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CEDAW Alternative Report

Platforma Femeilor Rome ROMNI and Asociația Națională a Mediatorilor Comunitari

Submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

Republic of Moldova

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1. Introduction

This alternative report is submitted by **Platforma Femeilor Rome ROMNI / Roma Women Platform ROMNI, ROMNI and Asociația Națională a Mediatorilor Comunitari / National Association of Community Mediators, ANMC**, to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) for its review of Republic of Moldova's implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The report focuses on the situation of Roma women and girls in Moldova, including refugees from Ukraine, highlighting the intersectional discrimination they face and the gaps in implementation of previous CEDAW recommendations.

Platforma Femeilor Rome din Moldova **ROMNI** is a non-governmental organization dedicated to protecting and promoting the rights of Roma women in Moldova. Our report draws on extensive fieldwork, information sessions, and individual direct assistance provided to local and refugee Roma women and girls across multiple localities in Moldova, including remote areas, UTA Gagauzia and the Transnistrian region.

The purpose of the **ANMC** is to protect the civil, economic, social, cultural and other legitimate rights and freedoms of Roma people, as well as to promote the function and develop the potential of community mediators.

Currently, 48 community mediators operate in several regions, covering more than 35 localities in the country.

Sources

1. Results of the focus-groups, information sessions, interviews, GBV cases from 2022-2025 years of both submitting entities
2. Center for Policy and Research, "Alternative Report Submitted to the 112th Session (08 April-26 April 2024) of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination" (February 2024)

3. European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), "ECRI Report on the Republic of Moldova" (2023)

2. Executive Summary

The report draws on recent fieldwork, consultations, focus-groups and data analysis conducted between 2023–2025, with a strong emphasis on intersectionality, human rights standards, and the lived experiences of Roma women, refugee women from Ukraine, survivors of gender-based violence (GBV), and women with disabilities.

Key Findings

1. Persistent Discrimination Against Roma Women

Roma women face systemic barriers in education, employment, and healthcare. Discriminatory attitudes are entrenched in both public institutions and private interactions, leading to underreporting of abuses and minimal access to legal remedies.

2. Limited Access to Justice for GBV Survivors

Roma women and refugees face increased risk of gender-based violence and remain underserved by state protection systems. Language barriers, lack of identification documents, Low levels of trust in law enforcement authorities and fear of stigma discourage survivors from seeking help.

3. Reproductive Rights

Many Roma women and girls, particularly those who are illiterate, have extremely limited access to accurate information about reproductive health, family planning, and their rights.

4. Lack of Disaggregated Data and Inclusion

The State fails to collect and report sex- and ethnicity-disaggregated data, impeding evidence-based policymaking and resource allocation for minority and vulnerable women.

5. Insufficient Implementation of Legal Reforms

Despite legal improvements, including the ratification of relevant international instruments, implementation is weak. Roma women are rarely included in monitoring or advisory bodies related to CEDAW or GBV strategies.

Priority Concerns

- Failure to effectively implement the National Program for Roma Population Support.
- Inadequate training of service providers on anti-discrimination, intersectionality, and Roma cultural competencies.
- No specific budget allocations for programs targeting Roma or refugee women.
- Lack of Roma women's representation in public decision-making bodies.

Key Recommendations

1. **Develop and fund targeted national programs** that address the unique needs of Roma women and girls, including in education, health, and employment.
2. **Establish a robust monitoring mechanism** that includes Roma women and CSOs in evaluating the implementation of gender equality frameworks.
3. **Ensure accessible, multilingual services** for survivors of GBV, including mobile support units and culturally competent staff.
4. **Improve data systems** to include ethnic and gender-based disaggregation in official statistics.
5. **Guarantee the participation of Roma and refugee women** in all CEDAW-related consultations, planning, and follow-up mechanisms.

