

CHILD MARRIAGE

AMONG THE ROMA POPULATION IN SERBIA

Ethnographic
research



Roma Women's Centre
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Belgrade, 2017

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1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Child marriage occurs in the general population in Serbia, and is most commonly encountered among poor populations and in rural areas. The practice, however, is noticeably present in Roma communities, where, according to UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS), more than half of all girls are married before turning 18 years old. This report presents the findings of research on child marriage in Roma communities in Serbia, with a focus on the key factors that influence the existence and reproduction of the practice. The analysis conducted encompassed diverse risk and change factors present in Roma communities, ranging from the impact of social and cultural norms, economic factors and perceptions of the importance of education, to marginalization of these communities as a consequence of pressure from the majority environment. The analysis focused in particular on the interconnection of these factors and their differing impact depending on the local context.

This report is based on field research, implemented jointly by the Institute of Ethnography at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA), Roma Women's Centre BIBIJA and UNICEF. The research data were collected following the principles of qualitative research, with the goal of providing insight into the practice of child marriage from the perspective of the members of Roma communities themselves, and based on their lived experience and views on the issue. The field research was conducted at five sites: Belgrade, Kragujevac, Novi Bečej, Pirot and Vranje. This report, which is based on the mentioned research, was reviewed by an expert team from the Institute of Ethnography SASA.

The report is intended for all stakeholders active in working to reduce the number of child marriages among the Roma community in Serbia, towards the goal of ending the practice altogether. In order to achieve this goal, it is crucial to have the active involvement of all stakeholders, from state bodies and institutions to activists in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions and the interested public. The purpose of the report is to offer all actors grounded insight into the functioning of child marriage from the viewpoint of Roma communities themselves, as well as to provide recommendations on possible interventions for reducing the practice.

The research that was conducted entailed 70 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with both male and female members of Roma communities of diverse ages. The selected sample had the aim of encompassing in the broadest sense the different models of entry into child marriage, which, taking into account respondents' narratives, offered the most useful insight into the marital decision-making process. Taking this into consideration, we did not look for correlations and trends based on comparisons within the sample, but instead attempted to glean the structural factors that in individual cases affect marital decision making. The relevance of the results obtained in this way, based on the selected sample, is reflected in the possibility of comparing a series of complex individual narratives and identifying from this set of lived experiences the regularity of factors that primarily influence the existence and reproduction of the practice of child marriage.

The objectives of the research included:

- Identifying the basic factors that influence the existence and reproduction of the practice of child marriage, as well as those factors that represent the basis for changing this practice.
- Discussing and analysing social and cultural norms related to the practice of child marriage.
- Determining the key stakeholders in the decision-making process regarding marriage, and evaluating what types of thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and economic and socio-cultural contexts influence this process.
- Identifying the key stakeholders that, from the point of view of the Roma communities themselves, can be the bearers of change.
- Proposing interventions which arise from an understanding of the local context and are adapted to the characteristics of each of the communities surveyed, but which also take into account the general trends associated with the practice of child marriage at all surveyed sites.

The approach to the issue of child marriage in the Roma population in Serbia in this research is based on the principles of qualitative research methodology. As a research process, this methodology is used to expose deeper meanings when it comes to the attitudes, opinions or motives of the respondents. One of the basic methods used is the technique of in-depth, semi-structured interview. The expected result of using this research technique was obtaining material showing the experiences, attitudes and life stories of the respondents. In this regard, the collected material — i.e., the narratives of the members of the interviewed community — was the basis for interpreting the issue of child marriage. The research was also based on 'multi-sited' ethnography. This method of data collection is used to identify and analyse the same problem in different geographic or social contexts.

The qualitative research method shows its full potential when all important parts of the research process are linked together. The approach, as well as the research, relies on the methodology of grounded theory. The basic postulate of this methodological concept is insisting on the circular model of the research process — i.e., on continuous adjustments of the methodological apparatus and theoretical concepts — throughout the entire research process.

The research confirmed the widespread prevalence of the practice of child marriage among Roma communities. At the same time, it confirmed that the modalities, causes and the very prevalence of the practice vary considerably in relation to the communities where the research was conducted. The observed differences indicate the complexity of factors that affect the existence and characteristics of child marriage. The research indicated that there is a series of different risk and protective factors, and factors of change that occur in different communities, and that what the practice looks like in reality depends directly on their mutual influence and predominance. The main idea in this report is to present those factors through rich narratives of lived experience — that is, to present the very testimonies of respondents that give a clear picture of the functioning of each of the factors in real-life practice. Following this procedure enabled us to obtain the required local knowledge, which served as the basis for the formulation of the proposed interventions.

Based on an analysis of the collected material obtained from interviews with respondents, the most important topics related to the risk and protective factors as well as factors of change that occur in relation to the practice of child marriage in Roma communities in Serbia are the following:

- Acceptance of marital status and marriage in general.
- Agency — i.e., the decision-making process in the context of the balance of power between the community/family/child.
- Role of social and cultural norms: cult of virginity, bride dowries, elopement, and customs related to marriage.
- Perception of the importance of education, but also the benefits of education in real-life practice.
- Social integration — examples of good practice and constraints that occur in that context.
- The 'glass ceiling' phenomenon — i.e., factors resulting in an inability to overcome invisible barriers relating to the marginal position of Roma communities in Serbia.

Based on the presented and analysed material, it is possible to identify key findings which can be marked as important factors when it comes to the decision-making process related to child marriage. Those key findings include:

- The patriarchal model of functioning of the community where the position of women is subordinate, and their gender roles predominantly imply the role of wife, mother and housewife.
- Strong influence of social and cultural norms within which the cult of virginity determines the perception of marriage.
- Consequently, entry into marital union as a result of the first sexual relationship, without knowing what it implies, which in particular refers to the complete absence of knowledge about sexual life, especially among girls.
- Lack of intergenerational dialogue when it comes to marriage and sexual life, especially between mothers and daughters. As a consequence of the taboo of sexuality, there is a high risk of endangering the reproductive health of young girls, especially in cases of early childbirth.
- Pressure from the community regarding the irreversibility of entry into marriage, where divorce is largely seen as damaging to the family's reputation and honour.
- The economic factor, which implies the perception of the child being better off when she moves to the husband's family. Selling the bride in this context is not a prevailing model, but an assessment of the parent or the child herself that she will have a better life in the new community, in the absence of alternative life choices, where marriage is the only possible and desirable starting point of the life cycle.
- Perception of education as a generally desirable, but essentially unnecessary, resource. In this regard, the lack of motivation for further education, primarily among girls, makes marriage seem desirable because there is no alternative model. The gender role of a woman as a housewife, mother and wife is imposed on girls from early childhood, denying them the idea of different life choices.
- Poverty as a consequence of marginalization by the majority environment, but also of the closed circle of social norms and the lack of education within the communities themselves.
- The examples of good practice of integrated Roma show the possibility of having an alternative to child marriage in terms of understanding a wider range of life options. However, the factors of discrimination from the wider social environment, as well as the difficult economic situation in the entire country, point to the danger of the reverse practice where children from integrated families marry as the result of the aforementioned factors, which can also explain the increase in the rate of child marriages in the past decade.

- Limitations in the examples of good practice are related primarily to their marginal position as members of the Roma minority, which is evident at levels ranging from education to everyday life. In this regard, the phenomenon of the 'glass ceiling' is particularly emphasized, where, due to their ethnicity, Roma have a subordinate position both in the education system and in the labour market. Such a position poses a great challenge in combination with the potential pressure from traditional norms and customs present in Roma communities, where young Roma, faced with obstacles encountered in the majority environment, often choose to follow their community models.

Based on the identified key findings, we suggest the concept of the *marginalized environment* as a basic framework within which the practice of child marriage functions and is reproduced in Roma communities in Serbia. This concept, above all, insists on a marginalized environment that includes social and economic status, and the perspective of the community inhabiting it, as well as the community's cultural norms and traditions, as determining risk factors for child marriage. The *marginalized environment* functions as an interlaced series of factors which determine a community's possible responses to the various challenges posed to it. On the one hand, Roma communities are defined by a series of their own rules, among which the perception of virginity as a necessary condition for entering into marriage is one of the most important. Such rules differ considerably from those existing in the majority environment. On the other hand, the quality of being different is a direct cause for marginalization by the wider social environment, which considers this and similar practices to be backward and which, as such, constitutes grounds for discrimination.

The complex interrelation between these two factors puts an individual or a family trying to change the established practice before a challenge of the conflict with their own community in the event of not following the norms, with the risk of, despite the efforts made, the majority environment not recognizing this effort in terms of full integration into society. The greater the marginalization, the stronger the community's grasp, an element that represents an additional aggravating circumstance regarding the functioning of the possible factors of change. The concept of the *marginalized environment* understood this way offers a comprehensive explanatory framework that takes into account both the external and internal risk factors for entering into child marriage, and emphasizes in particular the interlacing of these factors in the reception of the respondents themselves.

Based on the material analysed and the theoretical concept of the marginalized environment that arises from it, when formulating the recommendations, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the risk factors active in Roma communities for entering into child marriage are extremely strong and restrictive. These factors include maintaining the cult of virginity,

the concept of family honour, and gender roles where women do not have the option to be educationally empowered and economically productive. The complexity and interconnectedness of these factors greatly limits the possibilities of alternative life choices, and the factors themselves constitute internal constraints acting within the communities, defining early marriage in advance as a desirable social practice.

On the other hand, the discrimination and marginalization of the members of the Roma communities by the majority environment constitutes a fundamentally limiting factor in efforts to limit the constraints imposed by the community. As the research indicates, in the vast majority of cases going outside their own communities into the majority environment implies facing different forms of exclusion, from exclusion in the education system to exclusion in the labour market. The close link between internal risk factors and the limiting mechanisms imposed by the majority environment suggests that the approach to combating the practice of child marriage must be directed towards the coordinated action of various stakeholders, both from the local Roma communities and from the institutions and other organizations representing the majority environment.

In that sense, 'Communication for Development' stands out as an adequate approach for combating the practice of child marriage in Roma communities. The approach is based on inclusion of communities and listening to their members, in order to understand how they identify their own problems, propose solutions and work towards their attainment. The idea of 'Communication for Development' is a two-way process of sharing ideas and knowledge, using different channels of communication and approaches that empower individuals and communities to undertake actions aimed at improving their lives. 'Communication for Development' in this context implies sending a message about the harmfulness of the practice of child marriage that is communicated by the members of the Roma communities themselves. However, in order for such a message to have an adequate effect, it is necessary to coordinate with different actors, including leaders in the Roma communities; the educational, health and social welfare systems; local self-governments; law enforcement authorities; and other institutions and organizations that are involved.

This report proposes the following recommendations for action to effectively approach combating the practice of child marriage in Roma communities:

- Encouraging the strengthening of the coordination among various state authorities, which would involve the creation of a broad front of stakeholders, functioning within the existing national strategies and plans.
- Strengthening intersectoral cooperation, which primarily includes the education, social and health care, justice and employment sectors.

- Creating protocols for the implementation and application of procedures related to cases of existing child marriages, but also for their prevention.
- Strengthening the capacities of existing stakeholders on the ground, such as pedagogical and health mediators, for their active participation in preventing the practice of child marriage.
- Further work on data collection on child marriages, with the aim of expanding knowledge on local specifics and its integration into the public policy domain.

The chapter on recommendations in this report additionally suggests possible interventions, based on actual problems Roma communities are facing. These recommendations are formulated in such a way that they address the needs and limitations at specific sites, and are based on the views expressed by the respondents as members of their communities. Further involvement with the issues of child marriages will allow the recommendations to be developed, implemented and evaluated.

INTRODUCTION

2

The practice of children and young people marrying before the age of 18 years is still present in Roma communities in Serbia, according to data obtained from recent studies.¹ Although the applicable Serbian laws prohibit the practice, it still persists among the Roma population and, according to the latest research, it is even on the rise in some areas. There are multiple reasons for this: from the difficult social and economic position of the Roma people, which has further worsened during the years of transition, to the social and cultural norms that are maintained and reproduced in Roma communities and affect, to a great extent, the defining of the life prospects of boys and girls.

Child marriage has been recognized in different government documents and strategies as an issue that needs to be addressed. Firstly, the normative and institutional legal framework is harmonized with international standards related to equality and prohibition of discrimination. Also, following the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the issue of child marriage also found its place in the National Strategy for Gender Equality for the period from 2016 to 2020, the Strategy for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination for the period from 2014 to 2018, and the Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma People in the Republic of Serbia for the period from 2016 to 2020.²

These praiseworthy efforts in identifying the issue of child marriage have nevertheless not been accompanied by adequate and sufficient progress on the ground. The measures taken by state institutions, whether they involve affirmative action or sanctions, do not show actual results indicating a decrease in the practice. On the other hand, Roma people in Serbia are very often subject to various types of prejudices and discrimination at the wider social level, and are on the social margins in almost every aspect. Such a social reception of Roma communities leads in practice to the fact that their problems are seen as if they are happening somewhere else and to other people. The result is that the high prevalence of child marriage, which would be

1 Until recently, this practice has been characteristic of a large number of traditional communities in Serbia, and to a certain extent is present even today, so it certainly cannot be talked about as being specific only to Roma communities.

2 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Synthesis Analytical Report on Child Marriage in Serbia', 2016.

considered an unacceptable social practice in the general population, still manages to survive in marginalized communities, such as Roma communities, due to, among other things, a lack of interest in the wider community in addressing the problem in a more serious manner. Invisibility in other domains also produces the invisibility of child marriage, which is usually interpreted as a Roma custom, a practice that exists among the Roma, and which, accordingly, should not be interfered with.

The fact that child marriage in Roma communities in Serbia is at the very margin of social interest is supported by the almost non-existent academic work on this topic. Although there were a number of important studies that focused on certain aspects of the functioning of Roma communities in Serbia, the topic of child marriage was barely addressed. Although there are statistical data that point out the problem and all its complexities, there are practically no materials or data from the field seen through the eyes of the involved parties.

This report is an attempt to change such lack of information. It aims to provide insight into the practice of child marriage from the perspective of the members of Roma communities themselves. The analysis of the obtained material and the proposed interventions are based on the experiences of the members and their views on the issue. The report concludes with proposed interventions, which consider the precise characteristics of each of the communities surveyed and are based on the perspective of the respondents themselves. They stem from the conceptual framework which was developed during the research, based on field experience and direct communication with people and their life stories.

The main challenge of such research was primarily in the previously mentioned fact that scientifically analysed material on the subject practically does not exist. The pioneering efforts to publish the life stories of Roma women, conducted by Roma women's organizations, brought light to the issue of child marriage and provide insight into its depth and complexity. However, such material does not provide sufficient information about the real or structural reasons why the practice still survives today. In other words, the challenges faced by the study ranged from basic questions such as what is it that marriage represents in general for our respondents, to how the decision is made to enter into a marriage and how the stakeholders themselves see the logic of loss and gain after making the decision.

The decision to base the collection of material on the principles of qualitative and ethnographic research necessarily led to opting for an approach where there was no initial hypothesis about the causes of the existence and survival of the practice of child marriage. The main idea was that the research process itself should, through interviews and interaction with respondents, produce an adequate conceptual framework for interpretation. The process of continuous learning, which involved constant adaptation to various contexts that appeared on the ground,

eventually resulted in the collection of material that consists of rich, deep evidence of the lived experiences of the Roma men and women with whom we talked.

The field research was conducted from March to June 2017 at five sites in Serbia: Belgrade, Kragujevac, Novi Bečej (Vojvodina), Pirot and Vranje, and was initiated as an integral part of the project, implemented jointly by Roma Women's Centre BIBIJA, Institute of Ethnography at the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (SASA) and UNICEF. The report resulting from this research was reviewed by an expert team from the Institute of Ethnography SASA.

This research would not have been possible without support from activists of the Roma organizations operating in these sites, whose contribution to building the trust between researchers and respondents was invaluable. They include, in addition to the Roma Women's Centre BIBIJA, members of the Roma Women's Network: Association of Roma Novi Bečej, Ternipe from Pirot, Sastipe from Vranje and Romanipen from Kragujevac. Finally, this report would not exist without the many Roma men and women who were willing to talk to us, share their life experiences and views, and allow us to examine, from their perspectives, a very sensitive social practice that largely determines their life paths.

3

APPROACH AND THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

3.1 Child marriage as a real-life practice

The process of defining the approach to the topic of child marriage in Roma communities was conditioned by a basic question about the type and characteristics of the data that we wanted to collect and analyse.

The quantitative indicators, which will be presented below, represented the starting point that enabled identification of the problem and general guidelines on the prevalence of the phenomenon of child marriage in communities and in sites which were planned for research. They indicated significant correlations between factors such as poverty, education level or place of residence, and risk of entering into a child marriage.

In order to fully comprehend the reasons for the persistence of the practice of child marriage, it is necessary to further understand the key factors impacting the decision to marry a child. To achieve this goal, we opted for insight revealing the real life of the community, whereby the interviews with its members reveal the complexity and the intertwining of the risk factors that ultimately lead to the decision to enter into marriage, as well as protective factors that may reduce its probability. The narratives about actual experiences represent material which, at first glance, is often a set of incoherent data on various topics, that does not necessarily have to be related to the research subject. On the other hand, it is precisely these stories from

the respondents, when subjected to fundamental analysis and comparison, which give meaning to seemingly unconnected elements. These elements together contribute to the process resulting in a decision to enter into marriage. In other words, by studying the behaviour of individuals, families and the community as a whole, we wanted to shed light on the causes behind the decision-making process regarding one of the most significant issues determining life prospects.

Without this insight, following only the correlations of the risk factors associated with the practice of child marriage, it is possible to develop and implement a type of intervention based on the 'top-down' approach. For example, working to increase the education level in some Roma communities is an important recommendation and measure when it comes to reducing the risk of child marriage. The 'top-down' approach involves action of institutions at various levels and implementation of programmes created within different public policies. The approach, however, does not show how the process works in practice — i.e., the real problems and obstacles arising in the process itself. One of the more important factors determining the success or failure of the desired changes is the attitude of the stakeholders themselves towards them. Knowledge about attitudes, values and cultural models of the Roma community in relation to, for instance, education, is of crucial importance when it comes to understanding the established process of Roma girls dropping out of the education system.

It is only when real insight is obtained into the local context, into the values and ideas that exist in individual communities regarding education, can the risk and protective factors that prevail in deciding whether and until when a child will have access to education be located. Thus, in certain local contexts poverty can be a factor that will prevent parents from continuing to send their child to school. In some other cases, the cause may lie in strong social norms that determine education is not required for female children, although the economic sustainability for continuing education exists. Also, the economic underdevelopment in some areas, with a high unemployment rate of the general population can also impact the decision to drop out of the education system, which is seen as unnecessary because of a lack of prospects to capitalize on the resource. On the other hand, economic prospects may act as a motivating factor for education and, consequently, as a protective factor against early marriage. Finally,

What are risk factors?

Risk factors include environmental conditions, events, experiences or characteristics of the individual or society which may place them in a situation of higher probability of facing an unfavourable phenomenon, such as violence.

What are protective factors?

Protective factors are the reverse of risk factors (see above). They are environmental conditions, events, experiences or characteristics of the individual or society which reduce the probability of facing, for example, violence.

all of the potential risk and protective factors mentioned above are often intertwined, and it is necessary to establish which one of them prevails. Although the complexity of these types of data presents a major challenge in terms of analysis, once observed, the risk and protective factors, as perceived by individuals, families and the Roma communities themselves, can be the foundation for interventions that will be planned 'bottom-up', taking as crucial those parameters that stem from the real-life experience of the stakeholders themselves.

The decision to base this research on these types of data was made with the aim of making recommendations for interventions consistent with the characteristics of communities, continuously taking into account the differences that exist between them and, consequently, the different prevailing risk factors for entering into child marriage at various sites where the research was conducted. In addition, we also sought and observed the regularities and consistencies in functioning and operation of the factors that influence the existence of the practice of child marriage, whereby, considering all the local characteristics, we tried to offer a wider framework based on which the possible interventions could be proposed.

3.2 Overview of the existing literature on child marriage in the Roma population in Serbia

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, very little research was carried out in Serbia related to the issue of child marriage in the Roma population, and academic work on the subject practically does not exist. One example of a scientific study providing deeper insight into the issue of child marriage in the Roma population is the article titled 'Virginity and Early Marriage Customs in Relation to Children's Rights among Chergashe Roma from Serbia and Bosnia', which, based on material collected through interviews, approaches this issue from the point of view of respecting children's rights, and represents a valuable contribution to the subject.³ Unfortunately, there are not nearly enough of such studies that would warrant discussion about a systematic research interest or a significant body of literature explaining the issue and how to resolve it. Also, it is worth mentioning that there are some scientific papers whose contribution is not based on specific empirical material, but mainly on secondary material.⁴

3 Bosnjak, B., and T. Acton, 'Virginity and Early Marriage Customs in Relation to Children's Rights among Chergashe Roma from Serbia and Bosnia', *International Journal of Human Rights*, vol. 17, no. 5–6, 2013.

4 See, for example, Cvorovic, J., 'Sexual and Reproductive Strategies among Serbian Gypsies', *Popular Environment*, vol. 25, 2014; Hotchkiss, et al., 'Risk Factors Associated with the Practice of Child Marriage', *BMC International Health & Human Rights*, vol. 16, no. 6, 2016.

In terms of the representativeness of the material and samples, as well as the systematic presentation of the current situation, we would like to highlight the previously mentioned UNICEF MICS⁵ and the synthesis analytical report on child marriage in Serbia, published by UNICEF in 2016, as well as research done in 2006 by the Roma Women's Centre (BIBIJA) on the cult of virginity⁶ and the publication from the same organization titled '(Too) Early Marriage: Life stories of the Roma women in Serbia'.⁷ Also, as a valuable contribution to the recognition of the issue of child marriage in Serbia, we should mention the study published by the NGO Atina, called 'Child Marriage in Serbia: Analysis of the situation and recommendations',⁸ which provides institutional insight into the issue, emphasizing in particular the link between child marriage and human trafficking.

3.3 Research methodology

In line with the main idea, the approach to the issue of child marriage in the Roma population in Serbia in this research is based on the principles of qualitative research methodology.⁹ As a research process, it is used to expose deeper meanings when it comes to the attitudes, opinions or motives of respondents.

One of the basic methods of collecting data in qualitative research is an interview, and in the case of the research in Roma communities in Serbia, the technique of an in-depth, semi-structured interview was used. The expected result of using this research technique was obtaining material that shows the experiences, attitudes and life stories of the respondents. In this regard, the collected material — i.e., the narratives of the members of the interviewed community — were the basis for interpreting the issue of child marriage.

The research was also based on multi-sited ethnography.¹⁰ This is a method of collecting material used to identify and analyse the same problem in different geographic or social contexts. This research method allows the issue of child marriage to be approached at the same time as a locally specific issue, but also as a phenomenon that has certain common characteristics in all sites where the research was conducted.

5 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Serbia MICS 2014 and Roma Settlements in Serbia MICS 2014', 2015.

6 Kurtić, V., 'Virginity: Freedom of choice', Roma Women's Centre Bibija, Belgrade, 2006.

7 Roma Women's Centre Bibija, '(Pre)rani brakovi. Romkinje progovaraju', 2013, available at <http://www.bibija.org.rs/images/PDF/BIBIJA_Romkinje_Progovaraju.pdf>, accessed 15 July 2017.

8 Aleksić, M., 'Child Marriage in Serbia: Analysis of the situation and recommendations', Atina and Foundation Ana i Vlade Divac, Belgrade, 2016, available at <<http://www.atina.org.rs/sites/default/files/1Deciji%20brakovi%20u%20Srbiji.pdf>>, accessed 15 July 2017.

9 Silverman, D., *Qualitative Research*, SAGE, London, 2016; Flick, U., *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, SAGE, London, 1998; and Blommaert, J., and D. Jie, *Ethnographic Fieldwork: A beginner's guide*, Multilingual Matters, Bristol, 2010.

10 Marcus, G., 'Ethnography in/of the World System: The emergence of multi-sited ethnography', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 24, 1995, pp. 95–117.

The qualitative research method used in this research shows its real potential when all the important parts of the research process are linked together. This approach relies on the methodology of grounded theory.¹¹ The basic postulate of this methodological concept is insisting on a circular model of the research process. This means that, unlike with a linear model, the grounded theory rests on continuous adjustment, both of the methodological apparatus and of the theoretical concepts, throughout the entire research process. The principles of grounded theory are:

- Refraining from setting the initial hypotheses and testing them.
- Decisions on the sample are made during the course of the research, based on periodic preliminary analyses.
- The final results are new insights, which are determined by the space for adapting to the subject and participants throughout the entire research process.
- Continuous comparative analysis of cases, both with each other and in relation to theoretical categories during each research cycle.
- The size of the sample is determined by the ‘theoretical exhaustion’ of categories, rather than demographic ‘representativeness’.
- The theory that is obtained develops inductively, but is constantly harmonized and checked through the collected material.

