

Author: Ina ZOON
Paper: *On the Margins – Roma and Public Services in Romania*
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Ina Zoon's book is a moving presentation of the way Roma population is excluded from public services, primarily in Romania, but also in countries like Macedonia, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic. The peculiarity of the book is the fact that it not only manages to report accurately the situation of Roma in the mentioned countries but it constitutes a professional action plan, aiming to draw the attention upon the issue and propose valuable solutions.

The targeted countries were selected because the Roma minority represents between 2 and 7 per cent of their population and because they live in the most precarious conditions, lacking proper housing, education, employment and healthcare. The author remarks that if applied correctly, governmental actions should have changed essentially the living conditions of Roma. Although legislation has been updated in order to satisfy European Union demands, there is little will to implement those measures. Practically, most of the social work, housing and healthcare programs exclude Roma population. They have difficulties in meeting the norms demanded by the legislation that should protect them. Direct and indirect discrimination comes to endanger the already fragile access to public services.

As for the methodology applied, the report was drawn upon the conclusions of interviews made by the author in Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia and the Czech Republic in October and November 1999 with representatives of central and local authorities, Parliament members of these countries, social workers, Roma leaders and members of Roma communities.

The difficulties in social care, healthcare and housing encountered by Roma are presented separately in the book, although, as Ina Zoon remarks, it is most likely that Roma face these problems every day, their dramatic position being much more complex than the scrupulous organizing of the chapters.

The study begins with the general presentation of the international and national legislation concerning discrimination and access to public services. The report notes that in all four countries examined the principle of equality is unanimously accepted and embodied by their constitutions. However most of these principles still wait to be applied. The second chapter examines the way governments of the four countries provide equal access for Roma to social security programs. The report presents various facts, proving that in most situations authorities exercise power arbitrarily, discriminating Roma population. Healthcare system, as presented in the third chapter is almost inaccessible to Roma. Medical personnel of public and private institutions often mistreat or refuse

treatment to Roma. The fourth chapter evaluates the housing situation. The author presents different types of housing and problems concerning property rights. She concludes that Roma are treated differently by municipalities, that they are segregated and often forced to move from their housing area.

The report ends with a series of recommendations, appealing to authorities to adopt and implement adequate laws in order to efficiently protect Roma and other vulnerable groups against discriminatory practices of local and central authorities. International community is also asked to contribute with technical assistance, financial aid and by monitoring those countries' efforts to fight and eliminate discrimination.