a situation results from upbringing and life in patriarchy from an early age. The impossibility to decide on one's own needs leads to the absence of wish and willingness to hold a position in the council, where they should adopt decisions regarding the wellbeing of the entire community. The low level of education creates dependence on the community and the existing way of life, and makes it impossible for women to participate in social and political life on an equal footing with men.⁸⁶ The higher the educational level, the greater the wish to participate in public, social and political life.⁸⁷

85 Interview with the MP and years-long, university-educated Roma female activist and president of an association.


86 Joint opinion of the MP and university-educated Roma female activist and president of an association.

87 In focus groups I and II, persons with a lower degree of education did not wish to be councillors, while persons with higher education expressed this wish.

5. CONCLUSION

The status of Roma women is often interpreted through the concept of double discrimination. Such term is also used in the Strategy, which currently represents the main document serving to improve the status of the Roma community and Roma women. The Roma community faces enormous problems and discrimination is multi-dimensional. The present research has only confirmed that problems of Roma women are placed in the background – they are invisible and do not receive sufficient attention even by Roma national minority councils. The Roma community and Roma women within the community often do not recognise discrimination against women. Only highly educated male and female members of the Roma community recognise the unenviable position of Roma women. However, Roma leaders do not recognise the unfavourable position of Roma women, except for cases when a Roma leader happens to be highly educated.

Based on the present research, two reasons leading to such a situation may be underscored – patriarchal upbringing and insufficient education. Roma national minority councils are a reflection of the community. The insufficient degree of education was identified as the main problem of councils' work, as it is also the case with the Roma community. It was ascertained that women are underrepresented in councils, but what poses an even greater problem is the very poor participation of women (councillors) in councils' work. The consequences of the patriarchal system have been recognised in the council, and are manifested in the fact that female councillors, including some other female participants in the present research, believe that men should serve as councillors, particularly as council chairmen.



Respondents agreed on the following: 1) they believe that the lack of educated staff affects most the quality work of councils, 2) they would support the initiative aimed at increasing the representation of Roma women in Roma national minority councils. Given the influence of informal and family relations on the process of running for candidacy and electing council members, as well as on the councils' operation, a mere increase in the number of Roma women in Roma national minority councils would not suffice. It is desirable, but the main focus of the Roma community should be placed on raising the overall quality of councils' work, primarily by electing sufficiently informed, educated and motivated individuals of both genders. Namely, it was indicated during the research that increasing the share of Roma women did not raise their participation in the council, nor did the council place greater emphasis on the issue of Roma women. Further research should be conducted in this regard.

The emancipation of Roma women should start with elementary education, which is mandatory and guaranteed to all citizens. A higher degree of education enables the recognition of gender inequality, and thus the possibility to fight against it. Judging by research results, Roma women with a higher educational background express aspirations to participate in public, political and social life, and thus to constructively participate in Roma national minority councils. In this regard, the process of elections for these two councils should be improved, in order to open the room for Roma women with higher education. Education is expected to ensure greater participation of women in Roma national minority councils.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on research findings, recommendations were developed and submitted to state, regional and local authorities in the Republic of Croatia.

- The implementation of the Act on Upbringing and Education in Primary and Secondary Schools, which stipulates mandatory elementary education for all Croatian pupils, must be ensured.⁸⁸
- To raise awareness of the Roma community, a number of educational workshops on gender equality, targeting male and female community members, should be implemented.
- Incentive measures should be introduced for councils to meet gender representation requirements.
- To raise the quality of councils' work, the criteria for council candidates must be introduced in terms of a minimum degree of education, regardless of the fact that councils are representative and not professional bodies, since the election of insufficiently literate persons devalues the councils' work.
- Measures should be taken so that Roma national minority councils place emphasis also on issues largely affecting Roma women. In this regard, cooperation must be ensured between local/regional self-government and councils, and funds should be provided for programmes of those councils which plan to focus on issues affecting Roma women.

⁸⁸ Act on Upbringing and Education in Primary and Secondary Schools, Articles 4 and 12; <http://www.zakon.hr/z/317/>.