An important concept used in this report is the concept of social norms. Social norms are informal forms of understanding between the members of a community or society, which greatly control their behaviour. They present collective perceptions of acceptable behaviours in the community. One of the most important forms of social norms refers to their cultural aspect. Those are cultural concepts, including values, customs and tradition, which determine the basic knowledge of individuals regarding what they and members of their community do or should do.¹² These are powerful social

What are social norms?

Common standards of socially acceptable or appropriate behaviour in a certain social group or certain social situations, whose violation results in social consequences.

11 Glaser, B. G., and A. L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for qualitative research*, Routledge, London, 1999; and Strauss, A. L., and J. M. Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*, SAGE, Thousand Oaks, 1998.

12 Scott, J., and G. Marshall, *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009; and Lapinski, M. K., and R. N. Rimal, ‘An Explication of Social Norms’, *Communication Theory*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2005, pp. 127–147.

control mechanisms, which informally set the rules and acceptable and unacceptable forms of behaviour, and they very frequently have stronger effects than formal laws.¹³ Such behaviour patterns are key to understanding how communities function and the behaviour of their members, and their identification in this report presents one of the key interpretation tools when it comes to understanding the process of making a decision to enter into child marriage.

An example of the functioning of social norms in the Roma community is partilocality — i.e., tacit agreement that, after she marries, the wife always moves in with her husband's family into their house. This rule is completely taken for granted and undisputed in Roma communities and presents unchallenged practice. A consequence of uncontested observance of this custom is the direct dependence of a woman on her husband and his family, both in terms of acceptance of their rules and of frequent economic disenfranchisement and low status in the new environment. This informal practice structurally determines the subordinate position of women in Roma communities, and its indisputability points to the complexity of changing cultural models when it comes to child marriage.

Key methodological pillars of the research:

- Qualitative research based on analysing narratives of lived experience
- Multi-sited ethnography approach
- Grounded theory methodology

3.4 Objectives of the research

This report, following the theoretical and methodological principles and guidelines outlined in the previous sections, presents the result of field research with the following main objectives:

- Identifying the basic factors that influence the existence and reproduction of the practice of child marriage, as well as those factors that represent the basis for changing this practice.
- Discussing and analysing social and cultural norms related to the practice of child marriage.
- Determining the key stakeholders in the marital decision-making process, and evaluating what types of thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and economic and socio-cultural contexts influence this process.

¹³ Hercfeld, M., *Kulturna intimnost, XX vek*, Beograd, 2004.

- Identifying the key stakeholders who, from the point of view of the Roma communities themselves, can be the bearers of change.
- Proposing interventions which arise from an understanding of the local context and are adapted to the characteristics of each of the communities surveyed, but which also take into account the general trends associated with the practice of child marriage at all surveyed sites.

FIELD RESEARCH

4

The field research at the designated sites was carried out by a team of two researchers: main researcher Ivan Djordjevic, PhD, scientific associate of the Ethnographic Institute of the SASA, and researcher Ljiljana Gavrilovic, PhD, scientific adviser of the Ethnographic Institute of the SASA. The total number of research days, distributed according to site characteristics, was 25, and during that time 70 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with respondents, members of Roma communities of both sexes and various ages. A key role in the organization of the research was played by field coordinators, members of local Roma organizations. They were responsible for recruiting research respondents based on instructions for a stratified sample provided by the research team. They were also responsible for all logistical assistance, with emphasis on access to the communities themselves, which would have been greatly hampered without their engagement. Depending on the situation on the ground, some interviews were done separately, while a number of them were conducted by both researchers. Also, in certain situations, interviews were carried out in groups, based on an assessment of the research team members and the coordinators.

Conducting interviews in this way, although not explicitly envisaged by the research protocol, proved to be very useful in certain situations. Although a certain degree of confidentiality typical for individual conversations was lost in this manner, the group dynamics in certain contexts contributed to the opening up of the respondents, and thus to higher-quality testimonies. This proved to be a particularly good approach in cases where the respondents felt much more relaxed when they were not in the sole company of the researchers, but also of members of their own community, which often resulted in their mutual encouragement to delve deeper into the conversation.

The basis for conducting the interviews was an elaborate research guide.¹⁴ The guide contained protocols and questions for researching the practice of child marriage, with a particular focus on the decision-making process related to the practice. The questionnaire contained sets of general questions applicable to all types of respondents, as well as specific questions intended

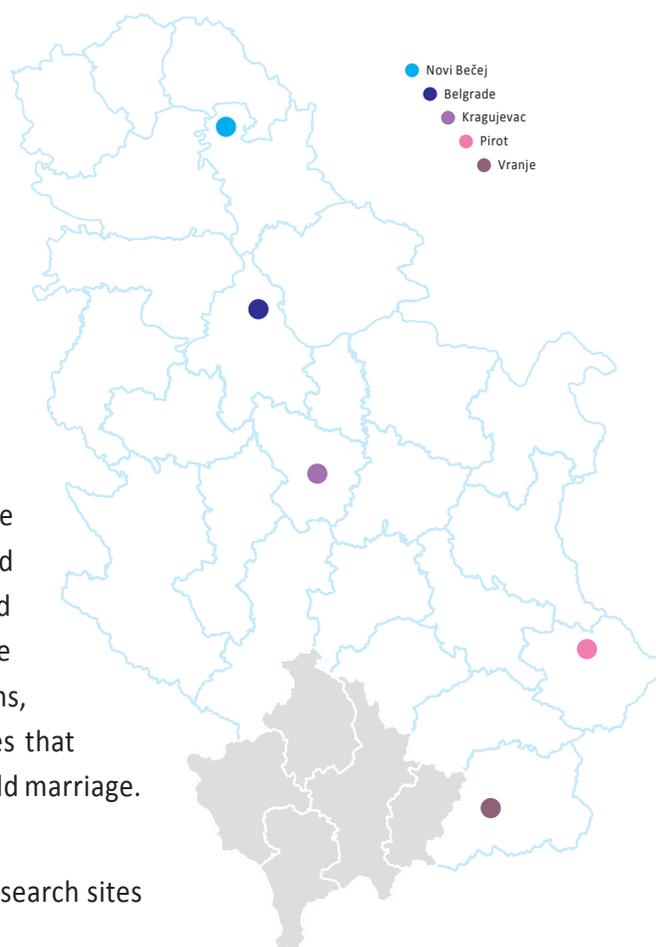
14 The research guide is attached as an annex to this report.

only for certain groups of respondents. Also, primarily depending on the local characteristics and in accordance with the good practice of ethnographic, qualitative research, the researchers, on the basis of their own assessment of the situation on the ground, had the opportunity to adapt the guide in those directions that would elaborate on some important issues or create new ones, which occurred during the interviews with respondents. The reason for this was the intention to primarily have a conversation with the respondents, which, in certain situations, veered off the main topic, but precisely through this process important pieces of information were obtained that the researchers would not have learned by strictly adhering to the pre-set questions.

The questionnaire used contained the following blocks of questions: a set of questions about marital experiences; a set of questions related to the education of respondents; a set of questions related to the attitude of children or close relatives of respondents to marriage and education; a set for respondents whose children did not marry early; and a special segment of the questionnaire related to the economic situation of the respondents.

4.1 Features of the research sites

The research was conducted in five different sites in Serbia, and the selection criteria were established based on consultations with experts from UNICEF, the Roma Women's Network BIBIJA and members of the active Roma organizations. The principles that were followed during the selection of sites were maintaining the geographical diversity and estimated presence of the practice of child marriage in each of them, as well as the feasibility of potential future interventions, in line with existing programme resources that are more closely related to the issue of child marriage.



Map 1. Research sites

As a relevant sample, in this sense, the following cities and towns in Serbia were highlighted: Novi Bečej and its surroundings, Pirot and its surroundings, Vranje and its surroundings, Kragujevac and Belgrade. What follows is a brief description of each of the sites surveyed and their socio-economic and demographic characteristics, with particular reference to the Roma communities in these towns and cities.

Novi Bečej is an urban settlement in Vojvodina in the Central Banat District. According to the 2011 census,¹⁵ the population of this municipality was 23,925. Out of that number, 1,295 people declared themselves as Roma, which is about 5.5 per cent of the total number of people. Most of the Roma population lives in separate parts of the settlement (mahallas), but a certain number of them are settled in parts of Novi Bečej inhabited by the majority population, predominantly Serbs and Hungarians, and both of the groups were interviewed. According to the data obtained from our respondents, a very small percentage of Roma people are employed, and if they do work, the activity is mainly related to trade at farmers' markets or seasonal work in agriculture. Accordingly, their economic situation depends largely on various types of social benefits, and they often 'go on asylum', which is the practice of seeking asylum in the developed countries of Western Europe, which, during the application process, opens up the possibility of acquiring a certain financial gain.

Pirot is a city in Pirot District, in the southern part of Serbia. According to the 2011 census, the population of the city was 38,785. Out of that number, according to the same source, 1,878 citizens declared themselves as Roma, which is 4.84 per cent of the total number of people in the census. There is a Roma mahalla in Pirot, but a large number of Roma are integrated into the majority population. Respondents' statements suggest that the Roma living in the city are integrated, many of them have jobs, and they view the way of life and customs of the non-integrated Roma as backward and primitive. The Roma living in villages around Pirot are significantly more economically vulnerable than those living in the city, making them a more sensitive group in relation to a number of risks arising from such a status. All three types of respondents were interviewed during the research.

Vranje is an urban settlement in Pčinja District, in southern Serbia, where, according to the 2011 census, 83,524 people live. Out of that number, 4,654 people declared themselves as being of Roma nationality, which is about 5.57 per cent of the total number of people in the census. In Vranje, most of the Roma population lives in mahallas, with the biggest one being 'Gornja Čaršija', which is traditionally defined as a part of the city inhabited almost exclusively by the Roma population, where most of the interviews were actually conducted. According to the

15 All the data with references to the 2011 population census are available at <http://popis2011.stat.rs/?page_id=2134>, accessed 24 August 2017.

testimonies of the respondents, it can be concluded that this is a tightly knit community, with extremely strong respect for traditional cultural forms. From an economic point of view, most of our respondents are not employed, and the predominant occupation is related to music — i.e., playing at different types of ceremonies. On the other hand, a very large number of Roma from Vranje and its surroundings lives and works abroad, which represents a resource that helps the economic sustainability of our respondents. This particularly applies to sites near Vranje — Surdulica and Vranjska Banja.

Kragujevac is a city in central Serbia, in Šumadija District. According to the population census, it has a population of 179,417, with 1,331 people declaring as Roma, which is 0.88 of the total population in the census. However, based on insights from the field and interviews with respondents, it can be concluded that this number is significantly higher in reality. According to their statements, a large number of Roma resort to the so-called ‘ethnic mimicry’ strategy, declaring mostly as members of the majority population or another national minority such as Romanian. This is especially noticeable among the internally displaced Roma from Kosovo¹⁶ and Metohija, but this trend is also present among the integrated Roma, who, by hiding their ethnicity, avoid the potential discrimination they would be exposed to because of their origin. There are Roma mahallas in Kragujevac, but many people of Roma nationality are fully integrated into the majority population both in terms of place of residence and living habits, culture and education. This is the result of a decades-long practice of employment in local factories, where a large number of Roma people who worked in them acquired the right to housing and thus moved from both the neighbouring villages and urban mahallas, integrating themselves into the majority population. Based on the testimonies of respondents, there is also a trend present that the integrated Roma are not familiar with the situation in the mahallas, and generally avoid any contact with those Roma people who inhabit them. It is on the line of this division that their economic position is determined. While the integrated Roma people work and have a steady income, economic deprivation is significantly more noticeable among the respondents living in mahallas.

Belgrade is by far the most complex researched site. It is the capital of Serbia and, according to the 2011 census, it has a population of 1,659,440, with 27,325 declaring as Roma.¹⁷ The diversity of the housing arrangements, the economic position and the degree of integration of members of the Roma communities in Belgrade is extremely high, and it is therefore difficult to

16 All references to Kosovo in this publication should be understood to be in the context of United Nations Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).

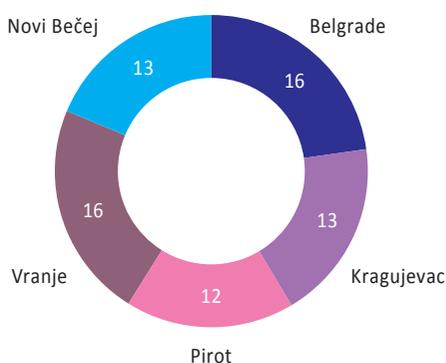
17 This number amounts to only 1.6 per cent of the total population, and is probably significantly higher. Unofficial data indicate that 90,000 Roma people live in Belgrade. The difference that exists between these pieces of data can be attributed to ethnic mimicry and other reasons.

talk about a general model that can apply to this site. The surveyed sites varied from informal settlements without basic conditions for life in the city centre, to integrated settlements in suburban municipalities, and the structure of respondents ranged from internally displaced people from Kosovo to people native to the parts of the city where they live. In that sense, it can be said that Belgrade represents a specific case where completely different models and cultural practices occur, depending on the specific site where the researched was conducted.

4.2 Sample

The research sample consisted of 70 respondents at different sites in Serbia. The distribution of respondents by sites was done in the following way:

Figure 1. Number of respondents by site



The assessment of the number of respondents by site was primarily based on the criterion of child marriage prevalence. This type of assessment was given by the local coordinators, based on their own knowledge and practice on the ground. Another important criterion was the size of the site, so a larger sample was taken at places where the Roma population is more numerous. Apart from that, the sample in Kragujevac was selected so as to be dominated by good practice examples, since preliminary field estimates, in view of the higher percentage of integrated Roma population, pointed to a lower prevalence of child marriage.

Out of the total number of respondents, 58 were women and 12 were men. Although in the original research plan the gender ratio was supposed to be more balanced and roughly equal to 60 per cent of women and 40 per cent of men, the situation on the ground had to lead to

a change in the definition of the sample. Namely, during the time spent on site, it turned out that it was incomparably more difficult to establish contact and find men ready to discuss the topic of child marriage, unlike with women, who were more open to this kind of cooperation, which is certainly an important fact, both for further research and future programmes. In many cases, when male respondents did initially agree to an interview, they would cancel it at the last moment or not show up at the agreed time. Also, during the initial stages of fieldwork, it turned out that, even when they want to talk, male respondents were much less willing to discuss real-life practice and life experiences, predominantly presenting idealized models of community functioning.

This is a phenomenon in qualitative ethnographic research, where respondents often talk about what they assume people they talk to would want to hear rather than what the real-life practice is. Such a phenomenon is particularly evident with sensitive topics that are not accepted by the wider community, as is the case with child marriage. During our research, in interviews with male respondents we often heard that the practice of child marriage has practically disappeared, although we received completely opposite information from other respondents at the same sites. In this sense, the imbalance between the number of male and female respondents had a justification in relation to the quality of the narratives in the research.

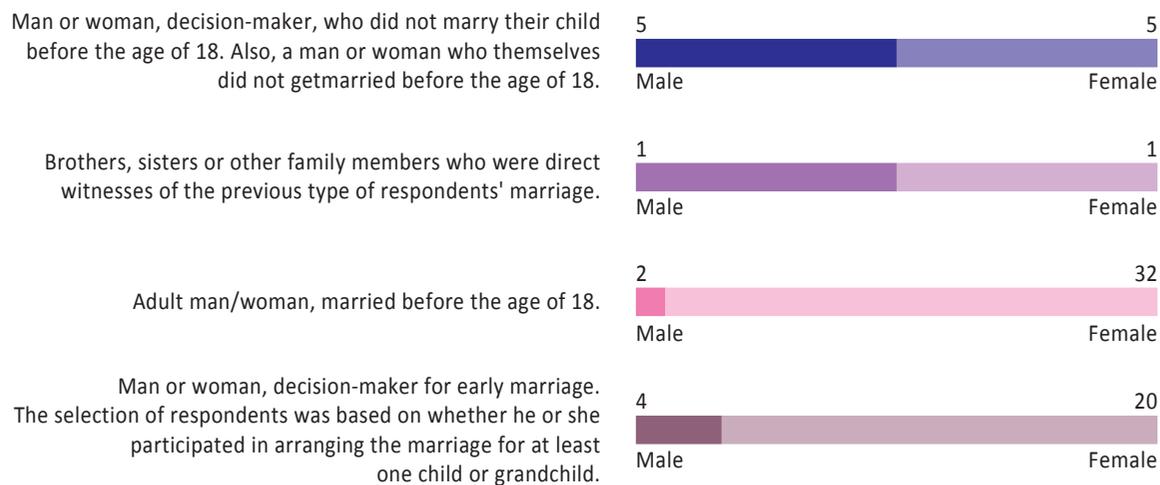
The types of respondents covered by this guide were:

- Man or woman, decision maker for early marriage. The selection of respondents was based on whether he or she participated in arranging the marriage for at least one child or grandchild.
- Adult man/woman, married before the age of 18.
- Brothers, sisters or other family members who were direct witnesses of the previous type of respondents' marriage.
- Man or woman, decision maker, who did not marry their child before the age of 18. Also, a man or woman who themselves did not get married before the age of 18.

Children were excluded from the research sample, and the reasons for such a decision are explained in detail in the section on ethical issues.

Out of the total number of respondents, the distribution of the sample in relation to the gender and type can be seen in the following figure:

Figure 2. Respondent type by gender



Qualitative research implies deep insights into selected individual cases, which provide knowledge on the life experiences of respondents, and enable understanding the impact of different factors on individual life situations, but also on the functioning of the community as a whole. Many of the respondents essentially represent cases in which the criteria overlap, where there were situations that the male or female respondent was married early, but also has children who got married in this way. Also, in many cases, the respondents who were selected as witnesses of the practice of child marriage in their surroundings were themselves married before the age of 18, so it turned out that their life stories were relevant from several aspects in relation to the proposed typology.

The sample selected had the aim of encompassing different models of entry into child marriage in the broadest possible way, which, according to the respondent's narratives, are the most useful for obtaining insight into the processes related primarily to decision making about marriage. Taking this into account, we did not look for correlations and trends based on the sample comparison, but instead looked for structural factors which in individual cases affect the decision-making process related to entering into marriage. The relevance of the results obtained based on the selected sample is reflected in the possibility of comparing a series of complex individual narratives and identifying from this set of lived experiences regularities in factors that primarily influence the existence and reproduction of the practice of child marriage or its absence. The topics highlighted in this way are given in chapter 4 of this report.

4.3 Ethics of the research

In order to verify the ethical issues related to the research protocol, we asked the Serbian Ethnological and Anthropological Society for their opinion, as the body relevant to make this type of assessment when it comes to qualitative ethnographic research. The Serbian Ethnological and Anthropological Society gave a positive opinion on the ethics of the proposed research. It was based on UNICEF's 'Protocol for Ethical Standards in Research, Evaluation, Data Collection and Analysis'. Verification of compliance with the standards was done through a form provided by UNICEF, which prescribes the necessary supporting documents, such as a detailed research guide and statements on the informed consent of respondents.

The question of ethics was one of the most important and most complex parts of both the planning process and conducting the field research. Researching a phenomenon such as child marriage implies that it is an extremely sensitive topic, which requires the respondents themselves to discuss personal and intimate topics, and the researchers to have a high level of empathy and sensitivity. Investigating the respondents' private domain, as well as the question of mutual respect and trust, was crucial not only for the quality of the material obtained, but above all for establishing a relationship where the respondents would recognize the sincere endeavour of the research which aims to present their point of view and which is conducted for their benefit and the benefit of their communities.

The main ethical question was raised even before the start of the research, and concerned the participation of respondents who are under the age of 18 and who are married. It was decided that they would not be included in the research, as it was assessed that interviews with them could seriously compromise their rights and well-being. First and foremost, it was felt that the testimonies of girls and boys under the age of 18 might represent a potentially unpleasant situation for them, primarily because of the pressure from their older family members, including their father and mother or father-in-law and mother-in-law. An honest conversation on the topic could aggravate their position within the family hierarchy, so their willingness to discuss their experiences the way they really happened was an issue. In addition, there was also a high probability that psychological anxiety would arise from a conversation on the topic, caused by the lack of time distance. The risk of possible sanctions, the likelihood of unwanted psychological consequences for children and, on the other hand, the potentially fragmented data that would be obtained by their inclusion, led us to conclude that participation of children, regardless of them being the key stakeholders, would not be justified from the point of view of both ethics and research.

The key role in establishing initial trust between the respondents and researchers was played by the coordinators on the ground and other activists from Roma organizations. Their previous work with the respondents, and the high level of trust established with them that way, enabled the researchers firstly to access the communities, and then to talk about deeply intimate topics such as their marriages and the marriages of their children or close relatives. The great majority of respondents, in this sense, were ready to talk with us sincerely and without restraints about their own life experiences. On the other hand, in some situations, the conversations evoked memories of certain situations in their lives that caused emotional reactions. Each of these moments was a challenge for the research, but above all a human challenge to assess whether it makes sense in such situations to continue with the interview. In actual cases, the researchers always offered to end the interview, but the respondents themselves did not want to stop, not even once.

The research showed that respondents found the question of anonymity — i.e., the guarantee that their personal data would not be publicly available in any form — as very important. In order to provide such an assurance, before each interview the researchers gave respondents a statement of informed consent. This document contained a list of researchers' obligations, which included the obligation that the material published in this report would not in any way reveal any personal information. Also, it was explained to the respondents that if, for any reason, they assessed that they no longer wished to participate in the interview, they could do so at any time, and that their statements in this case would not be used as research material.

Generally speaking, the respondents showed readiness during the interviews to share their experiences and attitudes with us. Although the issue of child marriage is a very sensitive topic, it turned out that the vast majority of respondents felt the need to tell their life story and talk about the different issues that they perceive as important. In a certain sense, the interviews served as a mechanism for respondents through which their story would be heard. We consider this aspect of the research process very important, as it turned out that the experiences of Roma men and women with whom we talked are such that society does not really listen to their problems and that the struggle with the prejudices surrounding them is considered by respondents as one of the key problems they are facing. Conversations with us, even when we were talking about deeply intimate life experiences such as, for example, the wedding night, were in this respect a way for the respondents to present and explain their own way of life, as it actually is.

5

KEY TOPICS IN THE RESEARCH

Previous research point to exact data on the prevalence of child marriage among the Roma population in Serbia. Data available from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) show that this practice is most prevalent among children from Roma settlements, while it is marginal in the general population. This survey indicates that, in Serbia, only 0.8 per cent of women aged 15 to 49 years married before the age of 15, while in the Roma communities this percentage is 16.9. Also, it is estimated that 0.2 per cent of girls aged 15 to 17 years married before the age of 15, while in the case of girls from Roma settlements this percentage is 15.2.¹⁸

In addition, there is a clear difference between women from the general population and women from Roma settlements when it comes to early first marriage or common-law marriage. Among women aged 20 to 49 years, almost 6.8 per cent of women from the general population and 57 per cent of women from Roma settlements entered their first marriage before the age of 18.¹⁹

The importance of resolving this problem is also indicated by the data obtained in MICS, which show that while the percentage of child marriages in the general population is steadily decreasing, in Roma communities the percentage is on the increase. For example, in 2004, 45.9 per cent of girls were married before the age of 18, while in 2010 this share rose to 53.7 per cent, and in 2017 it reached 57 per cent of girls who married before the age of majority.²⁰

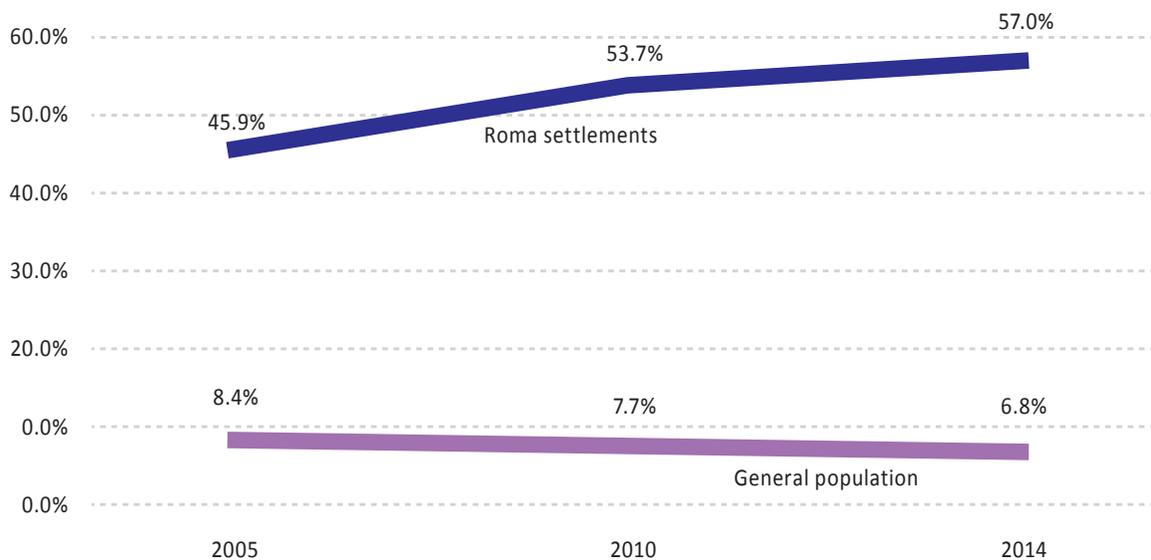
The research confirmed the widespread prevalence of the practice of child marriage, but it also determined that the modalities, causes and the very prevalence of the practice vary considerably in relation to the communities where the research was conducted. Significant differences in the practice were also observed within the research sites. These observed differences indicate the complexity of factors that affect the existence and characteristics of child marriage. The research indicated that there is a series of different risks and protective factors and factors of changes that occur in different communities, and that what the practice looks like in reality depends directly on their mutual influence and predominance.

