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Roma Women in Norway:

Experiences of Antigypsyism, Gender Inequality and Empowerment

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Contents

I am Norwegian. I have a Norwegian passport. I was born in Norway, my parents were born here, even my grandparents were born here. I often say that I do not have a country, but I am Norwegian. Norway is home. We [the Roma] are here, we will stay here, and we will not disappear.

- Sabina, Norwegian Roma

Introduction

Roma is one of the most marginalized minority groups in Norway and Europe. Prejudice towards and discrimination against Roma is a widespread and profound problem in most European countries (Rød & Gurvich, 2022). In Norway, the Norwegian Roma is one of the smallest but also one of the least liked minority groups (Tyldum, 2019). As a result of a century of institutional policies and practices of marginalization and exclusion of Roma, intensifying with the Nazi extermination policy in the years before and after the Second World War, there are only a few hundred Norwegian Roma today. The history of discrimination and prejudice towards Roma has led to fear and distrust between the minority and mainstream society, which is passed on to new generations, as well as perpetuated through continued discrimination and prejudice towards the minority group today (Tyldum & Friberg, 2014). In the last years, the Norwegian state has recognized its responsibilities and provided redress for its racist exclusion policies, and the situation has improved for most Norwegian Roma (Kirkens bymisjon, 2016). However, there is a lack of knowledge about Roma culture and history in society at large, and Norwegian Roma still experience widespread and profound antigypsyism in Norway (Tyldum, 2019). The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance has adopted the following working definition of antigypsyism or anti-Roma discrimination:

> Antigypsyism/anti-Roma discrimination is a manifestation of individual expressions and acts as well as institutional policies and practices of marginalization, exclusion, physical violence, devaluation of Roma cultures and lifestyles, and hate speech directed at Roma as well as other individuals and groups perceived, stigmatized, or persecuted during the Nazi era, and still today, as “Gypsies.” This leads to the treatment of Roma as an alleged alien group and associates them with a series of pejorative stereotypes and distorted images that represent a specific form of racism. (IHRA, 2022, para 2).

In addition to antigyspyism, Roma women may experience gender discrimination within the Norwegian Roma community, as well as in Norwegian society at large. Strict gender roles within the Roma community may limit Roma women. From an intersectional perspective, Roma women may be subject

to multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination based on their ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and other factors. Being member of a close-knit community that experiences marginalization from the majority, might heighten the threshold to seek help from Norwegian public services. Roma women may therefore be a particularly vulnerable group and face different challenges than Roma men. Improving the situation of Roma women may therefore require different efforts, including empowerment initiatives focusing on providing Roma women with the tools to take control over their own lives and to stand up against discrimination. Empowering Roma women can potentially have far-reaching impacts on their own lives, families, community, and society.

This report is based on qualitative research conducted as part of the "I have a dream" project by the Norwegian organization KUN Centre for Equality and Diversity, in collaboration with the Bulgarian organization LARGO. Funding for this project is provided by the EEA and Norway Grants Active Citizens Fund. Desk research already conducted by Rød and Gurvich (2022) as part of this project aimed to provide an overview of the challenges Roma women experience in Norway and countries in the EU, as well as best practices for empowerment. This qualitative research aims to explore Roma women's experiences with antigypsyism, gender inequality, and empowerment in Norway. Our aim is not to generalize, but rather to highlight the perspectives of the Roma women that participated in the research. First, we provide a brief background on the historic and current discrimination of Norwegian Roma, followed by a description of our research methods and analysis. Then, we present the main findings of the qualitative research before finally concluding the report.

Background

The following section provides a brief overview of the history of the Norwegian Roma and the situation in Norway today. The situation for Roma in other European countries is also mentioned briefly. The aim of this section is to provide some context to the findings of this study, not to provide a complete overview of Roma history and discrimination in Europe and Norway – that is a task too comprehensive to be taken on within the scope of this project.