3. Institutional Mechanisms and Gender Mainstreaming

Findings

Our research reveals significant gaps in the institutional framework for addressing the needs of Roma women in Moldova:

1. **Absence of Dedicated Authorities:** There is a critical lack of authorities specifically dedicated to addressing the needs and challenges of the Roma population, particularly of Roma women.
2. **Inadequate Gender Dimension:** The National Program for Roma Population Support¹ fails to incorporate a substantive gender dimension, resulting in policies and interventions that do not adequately address the specific challenges faced by Roma women and girls.
3. **Lack of Gender-Focused Initiatives:** in some localities despite over 12 reported information sessions provided on different topics like vaccination, education, employment, leadership, but only ROMNI organized informational sessions on gender equality, GBV and reproductive rights in Romani dialects.
4. **The Roma feminist movement currently faces significant challenges in establishing and sustaining local initiative groups that could serve as the foundation for a future national Roma feminist movement.** There is a marked absence of an intersectional approach and related policies within Roma civil society. This gap is further exacerbated by a limited understanding and recognition of intersectionality, particularly among male Roma leaders.

Impact on Roma Women

The absence of gender-sensitive institutional mechanisms creates a cycle where Roma women's issues remain invisible in policy-making and implementation:

- Roma women are excluded from decision-making processes that directly affect their lives
- Gender-specific needs are not identified or addressed in Roma-focused programs
- Resources are not allocated to initiatives that would specifically benefit Roma women and girls

¹ https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=133208&lang=ro

4. Discrimination and Racism

Findings

Roma women in Moldova face multiple forms of discrimination based on both their ethnicity and gender:

1. **Intersectional Discrimination:** Roma women experience discrimination not only as Roma individuals but also as women, creating unique barriers that are not adequately addressed by anti-discrimination policies.
2. **Institutional Racism:** Evidence from our fieldwork indicates persistent discrimination against Roma women by public institutions, including healthcare facilities, educational institutions, and social service providers, as in the recent case of the access to asylum in Belgium.²
3. **ECRI Findings:** The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has highlighted the particular vulnerability of Roma women in Moldova, noting that they face "aggravated discrimination" that limits their access to education, employment, healthcare, and housing.
4. **Barriers to Redress:** Roma women who experience discrimination often lack access to effective remedy mechanisms, compounded by low awareness of their rights and limited legal literacy.

Impact on Roma Women

These discriminatory practices have severe consequences:

- Limited access to essential services and opportunities
- Perpetuation of poverty and marginalization
- Increased vulnerability to violence and exploitation
- Distrust in public institutions and authorities

²<https://www.ziarulnational.md/ministrul-belgian-al-migratiei-avertizeaza-la-chisinau-stop-abuzurilor-de-azil-din-moldova-in-belgia/>
https://agora.md/2025/05/14/femeile-rome-condamna-declaratiile-ministrei-belgiene-despre-turismul-d-e-azil-sunt-generalizari-periculoase-si-discriminatorii?fbclid=IwY2xjawKUOvVleHRuA2FbQlxMQBicmlKETFITU90MG1TaGI6WDM2U3RkAR7ms4ZmlsR48DWetIK4KHPXBOnlzf8RT0zI5l_9RUEohX9vO1UJUF9UFk2h-w_aem_kUI0zaFToWFljPHriiR1pg

5. Gender Inequality and Participation in Public Life

Findings

1. **Limited Political Participation:** Roma women are severely underrepresented in political and public decision-making processes at all levels - local, regional, and national.
2. **Intergenerational Power Dynamics:** Our fieldwork revealed problematic power dynamics within Roma communities that often silence younger women's voices. In three separate information sessions, young women were actively discouraged from speaking by older community members with statements like "you are young, you shut up, you don't know!"
3. **Social Isolation:** Many Roma women, especially in traditional communities, experience significant social isolation. For many participants, attending training sessions represented a rare opportunity for socialization outside the home.
4. **Lack of Encouragement:** There is an observed lack of support and encouragement among women, particularly for younger women seeking to advance or speak up in public forums.
5. **Low Awareness of Rights:** Approximately 90% of beneficiaries in our information sessions did not know where to seek help in case of rights violations, severely limiting their ability to advocate for themselves.

