

P O L I C Y S T U D I E S S E R I E S ▸ 2 0 0 9

A N G É L A K Ó C Z É

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM
R A L U C A M A R I A P O P A

Missing Intersectionality
*Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Class
in Current Research and Policies
on Romani Women in Europe*

C E N T E R F O R P O L I C Y S T U D I E S
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the situation of Romani women, discusses and analyzes relevant research and policy efforts in recent years, and offers recommendations for more responsive, effective policy-making. Unpacking the complexity of multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination, the paper integrates the author's personal experiences as an activist for Roma rights, a scholar, a feminist, and a Romani woman with a range of theoretical literature and policy-oriented studies on development, discrimination, gender, vulnerable populations, and the Roma as a specific social group. Particular attention is given to research and policies from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) that claim to have included an awareness of the specific situation of Romani women both in the analysis of policy problems and in the design of solutions to these problems. Efforts of major international actors that deal with issues of social inclusion, minority groups, gender, and Roma in particular are evaluated. Presenting evidence that supports the view that Romani women experience multiple inequalities, the paper shows the need for specific measures to address intersectional discrimination. Existing anti-discrimination policies are not sufficient to address various forms of intersecting inequalities in social policies. The author explores if and how an awareness of the specificity and complexity of the situation of Romani women has permeated the existing policy discourse on Romani women, and shows that, despite some recognition of the specific situation of Romani women, there still has been no significant shift in policy debates that would indicate the integration of an intersectional understanding of Romani women's social position into policy-making. The paper concludes with some general guidelines for using an intersectional approach in policy research and policy-making, including a discussion of intersectional methodology.

PREFACE

This paper grew out of my background as a Romani woman, a seasoned political activist for Roma rights, a scholar, and a feminist. Many Romani women, including myself, harbor countless, unspoken stories of discrimination, exclusion, and violence. Over the years, I have had many encounters during which I felt that I was the target of discrimination, exclusion, and calculated attacks. I am sure that many times, these attacks were not directed at me, personally. But, they do reflect specific intersections of ethnicity, gender, and class. I have come to see my own subject position as a Romani woman as a site where multiple forms of power and hierarchy are enacted.

With a number of feminist-minded Romani women, I have striven to understand our positions vis-à-vis our own communities and the non-Romani population. We have struggled to untangle the complex social, political, and economic issues that structure our lives, and develop a language to understand our experiences with multiple inequalities. Finally, we have encountered a “new way of thinking” emerging issues in intellectual and policy circles: that of intersectionality. Though an intersectional approach is now used almost exclusively by highly educated Romani women, a much wider audience understands its implications in a tangible or practical sense and uses individualized vocabularies to express this.

In pursuit of the potential and innovative value of intersectionality, this paper focuses on the prospects for intersectionality in formulating policies for Roma and specifically, for Romani women. I embrace my grassroots activist experiences—which include my personal struggles—and situate them in a new theoretical framework that can advance academic discussions and public policy-making in ways that create more appropriate responses to the intersectional and structural discrimination Romani women face. In this paper, I do not attempt to provide completely new empirical data on intersectional discrimination. However, I hope the approach and selection of the debates and issues presented will stimulate and enable readers to explore Romani issues in fundamentally new ways.

Angéla Kóczé

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the situation of Romani women, discusses and analyzes relevant research and policy efforts in recent years, and offers recommendations for more responsive, effective policy-making. Focusing on research and policies from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), it examines various approaches to Romani women's inclusion that have been formulated in policy-related research and policy development since the beginning of the Decade for Roma Inclusion (2005).¹ Particular attention is paid to efforts that claim to have included an awareness of the specific situation of Romani women in the identification, analysis, and resolution of policy problems.

The analysis begins from the proposal that the social position of Romani women as a group is shaped by the interaction of (at least) ethnic, gender, and class inequalities.² Research and fieldwork from CEE show that Romani women face “intersectional discrimination”³ particularly in fields of employment, education, and healthcare. Violence against Romani women manifests in complex ways that vary widely across Roma communities—from intra-group forms such as domestic psychological and physical abuse and harmful practices that are often labeled “cultural traditions,” to institutional violence, police violence, and violence from members of the majority population. Further policy research and development aimed at addressing not only the violence, but also the daily forms of discrimination, social exclusion, and economic vulnerability Romani women experience should attend to group specificities and the complexities of social positionings. I contend that an intersectional approach is a useful strategy towards these goals.

Intersectionality is well developed in feminist scholarship (Walby, 2008; Verloo, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Lykke, 2005; McCall, 2005; Oprea, 2005; Wekker, 2004; Lykke, 2003; Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1994) as a means of dealing with “multiple” and “complex” inequalities. Scholars have taken up intersectionality to conceptualize and analyze manifold inequalities and discrimination that

¹ The Decade for Roma Inclusion (2005–2015) is a political commitment made by governments in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe to improve the socio-economic status and social inclusion of Roma within a regional framework. It focuses on the priority areas of education, employment, health, and housing, and commits governments to take into account the other core issues of poverty, discrimination, and gender mainstreaming. See: <http://www.romadecade.org> (accessed February 26, 2009).

² For the purposes of this paper, “class” is understood in terms of socio-economic status, which includes income and relevant factors that shape an individual's or family's economic well-being, like place of habitation (rural/urban), access to employment and services, and family size.

³ In using this term, I draw from scholars of international human rights law. See Satterthwaite (2005).

members of certain communities face. In theoretical terms, it appears as though intersectionality provides great opportunities to attend to the specificities of and diversity among Romani women and to conceive of ways to act against the complex inequalities they face.

Intersectionality offers tools for formulating complex and responsive public policies in fields such as social inclusion, gender equality, economic development, health, or education. However, this paper finds that, despite a wealth of theoretical literature and convincing arguments from Romani women activists about the value of an intersectional approach, in research on Roma and Romani women and in policies addressing the situation of Romani women, intersectionality has been used only limitedly. Researchers and policymakers have looked at intersections of gender and race/ethnicity, of poverty or unemployment and gender, and of poverty or unemployment and ethnicity, but almost never at gender, race/ethnicity, and class together.

While policy studies and recommendations that include a focus on Romani women suggest certain advances on the anti-discrimination, gender equality, and human development agendas, they still fail to achieve an integrated and coordinated policy response to the exclusion, inequality, and discrimination experienced by Romani women. It is important to realize that not only single-axis analyses—analyses, which are focused on one category of inequality and exclusion—but also double-axis analyses often miss important components of the situation of Romani women. The resulting “blind spots” allow particular issues to remain invisible. For instance, anti-discrimination policies often focus on combating racism and sexism, but do not integrate solutions to problems of social exclusion related to poverty, which might intersect with race/ethnicity, gender, and other facets of social identity. While the present study centers on initiatives to address the situation of Romani women, the approach developed here can also be applied to other groups that experience multiple inequalities.

This paper begins by reviewing influential theoretical works on intersectionality in critical gender studies. The purpose of this review is to identify central concepts and clarify what they might offer, or have already offered, to Romani women activists and to policymakers in their work towards advancing the social and economic inclusion of Romani women. Intersectionality provides a perspective and the tools needed for recognizing the categories of race/ethnicity, gender, and class as interacting categories. That is, it does not treat these categories as if they are isolated from each other. The novelty of the position advocated in this paper is in integrating Romani women’s issues and feminist theoretical insights regarding multiple inequalities.

The second part of the paper presents existing evidence supporting the view that Romani women experience multiple and intersecting inequalities. Data presented in this section comes

from quantitative and qualitative research conducted mainly in Central and Eastern Europe. Such evidence requires attention from decision- and policymakers, and suggests the need to design specific measures to address intersectional discrimination.

Third, the paper explores if and how an awareness of the specificity and complexity of the situation of Romani women, which is referred to here as an “intersectional social position,” has permeated the existing policy discourse on Romani women. Despite some recognition of the specific situation of Romani women, the paper shows that there still has not been a significant shift in policy debates that would indicate the integration of an intersectional understanding of Romani women’s social position into policy-making.

The concluding section provides some general guidelines for using an intersectional approach in policy research and policy-making, including a discussion of intersectional methodology.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF INTERSECTIONALITY AND ITS UNDERSTANDING BY ROMANI WOMEN ACTIVISTS

Feminist scholars introduced the concept of intersectionality to respond to the growing awareness of the limitations of gender as a singular analytical category. As McCall proposes, intersectionality means “the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations” (2005: 1771). There is now an established body of critical feminist scholarship that conceptualizes intersectionality (Walby, 2008; Verloo, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Lykke, 2005; McCall, 2005; Oprea 2005; Wekker, 2004; Lykke, 2003; Collins, 1998; Crenshaw, 1994).

Feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality theory” at the end of the 1980s to “denote the various ways in which race and gender interacted to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s experiences” (1989: 139). Then, African–American feminists had been criticizing the dominant understanding of discrimination as being based *either* on race *or* on sex—an understanding, which failed to represent accurately the experiences of African–American women. Intersectional analysis, inspired by the experiences and early conceptual work of these feminists, evolved into an understanding that forms of discrimination interact with each other and these intersections produce specific experiences of discrimination. Intersectionality is a concept that seeks to acknowledge the impact of multiple identities, discrimination, and inequalities on women’s and men’s experiences.

Crenshaw envisaged intersectionality as a critical intervention into traditional “identity politics” (1994: 179). She also distinguished between structural and political intersectionality (*ibid.*).⁴ More recently, Crenshaw (2000) has argued that intersectional subordination is often invisible particularly for women who experience multiple forms of discrimination, and it is inadequately addressed by either gender equality or anti-racist frameworks. The single focus on women’s or gender-based discrimination, she warns, could lead to blindness concerning the issues confronted by women who are simultaneously vulnerable to other power vectors, such as race/ethnicity, class, or disability.

⁴ *Structural intersectionality* occurs when inequalities and their intersections are directly relevant to the experiences of people in society. *Political intersectionality* indicates how inequalities and their intersections are relevant to political strategies.

Theories of intersectionality challenge the tendency to treat gender and race/ethnicity as mutually exclusive categories. Crenshaw (2000) offers an instructive illustration of the dynamic and structural causes of multiple forms of subordination using the metaphor of roads and traffic. Roads represent the axes of power/subordination (such as patriarchy, racial/ethnic hierarchy, class) that structure the relative positions of men and women, of races/ethnicities, and of classes in society. According to her description, marginalized women are located “in the crossroads,” where two or more axes intersect. They are subject to a heavy flow of “traffic” from many directions, thus increasing the risk of accident.

Intersectionality gained prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, even seeping into the language of the United Nations (UN). A pivotal use of intersectionality was formulated during the UN World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in 2001, with the recognition that those suffering from racial discrimination often “suffer multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination based on other related grounds such as sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, social origin, property, birth or other status.”⁵ Yet, it is important to note that feminist theories looked at the intersections of gender with other axes of inequality from the early 1970s and even much earlier. In particular, attention paid to the intersections of gender and class predated recent and prominent analyses of gender and race (see examples in Lykke, 2005; Brah and Phoenix, 2004; Collins, 1998). Most notably, the prolonged debates between feminists and socialists at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries engaged precisely with the intersections of gender and class. In the 1970s, powerful feminist analyses emerged as a critique of Marxist views, which positioned class as the primary form of inequality that determined other forms of social inequality. Some have criticized Marxist views for their “class reductionism.”

Crenshaw gives limited attention to class, and her discussion of intersectionality is mainly focused on the intersections of race and gender. However, one can argue that feminist intersectional theories posit “race-class-gender” as a central triad, while viewing these categories as entwined, mutually constituting, and reinforcing. It is important for the argument made throughout this paper regarding the lack of integrative approaches that categories of race/ethnicity, gender, and class do not have the

⁵ Declaration of the United Nations World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, §2. See also CERD (2000): “Racial discrimination does not always affect women and men equally or in the same way. There are circumstances in which racial discrimination only or primarily affects women, or affects women in a different way, or to a different degree than men. Such racial discrimination will often escape detection if there is no explicit recognition or acknowledgement of the different life experiences of women and men, in areas of both public and private life.”

same statuses in legal and policy debates in the European Union (EU). Despite—or perhaps because of—its long history of prominence among other social scientific categories, class is perhaps the most difficult category for current policy-making at the EU level and in many EU member states. As Verloo comments, “social class is the most prominent example of a social category that is strongly connected to inequalities, yet not currently included in the European equality agenda” (2006: 216). The missing concept of class from equality policies indicates a general trend in Europe towards recognizing political equality, rather than social and economic equality (Phillips, 1999). In other words, as Fraser (1997) argues, there is a move from redistribution to recognition. Furthermore, class is not a legal category; EU law does not recognize class as a ground for discrimination. As a result, class is rarely integrated into current policy analyses of inequalities.

2.1 Views on Intersectionality from Romani Women Activists

For Romani political actors, both men and women, the conceptualizing of multiple forms of inequality and discrimination is challenging. In a roundtable held in Cluj, Romania in June 2008, a young Romani woman activist stated that “gender is important in assuming [one’s] Roma identity.”⁶ At the same roundtable, Nicoleta Bitu, a leader of the Romani women’s movement, argued that some forms of “anti-gypsy” racism affect women more than men, and that this racism is most often represented by images of Romani women and children.⁷ Such statements, however, are not uncontroversial in the least. The relevance of gender to understanding anti-Roma racism and the importance of gender for the larger Roma movement are issues of much debate, both among Romani women activists and in their interactions with Romani male leaders with other human rights activists.