An estimated 10-12 million Roma live across Europe, making the Roma one of the largest ethnic minority groups on the continent, as well as one of the most disadvantaged (Rød & Gurvich, 2022). The Roma are nomadic people who originated from the northern Indian subcontinent and migrated to Persia, southeastern Europe, and then western Europe. The Roma is a heterogenous group of people that are geographically dispersed beyond national borders, speak different variations of Romani, are affiliated with different religions, and have different cultural practices (Sutkutė, 2020). "Roma" is thus an umbrella term covering many Roma and Traveller groups with a wide range of cultural, linguistic, and religious sub-groups practicing different settlement forms (Forray & Óhidy, 2019). Roma are commonly known as "gypsies", which is considered pejorative by most Roma.

Norway differentiates between three groups of people with Romani background: the Romani people, the Norwegian Roma, and visiting Roma. The first group is the Romani people, also known as the Tater people or Norwegian Travelers. The Romani people emigrated to Norway in the 1500s and between 4000 and 10 000 Romani people live in Norway today (Kommunal- og moderniseringsdepartementet [KMD], 2021; NOU 2015: 7). The second group is the Norwegian Roma, formerly known as "gypsies," to most Norwegians. The Norwegian Roma emigrated to Norway in the late 1800s and it is estimated that just under one thousand Norwegian Roma live in Norway today. The Norwegian Roma are the descendants of five families who resided in Norway before the Second World War (Lidén & Engebrigtsen, 2020). The third group of people with Romani background is the visiting Roma or immigrant Roma. Visiting Roma often travel to Norway from Romania, Bulgaria, or other European countries, to find employment. The three groups of people with a Romani background in Norway are often conflated in everyday language, especially the Norwegian Roma and the visiting Roma.

The Romani people and the Norwegian Roma are two of the five groups defined as national minorities in Norway, alongside Jews, Kvens, and Forest Finns (KMD, 2021). National minority refers to population groups that differ from the majority of the population in terms of ethnicity, religion, or language (Ivanov, 1998). In Norway, groups with a long-standing attachment to the country are considered national minorities (Holmesland, 2006). Thus, only the Roma with a long-term connection to Norway, Norwegian citizenship, and who live more or less permanently in Norway are considered Norwegian Roma (NAFO, 2022). This report primarily focuses on the Norwegian Roma and other Roma with a long-term connection to Norway.

When the Norwegian Roma first immigrated to Norway in the late 1800s, there were no restrictions on their immigration. After a while, many of the children of the immigrants received Norwegian passports since they were born in Norway. However, there were negative attitudes against the Roma, and the newspapers started writing about the so called “gypsy problem” (sigøynerplagen). In the beginning of the 1900s, the politics against Roma became more repressive, and in 1924, the Norwegian Justice Department declared that Norwegian passports were not sufficient documentation of citizenship, and that no Roma could be assumed to be Norwegian citizens. In 1925, a circular mail declared that Norwegian passports given to Roma were faulty and could be confiscated. The “gypsy law” of 1927 stated that “gypsies” and other travelers that do not have a right to Norwegian citizenship should be denied entrance into the country (Tyldum & Friberg, 2014).

At the same time, the Norwegian state began assimilation policies against all ethnic minorities in Norway. The Romani People were among the victims of these policies. Romani children were taken from their parents, and many adults were sent to work camps. Many Norwegian Roma feared that the same would happen to them, and therefore left the country in the late 1920s. In 1934, after Hitler came to power, a group of 68 Norwegian Roma attempted to travel to Norway but were denied entrance. The group was imprisoned and sent to an internment camp near Hamburg. Many ended up in concentration camps and only a few of the Norwegian Roma survived the Porajmos (the Romani genocide). After the war, the survivors tried to reenter Norway, but were denied, despite having Norwegian passports and birth certificates. However, in 1956, the first family got back their citizenship and the gypsy paragraph was dismissed. In total, five Roma men and their families received Norwegian passports in the decades following the war (Tyldum & Friberg, 2014).

According to Tyldum and Friberg (2014), Norwegian policies concerning Roma since the 1960s have primarily been shaped by the media with the aim of pleasing the public opinion. The focus has not been on the needs of the Roma themselves. Throughout the years, there has been a negative focus in Norwegian media directed towards Norwegian Roma and towards Government policies and public spending on improving their lives (Tyldum and Friberg, 2014). In 2015, the Norwegian Prime Minister apologized to the Norwegian Roma on behalf of the Norwegian state for the racist exclusion policies in the years before and after the Second World War. As part of the public apology, the Roma Culture and Resource Center – Romano Kher – was established in Oslo to preserve and convey Roma culture.