18 Babović, M., Rodni aspekti životnog toka viđeni iz perspektive podataka iz Istraživanja višestrukih pokazatelja (MICS), UNICEF, Belgrade, 2015, available at <http://www.unicef.org/serbia/Gender_aspects_of_MICS_October_2015.pdf>, accessed 20 July 2017.

19 UNICEF, Serbia MICS 2014 and Roma Settlements in Serbia MICS 2014, Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia and UNICEF, 2014, <http://www.unicef.org/serbia/Serbia_2014_MICS_National_and_Roma_Settlements_Eng_20141218.pdf>, accessed 20 July 2017.

20 Ibid.

Figure 3. Women married before the age of 18



Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), UNICEF

Considering the initial premise of our work, where the principle of grounded theory was used as the main theoretical and methodological postulate, highlighting individual risk, protective and change factors occurred during the fieldwork itself and in relation to the material obtained from the respondents, and was finally rounded up after the research was completed.

The main idea in this report is to present those factors through rich narratives of lived experience — that is, the very testimonies of respondents give a clear picture of the functioning of each of the factors in real-life practice. Following this procedure enabled us to obtain the required local knowledge, which served as the basis for the formulation of the proposed interventions. Certainly, a systemic, institutional response by the relevant stakeholders within society and by the state represents a necessary and crucial parameter for action and interventions towards the disappearance of the practice of child marriage. This research, however, is focused on uncovering the factors that determine the practice of early marriage from the perspective of the Roma communities themselves, as well as on proposing possible responses to the risk of early marriage within a particular social environment.

The research pointed to the great importance of the characteristics of each of the communities surveyed. On the other hand, the consistent presence of certain factors and the regularity in their functioning allowed us to adopt wider conclusions as the basis for considering the

theoretical framework from which the interventions might be planned and implemented in the future, which will be discussed in greater detail in the concluding chapter of this report.

Based on the analysis of the collected material obtained from interviews with the respondents, the most important topics related to the risk and protective factors and factors of change that occur when it comes to the practice of child marriage in Roma communities in Serbia are the following:

- Acceptance of the marital status and marriage in general (with emphasis on familiarity with marriage from the perspective of children who are to enter it).
- Agency — i.e., the decision-making process in the context of the balance of power between the community/family/child.
- Role of the social and cultural norms: cult of virginity, bride dowries, elopement, and customs related to marriage (wedding ceremony, reconciliation).
- Perception of the importance of education, but also the benefits of education in real-life practice.
- Social integration — examples of good practice and constraints that occur in that context.
- The ‘glass ceiling’ phenomenon — i.e., factors resulting in not being able to overcome the invisible barriers relating to the marginalized position of Roma communities in Serbia.

The choice of these topics was directly conditioned by the collected material. The process of collection itself actually presented the crucial part of the process, both for choosing the topics for analysis, and later for proposing the conceptual framework for planning of interventions. In other words, the research was a continuous learning process, where the relevance and importance of some topics became known during and after, rather than prior to, the research. We did not acquire this knowledge only from the conducted formal interviews and analysis of their transcripts, but also from informal conversations, spending time with our respondents in their surroundings and getting a picture of what their everyday life looks like. Documenting such situations goes beyond the scope and objectives of this report, but it will be the subject of further academic study, with the aim of expanding methodological insights on this type of field research.

An illustrative example of such situations is one of the interviews that was supposed to be conducted with a respondent at one of the sites in southern Serbia. The young woman we were supposed to talk to turned out to be extremely uncommunicative, because of the presence of

her husband's family. The woman in question was a so-called 'child of the street', who married very young and had four children by the age of 20. Since it was obvious that the interview could not be conducted according to protocol, we decided, in consultation with the field coordinator, to stop the interview. Consequently, the interview is not documented as part of the analysed material. On the other hand, while one of the researchers tried to conduct the interview with the respondent, the other researcher talked to her daughters, girls in the lower grades of primary school. This conversation, which was one of the common informal parts of the research process, showed that they are extremely interested girls who have different skills and show a great enthusiasm for school, which was evident in their need to share their knowledge of mathematics and English with us. Later, after we decided to stop the interview, we had the chance, while returning to our car, to talk to an older neighbour who was present during our stay in the respondent's house. We learned from her that this is a dysfunctional family, where the husband (and father) rarely stays at home and is prone to aggressive behaviour and alcoholism. His family has a very bad relationship with their daughter-in-law, and the neighbour's motivation for regular visits to the household is for the benefit of the children and trying to possibly help them. She is primarily motivated by realizing that, as she said, nobody is helping those children and nobody will help them. Given these circumstances, despite the current positive attitude towards school and education, it can be assumed that there is a real risk that the girls will not be able to complete their commenced formal education.

The example in question shows that the systemic insistence on compulsory education, accompanied by sanctions or conditioning with social benefits is not sufficient, but that it is necessary to understand the wider context that leads to the fact that, when it comes to school, in spite of the sanctions, dropping out from the system can still prevail. The 'top-down' intervention in the given case and at a specific moment has an effect, but for it to be sustainable in the long term, it is necessary to consider many factors that are not present in the wider social environment but are present in Roma communities. In that sense, insisting on continuing the education of girls can have an impact on reducing the practice of child marriage, but one must have in mind that such a thing is possible only if one has in mind all the challenges that a girl or her family are facing in order for her to have such an option at all, and if adequate support is provided to overcome these challenges.

In the case above, this is a family in which the mother is in an obviously subordinate position, with the likelihood of suffering various forms of violence, which makes her parenting capacities significantly reduced. On the other hand, thanks to the institutional pressure which makes any type of social support conditional on formal education, children are currently going to school and showing a clear and positive attitude towards it. However, growing up in an environment

without any support systems points to the existence of a likely risk that their education will be interrupted and that similar models to those existing in their primary family will be reproduced.

This case, on the one hand, demonstrates the effectiveness of a certain type of sanction of the wider social system in terms of the pressure that children go to school. On the other hand, this kind of sanction has a limited effect, because it is directed exclusively towards the child's formal attendance at school, and not towards the circumstances and possible obstacles for their normal education that exist within the family or community. Namely, the lack of support from the surroundings, family problems and poverty are some of the factors which remain invisible by the system and institutions that can significantly affect the inability to continue education. Also, taking all of these factors into account, the existing social norm that encourages early marriage can lead to school dropout, since many parents consider marriage as a more economically and culturally justifiable choice than education and going to school. By marrying their daughter, the parents no longer have economic pressure, because the child went to live in another house, while continuing education in the new household is mostly an unnecessary expense and is inconsistent with the foreseen role of wife and mother. In the case mentioned here, another realistic possibility is that the girls themselves, due to the dysfunctional family environment, assess that marrying and leaving home represents a benefit compared with the possible continuation of education, and that leaving school seemingly becomes an act of free will, but is actually caused by the environment and the lack of support systems. Taking all this into account, in this case it is crucial that institutional responses to, girls' possible dropout from the education system, take into account all the complex factors that can lead to it.

The narratives of our respondents in the next chapter are aimed precisely at indicating the impact of all the complex factors, including education, which influence the decision to enter into a child marriage. Special attention is paid to those topics that show internal processes in the surveyed communities themselves, such as economic factors or pressure from the social and cultural norms within them. But, we should constantly have it in mind that many of the mentioned factors are often directly conditioned by the marginalized position of the Roma population in Serbia in relation to the wider social environment, and that this marginalization often has a major impact on reproduction of conservative social practices such as child marriage.

CHILD MARRIAGE: THE INSIDE STORY

6

The research²¹ showed that when it comes to marriage in the surveyed Roma communities, this is a slow process of the dissolving of the typical Balkans patriarchate — i.e., the model that was predominant in the Balkans until the second half of the twentieth century, and remained in some areas until its last decades.²² The patriarchal system is made of ‘a set of formalized rules of inheritance, obedience of children, organized relations, sexual asymmetry, rules against immorality and rules of obedience of women’,²³ which, among other things, implies the universality of marriage, patrilinearity, patrilocality, high esteem for the elderly, especially ancestors and marriage at a young age.

This general Balkan model is in a natural process of disintegration in the modern Roma population, as evidenced by numerous modifications and deviations from the ideal model which is still present in the narratives, but the testimonies and real-life stories show various adjustments in relation to that ideal model. Thus, the widespread presence of child marriages can be noted as a typical element of the traditional patriarchal model, which is still undoubtedly present, but whose stability is slowly collapsing, due to the influence of the wider social context. The directions of transformation of the model are different in different communities, which primarily depends on the closeness/openness of the community towards the wider society, and the answers to the challenges of modernization are various and depend primarily on economic conditions, but also on the adoption of different strategies for adapting to the general living conditions in places of residence.

21 Authentic transcripts of the statements of the informants are used in the text, but the data about the informant and the date of the interview were deliberately omitted. All interviews were conducted in the Serbian language. There were no grammatical interventions in the transcript. The comments and questions from the researchers are given in italics in brackets.

22 Various studies show that elements of this model can still be identified throughout the Balkans. Compare, for example: Hisa, Armanda, ‘Srpsko-albanski mešoviti brakovi: kada patrijarhalnost lomi barijere nacionalizma’, 2015. In Aleksandar Pavlović, Adriana Zaharijević, Gazela Pudar Draško, Rigels Halili (ur.), *Figura neprijatelja: preosmišljavanje srpsko-albanskih odnosa*, 243-260. Beograd: Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju: Beton.

23 Kaser, Karl, *Patriarchy after Patriarchy: Gender relations in Turkey and in the Balkans — 1500–2000*. LIT Verlag, Münster, 2008, p. 33.

Marriage in Roma communities is every union of a man and woman under the same roof, whether it is formalized or not. In that sense, it is no different from the concept of marriage in other communities in Serbia, where the traditional social structure has been preserved to some degree or has been restored in the processes of retraditionalization, during the past three decades.

For the existence of marriage in Roma communities today, it is not even important to ritualize the marriage with a wedding ceremony, although, as a rule, there still are various forms of publicly marking the act of entry into the first marriage, first of all sweet/hot rakia,²⁴ which announces that the girl was a virgin and which is organized with or without a wedding. The second and all subsequent marriages are largely not ritualized, although weddings are sometimes also organized in those cases.

Marriage is still obligatory, in the sense that it is considered that 'something is wrong' with those not married — in a moral or physical sense, which degrades not only their honour, but the honour of the entire family and calls into question the successful matrimony of the closest relatives. It is always and only patrilocal, and it is considered concluded when the girl goes to the young man's house or goes with him to the house of one of his relatives, especially if they spend the night there. Since virginity is still the ultimate factor of the girl's value, and also the value of her family, spending a night with any man (even if there was no sexual relationship) even today disqualifies a girl from marrying anyone else, or diminishes her and her family's honour.

As a rule, the young married couple lives in the husband's family, often the extended family (husband's parents and, often, more married brothers under the same roof). During the research, we met only one young couple who moved away and live alone in a rented house.

6.1 Patriarchal structure of the community

6.1.1 Honour/virginity

Insisting on honour in patriarchal communities always means insisting on sexual morality, above all that of women. That is why insisting on forbidding pre-marital sexual relationships for girls in all Roma communities is almost absolute and this is one of the undeniable reasons for early marriages.

²⁴ This is the custom of serving the so-called 'soft rakia' to the people gathered, when it is determined after the wedding night that the bride was a virgin.

It's a disgrace, when the rakia is not sweet (when the bride is not a virgin). And that's why the bride should be young, everybody's looking to have her as young as possible because of the sweet rakia.

And if the rakia is not sweet, then it's crazy! Give them back. There's those who do it. Some return, some don't, but that ain't that then. And those who want to keep the daughter-in-law, they get by. But that's a big disgrace.

Novi Bečej, woman D, 55²⁵

And when a virgin girl goes that's wow. But if she ain't virgin it's a disaster, so they better give me away while I'm a virgin, than to have people laughing later.

Pirot, woman I, 39

Virginity is insisted on regardless of whether a girl gets married early or only after finishing school or even university studies:

(And do you think they should be virgins when they get married? daughters, both adult and unmarried) Yes. Well it's normal for us, regardless of how old she is. Twenty-five, twenty-five, no sex. With us, no... It is known, when you marry, she must be a virgin. My daughters also think that way. They know it. And they don't even think about breaking this rule. We insist on finishing school, but I don't see them really insisting to get married. I'm not forbidding them to have a boyfriend, but, I'm saying, it's different with us.

Surdulica, woman B, 45

(And if the girls don't get married too early? If they don't get married by 17, 18?) But I don't know, they go to school so they're 23, 24, 25, she also has to be a virgin?) Yes, she also has to be a virgin.

Surdulica, woman M, 40

Even very young women who recently got married insist on virginity:

But you know what, we have this, it's not even a custom, it's like a law that exists, and that we the Roma maintain. It's not just my generation, ever since people know about

25 Informants are denoted with the place, gender, initial and age. The city/town is in the first place because the difference between communities in different cities and towns is very large, and belonging to a community also conditions the position and attitudes of the respondents. The initials were changed in order to protect the identity of the respondents.

us Roma (my mother, my aunt, my husband's sister, everyone I know)... simply that's the law. When a girl gets married, her husband must be her first, meaning that she must be a virgin. If it happens that she is not a virgin, then the entire Gornja Čaršija will be buzzing, like, that will be a disaster.

But, basically, all girls are all right. They know it, they respect it, because they know if it happens, it's not gonna be good for them. Because our people are like that, that's a big shame and disgrace. Like when a woman is leaving her husband and children... It's gotta be followed. And thank God I followed that, and that was very important to me.

But I think that every smart woman, whether a Roma or Serbian woman or anyone, should save her virginity because I think that's something, how to say it, a gift from God... simply, I know that tomorrow you will be my husband, I am sure of that, you love me, I love you. There's no need for me to now go sleep with someone else, and then be you wife. What's mine, I save for you. Because tomorrow you can have a go at me about it: you were like this and that, you slept with this guy and that guy, and now you're like my wife. But this way you know it, I slept with you, you're my first, and I have nothing to think about. I think that's the smartest, that every girl should do that.

Vranje, woman J, 21

(How did you feel? When it was soft rakia?) (woman P): When you're a virgin, you feel really good. You didn't embarrass your father-in-law, or mother-in-law, or your parents. With us it's like a joy.

Vranjska Banja, woman P, 18, woman T, 18

Even the respondents from the communities where the model is almost completely dissolved, like in Kragujevac, although they themselves say that today in their surroundings girls are rarely virgins when they marry, they actually think that they should be, and those who have daughters teach them that this is the right way to behave:

We are Roma, but it's not among us (...) It's not mandatory now... Maybe who would like to be for her husband, to be, as it should be and so. (What does it mean as it should be?) Well, for example, to be a girl and so...

Kragujevac, woman M, 23

(Everyone from Kragujevac we talked to says that there is no more sweet rakia and hot rakia and that virginity doesn't matter anymore?) My generations it was sought and

asked for. Imagine my uncle was here and asked, and the father had to record on tape to send him the tape so my uncle could see, if I was a girl or not. (So in the 1990s that was still valid?) Yes, yes. The same when my sister was marrying, she was a girl. Then hot rakia, and music. I'm teaching my child the same, I have a little girl.

Kragujevac, woman C, 40

In all other places virginity is absolutely expected and required from the girls, because the daughter-in-law who comes to the house as a virgin is also considered to be honouring her parents, who taught her well and looked after her, but also honouring the family she married into precisely because she is brought up well, so she will be a good daughter-in-law. It does not only mean that she will be faithful to her husband, which is a given, but also that she will respect her elders and act in accordance with the entire set of moral norms:

They were admiring me that I was a girl. They loved that very much, they weren't embarrassed to be seen with me somewhere.

Novi Bečej/Novo Miloševo, woman B, 44

She (younger unmarried daughter) knows my position on what she can, and what she can't. (What is it she can't?) She can't have a boyfriend. I wouldn't want... Those Gypsy customs, that I pop her first. Let somebody else, and then she... I won't allow. I don't like it. (So, she must get married as a virgin) She must. That... There's no letting that go. Must do that. You know that, how and what.

Novi Bečej, woman I, 45

There was no one to make this for me, so I tried for my sister. Now we prepared all that. Went outside. We keep celebrating, until they brought out, here's what they did. That's their custom. I was glad when we saw the bed sheet... They brought it out. We're now, like... Moved aside, and they are waiting now. His family. And they bring it out. Then sweet rakia started. ... I was glad she proved she was a girl after all. When they saw the white bed sheet and you can see everything. Then they started celebrating. Until then they were all cool. Until they realized she was really a girl, until they saw the bed sheet.

Novi Bečej/Novo Miloševo, woman C, 37

Well, you know, when you're already a virgin, so people stop, and they celebrate, and they congratulate each other, and they called my parents to say everything is all right,

that it's good. That I'm a good daughter-in-law. (And tell me, were you embarrassed? Did it feel embarrassing for you?) Of course it did... of course I was embarrassed... Ah, of my parents, and his parents. ... And later they took, the day after, took some music, you know how it goes. They then were decorating my parents, and to them, so let's say, whoever comes, tries this brandy, and shows that, like, I was good... and yeah. Let's say, then they took it out, I was embarrassed... They were showing it to people here. And whoever came they looked at it. (And what do you think, when your daughters get married? You think it will fare the same for them?) Yes, it will. (You think they have to be virgins when they get married?) Yes, I think they have to. (You think they will not be able to find a good husband if they aren't?) It's a disgrace with us. It will be a disgrace for me and my husband. It would mean that I did not bring them up well, that I wasn't taking care of them well...

Vranje, woman SM, 30

The mere claim of the girl, who ran away with the goal of getting married, that she was in a sexual relationship with the young man, is enough for the parents or guardians to agree to the marriage, even if it is a lie:

So I lied that we had relations and ... that I slept with he, you understand ... I wanted to take him and yeah (laughter). (Then you got married?) Because that's our custom, you know.

Pirot, woman M, 26

There are sanctions for the girl who was not a virgin, and also for her family, and those used to be drastic but are partially toned down today:

(And what if you had not been? /a virgin/) Nobody in the family likes you, the entire family. Not just the father-in-law or mother-in-law or but no one don't like you... The entire family and aunts and ... and they said that if you hadn't been a virgin they would put you on a donkey yeah ... donkey so naked in the centre all people look at you (the coordinator T says that, according to her grandmother, this still used to happen in the 1970s)

Surdulica, woman M, 40

So — although public shaming no longer occurs, a young woman finds herself in a situation of not being accepted by the family in which she should spend her life and where as a daughter-in-law that just arrived she has the lowest status, so one can hardly expect that marriage to survive.

(And does that happen? that a girl is not a virgin) It happens. They used to return immediately, now somewhere she even stays, but that's not it any more. She is forever abused. Non-stop, criticize, criticize. Who's gonna take that?

Pirot, woman I, 39

Particularly significant is the fact that the disgrace — that the entire town knows about it, because the evidence of a bride's virginity is still publicly displayed — does not only apply to the girl, but also to her entire family, which greatly diminishes the family's reputation in the community and both girls and their families try to avoid that, which very often results in a (very) early marriage.

The cult of virginity is slowly losing its pressure, as can be seen from the stories of faking virginity, which can be achieved using the blood of small animals/birds:

And there are those who lie. Putted blood on the bed sheets, like that ain't important. They cut fingers, pigeons, chickens. There's all sorts of stuff.

Novi Bečej, woman D, 55

More recently, sometimes they even go for medical interventions, including hymen reconstruction (there are stories of girls living abroad whose families are financially well off), or using 'pills' that simulate blood.

However, we've also met (rare) respondents who think that there's a milder attitude about virginity in their surroundings today compared with how it used to be:

She has to be (a virgin). Depends on the family, husband's. Most still required it, because in the family you know what's she's like, and mother and father. Has to, and with some families it's agreed. Good for you, good for me. No returning. As agreed. And now I guarantee, I give my daughter, I say: she's a virgin, one hundred per cent. And tomorrow she goes, she's not. Then I have to marry him, to pay him for everything, the wedding, the gold, the music. Everything, because I guaranteed. If I say to my in-laws, I can't guarantee that my child's a virgin, if you accept it, you accept it. If not, that's the end of it. Good for you, good for me. And the child goes, and she's not. If she is, even better.

Belgrade/Ada, woman B, 38

Even those (the rarest) who completely accept the change of the model and abandoning the cult of virginity are aware that the pressure from their surroundings is still strong:

(Does the girl have to be a virgin?) I say, well now she's not. Here, I have a daughter aged 21, I talk to her, she knows about protection ... Thank good God we didn't have problems, she had a boyfriend, she has one even now for three months... but I think it's all normal, it's not how it used to be. But some women still think, God forbid my daughter is not a virgin, and that she marry here in the neighbourhood, that would be a disgrace ... my disgrace ... that destroyed them she says.

Belgrade/Rakovica, woman D, 50

The cult of virginity represents a social norm that still prevails at all the surveyed sites, and is one of the risk factors for entering into a child marriage which is widespread regardless of the local contexts. The narratives that completely reject this custom are very rare, even in the case of fully integrated community members. The strength of this custom, rooted in the traditional patriarchal model, largely creates the perception of marriage primarily among very young people, limiting their freedom of choice regardless of their economic or educational status. The requirement of a girl's virginity, in this sense, represents one of the most important risk factors for child marriages, and is likely to remain a factor that is difficult to influence. When planning interventions that aim to influence the occurrence of early marriage, one should keep in mind that the forced transformation of established customary practices often has negative effects on the desired changes.

6.1.2 Gender roles

In Roma communities, the traditional division of gender roles is almost completely preserved: men deal with the public and women with the private segment of life. It is taken for granted that — ideally — men are expected to work and support the woman and family, while women are responsible for maintaining the home and taking care of the children:

...Men to go to work. They go t' everywhere t' make money (In agriculture?) No, they play music.

Vranjska Banja, woman P, 18

In this model, neither girls nor married women should be employed. The possible employment of a girl would mean that a girl is not taken care of by her family (her 'honour' above all is not taken care of), people would not believe she was a virgin (because she walks freely outside the home), and then she would have a hard time marrying or would marry poorly. The employment of a married woman would mean for the community that the husband and his family are not able to support the woman and children, which would seriously undermine a family's reputation.

(daughter-in-law) *Even if I had completed secondary school they wouldn't let me work? (And why is that?) Because female children don't go out, we can't work. (And would you let your daughter-in-law work?) Why? There's no need.*

Novi Bečej, woman M, 39

I asked my husband later would he let me work? No, he says: our women don't work. Our men work for women and children. You won't work with me. Maybe later, but we'll see. If I have trust, let some years go by, if we have children, let them grow up. (You didn't work later?) No, I didn't. I practised with my husband's sister's children. With the neighbours, but didn't work like an employee (the respondent completed a hairdressing course).

