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Macedonia: Government's failure to address double discrimination against Romani women and girls

*I wanted to go to school but we needed to pay for food, for clothes.
My mother did not have any education. My father died when he was very young.
So I needed to take care of myself and there was no money for school.*

Silvana, a Romani woman talking to Amnesty International

Romani women in Macedonia suffer double discrimination -- on the grounds of their gender and their ethnicity, according to Amnesty International. In a report published today, the organization calls on the Macedonian authorities to break the pattern of discrimination against Romani women.

"This long-recognized double discrimination is widespread, routine and pervasive. Romani women and girls suffer from intersecting and overlapping forms of discrimination which, in many cases, go hand in hand with poverty," said Sian Jones, Amnesty International's researcher on Macedonia.

Amnesty International's report, *Macedonia: The government's failure to uphold the rights of Romani women and girls*, provides evidence of discrimination against Romani women in accessing three basic human rights: the right to education, the right to employment and the right to health, as well as violence against women as a form of discrimination.

The report also notes that significant number of Roma, including Romani women, who do not have birth certificates or citizenship cannot access basic services, including education, social insurance and health care.

"At school, Romani girls are faced with stereotyped low expectations from teachers which, along with the absence of free primary education, leads to the majority of girls dropping out of school before they complete their education," Sian Jones said.

The failure of the Macedonian authorities to guarantee the right to free and compulsory education means that more than half of Romani women -- an estimated 66 per cent -- are only able to find work in the informal economy, unprotected by labour or health and safety laws. Those employed by state institutions work predominantly as cleaners. Only a small percentage of university-educated Romani women are able to find employment in professional or managerial posts.

"When Romani women do find work they often face verbal abuse and harassment from their employers. Romani women work in worse conditions, for longer hours and for lower pay than non-Romani women," Sian Jones said.

Romani women find it very difficult, in some cases impossible, to secure health care for themselves or for their children. They may not have health insurance at all or because of poverty they may not be able to afford basic medicines or even medical treatment. In addition, Romani women may face direct discrimination by health workers, including in being refused access to treatment.

"The Macedonian government has, to date, failed to adopt a comprehensive anti-discrimination framework that would enable Romani women to secure their rights and challenge abuses."

Violence against women occurs in all communities and across all social groups in Macedonia. An estimated 70 per cent of Romani women have reported domestic abuse. However, when Romani women report -- if they report such violence at all -- law enforcement officers often fail to respond appropriately and may further subject them to racist abuse and discriminatory treatment.

Amnesty International is concerned that successive governments have consistently failed to address the human rights of Roma. The organization is also concerned that the current administration has failed to respond to the challenge of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, which aimed to introduce measures to ensure that all Roma in Macedonia are guaranteed their rights including access to education, work, health care and adequate housing. Where action has been taken, it has not been taken by the government, but rather by domestic and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including Romani NGOs, and with international funding.

Amnesty International calls on the European Union to continue their monitoring of the state's progress towards meeting the human rights standards set out for candidate member countries, ensuring that with respect to the protection and improvement of the rights of minorities, the rights of Romani women and girls are fully considered.

"If racial and gender discrimination persist, Romani women are unlikely to escape the cycle of poor education that traps them in low-paid jobs, while further discrimination denies them access to health care and social security and condemns many to a life of poverty," Sian Jones said.

See: *Macedonia: Little by little we women have learned our rights: the government's failure to uphold the rights of Romani women and girls*, AI Index: EUR 65/004/2007
<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engneur650042007>
Macedonia: "Little by little we women have learned our rights": The Macedonian government's failure to uphold the rights of Romani women and girls: Summary (AI Index: EUR 65/003/2007)
<http://web.amnesty.org/engneur650032007> (The summary of the report is also available in Macedonian)

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