Romano Kher is also a place where Roma can learn skills and gain work experience, and for Roma children to learn about their history, learn Norwegian and practice Romanes. Furthermore, Romano Kher is an arena for Roma and non-Roma people to meet, interact, learn from each other, and establish partnerships (Kirkens Bymisjon, 2016).

According to Tyldum (2019), 38% of Norwegians are today openly against having Roma as neighbors. In comparison, 39% of Norwegians are openly against having alcoholics as neighbors. Surveys show that off all the ethnic and religious minorities in Norway, the Roma are the least wanted as neighbors. Additionally, people are more against having a Roma Prime Minister or a Roma married into their family than someone belonging to any other group. There is also less willingness in the Norwegian population to stand up against discrimination on behalf of Roma (Tyldum, 2019). While it is unclear whether the people surveyed are thinking of visiting Roma or Norwegian Roma (Tyldum, 2019), the numbers reveal a negative view of Roma prevalent in the Norwegian population.

The Roma in Europe share a common history of persecution, exclusion, and marginalization. Most countries in Europe have a long history of systemic discrimination specifically against Roma, and violence against Roma. Several nation states have tried to exterminate Roma culture and language through assimilation, and during the Second World War, the Roma were the targets of the Holocaust (Tyldum & Friberg, 2014). As a result of this, the Roma are one of the most marginalized ethnic minority groups in Europe today. They face various challenges, including discrimination, social exclusion, and disempowerment; poor living conditions; and lack of access to education, health care, and labor and housing markets (Rød & Gurvich, 2022).

Methods

We conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews with four Roma women in Norway. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian, either in person or on the telephone between April and July 2022. Not all the interviews could be conducted in person due to the geographical distance between the interviewer and the participants. Furthermore, telephone interviews can be more flexible and

convenient, which was important to some of the participants. The interviews lasted between 15 minutes and 2,5 hours, and were audio recorded.

The interview guide was developed by KUN based on an initial interview guide developed by LARGO. Since the context is quite different in Norway and Bulgaria, the initial interview guide from LARGO was adapted to the Norwegian context. The final interview guide mostly consisted of broad, open-ended questions, to allow the participants to share their personal experiences with discrimination. The interview guide covered topics including family, leisure time, personal experiences with discrimination, and access to education and work.

Prior to the interviews, all participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the handling of the recorded and transcribed interviews. All participants provided verbal consent to the handling of their personal data and the recording of the interviews before the interviews began. Verbal consent was preferred over written consent because many Roma in Norway are illiterate. They were informed that the interviews are completely confidential and that no identifiable information about them, their friends, family or any other third parties will be used in the report.

As part of the recruitment process, we consulted with organizations working with Norwegian Roma and visiting Roma in Norway. An open invitation to participate in the qualitative study was published on our web page and in our social media, as well as posted in the lobby of Roma Culture and Resource Center – Romano Kher. One of the authors also attended a Christian worship in the Roma community to establish rapport and to meet potential interview participants. However, recruiting participants for the study proved challenging, and in the end, the four participants were found through gatekeepers in the Norwegian Roma community. The participants had to identify as Roma, have a long-term connection to Norway, and live more or less permanently in Norway. The age of the participants varied, but both younger and older Roma women participated. The youngest participant was in her teens at the time of the interview. Two of the participants are employed, while two are unemployed for health reasons. Three of the participants have one or more children.

This research has been approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data.

Analysis

This report is based on qualitative interviews and grounded on a social constructivist understanding of language as simultaneously reflecting and constructing social realities. Thus, the interviews both tell us something about how it is to be a Roma woman in Norwegian society, and simultaneously, how the single individual negotiate socially constructions like prejudice and expectations from society and shapes her own reality. We have few interviews, and we do not claim that they are representative of all Roma women. However, this report represents a selection of voices from a group that is seldom heard in Norwegian public debate, and thus gives an important contribution to the ongoing conversation about racism and prejudice against national minorities, as well as knowledge about being Norwegian Roma today. Although we acknowledge that writing this report, we as authors are also constructing reality, we have strived to let the women's statements stand for themselves and to stay true to their message. For instance, several of the informants in our study refer to non-Roma Norwegians as "Gadje" during the interviews. We therefore use the Romani term "Gadjo" (singular) or "Gadje" (plural) in this report to refer to non-Roma Norwegians.

