



**Център Амалипе**



## **Domestic violence and in particular HRV in Bulgaria**

HRV is a comparatively new topic for Bulgarian society. For Bulgaria HRV and its extent is a hidden phenomenon. The issue of HRV is at the intersection of several human rights problems, which characterize the Bulgarian reality as well- the problem of women's rights and violence against women, of child's rights, of social-economic rights and the marginalization of some vulnerable groups of the society, of religious rights and stereotypes and the clash of some traditional practices with the universal human rights, etc. Moreover, the Balkans are a place where violence is part of the growth of children, ie corrective measure. The same refers to some traditional groups like the Roma community. It is considered an element of the normal course of life having a number of traditional sayings and proverbs related to it. One of them, for example, is "Beat your daughter now, not to beat your head later".

The problem of violence, and namely, of HRV, has not been a specific issue in the work neither of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Demographic Issues, nor any other institution: the State Agency for Child Protection which has the function of elaborating policies and a methodological function for children's issues, and so on.

For 2010 organizations involved in providing protection and assistance to victims of domestic violence or potential ones have registered about 4,800 persons who sought help or advice. Approximately 380 of them are accommodated in one of the six shelters in Sofia, Varna, Burgas, Pleven, Silistra and Pernik. Approximately 70% out of those victims notifying domestic violence are women and 30% - children. The new cases in 2010 under the law against domestic violence are around 500.

According to recent research by NPOC done in 125 families in 55 cities:

- 49,2% consider domestic violence as a private problem
- 50.08% believe that this is a problem of society
- The men more often than women tend to view domestic violence as a personal problem that should not be discussed outside of the family.
- The majority of women believe that violence is primarily a social problem and blame society for his passivity and indifference.
- 60% of those surveyed do not know the victims of physical violence
- 37.2% knew victims of psychological violence
- 12.8% of surveyed knew victims of sexual violence
- If a relative or friend of suffered, 66.5% of surveyed would be advised victims to contact the police, 41.4% to contact relatives 35.9% to friends, 35.2% to social services, 10.6% to NGOs services.

One of the examples of harmful traditional practices is the issues of early marriages still practiced in some layers of the Roma community in Bulgaria.

The early marriages (it is actually about cohabitation, establishment of family and not for marriage, because it is lacking and in many cases a legal act of marriage is impossible) in the Roma community is a topic which is currently attracting the attention of the so called “wide society” and “public opinion”. On one side, the early marriages are often combined with “arranged marriages” and even “forced marriages”: usually the parents themselves are those who initiate this form of cohabitation. Even more often they lead to “drop-out”, i.e. to early drop-out of school which is related with limitation of the following suitable social development and realization. The early marriages are usually followed by “early births” as far as (at least within the traditional Roma families and the marginalized) the married woman is expected to prove that she can give a birth: she is highly appreciated as a prolonger of the family and if she cannot fulfill this role she has to bear one of the heaviest stigmas. Not even rare early marriages are accompanied by different forms of domestic violence, divorces, and health diseases among the young mothers and so on. I.e. we could see the whole aspect of negative phenomena where each European society is (or at least should be) painfully sensitive to each of them. On the other hand, the early Roma marriages seem curious, exotic and not understandable: a remain of “not-European marriage model” (typical for the people who live east of the Trieste – St. Petersburg line, in accordance with the classification of John Hajnal). This “exotics” is often related with the absolute stigmatization of the whole Roma community as lagging and unable for development generator of children, accompanied by even more expressive oblivion that the early marriages were also typical to not long time ago for the majority of the people on east of Trieste – St. Petersburg, (and a bit before that – for all of the European people), as well as with the neglecting of the fact that not all Roma groups, families and social practice the early marriages.

On the opposite of the wide public interest, a discussion on the early marriages rarely took place within the Roma community. Roma NGOs, formal and informal leaders and activists are avoiding this issue, because they are afraid not to enforce the stigma towards the community, and often because of disbelief, that they could oppose this practice. This is another barrier for overcoming the early marriages and all accompanying negative effects.