While it is clear that some forms of discrimination, exclusion, and violence affect Romani women either exclusively or disproportionately (forced sterilization), Romani women activists are confronted with two major dilemmas when trying to look at the intersections of sexism and racism.

⁶ Mihaela Nasture, participant in the roundtable “Romani women,” organized by the Institute for Research on National Minority Issues in the framework of “Come Closer!” Summer University, July 12-19, 2008, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

⁷ Nicoleta Bitu, participant in the roundtable “Romani women,” organized by the Institute for Research on National Minority Issues in the framework of “Come Closer!” Summer University, July 12-19, 2008, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

The first dilemma is *intra-differentiation*. Once gender differences come into focus and Romani women are seen as a group that is confronted by a set of specific problems and may, at times, have different needs from Romani men, the logic of further differentiation is set into motion. The aforementioned roundtable in Cluj, Romania, during which five Romani women activists addressed an audience of Romani women, Romani men, and other participants, powerfully illustrates this dilemma. When asked to analyze how gender is important for the situation of Romani women and for the mobilization of movements to address this situation, the five Romani women activists responded through the logic of differentiation. Several panelists argued that single Roma mothers face specific problems that require specific solutions, and that young Romani girls from traditional communities of *gabori*⁸ face specific barriers to access to education, because of purity customs and early marriage. Some contended that traditional communities are dissimilar, and very different practices have developed among poor *gabori* in comparison with better-off *gabori*. Finally, a number of participants confessed that they did not understand the problems of Romani women from traditional communities, but they could speak of very different forms of discrimination that affected educated Romani women who worked as professionals.⁹ It is also important to note that the discussion of issues specific to different groups of Romani women was in part a reaction to requests from the Romani men who attended the roundtable to “be specific” and not speak about Romani women in general or abstract terms. Some male participants went as far as accusing Romani women of “maintaining a very low level of discussion” because they did not provide enough specificity, details, and evidence for their statements.¹⁰ The gendered power dynamics surfacing in this discussion are clear. Following this, the issue of “how many social divisions are involved and/or which ones should be incorporated into the analysis of the intersectionality process” (Yuval Davis, 2006: 201) appears to be an important question for Romani women activists as much as it is for intersectionality scholars and for women’s movements around the world (as in the case of Black or African–American feminists or indigenous women’s movements). Are the categories of gender and race/ethnicity sufficient to describe, analyze,

⁸ *Gabori* are kin groups that observe many social and cultural customs that other Roma and the majority population perceive as “traditional.” There are many different communities of *gabori* in Romania.

⁹ Audio recording of the roundtable “Romani women” organized in the framework of the Summer University Come Closer, July 12–19, 2008, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

¹⁰ Young Roma male activist that participated in the roundtable “Romani women” organized in the framework of the Summer University Come Closer, July 12–19, 2008, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

and formulate policies that address the situation of Romani women, or are other categories such as class, age, or religion equally important? This crucial question is revisited later.

The second dilemma confronting Romani women activists as they attempt to argue from a position that looks at the intersections of racism and sexism is the danger of further stigmatizing the group by *exposing intra-group hierarchies*. For example, the discussion of early marriages in Roma communities can easily fuel majority biased representations of Roma culture as “oppressive” and “backward.”¹¹ Opening up the debate about gender inequalities becomes, then, an issue of loyalty to the larger Roma community. Some male leaders go as far as claiming that “Romani women are going to choose between their ethnicity and their gender.”¹² This statement captures the difficulty of formulating a political position that starts from the interrelationship of multiple forms of inequality and difference that Romani women face. In this statement, ethnicity and gender are treated as separate categories, which are assumed to create opposing political claims.

Several Romani women activists developed an interest in how gender and race/ethnicity as axes of inequality interact to shape the social position of Romani women precisely because of their experiences of sometimes being silenced and marginalized in an effort by mostly male leaders to create a homogenous Roma movement. Reflecting on her early activism as a Roma feminist, Bitu explains that in her experiences, “feminist mobilization among Romani women started for reasons inside the [Roma] movement, not outside it.”¹³ It was due to their experiencing of gender hierarchies within the Roma movement that Romani women activists began to interrogate the intersections of racism and sexism at play in the lives of Romani women.

Alexandra Oprea is a Romani feminist, originally from Romania, who has endeavored to develop the understanding of Romani women’s social situation as the intersection of (at least) race/ethnicity, gender, and class. She states:

“How do we fight for Roma rights without looking at how gender intertwines with racial hierarchy to position Romani women and girls at the bottom of the food chain (below Romani men) whether it is in the market place or the home?”¹⁴

¹¹ For a discussion of the production of such racist images of Roma culture in the media reports on the early marriage of the daughter of the Romani leader Florin Cioaba, see Oprea (2005).

¹² Young male Romanian leader Roma leader, September 2005, cited in Schultz (2005).

¹³ Nicoleta Bitu, participant in the roundtable “Romani women,” organized by the Institute for Research on National Minority Issues in the framework of “Come Closer!” Summer University, July 12–19, 2008, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

¹⁴ Interview with Alexandra Oprea, February 19, 2008, New York.

In her view, Roma rights—in the sense of full human rights of Roma—cannot be realized without acknowledging that gender inequalities undermine Romani women’s rights. Hers is a harsh criticism towards activists in the Roma movement who do not comprehend fully what constitutes Romani women’s positions.

Oprea also criticizes majority women’s movements for largely the same reason—namely, for its blindness to how the political construction of “women,” as a group, has reinforced racial hierarchies within this group. Like Roma rights, gender equality cannot be achieved, Oprea argues, without an interrogation of the multiple and intersecting inequalities underlying it. She provocatively asked:

“How can one stand for women’s equality without examining racism within one’s own ranks and looking at disparities among white women and Romani women (e.g., in terms of earning potential, educational level, access to the justice system, treatment by law enforcement officials, etc.)?”¹⁵

In Oprea’s view, neither the Roma movement nor the mainstream women’s movement properly conceptualize the intersectional social position of Romani women. In terms of movement mobilization, the result is that Romani women’s claims are very often politically marginalized or even excluded. There are numerous cases of women’s organizations that equate discrimination of Romani women with gender discrimination, without any consideration of ethnicity. For example, quantitative analysis of pay discrimination in Europe typically does not include data that is disaggregated by racial/ethnic group. Annual reports from the European Industrial Relations Observatory (EIRO), for example, which are compiled based on contributions from national centers, provide a broad indication of trends in pay increases over 2006 and 2007 across the current 27 EU Member States (EU27) and Norway. The report has no reference to Romani women’s wages in the EU member states (EIRO, 2008). Other evidence, meanwhile, shows there are large gaps between majority women’s wages and Romani women’s wages (Fagan, Urwin, and Mellin, 2006; Surdu and Surdu, 2006).

Similarly, Romani activists and organizations sometimes present problems and issues related to the discrimination against Roma, without making any reference to Romani women. At the UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Forms of Intolerance (WCAR) in Durban, South Africa, 2001, one member of the Roma delegation, Andrea Buckova, was prompted to speak up and expose the internal gender dynamics in the Roma movement. “Romani leaders, exclusively men,” she said, “only allowed us to speak about forced sterilization as

¹⁵ Interview with Alexandra Oprea, February 19, 2008, New York.

an effort to reduce and control the Roma population. This was seen as a violation of Roma rights and not necessarily women's human rights" (cited in Mihalache, 2003). According to other Romani women participants, many Romani men activists considered Buckova's statement insolent. While male leadership did not support fully Romani women who spoke openly about oppression within the Romani community or domestic violence, the official UN report recognizes multiple forms of discrimination Romani women face. The report states:

"As a member of the Romani population, she has few advocates and is the target of constant hostility. She is marginalized within her community because of her minority status and within her family because of her gender. The same can be said of an aboriginal woman living in Australia, a Dalit woman living in India, a female asylum seeker living in England and so on. These women live at the crossroads of gender and racial discrimination" (UNDP, 2001).

International and transnational fora like WCAR have provided an important context for Romani women activists to articulate their concerns and to formulate a voice of their own. However, as soon as the issue of multiple discrimination was placed on the international agenda, the powerful question of *how many* social divisions/inequalities affect the lives of Romani women was inevitable. This question was raised in the beginning of this section, as one of the two major dilemmas confronting Romani women activists that engage with notions of intersectionality. In what follows, several responses deployed by Romani women activists are presented. These views on intersectionality expressed by Romani women activists, including myself, are centered on the idea that the categories of race/ethnicity, gender, and class are ubiquitous and thus constantly overlapping in the lives of Romani women. They should be incorporated systematically into analyses and policy responses that seek to improve the position of Romani women.

Romani women are exposed to multilayered inequalities, which are disempowering and silencing. Certainly, there are many differences among Romani women. Yet, some general, troubling trends can be identified, which will be discussed in the following section. In some countries in Europe, most Romani women do not complete secondary education. Across Europe, a very small minority pursue higher education (college, university, or graduate studies). If they can find a job at all, Romani women are often deemed suitable only for jobs in the lowest strata of the labor market. Their sexual and reproductive lives are threatened by violence exerted on them by public officials and healthcare providers, among others, and sometimes, by their own families and communities. The compound effects of racism, sexism, and poverty that comprise the social environment of many Romani women discourage them from taking a stance against internal gender oppression, lest they should suffer personally and stigmatize their families and communities even further.

Despite the significant social pressures on Romani women to remain silent, as well as the initial lack of support from women’s movements and Roma movements emerging in different countries, the articulation of Romani women issues has been developed in the last decade from rather impassioned, intuitive statements to quite formal, evidence-based arguments.

In the early 1990s, Romani women’s issues were identified with “a problem of children, especially girls, leaving school at rates generally higher than all other ethnic groups” (OSI, 2002: 46). It is widely accepted that the very first attempt to make Romani women’s issues visible on a policy agenda was at the First Congress of Roma, in May 1994, Seville, Spain, sponsored by the EU. The conference issued the *Manifesto of Romani Women*, which discussed the situation of Romani women in both Western and Eastern Europe (Bitu, 1999). The manifesto primarily addressed external discrimination, but it also challenged the internal discrimination of Romani women. Later, activists referred to the critical role of Romani women in particular communities where they act as mediators between their families/communities and primary public institutions, such as educational and healthcare systems. As a result of gender-typified socialization, as in most societies around the world, Romani women are expected to be the main care providers for their children, and are often positioned as mediators between families/communities and service providers. In their encounters with the educational and healthcare systems, Romani women and especially Romani mothers come into contact with institutional anti-Roma racism frequently, likely more often than Romani men.¹⁶

Very recently, Romani women activists employed feminist theories of intersectionality in their statements, pointing to the intertwining of various social categories like race/ethnicity, nationality, class, disability, age, sexuality, and gender in the analysis of the social position of Romani women. Intersectionality in the case of Romani women has been conceptualized in various ways by Romani women activists from different NGOs and intergovernmental organizations, such as the Council of Europe (CoE), EU institutions, the UN system, or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

In 2006, Lívía Járóka, Member of the European Parliament (MEP), and Rapporteur for the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, prepared a report on the situation of Romani women in the European Union (European Parliament 2006). The report was adopted by the European Parliament in what is considered a landmark vote supporting Romani women’s equality with Romani men and with other women in Europe. However, to date there is no follow up by

¹⁶ Statements by Enikő Magyari-Vincze, participant in the roundtable “Romani women,” organized by the Institute for Research on National Minority Issues in the framework of “Come Closer!” Summer University, July 12–19, 2008, Cluj-Napoca, Romania. See also Magyari-Vincze (2006).

the European Commission (EC) to design concrete measures in support of Romani women. In the brief analysis introducing the Resolution, Rapporteur Járóka argued that: “[b]eing members of an ethnic minority which is confronted with discrimination in various forms, Romani women are facing additionally gender specific problems” (ibid.). Ethnicity and gender are the main categories of inequality that she selected to describe the situation of Romani women. Yet, in other contexts, Jaroka has emphasized that “if the European Commission or national governments will ever design any program for Romani women, then their social and economic position should be considered in the planning and implementation process.”¹⁷ This statement points to the need to take into consideration the class position. In a similar vein, Crina Morteau, a member of the Roma Civic Alliance in Romania, also stressed the salience of class when considering the position of Romani women: “Another important inequality is social class,” she argued. “I do not think anybody can disregard poverty or social class. For Roma also, social class is closely related to their exclusion.”¹⁸

Intersectionality in the case of Romani women is most often conceptualized in terms of gender and race/ethnicity. As examples above show, however, some activists also stress the importance of integrating economic status or social class in the analysis. Poverty and social exclusion intensify the level of discrimination experienced by Romani women. While class may or may not be a ground for discrimination in legal terms, it is important to understand how it interrelates with other facets of social identity and thus, its role in intersectional discrimination.