Belgrade/Ada, woman A, 41

(Have you tried to start working somewhere?) *Aaah, a job? Haven't thought about it. Because they all work together, my husband plays, my father-in-law also plays. They owned this store for a while, but closed it because there's no more sale. For a job no one has ever told me so far that I should work. They support us. I would like to work, but right now I'm not in the condition to be able to work. I was called from the bureau once, to go to a course, and if I do well, that I can stay, get a full-time job, have insurance. But, my husband didn't allow it. You're not gonna go work, he says, the children are still small, who will stay with them, take care of them... Sit where you are! And so, I didn't take it.*

(Did you regret it?) *Both yes and no. On one hand, maybe yes. Because I would love to, why not, **to also have my own pocket money**, to go to work, to bring, to have some income. I think every woman should work. Because, why ask: give me 100 dinars, give me 200 dinars, give me for this, give me for that, when you can have your own money you make yourself.*

Vranje, woman J, 21

The last statement clearly indicates that any money that a woman could earn would be the money at her own disposal, which is therefore understood as a kind of a *personal property*,²⁶

26 Property belonging to the wife which is exclusively at her own disposal and which exists in all patriarchal environments in the Balkans. In villages that's usually a couple of small livestock animals and the trousseau she brought when marrying. A similar view — that the woman's earnings are actually her personal property — was recorded during the 1970s in Novi Pazar and Sjenica (Gavrilović, Ljiljana, Pazarsko-sjenički kvartet, Novi Pazar: Muzej "Ras", 2013).

which in no way reduces the husband's obligation to financially support the family, but only improves the wife's social and economic status.

However, the difficult economic situation requires women to work on the grey market: they work 'on trash cans', sell stuff on the market, go to day labour, in some cases do even the hard physical labour like logging, but as a rule they do it together with husbands and only if they have a healthy mother-in-law or grown up daughters (which usually means — older than 11–12) at home who will take over caring for the home and the smaller children.

Divorced women and widows, especially if they have to take care of children, in some communities (all Belgrade settlements, Novi Bečej, Kragujevac, Pirot) have no restrictions concerning employment; on the contrary, it is highly valued. In Vranje and Surdulica, however, divorced women have even less freedom than girls and young daughters-in-law, so their employment is practically impossible.

One of the respondents considers that the insistence of Roma women on constantly cleaning the house is due to the inability to get employed:

Yes, Roma women, hygiene is number one for them and it's impossible ... hygiene. They like to clean, wipe, this the only thing they do. They ain't doin' nothing else. They ain't got nothing else to do, deprived of everything ... and that's why they have to toil to clean the entire house. And it's embarrassing to sit all day, and not clean the house ... and it's embarrassing

Pirot, woman J, 58

She believes that, especially for Roma women from villages, the solution would be self-employment at home, because the husbands (and their families) would also accept and support that. This respondent is an example of such a practice because, with the support of the municipality and non-governmental organizations, she managed to start an entrepreneurial flower-growing project, with the entire family participating now:

And they keep goats, and they keep everything... There's families that keep livestock... But still the woman has no say... all Roma women in villages. They usually never worked in companies, didn't work nowhere... Day labour, children, home, day labour... That was their job. They even sometimes get up at 5 and go to bed and 10, 11 after everyone else ... All day on her feet and still she's not a good Roma wife ... Discriminated in her family, in the general public. I have in one village Kostur, Roma women where they are hard-working they want to do all sorts of stuff... That's the problem, we're just Roma.

We have no property, or our land. Everyone has some houses, everyone managed to build some home, but that's the only thing they have (Would the husbands agree? /for the women to work in livestock or agricultural production/) Yes, 100% ...because the woman is still at home and can work.

Pirot, woman J, 58

The public-private relationship is completely preserved even in areas where the traditional community is completely dissolved, such as in Kragujevac:

...fathers come really rarely. And to workshops, and rarely come with children at all. Maybe because fathers are the ones who work, and mothers are homemakers. Probably they can take the time, and fathers can't. And even if they come, they are bored, they usually look at their phones, look at the watch, just waiting to go home. Mothers are the ones running after the children, but they also drink coffee, talk.

Kragujevac, woman K, 20

With a female child, then the mother had a bigger role, and in my case it was the father. Because the mother is responsible for a female child, because that's women's stuff, a woman's perspective, and the father is here for men's stuff. I like that, that's really important, and that's how I will do it with my children one day.

Kragujevac, man D, 28

My husband, he's not some man who will be invested in this house, these children. He's not interested in that.

Kragujevac, woman F, 51

By marrying, a woman takes on all the women's obligations in the new house:

(When a girl marries) she now has to be a mother, and wife, and housewife, and everything. (The way it usually goes in a traditional community when a new daughter-in-law arrives?) That's right. That's right. I think, that, it seems to me that it's in every nation, but that it's 10 times more prominent in this Roma community.

Pirot, man Z, 28

My mother-in-law gets up in the morning, sits down next to the window and looks out, you make coffee, prepare breakfast, lunch, dinner, do the laundry, hang it up to dry...

(Was that immediately after you came?) *Everything*. (Did you know how to do all that, since you were young? aged 15) *I knew, because I ain't really lived like a princess with my parents. We kept livestock, we had land. Father and mother worked, mother in a private business, father in a brickyard. And then when I get up until they come the lunch must be ready. (So you were a good daughter-in-law when you arrived?) I was a good daughter-in-law (proudly).*

Pirot, woman I, 39

The status of a young daughter-in-law is nevertheless very low and she is not allowed to go anywhere alone, which is a practice maintained even by Roma living in Western European countries:

...but the taxi come to the gates, my mother-in-law sits and I. And we go together and return together, I get out and immediately — inside. Neighbours, friends, no access.

Pirot, woman I, 39

(So, if you go anywhere, your mother-in-law goes with you?) *Even, she's your family. I have a lot of family there (in Germany, where she married) and when I want to go, I can't go alone. I ask her and according to her will.*

Vranjska Banja, woman P, 18

The status is significantly changed with the birth of the first child:

(A woman who has children is secured? She is safe. They don't worry about her?) *When you have children, everything's different. Your mother-in-law says, she's become a housewife. She has a child, let her go out. Until you have children, you're not a housewife.*

Vranjska Banja, woman P, 18

In the Vranje region (Vranje, Vranjska Banja, Surdulica), 'housewife' is a term that indicates a successful and respected woman, although this status often implies a difficult life:

You shut up and put up, because you cannot be a housewife until you put up with things.

Vranje, woman A, 44

In more traditional Roma communities (Novi Bečej, Vranje, Surdulica), the women who fully match the ideal pattern of behaviour in a patriarchal society, over the years, through long-lasting sacrificing work and pampering the father-in-law, husband, later the sons, and also all the other men in their new surroundings, only when they acquire the status of the mother-in-law become only formally subordinate, with the symbolization of subordination also being reduced to the smallest possible extent. That is why women want sons maybe even more than men, because only sons will enable them to reach the highest status among women: only when they reach full maturity can a mother largely influence the relations in the family through them, far more than through her husband. So having sons becomes the way of acquiring status and achieving personal prestige for women:

But yeah, you have to wait for everything in life. I think everyone should have to wait in order for something to come. And I, I can't wait to become a mother-in-law. I have two sons, so to have two daughters-in-law: my oh my, gonna be a disaster (laughter).

Vranje, woman J, 21

Although the distribution of gender roles in all Roma communities surveyed is completely pre-modern, the women are the ones who carry over this model and insist on maintaining it, which is completely clear from the attitudes of the older respondents who think this is the way it should be.

A shift can, however, be seen among the educated women who live outside the mahallas and are employed, though there's still a small number of them, and also among the very young, recently married women, living between the place where they grew up and the foreign country where they married. Those from the second group estimate that they could work in the new environment and that it would be good for both the family and for them personally, but they still rely on the traditional model in planning for the future: the mother-in-law, and a housewife young and healthy enough to care for children.

And in spite of the identical ideal model in all surveyed communities, there are differences in practice. In the Belgrade settlements, the model survives in its entirety, and in Novi Bečej as well, where the cases of employed women are rare (we met two, one of whom is divorced, and the other one grew up and lived her entire life outside the mahalla). In Vranje, where there is a local footwear factory that employs female workers, women and girls make shoes manually at home, which is acceptable because it is done along with the housework. Nevertheless, there is an evident desire for employment in factories, as this implies a stable income and other benefits for employees. Some of them (a smaller number) work in a factory and consider this to be

their great success. This is not strange, although Vranje is a traditional and closed community, given that in Vranje there was an already established system in which women worked outside the home, because there used to be many more opportunities for women's employment — as *homemakers*, in industrial production (Simpo, and the now closed Koštana and Jumko). In Pirot, there are also women who are employed in the industry or in the service sector, but they usually do not live in a mahalla and have completed at least secondary school.

6.1.3 Perception of marriage before marrying

Before they get married, young girls do not know much about the life that awaits them in marriage, or at least they do not think much about it. However, their mothers, on rare occasions when they talk to them about marriage, mostly tell them about the difficulty of adapting to the new environment, the expectations and demands of the father-in-law and mother-in-law, or of taking over the housework:

(Did you at all know what marriage implies?) Well I didn't, I wasn't aware of it because I was really young, and I didn't put the house and conditions in my head

Kragujevac, woman A, 40

(Did she /your mother/ tell you about all the things that marriage implies?) No, you know what she ... actually she did tell me about it. She told me it is really difficult in marriage and can't I see what I'm doing. Can't I see where I'm going, like she was really pulling me and don't son and don't son and I didn't listen because my mother and father were always indulging me. And then I thought, like, my mother lives nicely so will I.

Kragujevac, woman B, 28

(What did marriage seem like? Did you know what it would be like?) I didn't know anything. I didn't know what to do, to make things, the most basic things. They taught me that, my mother-in-law, mother, sister-in-law. They didn't expect everything from me, since I was a child. I liked taking their advice and then I like knowing everything, so I fit in quickly and everything went kinda fast. And I was happy. I never had regrets, my husband is really good, I don't have any problems...

Kragujevac, woman N, 37

Conversations about sex between mothers and other older relatives and young girls practically don't exist and there is practically no deviation in this respect. The testimonies show that what

was considered an ‘embarrassing’ conversation topic in the generation of our respondents’ parents is also embarrassing today:

She (the mother) doesn’t even know how she married my father. She married from 15, at 16 had a child. Says she was put by my father’s mother. Says, she made their bed. Says, she thought a girl. She thought she would lie there and sleep. She lay in bed and he came for her. She didn’t know what it would look like, the marriage, what would happen.

Novi Bečej/Novo Miloševo, woman C, 37

(Daughter, 40, married while in the secondary school) The problem is that we did not talk about it with mother with no one about relations, about protection and all. (The respondent) Yes, it’s my fault. I was then, like them now, I was really backward. We didn’t talk about that, it was embarrassing to say that to a child.

Pirot, woman G, 63

I didn’t know anything. Imagine, a child... didn’t with anyone. (And you didn’t talk to anyone about the wedding night, about sex, about what happens.) No, no, no, no... (You didn’t have older married sisters, sisters-in-law, something?) I was more for at home. Like, my parents weren’t really wealthy, they went around the Banat (the local expression for working in agriculture / as a day labourer) and they worked. I was at home, staying with my sisters, making lunch, cleaning — I knew that. And, regarding marriages, here-there, I didn’t know anything about that.

Vranje, woman SM, 30

(Did you talk to your mom about marriage at all while you were a girl?) No, of course not. I never talked to her while I was a girl, of course not. Actually, I didn’t talk to anyone about it. I didn’t even know what this marriage means, but I wanted to try. To see what it is and what it’s like.

Vranje, woman J, 21

(Did you talk to your mothers about sex?) (woman P, woman T, both giggling): Never. (So, when you were getting married, you had no idea what you were getting into?) (both) No. (Would it have been easier if you had known something?) (both) Yes.

Vranjska Banja, woman P, 18, woman T, 18

That is how underage girls enter the sexually active world without any previous knowledge about what is actually expected from them in marriage, apart from the ideas they got from the media and from conversations with (also clueless) friends/ peers. In addition, they do not know anything or know very little about family planning methods, which they usually learn about only after the birth of their first child.

Older respondents, who have reflected on their own life experience, but also those of others, assess that precisely the lack of understanding of all the things that marriage implies is one of the main reasons for the relatively easily made decision to marry at an early age:

My opinion is that the children as young as that don't even know how to think about marriage the right way. I got married. I will have a child and everyone will help you. That's not it. They are not mature enough for marriage. Even at 18 it's too early. They're still restless. Only at 20, 21 they start becoming mature... Marriage is not just, pardon me child, lie down and make love. What will we eat tomorrow? Why would someone else take care of them? With poor people first comes the child. Poor man's capital is a child. First, you get that right away. And that's why I'm against it, 'cuz they're not aware of what that marriage brings. Marriage brings both good and bad ...

Novi Bečej, woman A, 59

It should be noted that childbirth is very often the factor that represents the biggest risk with regard to early marriage. In addition to the health consequences that childbirth often brings, a girl is deprived of many prospects after childbirth, from economic independence to suffering violence 'because of the child'. According to the data we received from respondents, there is a higher percentage of successful marriages among couples who married early but didn't have children immediately.

What should be particularly emphasized when it comes to the complete absence of intergenerational conversations about marriage and sexual relations is the impact on the reproductive health of young women. The fact that our respondents had no knowledge about the sexual act itself implies that knowledge on protecting one's own health practically does not exist. Non-invasive contraception methods also do not exist as a possible option in Roma communities, and the only method used is abortion, which is called 'cleaning' among the respondents. In this respect, working with young mothers and girls in terms of education related to sexual life is one of the most important tasks in terms of not only prevention of child marriages, but, above all, as a method of protecting girls' health. Intergenerational dialogue is a crucial factor that could contribute to the reduction of risk from serious reproductive health threats to married girls.

The patriarchal structure of the community presents the main framework in which the practice of child marriage is perpetuated and reproduced. Based on the analysed material, the cult of virginity, the division of gender roles according to which the woman is in a clearly defined subordinate position, as well as the lack of basic knowledge of what entering into marriage entails, proved to be the most important risk factors related to perpetuating the practice of child marriage in the surveyed communities.

In line with the defined research goals, it is possible to identify the key actors who can impact the stated risk factors. Those are primarily young mothers who recently went through the experience of a child marriage and who can play a key role in interrupting the reproduction of such practice, in particular by establishing dialogue with their children. Very important actors are also older women, usually mothers-in-law, who present strong figures of power in numerous communities that were surveyed and often influence the perpetuation of child marriage. Working with them is of crucial importance because they occupy a much higher position in the hierarchy than young women and because, in the longer term, their support is a precondition for initiating changes in the standard practice.

6.2 Decision making about entering into a child marriage

Decision making about getting married has greatly shifted in the last generation of the Roma population from the generation of parents, who have the economic and formal power in the family, towards those getting married. There are three parallel decision-making models in practice today:

- The decision is made by parents, along with at least formal respecting of the wishes of the young people.
- Parents formally decide, while basically the decision about the marriage is made by the future partners themselves.
- The decision regarding marriage is made exclusively by young people, most often with opposition from their parents.

While the first model has remained almost exclusively in Novi Bečej (although there are sporadic cases in other sites), the other two models are widely represented in all the areas.

The communities where it is still common for parents to make decisions about their children marrying are more traditional as a rule (above all, Novi Bečej). In those communities, the patriarchal structure is almost completely preserved, where women are responsible for the sphere of private life, and therefore for the marriage of their children and the mother-in-law is the centre of power in the family:²⁷

Then I'll tell you how I married my son. I went and proposed to her. I heard there's a girl, that she's smart, that she's from a good family, so we went and proposed to her. I didn't know them (her family), but some other people I can trust knew them. My son was 17 back then, and the girl was the same age.

That's our custom, he's gonna get married... I don't know if he had some girlfriends or not, I wanted him to get married. I planned it and it was done... He didn't complain. If she had been ugly he would have complained. If he hadn't liked her, he wouldn't have said yes. If he doesn't like this one, we'll take another he likes. I didn't think he has to take anyone. If he likes her, good, if not, we'll take another. But I thought it was time for him to marry. That's the custom, and that's what I wanted.

*They didn't know each other (before the proposal). Then they saw each other for the first time. He agreed. I took him to see her, and if he likes her **we'll take her**. And, he liked her, and it's done, **we took her**. Then her folks stayed to talk to her. The next day we arranged everything, organized the wedding, brought her home, and that's it. And there, they have a child now.*

He had to get married. All his friends got married, he can't stay like that... No question, he had to get married. When I say so, it's gotta be so. He ain't gonna complain. And he wouldn't complain anyway, he knows.

Novi Bečej, woman M, 39

*And so, he went with my husband to the village, and walked around and found that... S.. Husband, when he came home, says there's one young girl, also was married, lived at her husband's for a month. But, we gotta know who he'll be tying his head to, who he will get old with. To know why they parted, what happened here, how and what. So we go to the village, I go with him, I went on purpose to her parents' home (current daughter-in-law). Poor people, worse than me. **And I need something like that**. We went two, three times to her parents, we buy iron. I don't say why I came, I watch how she*

27 Gavrilović, Ljiljana, 'Pojedinač i porodica'. Glasnik etnografskog instituta SANU, LIII 197–212: 206.

behaves. When we started going back, I ask my son if he likes her. No, he says, indulge me. You did not indulge me for these two, you married on your own. I tell him, I like this girl and you will have a wife, a housewife. Yes, she was married too, but we can't take a girl for you now, and you were married. He laughs, and I tell him — you sit in the apartment and I'll go get you married. We married him without him.

Novi Bečej/Novo Miloševo, woman B, 44

These statements clearly show that neither the bride nor groom in these situations are treated as independent individuals, but as an integral part of the family, and that the well-being of the family comes first. The 'we take the girl' formulation that is repeated in testimonies in Novi Bečej talks about preservation of the traditional structure of the society, in which the family is the basic social unit and where the interests of individual members are completely subordinate to the interests of the family. The following testimony explicitly talks about that:

... they wanna young daughter-in-law so to shape 'er, their way, what she's to be like. That's why it's good for the daughter-in-law to be as young as possible. If an older one comes, then she knows more than her mother-in-law, and that can't be.

Novi Bečej, woman D, 55

The shift towards individuation is seen in the fact that now, as a rule, the young man and woman are asked if they want to marry, although this ultimately depends on the will of the parents, because the choice of the future spouse depends on the parents' wishes. This, however, is a significant change compared with the situation before, where neither the young man nor the woman were asked anything, because all the arrangements for the future marriage were completed by the parents, and the children were only informed about their decision:²⁸

I couldn't say anything. Because I know about this tradition, if your mother and father tell you, they schedule your marriage. They told me to get married. It was like that. My husband came, they told me, this is gonna be your future husband, I say fine. Without knowing anything about him.

Kragujevac, woman F, 51

(The daughter's) mother-in-law is ... younger than me. She just turned 40, and has six grandchildren, already. She married when she was 13 and a half. Actually, she was 14,

28 Of course, even back then there were channels to fulfil the wishes of the future married couple, but they were exclusively within the framework of the women's subculture and invisible in the ideal model of marriage, the family and the social structure.

and her husband was 13 and a half. He ran away from the wedding to play marbles. (P: And that was also an arranged marriage?) Well yes. Proposed, fine. That's how it's gotta be. (P: His mom and dad found him a good wife.) Yeah. You have to get married. That's how it should be. He left. They really say he was in a white suit and he went to the canal to play marbles. They're looking for the groom. The groom is playing.

Novi Bečej, woman I, 45

However, although children today are asked whether they agree with the marriage, the traditional concept of respecting the parents' wishes largely limits the expression of free will — i.e., opposing the parents' recommendations. Parents, on the other hand, rely heavily on the assessment of the wider community, primarily relatives:

*Whoever I asked what to do (when they came to propose to her daughter, aged 15), how, what? Ah, if you don't give her, who will you give her to? They are good people. We're among us, we know each other. She will live there nicely. They're a bit well off. You know, financially. And they're even in Germany, they live there. How to do, what to do? We ask her if she wanna? She accepted. And now, what to do? Whoever I asked... And even he (the father)... In the beginning he was against it. He was the same... Well he was against it in the beginning, but later when he saw. Same like me. What all the other people say. **You know how it goes with us? It's not just up to us, but we gotta get together. Gotta get together to agree on what's the best.***

Novi Bečej, woman I, 45

In places where today it is unusual for parents to decide on marriage, as a rule this happens in very difficult economic situations without any prospects, when parents want to provide their children with the best possible conditions for future life, aware that there is no other way to do it under their current circumstances:

We chose (for daughter, aged 17). We said. She just said whatever you decide, father and mother and I will do it that way. She was obedient. (P: Tell me, how did you choose him? Based on what?) To tell you the truth. They live in Germany. We saw that it was good for our daughter. There ain't nothing here in Vranje. And there's nowhere to go in Banat, rarely. Where will she work now? Some parents-in-law want work, and there's none here. So we decided it's better for her to go there. Not for us, but it's better for her. Life is different there than here. We first met the parents. (Husband): You want, sonny? We want you to be in a good place. (Wife): To have a good life. You know there's nothing

*here. And so she decided. She said, fine, whatever you say, I'll do it that way. And now she lives nicely.*²⁹

Vranje, married couple 2, 40

Although these types of decisions seem like a rigid application of the patriarchal model, parents' intention to provide the best possible living conditions for their children is absolutely indisputable.

The other variant is the formal involvement of parents in the decision about marriage, which is actually made on the basis of the wishes of the bride and groom:

Yes, they gave me (...) They didn't want at first they said about the age. They say you're too young and immature for marriage. But I said I loved him and if you don't want to give him to me this way, I'll run away. And they said it was better to have everyone here, to at least know I'm married instead of running away and going who knows where.

Kragujevac, woman A, 40

(Did you agree when they came to ask for girls? married at the age of 15 and 16) I agreed because with her word and what she told me, mother I can't take it anymore that dad is beating you. She even poisoned herself, drank washing powder. I found one boy where I will get married and be happy. And then when the people came and we talked about it. After we put some period, to let a month or two go by to come and propose to her with the wedding dress as appropriate and she left. Then for the other one, the younger it was like that too. I didn't let them run away, who knows what and where she will get married somewhere.

Kragujevac, woman A, 40

Parents' acceptance in these situations is largely based on the desire for their children to "be happy" and live better than in their parents' home (this mainly concerns girls). The concept of ultimate virginity makes the girls' parents accept their wish to enter a marriage they chose themselves, regardless of the fact that they disagree with it — whether because they consider their daughters to be too young, or because they disagree with their choice, because they will otherwise elope and the final result will be the same.

29 These parents are both unemployed and ill (husband with serious heart illness, wife depressive), and they have two more sons. They hope that the daughter will find a good opportunity for her older brother to get married, and that he will also go to Germany.

The most common model of marriage is solely through the wishes of the young couple, often with sharp opposition from the girl's parents. The young man's parents are, as a rule, informed about the new daughter-in-law coming and should give their consent, given the fact that the young married couple, as a rule, lives with the husband's family. So, the traditional patriarchal model is manifested in a relatively new form (consent of the man's side with the opposition of the woman's side), which is a phase in the process of its disintegration, as seen in other Balkan regions.

Well no, they didn't say anything. My folks or his. I ran away for him, you want me, I want you, and it's done. They knew after that, but didn't know I was planning it. Oh well, I was young, crazy. I loved him and I married him. Mother wouldn't let me. She was against it... she was angry. She didn't want to talk to anybody. But not like a lot, we made up later. It didn't take too long, four-five days.

Kragujevac, woman D, 20

It all went very fast. We went to buy cigarettes, it was cold, January, and at the end I went to his place and so stayed with him. His folks knew, they welcomed us there. Grandma and grandpa didn't know anything, but they were really sad about it. They were really angry. I was going to school, in first year, and they felt bad.

And his folks yeah knew about it all, waiting for us. None of my folks knew. But the problem was later not with my mother, but with grandma and grandpa, they made problems, wanted to get me back, but I didn't want to.

Kragujevac, woman N, 37

The newest model is meeting, decision making, and agreeing to a marriage through social networks, primarily Facebook.

Now mostly those who know each other, they run away. Facebook. Facebook gets people together and gets them apart.

Novi Bečej, woman D, 55

That's a frequent reason for parents banning Facebook, and even mobile phones, due to the fear that girls will run away and marry before their time and against the parents' wishes.

Girls often run away several times, if the parents insist on getting them back. In one case, a girl was returned home three times, and the fourth time they gave up, because the previous returns

gave no result whatsoever. Also, children refuse to go back to the parental home often even with the police and social workers, which again leads to the practical acceptance of the wish of young people, which is also influenced by the opinion of the community:

(What happens when a girl runs away and her parents are really against that marriage? Do they sometimes call the police?) Well when she's underage, they sometimes even call. But even the police can't do anything if she wants it. The Centre for Social Welfare can't do anything either, if she wants it. She threatens with suicide, there's nothing to do then. No one can do anything then. And it's also embarrassing for the parents to get her back. She went, and if she slept over there, 'tis a disgrace then. Then she got married. Nothing to do there anymore.