### **Legislation**

Since 2009 Bulgaria has finally adopted the Law for Protection against Domestic Violence (effective 22.12.2009). The law regulates the rights of victims of domestic violence, protective measures and procedures for their enforcement. The benefit of all governmental and non - governmental organizations working on this problem is clearly writhed fact in Article 6 Section 3 of the Act on Protection against Domestic Violence "The executive authorities and / or legal entities registered in accordance with Art. 18, para. 2 and 3 of the Social Assistance Act and Art. 45 of the legal non-profit, working to protect victims of domestic violence.

Each year by March 31 the Council of Ministers accepts a National Programme for Prevention and Protection against Domestic Violence. Funds to finance the implementation of obligations under the National Program of para. 5 are determined annually by the state budget of Republic of Bulgaria for the year to the budgets of relevant ministries as defined in the program.

In 2010 Rules implementing the Act against domestic violence that defines the parameters of the implementation of measures for protection from domestic violence, the interaction

between government and NGOs working on this problem and the mechanism for annual funding for activities to implement the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence were adopted. Achieved is a change in regulations which allows emergency accommodation for women and children in situations of violence in crisis centers and shelters of NGOs.

Regarding early marriages the Bulgarian legislation is in turn with the European legislation. It rejects marriages up to 16 years old, and between 16 and 18 years old marriages are allowed only with the consent of both youngsters and parents. In this regard Bulgaria does not differ from many other European countries. The children at age of 14 years old until 18 years old are minor. This period is a transition period to an age when there is mental and spiritual maturation that would give the opportunity for limited participation in taking rights and obligations. The acts of minors have its significance for the law if it is exercised with the consent of their parents or guardians, as individually they can solely conclude small ordinary transactions for meeting their current needs and dispose with that they have obtained by their own labor.

### **Criminal law**

The criminal law defines the minimum age for expression of consent for sexual intercourse – completed 14 years old. The sexual intercourse with a girl under 14 years old is considered a crime, regardless of whether the child has wishfully participated or not. With the completion of 14 years old the law is protecting the child from undesired sexual intercourse through the requirement to understand “the feature and meaning of the accomplished”. Crimes against youth are in direct relation with the tradition of settled marriages. Anybody using parental authority and forces its child before the age of 16 years old to live with someone in matrimony is subject of punishment. For a crime is declared also the life in matrimony between adult and a girl under the age of 16 years old. Subject of sanction is also the inciting and facilitating of such a marital cohabitation.

The marital ransom is a crime only if it is for a girl under the age of 16 years old. A parent or any other relative that received the ransom and allows his daughter or relative under the age of 16 years old to life in marital cohabitation is subject of punishment. A specific feature of significant importance is if between the victim and the perpetrator is concluded marriage before the execution of the punishment or conclusion of the court investigation criminal responsibility is not implied. Thus, serious crimes are compensated if marriage is concluded between the perpetrator and the victim.

### **Civil law**

The regulations of the Domestic code are enforced only if the civil marriage concluded in the form prescribed by the Code will have consequences which laws relate to marriage. Thus, not only the different religious and cultural related rituals and practices but the newly established “marital cohabitation” does not bring forth any valid juridical consequences. *Marriage can be concluded only if there is evident mutual and free consent between adult man and woman, stated in person and simultaneously before a civil servant in given municipal administration.* Legally recognized marriage is possible with a person under the age of 16 years old<sup>1</sup>, as an exception of the major rule, only if important reasons are implying that.

For the purposes of the research under “**Prevention of forced marriages**” project<sup>2</sup>, implemented by Centre Amalipe in 2010, a complex questionnaire was developed. The

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<sup>1</sup> *De lege ferenda* in the part of the study examining the theoretical fields of the issue one could find a reasonable opinion that in each marriage, where one of the sides is a person under 18 years old, should be decided as an early marriage, and often as a forced marriage.

research of the early marriages in the Roma communities in Bulgaria covered 595 households, living in segregated residential areas with predominant Roma population. Within the frames of the field-work, information for the marriages and the partnerships of 2746 individuals has been collected.

Studies on the Roma living culture and way of life distinguish several types of traditional marriage amongst Roma in Bulgaria. Although they are not legally recognized today they have its historic parallels in number of societies including the Roman law, as well as in the Bulgarian traditional culture until the mid XX century. The custom of “buying the bride” is most typical for Kalderashi, Burgudjii and Thracian Kalaidjii; however it is often met between some of the subgroups of Horahane and Dasikane Roma.