In recent years, the situation of Romani women has been described in various ways, including double discrimination, double marginalization, multiple disadvantages, or multiple discrimination. These terms mainly consider the gender and ethnic dimensions of discrimination as separate from the dynamics of poverty and economic exclusion. However, the latter play a vital role in shaping individual identities, group structures, and the reproduction of multiple social hierarchies of difference. Scholar and activist Enikő Magyari-Vincze of Romania argues that to understand the social position of Romani women, we must investigate the junction of gender, race/ethnicity, and class. These factors create dynamic structures of inequalities, which have an enduring effects on Romani women’s social positions. She describes the social processes in which Romani women are embedded in the following way:

¹⁷ Interview with Lívía Járóka, April 3, 2008, Budapest.

¹⁸ Interview with Crina Morteau on February 22, 2008, by phone.

“The ethnicized/racialized and gendered construction of the order within which people’s lives are embedded comes in a cultural and social process. Through this, women and men are defined and classified on the basis of some characteristics supposedly determined by their ethnicity and sex, as if these were their natural and inborn essences; also via this mechanism, women and men are placed in certain social and economic positions (and, consequently, have access to, or are excluded from, specific material and symbolic resources) according to the hegemonic representations of their ethnic and sexual properties” (Magyari-Vincze, 2006: 8).

The entanglement of race/ethnicity, gender, and class might be studied at the structural and personal levels. Magyari-Vincze concludes that “these processes might be observed inside different institutions and in the context of their complex relationships, including different sites of everyday life” (2006: 6).

Intersectionality and the accompanying notion of multiple discrimination have offered a language for Romani women activists to speak about their experiences with both racism and sexism, of which they have become aware as members of the Roma movement and in their interactions with majority women’s movements emerging in different countries. However, an intersectional approach is merely a possibility for Romani women activists. As I have argued in this section, Romani women activists still struggle with the task of specifying *what* social categories should be included in the analysis of the situation of Romani women and how. However, some consensus has developed based on evidence and community work that, at least, the categories of race/ethnicity, gender, and class should be observed systematically in analyses of the situation of Romani women. Leaving out any one of the three categories inevitably leads to silences and inaccuracies.

3. INTEGRATING INTERSECTIONALITY IN RESEARCH: BEGINNINGS AND FURTHER STEPS

Data are still scarce on the specific situation of Romani women in Central, East, and Southeast Europe, but there are edifying examples of data collection and analyses that integrate a focus on Romani women. Among the first of such examples is a household survey carried out in 2000 by the Center for Comparative Research at the Sociology Department of Yale University that addresses the ethnic dimension of poverty across five countries in Central Europe—Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia—in a comparative quantitative assessment of the living conditions of Roma (Ringold and Tracy, 2002, Emigh and Szelenyi, 2001). One of the overall conclusions of the survey is that the probability of being poor was higher for Roma than for non-Roma, irrespective of educational achievement and employment status. Race/ethnicity and gender were used as categories of analysis in the survey and ensuing publications (Emigh and Szelenyi, 2001). However, the categories of race/ethnicity and gender are employed as separate categories, so that the analysis speaks about “racialization” and “feminization” of poverty as two distinct, though similar, processes: the feminization of poverty is understood as an “analogous concept” to the “understanding of the racialization of poverty.” The authors of the survey and of subsequent publications do not discuss potential interrelations between these processes. That is, the authors remark, there is a classificatory struggle around gender. The feminization of poverty occurs “when women are concentrated in poverty and when biological, not social, causes are proposed as the explanation of this concentration” (Emigh, Fodor, and Szelenyi, 2001: 7). The analysis of the survey findings addresses “the interaction between ethnicity and gender” in poverty and concludes that “the interaction between gender and race creates a double disadvantage for Roma women” (*ibid.*: 22).

Certainly, Romani women are not a homogenous group. Household poverty correlates to various factors, such as the employment status of the head of the household, educational achievement of the household head, the number of children in the family, the gender of the breadwinner, and whether the household is located in a rural or urban area. Romani women who are undereducated, married at a young age, have more than one child, are unemployed, and live in rural areas face higher risks of poverty and social exclusion than Romani women who are better educated, have one or no children, earn income, or live in urban areas. Following from this, it is quite conceivable that Romani women who experience the highest levels of absolute poverty also face greater gender-related vulnerability in their own communities.

This section reviews research initiatives that have attempted to collect data on the situation of Romani women and assesses to what extent these initiatives have integrated the concept of intersectionality. The assessment finds that, with a few exceptions,¹⁹ researchers have generally not operated with the concept of intersectionality when designing data collection or analyzing their findings. By and large, the different aspects of the discrimination that Romani women face that can be qualified as “intersectional discrimination” are either not recognized or not conceptualized as such by researchers and policymakers. I argue that by integrating the concept of intersectionality, researchers would not only gain a better language for designating those specific and complex situations that Romani women face, but also be pointed to the need for a deeper analysis of the social processes that create such situations. In the household survey cited above, the “double disadvantage of Romani women” may be better understood if we look also at how the racialization and feminization of poverty support, reinforce or otherwise interact as related, and not neatly distinct social processes.

Intersectional approaches do not supersede analyses that focus on one or more distinct categories (gender, or ethnicity, or social class, or any combination of the two), but rather add an extra layer of complexity to such analyses. Disaggregated data collection on gender and ethnicity is thus a necessary first step for intersectional analysis. It is therefore important to note again that numerous reports and policy papers on Roma issues indicated that there is a lack of disaggregated statistics on the situation of Romani women (EC, 2008; 2007). The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) recommends that disaggregated data should include color, religion, language, nationality, national or ethnic origin, and gender, in order to allow for investigation into the extent and nature of double or multiple discrimination.²⁰ However, there are still very few representative sociological surveys and studies that allow for comparisons of the situation of Romani women with that of non-Romani women or Roma men.

¹⁹ Exceptions include large scale-surveys: *Gender Inequalities in the Risks of Poverty and Social Exclusion for Disadvantaged Groups in Thirty European Countries* (EC, 2006a) and the UNDP vulnerabilities surveys (2006), which collected gender-disaggregated data; individual research projects: *Social Exclusion at the Crossroads of Gender, Ethnicity and Class: A View of Romani Women’s Reproductive Health* (Magyari-Vince, 2006); and country-based studies: *Broadening the Agenda* (OSI, 2006).

²⁰ See for example, country-by-country reports of the Council of Europe European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), on the situation of racism and intolerance in CoE member States, which include suggestions and proposals. Third Reports on Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, and Norway comment on the value of an intersectional approach. All reports can be viewed at: http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/library/publications_en.asp (accessed March 12, 2009).

Available data do indicate significant disparities between Romani and non-Romani women, as well as gender gaps between Romani women and men in education, employment, access to healthcare, and vulnerability to violence. I summarize below the main areas where the comparative disadvantage of Romani women has been documented. In doing so, I draw attention to potential areas for research that could include the concept of intersectionality. My focus is primarily on devising ways forward for intersectional analysis, rather than assessing availability of data on the situation of Romani women. I indicate how the use of multiple categories of (potential) social inequalities in research and analysis can enhance our understanding of the situation of Romani women, as a necessary first step toward adequate policies.

3.1 Assessing Multiple Disadvantages in Education

It is a widely accepted notion that equal access to quality education will increase the employment opportunities of Roma. With respect to access to education, ethnicity, social status, and rural/urban divides combine to structure and often curtail opportunities for individuals and groups. However, most reports and studies have focused on ethnicity only, highlighting the remarkable discrepancies in education between Roma and non-Roma, with few studies also exploring the educational differences between Romani men and women, or those between Romani and non-Romani women (e.g. EUMAP, 2007). Raising the level and quality of education is one of the primary objectives of the UN Millennium Development Goals,²¹ and also one of the priorities of the Lisbon Treaty²² with respect to improving the education and training systems in Europe by 2010. Both international commitments could encourage policymakers to set indicators, which would provide adequate descriptions of the situation of Romani women.

Further gender-sensitive research in this field is urgently needed, as the findings of currently available studies suggest. Among the initiatives that have taken steps in this direction is a 2006 report by the UN Development Program (UNDP), entitled *At Risk: Roma and the Displaced in Southeast Europe*, which offers a comprehensive socio-economic analysis of the position of this ethnic group in eight countries of the region (UNDP, 2006). Among many other findings, the report compellingly

²¹ For more on the Millennium Development Goals, see: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/> (accessed February 26, 2009).

²² For more on the Lisbon Treaty, signed by the Heads of State or Government of the 27 Member States in Lisbon on 13 December 2007, visit: http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/index_en.htm (accessed February 26, 2009). See also: Commission of the European Communities (2004).

summarizes the severe educational deficit for Romani women: “Three quarters of Romani women do not complete primary education (compared with one in five men from Roma communities) and almost a third is illiterate (compared with 1 in 20 women from majority communities)” (ibid.: 29). The same UNDP survey found that gender inequalities in education were “most noticeable through high illiteracy rates among women: 32 percent of Romani women illiterate compared to 22 percent of Roma men” (ibid.: 33). The UNDP report observes that the gender gap in literacy is “far less substantial in the case of majority communities, in which male and female illiteracy rates are low and broadly comparable—two and five percent, respectively” (ibid.).

Literacy rates are an indicator of the multiple disadvantages Romani women face. The gap in literacy rates for Romani women is not only a gender one, but also an ethnic one. Data from Bulgaria show significant differences in literacy between Bulgarian Roma women and majority Bulgarian women. According to the 2001 Bulgarian census,²³ only 4.23 percent of Romani women have secondary education, and a tiny fraction (0.24 percent) completed higher education. At the same time, 40.54 percent of majority women in Bulgaria have completed secondary education; 18.79 percent of them have higher educational attainment. Thus, the participation of non-Romani women in the educational system is almost ten times higher than that of Romani women. The most severe aspect of this general pattern is the discrepancy in literacy. As the same census data shows, the illiteracy rate among Romani women is eight times higher than among non-Romani women in Bulgaria (18.83 percent for Romani women, compared to 2.29 percent for non-Romani women). Presumably, there is a similar educational pattern in other European countries as well.

In Hungary, a country not included in the 2006 UNDP analysis, significant discrepancies in educational attainment between Romani women and men were reported by Péter Farkas (2002). Farkas measured the overall educational achievement of parents of a group of Roma students. According to his findings, there is a significant difference between Romani women’s and men’s overall educational achievement especially at the high school level, in vocational or grammar school. Only 5.8 percent of Romani female parents graduated from vocational school, compared with 17.5 percent of male parents who had finished vocational school. Other social divisions also affect the educational chances for Romani women. The impact of rural-urban divisions on the educational

²³ National Statistical Institute (NSI), *Census of the Population-Demographic and Social Characteristics of the Population*, cited in EUMAP (2007: 40).

achievement of Romani women has been presented by Ferenc Babusik, who conducted research in northern Hungary (2002). The study shows that in the region of Ózd city, 37.2 percent of Romani women between the ages of 17–29 did not complete elementary school. Only 30.7 percent of Romani women who lived in the city belonged to this category, while among those who lived in surrounding villages, 46.4 percent had not completed elementary school education.

The effect of ethnicity on the length of education (average number of years spent in school) has also been compellingly documented (EUMAP, 2007; International Center for Minority Studies and Inter-Cultural Relations, 2003). However, evidence of the impact of other categories—prominently, gender, but also religion or poverty status—is only incidental, and not systematically collected. An early qualitative study conducted in eight settlements in Bulgaria found that Romani women were much less likely to have attended school than Romani men; 29 percent had never been enrolled in school or had dropped out before finishing fourth grade in comparison with 11 percent of Romani men. Romani women were also less likely to have continued on to upper secondary school (Ringold, 2001: 26).

An example from Hungary adds to the evidence that supports the need for going further in systematically collecting data on the impact of other categories (beyond ethnicity) on educational performance and schooling. According to educators, the Hungarian practice of awarding a child the status of “private student,”²⁴ effectively releases both the school and the parents from the obligation of guaranteeing compulsory education for a child (a right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948). According to educators, this practice is frequently used as a technical solution for getting Romani girls out of school for marriage. The number of private students can be a proxy indicator for education experiences of young Romani women in Hungary.

The private student phenomenon in Hungary is but one example of potential intersectional discrimination of Romani girls, in which the lack of specific gender data precludes a more in-depth analysis. As indicated above, most studies on school abandonment rates do not indicate the gender of Romani students either in the data, or in the analysis. As also mentioned, gender is not the only category that may impact the educational opportunities of Roma. Some ethnographic studies

²⁴ The possibility to become a “private student” is a particularity of the Hungarian educational system. Parents can request this status for their child if the child for certain reasons can not attend school for certain reasons (example illness, involvement in professional sports, so on). It has been observed that the number of pupils of Roma origin among private students is disproportionately high as authorities try to keep “troublesome” Roma pupils out of the classroom or as Romania girls are kept from school for marriage.

indicate that the opportunities for Romani girls to attend school are lower than for Romani boys, and much more so in traditional and socio-economically marginalized (rural) Roma communities than in socially integrated communities. For instance, in community-based research carried out in 2005, Romani women said they favored higher levels of education for boys rather than girls, because boys are traditionally seen as a future breadwinner of their families (Surdu and Surdu, 2006: 46). Moreover, Romani mothers also explained that a girl’s success in life depended very much on a successful marriage.