Findings

Antigypsyism

The women describe discrimination committed by the State, Gadje, and other Roma. They describe the discrimination as pervasive, and give examples from many different areas and situations, including discrimination in public spaces, retail stores, education, healthcare, the housing- and labour market, and by the police, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Organization, and the Norwegian Child Welfare Services.

For two of the participants, discrimination is an everyday reality. Sabina describes how discrimination has become normal for her. She says, “I have experienced discrimination, my husband has experienced discrimination, we have been very exposed…I would not say that it has been the worst, most extreme for us, but we have been discriminated against many times” (Sabina). Similarly, Rosella describes how she does not have any “grave” experience with discrimination, but that she has experienced many smaller things. Discrimination has also become normalized to Rosella. She says that as a minority, it follows that people view you differently, and you start “accepting it [discrimination] as a part of it [being a minority]” (Rosella).

Discrimination in the housing market

Discrimination presents itself as a major obstacle to living in Norway, down to the basics, of having a place to live. Naomie has experienced a lot of discrimination on the housing market. She describes an incident in which she was told to move out of the apartment she was renting before the lease was up because the housing board did not want Roma living in the building. Several other Roma that were living in the same building were also thrown out. Naomie says that the owners easily can annul their renting contracts by claiming that they are moving into the apartment themselves. She knows of at least five Roma families that have experienced this. Furthermore, Naomie’s daughter was told by a landlord that they normally do not rent out apartments to Roma, but that they would make an exception for her. Naomie also knows of a Roma person who reported discrimination in the housing market to the Anti-discrimination Tribunal in Norway and won.

Discrimination in education

Discrimination of Roma also occur at school and in education. Sabina’s daughter used to be bullied and called “fucking gypsy” by some of her classmates. In addition, the way that the school is structured makes it difficult to maintain their travelling lifestyle. When Sabina’s daughter was younger, Sabina wanted to start travelling for the summer before the school holiday started. Sabina asked the teachers and school leaders for permission to take her daughter out school before the holiday, but her request was denied. It was very difficult for Sabina to not travel. For this reason, one year, she and her family

decided to travel before the summer holiday against the school's advice, but when they returned in the fall, Sabina realized that it was best for her daughter to follow the schoolyear. To ensure that her daughter did not miss out in school, their family therefore stopped travelling outside of school holidays from then on, even though it was difficult for Sabina.

The Norwegian Education system is not always adapted to people who have travelling as part of their lifestyles, such as the Roma and Romani people (Kommunal-og regionaldepartement, 2001). However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and school leaders had to quickly organize and provide homeschooling for their students (Mælan, Gustavsen, Stranger-Johannessen, & Nordahl, 2021). During the periods of homeschooling, many schools reallocated resources to assist teachers in the process of following up particularly vulnerable students. However, many students reported that they experienced less support from their teachers and that they did not learn as much during homeschooling as they would have in regular school (Mælan et al., 2021). While homeschooling might not be an ideal solution, the pandemic proved that restructuring of education activities and full online learning is possible. This experience is potentially important for further practice and might open up for some flexibility from the school's side.

Discrimination in the labor market

Also in the labor market, Norwegian Roma experience obstacles. The participants mention several reasons for unemployment among Roma. Previous negative experience is a contributing factor to this. According to Naomie, Roma that have worked with Gadje have been treated poorly in the past. Sabina says that many Roma have had to change their last names to get a job. In 2012, Midtbøen and Rogstad (2012) found that in Norway, the chance of being invited to a job interview was 25% lower for applicants with foreign sounding names compared to applicants with identical experience with Norwegian names. They conclude that discrimination in hiring processes is a substantial barrier for labor market participation for persons with backgrounds from ethnic minorities (Midtbøen & Rogstad, 2012).