Despite the distorted idea of the syntagma of “buying the bride” and “brides ‘market” from scientific point of view it is not actually buying the girl, but rather buying her “honor” – the right of the boy to take her virginity and the right of the boy’s family to associate future children towards his kinship (Pamporov, 2006). According to the theoretic construction in sociology and social anthropology the “ransom for the bride” is payment given as compensation to the family for its loss, when she leaves her home for marriage. And because amongst ethnic groups with patriarchal social organization the woman belongs to the kinship of her father the compensation has to be paid to that kinship. One of the main functions of payment in marriage is to define the exact social status of children from the marriage.

The results of number of ethnographic and sociologic studies amongst Roma in Bulgaria indicate that the purchase of the brides has negative effect in terms of marriage age and the early/forced marriages as whole. In some local communities after the onset of the first menstruation the girl is suspended from school in order not to “be deceived” to lose her virginity. The fear that the girl could meet a boy and have sexual intercourse before her marriage enforces parents to marry their daughters at a relatively early age. Since girls at this age are yet children and do not recognize “what is good for them” the parents are choosing the marital partner – more common amongst boy’s parents that have decided that it is time to get him married (Pamporov 2003, Pamporov 2006, Pamporov 2009).

The custom of “eloping” or “stealing bride” in the common case is typical for those Roma groups amongst which the custom of buying brides is in process of living down or is already surmounted. With that custom (eloping) the social legitimacy of marriage progress only by the consumption of the sexual relationship and a proof for this is the blood from the defloration. De facto eloping is met also with other groups in which buying the bride is a lead model. From this point of view some authors consider it as an attempt to avoid paying ransom (Liegeois 1994: 66; Marushiakova & Popov 1993: 182; Tomova 1995: 38). In some cases this hypothesis is valid, however in other it is not, because the “ransom” can be demanded again. Usually in this case the girl’s family, based on the official legislation of the country is blackmailing the boy’s family for exact amount as threatening with trial and prison (Pamporov 2003, Pamporov 2006).

The cases when eloping is related with an attempt to avoid the contracted by the parents partner also is affecting the early marriages, because the purpose is the first sexual intercourse (that legitimates this type of marriage) to take place before the first marital night (legitimated by the ransom, paid for the bride).

The third type of traditional marriage with Roma is related with preliminary/previous engagement. In this case the payment is rather symbolic (the same with filling the show of the bride before leaving her home in the contemporary wedding rituals in all ethnic groups in Bulgaria). An important sign” however is the one that the boy’s family is giving (ring,

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<sup>2</sup> Reference number **JLS/2008/DAP3/AG/1298-30-CE-03124780080**

bracelet, and earrings). With this type of marriages the parents again negotiate the conditions – when the youngers are going to get married, where shall they live, what will be the size of the dowry (Pamporov, 2006). Similarly to the previous two types of traditional marriages with this one again there is a risk of forced marriage especially in regard to the girl of course it has negative effect on the early age for first marriage.

The three typical forms of marriage amongst Roma are not legally recognized by the macro society without the evidence of civil act. In the years of socialist regime the unregistered cohabitation on family basis are constantly criticized.

The present study reveals that 74.1% of Roma above 10 years old have permanent partner, with whom they are living together. In the representative sample for persons above 10 years old (where one person per household reports data for the rest of the household), the average age for start of the cohabitation with partner is 18 years and 8 months. The most common age for onset of cohabitation is 17 years old, while the earliest is 10 years old.<sup>3</sup> At the age of 16 years old, 20% of Roma have already entered in cohabitation with a partner as family. At age of 18 years old the share of persons in cohabitation with partner is 50%, and at the age of 21 years 80% of the living in segregated mahala have partner. According the data of the same sample 52 % of the persons above 10 years have concluded marriage, whole 55.5% of them are living with a partner as family before concluding marriage.

In the representative sample for persons above 15 years (where the interviews were conducted face to face) the average age for start of cohabitation without marriage is 18 years old and 4 months, the most common age for start of cohabitation however is 16 years, and the earliest one is 12 years and late one is 37 years old. The average number of cohabitation without marriage is 1.37 and the largest one without marriage registered during the study is 3. According the data of the same sample the average age for concluding marriage is 21 years old and 8 months, i.e. 3 years and 4 months after the start of the cohabitation. In the sample representative for persons in the household above 10 years the average length of cohabitation before marriage is 3 years and 2 months. Most common frequency of length of cohabitation before marriage is 1 year, and the longest – lasting cohabitation before marriage is 17 years. And after a year in cohabitation 20% of Roma have concluded civil marriage, after 2 years of cohabitation 40% and after 5 years – 80%.