In sum, the few available studies that have provided data on the impact of other categories on drop-out rates, such as the above-quoted research from Bulgaria and Romania, show that collecting data on the general school abandonment rate among Roma students is not sufficient for understanding educational attainment and performance. There are significant differences based on gender, ethnicity (and/or religious affiliation, such as for Muslim pupils), and class. Irregular school attendance by Romani students is a massive problem educational that may be caused by a number of social, economic, and gender factors, such as illness, the expectation to fulfill household duties, early marriage and childbearing, desire to help the family by generating income, the inability of parents to provide appropriate clothing, or “hidden” school fees. All these aspects should be taken into account when designing data collection and analyses to support educational policies. The impact of various factors cannot be understood merely on the basis of a general abandonment rate for the Roma; further analysis and more complex approaches are required.

Furthermore, given that the few available studies show differences between the educational experience of Romani and non-Romani girls, as well as that of Romani girls and boys, one of the urgent tasks for governments and intergovernmental organizations is to increase efforts to systematically collect intersectionality-sensitive data. Doing so would allow for such inequalities to be documented and monitored over time. The availability of evidence of such inequalities would prompt policymakers in the educational system, particularly those whom develop programs for Roma education, to also integrate a gender analysis in the setting of targets for enrolment levels in vocational and higher education.

Making intersectionality-sensitive data available would also prevent the political prioritization of certain categories over others. Prioritization does take place and gender is more often than not “left out.” In Hungary, for example, building on the negative experience of the first round of EU Structural Funds allocation, when Roma were often excluded from the groups of beneficiaries, the Managing Authority for the Structural Funds integrated a requirement that all general infrastructural and other development projects in the field of education should demonstrate how they contribute to equal

opportunities. However, this initiative did not specify targets, or special attention to educational attainment of Romani girls; the focus was on Romani children, without further attention to gender differences.

3.2 Lack of Systematic Documentation of Labor Market Participation among Romani Women

Formal employment is a principal mechanism for the greater integration of Roma. The international development community overwhelmingly agrees on this point, as illustrated by reports concerning Roma labor market characteristics in Central and Southeast Europe coming from the United Nations Development Fund (2005), or the World Bank (Ringold, Orenstein, and Wilkens, 2005). Both studies found that unemployment rates were significantly higher among Roma than (non-Roma) majority communities. Despite the fact that, at the time, these studies were among the most comprehensive in the region, it is worth mentioning that they lacked data on gender differences in Roma unemployment. Most recent studies integrate an awareness of gender differences in Roma employment, or unemployment. The previously quoted study by the UNDP on Roma and the displaced in Southeast Europe (2006) includes gender-disaggregated data on each of the policy fields that it covers, including employment. Data on unemployment and employment rates by sex, which were collected for this study, show significant differences for Roma, but also for the majority population. Based on these findings, the report concludes that Romani women face a “double disadvantage” (UNDP, 2006: 49).

Perhaps surprisingly, there is comparatively less gender-disaggregated data available on the situation of Roma in current EU member states. A report published in 2006 by the European Commission’s Expert Group on Gender, Social Inclusion and Employment, entitled *Gender Inequalities in the Risks of Poverty and Social Exclusion for Disadvantaged Groups in Thirty European Countries*, underlined that there were “few available gender breakdowns of unemployment and employment conditions for the Roma” (EC, 2006a: 109). The report observes, however, that the available evidence signaled “pronounced gender inequalities.” Data also shows that in the Czech Republic, 90 percent of all unemployed Roma are women. In Bulgaria, it is estimated that 80 percent of Roma women are unemployed and 66 percent have never held a paid job, in contrast to 34 percent of Roma men who have never held a paid job. In Hungary, the employment rate for Roma women is 16 percent compared with 29 percent for Roma men, with both rates significantly lower than those for the non-Roma population (57 percent and 63 percent respectively).

Sociologist and human rights advocate Herta Tóth offers two ways of explaining Romani women’s performance on the labor market. “Firstly,” she argues,

“Romani women continue to be invisible in most surveys and publications, and secondly most studies lack the gender perspective in that they continue to reproduce a narrow interpretation of ‘economy’ and ‘work’—only focusing on the formal economy, and interpreting work as paid work only” (Tóth, 2005: 1).

According to Tóth, both productive and reproductive roles of Romani women must be analyzed in order to understand the position of Romani women on the labor market. Just as in the case of majority women, Romani women’s domestic and reproductive roles are taken for granted and valued less than paid work. However, the difference is that Romani women are overrepresented among women who are domestic workers.

According to the 2006 UNDP study mentioned previously, employment rates for Romani women in some Southeast European countries are below 20 percent (UNDP, 2006). The situation is very similar in Central European countries that are now EU member states. For example, in Hungary, Babusik (2004) estimated that only about 32 percent of Romani men and 18 percent of Romani women were employed in formal jobs (2004: 13).²⁵ The same research shows that one half of Romani women are at home for childcare, or they work in the household. Earlier research carried out by UNICEF in Macedonia (1997) found that 94 out of 96 Romani mothers from eight different cities were not engaged in any income generating activity. From the whole group of Romani mothers that were interviewed for the research, only two Romani women had ever held formal jobs; the rest had been employed as household servants or worked on the informal market without social protection (Najčevska, Petrovska-Beška, and Layhar, 1997).

Research carried out for the 2005 *Shadow Report On the Situation of Romani Women in the Republic of Macedonia*, submitted to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, showed that out of 202 Romani women between the ages of 18 and 54 years, 51 percent were unemployed, eight percent were employed in state institutions as cleaners, five percent were employed in private firms without social benefits, four percent were self-employed with social benefits, and 34 percent were working on the black market without any social protection.²⁶ These findings resemble data from other studies in Macedonia and elsewhere.

²⁵ Babusik’s work is one of the very few representative sociological surveys in Hungary that offers data on Romani women’s labor-market position.

Research conducted in Romania²⁷ shows similar tendencies: only 11 percent of 717 Romani women interviewed during a 2005 community research study were formally employed. According to the *2003 Romanian Statistical Yearbook*, the corresponding percentage at the national level was almost two and half times higher—27 percent of all women were employed in 2002. Moreover, the survey showed that two-thirds of the Romani women who were employed lived in urban areas and had secondary or higher education. In addition, from the group of employed Romani women, almost half were skilled workers and more than one-third were unskilled workers. The research also revealed that from the group of Romani women who were employed, 54 percent women said the employment was informal, unreported, and based only on verbal agreements with their employer.

During research with Romani women who have a university degree and are employed in public, private or civil sector, interviewees several times noted that their salaries were lower than those of non-Romani women or Romani men in similar positions. The majority of this type of complaint came from the non-governmental sector. Most of the educated Romani women also reported that they were faced with a “glass ceiling effect” at their workplace. Their knowledge and work experience are not valued in a same way as that of non-Romani women or Romani men. The notion of the “glass ceiling” implies that gender (or other) disadvantages are stronger at the top of the hierarchy than at lower levels and that these disadvantages become worse later in a person’s career (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, and Vanneman, 2001). In the case of Romani women, gender disadvantages are intertwined with ethnic discrimination and also with difficulties arising from their social class background. Most Romani women whom I interviewed came from impoverished families, in which their parents had low educational levels and worked as unskilled workers or were unemployed over the long-term. These women usually represent a first generation in their extended family of university-educated Roma.

²⁶ In 2005, the Roma Centre of Skopje, the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), and the Network Women’s Program (NWP) of the Open Society Institute, with the support of the UNIFEM regional office in Bratislava, jointly provided a shadow report to the United Nation Committee on the elimination of Discrimination against Women. The report is based on a research which was carried out by 11 Romani women researchers, which aimed to document the situation of Romani women in Macedonia. See: Roma Centre of Skopje, NWP, ERRC, *Joint Submission: Shadow Report: On the Situation of Romani Women in the Republic of Macedonia*, October–November 2005, at: http://www.soros.org/initiatives/women/articles_publications/publications/macedonia_20051101 (accessed March 12, 2009).

²⁷ The Romania research sample was composed of 717 respondents. The research was conducted in two parts: a survey of Romani women between ages of 18 and 73, based on an 80 item questionnaire; and a series of focus group discussions with Romani women, based on a 58 item interview guide (Surdu and Surdu, 2006).

Aside from the relatively small population of Romani women with higher education, large groups of Romani women are employed in low-skilled jobs and have limited opportunities to change their work or career paths. Particularly in socially and ethnically segregated regions of Roma settlements in Central and Southeastern Europe, unemployment rates are exceptionally high—between 70 and 100 percent (Ringold, Orenstein, and Wilkens, 2005: 38–39).

Lack of employment opportunities is often associated with low levels of education. A study published by the UNDP in 2002 on social vulnerability provides ample evidence for the correlation between unemployment or labor inactivity with low levels of education. Just as a means of illustrating such links, the survey found that more than 20 percent of Montenegrin Romani women were unemployed. Another 30 percent were housekeepers, while 54 percent of Romani women had never been employed. Of the same sample of Romani women who were interviewed for the survey, 44 percent could not read and write. As much as 51 percent of Montenegrin Romani women had not had a single year of formal education. Only 15 percent of Romani women earned their own income, and on the average they earned 78 EUR per month, compared to 169 EUR per month earned by Romani men and 220 EUR by non-Romani women (UNDP, 2002).²⁸

Low educational attainment is not the only factor that negatively influences Romani women’s prospects to access gainful work. Discrimination is a further obstacle for Romani women in the employment sector. According to a World Bank needs assessment for Macedonia, an applicant’s name, surname, and ethnicity influence potential employer’s hiring decisions (Lakinska, Memedov, and Demir, 2004: 20). In the case of Romani women, discrimination in hiring can be even harsher if the woman’s physical appearance or style of dress indicate her ethnic belonging. Recent research from Romania provides further evidence of the multiple forms of discrimination of Romani women face in public life. Namely, a survey of perceptions of discrimination that was conducted on a representative sample of the population of Romania at the request of the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men concluded that “in public spaces, in relation with local authorities, but also in respect of access to education and health, *Romani women, poor women and women with disabilities* are perceived as the most discriminated against groups” (NAEO, 2007: 136).

Other factors contribute to Romani women’s unemployment rates as well. A 2004 Shadow Report on the situation of Romani and Sinti women in Germany, which was submitted to the United

²⁸ Data on 12 Central and Southeast European countries available from the UNDP Vulnerable Groups Dataset, is available at: <http://vulnerability.undp.sk> (accessed February 27, 2009).

Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women listed a series of factors that appeared to be linked with the limited access of these women to employment opportunities. According to the report, remote and inaccessible housing, and lack of education are among the factors contributing to low employment opportunities for Sinti and Romani women (EUMAP/ERRC, 2004). The report also highlights that an additional, important obstacle for Romani women in accessing employment opportunities is their being responsible for all the domestic work and childcare activities. Despite the fact that in Germany there is an available childcare system, presumably most of the disadvantage families cannot afford the costs, which are approximately 110 EUR per month for public childcare, and around 690 EUR per month for private childcare (EC, 2005: 39).

The report also highlighted that even in those countries where parents only pay for their children's meal, as in the case of Hungary, there are still many cases particularly of Roma families who cannot afford the costs (EC, 2005: 40). Certainly, Romani women's high unemployment rate cannot be explained solely by the (un)affordability of childcare, but its effects on Romani women should be considered when rethinking access to childcare and the distribution and affordability of the childcare systems.

As I have shown in this brief review of available studies on the participation of Romani women in formal and informal labor markets, by and large, Romani women's experiences with paid work is in comparable with those of the majority of women in the European Union. In this field, as in education, researchers have to go further and document the labor market participation of Romani women with gender-sensitive data, and employ intersectional analyses that look at the interplay of at least gender and ethnic inequalities to determine the causes for the low participation of Romani women on the labor market.

The effects of intersecting inequalities mean that some individuals who are out of the system of formal employment might never have the opportunity to enter it because of their ethnicity, social class, age group, gender, or disability status, which form the basis of structural inequalities. Ethnic-, gender-, class-, or age-based structures of inequality are patterns of advantage and disadvantage that are durable, although they may appear permeable at the individual level (Tilly, 1998). The fact that some individuals—in this case, individual Romani women—succeed in crafting paths of upward mobility does not dissolve these structures of inequality. Isolated stories of individual success do not dismantle the structural patterns of inequality, although they may inspire determination in other individuals. Necessary requirements for successful policy responses to this situation are that they be evidence-based and that the evidence be sensitive to multiple categories of inequality.

3.3 Making Visible Intersecting Categories in Health Research

Gender, ethnicity, and class belongings have a profound impact on the health status of Romani women. The World Health Organization (WHO) argues that “across continents and cultures, established gender norms and values mean that women typically control less power and fewer resources than men. Not surprisingly, this often gives men an advantage—in the economic, political, and educational arenas, but also with regard to health and healthcare.”²⁹ Ethnographic studies substantiate the existence of gender imbalances in health in Roma communities, too. Available data show higher rates of illness and mortality among Roma than the majority populations in European countries. Moreover, a number of health and gender factors put Romani women at a relative disadvantage compared with Romani men. For example, experts’ statements and ethnographic fieldwork show that large numbers of Romani women have endured physical or sexual violence committed by an intimate male partner at some point in their life. A range of health risks affect the reproductive lives of Romani women. Significant numbers of adolescent Romani girls become mothers every year. Furthermore, some reproductive health problems are specific to Romani women: forced sterilization still occurs as a gendered manifestation of racism against Romani women and Roma communities in some countries of Central Europe, particularly Hungary and the Czech Republic.³⁰

One has to recall here that the issue of the health status of Romani women was one of the first gender related topics to appear in international debates on abuses and discrimination against Roma. In 2003, at the initiative of the CoE and European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), a report was compiled on Romani women’s access to healthcare (EUMC, 2003). The report showed that Romani women suffer from poor access to healthcare. The report also showed that when Romani women do receive care, it is usually of poor quality due to discrimination based on their ethnicity, gender, and class belonging. Moreover, many reproductive risks, particularly from non-consensual sterilization, are caused by racial bias in healthcare institutions and efforts to slow

²⁹ See the World Health Organization webpage on women and gender: <http://www.who.int/gender/genderandwomen/en/index.html> (accessed February 27, 2009).