Novi Bečej, woman D, 55

This possibility of a girl living in a community that still maintains traditional values regarding making a decision about her own life, however counter-productive it is on both a personal and general society level, shows that the patriarchal model is corroding and dissolving, although it is based on strictly patriarchal criteria: ultimate virginity and preserving the family honour. But still, this model, however emancipatory, has a hidden trap. The girls, faced with the pressure of a potential forced marriage, the repressive family environment in which their 'honour and face' are protected, and above all the 'cult of virginity', decide to elope with the first guy (they think) they fell in love with, seeing it as a way out of a potentially unwanted scenario. Such marriages are often very short or are very unhappy (of course, there are happy endings, but these are less problematic both from the point of view of the girl and from the point of view of her community), which speaks of 'forced free will', where girls seem to marry of their own will, and in fact they do so because of the numerous structural pressures from the preserved elements of the patriarchal model that hinder them in making a decision that would go outside the framework of this model.

6.2.1 Motives for early marriage

Motives for early marriage are different from the point of view of parents and children (those who enter a marriage). In the areas where parents still make decisions on marriages, or in cases where parents agree with their children's decision to enter into marriage, it is considered that early marriage protects not only girls, but also young men from the temptations they face in their surroundings:

And she (daughter-in-law) came at the age of 15... well when my son loved her... Because people came maliciously to tell us. Junkies, problem-makers, bad company... Better wife for him than bad company, go get married son and bring us a daughter-in-law. (And how old was he?) Well he was 16 and she was 15.

Pirot, woman T, 41

Motives for early marriage are often clearly economic in nature:

Families where there is no economic empowerment ... the children and family there are totally capitulated... there's fights, there's disputes because hunger does not tolerate anything... poverty does not tolerate anything... So these children marry early. Because they're moving away from this family and think they will enter a better family. But the same thing also waits for them there.

Pirot, woman J, 58

Economic motives are completely clear in cases of marrying Roma living abroad, since leaving the country is considered the best possible solution — both the parents and children think so. On the other hand, the Roma living in Western European countries, as a rule, marry women from the regions they come from and where they have relatives, believing that the girls from their old regions have the desired moral and other virtues, and that bringing a wife from back home is also perfectly functional for them. In practice, it's seen that marriages of this kind often fail and that girls return to their parents' home (often with children not recognized by the fathers), except in cases where families have known each other for a long time or if there are some kinship relationships between them.

One of the motives for early marriage, especially when it comes to girls, is the great pressure from the parents and the surroundings, the concern that is reflected in denying the freedom of movement and complete control of the time spent outside the house, which completely separates primarily Roma girls from their non-Roma peers. This is the motive that is (subsequently) recognized by many parents who are explicitly against early marriages and who are very unhappy that they failed to prevent their children's intentions to marry before their time:

Maybe it's also our mistake that we didn't let her play a bit more, there were... We are of Roma nationality and she had friends from the street...

Pirot, man I, 43

According to older people, especially in regions where parents still decide on marriage, girls often elope from fear that their parents will arrange an unwanted marriage for them:

Why do they run? Because they are afraid of parents. With Roma it is very important that the mom and dad are satisfied with the family she marries in. You don't look at what the guy is like. You look to see what the mom and dad are like, what the financial situation is. And now, she, the girl, falls in love with you, you are poor, you'd like to marry her, the parents are not satisfied, they don't want to give her. She is forced to run away, she loves you. If she is adult, there's no way anyone can force her to come back... but those Roma children too, men very rarely, that man who likes his girl to go to school, to continue school. What do you think, she'll go somewhere on the side, she'll see someone, she'll fall in love with another guy? I should grab her on time.

Novi Bečej, woman A, 59

Whatever the main motive for entering a marriage is, the usual formula for the girl is 'I fell in love', as a necessary legitimization of the decision to enter into marriage, as if any rational reasons could delegitimize the decision, even if they are very obvious. This 'falling in love' is very often at first glance — i.e., after meeting just once, regardless of whether it is a meeting during the formal proposal when the girl agrees to marry a complete stranger, or if it is an informal meeting that results in the girl eloping. The formula then repeats even when, the older respondents as a rule, completely rationally explain their decisions to marry. One of them (Belgrade/Makiš, woman B, 32) clearly says that with this decision she helped her older brother who was taking care of her and three younger children, because their father had left them and their mother died when the respondent was 12 years old, but still she claims she 'fell in love', although she says of her husband that he was 'older' and that he's not handsome, which she herself understood as flaws.

The same formula is also used by the girls who elope, hoping they will live better lives in the marriage or be freer than in the parental home:

(Why did you marry so early? aged 15) Well yeah, I thought I would... live out my life a bit... (And how did it come to you getting married?) Well that school we were in... that school Mladost (special education school) and there was a shop there and he was there and we met... And first love, at first sight...

Pirot/Izvor, woman M, 26

The respondents who explain their decision completely rationally are rare, although this can also be ‘hindsight knowledge’ — i.e., the present assessment of a situation in the past:

I didn't have another solution, if I had maybe I wouldn't have done at that age, maybe only later. But when someone does not have their own roof and their own family then I had to do those things.

Kragujevac, woman L, 39

6.2.2 Preferred age for marriage

Early marriage is commonly attributed only to the Roma, although it also exists in the wider society, and even where it does not exist now, it used to exist, especially in rural areas.³⁰ The estimated ideal age for getting married varies greatly from place to place and from community to community.

The idea of early age as ideal for getting married:

I was already 19, that was embarrassing in (the place she's from), and I still wasn't married — people were already wondering what's up with her.

Novi Bečej/Novo Miloševo, woman B, 44

In the Roma communities that are the most marginalized and without any prospect of fitting into the wider society, it is still generally considered that girls are ‘mature for marriage’ as soon as they enter puberty:

She was the most beautiful young woman here... (P: Well, how can she be a young woman at the age of 11? She's still a child at 11) No matter, it's like that with us. Our tradition is that, we are Roma. As soon as she is 11–12, the girl, pardon me, her boobies grow, that's a young woman for us. And they're all flying after her, the boys. And that's it.

Belgrade/Šuma, woman M, 23

30 During the 1980s, for example, the recommended age of the bride on the Sjenica-Pester plateau was 14 (Gavrilović). At the last population census (2002), the lower age limit for the question of ‘legal marital status’ was the age of 15 (Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Serbia 2016: 29, 47), although the age limit for marriage according to the Serbian Family Act is 18. It can be lowered to 16 by court order, but not below. However, the census data based on the initial age of 15 still show that the practice of marrying in the period before the age of majority is neither a rare phenomenon, nor is it limited to Roma communities only. This is further evidenced by the fertility data in the age up to 19, which — although continuously decreasing during the past 15 years — are still not negligible (the fertility rate for girls up to the age of 19 was 16.5 in 2015).

The respondent in question lives in an informal settlement without living conditions in a forest on the outskirts of Belgrade, and she was married for the first time at the age of 11, when her father negotiated a kidnapping. However, the community does not think that there was a problem with her age (she was 'happily' married the second time at the age of 13) — the disapproval of the community was caused by the way she was married, that is, by not respecting the right to her own choice of partner. This is clearly explained by the assessment of another case of marriage at the age of 10:

She's 11, yes. She had a child at 11. It was a C-section, she has a son. The kid is 2 years old.

(Other woman): And what's wrong with having him at 11?

Nothing.... she's like a queen now... nothing's wrong with her.

Belgrade/Šuma, woman Z, 31

Although none of the other surveyed communities were as deprived as Belgrade Šuma, the idea of early age for marriage is largely, willingly or unwillingly, also preserved in other sites, more so in places where the Roma mostly live in segregated mahallas:

...Thirt'n she was. Well, it usually starts like that with us Roma... that's with us Roma, we repeat again, that children grow up early and now, for example, when we talk, here I'm telling you I married at 14, 15, that she (his wife) married at 15 and children listen to that and when some time comes of 12, 13, they already have a boyfriend.

Vranje, married couple

Some give them younger at the age of 13–14. Those are the customs.

Novi Bečej, woman D, 55

We if we wait for 18, we are as old as the parents. That's what people say. Eighteen-year-old, my oh my, this one got old. Who gonna take her?

Vranjska Banja, woman P, 18

Most respondents, especially those who married early, believe that early marriage would not be good for their children, but except for those who actively sought to return their runaway daughters and those whose children did not marry before adulthood, it cannot be said with certainty that they truly think that way. Everyone is fully aware of the stigmatization of early marriages in the wider population, as well as legal prohibitions, so there is a realistic possibility

that the views expressed are the result of the desire to publicly/verbally express a desirable attitude, and not their real beliefs.

6.2.3 Acceptability of divorce

Considering the fact that marriages happen very early and often without the young man and girl really getting to know each other, it is not surprising that they often do not last long, and are also often accompanied by violence and trauma.

Although divorce and second and even third-time marriages are frequent in all the surveyed sites, the attitudes towards divorce differ significantly between localities. In Novi Bečej and some Belgrade settlements, the first, usually early, marriage is actually a ticket to the world of adult and sexually active members of the community. As these marriages often fail, only after their break-up the woman (in communities where marriages are still arranged, often the man too) has the possibility to really choose her partner, which is usually 'starting from scratch', and this gives much better life prospects. By marrying, the girls remove the mortgage of virginity, thereby paying the price for the possibility of the freedom of choice later. Those who manage to get out of such a marriage (usually those who eloped — that is, those who independently chose the first marital partner) after that often succeed in having a good life with another husband, or even (much more rarely) alone. First marriage can also be caused by earlier sexual activity: girls who are not virgins decide to marry anyone, because after the divorce no one will raise the issue of virginity since it's known they had already been married:

She lived, well, for a month. Like, it was like that — she suddenly ran away. She packed her things and ran away. When we went to get her, she says she don't love him, she married just like that, to indulge her parents, like we went to propose to her, to indulge her parents. She doesn't love him and yeah... (So that's how she resolved not being a virgin (before marriage), by marrying your son?) Yes, yes.

Novi Bečej/Novo Miloševo, woman B, 44

In other places, however, the break-up of the first marriage presents a huge difficulty, especially if there are children from the marriage. This is especially prominent in Surdulica, Vranje and Vranjska Banja, although we have encountered similar cases in Pirot and some Belgrade settlements. Parents are often not ready to accept their divorced daughter; they believe she should suffer and sacrifice, primarily for the children, but also for their honour:

(What do you think why she reacted like that then? the mother who got her back to her husband when she ran away from her husband to her parents' home) ...being a divorcee

Gypsy, that's a disaster. Don't wanna have dogs gathering around the house. You have female children and it's not nice to embarrass your children. As if I'm like, you see a man for the first time and you fall in love. It doesn't go like that.

Pirot, woman I, 39

Parents deliberate the difficulty of remarrying, especially if the woman has children from her first marriage:

(Would you take her back? the daughter, for whom even the respondent believes she lives in an unhappy marriage) Now? Nah. (Why?) Well she's gonna have the second kid now, what to do with her... I wouldn't take her back, I have other children too and I'm supposed to get a daughter-in-law, and it will be difficult for her to get a divorce and be gone to another man with children...

Vranje, woman A, 44

There's those guys here. She's also done, has a daughter. He ain't been married, like, they're together, he respects her, as if she's his. But I'm telling ya, that's one in thousan'. And that's, how many times I told her that (her divorced daughter who has a son from her first marriage), here look, we live with 'em non-stop, we're together every day, I say, like, I joke sometimes, find a fool like him, for example. But, that's for example I say in jokes. Like, that's only one in thousan' that can be used, he to accept the kid not abuse him and such.

Pirot, woman B, 46

In these communities, the pressure on divorced women is even greater than on girls, because it is believed that the fact that they were sexually active causes the loosening of the moral discipline, and maintaining it is crucial for establishing and maintaining family honour.

Life's not simple when you're a girl and when you're.... You can't go nowhere without your mother. (It's even worse when you're divorced?) Yes. It's much worse. It's the worst thing. ... She went there, and now she go at father's house. Like she's, you know... I'm embarrassed to say it. (Practically a whore? I'll say it since you're polite and won't say it) (laughter) Yes. You went there, you had relations with whoever, and then you enter father's and mother's house. How are you not ashamed? Of course, you won't be going out with no-one for two, three and five, six months. And an opportunity comes, you have

to get married. But you're dating someone, someone comes to propose to you, you ain't wanting to get married. Then they gotta talk that way.

Vranjska Banja, woman P, 18

When I said I'm gonna run away, my dad and mom and everyone jumped at me. And then when I came even worse, like a nun... Yeah, you get back and there's no more friends, you're just staying home with your mother. Then it's even... (And how long did that last?) Well for a good part of two-three years. Later I went to my sister's and there and shame and everything (And were you ashamed or were you made to be ashamed?) A lot, I would have been ashamed. It's really a disgrace.

Vranje, woman S, ??

*(Why did you ... get married again at 13?) Well, because I get married, because I can't live at my parents', like, I'm female, like. (ow:) to be a **back-to-mommy-wife**? (M) Yes, like. That's a disgrace. (So, that can't be?) No. No, no. It's a disgrace and, like, I had to get married. That's not how you live at your father and mother's. (ow:) That's our custom.*

Beograd/Šuma, woman M, 23 (another woman was joining the conversation, marked as ow/other woman)

So, although the 'second chance' seems to be an incomparably more successful life project, it is troubled with difficulties as well. In communities that accept divorce relatively well, it implies the weight that relates to many factors that affect life prospects, from disease to the consequences of the survived trauma. In communities where divorce is treated as a personal and family disgrace, getting to the second chance is much more difficult.

Divorced women usually enter their next marriage with a partner who was also divorced. The same rule applies to men — a divorced man cannot possibly marry a girl, because although immorality is not attributed to men, there is a presumption that they may be to blame for the divorce of the previous marriage, which usually involves some sort of a personality flaw. In Novi Bečej, where there is still the tradition of the *Gypsy court*,³¹ a woman leaving her marriage is considered to be a reason for initiating a procedure that will show that there is no *disgrace* on the part of the abandoned husband, especially if a dowry was paid or if an expensive wedding ceremony was organized:

31 The *kris* or *Gypsy court* is a common law method of resolving disputes and overcoming conflicts in the community, which corresponds to courts of good people or *muslihuns* in other areas of the Balkan Peninsula with an extremely patriarchal social structure. Although largely abandoned over the past decades, it is still occasionally organized in high-value disputes, such as the dispute about the high price of a bride or organizing an expensive wedding ceremony for a young woman who is not a virgin.

(M.), he is 60 years old, he is the oldest, suggested to us to make this Gypsy court, he says, why will your son remain in disgrace, to have it from your house that your son was married and that your daughter-in-law left. Why she left, there's gotta be a reason, let people hear, why she left, and not for you to be left in disgrace. How will you marry your son the second time? Let people know why she left, what reason, let people know how you made the wedding, how you paid for it... My husband and I didn't want

Novi Bečej/Novo Miloševo, woman B, 44

6.2.4 Bride dowries

Paying a dowry for a bride is not a common practice among Roma in Serbia, except in certain groups from marginal areas: with Roma originating in Romania (the Banat and the surroundings of Pirot) and those who came from Kosovo. Other Roma do not understand this practice and find it degrading:

There is, there is somewhere, usually with the Muslim Roma, they hold this tradition, but we Serbian Roma, we don't. But, yes, they also marry early like we do, just no money is asked for that. With the Muslim Roma they ask for money. That's unacceptable for me. Practically it turns out you are selling her for money. But that's not it. No money's good for me. I don't like that. The mother of my older daughter-in-law comes, says you should pay. Pay for what? She says, for the daughter-in-law. I said, you should pay to my son. I didn't ask for her, but they loved each other. To give you money, I have no, but if you're looking to destroy your daughter's life, you look for another. I have nothing against it. And they are Muslim Roma. Well okay, she says, at least one lunch come on. I said, no problem. I gave some, she gave some, and we made a fine lunch, as God wills it. Instead of a wedding.

Kragujevac, woman F, 51

There are a lot of Romanians here, they are confused with Roma, but that has nothing to do with Roma. When it comes to a wedding, they buy the bride, that's a custom of theirs. Unfortunately, this still happens...

Kragujevac, man D, 28

It seems that in these two groups, where bride dowries have remained, the practice is based on different traditions, although little is still known about it. Some researchers assume that in the case of Roma of Romanian origin, it is based on customs developed over the long period of Romanian neo-feudalism, during which Roma were mostly slaves (slavery lasted until the mid-nineteenth

century), although this is still an unconfirmed thesis. In the case of Roma from Kosovo, it is clear that this is a part of the wider patriarchal tradition where the price for the bride compensates for the departure of an able-bodied family member. In any case, the customs show a significant degree of similarity: the price is negotiated (in the case of Roma from Kosovo with participation of the wider community) and it pays for the trousseau for the bride and the wedding celebration — i.e., that's the money indented for preparing the girl to go to the new home. The dissolution of the model led to different interpretations of the practice. In some cases, a wedding is organized instead of the dowry, which is considered paying the dowry for the girl:

And we paid for her, made a big wedding, it cost me 9,000 euros. But I don't want to make the Gypsy court when (?) parted from Z. My husband's brother wanted us to make a Gypsy court, why she parted, that there's a reason, to return the debt to you. The expense, for the wedding you made, paid for this that, the people should get you your money back. You made her a girl, and she's not a girl, ask to make a Gypsy court. I didn't want to.

By the way, when you don't pay the bride, then you make such big weddings. And there's also those who pay and make a wedding.

Novi Bečej/Novo Miloševo, woman B, 44

But you see, there, this still exists. This old custom still exists. They now buy the daughter-in-law. There's one woman here in Čurug, she's paying for her daughter-in-law. Not 1,000 euros, 4,000 euros. Plus, when they make a wedding. How much does this bride cost? You know what's also their custom? When the girl is, is not (when she is not a virgin), they return her. You gotta get all the money back that I put into the wedding. Give it all back to my hands. And that your child went through a disgrace, nobody cares for that.

Novi Bečej/Novo Miloševo, woman C, 37

In other cases, the price is lowered to a symbolic amount (500 euros as a rule), in order to follow the custom, especially if the parents of the bride want the girl to marry or are just granting her wish, and they know that the young man and his family have no money:

Five hundred euros (he gave for the bride) and I made a celebration there, a small one. They saw I have no money. And now, better to take 500 euros, than to have her run away for me.

Novi Bečej, married couple 15, 27

And then came the time to ask for money. They ask for us to throw 1,500 euros on the table, since she was already married, just that much and no wedding. I say, you know what: we don't give money for the daughter-in-law. If you want to give your daughter to live, if you don't want, you don't have to. I can't deal with them. Money or nothing. They don't wanna give her without money. I see that he (the son) is a bit crushed and that he likes her, that he would, and I was also really up for it. I say I have 600 euros at home. They ask, how we want to marry our son with no money, and I ask, what, who has no money can't marry his son? I tell them, money comes and goes and they should live. In our family, when we marry a daughter, we don't ask for money. The wedding and sweet rakia, those are their expenses. We pay for daughters-in-law, but we do not sell out daughters. And so we say we have these 500 euros and I can put this on the table. They took these 500 euros and we made a lunch here. Then I went to buy some new things for my daughter-in-law, at the Chinese, I bought her jeans, sweatshirt, sneakers... I didn't have any more gold to put it on her...

Novi Bečej/Novo Miloševo, woman B, 44

If members of different Roma groups marry (those who do not have the tradition of paying for brides and those who do have it), there are often misunderstandings, which are difficult to overcome:

With this third (daughter-in-law) I had great problems... Her mother asked of me, asked for five thousand euros. Woman, I said, are you sane? This child of yours who will live with me will tomorrow ask to eat. Who do I have to kill for 5 thousand euros? I can give you a coffee and a juice and a lunch, and you should thank God her wish is fulfilled! But no, we have not made up yet. Third year of life, I swear with my life. There was such a problem about money. If I had had money, that would not have been a problem. This way it turned out they are pushing, they wanna, and I won't give.

Kragujevac, woman F, 51

If it is agreed not to give money for the bride, then the groom's parents have to buy the trousseau for the wedding and golden jewellery, and organize the celebration:

They were reconciling (after the girl ran away) by gathering the family, both husband's and from my side and then they talk here about the price they will sell me for. My mom was so angry that she asked for 3,000 Deutsche Marks, at the time. (Would it have been the same if they had proposed to you?) Yes. Prices in general, now depend on

parents. Will she sell her child or not? I told mom not to take a single dinar. You don't need it. Back then they were messing around with the daughters-in-law who were paid. Come now you who were paid go do this and that. That's very degrading. I heard that's how it's done and I didn't allow this for myself. That's why I told mom not to take that dinar. She really didn't take it. My father-in-law said: for 3,000 euros, you take both your daughter and my son, take them, you live with them. That's it, about this making up. Mom didn't want to take a single dinar, which really made me satisfied. (Did some people who are not from the family participate in that?) I think they also call them neighbours of trust. There was those who will lower the price... There's a lot of that. They still do that. But from all the money they take for children, they make them this wedding, they buy them gifts. Again takes the money with them. Mom buys gold. It's not like, I'll make a room from this money. (So then they bought you everything your mom would have bought you anyway? They didn't give the money, but bought everything that goes for the bride?) Yes. Because they were also satisfied that mom didn't take money. What would I, that they criticize like that sometimes.

Belgrade/Ada, woman A, 41

Even the Roma among which paying for the bride is common often think the practice is not positive:

That's stupid what we have, you have to make a big wedding, to put money on the table, and you have no. So, a poor man should not go and marry his son. They ask for big money, a wedding, and they don't see that children should have somewhere to live, to have children, have their love, money is not everything.

Novi Bečej/Novo Miloševo, woman B, 44

What do you think: what will your daughter eat if I give you that money? There are poor people who really try to get that money, and you spend it in luxury, you make something there, a wedding, for someone else to be happy, and tomorrow your daughter has nothing to eat.

Belgrade/Ada, woman A, 41

Roma who are not familiar with the practice of paying a dowry for the bride, as a rule, stigmatize the groups that do it. There is a story in Pirot about a man who got rich by selling his daughters (the amount of 1 million euros is mentioned), and after he died his only son gambled away all the money. In Novi Bečej, we heard a similar story. Both cases are unconfirmed and, according

to the structure of the story, they seem to actually be urban legends that say that the money 'earned' by selling daughters is not lucky money and that the family future cannot be built on it. Another type of story about the aberration of the practice is, unfortunately, very likely: the story goes that the paid brides (especially those who go Italy, which is common for the Roma community, called 'Lajasi' in the surroundings of Pirot) have to return the money given for them, so they are forced to work until the price is settled.

At the majority of the surveyed sites, the process of making decisions on entering into child marriage is a result of social norms such as the cult of virginity and family honour. Variations that occur in the decision-making process point to different degrees of transformation of the patriarchal model, which is still very much in force in the communities surveyed. Still, in the large majority of cases, it is the parents who have the final say when it comes to approving the marriage, even when it is entered into with the consent of the boy and the girl, but also in the cases when the girl elopes. They present their opinion whether the marriage is acceptable or not, and, in the situations when their daughter elopes, they frequently accept the marriage in order to preserve family honour.

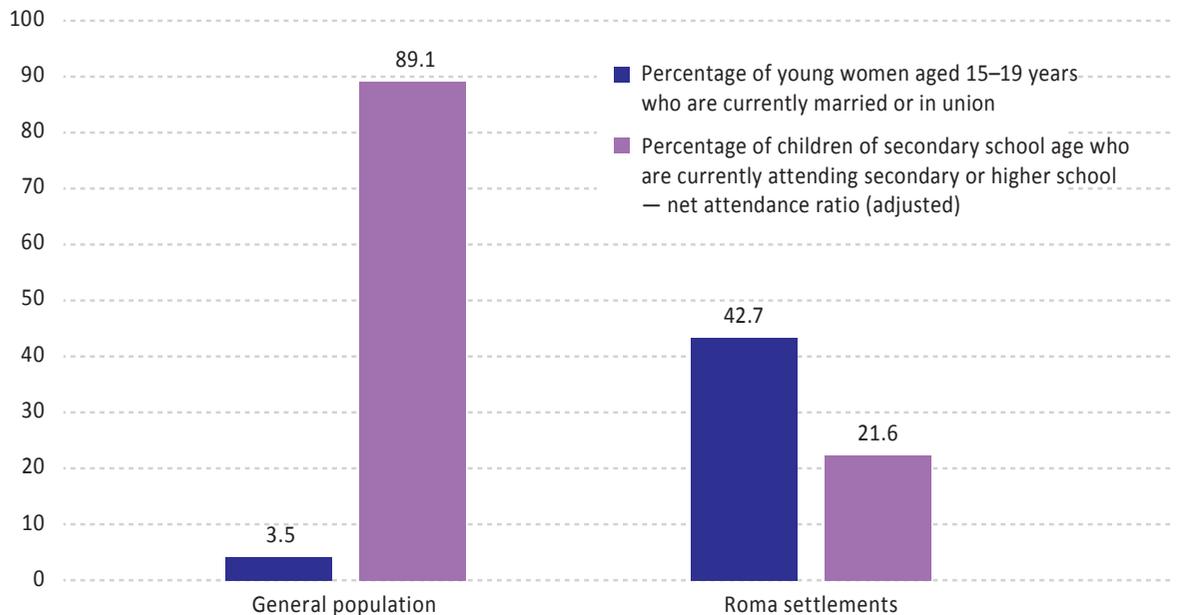
The understanding of honour makes the termination of unsuccessful marriages much more difficult, as divorce is perceived as a major embarrassment, in particular for the woman. Arranged marriages in the classical sense are no longer the prevailing model, nor is the bride dowry (except in Novi Bečej), but the economic factor is still important when it comes to making a decision on marrying off a son or a daughter. Poverty is a frequent motive, with parents arranging or accepting the marriage of their daughter into a family that is wealthier than theirs, or, even more frequently, to persons who live and work abroad. The material also shows that many young people perceive marriage as an opportunity to improve their economic status or escape from a dysfunctional family, although in most cases their position does not in fact become better. Focusing on the factors of change, long-term efforts definitely need to be directed towards the process of changing the mindset connected with traditional social norms such as virginity and family honour. However, when it comes to economic factors, it is important to identify potential models which will motivate parents, as well as children, to even contemplate alternative life prospects, beyond marriage. In this context, there is room for encouraging the adoption of different decisions, primarily by designing sustainable models of providing support to parents and children, which is discussed in detail in the chapter on recommendations and interventions.