As the most significant and distinctive factor for the early onset of informal cohabitation and marital life is education. The increase of age of the first cohabitation and first marriage is in direct correlation with the level of education. The higher the education level is the latest the marital and celibate partnerships start. The average age of first partnership cohabitation amongst persons with incomplete primary education is 17 years old, however the most common start age is 16 years old, as 50% of Roma with the lowest level of education already have partner.

The average age of first partnership cohabitation amongst persons with higher education is 23 years old; however the most common start age is 28 years old. At the age of 25 about 50% of Roma with higher education have partners already. It is interesting to note that the type of secondary education also has significant influence. The one graduated professional high schools (vocational schools) have 2 years higher than the average age of first partnership cohabitation (22 years old) and marriage (23 years old) compared to graduates in secondary schools.

A curious phenomenon is the fact that with the increase of education, the average length of partnership cohabitation before marriage is decreasing. Of course this phenomenon is largely

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<sup>3</sup> Within the framework of the research a case of start of cohabitation at age of 10 years old was registered. It could be a mistake on behalf of the respondent and the actual age could be a bit higher.

due to the fact that greater part of the cohabitation before marriage within persons in lower education groups starts before the legal age for concluding civil marriage.

An important factor, albeit with less significance is emerging the economic status of the household. The average net monthly income of households in the segregated neighborhoods after taxation and repay of amounts due on loans is 423 BGN. The poorest 20% of the households are living with an income below 171 BGN, and the wealthiest 20% have income above 600 BGN. In other words the risk of early start of family life in celibate cohabitation or after concluded civil marriage is the highest amongst households with lower incomes.

The ethnic self identification of the surveyed persons has also significance. The average age of first cohabitation is the lowest amongst those residents of the segregated neighborhoods that have self identified themselves as Millet. In this group at the age of 17 years old 50% of them has started their celibate cohabitation, as the most common age is 16 years old. The highest is the average age amongst those that have self identified themselves as Bulgarians and Rudari. With the Rudari unlike other communities an interesting phenomenon is observed the average age of first cohabitation is higher than the average age for first marriage. This could be explained by the smaller share of persons that cohabite together before marriage, i.e. in contrast with the other communities where cohabitation is observed before marriage, with the Rudari more common is marriage without previous cohabitation.

And last place, but not least when it comes to basic human experiences and social practices, it is essential to identify differences in attitudes and behavior of both sexes. Similarly to previous sociological surveys (Tomova 1995, Pamporov 2006) and the data from the population censuses in the country, the present study distinguishes the evidence of significant disparities in the history of partnerships among women and men.

The average age for start of celibate cohabitation with women, living in segregated neighborhoods with predominant Roma population is 17 years old and 5 months. Between men this age is 20 years old and 1 month, i.e. three months later than women. The most common age for onset of cohabitation with women is 17 years old and at this age more than the half of them have already entered into cohabitation. The most common age for start of the cohabitation of men is 20 years old and at this age half of them have their partner in cohabitation.

#### Attitude towards partnerships

As it was mentioned in the previous chapter the Roma culture is characterized by attaching great importance to the girl's integrity before marriage. Therefore in all Roma groups the first sexual intercourse de facto plays the role of a social legitimacy of partnership cohabitation. After the first sexual intercourse the partners are being perceived as "married" regardless of the fact that there is not or there is civil marriage. The vignette questions for attitude towards early marriages were constructed and have to be interpreted from this point of view.

When taking into account the subgroup differences in the community however extremely high and statistic differences are noted in all possible answers. It is completely delineated that for the group of Horahane Roma the sexual intercourses at the age 14 - 15 are totally unacceptable.

We must acknowledge though that the exit hypothesis for potential risk of forced marriage in Roma communities – where parents decide regardless of their children's will in this case is rather rejected. Despite this it is to be noted that almost 14.4% of the living in segregated mahali are inclined to accept the decision of the two parental couples regardless of the

willingness of the young people and that is not to be underestimated. It is curious in this case that the most prominent model as a precondition of forced marriage is registered amongst the persons self-identified themselves as Bulgarians.