³⁰ The following reports discuss forced sterilization of Romani women: Coercive Sterilization of Romani women (ERRC, 2008), at: http://www.soros.org/initiatives/health/focus/roma/events/romawomen_20080703/errcbrochure_20080703.pdf; Final Statement of the Public Defender of Rights in the Matter of Sterilizations Performed in Contravention of the Law and Proposed Remedial Measures (Ombudsman of the Czech Republic, 2005), at: <http://www.ochrance.cz/documents/doc1142289721.pdf>; A.S. vs Hungary, Communication 4/2004 (Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 2004), at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/protocol/decisions-views/Decisionpercent204-2004percent20-percent20English.pdf> (accessed February 27, 2009).

high birth rates among Romani women, which often outpace those of non-Romani women (EUMC, 2003; UNDP, 2006: 92–93).

Ethnicity, gender, and class interact in various ways to shape Romani women's access to healthcare. For many Romani women in Europe, limited access to public healthcare and social benefits are some of the greatest obstacles to wellbeing. Lack of access to social benefits and health care and poor health status are directly linked with unemployment, poverty, low education and inadequate housing and living conditions. The *Shadow Report on the Situation of Romani women in the Republic of Macedonia* reported that Romani women who have access to state health care are facing serious problems in affording the required participation fee for almost all medical exams, hospitalizations and, especially, medication (ERRC, 2005: 28).

The 2003 joint report of the CoE and EUMC recognizes that ethnicity, gender, and class disadvantages combine, but fails to acknowledge the complex ways in which they interrelate in different contexts. Crina Morteau, a Romani activist from Romania, explains by providing an example of segregation in maternity wards, based on her own knowledge of the phenomenon: “As a Romani woman, whether you would be placed in a special ward or not sometimes depends on how much money you have also. If you are ‘dark-skinned’ (*bruneta*), but you have money, you will probably be able to ‘pay’ your way into a normal maternity ward.”³¹ This example suggests that advantages on one axis of inequality (in this case, class) can “overrule” disadvantages on other axes of inequality (ethnicity); class trumped ethnicity as a source of privilege. Further, some violent practices that affect the reproductive lives of Romani women are deeply rooted in the historical legacy of eugenic policies in Europe, and elsewhere. According to gender scholar Tracy Smith, studies of the 1970s and 1980s used an insensitive approach to Romani women's health, which tended to blame Romani lifestyles and culture for health problems, rather than addressing the deeply-rooted structural inequalities compounded by poverty and illiteracy, which prevent many Roma from maintaining adequate health (Smith, 1997; see also Thomas et al., 1987; Barsicas et al., 1979). Such studies directly and indirectly perpetuated racist images of Roma as socially inferior, or “undesirable,” and did not give a substantial analysis about their social and economic exclusion and its significant impact on their health. Romani women's reproductive lives were severely violated by the racist-motivated abuse of the 20th century, based on the ideology that Roma population can be a threat to society.

Coercive sterilization of Romani women gained visibility internationally in 2003 with the publication of a major report by the Center for Reproductive Rights and Poradna on the practice

³¹ Interview with Crina Morteau, February 2008, via email.

in Slovakia (CRR, 2003). The report cites 110 cases of forced sterilization of Romani women and reveals widespread patterns of discrimination in public hospitals, including verbal and physical abuse by medical staff, racially discriminatory standards of care, misinformation in health matters and denials of access to medical records. The report had an extensive influence on the political discourse inside and outside of Slovakia. Among many other developments, in an attempt to deflect attention from their responsibilities, Slovak authorities responded to the report by disparaging it and harassing and intimidating Romani women and their advocates.³² However, the report catalyzed discussion on the sterilization of Romani women not only in Slovakia, but also in many other countries—including the Czech Republic and Hungary. Indeed, the coercive sterilization of Romani women appears to be widespread.

Several cases provide personal testimonies about the vulnerability of Romani women to maltreatment from medical practitioners during pregnancy or childbirth. In one case, for example: “In Kumanovo, Macedonia, 30-year-old Ms F.A. told the ERRC and partner organizations that four years previously she had had a very hard pregnancy. One night, the pain was severe but no one came to help her. She asked the nurse to give her some medicine to ease her pains but the nurse reportedly said that the woman complained too much. That night F.A. miscarried” (ERRC, 2006a: 41–42).

Cases brought forward by human rights reports signal the effects of the intersections of gender inequality with deeply rooted poverty and racial discrimination. In most reported cases, these effects are additive, in the sense that gender inequality, poverty, and racial discrimination combine and increase Romani women’s exclusion from healthcare, as well as their vulnerability to maltreatment by medical practitioners. In some cases, however, one axis of inequality (in the example I have cited, class) is able to override the effects of other axes of inequality (in the same example, gender and ethnicity). Thus, the effects are not always additive, but can have complicated interrelations based on the context.

While the understanding of the multiple, intersecting sources of discrimination for Romani women with respect to health is more advanced than in the fields of education and employment, research has to go forward in analyzing how different categories impact on the health status of Romani women.

³² In May 2003, the Government of Slovakia issued a response to the CRR/Poradna report. See: http://reproductiverights.org/sites/default/files/documents/report_slovakiafollowup_0603.pdf.

3.4 Intersectional Aspects of Violence: A Necessary Research Agenda

In order to understand the complex nature and mechanisms of violence against Romani women, I suggest using an intersectional approach, instead of one that understands violence against Romani women as either racial or gendered violence. In the case of trafficking in women, for instance, a growing body of studies shows how, since the early 1990s, women and girls have been trafficked from CEE countries to work as forced prostitutes in western Europe and elsewhere. While estimates of the numbers of trafficked persons are very limited, the problem is clearly vast in scope. Yet, few studies are based on extensive research, and most do not document the ethnicity of the trafficked person. To treat trafficking as (solely) a function of gender discrimination, while ignoring ethnic, geo-political, geo-economic, and class dimensions, would ultimately result in inconsistent analyses of the issue's causes and manifestations. This approach would not yield appropriate measures. As in other examples, intersectional approaches add a layer of complexity to the analysis. At the least, identifying the sending countries gives an indication of the degree of gender discrimination and the political economic situation of the respective country. Nevertheless, it is important to identify, for instance, why women from certain countries and from certain regions of their country make up the majority of forced sex workers in the EU countries. We can expect that, due to the dynamics of ethnic, gender, and class inequalities, Romani women's risk and vulnerability to be trafficked, abused and harassed are much higher than for non-Romani women. However, systematic research on the vulnerability of Romani women to trafficking is still missing. Such high degree of vulnerability should be traced using the analytical categories of such as ethnicity, gender, class and their intersections. The only available reports on trafficking of Romani women and forced prostitution mainly come from NGOs, but are based on anecdotal evidence from various communities, and not on extensive research (ERRC, 2006b; European Parliament 2006, Bitu 2003).³³

Some of the most violent forms of intersectional violence against Romani women, like rape and sexual torture during armed conflicts, often are not treated as intersectional forms of violence, but rather as manifestations of racism. The European Roma Rights Centre, for instance, documented cases of rape of Romani women during the conflict in Kosovo in the late 1990s. Throughout the conflict, rape was not only an attack against women's human rights, but also a calculated effort to annihilate the Roma community (ERRC, 1999; see also HRW, 2000).

³³ A collection of sources on Human Trafficking and Modern-day Slavery is available at: <http://www.gvnet.com/humantrafficking/Romania.htm> (accessed March 12, 2009).

Furthermore, the plethora of testimonies collected by the ERRRC show intersectional discrimination in the lives of Romani girls, who face verbal, physical, and sometimes sexual harassment by classmates and teachers, based on ethnic and sexist premises at the same time.³⁴ Whereas these experiences negatively influence the education and personal development of Romani girls, the reports state that teachers rarely punish these practices, and that these events elicit substantially less media attention and communal support than when they happen to white girls in the same society.

An NGO report which was based on community action research carried out by a group of trained Romani women in Macedonia found that more than half of the Romani women experienced discrimination and/or related harms in the educational system. The research team conducted 237 interviews with Romani women aged 14–65 who self-identified as Roma. According to the report:

“57 [Romani women] reported cases of discrimination by their teachers, 30 experienced direct acts of harassment at the hands of their classmates, 15 reported discrimination by other school staff and 41 suffered unequal treatment by their parents, especially the selective promotion of Roma boys, and relegation of Romani girls to subordinated/subjugated roles” (Roma Centre of Skopje, et al. 2005).

The same study found that Macedonian Romani women were particularly vulnerable to domestic violence: more than two-thirds of the Romani women interviewed reported that they had endured domestic violence, most often at the hands of their husbands. The study also found that 34 of the victims had reported the crimes to law enforcement officers. According to the report, “[i]n 20 of these [34 cases], law enforcement officials subjected the women to further degrading treatment on racist grounds, usually in the form of insults about the ‘Gypsy’ origin of the victim” (ibid.).

This report was cited by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women to present evidence on discrimination and violence against Romani women. Particularly, the Committee has been very active in the last couple of years to use NGO shadow reports to expose the degree of violence and discrimination against Romani Women and to demonstrate the extent of problem of non-enforcement of existing regulations against discrimination.³⁵ To conclude, early research on the situation of Roma in Europe, most of which focused on Central and Eastern Europe,

³⁴ In particular, see oral statement by the ERRRC (2007) and written comments by the ERRRC, Bibija, Eureka, and Women’s Space (2006) on the status of Romani women, submitted to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

³⁵ Namely, the UN CEDAW’s Concluding Comments on Women’s Rights in Hungary (2007) express concern about the situation of Roma.

and was conducted or commissioned by the international development community, was gender-blind. Gender-sensitive analyses of the Roma poverty were developed in academic projects, such as the influential household survey at Yale University. More recent studies and research have integrated gender in data collection on Roma, and commonly discuss the “double disadvantage” of Roma women. However, the systematic effort to integrate gender, ethnicity, and class (poverty status) in data collection and analysis of the situation of Romani women is still lacking.

4. POLICY DISCOURSES AND POLICY RESPONSES TO ROMANI WOMEN'S ISSUES

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Roma transnational political activism gained momentum at the European level. In 1993 in Copenhagen, the EU agreed upon a set of political criteria for EU accession. One of the most cited Copenhagen criteria for acceding countries is respect for and protection of minorities. According to the agreement, candidate countries must have achieved “stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities” in order to become an EU member state. The Copenhagen criteria gave significant political leverage for Roma advocacy organizations to claim human rights and legal protection of Roma and put international pressure on candidate countries to fulfill the required conditions. The EU accession process strengthened the notion of gender equality, which has also been widely promoted by other intergovernmental organizations and also by Western philanthropic organizations, such as the Open Society Institute (OSI). The OSI Network Women’s Program had a significant role as a strategic player on the international level, enabling Romani women’s rights activists to lobby intergovernmental and international agencies and also connecting them to a global women’s rights forum (OSI, 2004: 42–49). In the last decade, Romani women’s issues have been addressed by a range of internationally active actors. Each has a specific emphasis and understanding of Romani women’s issues according to their institutional mission and framework.

This section reviews initiatives taken at the level of the major inter-governmental structures—the EU, CoE, UN, and OSCE. I focus on the transnational level, as it is at this level that a more inclusive and systematic approach to Romani women’s issues has been developed. However, governments of most EU member states have also developed policy responses to the situation of Roma, and in some, although much fewer cases, the specific situation of Romani women. Currently, the Governments of twelve European states (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Spain) are committed to action towards closing the gap between Roma and non-Roma in education, health, housing, and employment as part of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005–2015. This paper does not argue that all intergovernmental or governmental initiatives in the past years have been beneficial for Roma or Romani women specifically. Examples previously provided in this paper show violations of the rights of Roma in general (lack of access to health and education) and Romani women specifically (forced sterilization) for which the state has either failed to provide redress, or which it has even

condoned.³⁶ This section focuses on what might be called “positive” policy initiatives to address the situation of Romani women, and indicate how an intersectional approach would improve these policies and the policy approach to the situation of Romani women more generally. It is also argued, however, that policies aimed at improving the situation of Roma “shrink” the potentials contained in the concept of intersectionality and most often divert from a comprehensive notion of multiple inequalities to focus only on two aspects of inequality, gender and ethnicity.³⁷

4.1 European Union: Addressing Multiple Discrimination

The development of gendered policies in the EU member states cannot be dissociated from the process of European enlargement and integration. Member states are required to adopt a set of gender equality legislation and policies, and so are candidate states through institutional capacity building and rapprochement vis-à-vis the *aquis communautaire*.³⁸

At times, in the context of the EU accession process, specific Romani women issues gained frontline visibility in European politics. Such was the case of Ms. Cioba’s wedding, a 12-year-old Romani girl from Romania. The debate emerged in the frame of Romania’s preparation for EU accession. International media depicted the arranged marriage as an oppressive and criminal traditional act by the girl’s Roma community (BBC News, 2003). The debate in the European Parliament was initiated by the British MP and the EU’s Special Rapporteur for Romania, Baroness Emma Nicholson. Baroness Nicholson had called for police to “remove Ana-Maria [the Romani girl due to be married] from harm.” The Romanian authorities—with an eye on entry to the EU in

³⁶ Among recent examples of direct actions taken by states that violate Roma rights, authorities and leading politicians in 2008 in Italy fueled anti-Romani sentiment and violence and sought to fingerprint forcibly all Roma living in the country. See: *Security a la Italiana: Fingerprinting, Extreme Violence and Harassment of Roma in Italy* (ERRC et al., 2008). See also: Anti-Romani Developments in Italy Highlighted in a Report Launched by NGOs at the OSCE Meeting on Sustainable Roma Policy (ERRC July 10, 2008, at <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2970&archiv=1>; and Rights Groups Demand European Commission Clarify Its Position on Fingerprinting Roma in Italy (ERRC September 9, 2008), at <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2980&archiv=1> (accessed March 12, 2009).