A recent study by Midtbøen & Quillian (2021) found that the amount of discrimination in hiring processes has not reduced over time. The study is based on a systematic review of 140 field

experiments in 30 countries over the last 50 years. The most common form of field experiments is where researcher sends out similar job applications for fictive persons where the only difference between the candidates is their name. The study finds that both first- and second-generation immigrants experience discrimination in the job market, primarily because of skin color (Midtbøen & Quillian, 2021).

Language is also a barrier to get a job. Naomie and Sabina explain that most Roma cannot read and write Norwegian, which makes it difficult to get a job. This, according to Sabina, creates a negative cycle, as difficulties entering the job market leads to lack of work experience, something which again makes it even more difficult to find work. Naomie, on the other hand, says that even though she has the necessary work experience, she is only paid the minimum wage because she does not have any formal education. This makes her feel underappreciated.

Being visible as Roma

According to Sabina, due to historical discrimination of Roma in Norway, many Roma are scared to publicly identify as Roma, and to seek help from the police or at the hospital.

> Most Roma, if you talk to them, they will say 'I do not dare say that I am Roma, I do not dare say I am a gypsy, I do not dare to show them who I am'…because the history has created such a fear. (Sabina)

One of the reasons that Roma hide their identity is the frequent stereotyping by Gadje. However, hiding their identity does not always work. Sabina says, "If you see me, you will see right away that I am not Norwegian. I have a look, kind of like…'She [Sabina] is not Norwegian'. My language…I do not sound very Norwegian". All the participants frequently mention negative stereotypes about Roma during the interviews. According to Naomie, Gadje tend to assume all Roma are "beggars", "homeless", "liars", "thieves" and "dangerous".

Naomie and Sabina describe how they are assigned a position of representative of all Roma. Both Sabina and Naomie experience prejudice and discrimination in retail. They both give examples of being watched and followed around by retail workers and security guards in stores and shopping malls.

Naomie finds this discrimination particularly uncomfortable when she is with her children. Sabina claims that the retail workers and security guards do not follow "Norwegians" (Gadje) or "Africans", only Roma. Naomie says that the skirts make Roma women visible and that Roma women wearing skirts are assumed to be thieves. She has also been stopped by the police without reason, only for wearing a skirt. According to Ramirez (2021), Roma clothing is associated with laziness, begging, poverty, and unwillingness to pursue a "normal" way of living.

Baugerud (2021) found that women wearing hijabs in Oslo were assigned the role of being representative of Islam by others, which led people to hold them accountable for global Islam. They also experienced being prejudged and associated with dominant stereotypes about Muslim women with hijabs (Baugerud, 2021). Similarly, Roma women wearing skirts are associated with thieves – a dominant stereotype about Roma.

Stigma and negative stereotypes

The experience that Norwegian Roma are singled out and negatively stereotyped as a group is described several times by our informants. Naomie says that many Roma are denied entrance at movie theatres and in restaurants because the staff assumes that they will be loud or because they have negative experiences with other Roma from before. Roma are looked down upon in many public spaces. According to Naomie, people say, "ah, they are gypsies, okay. They should not be let in. They will create chaos; they are dirty, and they steal" (Naomie).Naomie says that Roma are looked down upon even though there are Gadje in Norway that are just as dangerous. Sabina also underlines several times that Roma are not any more criminal than Gadje, but that they are often assumed to be. Sabina points out the hypocrisy in Norwegian society:

> Breivik [Norwegian right-wing terrorist] for example …Should we blame all of Norway for that [the 22 July terror attacks in Norway]? Or should we only blame him [Breivik]? If it had been one of us [the Roma] who had done something like that…we [the Roma] would have been sentenced to hell, just because of the actions of one [Roma] person…It has happened that one [Roma] person has done something stupid and then it is kind of like "those gypsies" or "those Roma" – "they" – did it. (Sabina)

Sabina also describes an incident that occurred a few years ago. A Norwegian news channel published a video of a Roma man "brutally" cutting the hair of a Roma girl. The caption stated that the "the gypsies" were at fault, as if the entire Roma community in Norway was responsible. Sabina neither appreciated the use of the slur "gypsy" nor that they blamed all Roma for the actions of a few. Such public depictions of Roma also cause a lack of trust towards the Norwegian society and justice system. According to Sabina, since Roma are often blamed for actions and crimes they have not committed, they are often scared to report crimes they are victim of to the police.