.	Total	Bulgarian	Turkish	Roma	Millet	Rudari <sup>4</sup>
Ivancho must take his parent's consent and then can take Mariika for wife	27.1%	20.0%	20.8%	29.3%	21.4%	62.5%
Mariika must take her parents' consent and then can live with him	5.5%	6.7%	8.3%	3.3%	4.8%	25.0%
Ivancho must ask for the consent of his parents and then they must ask Mariika from her parents	42.0%	20.0%	33.3%	47.8%	47.6%	12.5%
Mariika must take her parents' consent and they must negotiate with Ivancho's parents	6.6%	6.7%	8.3%	6.5%	7.1%	.0%
The parents should agree between themselves regardless of what Ivancho and Mariika want	14.4%	33.3%	16.7%	9.8%	19.0%	.0%

The necessity for the boy to take his parents' consent and for them to ask for the girl's hand from her parents is emerging as leading attitude with all Roma subgroups.

The importance of parent's consent is visible from the consensus between all groups: if parents do not permit than the young people must wait a bit more (78.2%). About 10% of Roma indicate that young people can have sex; however the girl must keep the bed sheet with her maidenhood, which once again emphasizes the great significance of virginity in this community.

The preservation of the bed sheet with the blood from the defloration stands as major attitude even among those persons that have answered to the first vignette as "They can have sex when in love". As traditionalistic in this regard stands the group of Millet. An important clarification here is that the share of Burgudjii and Kalderashi in the intensive sampling indicated that answer is small therefore subsequent statistical analysis is not possible.

On the basis of the study in 2010 Center Amalipe has implemented campaign for prevention of early marriages in 10 localities in Bulgaria.

#### **Main findings from the implementation of the local campaigns: principles and models for prevention of the early marriages**

Summarizing the results, achieved during the implementation of the ten local campaigns, several principles and models for impact come out, that could influence the attitudes towards the early marriages in the community.

On first position could be highlighted the principle of **personal example from successful Roma**: the young, educated and managing with the living challenges Roma that have exited a particular community, and have grown up before the eyes of the others and managed to achieve more than the rest without forgetting their Roma origin and without neglecting their private life and family, they can influence significantly the others. The personal example of

<sup>4</sup> After breaking the respondents by ethnos, in this response the aggregation of the Rudari is too small for a statistically significant analyses and this might distort the data. In a larger aggregation there might be other results. The data for the Rudari in this table should be taken into account only as estimation.

those Roma may influence in two ways. The first is by inviting successful Roma to participate in public meetings, hearings, etc. The other, more effective approach is with empowerment of those Roma and engaging them on certain positions to work for prevention of the early marriages in the community: among their group or among other Roma. Transformation of those Roma into role models, i.e. the validation of their authority is a particular guarantee for success.

There is a close link between the quality of education in the relevant locations, **building motivation for continuation of the education** and the distribution of the early/forced marriages. In this regard, the transformation of the schools – where a problem with the drop outs exist – in attractive and adequate to the modern requirements educational centers, inevitably would influence positively the prevention of the early marriages and births. The increasing of the motivation for studying would happen in many ways – through the measures pointed above (personal example from successful, community discussions, etc) and also through activities for improvement of the quality of the educational process in the existing schools, activities for introduction of different forms of intercultural education (e.g. elective subjects on Roma folklore, celebration of the calendar holidays in school and etc.) and for involving the Roma parents in the educational process (through trainings for parents, involving the parents in the classes on Roma folklore, involving the Roma parents into the school Board and etc.<sup>5</sup>). Increasing the motivation for continuation of the education influence significantly the communities where the process of overcoming of traditions is on the way and early, but forced marriages, happen. In these communities the initiative for early marriages is most often arising from the young people themselves and the increasing of the motivation for education directly leads to overcoming of the early marriages.

**Support for community development** is another important principle that should be applied in the efforts for prevention of the early marriages. The community and the different communal mechanisms for influence are very important for the life of the individual Roma. Thus, it is necessary the community to participates actively in the efforts for overcoming different negative practices. Even more – the complete community development has to be supported. That may occur through different community discussions, activities for support of individual members of the community and etc. The sustainable frame, where the community development may be supported, is the establishment of community centers that should systematically organize the indicated activities.