³⁷ Similarly, Lombardo and Verloo (2009) argue that across different political contexts, various social and political actors engage in trying to “shrink” the meaning of intersectionality and limit the areas in which it can be applied, to “bend” it to better fit with other issues, and to “stretch” it to meet emergent needs.

³⁸ The *aquis communautaire* represents the set of principles, policies, legislation, practices, obligations, and objectives agreed upon within the framework of the European Union.

2007—mounted an inquiry (Macrae, 2004). According to Callum Macrae, a journalist reporting on the story, “the effect was to encourage another episode in the vilification of Romani people” (ibid). That is one way of seeing it.

In a more thorough analysis, Oprea used the example of the wedding to challenge the prevailing images of Romani women in the media and in the political discourse that portrayed Romani women as culturally and traditionally oppressed by their communities. Oprea’s point was “not to deny that Romani women [were] profoundly oppressed, but to challenge the monofocal conceptualization of ‘Romani culture’ as being the sole factor affecting their experiences” (Oprea, 2005).

At the time of the widespread media coverage and extended discussions about arranged marriages in Roma communities, the Committee on Women’s Rights and Equal Opportunities of the European Parliament conducted a meeting during which Romani women’s issues were addressed. Romani feminists, activists, and experts were invited. Among other issues, MEPs solicited opinions on the issue of child marriages. Participants responded with the message that “no human rights violation can be justified as a tradition.” Specifically, “the European women’s rights networks should develop a more inclusive language and discourse to encompass the specific problems of multi-dimensional discrimination faced by Romani women today in Europe” (Kóczé, 2003). The ensuing discussion offered a more comprehensive perspective on Romani women’s issues than had appeared previously in the European Parliament’s discussions, which were narrowly concerned with early marriages.

In 2005, the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality (FEMM Committee) of the European Parliament initiated a background study, which explored the economic aspects of the condition of Romani women (European Parliament, 2006b). The report gives an overview on the social and economic condition of Roma with a very limited analysis of Romani women in fifteen states: Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Turkey. The strength of the report was that it emphasized the difficulty in acquiring data on Romani women issues. It states:

“The first conclusion with regard to knowledge obtained in this empirical research study on Romani women is that the available information is rather thin and uncertain, yet this is to be expected considering the overall lack of comprehensive wide-ranging data to this topic [...] Social, political and economic studies on women and gender issues are not available” (ibid.: 3).

The background study did not provide ample information about the situation of Romani women, nor did it challenge the gender roles of Romani women; it rather showed the general situation of Roma in the respective countries.

As a follow up to the report, the FEMM Committee called a public hearing in November 2005 to explore the situation of Romani women. The hearing was attended by several Romani women activists, experts, and representatives of the EC. The hearing provided a forum to discuss the possibility to pay attention in public policies to the multiple forms of discrimination towards Romani women. According to Járóka, member of the FEMM Committee:

“[M]embers of the FEMM Committee agreed that new policies and more tangible results were required in order to overcome the obstacles faced by Roma. There was a consensus within the group that Romani women were the most discriminated against, but also the most forgotten and *invisible, minority; and that action must be taken at European-level without delay* (Járóka, 2006: 4).

The 2005 hearing provided a justification for the decision to commission a report on the situation of Romani women, which was the initiative of Járóka. The report contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the structural position of Romani women in various European countries. Moreover, the report also challenged gender norms in “traditional patriarchal communities,” which, according to Járóka, can contribute to violence against Romani women and deny their freedom of choice. Notably, violence against women was an explicit topic during the hearing. However, the report did not provide any further analysis of intra-community gender inequalities.

Based on the results of the Report on the Situation of Romani Women, on June 1, 2006, the European Parliament adopted a Resolution on the Situation of Roma Women in the European Union (European Parliament, 2006a). The Resolution can offer a strategic tool for the EC to address the multiple discrimination Romani women face on the programming level and also in EU social policies. However, further steps are required from the Commission to make this Resolution a policy reality—for example, by attaching specific measures to it. To date, the Resolution on the Situation of Romani Women has not been translated into concrete action.

Specific initiatives on Romani women are part of a larger policy approach at the EU level that has become increasingly favorable to the integration of intersectional approaches. Throughout the last decade, the EU has broadened its agenda on gender equality issues and introduced the notion of multiple discrimination. The EU has been a leading intergovernmental organization in adopting and implementing policies on anti-discrimination and gender equality. These policies still provide probably the most inclusive language and policy tools to address the intersectional social status of Romani women. Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) lists eight grounds on which discrimination is prohibited—sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, and sexual

orientation.³⁹ The Racial Equality Directive,⁴⁰ the Framework Directive,⁴¹ and the Equal Treatment Directive on Discrimination between women and men in employment,⁴² which was amended in 2002,⁴³ now provide rather diverse levels of protection for the respective grounds.

According to the Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men 2006–2010 (EC, 2006b), and the follow-up of the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007), the multiple discrimination of Romani women must be articulated and addressed in policy terms. This paper argues that European initiatives should include the more comprehensive notion of *intersectional discrimination* when devising interventions to redress the disadvantages of Romani women.

Since March 2000, the EU has formulated its policies to be in line with the ambitious objectives of the Lisbon Strategy, which sets a framework for action until 2010. The main goals of the Lisbon Strategy are economic growth, as well as social and environmental sustainability. The Strategy seeks to increase European competitiveness by investing in a knowledge-based and highly productive society. One of the aims is to increase the overall EU employment rate to 70 percent and to increase the number of women in employment to more than 60 percent by 2010. Although the rates vary in countries throughout Europe, targets are often met in majority communities; however, it is unrealistic that they will be fulfilled in the case of Romani women, unless targeted program are developed to increase the formal labor participation of Romani women and enable them to step out of the gray economy. To that end, single-axis strategies are not sufficient; achieving the goals of the Lisbon Strategy for Romani women depends on the elaboration of more comprehensive, intersectional strategies that acknowledge and provide solutions for multiple inequalities.

³⁹ Treaty Establishing the European Community, Nov 10, 1997, O.J. (C 340) 3 (1997). Article 13 was originally promulgated as Article 6a of the Treaty of Amsterdam, which was signed on October 2, 1997, and came into force on May 1, 1999. Treaty of Amsterdam amending the Treaty on European Union, The Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related Acts, Oct.2, 1997, O.J. (C 340)1 (1997).

⁴⁰ Council Directive 2000/43/EC, 2000 O.J. (L 180) 22 (implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial and ethnic origin) (hereinafter Racial Equality Directive).

⁴¹ Council Directive 200/78/EC for Establishing a General Framework for Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation, 2000O.J. (L303) 16 (hereinafter Framework Directive).

⁴² Council Directive 76/207/EEC on the Implementation of the Principle of Equal Treatment for Men and Women as Regards Access to Employment, Vocational Training and Promotion, and Working Conditions, 1976 O.J. (L39) 40, derogation in 194N, incorporated by 1994 O.J. (L1) 484 (hereinafter Equal Treatment Directive).

⁴³ Directive 2002/73/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council Amending Council Directive 76/207/EEC on the Implementation of the Principle of Equal Treatment For Men and Women as Regards Access to Employment, Vocational Training and Promotion, and Working Conditions, 2002 O.J. (L269) 15–20.

The anti-discrimination and gender equality agenda of the EU have come to the fore in the year 2007 with the roll-out of the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All.⁴⁴ The four main objectives of the year were: rights, representation, recognition, and respect. The European Year of Equal Opportunities for All made intersectional thinking more visible, as multiple discrimination was a focus of the EU strategy for the year and the major theme of all activities implemented as part of the year in some countries, such as Romania. Although the concept was not elaborated in the plan, its use has meant the recognition of multiple differences and inequalities, which affect particular groups in the European context.

Apart from the plans for Equal Opportunities for All, another EU initiative that includes attention to multiple discriminations is the European Commission’s *Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men 2006–2010* (EC, 2006b). The Roadmap suggests new actions and re-affirms the need to implement existing ones. The document outlines six priority areas for EU action on gender equality for the period 2006–2010: “equal economic independence for women and men; reconciliation of private and professional life; equal representation in decision-making; eradication of all forms of gender-based violence; elimination of gender stereotypes; promotion of gender equality in external and development policies” (ibid.). The Roadmap includes a focus on intersectionality (Priority Area 1.6: Combating multiple discrimination, in particular against immigrant and ethnic minority women), and states that:

“The EU is committed to the elimination of all discrimination and the creation of an inclusive society for all. Women members of disadvantaged groups are often worse off than their male counterparts. The situation of ethnic minority and immigrant women is emblematic. They often suffer from double discrimination. This requires the promotion of gender equality in migration and integration policies in order to ensure women’s rights and civic participation, to fully use their employment potential and to improve their access to education and lifelong learning” (EC, 2006b: 10).

In the above, “double discrimination” is used, which is one step beyond single-ground approaches (only gender, for example), and it recognizes that some groups (in this case, ethnic minority and immigrant women), experience multiple inequalities. However, the notion of double discrimination is narrower than the more encompassing and integrative concepts of multiple discrimination or intersectional discrimination. It captures only two axes of inequality—gender and ethnicity—

⁴⁴ See Decision on the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007)—Towards a Just Society (May 2006). Available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/eyeq/index.cfm?cat_id=EY (accessed February 27, 2009).

and treats them as if they were separable and additive. The notion of double discrimination fails to capture how gender and ethnicity intersect and are mutually constituted.

At the same time, double discrimination has been widely used by Romani women activists as well in order to draw attention to a hitherto ignored reality. Activists have spoken about the double discrimination Romani women face, hoping to rally support for targeted policy responses.⁴⁵ Double discrimination had been (and continues to be) used widely, as many activists keenly recognized that ethnic discrimination did not capture fully what Romani women faced; hence, gender-based discrimination was “added.” Double discrimination was already a well-known term among within feminist and human rights circles, in which the role of class was typically neglected.

Prominent European officials have also offered a conceptualization of the specific situation of Romani women in the EU that focused on their double discrimination. In a speech given at the 2005 Roma Forum, Fay Devonic, Head of Unit on Equality between Women and Men, DG Employment and Social Affairs, declared:

“We must eliminate all forms of discrimination against the Roma and ensure that the Roma are represented in economic, social, and political life. This is quite a challenge and an even greater one if we consider that Romani women are the victims of double discrimination. A significant percentage of Romani women are unemployed. This is particularly the case for unmarried mothers, widows, victims of domestic violence. These women often live in situations of extreme poverty which make them the ideal victims for prostitution and trafficking. These phenomena affect women in general. The fact that they belong to a minority group exacerbates the problem” (Devonic, 2005: 7).

In the above, Devonic acknowledges the particular social and economic situation of Romani women, and focuses even more specifically on those Romani women who are unmarried mothers, widows, or victims of domestic violence. These are also “classical” target groups for gender equality policies. However, her focus on specific groups obscures the ways in which the majority of Romani women’s social position is shaped by the intersections of gender, ethnicity and class. These axes of inequality operate on a social-structural level also and create a more widely present social context

⁴⁵ During a speech for the European Parliament in 2003, I argued that “Romani women often experience discrimination based on their gender and their ethnic background simultaneously, thus they face *double discrimination*. Romani women living in Europe are on the one hand targeted by majority racial hostility, and on the other hand, oppressed by their own patriarchal community” (Kóczé 2003). At that point, I also specifically requested that the European women’s rights networks developed a more inclusive language and discourse to encompass the specific problems faced by Romani women in present-day Europe.

in which particular situations of discrimination occur. Thus, the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and class are relevant not only because they configure very specific disadvantages, such as those experienced by unmarried Romani mothers, but also because they shape the wider social context of Romani women’s lives. The latter point is often overlooked, even by observers who speak about the multiple disadvantages of Romani women. For example, in the same speech quoted above, Devonic links Romani women’s vulnerability to prostitution and trafficking to poverty only, arguing that Romani women “often live in situations of extreme poverty which make them the ideal victims for prostitution and trafficking” (Devonic, 2005: 7). However, she fails to note that vulnerability to trafficking and prostitution is also linked to gender and ethnic discrimination.