6.3 Education

Relevant quantitative studies indicate an indisputable correlation between the education level (especially of girls) and the age at marriage.³²

And UNICEF's MICS³³ gives a similar insight into this correlation:

Figure 4. Early marriage and high school attendance



The analysis of statistical data, although undoubtedly of great importance, does not, however, give a clear answer to the question of which structural factors are causing this correlation. In other words, the established correlation does not mean that at the same time the crucial cause-and-effect relationship exists. This would mean, for example, that leaving school does not necessarily have to be caused by the decision to marry, even when the marriage comes immediately after leaving school. This is also demonstrated by the secondary analysis of the MISC data for 2010,³⁴ which shows that several different causes influence *both* school leaving

32 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Education Transforms Lives: Education for All Global Monitoring Report*, UNESCO, Geneva, 2013; and Delprato, Marcos, et al., 'On the Impact of Early Marriage on Schooling Outcomes in Sub-Saharan Africa and South West Asia', *International Journal of Educational Development*, vol. 44, 2015, pp. 42–55.

33 United Nations Children's Fund, 'Serbia MICS 2014' and 'Roma Settlements in Serbia MICS 2014', UNICEF, 2014.

34 Hotchkiss, David R., et al., 'Risk Factors Associated with the Practice of Child Marriage among Roma Girls in Serbia', *BMC International Health and Human Rights*, vol. 16, no. 6, 2016, available at <<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4736708/>>.

and early marriages. The most important of them is undoubtedly economic position — i.e., poverty.

Data obtained by qualitative research focuses on discovering the other parameters that determine the length of schooling and the time of entering marriage, viewed from the perspective of the Roma communities themselves. It should be kept in mind that external factors, such as discrimination within the education system or the ability/inability to get a job after completing school, play a major role in deciding to continue education. This analysis, however, focuses on the processes that take place within the marginalized environment — that is, the answers given by the Roma communities, in response to both the external risk factors as well as those that occur within the community. The material obtained by this research indicates that two factors are crucial for the extension of education, and at the same time the postponement of marriage after the age of majority:

- Considering the prospects that better education provides or can provide, which depends primarily on the economy — i.e., the potentially available jobs in the place of residence; and
- The degree of conservation/degradation of the patriarchal model, where financially supporting the family is exclusively the duty of men.

In places where all industrial production has completely died out, people cannot see the purpose of education, not even primary education, and even less the secondary. Novi Bečej is a typical example of a town with no awareness of the purpose of education, because almost the entire Roma population lives off social benefits and child allowance or work in the alternative (grey) market. In this type of environment, people have to be forced to complete primary school:

But for us this night school, that we have to go, they wanted to take us off the welfare, to take health insurance from children, they take even that because of school, if you don't go to school you can't go to doctor. And when we heard that, well then everyone had to go to school. Just so they tick that you are here.

Novi Bečej, woman N, 32

People usually don't even think about completing secondary school, and this applies to both girls and boys:

Well I don't know that someone completed it. I don't know anyone who completed anything. Not here, I don't know anyone. You know how it goes with us? As soon as she turns 15, they don't let her go to school any more, lest someone steal her. Because it happens. And it's also time for boys to get marry. And girls as soon as they turn 14,

parents won't let them go to school... Some wanna go, but when parents say she can't, then she can't. What can she do? No one sees no use, that someone will work, that someone will get a job, that ain't gonna happen. And it's always been like that.

Novi Bečej, woman D, 55

He went to school (son), completed eight grades, but didn't complete secondary school. No secondary school for us... It doesn't pay off to go, and they don't want to go, and we don't want... To know to write, read, calculate and that's enough for them. Ain't no use from that.

Novi Bečej, woman M, 39

In places where the economy exists and there are opportunities for employment, going to school is considered important, and primary school as mandatory:

To complete school... nowadays, if you don't have at least primary school... you can't even get a job with brooms anywhere. Can't end up without at least one, complete at least the eighth grade.

Vranje, woman SM, 30

The awareness that even secondary school is desirable exists there, so much that even the married boys and/or girls complete it. The examples from Pirot and Vranje show that:

We accepted her (daughter-in-law, aged 17), but I told her you will finish school. If you get married, you stay here and keep going to school until you complete four years of secondary.... and that's what we did. She went to school from home ... I went to parent-teacher meetings.

Pirot, woman J, ??

... it was the first semester that was over, then I was married and was going to school. And my friends were a little bit, you know it, just like... how the hell are you married and coming to school? Later the teachers found out, you know, he says, why are you complaining, he says what's the problem here he says. Well, we live, he says, in thesesurroundings with Roma and we know they at 14, 15, they get married. What's so strange, he says. And like that later, I completed this second semester.

Vranje, married couple

For those who didn't complete secondary school in these communities, some parents plan the continuation of education, even though their children 'grew up':

She (daughter, married at 13 against her parents' will, mother of a child aged 5) could now this year start the first grade of secondary school. He too (son-in-law) from screwing around remained just with primary school. I can send my child to complete school and I will that ...

Pirot, man I, 43

This type of impact of the economic prospects on the length of formal education — i.e., the preferable age for marriage, fully corresponds to the results of research in post-socialist Hungary, where, in the period after 1989, as a result of losses of jobs and job opportunities, the Roma population suddenly became impoverished, the education level decreased and, at the same time, the number of underage marriages increased.³⁵

Roma living in informal settlements, most of whom are refugees from Kosovo, are a special case. As a rule, they have not spent a single day in school, which is explained by their parents being worried for the safety of children. Changing the environment and coming to a big city changes their perception of the value of education:

They (the older brothers who took care of the respondent, because she lost her parents early) were afraid, they did not have the time to take care of me because they worked you know. They didn't let me, he says, sister you can't go to school because there ain't no one to take care to you. I say, I will stay here brothers, I say I won't go to school, but I ain't gonna know nothing. Today I can't write, I don't know anything... I say for my daughters. School must, must... children must learn the school, and not walk around. I'm a mother and I said I'm gonna send you to school, I'll bring it for you and I tell him I'm bringing. Not to be a fool like me, I don't know in school, I can't read, I don't know anything.

Belgrade/Makiš, woman B, 32

The rare literate people in these settlements can be seen as the local leaders, because they help the community members function in a world where literacy is necessary:

They gotta go to school, they gotta. I went to school too. My husband went t' school, they also gotta go to school. No life without school, no nothing. You can't get by, can't

35 Durst, Judit, 'Fertility and Childbearing Practices among Poor Gypsy Women in Hungary: The intersections of class, race and gender', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 35, 2002, pp. 457–474.

do nothing. And here, these our neighbours, let them all say, I'm the only one who went to school in mine. They all come to me, I fill up their documents, I write their requests, I help them, I explain them, I read them. When they find a skin cream on the trash can, they gonna bring it to me, I'm gonna read it for him and tell him — this is good, this is not good and what this is for. Here they are. Like, these are all my neighbours... I helped all of them with these applications, I went with everyone even pregnant, and with baby I ran for all them here, I helped them all.

Belgrade/Suma, woman Z, 31

In these cases, however, there's the question of how successful the parents will be in implementing an education plan for their children, given the evident poverty and difficult living conditions in the temporary settlements and reception centres.

On the other hand, living outside the Roma mahallas has an impact on at least partial acceptance of the value system of the majority population, which is especially evident when it comes to education. The positive examples, and they do exist in all surveyed sites, live outside the mahallas, or outside the environment where traditional models of separation from the majority population and the patriarchal structure of the family are reproduced, according to which it is not good to be within the (state) system, and women definitely should not work and, therefore, it makes no sense for them to get education. This is also confirmed by the insight of Roma activists:

The Roma people living in mahallas believe that education is not something that will help them. Seventy, 80 per cent of them complete school under pressure from the state. The lowest number of the Roma enrol in secondary school. For Roma living in the city or suburban settlements, almost all of them finish secondary schools.

Kragujevac, man S, 23

Young people who decide to continue their education (medical student from Novi Bečej, daughters of a respondent from Surdulica) either have scholarships for their education or are preparing to get a job in one of the Western European countries after completing their education (primarily in Germany — they are all preparing for jobs in the health-care sector). The others, for now, are as a rule engaged in the non-governmental sector (primarily in the Roma organizations), because that is the only way to get a job after completing their education.

It can be concluded that the attitude towards education depends primarily on the local context in which certain Roma communities live. Although parents in all communities, except partially for Novi Bečej, claim that they will try (or have tried) to have their children complete at least

primary school, it can be said that these statements are based on presumed desirable behaviour, because a comparison with the real-life situation shows that children, especially girls, leave school very early. From this it can be concluded that, even if parents had been telling children that education was important, their overall behaviour had not appeared to be stimulating, so children had not recognized education as an important factor for their future adult life, in which they also had the support of the wider community.

Economically more deprived areas where the general level of employment is low do not provide prospects for the local Roma communities either, which leads to not valuing education very highly. Also, the risk factors for school drop-out which are related to the patriarchal cultural model, such as the girl's safety or the gender division of roles where women's jobs are solely those related to the house, are clearly locally contextualized.

The testimonies of the respondents indicate that awareness of the importance of education exists, even if it's at a basic level. This is particularly evident among those actors such as mothers who married early and who stopped their education, and who are trying to create different conditions for their children. It is important to note that when they left school or someone else made that decision for them, they were not old enough and did not have enough experience to assess the consequences of that act, which is also an important part of their testimony.

Risk factors in these contexts can be reduced by empowering parents to persevere in such a decision. Also, supporting children by rewarding their success at school presents one possible model of helping them see more clearly the benefits of staying in the education system. Although the decision to continue education is not always or necessarily structurally related to the decision to enter into marriage, it is clear from the collected material that this risk increases when there are no education prospects. This risk factor is particularly active in the sensitive period at the end of primary school, when children's entry into puberty overlaps with the lack of prospects and motivation for further continuation of education.

Building the capacities and resources that will enable children to continue education, both in terms of logistics and advisory support, is the direction that should be followed in the context of reducing the risk of dropping out from school. In that sense, the interventions should be directed towards supporting the decision makers in terms of their children continuing education, and towards encouraging young mothers to continue the education interrupted after getting married and having children. Proposed interventions will be elaborated in detail in the chapter on recommendations and interventions.

6.4 The “glass ceiling” phenomenon as a result of marginalization

The exclusion of Roma people, from the wider society is evident in all surveyed sites³⁶ even among those who are fully integrated, and is reflected in all segments of life from school³⁷ and jobs to everyday life, such as ethnic targeting — for example, when entering a store, boutique, or in public transportation:

I hear that children have problems, every day. Children, for example, nobody wants to be friends with them. Or they don't have the money for school trips, or for birthdays, so they don't have the money to buy a present, and then they can't go to birthdays at all. Children, especially in primary school, have less understanding.

Kragujevac, woman K, 20

An example of a young respondent, who grew up in the majority community, who, in his own words, did not even know that he was of Roma nationality until he started school, illustrates the mechanism based on which discrimination works:

In the first grade, you know how children go, they were yelling after me Gypsy, dumpster. That was a bit...

In the second and third grade I started withdrawing. I had a cousin in the class, they tried the same on her, but she didn't pay any attention to it. She fought it off back then, but I couldn't. I withdrew. In secondary school you already learn how to deal with it.

Kragujevac, man S, 23

In a similar way, another respondent, also fully integrated and with high education, who grew up among children from the majority population, explains the challenges he faces at his workplace and in everyday life:

36 There is also relatively extensive recent literature on this, for example: Đurović, Bogdan, 'Socijalna i etnička distanca prema Romima u Srbiji', *Facta universitatis — series: Philosophy, Sociology and Psychology* 2, 2002, pp. 667–681; Djordjević, Dragoljub B., Dragan Todorović and Lela Milošević, 'Romas and Others — Others and Romas', *Social Distance*, 2004, 'Ivan Hadjijski' Institute for Social Values and Structures, Sofia, and several others.

37 Compare, for example: Franceško, Mirjana, Vladimir Mihić and Jelena Kajon, 'Socijalna distanca i stereotipi o romima kod dece novosadskih osnovnih škola', *Psihologija*, vol. 39, no. 2, 2005, pp. 167–182.

I had to leave Fiat, some kind of a redundancy layoff. I don't think that was really fair, not fair at all. I worked overtime every day, I had the certificates. I was fixing robots, I was doing everything, both the things that were and that were not a part of my job. I was also the deputy team leader. And now, with these layoffs, they called me and told me I did poorly in the work evaluation. It wasn't clear to me, because I worked on things bringing a lot of points, I was getting bonuses...

Just by being a Roma, you are labelled, that you have no rights, it's absurd. The system itself is problematic. And when you complete this special education school (attended by the largest number of Roma children), where are you going to work? They are now listed as people with disabilities. What can then the Roma people do? Collect secondary raw materials and get spit on for doing it. And this all goes in a circle, a vicious circle, with no exit...

And why did you even go to school if they don't want to hire you and take you, and everyone knows how much faculties cost. Who will pay for that? And how can your parent pay for your faculty, when he wasn't able to be hired because he is a Roma?

There's that in stores and in boutiques it's really present there. When I go to a boutique store, I'm followed by the security guys, it's a disaster.

Kragujevac, man D, 28

Another example from the everyday of an integrated Roma man shows how ethnic targeting works:

Like you can't even report him ... this is done in a convoluted ... I had a situation with the ticket collectors on a bus and of course I had the monthly pass. And bam he comes to me, of course someone's gotta be his first. And since he was with his colleague, and my aunt was with me and my aunt knew the other guy and since she has a sharp tongue she says your buddy immediately asks us for our IDs. Well he says your suspicious. And then I had to react because, what for I said, because we're coloured I said. Give me one feature that made you suspect we didn't have tickets, that we're cheating or you know. One feature — So just this colour was the key thing at that moment for discrimination...

Kragujevac, man A, 31

Although in private communication the relationships are much better, there are sporadic problems even there:

And at farmers' markets they don't wanna buy from them, because they're Gypsies. ...we are here among Serbs ...and again they say I'll go to a Gypsy to buy flowers ...and when he comes to me, asks me to lower the price, blackmails ... and I am very angry at it and still he says Gypsy business... that kills me most... because they endanger us here and... we lose the will for further struggles in life.

Pirot, woman J, 58

However, the problem is the most significant at the employment level, which is one of the causes of early school drop-out. Almost all respondents recognize it and insist on it, because employment is the crucial requirement for economic security and any kind of life prospects:

And those with faculties, can't find jobs. Ain't gonna happen. No jobs. And now when school is over and during the break, every child goes and finds a job for themselves, they go to dig. That's the first thing. And they need no school for that. But they need some money. And then they complete school, and again go to dig, go for brooms, to pick cherries... Life's hard. You ain't got money. No jobs.

Novi Bečej, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, 38, 18

What hurts me the most now...there's a lot of these people who finished big schools, faculties, masters. And when they should get a job... it's like, we'll call you, we'll let you know. And they hire someone just because they're not Roma, regardless of the level of education. They hire people with lower education level just because they are Serbs.

Kragujevac, man D, 28

... so we in the Pirot public service, the national service, we have no Roma employees ... to have children with faculties and with secondary schools. I'm always fighting for that ... to have them start putting Roma children in positions, because they studied faculties.

Pirot, woman J, 58

Come on now, a Roma wants to work. Aw go to the bureau, beg, beg. And in the end he says... in Tigar they want workers, for loading and unloading tires. Tell him (husband) to go there at eleven. Oh I said, great. And I came, told him. There he gone to them. We'll let you know by phone. Three months now they're not calling. So, it ain't gonna happen. You ain't got nothing do to and that's it.

Pirot, woman R, 44

*And it's difficult to find a job. When did you see a Gypsy woman working in a bakery?
Or in a Chinese store. You haven't seen it? Well you won't see it. Never happens.*

Novi Bečej, woman M, 39

But where to find that work (adult son)? Nowhere. If he could find, he would wanna work. But ain't got nowhere to work. When he has a shift, he goes to the Banat (the local expression for working in agriculture / as a day labourer) to work... we go to Čačak, to them raspberries. We pick raspberries. And that all day in the sun. Fro' six to eight, half past eight. You gotta, what can you do. I can't do nothing alone. I gotta, I holler, son you gotta go with me. But he also has a weak heart. I gotta harass my child too when there ain't no work.

Vranje, married couple 2, 40

Me think for us Roma, it's a hard life here. There's nothing to live off, no work. And if you work for forty dinars (hand-sewing per one pair of shoes for Geox), there ain't no work for social security. No official years of work. All black-market work. Nowhere to go. Nothing works.

Vranje, married couple 2, 40

Unlike in other places, efforts are being made in Pirot to improve the economic situation among the Roma population, although there are many difficulties with that as well. Nevertheless, in cooperation with the municipality, there are projects such as recycling waste, and there is also support in the context of entrepreneurship, so the economic factor associated with education is one of the key parameters of improving the living conditions of the local community. But, once again, there is a significant difference between the urban and rural context:

They (Roma women from villages) are invisible, completely... They need a lot of help, a lot of work done with them. They are completely invisible. They even... in three/four months they come to Pirot once, after that they're not in the city, no one comes across them... they do agriculture, work in agriculture. Okay. But they do not have a lot of income, they still work as day labourers.

Pirot, woman J, 58

These testimonies point to a problem that occurs massively not only when it comes to marginalized communities but also with fully integrated individuals and families. It is the 'glass

ceiling' phenomenon, that is, the factors of not being able to overcome an invisible barrier that defines the marginalized position of our respondents. Whether it's one or the other group, in everyday life, regardless of the level of integration, there is an obvious discrimination present which prevents equal participation in the life of local communities, which is especially evident in the education system and the labour market. Such practice shows that, even in cases and examples of good practice, our respondents face obstacles that in no way stem from themselves, but from the widespread prejudices that exist among the majority population.

In this regard, a separate problem, which is reflected in particular cases of parents not accepting the early marriage of their children and insisting on the application of the law, is institutional discrimination, which is not based on the law, but on the individual interpretation of the Roma way of life and 'customs', based on preconceived prejudices:

They (the policemen from Bela Palanka) didn't even want to properly come out... the policemen didn't even want to talk to us, but they said, if you want to talk, come to the police administration, that's right there and like we can sit down and talk. We have absolutely no need to like come out to the field and come to your house... that's normal for you, you get married today, tomorrow you fight, the day after tomorrow you celebrate, get a divorce or whatever, and that's it.

Pirot, man Z, 28

With all this anger and nervousness, I call the police. What's up? (P: And your husband?) He's present too. What's up? She is under-age and he is an adult 25 years old. It's normal for you Gypsies. And I say, maybe it's normal for someone but not for me, because it's still a child. My child. Sit tight don't move, we'll be right there. The police took us out and directly to the police station. And it's my husband, I and my husband's brother. And somewhere there in the police basement sit me, my husband, my daughter and son-in-law. And the policeman asks me, why are you so, when it's normal among you. It's not normal for me...

Pirot, woman I, 39

What is 'the glass ceiling' phenomenon?

A situation in which advancement seems possible but is prevented by barriers or discrimination.

The 'glass ceiling' phenomenon — i.e., the factors preventing the breaking of barriers causing the marginalization of Roma communities by the majority population — presents a visible and systemic problem which greatly hinders individuals' prospects, even when it comes to so-called good practice examples. Present in those cases as well, the glass ceiling has an even stronger impact on individuals and communities on the very margins of society. It essentially intensifies the effects of all other risk factors, because it demotivates individuals, families and entire communities from considering other life options and prospects, which often results in early marriage.

These factors are of a systemic and structural nature and present a challenge that may be overcome only through long-term systemic efforts and cooperation between different social actors, starting from government institutions, social and health-care systems, education and law enforcement services. Apart from the need for intersectoral cooperation, the key actors that can be identified as agents of change are local leaders and successful individuals who, at least to a certain degree, managed to break the glass ceiling. In combination with other stakeholders, their engagement, is key to sending a message that life paths avoiding the practice of early marriage are possible.

6.5 Positive examples

There are examples of good practice, although with relatively low representation in the research sample. The positive examples are encountered primarily in families that are integrated into the wider society and, as a rule, live outside the Roma mahallas — i.e., among those who have managed to get out of the environment before the transition period. This is best seen in Kragujevac, but also in Pirot — so, in the cities that had a developed industry, where the Roma were employed and, thanks to better economic conditions, they built houses for themselves or got apartments outside Roma settlements. Children from these families usually complete secondary school and do not opt for early marriage, although there are also reverse cases, as shown by the example of the daughter of a respondent from Pirot.

Life outside the Roma community implies that the pressure from the surroundings on young people, primarily girls, but also their parents, is significantly lower, so girls live their teenage years the same as their non-Roma peers: they go out, 'have fun', socialize with peers and have no need or interest to marry early. Kragujevac is the best example in this case: due to rapid

urbanization (back in the nineteenth century) and later industrialization, the Roma settlements were being moved and resettled according to urban plans, so — although there are still Roma settlements on the outskirts of the city today — the destroyed structure of the community, and the emigration of Roma employees from these mahallas into the newly built apartments in the city centre and new settlements led to a more intense coexistence with the majority population and adoption of the set of values that the majority population has as well. So, in Kragujevac, the ultimate virginity of the bride is almost completely abandoned (except among the immigrants from the south or from Kosovo, who settle in the mahallas), and the idea that the education of young people is necessary for their future successful life is accepted, so early marriage among the Roma living outside the mahallas is extremely rare.