Gender Inequality

In addition to the discrimination Roma women experience based on their ethnicity, Roma women experience discrimination based on their gender. Roma women thus experience multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination, for example on the labor market. While both Roma men and women experience racial discrimination in the labor market, Roma women's labor market participation is further limited by the gender roles within the Roma community. Both Naomie and Sabina refer to that traditionally, married Roma women cannot wear pants. Once Roma women are married, they must wear skirts. This tradition affects the ability of Roma women to find employment, according to Naomie, because Roma women cannot "work in a store and wear pants" (Naomie). Furthermore, Naomie says that Roma women will get a bad reputation from working in a regular retail store because there is no one there to look after her. It is easier for Roma women to work in a workplace with many other Roma women.

Generally, in the Roma community, women are not supposed to work, but to "get married, take care of the house, clean, cook – basically be a wife" (Naomie). One of Naomie's daughters dropped out of school when she was 16 years old and married another Roma and now, she is a stay-at-home mom. Naomie herself is employed and her justification is "my husband allows me to so why should I not work?" (Naomie). On the other hand, according to Sabina, it has long been taboo for all Roma to work, especially to work with Gadje. In the past, Roma that have work with Gadje have been frozen out by other Roma, but this is starting to change.

A study by Stoychev (2022) found that the roles and expectations for Roma boys and girls are very different. Some of the participants in the study said that Roma women are supposed to do the household chores while the men work. However, many of the female participants believed that women need to work in order to be independent and contribute to the family budget. Some of the men, however, stated that they were fine with women working as long as they finish the household chores first.

As we have seen, discrimination in retail is an example of the multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination Roma women experience. While most Roma appear to experience antigypsyism in retail and the service industry, Roma women are more visible as Roma due to their tradition of wearing skirts after marriage. Wearing the traditional Roma skirts makes the women visible and thus more likely to experience negative attitudes to Roma from the Gadje community. Therefore, it is not only an issue of racism or sexism, but an intersection of the two.

Domestic violence

Living in small, closed communities increases the risk of being exposed to domestic violence (Eriksen, 2020). Loyalty to the family combined with fear of contributing to further stigma against your group are contributing factors to keep the violence hidden, and unreported. This is often found in connection to marginalized ethnic or religious groups, like in a study by Eriksen (2020) about domestic violence in Sami communities in Norway.

Leonora describes previous experience with domestic violence. Her former partner as very possessive. He restricted where she could travel, who she could visit, and her life in general. She says “he was possessive, you know. He simply owned me. He had power…He was jealous. And he owned me. I was not allowed to talk on the telephone…everything was restricted” (Leonora). He also threatened her and spread lies about her, which resulted in serious threats against her young daughter from other Roma men: “They said a lot of bad things about my [age omitted] daughter…They said they would rape her and-so-on…” (Leonora). According to Tyldum and Friberg (2014), there are many indications that violence against women and children is widespread in the Roma community.

Leonora describes herself as “helpless” in relation to her violent ex-partner and the police. She has tried her best to report the threats and violence she has experienced to the police, but she has not been heard. According to Tyldum and Friberg (2014), there has been several episodes of threats and violence within the Roma community in the last years. Many of those who have wished to get help from the police have not received help, and many of the cases have been dropped even though they had many witnesses. This has led many Roma to feel as if the police do not want to help them (Tyldum & Friberg, 2014). Thus, it seems that for some of those exposed to violence among Norwegian Roma, a combination of a close-knit Roma community that might exert various forms of control over its individual members and an experienced lack of interest or help from the police, constitutes a situation where it is difficult to know where to go for help. This in turn might heighten the threshold for help-seeking and for breaking out of violent relationships.

Empowerment

As is the case with all societies, there is also change in the Norwegian Roma community. According to Sabina, it used to only be Roma men who fought for change. When Sabina started working with anti-discrimination, she was told by a Roma man that “but you are woman, you do not have anything to say” (Sabina). However, Sabina refused to listen and stood up against the man instead, although she knew this would “hurt the man’s ego” (Sabina). According to Sabina, this is a common sentiment in the Roma community. Sabina says that she has therefore done a lot of things without the “permission” of other Roma, and that that she and a few more Roma women have worked for gender equality for many years without being heard, but that people are starting to listen now, and more Roma women are starting to feel that they are heard in their fight for gender equality.