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Annex 1: Council members

Members of the **Roma national minority council of the Sisačko-moslavačka county** are the following:

1. Dragoljub Nikolić
2. Stjepan Bogdan
3. Dean Nikolić
4. Željko Bogdan
5. **Mira Nikolić**
6. Đorđe Lukić
7. **Dijana Mitrović**
8. Željko Mitrović
9. **Anđelka Nikolić** (Dušan)
10. Dragan Nikolić (Drago)
11. Drago Nikolić
12. Saša Nikolić
13. Srećko Nikolić (Stanko)
14. Vid Nikolić
15. Zlatko Nikolić
16. Stanoje Todorović
17. Dragan Nikolić (Stanko)
18. Stanoje Nikolić (Stanko)
19. Stojan Todorović
20. Miroslav Nikolić
21. Stanko Nikolić (Krstó)
22. **Stoja Nikolić** (Stanko)
23. Slobodan Nikolić
24. Željko Nikolić (Stanislav)
25. Simo Nikolić

Members of the **Roma national minority council of the City of Sisak** are the following:

1. Dragoljub Nikolić
2. **Tatjana Nikolić**
3. **Stanoja Nikolić**
4. Stanoje Nikolić
5. Vid Nikolić
6. Zlatko Bogdan
7. Danijel Nikolić
8. Drago Nikolić
9. Goran Vasiljević (Stojan)
10. Goran Mitrović
11. Željko Mitrović
12. Nenad Vasiljević
13. Goran Vasiljević (Stanko)
14. **Mirjana Stanković**
15. Marko Nikolić

Annex 2: Roma national minority councils and share of Roma women

No.	Roma council	No. of male councillors	No. of female Roma councillors	Percentage of women	Council chairman	No. of Roma in the municipality, city or county, according to the 2011 population census	Share of Roma in total population of the municipality, city or county, according to the 2011 population census	No. of Roma in the municipality, city or county, under the 2011 census of voters
Roma national minority councils of municipalities								
1	Municipality of Pribislavec	10	0	0,00%	Željko Balog	608	19,39%	266
2	Municipality of Orehovica	10	0	0,00%	Krunoslav Vuk	491	18,29%	240
3	Municipality of Nedelišće	10	1	10,00%	Vlado Horvat	1.239	10,35%	488
4	Municipality of Mala Subotica	10	0	0,00%		694	12,73%	261
5	Municipality of Petrijanec	3	0	0,00%		379	7,88%	179
6	Municipality of Darda	10	4	40,00%	Branko Đurđević	650	9,41%	429
Total municipal councils		53	5	9,43%	-	-	-	-

Roma national minority councils of cities

7	City of Rijeka	15	3	20,00%	Surija Mehmeti	867	0,67%	387
8	City of Pula	15	1	6,67%	Jetiš Bajrami	443	0,41%	313
9	City of Slavonski brod	15	2	13,33%	Ibrahim Gušani	1.142	1,93%	414
10	City of Sisak	15	3	20,00%	Dragoljub Nikolić	648	1,36%	282
11	City of Čakovac	15	0	0,00%	-	1.039	3,83%	402
Total city councils		75	9	12,00%	-	-	-	-

Roma national minority councils of counties

12	Sisačko-moslavačka county	25	4	16,00%	Stanoje Nikolić	1.463	0,85%	460
13	Osječko-Baranjska county	25	2	8,00%	Branko Petrović	1.874	0,61%	1.325
14	City of Zagreb	25	9	36,00%	Neđatim Kamberovski	2.775	0,35%	1.739
15	Međimurska county	25	0	0,00%	Željko Balog	5.107	4,49%	2.165
16	Primorsko-goranska county	25	9	36,00%	Princ Miftaraj	1.072	0,36%	499
17	Brodsko-posavska county	25	1	4,00%	-	1.178	0,74%	435
18	Istarska county	25	2	8,00%	Neđat Bajrami	858	0,41%	545
Total county councils		175	27	15,43%	-	-	-	-
TOTAL COUNCILS		303	41	13,53%	-	-	-	-