This report aimed to present primarily the factors and motives for child marriage from the perspective of the Roma communities themselves, and did not consider in detail the factors concerning the wider social system. This chapter, however, points to an inextricable link, which the respondents themselves perceive, between the factors that can contribute to their integration and the obstacles they face at all levels of functioning outside their own communities. Even with the respondents who live in the majority environment, who are educated and emancipated, without any pressure that comes from the environment structured by the traditional cultural and social norms, discrimination and the marginalized status remain one of the fundamental elements of their identity. It is therefore very important to take into account the respondents' perceptions of their own opportunities in the majority environment, since it largely determines both the decision-making processes regarding their own life prospects and the prospects of their children, with child marriage representing one of the most important parts of this process.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND PROPOSED INTERVENTIONS



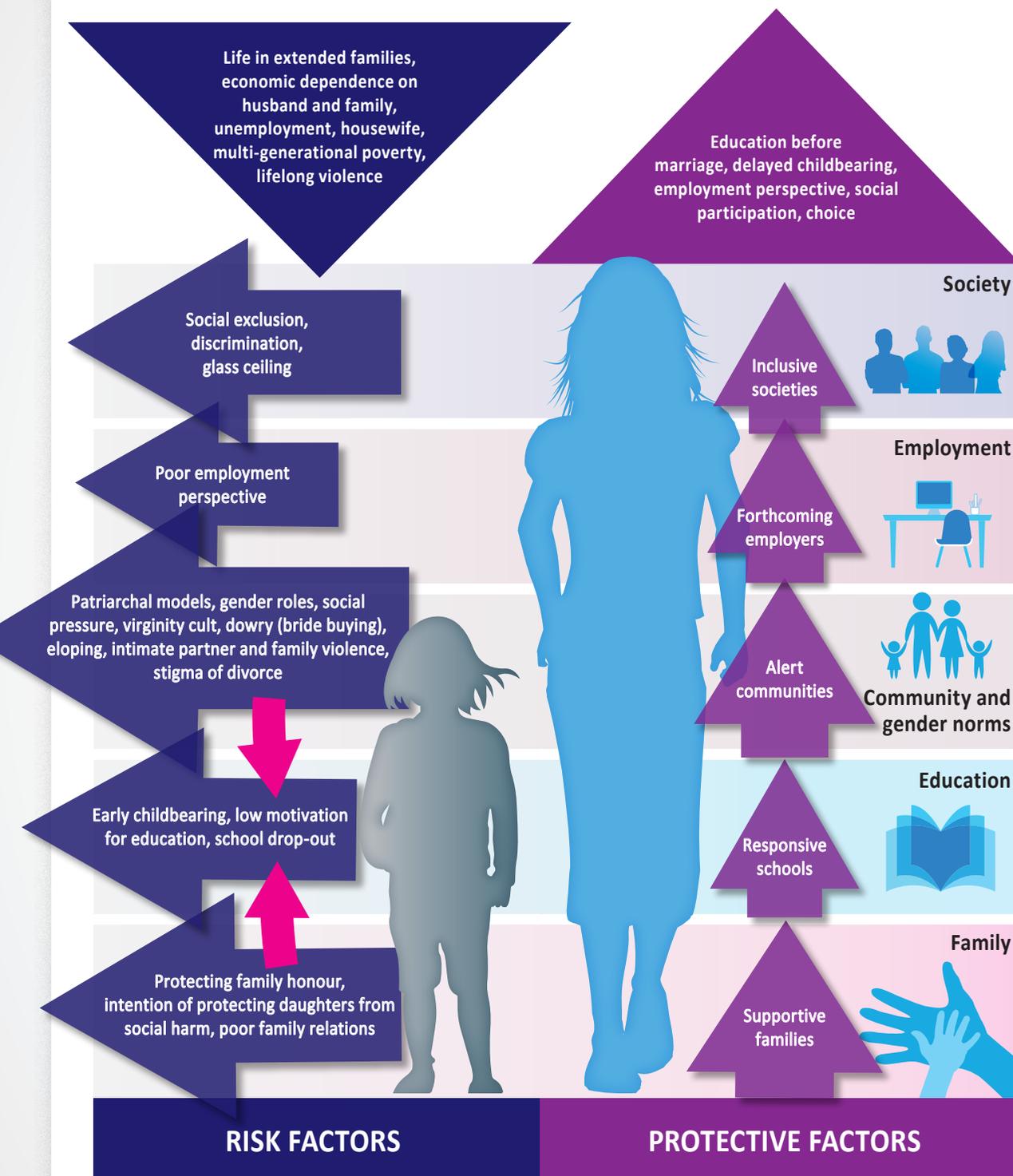
The rich testimonies of the respondents presented in the previous chapter give an insight into the internal logic of the decision-making process for entering into an early, child marriage. These testimonies speak in detail about the factors that have crucial influence on the existence and reproduction of this practice in different Roma communities. These factors are clearly locally contextualized, and vary depending on the communities that were researched.

Based on the presented data, it is possible to identify the key findings which can be marked as important general factors when it comes to the decision-making process related to child marriage:

- The patriarchal model of functioning of the community where the position of women is subordinate, and their gender roles predominantly imply the role of the wife, mother and housewife.
- Strong influence of social and cultural norms within which the cult of virginity determines the perception of marriage.
- Consequently, entry into marital union as a result of the first sexual relationship, without knowing what it implies, which in particular refers to the complete absence of knowledge about sexual life, especially among girls.
- Lack of intergenerational dialogue when it comes to marriage and sexual life, especially between mothers and daughters. As a consequence of the taboo of sexuality, there is a high risk of endangering the reproductive health of young girls, especially in cases of early childbirth.

- Pressure from the community regarding the irreversibility of entry into marriage, where divorce is largely seen as damaging to the family's reputation and honour.
- The economic factor, which implies the perception of the child being better off when she moves to the husband's family. Selling the bride in this context is not a prevailing model, but an assessment of the parent or the child herself that she will have a better life in the new community, in the absence of alternative life choices, where marriage is the only possible and desirable starting point of the life cycle.
- Perception of education as a generally desirable, but essentially unnecessary, resource. In this regard, the lack of motivation for further education, primarily among girls, makes marriage seem desirable because there is no alternative model. The gender role of a woman as a housewife, mother and wife is imposed on girls from early childhood, denying them the idea of different life choices.
- Poverty as a consequence of marginalization by the majority environment, but also of the closed circle of social norms and the lack of education within the communities themselves.
- The examples of good practice of integrated Roma show the possibility of having an alternative to child marriage in terms of understanding a wider range of life options. However, the factors of discrimination from the wider social environment, as well as the difficult economic situation in the whole country, point to a danger of the reverse practice where children from integrated families marry as the result of the aforementioned factors, which can also explain the increase in the rate of child marriages in the past decade.
- Limitations in the examples of good practice are related primarily to their marginalized position as members of the Roma minority, which is evident at levels ranging from education to everyday life. In this regard, the phenomenon of the 'glass ceiling' is particularly emphasized, where, due to their ethnicity, Roma have a subordinate position both in the education system and in the labour market. Such a position poses a great challenge in combination with the potential pressure from traditional norms and customs present in the Roma communities, where young Romafaced with obstacles encountered in the majority environment, often choose to follow their community models.

Figure 5. Risk factors and protective factors



Based on the identified key findings arising from the rich testimonies of respondents, we suggest the concept of ‘subaltern’^{38, 39} as the basic framework for understanding the decision-making process for child marriages. This term refers to populations which are socially, politically or geographically outside power structures — that is, they are excluded from established institutions. This theoretical paradigm implies that those are populations whose voice is not heard and whose position, survival and interests are defined through interpretation and representation by others — i.e., those within the power and decision-making structures. It follows from such a position that the important differences, nuances and characteristics of the cultural contexts related, inter alia, to the practice of early marriage, are often overlooked. In this report we start from the fact that the Roma population in Serbia — i.e., the barriers that it faces, can be viewed from the perspective of the concept of ‘subalternity’.⁴⁰

The testimonies of the respondents indicate that the external, majority environment is the predominant factor that produces marginalization.⁴¹ Unfortunately, in marginalized communities, marginality often functions as a resource and strategy for self-preservation. Marginality is, in this case, viewed as a practical consequence of the marginalization conditioned by the actions of the majority environment, reproduced and maintained within the community itself. Marginality in this way becomes a means by which communities protect themselves from assimilation, maintaining certain practices as an integral part of their identity which clearly implies being different from the surrounding society.⁴² In a large number of cases given in this report, the inability to penetrate into the established structures of society in Serbia conditions the respondents’ decisions to adhere to the rules of their own community, as the only one offered to them as an option for survival.

38 There is no completely adequate translation of the term ‘subaltern’ in the Serbian language. In literature, the term ‘podređenost’ is most commonly encountered, but we will also keep the original word in English in this text, because the Serbian translation does not fully explain the meaning of the original term.

39 Spivak, G., ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’, in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Ill., 1988, pp. 271–313.

40 Sardelić, J., ‘Romani Minorities on the Margins of Post-Yugoslav Citizenship Regimes’, CITSEE Working Papers 31/2013, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, 2013; Trehan, N., ‘The Romani Subaltern within Neoliberal European Civil Society: NGOization of human rights and silent voices’, in *Romani Politics in Contemporary Europe: Poverty, ethnic mobilization and the neoliberal order*, edited by Nando Sigona and Nidhi Trehan, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 51–71; and Kóczé, A., ‘Gender, Ethnicity and Class: Romani women’s political activism and social struggles’, PhD thesis, Central European University, Budapest, 2011.

41 More about this concept in Žikić, B., *Reprodukcija, marginalnost, rizik*, Srpski genealoški centar i Filozofski fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu, Beograd, 2016.

42 Habermas, J., *Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic States: The inclusion of the other — Studies in political theory*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1998.

Child marriage in the Roma population in Serbia in this context should be seen as a social form that survives in the interplay of the marginalization and the response of the Roma community to it. This practice survives due to being on the margins of the majority society, since there is no external pressure to change the undesirable social norm. Within the community, it functions as a response to marginalization, which is always and necessarily conservative.

A systemic, institutional response by the relevant stakeholders within the society and the state represents a necessary and crucial parameter for action and interventions towards the eradication of child marriage. This research, however, is focused on uncovering those factors that determine the practice of early marriage from the perspective of the Roma communities themselves, as well as on proposing the possible responses to the risk of early marriage within the particular social environment.

The empirical data obtained by the research clearly indicate that the Roma population in Serbia does not represent a single group that has a homogeneous culture and shares a common socio-economic or political status. It was determined that they are extremely heterogeneous narrow communities where the economic and social position, but also the strength of the cultural and social norms and traditions, vary from site to site, and also within the local contexts themselves. Variations in the practice of child marriage, as can be seen from the testimonies of respondents, range from non-existence, through the partially destroyed to the almost completely preserved traditional model in which the social and cultural forms have a crucial impact on its reproduction. However, it is noticeable that many families, in which the existence of child marriage has not been recorded, are completely socially, economically and spatially integrated into the majority environment.

Having this in mind, we faced the question of an adequate concept that would take into account all the local characteristics, but at the same time offer a wider framework based on which potential interventions could be proposed. As a possible answer to this question, we propose the concept of the *marginalized environment*, as a general framework in which the practice of child marriage in the Roma communities in Serbia functions and is reproduced. The concept set out this way primarily insists on the fact that the marginalized environment, including the social and economic status and prospects of the community in it, as well as its cultural norms and customs, represents the determining risk factor for entering into a child marriage. In this regard, the risks and responses to them represent a relative category that varies and is structurally dependent on that environment, where different factors play a greater or lesser role in increasing or decreasing risks associated with child marriage.

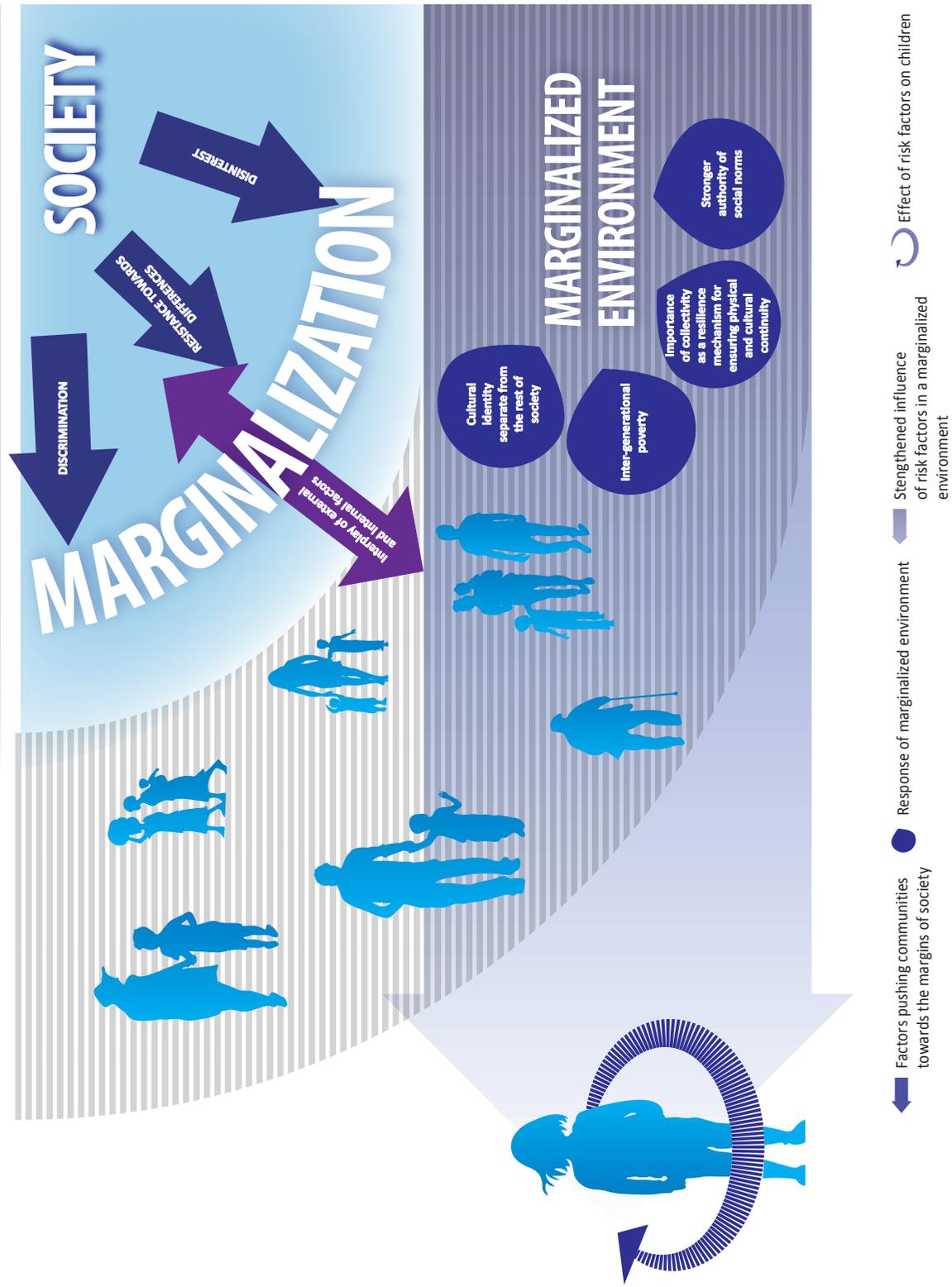
Marginality in this case implies both sensitivity and vulnerability of the surveyed community in relation to the majority environment, and the complexity of its functioning in relation to the primary determinants of one's own identity. Marginalization understood this way determines in multiple ways the risks of entering into a child marriage, acting both externally and internally. Understanding the concept of marginalization in the given context also implies that it presents a structural barrier, which is implicitly present in the entire social environment when it comes to members of Roma communities. The respondents' statements very often point to such implicit effects of marginalization, with regard to the education system, labour market or daily life. Statements such as 'who will hire me' or 'why should I go to school' indirectly refer to a marginalized position leading to a lack of motivation for, for example, continuing education or job search, caused by the respondents' subordinate position.

Essentially, the *marginalized environment* functions as an interlaced series of factors which determine the possible responses of a community to the various challenges that are posed to it. On one hand, Roma communities are defined by a series of their own rules that differ considerably from those that exist in the majority environment, where the perception of virginity as a necessary condition for entering marriage is one of the most important. On the other hand, this quality of being different is a direct cause for marginalization by the wider social environment, which considers this and similar practices to be backward and which, as such, constitute grounds for discrimination. The complex interrelation between these two factors puts an individual or a family trying to change the established practice before a challenge of the conflict with their own community in the event of not following established norms, with the risk of, despite the efforts made, the majority environment not recognizing this effort in terms of full integration into society. The greater the marginalization, the stronger the grasp of the community, and this represents an additional aggravating circumstance regarding the functioning of the possible factors of change.

The concept of the *marginalized environment* understood this way offers a comprehensive explanatory framework that takes into account both the external and internal risk factors for entering into child marriage, particularly emphasizing the interlacing of these factors in the reception of the respondents themselves. Viewed from this perspective, the focus is on the agency of the environment, rather than on individual actions, by identifying those factors created by the environment that determine the actions of individuals and families in the decision-making processes about entering into child marriage.

The concept of the marginalized environment can be presented in the following way:

Figure 6. Presentation of the concept of marginalized environment



7.1 Recommendations

Based on the analysed data and the theoretical concept of the marginalized environment that arises from it, formulating recommendations firstly needs to take into account the fact that the risk factors for entering into child marriage acting within the Roma communities are extremely strong and restrictive. The complexity and interconnectedness of these factors greatly limits the possibilities of alternative life choices.

Factors like maintaining the cult of virginity, the concept of family honour, gender roles where women do not have the option to be educationally empowered and economically productive, constitute internal constraints acting within the communities, defining early marriage in advance as a desirable social practice.

On the other hand, the discrimination and marginalization of the members of Roma communities by the majority environment constitute a fundamentally limiting factor in the efforts to abandon the constraints imposed by the community. As the material indicates, in the vast majority of cases, going outside their own communities into the majority environment results in facing different forms of exclusion, from the one in the education system, to the labour market. Changing the internal rules, customs, laws and ways of thinking within the Roma communities in this regard is practically an impossible task without opening the channel for the members of the Roma population to move into the majority environment.

The close link between internal risk factors and the limiting mechanisms imposed by the majority environment suggests that the approach to combating the practice of child marriage must be directed towards the coordinated action of various stakeholders, both from the local Roma communities, and from the institutions and other organizations that represent the majority environment.

In that sense, 'Communication for Development' stands out as an adequate approach to plan combating the practice of child marriage in the Roma communities. It is a tool that involves understanding people, their beliefs and values, and the social and cultural norms that determine their lives.⁴³ This approach is based on the inclusion of communities, listening to their members, in order to determine how they identify their own problems, propose solutions and act towards their implementation. The idea of 'communication for development' is a two-way process of sharing ideas and knowledge, using different channels of communication and approaches that empower individuals and communities to undertake actions aimed at improving their lives.

43 <<https://www.unicef.org/cbsc/>>

Basically, such approaches are aimed at communities in clearly defined social and cultural environments, with the objective of identifying their problems and needs, and encouraging their participation.

The presented and analysed material clearly indicates the factors that lead to the maintenance and reproduction of the practice of child marriage from the perspective of the members of the communities themselves. At the same time, the testimonies of the respondents show that external factors, which determine the marginalized position of the Roma communities, have a major impact on maintaining the internal risk factors. Active participation of individuals and communities in this regard should necessarily be accompanied by a support system by stakeholders belonging to the majority environment.

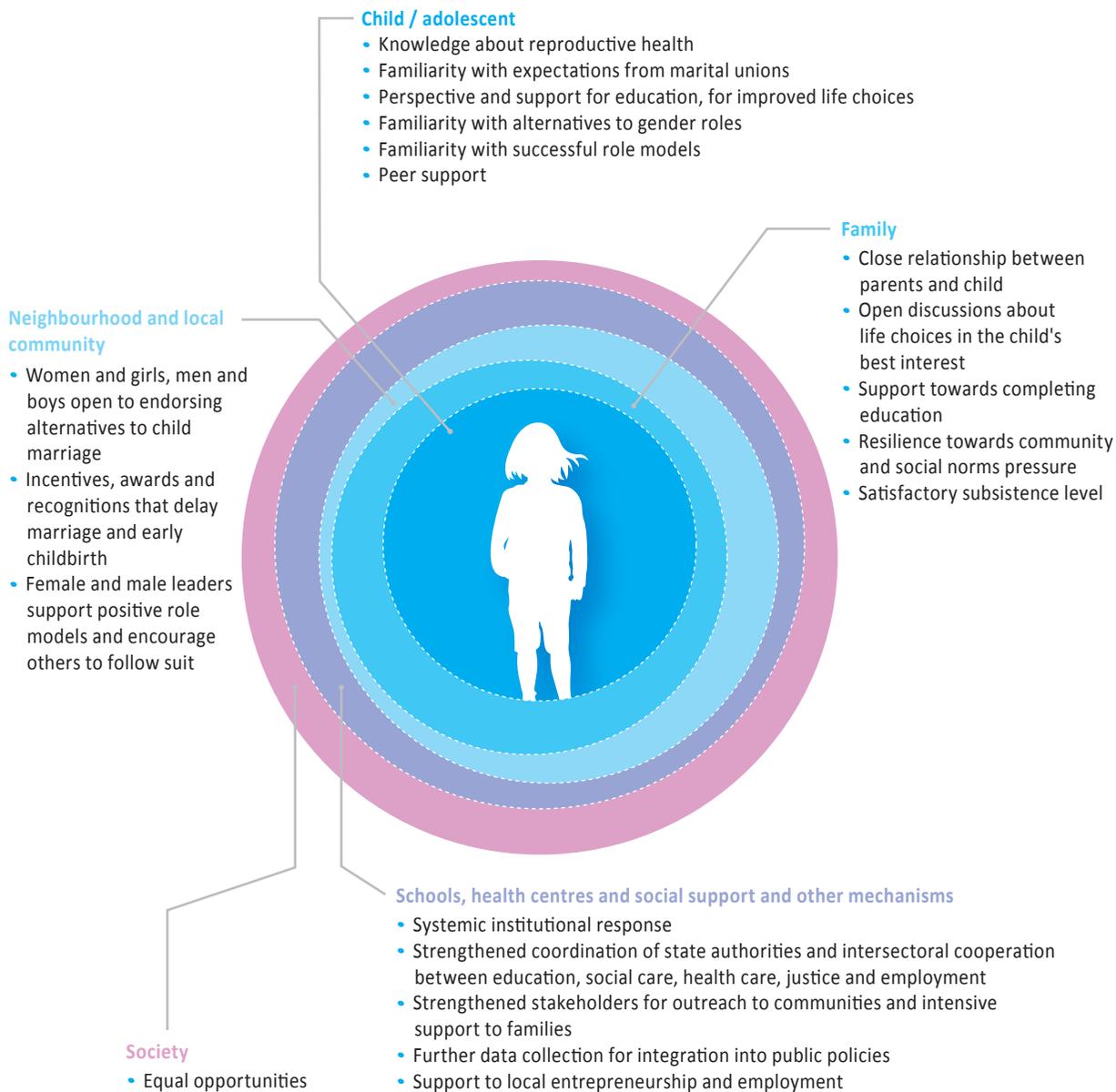
‘Communication for Development’ in this context implies sending a message about the harmfulness of the practice of child marriage that is communicated by the members of the Roma communities themselves. However, in order for such a message to have an adequate effect, it is necessary to coordinate it between different instances, from the leaders in the Roma communities, through the educational system and the health and social care systems, local self-governments, law enforcement authorities and other institutions and organizations involved in the process.

The two-way process as the basis for the ‘Communication for Development’ approach relates primarily to the fact that all stakeholders in the process send out, in a coordinated manner, the same message about the harmfulness of the social practice of child marriage. The messages communicated within the community itself will have little or no effect unless they are also broadcast at instances such as schools, the police or the judiciary authorities, and it is the very lack of such support that is apparent from the presented material. The strength and deep-rootedness of certain social and cultural norms, customs and beliefs present in the Roma communities indicate that the efforts to change them are a long-term and complex goal, which cannot be achieved without a high level of coordination of all stakeholders.

In this regard, the recommendations that follow indicate the different levels that need to be addressed in order to effectively approach combating the practice of child marriage in Roma communities:

- Encouraging the strengthening of the coordination among various state authorities, which would involve the creation of a broad front of stakeholders, functioning within the existing national strategies and plans.
- Strengthening intersectoral cooperation, which primarily includes education, social and health care, justice and employment sectors.
- Creating protocols for implementation and application of procedures related to cases of existing child marriages, but also for their prevention.
- Strengthening the capacities of existing stakeholders on the ground, such as pedagogical and health mediators, for their active participation preventing the practice of child marriage.
- Further work on data collection on child marriages, with the aim of expanding knowledge on local specifics and its integration into the domain of public policies.

Figure 7. Preconditions for ending the practice of child marriage



In addition to the above, the following are the proposals of interventions defined based on the presented and analysed material, which take the factors that arise from the functioning of the Roma community from the perspective of the respondents themselves. These are locally specific interventions, based on the specific problems faced by the members of the Roma communities which have a significant impact on decision making regarding early marriages:

- Material aid in school supplies, clothing and shoes, transport costs.
- Financial transfers to families conditioned by the girl completing school not marrying until the age of 18. The risks, primarily related to possible abuses, require precise criteria in the choice of the intervention beneficiaries, in cooperation with local Roma organizations on the ground. The sensitivity of the issue requires further development of the model. A model in which the allocated funds are transferred to the mother for her disposal can be considered as a possible solution, which could potentially also strengthen her position in the household.
- Institutionalization of awards and recognitions for demonstrated success in school for Roma children (motivation for children and decision makers — potentially financial, but also non-financial).
- Stimulation of employment of the best students (in cooperation with the local self-government or other stakeholders) — addresses the predominantly mentioned problem of unemployment as a demotivating factor for education among the respondents, which often leads to early marriage. In this regard, it is important to take into account the cultural context, where girls/women could be offered to work from home, given the deep-rootedness of the cultural model in the Roma communities where women primarily belong at home.
- Highlighting examples of good practice of stimulated local entrepreneurship, as an opportunity for self-employment, with the condition of compulsory education. One example of such a practice is given in the research data, where, due to the stimulation supporting entrepreneurship that was accessed, one respondent launched a flower-growing business, which currently employs several members of the primary and extended family.
- Empowering the possibility of the economic/educational emancipation of young mothers with young children: proposal of organizing a volunteer-based daycare programme. In this regard, we propose cooperation with institutions that require compulsory student internship of this type, which also includes considering modalities for internship at sites and in settlements outside the university centres. In this way, we address the prevailing problem of the lack of resources for caring for children which limits the movement of young mothers, and which is supported in the customs of women strictly staying at home. This intervention could also be directed towards older school-aged children in order to provide help with studying. Working from home in this case can also represent a sustainable model for implementation.
- Locating local male/female leaders in the local communities who have knowledge/skills that are beneficial for the community (reading, writing, understanding administration etc.) and working with them in order to direct their informal skills into focused programmes.