So, what are the factors that helps the Roma to fight for their rights and for the Roma women to fight for their rights as Roma women? The participants mention employment, education, and legal awareness as important prerequisites for empowerment.

Education and work; getting out of the house

Sabina says that her parents did not support her learning in school because their parents again did not support them when they were children. Studies have shown that parental involvement influences the educational achievements of children, particularly minority children (Hill & Tyson, 2009; Jeynes, 2007). However, Sabina and Naomie are trying to break this cycle, and they see education as important and valuable. Sabina always prioritized her daughter's education, as mentioned previously, and she has tried to motivate her daughter to finish upper secondary school. Naomie is very proud of her son who will soon finish upper secondary school as one of the first in the Norwegian Roma community. Most Roma boys and men drop out to work with their fathers. One of Naomie's daughters also dropped out of school to get married. Sabina describes formal education and employment as part of the Gadje mindset, but still recognizes the value of education. She says that Roma are not that articulate and lack knowledge and understanding of the majority society, which makes them insecure and consequently result in Roma not daring to stand up for themselves when experiencing discrimination. She also says, "we cannot read or write so it is difficult to get out". Thus, education becomes an important way of combating discrimination and give Roma more options and freedom in the Norwegian society.

As we have seen, several of the informants emphasize the importance of education for empowerment. Naomie believes that the entire Roma community will benefit from Rom youth attending school: "They [Roma youth] need to get an education, that's the way forward".

Naomie says that working women feel more independent because they get out of the house and earn their own money. Their salary allows them to pay bills and go grocery shopping on their own, which improves their self-confidence. Illiterate women have also become more independent after they started working. Naomie believes that getting out of the home and developing a stronger sense of self-worth is important for Roma women's empowerment. Similarly, Stoychev (2022) found that Roma girls in Bulgaria believe that women need to work in order to be independent, as well as to develop and diversify their own lives. In addition, more Roma children attend kindergarten when their mothers work, according to Naomie, something which can improve their health and wellbeing, and help them develop social skills and a love of learning.

Knowing your rights and speaking up about discrimination

According to Sabina, Gadje believe they can do whatever they want to Roma without any consequences because most Norwegian Roma are unaware of their rights. Similarly, lack of legal awareness is one of the reasons why many Roma fear speaking up for themselves, according to Naomie. Naomie, on the other hand, is aware of her rights because she has been working with anti-discrimination for years. She explains how her experience helps her speak up:

> I have worked with this for many years, and I know how it is and I know what is right and what is wrong. And I can speak for myself. But others are afraid. They are afraid to speak. So that is how it is to be Roma in Norway. (Naomie).

Sabina describes how she has development and found strength in herself, and that she has worked hard and gained knowledge and tools to get where she is today. With the vantage point of not knowing how to read and write ten years ago, she has had to learn a lot in a short while. It motivated her to work with Roma issues, and she describes how it did not feel difficult for her because she was strongly motivated by knowing that Norway had been wrong, and that the Norwegian society needed to take responsibility for their wrongdoings. Furthermore, she describes how all the negativity she experienced from others while working made her stronger and more confident in herself and her beliefs. She feels like she can both be herself *and* Roma now. She describes herself as very self-confident today, that she speaks her opinion without doubting herself, and does not accept discrimination anymore, but rather speaks up against it. She has become more aware of what she stands for and what she is fighting for. She believes that learning about the history of discrimination against Roma in Norway changed her perspective. Similarly, Roma condemned the use of the term “gypsy” after learning the history behind the term, according to Rosella. She says, “we have learned that people should not call us that”.

Sabina way of thinking corresponds well to what the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire coined “critical consciousness”. According to Freire, by learning to question oppressive social arrangements and structures – including learning to see how history works, how received ways of thinking and feeling perpetuate existing structures of inequality – oppressed people can develop capacity and commitment

to address injustice and engage individually or collectively to fight injustice (Diemer, Rapa, Voight, & McWhirter, 2016, p. 216).