As illustrated by the above-quoted example and confirmed by recent analyses (e.g. Verloo and Lomdardo, 2009), the conceptualization of intersectionality by EU officials—and specifically, their understandings of the situation of Romani women—is limited. EU institutions have nevertheless provided important policy frames and theoretical ideas to steer the debate towards more complex ways of thinking. Initiatives at the EU level have created a good opportunity for Romani women and pro-Romani women equality advocates to “overcome a simple bipolar logic of analysis that treats one type of inequalities as compared to another, taking what appears as the dominant one as the norm for comparison,” instead of “focusing on the point at which the various inequalities of race, gender, class, etc., intersect with each other” (Verloo and Lombardo, 2007: 25).

Important challenges remain, however, and the road ahead to secure that Romani women can thrive as equals in the European Union is still very long. The first EU Roma Summit in Brussels, which was held on September 16, 2008, recognized that even now “[t]here are only a few programs that directly address the specific situation of Roma girls and women in the Member States” (EC, 2008: 42). Intersectional analysis can provide the way forward to develop more targeted programs and at the same time to ensure that initiatives in the fields of social inclusion, anti-discrimination or gender equality reach Romani women and girls beneficiaries. To date, in European policy-making, very limited attention has been paid to both structural and political intersectionality. In order to create a more inclusive and relevant equality mainstreaming mechanism, it is necessary to comprehend the differences and relationship between various inequalities. Some authors and policy analysts have proposed that diversity mainstreaming (see Shaw, 2005) or inequality mainstreaming policy approaches should be developed building on the experiences of gender mainstreaming strategies. According to Verloo, “what is needed is the development of complex methods and tools informed by intersectionality theory, and a rethinking of the representation and participation of citizens in an era of post-identity politics” (Verloo, 2006: 224). Along these lines, the concluding section of this paper returns to possible ways forward.

4.2 Council of Europe: Womanizing the Domain of Ethnicity

The Council of Europe (CoE) was one of the very first inter-governmental organizations to become active in introducing the gender equality concept in international Roma activism. The CoE organized a hearing with Romani women in 1995 as a first attempt to raise awareness about the situation of Romani women. Romani activist Nicoleta Bitu, one of the participants, argues that “the hearing introduced a new dimension in the discussion about the situation of Roma women” (Bitu, 1999). The meeting was convened by the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men of the Council of Europe and conveyed the message that attention to Romani women’s issues needed to be integrated into the mainstream gender equality framework. This event provided a forum for Romani women to articulate their particular concerns and raised awareness about the existing gender-related resources and mechanisms at the level of the CoE.

Later on, in 1999, the CoE Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsies requested a comprehensive document on Romani women’s issues. Bitu prepared the document. The language of the report is very depictive and was considered provocative and progressive in the field of Roma issues. The report prepared by Bitu raised several important points such as the lack of data on the status of Romani women, lack of understanding of gender concepts by the national governments who elaborated policies aimed at improving the situation of Roma. Moreover, this pioneering paper talks about “sensitive issues,” such as domestic violence, trafficking of persons, and prostitution, which had not been discussed before by Romani activists.

The CoE, in cooperation with OSCE and EUMC, has also played an essential role in preparing a report on *Romani Women’s Access to Public Healthcare* (EUMC 2003). At the launch of the report at a Council of Europe conference on Roma women and access to public healthcare (Strasbourg, September 11–12, 2003), Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the CoE, explained that one of the main emphases of the report was on “the harsh realities Roma women face,” as they are “traditionally responsible for their families’ well-being and often neglect their own health” (2003). Generally, the report pictures Romani women as heroes of their communities who sacrifice their own health for the benefit of those for whom they are caring. However, neither the report nor the speeches delivered at the launching conference emphasized economic injustice and racial and gender discrimination, which prevent Romani women from accessing public healthcare.

As a follow-up to the report, the CoE supported the creation of the International Network of Romani Women (INRW). The network’s aim was to establish bonds of solidarity with national and international organizations of non-Roma women. The understanding of the INRW was that “in the final analysis, issues such as access to healthcare, education or the fight against discrimination

are priority issues for all women, irrespective of their nationality, belief system and ethnic and social origin” (de Boer-Buquicchio, 2003). At the onset of the Network, the CoE supported the understanding that broad changes were needed in Roma communities, in governmental action, in the roles of Romani women themselves:

“Romani women are today required to adapt traditional Roma values to current realities, so that Roma culture can continue to exist as a living culture. They are aware that they can no longer simply play the role of sisters, wives and mothers, but that they must also act as bridges between their community and society. As for the governmental representatives who are attending this conference today, you too must make efforts to ensure that Romani women are treated as fully-fledged interlocutors in all decisions that directly affect Roma community” (de Boer-Buquicchio, 2003).

However, as the above illustrates, the CoE treated minority and diversity issues solely as issues of culture and tradition. The shortfall of this conceptualization is that it does not emphasize the deep-rooted, social-structural causes of inequality. Romani women are seen as “mediators” between their communities and society. This view positions women in the gendered role of “peacemakers,” who seek reconciliation, rather than justice.

The discourse at the level of the CoE did not make any reference to the social and economic differences amongst Romani women, or between them and non-Romani women, and pushed Romani women’s issues under the convenient umbrella of a universal or global womanhood—which is both unfair and unworkable. As the previous section argued, quantitatively and qualitatively, Romani women’s structural position is significantly different from that of non-Romani women. The conceptualization of Romani women’s issues by the CoE is one-dimensional, particularly focusing on the ethnic dimension. The CoE discourse defines Romani women as a subgroup of the Roma population, which needs to be mobilized for the Roma cause in Europe. Romani women are centered in the private domain where cultural continuity is guaranteed along with the identity of family and Roma community. The discourse used by the CoE transformed Romani women into a symbol that united women across different ethnic groups and helped forge a Roma national identity, overriding sub-ethnic divisions. Moreover, Romani women and mothers were seen as interlocutors between their communities and majority societies, a position which reinforced stereotypical “female roles” and downplayed the need to achieve justice for Roma communities and Romani women within their communities. Although the CoE was the first intergovernmental organization that focused on the disadvantages of Romani women, their discourse did not challenge the symbolic gender boundaries, which reproduce the deeply gendered public-private divide, power structures, and the unequal social

and economic distribution both inside and outside Roma communities. In doing so, the CoE did not understand and interrogate Romani women's issues from an intersectional point of view, but rather simplistically "womanized" the domain of ethnicity.

4.3 United Nations: Towards Intersectional Discrimination?

A working paper prepared by Y.K.J. Yeung Sik Yuen in 1999 on the human rights problems and protections of the Roma included the first acknowledgment of Romani women's issues by the UN. The paper was initiated by the UN Commission on Human Rights, Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. In this important document, there is only one paragraph that specifically engages with gender issues; the paragraph refers to sexual violence and the sterilization of Romani women. The same section also noted there was information that "young Roma women are lured or forced into prostitution, ending up as subjects of international trafficking" (Yeung Sik Yuen, 1999: 35). It is important that the working paper specifically highlighted issues which relate to Romani women. However, it failed to analyze the social and economical disadvantages of Romani women.

Within the United Nations system, one of the most active bodies on Romani women's rights is the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The Committee was established in 1982 to monitor compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), widely referred to as the Women's Convention. Romani women's rights advocates enjoy a great access to the monitoring process. In recent years, a number of NGOs working on Romani women's issues have submitted country reports to the CEDAW Committee, which specifically analyzed the situation of Romani women. In the last few years, several shadow reports on the situation of Romani women were submitted to the Committee, as part of the reporting process for the Czech Republic, Croatia, Macedonia, Germany, Romania, Serbia, Spain, and Slovakia. These reports were prepared by the ERRC jointly with local human rights and women's organizations.⁴⁶

Despite the fact that the Committee does not have an enforcement mechanism for CEDAW, they have some political leverage in urging states to comply with international law. CEDAW Committee recommendations usually receive strong media attention. To illustrate, in August 2006, the Committee condemned Hungary for violating CEDAW in connection with the sterilization of

⁵⁰ For the full texts of the above-mentioned countries' submissions, visit: <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2136> (accessed February 28, 2009).

a Romani woman without her consent in January 2001. “Ms. S” had been admitted to the hospital following a miscarriage and was sterilized without being provided with sufficiently clear information on the implications of the procedure. The CEDAW Committee ruled that Hungary’s failure to provide Ms. S. with due compensation for the act violated international human rights law. The Committee held that “appropriate compensation should be paid to Ms. S. commensurate with the gravity of the violation of her rights.” Moreover, the Committee asked the Hungarian government:

“to ensure that the relevant provisions of the Convention and the pertinent paragraphs of the Committee’s general recommendations in relation to women’s reproductive health and rights are known and adhered to by all relevant personnel in public and private health centers, including hospitals and clinics” (ERRC, 2006c).

In the field of reproductive rights of Romani women, the CEDAW Committee made important steps in raising the awareness of the international community about the forced sterilization of Romani women in Central and Eastern European countries, but the Committee has very limited power to enforce their recommendations upon states. To date, the UN mechanism has been one of the most successful and responsive avenues to advocate for Romani women’s rights, especially concerning reproductive rights. The Committee can mobilize the power of public pressure in favor of its recommendations and thus keep states conscious of their legal accountability for discrimination against women. The reporting process has encouraged some states to bring their laws into compliance with CEDAW.

In 2007, Romani women’s and girl’s issues were taken up by the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The 51st session of the Commission, held on February 26 to March 9, 2007, hosted an interactive expert panel discussion on key policy initiatives to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child.⁴⁷ Among others, a specific panel focused on the situation of Romani girls. Through such fora, the UN and its mechanisms and instruments have provided important opportunities for Romani women activists, using a rights-based approach, to participate in global arena. These opportunities have raised awareness about Romani women’s agenda amongst global women’s rights advocates. The UN appears to be in a leading position to advocate for the recognition of the intersectional discrimination of Romani women. As the above suggests, the CEDAW Committee has shown great sensitivity and interest to expose intersectional violence against Romani women.

⁴⁷ I was invited to speak at this panel. In my speech, I emphasized and explored the systemic gendered discrimination against Romani girls and encouraged state representatives to introduce legal and policy measures to prevent their social and economic exclusion (Kóczé, 2007).

4.4 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe: Gender Issues Are a Security Matter

In 2000, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe took a first step to include a specific discussion of Romani women's issues with the elaboration of its report on the situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area (OSCE, 2000). This first step was nothing more than an attempt at including Romani women's issues, since the report mentions Romani women only once, in a very short paragraph related to the context of education and health. The report draws attention to Romani women's capacities "as intermediaries between Roma communities and healthcare providers" should be enhanced (ibid.: 127). As in the case of the CoE, the initial OSCE discourse constructed Romani women as "reconcilers" for the specific area of health, where gender issues are also prominent. In other words, the OSCE attributed Romani women an auxiliary or intermediating role between majority societies and Roma communities, without seeking justice and an end to discriminations against them.

Subsequent developments modified this perspective and in 2003 the Action Plan for Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area emphasized that "the particular situation of Roma and Sinti women should be taken into account in the design and implementation of all policies and programs" (OSCE, 2003: 2). The Action Plan also focused on "the needs of Roma and Sinti women and children in crisis and post-crisis situation" and urged a response to these needs "by providing them with access to healthcare, housing and schooling" (ibid: 14). However, the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan would require a background study to identify the specific issues affecting Romani women. In the absence of a clear assessment of the situation of Romani women, the Action Plan is in danger of turning into yet another example of commitments without implementation. As part of its activities to address the situation of Roma, the OSCE maintains a special office called the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues (CPRSI).

In most OSCE documents related to Roma, gender issues are conceptualized as a security matter; Romani women are a "high risk" group that is vulnerable to trafficking for prostitution and other sexual services. In the past years, the Anti-Trafficking Program of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) sponsored research related to issues of trafficking human beings in Roma communities in the following countries: Albania, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia and Montenegro (CPRSI, 2006). OSCE activities to address the situation of Romani women are rather narrowly confined to the issues that are strictly connected to the OSCE mission and institutional arrangements. However, even within this narrower scope, there is still room for efforts to address

Romani women’s issues and initiate research, for example in the field of political participation of Romani women both as voters and as potential candidates.

4.5 Impact of Intergovernmental Activities

Most major intergovernmental organizations operating in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the wider Europe have recognized, at least politically, the plight of Romani women and the need for specific interventions. However, very few evaluations have been conducted to date to measure the outcomes of actions supported by intergovernmental organizations towards ensuring that Romani women enjoy equal rights. The European Commission and independent researchers have evaluated the Phare⁴⁸ financing for Roma programs, for example, but none of these evaluations addressed the gender dimension in Phare-funded programs for Roma.⁴⁹

In the absence of systematic knowledge about the impact of programs for Roma on Romani women, the only concrete examples of interventions that can be cited as having had a direct impact on Romani women’s lives are the (few) targeted programs.