The principle of **interaction between all institutions**, which are relevant to the existence of the problem with the early/forced marriages, is of a high importance for its limitation. The structures of the Ministry of education, Ministry of labor and social policy, Ministry of Justice that are situated in the problematic location has to be motivated and encouraged to be familiar with the problem and to take their responsibilities for its prevention. They should overcome their passiveness on the issue, which is usually being excused with the argument that “this is a Roma tradition and we do not want to get involved”. It appears that the image of the representatives of those institutions has a positive impact within the community in regard with the knowledge and keeping the existing rules.

Meanwhile, it should be born in mind that this is not enough. **The institutionalization of a position within the community** is needed. The influence of the institutions from “outside” as it is about the Roma community (especially with the more traditional Roma groups) is limited. The influence has to be supported by activities of people inside the community, who are doing the social work by working for solution of certain problems (like the one with the early

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<sup>5</sup> Similar activities were tested within the project “decreasing the number of the drop out of Roma students” and have shown the possibility to involve actively the parents.



marriages, drop out from school) and in the same time they support the development of the community itself. This position should be institutionalized.

Another successful model could be the **community discussions**, where participants are the significant people from the community – the outer significant persons (e.g. the spiritual leader, the mayor of the village, the teacher and etc.<sup>6</sup>), as well as the people with internal significance (e.g. informal leaders, who are usually wise people and their advices are being accepted). In some Roma groups the internal authorities have some level of institutionalization: e.g. the so called “meshere” – among the group of the Kalderashi. Usually among the other groups there is no such institutionalization, but the informal leaders are very well known (“cheribashii”, “patroni”, and etc.) and should definitely be involved in the community discussions.

The implemented campaigns clearly showed the necessity of such discussions. The discussed topics cannot be limited only to the early marriages: other topics of importance for the local community are also a part of the discussed issues – employment, education, received services.

Another effective method appeared to be the **group discussion** where participants are not the whole community, but representatives of a certain group: e.g. young people, women and etc. The group discussion gives opportunity to the participants to debate the issues in depth, as long as there are no hesitations for speaking in front of the older people. The topics for these discussions cannot be limited to the early marriages only too, but to many others also.

Viewing the fact that there is a lack of information within the pilot municipalities among the young people on the matters of the **reproductive health and the family planning**, obviously there is a necessity of organizing conversations and discussions on this topic that should be served in the best way in regard with the audience. It should be born in mind that there are serious differences in the approach of serving this information in Roma community: depending on the different Roma groups, on the level of modernization of the local community and on the age (the generation) of the audience. For example, the usual measures for distribution of the information on reproductive health and the family planning could have a contraindicative effect in the groups of the Kalderashi, Burgudjii (especially those in North-East Bulgaria, the Thracian Kalajdjii and etc.: absolutely different information materials are needed there, that are relevant with the cultural norms of the Group.

The method of the **family-group conference** could be briefly defined as a method, of which aim is to make the family a generator of the positive social change and is based on the understanding that the families could find solution for their problems by themselves, they have enough resources to manage with the problems of their children, as well as the right to participate in the decision making in planning the future. This method proved to be extremely suitable for work with the Roma families that not even rarely deny to let in an external intervention in managing their family issues, but often they also have enough capacity to make the best decision for their children, if they receive a minimal support and to realize the responsibility which they bear for this decision. In most cases it is relevant to transform the method into **community conference** through the involvement of internal authorities from the community: often, namely the influence by the side of the community is decisive for an early marriage (e.g. through the power of tradition) and in such cases it is important to engage the community authorities in the prevention of the early marriages through the model of the **community conference**.

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<sup>6</sup> NB! It should be determined who from the outer environment is actually known and trusted. Often the social worker is not one with credibility.

Many of the implemented campaigns showed the necessity of **door-to-door** campaign in the Roma neighborhoods. Individual conversations or family discussions within the frames of such a campaign appear to be an effective measure for increasing the awareness on the issue of the “early marriages”, which a required step for its solution.

The described methods are not a “magic tool” for immediate success. Their application depends a lot on the skills of those who realize the activities for prevention of the early marriages: one and the same approach could be very effective or to bring contra results. The different methods should be in accordance with the specifics of the local community: some of them may be applied among all Roma, while others will influence effectively certain groups. In any case, it should be born in mind that resolving the issue of the early marriages cannot be achieved in a short time: continuous and systematic efforts are needed in order the described methods and principles to bring sustainable results.