Also, Sabina emphasizes how advocating for Roma rights is based on her individual motivation and choice to do something about it. She says that you either choose to give in or to stand up, and she has chosen to stand up. She is her own idol, and it is important for her to be herself. This has made her a role model. She knows of other Roma women that look up to her and she is often contacted by others who need help. She feels like her voice is heard by the Roma community and the majority society – if she says something, Gadje and other Roma listen.

Naomie and Rosella also feel like their voices are heard by the Roma community and the majority society. Naomie often experiences discrimination but finds that it helps to speak out about it, "as soon as I speak and open my mouth, I put them in their place with the right words". She knows how to stand up for herself because she knows her rights and how to articulate herself. She feels like people particularly listens when she talks about Roma issues because she is Roma. Rosella is glad that she can be passionate and talk about things that matter to her and has previously spoken about Roma issues at public events. Rosella says, "if I want to, I can be limited by discrimination…but that is not something I want anymore".

International networks

Naomie and Rosella also mention that the situation is different for Roma in Sweden. According to Naomie, more Swedish Roma are educated, literate, and speak up for themselves. Rosella says that the Roma in Sweden have been fighting for their rights for longer, which has made the issues more known to Swedish Gadje. She also mentions that Sweden, as opposed to Norway, has an action plan against antiziganism. According to her, there is thus less discrimination of Roma in Sweden. Both Naomie and Rosella know this because they have visited Sweden. Thus, the access to the international Roma networks can be seen as a potential source of empowerment, providing knowledge of different national contexts, and giving a broader view on ways of working for Roma rights. This is similar to the findings in the Stoychev (2022) report, that travelling allows the Roma to compare the situation in

different countries, giving them a basis of comparison as well as access to good examples of best practice.

Sabina says that it is difficult for the Norwegian state and for Gadje to treat the Roma badly today because the Roma have realized that they have a voice and that they are an established people. Roma are more educated today, they know more how to speak up, and they can have their own opinion. They have started to believe in the notion that all humans, including Roma, are equal. Sabina says that Roma women now have a voice in Norway, after many years of hard work. Naomie met a lot of resistance because Roma women are not supposed to work, but she has worked very hard together with other Roma women for many years in order to get more Roma women employed.

Conclusion

The Roma is one of the groups in Norway that experience the most stigmatization and discrimination. Historically, the Norwegian Roma have been seriously discriminated against by the Norwegian Government, and the Roma still experience discrimination from public institutions and the public. Roma women experience multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination, mainly antigypsyism and gender discrimination. Roma women are visible as Roma due to their skirts and thus particularly vulnerable to racism. Furthermore, Roma women experience gender discrimination and inequality within the Roma community in Norway. The informants describe discrimination committed by the State, the public, and other Roma; in public spaces, retail stores, education, healthcare, the housing- and labor market, public institutions, and in the home. Many Roma have lost trust in law enforcement due to experiences of stereotyping and false accusations and inaction in investigating crimes against Roma.

Empowerment can improve the lives of Roma women in Norway. The informants mention education, employment, and legal awareness, as important prerequisites for empowerment. In addition, international Roma networks are a potential source of empowerment. Knowledge and legal awareness can empower Roma women to stand up for themselves and speak out against discrimination.

Employment may help Roma women become more independent and self-confident. State and civil society actors should thus focus on initiatives that promote empowerment through education, employment, and legal awareness. It would be particularly useful to provide training and jobs in fields that Roma women are interested in and would be comfortable working with. However, it is important to note that empowerment initiatives do not necessarily address the social, economic, and political structures that create discrimination and marginalization. Empowerment alone is therefore not the solution to the challenges Roma women in Norway experience.

Based on suggestions from the informants, we make three recommendations for improving the situation of Roma in Norway. First, we recommend that the Norwegian Government, in collaboration with the Roma community, draws up a concrete and effective action plan against antigypsyism. It is important in this process that different groups in the Roma community, specifically Roma women, are heard. We recommend that Roma women are involved in all parts of this process, including the design of solutions, which should draw on Norwegian Roma's knowledge and experience. Secondly, we recommend raising the awareness within public institutions and the public of Roma issues, for example by including more Roma history in the curriculum in primary and secondary schools. Thirdly, we recommend measures aimed at making job opportunities accessible to Roma women.

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