- Greater inclusion of the integrated members of the Roma population, who often, through the process of personal and family emancipation, cut their ties from the local communities to which they belonged. Their greater participation in the life and activities of the community, primarily through involvement in existing support programmes, could create space for highlighting examples of good practice that are often invisible for the reasons listed above.
- Focusing on activities with mothers of girls and girls, if they are of the appropriate age, with the aim of raising awareness about the importance of specific conversations about marriage, sexual life and reproductive health with children — addresses a widely observed problem in the local communities that girls enter early marriage (voluntarily or not) uninformed and unprepared, which increases the likelihood of them deciding for marriage without the full awareness of the consequences of such a decision. This aspect of action should in the long run also be aimed at older women, as the pillars of informal power in communities, with the goal of gradually working on changing awareness about the acceptability of the practice of child marriage.

Further work on the issue of child marriages will certainly help further develop, implement and validate these recommendations.

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Appendix 1: Detailed interview guide to studying child marriage in the Roma population in Serbia

This guide provides a framework for key qualitative techniques used in this research to study the causes of perpetuation of the practice of child marriage in Roma population in Serbia.

The guide contains the protocols and questions for studying the practice of child marriage, with special focus on the decision-making process with regard to the stated practice. The questionnaire contains sets of general questions, applicable to all types of respondents, as well as specific questions intended only for certain respondent groups. Furthermore, primarily depending on local specifics and in line with good ethnographic research practice, based on their own assessment of the situation on the ground, researchers may adapt the guide in those directions that deepen certain important questions or raise new ones which come up during interviews with the respondents. The reason for that is also the intention primarily to have a conversation with the respondents, which may in certain moments veer off the main topic, but it is precisely through that process that it provides key information that the researcher would not have learned by sticking to the predefined questions.

The respondent types based on which this guide has been designed are the following:

- 1.** A man or a woman making a decision on early marriage. Respondents are selected based on whether they participated in marrying off at least one child or grandchild. The ideal parameter would be that this marriage was entered into during the past five years, but a longer period is also acceptable (up to 10 years). If the surveyed site does not have a sufficient number of this type of respondents, parents/decision-makers whose child got married of their own free will or eloped at an age below 18 could alternatively be considered.
- 2.** An adult male/female, married before the age of 18.
- 3.** Brothers, sisters, other family members or elders, who directly witnessed the marriage of the previous respondent type.
- 4.** Male or female decision-makers, who did not marry off their child before the age of 18. Also, a man or a woman who did not enter into marriage before the age of 18.

The supporting research protocol related to the interview procedure

General information to be recorded during each interview:

1. Initials (pseudonym) of the respondent
2. Date
3. Site
4. Type of respondent
5. Age of respondent
6. Duration of interview
7. Researchers/other actors present (coordinators, neighbours, other family members, etc.)

Introductory protocol

Before each interview the researcher presents himself/herself to the respondent and gives a brief description of the nature of the interview and research and explains the technical details.

- *Concrete reason for interviewing the respondent — explain the main motive:*

My name is (...), I work as a researcher at the SASA Ethnographic Institute and I would like us to talk about the topic of marriage today. What I would primarily like to talk to you about is your personal experience related to marriage and family, as well as your experience related to marriage or marriage plans of your children. I would like to hear first-hand your experiences and thoughts about these topics, as a parent/family member.

- *Project explanation — explanation of how this interview fits into the broader project:*

Your experience and opinion about marriage is important for the research we are doing, as we would like to hear different views and experiences primarily about child marriages in your community. This will be useful to understand better decisions on marriage, especially when it concerns children.

- *Technical clarifications — explain to the respondent that the interview is being recorded and possibly provide additional clarifications about the statement on informed consent.*

The coordinator has already explained to you the content of this statement on consent that you need to sign. If necessary, I can repeat to you the main items from it, but the key thing is that your personal data will be fully protected and will not be mentioned anywhere. The coordinator also told you that, if you do not mind, this interview will be recorded.

- *Explanation of the course and method of conducting the interview — primarily in order to avoid the situation where the respondent attempts to provide 'correct' answers*

Before we begin, I would like to clarify how this interview will more or less go. I will be asking you questions and I would like to hear your personal experiences, as you and your family members lived through life situations and how you perceived them.

General set of questions

At the start of the interview, a number of general questions are asked relating to general data on the respondent and their family. This set of formal questions should be used to start the interview by talking about everyday topics and, consequently, relaxing the atmosphere and allowing the respondents to say something about themselves and point out the data they consider important.

1. Name and surname
2. Gender
3. Place of birth
4. Place of residence
5. Marital status
6. Number of family members
7. Number of children
8. Profession
9. Level of education
10. Level of education in the family
11. Religious affiliation

Set of questions about marriage-related experiences

This set of questions aims at providing general insight into the respondent's personal experiences of marriage: their own, their children's and their family members'. These questions are intended for all respondents, irrespective of their gender or type. The questions leave room for adjustment relating to the large number of variations in terms of manners of entering into marriage, as well as room for adaptation in terms of the semi-free interview form. On the other hand, although fairly broad in their characteristics, they focus on personal experience and decision-making process.⁴⁴

1. Could you tell us when and at what age you got married?
2. Can you describe what it was like?
3. What was your attitude to marriage you were about to enter?
4. Did you know your future spouse before the wedding?
5. If so, how did you meet? How long did you know each other?
6. What was your main reason to decide to get married?
7. Was it your and your spouse's decision?
8. Did you perceive any difficulties relating to your future marriage? Did you think about them?
9. Was there a wedding? If so, who organized it, what was it like?
10. What did your family think about your marriage?
11. What did your spouse's family think about that?
12. Did they give you any advice about your future marriage?
13. How much did they influence your decision?
14. Did you listen to their advice?
15. Did anyone else around you influence you with regard to your marriage? If so, who was it?
16. Was there anyone who openly opposed that marriage (immediate or extended family, people around you)
17. What was your marriage like at the beginning?
18. What were relations like in your family (yours/your spouse's)?

44 In this set the issue of child marriage is not directly specified, since different types of respondents are covered by them. However, the questions do open for the researcher a possibility of specifically discussing child marriage, if the respondent had such an experience.

19. Were there any difficulties in married life?
20. Did you or your spouse have to give something up in order to enter into marriage?
21. What was it? Was that a problem for you or have you ever regretted it?

Set of questions related to the education of respondents

This set of questions is aimed at determining the attitudes of respondents towards education, primarily in connection with the possibility of attending school and the context in which this process was possible or impossible. An attempt is made to determine how the respondents perceive what was gained and lost by having/not having education and how this affected their life. The focus is primarily on the question of relation between entering into marriage and education opportunities.

1. Did you go to school?
2. If so, how long did your education last?
3. Can you describe your experience at school?
4. Did you want to get educated?
5. What was your family's attitude towards the issue of your education?
6. Who made the decision whether or not you would go to school?
7. Did your family differentiate between girls and boys as regards going to school?
8. If your education was interrupted, what were the reasons for that?
9. Who made the decision that your education would be interrupted?
10. Did the fact that you got married affect your further education?
11. Was there even a possibility for you to continue your education after getting married?
12. What was your family's position on that issue?
13. What was your spouse's and their family's position on that?
14. Do you think that you would have had an opportunity to find a job more easily had you finished school?
15. In this respect, have you ever regretted interrupting your education?
16. If you did not go to school (and you did not get married), what was the reason for that?
17. If you finished school, did that affect your decision to get married/not get married?

18. Who made the decision regarding the continuation of your education?
19. What was your parents' position on this issue? Can you briefly describe it to us?
20. Did the decision to continue your education and not get married have an impact on your life? How?
21. Did your extended family or community treat you differently because of your decision not to get married and to continue your education?
22. Did this decision have an impact on your emotional life? Did you have an opportunity to go out with boys/girls?
23. If that was not possible, did you ever want to leave school because of that?
24. Is there a difference between girls and boys in this regard? What was your family's position on that?

Set of questions related to the attitude of respondents towards the marriage and education of their children/close relatives

This set of questions is aimed at determining the attitude of respondent parents/decision-makers towards the issue of marriage of their children, and is focused on the group of respondents *with a positive attitude towards child marriage* or such an experience they had with their children/grandchildren. In connection with this, this set of questions also includes a question on child education as an important parameter that could be closely connected with the decision to get married. The questions are formulated as a conversation with parents, but, with minimal adjustments, they may be treated as a framework for conversation with other decision makers.

1. Can you tell us how many children you have? How many daughters and how many sons? How old are they?
2. Are your children married?
3. How old were they when they got married?
4. Who are they married to?
5. How would you describe your daughters-in-law/sons-in-law?
6. Can you tell us how it happened that your child got married?
7. Did you know the groom/bride before your child got married?
8. Did you approve of that relationship?
9. Did you think that your child was too young to get married?

10. Did you have any influence on your child in their decision to get married?
11. What did you say to your child?
12. Did they listen to your advice?
13. Did you know the boy's/girl's parents?
14. If so, did this have any impact on the decision on marriage?
15. What is your relationship like with the family of your daughter-in-law/son-in-law?
16. Did you organize the wedding together?
17. What was it like for your child at the beginning of marriage? Were they satisfied with the decision to get married?
18. What was your children's love life like before they got married?
19. Did you allow them to go out with girls/boys?
20. What was your biggest fear/problem in terms of your children going out with other boys/girls?
21. Before your daughter's marriage, did anyone come to ask for her hand in marriage? If so, what was it like?
22. Before your son got married, did he have a steady girlfriend whom he wanted to marry? What was your position on that?
23. Had your daughter wanted to be with a boyfriend without getting married, would that have been possible?
24. Would you have allowed that? Why would/wouldn't you?
25. What would happen if your son were with a girlfriend and then did not want to marry her?
26. What would happen if your daughter were with a boyfriend and then he refused to marry her?
27. Does the desire to have a boyfriend/girlfriend have an impact on the children's tendency towards early marriage?
28. Did you consider the education of your children important?
29. Did your children attend school?
30. If not, can you tell us why?
31. If so, how many school grades did they complete?

32. What was their attitude towards the school? What kind of experience did they have?
33. Was there a difference between your sons and daughters in this regard?
34. If their education was interrupted, can you tell us when and why?
35. Did your child's marriage cause the interruption of their education?
36. If so, can you tell us what you think about that?
37. Was that your child's independent decision?
38. Did you have any advice for your child regarding this issue?
39. Do you think that it would even be possible to continue education after getting married?
40. Do you think that the interruption of education reduced your child's chances for a better life?
41. Do you see any way for a child to be in a relationship with someone without necessarily being married and interrupting education? Would that even be possible at all in your family/ community?

Appendix for respondents whose children did not marry early

The set of questions for this group of respondents is fairly similar to the previous one, with the exception of questions about a specific marriage. The focus should be on the questions that state the reasons for the decision not to marry off their children. This is primarily related to the attitude towards education, but special attention should be paid to whether the children had the desire to get married early and whether the decision makers prevented these desires and with what motives. Particular focus should be on the group of questions related to the possibility of having a boyfriend/girlfriend without getting married, and if there are ways to make this possible.

42. What are your motives for not approving of your children marrying before the age of 18?
43. Were you in a situation where someone came to ask for your daughter's hand in marriage before the age of 18?
44. Were you in a situation where your son wanted to propose to a girl before the age of 18?
45. Can you describe those situations to us?
46. Did your children express a desire to get married before the age of 18?
47. What was your position on that issue?

48. Did such a situation mean that children must wait until the end of their education in order to have a proper relationship?
49. Did this present a problem to your children?
50. Was there anyone in your family/community who had the opposite attitude?
51. Would you allow your daughter/son to be in a relationship with someone, without it resulting in a marriage?
52. Would it be possible at all?

Addition

Recommended post-interview research procedure related to the contents of field notes and/or daily report

General impression of the interview

1. What did the interview process look like?
2. Was the respondent engaged or passive?
3. Was it easy to conduct the interview?
4. Was the respondent relaxed or not? Why?

Researcher's general impressions

1. Key findings
2. Surprising or interesting statements
3. Potential new directions to follow in subsequent interviews
4. Key problems and limitations noticed during the interview
5. Single out interesting and striking expressions or quotes of the respondent
6. Impressions on interesting or striking moments in informal situations or on anything potentially significant, which was noticed in the observation process

Appendix 2: Proposed site-specific recommendations and interventions

Novi Bečej

General features of the site: economically deprived area, poor employment opportunities. Opportunities for work mainly in agriculture and in the informal economy (reselling goods at farmers' markets).

Housing: 1,295 citizens declare themselves to be Roma, representing about 5.5 per cent of the total population. Most of the Roma population live in mahallas, but a significant number of them live in mixed settlements.

Basic active factors regarding the practice of child marriage:

- Powerful effects of cultural and social norms related to the patriarchal model — the cult of virginity is uncontested and practices such as bride dowries are still present. The customary practice causes the lack of life prospects, particularly for girls.
- Education — very few boys and girls finish school, and almost none of them complete secondary education. Education is perceived as mostly unnecessary because, in the respondents' opinion, there are no opportunities for employment regardless of qualifications. The economic models present at this site are not related to the education level, but are based on living on social benefits, trading goods from abroad at farmers' markets, as well as seeking asylum in Western European countries as an alternative way to earn a living.

Recommendations: in view of the predominant factors at this site, the work in communities should primarily follow these directions:

- Support to continued education of children, especially girls — stimulating the idea of education primarily among parents, because they see no benefits of children's education. Cash benefits could be a mechanism. Special attention should be paid to the issue of safety of girls, because the distance to the school and the inability to supervise the girls due to the fear that someone would 'steal the child' is for many parents an important reason behind their decision that the child should leave school.
- Stimulating the children to finish school — introducing rewards for success in school and, in connection with this, potentially employing the best students as a reward model.
- Given the strong social norms according to which women should not work and should stay home, consider work-at-home models that could, at this moment, bridge the gap between the customs and the possibility of economic empowerment of women.

- Long-term work on weakening social and cultural restraints — primarily through strengthening intergenerational dialogue on marriage, sexual life and reproductive health with children, as the primary level and channel for empowering girls with regard to the possibility of choosing whether to get married.

Vranje

General features of the site: the economic status is unstable and the income is mostly generated by working in alternative economic spheres, where engaging in music activities — i.e., playing at celebrations — is the predominant model among men. Women have recently been able to find jobs in newly opened shoe factories, where the working conditions are hard, but they are the source of security for the employed respondents. Many people wish to emigrate abroad, which has been a common practice in Vranje and its surroundings since the 1960s.

Housing: 4,654 citizens declare themselves to be Roma, which is about 5.57 per cent of the total population. Most of the Roma in the city of Vranje live in a mahalla, which is integrated into the urban core, but inhabited almost exclusively by the Roma population. A smaller percentage of Roma communities live in mahallas on the outskirts of the city, while mixed settlements are not customary. There are mixed settlements in Surdulica, but there also are mahallas there, as well as in Vranjska Banja. Many members of the Roma community from these two places live abroad permanently or temporarily.

Basic active factors regarding the practice of child marriage:

- Closed characteristics of the community and reluctance to mix with the majority population. Hence the predominant impact of traditional social norms and, in particular, the cult of virginity as an unquestionable condition for girls to get married. This obligation is present among all respondents, regardless of their level of integration, education level and social status in general.
- Lack of intergenerational dialogue on marriage, which causes traumatic experiences and endangers reproductive health, as well as strengthens the sexuality taboo in communities, especially among women.
- Education — most of the respondents completed primary school, and the completion of secondary education is not a rare phenomenon, either. However, even when the daughter has support to finish school and get married when she wants, her virginity before marriage is sacrosanct.
- Unstable economic status — marrying the community members who live abroad is a frequent and desirable way of escaping poverty, which is resorted to both by parents and by girls themselves. Although the laws do not allow formal marriage, it is not uncommon for girls to

alternate between staying abroad and at home until they reach the age of 18 and acquire the legal right to get married. The members of the Roma diaspora originating from Vranje and its surroundings fully perpetuate the practice of child marriage, insisting on the youth and virginity of potential brides.

Recommendations: with regard to predominant active factors present at this site, the focus should be on:

- Encouraging and strengthening the capacities of institutions in terms of enforcing the current regulations related to child marriage.
- Work on intergenerational dialogue with regard to experiences related to early marriage as the primary framework that could lead to a change of perception regarding the social pressures related to marriage.
- Creating possibilities for rewarding successful students, primarily in terms of access to the labour market. This kind of building of a desirable model could contribute to creating an alternative to ‘marrying abroad’ as currently the most desirable strategy among girls at this site.

Kragujevac

General features of the site: economically healthier area, with a tradition of industrial production within which, particularly during the socialist period, Roma were employed in factories. Even today, a significant percentage of the Roma population are employed, compared to other sites. The Roma who are not integrated into the urban core, and particularly the population of internally displaced persons from Kosovo, are mostly social welfare beneficiaries, and work in the informal economy.

Housing: 1,331 citizens declare themselves to be Roma, representing about 0.88 per cent of the total population. Based on field insights and conversations with the respondents, it may be concluded that this number is significantly higher in reality. Many respondents are fully integrated into the urban core and have no contact with the Roma in mahallas. They function within the majority community, do not speak the Roma language, live in apartments in the urban core, get educated and have fully assumed the social norms prevailing in the majority population. On the other hand, there are also Roma mahallas, as well as settlements inhabited by internally displaced persons from Kosovo. It is worth mentioning that the sample of respondents at this site was selected so as to be dominated by the good practice examples, considering the higher percentage of integrated Roma population.

Basic active factors regarding the practice of child marriage:

- There are significant differences among the Roma communities at this site, so there is no well-rounded and coherent social and cultural context that would determine the rules of behaviour in the communities. The sample includes the integrated Roma, whose behavioural patterns conform to the majority population's, the inhabitants of mahallas, where the remnants of traditional patriarchal models have been retained, but also the displaced persons from Kosovo, among whom the customs, such as the adherence to the cult of virginity and bride dowries, still survive.
- It may be concluded based on the surveyed sample that the practice of child marriage is mostly not caused by risk factors related to the traditional patriarchal model, but rather to the problem of poverty and living in a deprived economic and social context. Virginity before marriage is not a requirement, there is no pronounced pressure for girls and boys to get married early, and in the cases where it happens the parents show flexibility both in terms of abortion and in terms of assuming responsibility for the child in case the girl decides to have it. The risk factors are present as in the majority population in similar economic and social conditions, and are a consequence of hard life, escaping deprivation or violence, leaving school and lack of prospects.
- The risk factor that clearly stands out at this site is the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon, caused by the presence of discrimination by the wider social community, which is particularly visible in the population of integrated Roma. This factor can act, in the medium term and in the long term, as a risk factor in terms of the return of conservative practices such as child marriage, which are caused by difficult integration into the majority population.

Recommendations: with regard to active factors present at this site, the focus should be on:

- Work on encouraging and opening life alternatives, primarily in connection with education and employment. The key role in this context belongs to local leaders and integrated individuals who are examples of good practice and whose greater engagement in current and future support programmes can be of great significance in terms of encouraging the youth, primarily to continue their education.
- Work on creating programmes fostering employment, while account should be taken of the significant production activity at this site, which also enables the promotion of education for profiles in demand at the labour market, where a more active role of institutions such as the education system is of key importance.
- Strengthening intersectoral cooperation, which includes the engagement of various government institutions in focused efforts to reduce the effects of the "glass ceiling".

- In the case of a smaller number of communities in which there are still strong social norms, work on intergenerational dialogue with regard to experiences related to early marriage.

Pirot

General features of the site: economically healthier area compared to certain sites surveyed. In accordance with this, there is a significant number of employed Roma, especially in the urban area, while poverty is a problem in rural areas.

Housing: 1,878 citizens declare themselves to be Roma, which is 4.84 per cent of the total population. There is a Roma mahalla in Pirot, but a large number of Roma are integrated into the majority population. The respondents' statements suggest that the Roma living in the city are integrated, with many of them having jobs. The Roma living in villages around Pirot are significantly more economically vulnerable than those living in the city, making them a more sensitive group with regard to numerous risks arising from such a status.

Basic active factors regarding the practice of child marriage:

- The practice of child marriage is not common in the urban area, and the majority of the integrated Roma population consider these customs to be backward and primitive. This practice is considerably more prevalent in rural areas at this site. The basic active factors in this case are not social norms and community pressure but economically deprived status and lack of life alternatives, primarily related to education. While education is common and employment is at a relatively high level in the urban core, such opportunities are very limited in villages.
- A risk factor is the phenomenon of the younger population returning to the tradition of child marriage, mostly against the will of their parents. This factor appears due to the 'glass ceiling' phenomenon — i.e., the increasingly prevalent discrimination against Roma when it comes to employment.

Recommendations: with regard to active factors present at this site, the focus should be on:

- Strengthening and encouraging local stakeholders and institutions in terms of combating 'glass ceiling' effects in order to avoid the risk of returning to the practice of child marriage, recorded in the respondents' statements.
- Supporting local entrepreneurship, primarily in the form of incentives to start entrepreneurial activities, where such examples of good practice already exist in the respondents' statements.
- Encouraging the best students in terms of rewarding success in education by providing employment with local enterprises or institutions.

- In rural regions, encouraging continued education of the children who do not have economic or logistical opportunities for this through different forms of support, including financial support.

Belgrade

General features of the site: it is by far the most complex site surveyed. This site presents a specific case where completely different models and cultural practices occur, depending on the specific community where the research was conducted.

Housing: 27,325 citizens declared themselves to be Roma, representing about 1.6 per cent of the total population. This number is significantly greater in reality. Unofficial data suggest that about 90,000 Roma live in Belgrade. The diversity of housing arrangements, economic position and the degree of integration of members of the Roma communities in Belgrade is extremely high, and it is therefore difficult to talk about a general model that can apply to this site. The surveyed sites varied from informal settlements without basic amenities in the urban core, separate settlements created by moving Roma from certain urban sites, to integrated settlements in suburban municipalities.

Basic active factors regarding the practice of child marriage:

- It is not possible to identify individual active factors that would apply to the population of Roma communities at the surveyed site. These are the communities in which the operation of the risk factors impacting the existence and reproduction of the practice of child marriage is intertwined and complex. Considering that Belgrade, as the capital of Serbia, similarly to the majority population, presents a migratory destination of Roma from all parts of Serbia, the diversity of the risk factors corresponds to the social and cultural context of the areas from which the members of different communities came. This diversity sometimes leads to lower effects of risk factors due to the mixing of different groups of the Roma population, but also to the self-isolation of certain groups that seek to preserve their customs and group identity.
- In the case of completely unintegrated communities such as the Šuma site in Belgrade, there is a series of active factors, but poverty and complete exclusion from the majority population are the most prevalent and cause to a great extent the reproduction of all other risk factors. The prevalent factors in certain suburban settlements that were surveyed are primarily related to the culture and customs of the communities from which their inhabitants originate, so, for example, the practice of child marriage as well as the norms related to virginity and bride dowries are prevalent in the places where there is a strong influence of the culture of Romanian Roma. The situation is similar when it comes to respondents originating from

Kosovo, where the patriarchal structure of the community is preserved and where child marriage is a widely accepted practice.

Recommendations: considering the pronounced diversity of active factors present in different communities, the approach should take into account the following:

- The design of interventions should be determined by specific local contexts and vary with regard to specific communities.
- In completely unintegrated communities in informal settlements, the focus should be placed on basic support in terms of ensuring fundamental rights and living conditions, considering that child marriage presents merely one of the consequences of deprived social status. In this respect, based on the respondents' statements, education presents a very important factor for emancipation, because most of them have never attended school, while the experiences of their children who attend school is seen by them as a very positive step forward. Some informal local leaders, who have certain skills and knowledge such as reading and writing, present key stakeholders in this process and their engagement in the implementation of the support programme is of great importance. These communities present a special category that requires specific approaches and engagement.
- In relatively integrated communities on the outskirts of the city, in cases where the predominant factors of child marriage risks are social norms, efforts should primarily be aimed at strengthening intergenerational dialogue on marriage, sexual life and reproductive health with children, with the goal to empower girls with regard to creating an alternative to getting married. In this respect, the focus should primarily be on encouraging girls to continue their education, as well as on stimulating work at home, considering that it is customary in these communities for women to leave school in order to stay at home as homemakers, mothers and wives.

CHILD MARRIAGE

**AMONG
THE ROMA
POPULATION
IN SERBIA**