One particular example of a Phare-funded Roma project in Romania, which one may argue has a dimension of empowerment of Romani women in its implementation, is that of the health mediator. The program was initiated by the Ministry of Health in Romania, in cooperation with Romani CRISS, a Roma NGO. As a result of the success of the program in August 2002, the Ministry of Family and Health passed an ordinance making Roma Health Mediator an official profession within the Romanian public health system (OSI, 2005: 19–20). The program decided that, in order to address the specific health needs of the Roma communities, those nominated as mediators should be women (according to Article 11 of the Order no. 619/2002 of the Minister of Health and Family). The reasoning behind hiring only women in the health mediation program was that the purpose of the program was to achieve a specific objective, “promoting the health of women and children at the level of Roma communities.” Since one of the main responsibilities of the mediator was reproductive health, the Ministry reasoned that mediators should be women. However, an OSI conducted evaluation of the work of health mediators in Finland, Romania, and Bulgaria found that:

⁴⁸ The Phare program is one of the three pre-accession instruments financed by the European Union to assist the applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe in their preparations for joining the Union.

⁴⁹ Some evaluations include: EMS Consortium (2003), Guy and Kovats (2006), and Human Dynamics et al., (2006).

“In its current manifestations, Romani health mediation does not adequately address the need of doubly marginalized groups, such as Romani women, Romani persons with mental or physical disabilities, Romani drug users, and Romani sexual minorities. Some Romanian RHMs have expressed an interest in learning how to address domestic violence, a major unaddressed health concern for Romani women” (OSI, 2005: 5).

In Hungary, Phare funding supported targeted Romani women projects, which built upon the revitalization of traditional roles for women. In 2001, the Phare program funded a project that trained Romani women to work as a *dajka*, a kindergarten assistant to improve the integration of Romani children in the educational system. The program improved the employment of Romani women especially in rural areas and also increased the participation of Romani children in kindergarten. However, Romani women faced hostility in those institutions. Therefore, one of the lessons learned in the project was the need for an anti-bias training for employers and employees to accept active measures on the labor market and maintain an inclusive workplace for Romani women.⁵⁰

Another example of targeted programs for Romani women was the 2003 project “Roma Women Can Do It,” which was implemented by the Stability Pact Gender Task Force (SPGTF) with the cooperation of the OSCE. Between 2005 and 2007, the project continued in Southeastern European countries. The primary goal of this project has to improve gender equality politics and public service, from local to central levels of government. This project was very progressive because it was able to step away from the stereotypical association of Romani women with issues such as reproduction and care and created an image of Romani women as potential political actors that could influence their own communities and majority societies.

In sum, the current review of initiatives to improve the situation of Romani women taken at the level of the major inter-governmental structures—the EU, CoE, UN, and OSCE—showed a significant transnational political agreement on the need to address the disadvantages of Romani women. Some initiatives have also taken shape, beyond the political commitments expressed in various conferences, reports and media statements. However, even these initiatives, which I termed here “positive” policy responses to the situation of Romani women, are limited in as much as they do not see the situation of Romani women as one of intersection of multiple inequalities. In the context of Roma programs, too often intergovernmental organizations such as the EC or the CoE have

⁵⁰ Parts of the Phare program were continued by the EQUAL Community Initiative (CI) in 2004–2006, such as specific support for efforts to empower disadvantaged groups, including Romani women.

reproduced gender stereotypes and reinforced gender norms that prescribe women would naturally be responsible for reproduction and care. Nevertheless, we have also seen that the discourse of the role of the intergovernmental organizations can change (as in the case of OSCE) and in the years to come, we may expect a gradual integration of the concept of multiple discrimination into policy-making and concrete actions. Initially formulated by the international women’s movement at the UN Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing, 1995, and by the transnational anti-racist movement at the UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Durban, 2001, the concept of multiple discrimination has also made significant inroads in the approach of the European Commission. The wider use of this concept by the international community would be a welcome development.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 What Are the Next Steps?

Compared to strictly sectoral approaches, intersectional approaches go deeper to examine the limits of policy making based on gender only or ethnicity only (as in gender equality policies or Roma policies). Too often, Roma policies reproduce gender stereotypes of Romani women being chiefly responsible for the reproduction of and care for their families and communities. Thus, anti-racist interventions end up recreating gender inequalities. At the same time, gender equality policies reproduce ethnic biases. The compound result is that Romani women do not benefit from and sometimes are even adversely affected by both Roma policies and gender equality ones.

The way forward is threefold. Firstly, Roma policies have to integrate the goal of gender equality and consciously work against gender stereotypes. Secondly, gender equality policies have to become more inclusive and integrate anti-racism and diversity among their goals. Finally, specific Romani women policies are also necessary to address some of the most pronounced disadvantages, such as those that Romani women face in employment and health. The last of these requires an understanding of the specificities of Romani women's situation, which lie at the intersection of ethnic, gender, and economic disadvantages.⁵¹ Existing research has focused on only one (poverty) or two (gender and ethnicity) axes of inequality, but almost never on the compound effects and the mechanisms of interaction and intersection of racism, sexism, and poverty.

This research suggests that European institutions are the most resourceful and strategic institutions in pursuing the project of addressing the structural and multiple inequalities affecting the situation of Romani women. The EU, especially after the 1995 Beijing conference on women, has been a strong advocate of gender equality and diversity. The special attention paid to multiple discrimination at the EU-level has created new political leverage for Romani women activists. Various EU institutions now face the challenge of pursuing this focus. Some of the immediate opportunities lie with the European Institute Gender Equality,⁵² which should have a focus on the multiple discrimination

⁵¹ A clear example of Roma policies overlooking gender differences and inequalities in Roma communities are the National Action Plans of the Decade for Roma Inclusion, which, in effect, constitute governmental policies. National Action Plans of the Decade for Roma Inclusion are available at: <http://www.romadecade.org/index.php?content=70> (accessed March 12, 2009).

⁵² For more information on the European Institute for Gender Equality, see http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/gender_equality/gender_institute/index_en.html (accessed March 12, 2009).

Romani women face and should reflect the diversity of European societies (for example, by including Romani women among their staff members). The Fundamental Rights Agency should also include a systematic focus on multiple discrimination.

5.2 Towards Intersectional Methodology

The development of adequate policy responses to the situation of Romani women is hindered by both conceptual problems and lack of baseline data on the situation of Romani women. I propose that intersectional methodologies can provide a useful tool for policy making processes that respond to the complex situation of Romani women.

In the last decade, Romani women’s gender disadvantages have been increasingly recognized, especially in transnational fora. However, the discursive trends require empirical support and intersectional methodologies can provide the ground for collecting missing data and analyzing and generating policies based on existing data. One of the specific characteristics of intersectional analysis is an anti-homogenizing approach that refrains from over-generalization. An intersectional approach scrutinizes the differences within large categories of ethnicity, gender, and class and explores how different social divisions are enmeshed and constructed by each other (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 193–209). The broad and homogenous categories of ethnicity, gender and class are not easily applicable to the study of the situation of Romani women, who are located in a particular juxtaposition, which needs to be explored and challenged with new variables and through new analytical frames.

Intersectional methodologies are contextual and should respond to the specific social and cultural contexts of Romani women’s lives. However, I argue that two important dimensions should be observed in all contexts: (1) *collection of gender-disaggregated ethnic data*; and (2) *empowering data collection methods*.

5.2.1 Collection of Gender-disaggregated Ethnic Data

Intersectional analysis requires the establishment of data collection processes that generate gender-disaggregated ethnic data. National statistical offices and other institutions involved in data collection may generate ethnic data based on the EU Data Protection Directive⁵³ that allows Member States

⁵³ EU Directive on the protection of individual with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data 95/46/EC of 24 October 1995.

of the European Union to collect group anonymous statistical data (ethnically disaggregated). The design of any social policies of affirmative action measures require a strong evidence base that can only be substantiated by quantitative data disaggregated by ethnicity, gender and other socio-economic characteristic.

A key methodological distinction to be observed is that between personal and statistical data. A common argument is that collecting aggregated data on Roma and other ethnic minorities violates data protection law (Petrova, 2004: 5). Other experts contest this view, but warn that data protection legislation must be understood properly. According to Andrea Krizsán, who has written extensively on ethnic statistics, “technical solutions have to be worked out which, on the one hand allow for meaningful collection of ethnic statistics, on the other hand respect the rules of data protection, and assure minorities that their data will not be abused” (2001: 198). Good statistics do not establish a relation between data and specific persons. EU regulations also clearly provide that aggregated data about groups and disaggregated data by ethnicity or any other criteria do not violate personal data protection rights.⁵⁴

A more serious concern with ethnic data comes from Roma communities and Roma activists, who are worried that statistics on Roma could be abused to reinforce racial stereotypes about some Roma groups or about Roma being pathologically violent or criminals (Goldston, 2001: 27). These fears, based on historical experiences, are well founded. As one Roma activist commented, “we have certain historical experience with genocide, and have no guarantee democracy will stay here forever. What if neo-Nazis take over?” However, initiatives to collect data on Roma can mitigate such responses by creating community ownership over data collection and by explaining and offering guarantees of anonymity.

Although an increasing number of independent reports from human rights experts emphasize the importance of collecting data on Roma (EC, 2004; Hollo, 2006), relatively few urge the collection of gender disaggregated data on Roma (Oprea, 2003). One again, the European Union has offered some promising developments in field of gender disaggregated data collection. Ethnicity has been somewhat integrated in the framework of gender data collection. For example, EU documents on

⁵⁴ Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2000 “on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies on the free movement of such data” states: “(a) ‘personal data’ shall mean any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person hereinafter referred to as ‘data subject’; an identifiable person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly in particular by reference to an identification number or to one or more factors specific to his or her physical, physiological, mental, economic, cultural or social identity.”

social inclusion have noted the need to pay particular attention to the needs of *women “belonging to a group experiencing particular integration problems.”*⁵⁵ However, Eurostat data collection and data analysis practices are not equally hopeful. In 2006, a Eurostat report on people outside of the labor force, focusing on “female inactivity, makes no mention of the structural discrimination that affects particular ethnic groups such as Roma and no reference to ethnic discrimination on the labor market (Hardarson, 2006). Another Eurostat publication, “European Social Statistics: Income, Poverty and Social Exclusion” does not include any data on the situation of minority groups, including Roma, which are socially and economically vulnerable or on the impact of socially exclusionary forces on specific ethnic groups (Eurostat, 2002). Furthermore, the European Commission’s report on the social situation in Europe in 2006 provides rich statistical data on social exclusion, but no reference to the situation of Roma or ethnic discrimination (EC, 2003).

5.2.2 Data Collection Methods Based on Empowering Methodologies

The most recent method to provide quantitative and comparable data on development problems and challenges faced by vulnerable groups and Roma in the Central and Southeastern Europe was developed by the UNDP (UNDP, 2005). The UNDP data sets provide quantitative data to calculate the poverty line, poverty depth, employment rate, educational level and housing condition. The UNDP survey used two samples: a Roma sample and a sample for non-Roma that are living in close proximity to Roma populations and facing similar socio-economic conditions. The non-Roma sample was called a “majority booster” (ibid: 8). According to the report: “This approach [...] enables distinguishing various vulnerability factors, in particular those that are related to minority status (and hence can be attributed to various forms of discrimination) from those due to regional disparities or depressed local economies (i.e. due to the fact that populations studied live in less developed territories)” (ibid.). The UNDP survey is one of the very few multinational, comprehensive and comparative research that disaggregated data by gender. The survey was carried in Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, and Kosovo, where there is a significant number of Roma population.

Community action research provides an empowering method for collecting data on the situation of Romani women. One of the few examples of such research was conducted in Romania by trained

⁵⁵ See: Objectives in the Fight against Poverty and Social Inclusion, laid down by the European Council. Brussels, 30 November 2000. http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_inclusion/docs/approb_en.pdf (accessed March 2009).

Romani activists (Surdu and Surdu, 2006). The research was supported by the Open Society Institute's Roma Participation Program. The research methodology provides for an intensive participation of Romani women, an approach which the authors call an "empowering methodology." Romani women were included at all stages of the elaboration and realization of the research. Furthermore, most members of the research team were Romani women with an appropriate educational background and they were also trained to acquire all the necessary research skills for the data collection process. The results are not representative for the entire population in Romania, but the report nevertheless put forward issues, such as lack of education, employment, housing, very poor health condition and lack of participation in political life which disproportionately affect Romani women.

To conclude, I follow the influential Black feminist bell hooks in suggesting that feminism is a "transformational politic" (hooks, 1995; 1989). Intersectionality as a concept and theoretical framework has made available a new approach and research paradigm to explore the position of Romani women and the structural processes in their lives. At the same time, notions of intersectionality function as "open possibilities" that are constantly filled with meaning and political content by various actors in Central and Eastern Europe, including the Romani women's movement (among the most vocal), the Roma movement, human rights activists, international inter-governmental organizations and international NGOs and, importantly, national decision makers. The concept of intersectionality partly originates in critical feminist theory on race whose proponents, like Crenshaw, certainly wanted to challenge the existing feminist and anti-racist discourses. The meeting of feminism and Romani politics has already transformed internal discourses within the Roma movements. It could also make a difference in gender policy making and social inclusion policy making. Dominant anti-discrimination policies are not sufficient to address various forms of intersecting inequalities in social policies. The development of intersectional approaches and methods might bring a new transformational politics in Europe, which will recognize and address Romani women's issues and social position.

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