Regarding the broader scope of HRV and domestic violence a number of other Bulgarian organizations also attempt to address the problem:

### **Alliance for Protection against Domestic Violence**

Guided by the principle that the fight against domestic violence is the part of the fight against violence in society in general, the main organizations in the country working for the protection and prevention of domestic violence come together in September 2008. and create the "Alliance for Protection against Domestic Violence" The main tasks of the Alliance are coordinating and ensuring the sustainability of activities to implement the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence, development and implementation of standards for social services and cooperation between NGOs and institutions, monitoring, research , developing programs and strategies for prevention and protection against domestic violence, promoting educational activities and youth work, international cooperation and exchanges.

#### **Contact information:**

**Sofia, 1142, 5 Evlogi Georgiev St, p.o.box 113, [office@bgrf.org](mailto:office@bgrf.org), +359 (2) 963 53 57**  
<http://alliancedv.org>

**Animus Association Foundation** - established in 1994. With interest to women survivors of traumatic events, the challenge to create a structure in Bulgaria for psychological counseling of women. The aim is to assist for intellectual, professional and spiritual development of women to initiate a change in the Bulgarian family and society to develop projects and programs related to support of wife and child to promote understanding in society, to improve the status of the woman to mediate between the various government institutions and NGOs to coordinate their efforts on violence against women.

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### **Foundation "Bulgarian Gender Research Foundation"**

**BGRF** was established in 1998 as an independent non-governmental organization. The organization works in the field of gender violence and discrimination and reproductive rights, providing information making research, analysis and draft campaigning and lobbying for legislative changes, provide training and consultation for professionals working in a wide network of organizations public institutions and experts. Foundation "BGRF" has branches in Plovdiv, Haskovo, Gorna Oryahovitsa. Since 2001 the Foundation created the "Youth Program" whose business is managed and is aimed at students.

Working for targets:

- Domestic violence
- Protection of Human Rights
- Human Trafficking
- Prevention of Discrimination
- Socio-economic and political rights of women
- Youth Activities

The main goals are: achieving gender equality as a fundamental and integral part of economic, social and democratic development of our country by:

- Legislative changes to ensure gender equality in the exercise of socio-economic rights in the transition period;
- Protection of women against violence in its various forms - domestic violence, trafficking in women, sexual harassment in the workplace;
- Adopt a national policy with a high degree of commitment on the issues of balanced participation of both sexes in political life;
- Identification, protection and advocacy for the development and implementation of policy for young people, promotion of information to increase knowledge and public awareness on issues of gender equality.

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**Bulgarian Fund for Women is the only** indigenous donor for **local** NGOs, that work on women's and girl's rights, on real gender equality in all social spheres and on elimination of all forms of discrimination.

**Objectives:**

- To support the Bulgarian women's human rights organizations working to raise gender awareness of society and for recognition of women's rights as human rights.
- To strengthen Bulgarian NGO capacity to work on women's and girls inclusion and empowerment, and improve their skills for mobilizing local resources for their sustainable development.
- To support alternative and innovative women's initiatives.
- To support independent monitoring of government's commitments and initiatives related to gender equality in Bulgaria.
- To support cooperation between NGOs working on gender equality on national and local level.
- To promote a new vision for philanthropy as an instrument for social change.
- To support the civil society development in Bulgaria as a precondition for irreversibility of the democratic process.

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## **Human Trafficking**

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs last 2010, a total of victims of trafficking are 561 - 526 women, 79 children (5 of them are minors). As of November 2010., the prosecution has led a 261 pretrial proceedings . Convicted of trafficking were 87.

Law on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings was accepted May 20, 2003., regulating powers and duties of state bodies involved in combating trafficking in human beings:

- the status and tasks of the shelters, centers and commissions under this Act to provide protection and assistance to victims of trafficking;
- measures to prevent and combat trafficking in persons;
- measures to protect and assist victims of trafficking, especially women and children;
- providing special protection for victims of trafficking who cooperate with the investigation.

Achievement of the National Commission for Combating Trafficking in late 2010 year is a national referral mechanism for victims of trafficking. Through it victims can be supported and guided in their choice of organization or institution they want to turn to social, legal and psychological counseling.