Annex 3: Percentage of representation of women in councils of Italian, Serbian and Bosniak national minorities

Italian national minority councils	No. of councillors	No. of women in the council	Share of women in the total number of councillors
Council of Istarska county	25	9	36,00%
Council of City of Buje	15	10	66,67%
Council of City of Novigrad	15	7	46,67%
Council of City of Poreč	15	9	60,00%
Council of City of Pula	15	8	53,33%
Council of City of Rovinj	15	9	60,00%
Council of City of Umag	15	9	60,00%
TOTAL	115	61	53,04%

Serbian national minority councils	No. of councillors	No. of women in the council	Share of women in the total number of councillors
Council of City of Zagreb	25	9	36,00%
Council of Varaždinska county	25	9	36,00%
Council of City of Varaždin	11	2	18,18%
Council of Osiječko-baranjska county	25	5	20,00%
Council of City of Beli manastir	15	6	40,00%
Council of Brodsko-posavska county	23	7	30,43%
Council of City of Nova Gradiška	15	3	20,00%
Council of City of Slavonski brod	13	4	30,77%
TOTAL	152	45	29,61%

Bosniak national minority councils	No. of councillors	No. of women in the council	Share of women in the total number of councillors
Council of City of Zagreb	25	8	32,00%
Council of City of Slavonski brod	15	5	33,33%
Council of Zagrebačka county	25	8	32,00%
Council of City of Velika Gorica	15	6	40,00%
Council of Vukovarsko-srijemska county	25	10	40,00%
Council of municipality Drenovac	10	4	40,00%
TOTAL	115	41	35,65%

Councils were elected by random choice.

Annex 4: List of interviewed persons and female focus group participants

1. Veljko Kajtazi, MP, Zagreb, 03/10/2013
2. University-educated Roma woman and president of an association, Zagreb, 09/11/2013
3. Branko Đurđević, chairman of the Roma national minority council of Darda municipality, Zagreb, 05/11/2013
4. Suzana Krčmar, president of "Traipe" association, Zagreb, 06/11/2013
5. Agron Tahiri, president of Roma humanitarian association "Nova sreća", Sisak, 09/11/2013
6. Stanoje Nikolić, chairman of the Roma national minority council of Sisačko-moslavačka county, Sisak, 20/10/2013
7. Dragoljub Nikolić, chairman of the Roma national minority council of City of Sisak, Sisak, 27/10/2013
8. Mirjana Stanković, female councillor (City of Sisak), Sisak, 27/10/2013
9. Tatjana Nikolić, female councillor (City of Sisak), Sisak, 27/10/2013
10. Mira Nikolić, female councillor (Sisačko-moslavačka county), Sisak, 20/10/2013
11. Anđelka Nikolić, female councillor (Sisačko-moslavačka county), Sisak, 20/10/2013
12. Marko Nikolić, male councillor (City of Sisak), Sisak, 27/10/2013
13. Danijel Nikolić, male councillor (City of Sisak), Sisak, 26/10/2013
14. Dragan Nikolić (Sisačko-moslavačka county), Sisak, 26/10/2013
15. Saša Nikolić (Sisačko-moslavačka county), Sisak, 20/10/2013
16. Nevena Tahiri, Sisak, 09/11/2013
17. Gaši Albina, Sisak, 09/11/2013
Francesca Bajrami, Sisak, 09/11/2013
Čolić Anđelka, Sisak, 09/11/2013
Jasmina Dedić, Sisak, 09/11/2013
Amela Šoštarić, Sisak, 09/11/2013
Ramajana Hajvazi, Sisak, 10/11/2013
Jelena Bajramović, Sisak, 10/11/2013
Amela Tahiri, Sisak, 10/11/2013
Female focus group participant who wanted to remain anonymous, Sisak, 10/11/2013
Female focus group participant who wanted to remain anonymous, Sisak, 10/11/2013