Impact on Roma Women

These barriers to participation have far-reaching consequences:

- Exclusion from decisions that directly affect their lives and communities
- Reinforcement of traditional gender roles that limit women's autonomy
- Perpetuation of intergenerational cycles of disempowerment
- Lack of visible role models for younger Roma women and girls

6. Roma women and girls: multiple vulnerabilities and barriers in access to services

Findings

Roma women and girls: multiple vulnerabilities and barriers in access to services:

- 1. Literacy and Digital Exclusion:** A significant proportion of local and refugee Roma women in Moldova experience functional illiteracy, severely limiting their access to information, essential services, and rights-based education. This literacy gap is compounded by a pronounced digital divide; many have never utilized email or navigated official online platforms, relying instead on informal networks for information. The scarcity of materials in Romani dialects, particularly audio-visual resources, further exacerbates their exclusion, especially as key services and humanitarian responses increasingly transition to digital platforms.
- 2. Legal Awareness and Access to Justice:** There is a pervasive lack of awareness among Roma women regarding avenues for legal recourse in instances of rights violations. Feedback from community sessions often includes sentiments such as, “Thank you, now we know where to go,” highlighting the critical need for sustained grassroots outreach and legal literacy initiatives. For instance, awareness of governmental programs like “Ajutor la contor” is minimal among Roma women, leading to underutilization of available support and heightened vulnerability. Misinformation, particularly among refugee populations, further impedes access to social services.
- 3. Intersectional Barriers in Accessing Services:** Roma families with members who have disabilities encounter compounded challenges in accessing services. These include physical and infrastructural barriers, systemic discrimination, and inadequate communication with service providers. Instances such as the lack of accessible transportation in areas like Vatra and insufficient inclusive outreach from institutions underscore the need for comprehensive support mechanisms. Effective case management, encompassing legal and psycho-social assistance over extended periods, is essential to address these multifaceted barriers.
- 4. Discrimination in Shelter Access:** Roma women, particularly those who are refugees or have disabilities, face significant obstacles in accessing shelters for survivors of gender-based violence. Reports indicate practices of refusal based on internal regulations, which are neither public nor transparent. This discriminatory practice leaves many victims without safe refuge, perpetuating cycles of abuse and marginalization.

Impact on Roma Women

- These access barriers create severe disadvantages:
- Inability to benefit from existing services and support programs
- Increased vulnerability to poverty and economic insecurity
- Reduced ability to advocate for their rights and needs
- Reliance on informal and potentially exploitative information channels

7. Gender-Based Violence

Findings

1. **Taboo Subject:** Discussions around gender-based violence remain largely taboo within Roma communities. Information sessions conducted in 2024 marked the first instances where such topics were openly addressed in ROMANI dialects with local and refugee Roma women, especially community based.
2. **Reluctance to Report:** Despite increased awareness, a significant majority of Roma women expressed reluctance to report marital rape to authorities, citing distrust in the police, fears of racism, and feelings of shame. During sessions, 99% of women stated they would not report their husbands to the police if they experienced marital rape.
3. **Cyclical Patterns:** Our case studies reveal the cyclical nature of violence, with survivors often returning to abusive situations due to economic dependence, family pressure, and lack of sustainable alternatives.
4. **Shelter Access Discrimination:** Roma women, particularly refugees or those with disabilities, face significant obstacles in accessing shelters for survivors of gender-based violence. Reports indicate practices of refusal based on internal regulations that are neither public nor transparent. In one documented case, a shelter initially accepted a refugee woman but later refused when they discovered she spoke only Ukrainian and Russian, claiming their psychologist speaks only Romanian.
5. **Intergenerational Conflicts:** The relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law in many Roma families involves significant power imbalances, with the latter often treated as servants and subjected to psychological abuse even after childbirth.
6. **Specialized Services Needed:** In at least two cases, Roma survivors of gender-based violence expressly refused existing specialized services, specifically requesting services tailored for Roma women due to lack of trust in mainstream institutions.

Impact on Roma Women

The consequences of inadequate GBV response include:

- Continued exposure to violence and trauma
- Normalization of abuse across generations
- Distrust in protection mechanisms
- Lack of safe pathways out of abusive situations

8. Reproductive Rights

Findings

1. **Reproductive Violence:** Issues related to reproductive rights and violence, including marital rape and forced marriage, remain largely taboo within Roma communities. The information sessions conducted in 2024 represented the first time these topics were openly discussed with local and refugee Roma women.
2. **Generational Divides:** Opinions regarding reproductive rights were strongly polarized across different generations. Some older women expressed traditional views that "the will of the husband must be respected" as a "marital obligation," while younger women demonstrated more awareness of their rights to bodily autonomy.
3. **Positive Impact of Education:** Following education about consent and reproductive rights, some participants changed their views. After one session on reproductive violence, a case of marital rape was reported to ROMNI, indicating the importance of education in enabling women to recognize and name their experiences.
4. **Lack of Culturally Sensitive Services:** Roma women lack access to reproductive health services that are culturally sensitive and free from discrimination, limiting their ability to make informed choices about their bodies and families.
5. **Limited Access to Information:** Many Roma women, particularly those who are illiterate, have extremely limited access to accurate information about reproductive health, family planning, and their rights.

Impact on Roma Women

The denial of reproductive rights has profound consequences:

- **Lack of bodily autonomy and self-determination**
- **Health risks associated with limited reproductive healthcare**
- **Perpetuation of harmful traditional practices**
- **Intergenerational transmission of misinformation**

9. Education of Roma Girls

Findings

- 1. Barriers to Education:** Roma girls face multiple barriers to accessing quality education, including direct and indirect discrimination, poverty, early marriage, and gender-based stereotypes within their communities.
- 2. Administrative Barriers:** Administrative processes that fail to accommodate the needs of illiterate parents create additional obstacles. In one case, a Roma mother seeking to enroll her child in kindergarten was sent home by the administration instead of being assisted with the digital registration platform, constituting a form of indirect discrimination.
- 3. ECRI Concerns:** The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has highlighted the particularly low educational attainment of Roma girls in Moldova, noting that they are often the first to be withdrawn from school when families face economic difficulties.
- 4. Intergenerational Impact:** Low literacy levels among current generations of Roma women perpetuate a cycle of educational disadvantage, with illiterate mothers less able to support their daughters' education or navigate educational systems.
- 5. Digital Divide:** The increasing digitalization of educational processes and resources creates additional barriers for Roma girls from disadvantaged backgrounds who lack access to technology and digital skills.

Impact on Roma Girls

Educational barriers have lifelong consequences:

- Limited employment opportunities**
- Increased economic dependence**
- Perpetuation of poverty cycles**
- Reduced capacity to advocate for rights**

10. Recommendations

1. Institutional Mechanisms and Gender Mainstreaming

1. Establish dedicated authorities specifically responsible for addressing Roma women's issues within the national machinery for gender equality.
2. Integrate a substantive gender dimension into the National Program for Roma Support, with specific targets, indicators, and budget allocations for advancing Roma women's rights.
3. Consolidation of the Roma feminist movement
4. Mandate gender impact assessments for all policies and programs targeting Roma communities.
5. Provide gender equality training for all Roma community mediators, with particular emphasis on male mediators.

2. Discrimination and Racism

1. Develop targeted anti-discrimination programs that address the intersectional discrimination faced by Roma women.
2. Establish effective monitoring mechanisms to track and address discriminatory practices against Roma women in public institutions.
3. Implement the recommendations of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) regarding the protection of Roma women from "aggravated discrimination."
4. Ensure transparent and non-discriminatory access to shelters and support services for all survivors of gender-based violence, regardless of ethnicity or disability status.
5. Conduct public awareness campaigns to combat stereotypes and prejudice against Roma women.

3. Gender Inequality and Participation in Public Life

1. Implement special measures to increase the participation of Roma women in political decision-making processes at all levels.
2. Support the development of leadership programs specifically targeting young Roma women and girls.
3. Create safe spaces for Roma women to gather, share experiences, and develop collective advocacy strategies.
4. Establish mentorship programs pairing experienced Roma activists with younger women.
5. Provide civic education programs tailored to the needs of Roma women, with special attention to those with limited literacy.

4. Access to Services

1. Enhance literacy and digital inclusion programs specifically targeting Roma women, including the development of resources in Romani dialects.

2. Develop audio-visual materials on available services and rights in Romani to overcome literacy barriers.
3. Strengthen Legal Literacy and Access: Expand grassroots legal education initiatives and ensure the availability of legal aid services tailored to the needs of Roma women.
4. Train service providers on culturally sensitive approaches to working with Roma women.
5. Establish mobile outreach services to reach isolated Roma communities.
6. Address Intersectional Barriers: Develop comprehensive support systems for Roma families with disabilities, encompassing accessible infrastructure, inclusive communication, and sustained case management.
7. Create "one-stop-shop" service centers in areas with significant Roma populations, with Roma mediators present to facilitate access.
8. Ensure Equitable Shelter Access: Establish transparent policies to guarantee that all survivors of gender-based violence, regardless of ethnicity or disability, have equal access to shelter and support services.

5. Gender-Based Violence

1. Develop specialized GBV services tailored to the needs of Roma women, with particular attention to cultural sensitivity and trust-building.
2. Implement culturally sensitive programs to address reproductive violence, build trust in law enforcement, and encourage reporting of abuses.
3. Train law enforcement officers on responding to GBV cases involving Roma women in a non-discriminatory and culturally appropriate manner.
4. Establish emergency and long-term shelter solutions specifically designed to accommodate the needs of Roma women and their children.
5. Create community-based prevention programs that engage both women and men in Roma communities.
6. Ensure all GBV services are accessible to women with disabilities and those speaking minority languages.
7. Establish transparent policies to guarantee that all survivors of gender-based violence, regardless of ethnicity or disability, have equal access to shelter and support services.

6. Reproductive Rights

1. Develop culturally sensitive sexual and reproductive health education programs for Roma communities, with special attention to involving both young and older women.
2. Ensure access to culturally appropriate reproductive health services free from discrimination.
3. Train healthcare providers on working with Roma women in a respectful and non-discriminatory manner.
4. Create safe spaces for intergenerational dialogue on reproductive rights within Roma communities.

5. Develop audio-visual materials on reproductive rights in Romani to overcome literacy barriers.

7. Education of Roma Girls

1. Implement targeted programs to support the education of Roma girls, including scholarships, mentoring, and after-school support.
2. Train educational institutions on providing appropriate support to Roma parents with limited literacy, including assistance with administrative procedures.
3. Develop programs to address harmful gender stereotypes that limit Roma girls' educational opportunities.
4. Create bridging programs to support Roma girls' transition from primary to secondary education.
5. Establish early intervention programs to identify and address barriers to Roma girls' education before they lead to dropout.

8. Data Collection and Monitoring

1. Improve the collection of disaggregated data on the situation of Roma women and girls across all sectors.
2. Establish effective monitoring mechanisms to track progress in implementing these recommendations.
3. Ensure the meaningful participation of Roma women's organizations in monitoring and evaluation processes.
4. Conduct regular assessments of the impact of policies and programs on Roma women and girls.
5. Publish annual reports on the status of implementation of CEDAW recommendations related to Roma women.