**Desk research on the situation in the labour market of the Roma population and the Roma Women**

**About the Roma in Hungary**

Several surveys were conducted in previous centuries to determine the number of Roma in Hungary. However, the data are rather contradictory, which explains why they are poorly represented in census statistics. Living on the margins of society, they are often hard to reach, and it is not easy to define who they are using clear parameters. Many have attempted to categorize the main characteristics of Roma based on various criteria, but no universally accepted or uniform definition has emerged.

Due to deeply rooted prejudices over the centuries, being Roma is considered by some segments of society as a low-prestige status. Most Roma identify themselves as part of the majority society and typically adopt the language and religion of their host country. In some countries, they are recognized as a nationality, while in others, lacking a mother country, they classify themselves as an ethnic minority. This is one of the reasons for the significant discrepancies worldwide between official census figures and scientifically estimated data.
Census data differ significantly from the findings of sociologists' surveys. This phenomenon is generally observed for all nationalities. It is well known that people's perspectives on their declared nationality and mother tongue can change over time.
A sociological survey led by István Kemény estimated the number of Roma in Hungary to be 320,000 in 1971. By the early 1990s, this number was projected to be close to half a million. Today, according to sociologists, the Roma population accounts for 6-8% of Hungary's total population. In 2022 206.000 people were registered as Roma.

**Income and Wealth Situation**

In the sociological definition of poverty, income is often the ultimate measure. A person, family, or group of people is considered poor if their available resources (material, cultural, social) are so limited that they are excluded from a minimally acceptable way of life.
Due to a continuously declining and rapidly ageing population, the economic and budgetary costs of the exclusion of disadvantaged social groups, including Roma, represent a particularly acute problem. Hungary's population may decrease
se by 3.2% by 2021 compared to 2009, while the proportion of those aged 65 and older is expected to rise to 20.6%.

These demographic trends place particularly heavy burdens on the shrinking working-age population, as they are accompanied by a significant expected increase in expenditures on the pension system and healthcare. This situation can only be improved with the active participation of every community in the labour market among the working-age population (Strategy 2011).

According to data from Hungary's Central Statistical Office (KSH) in 2001, the per capita gross income in 2010 was 1,145,614 forints, while the net income amounted to 939,396 forints. Although the majority of taxpayers saw their incomes rise compared to the previous year, higher-income individuals benefited the most. Regional inequalities remain significant: within unemployment benefits and other social incomes, the proportion of regular social assistance remains notable.

**In Hungary, the regions of Northern Great Plain and Northern Hungary still have the highest poverty levels, where low employment rates and closely related low education levels remain the primary causes of poverty.**

According to a June 2012 report by the Central Statistical Office (KSH), the number of unemployed individuals in the second quarter of the year was 472,000, 12,000 more than the previous year.

For the Roma population, in addition to general economic and labour market trends, a number of other factors complicate their situation. These factors either stem directly from their ethnic background or indirectly from the specific sociological characteristics of the Roma. In 1993, the wages of Roma workers were, on average, 80.81% of those of non-Roma workers. (There is no more recent comparative study, but it is unlikely that this disparity has significantly changed over the decades since.)

In regional comparisons, it can be observed that employees in Budapest earn more than their rural counterparts, and those living in cities earn higher wages than the average in villages, regardless of whether the workers are Roma or non-Roma. This is due to the differing economic situations and employment potential of settlements at various levels of the settlement hierarchy. Consequently, the average wages of Roma populations living in different types of settlements also depend on these factors. As seen in the table below, the average wages of Roma workers fall closest to the overallHungarian average in Budapest, which has the best labour market conditions, and lags the furthest behind in villages with limited job opportunities.

It is also evident that even within the same settlement type, Roma workers earn less than non-Roma workers. This indicates that their earnings are influenced not only by the region, the economic and employment situation of the settlement, and labour supply and demand but also potentially by an ethnic factor reflected in the data. The wage gap between Roma and non-Roma workers in villages is smaller than the gap observed in Budapest. The largest disparity has been identified among those working in rural towns.

In terms of total income, there is little significant difference between the Roma populations of rural towns and villages. Although the employment income of those living in towns is about 40% higher than that of the village population, this disparity is mitigated by other sources of income (such as welfare benefits, social security, etc.), which appear to be larger in scale and significance for those living in villages.

In Budapest and its surrounding areas, the situation is different. Only 17% of households have no earners, and in 30% of households, all adult members have income from work. In their study, Kemény and his team found a 6.5-fold advantage in work-derived incomes among Budapest residents. While the amounts of welfare, other social benefits, and pensions are not higher in this region, the per capita total income in Budapest showed a 90% surplus compared to the incomes of those living in the eastern counties (Kemény, 1998).

**During the 2003 study, 56% of Roma households had no member with income from regular employment.**

At that time, Kemény and his team estimated that the per capita monthly income in Roma households amounted to only 34.8% of the average income for the entire population. In 82% of Roma households, total income did not even reach the subsistence level calculated by the Central Statistical Office (KSH), and 56% belonged to the lowest income decile of the population.

The situation of Roma families in rural areas was particularly disadvantaged. In 1991, 37% of these households had no income from employment, and in 18% of cases, there was no regular income of any kind. By 1993, 57% of Roma families had no employment-related income, and approximately the same proportion had no regular income whatsoever. This trend clearly reflects the impact of the economic transition following the regime change, which heavily affected the Roma population through job losses—a process that has not ceased since.
Due to livelihood difficulties, Roma workers are forced to seek alternative sources of income.

The question arises whether other income sources (such as entrepreneurship or non-employment-related incomes provided by state or municipal bodies) can alleviate these social disadvantages.

In 1993, 3% of household members in Hungary were self-employed, while this rate among Roma was only 1.43% (and 1.3% in 2003).

Income from non-primary employment activities—such as gathering, trading, and casual labour—was much more common.

In 1993, the average income of Roma households was composed as follows:

- 31.8% from wages,
- 1.41% from entrepreneurial activities,
- 3.19% from non-primary employment activities,
- 65.58% from non-employment-related incomes.

In comparison, before the regime change, the average household income composition was:

- 54.59% from wages,
- 4.29% from entrepreneurial activities,
- 9.15% from non-primary employment activities,
- 31.96% from non-employment-related incomes (Dupcsik 1997).

Under the current economic, income, and labour market conditions, several survival strategies can be considered:

1. **Reintegration into the legal economy:** This is not a realistic prospect in the foreseeable future.

2. **Reliance on welfare systems:** However, these are insufficient for a sustainable livelihood, and contrary to popular belief, the Roma population has never been particularly advantaged in accessing social assistance.

In 1993, the Roma population (representing 4.22% of Hungary's population) received only 2.9% of non-employment-related income benefits.

**Employment and Labor Market Integration**

Statistics define the working-age population starting from the age of 15, with no uniform upper age limit, and this is not directly linked to labour law categories. Traditionally, the upper limit of working age was considered to be 59 years, but since the 1990s, it has been adjusted to 74 years in alignment with international practices.

The composition of society is often analyzed from the perspective of economic activity. The economically active population consists of the employed and the unemployed. In accordance with international recommendations, any individual aged 15 or older who worked at least one hour in the week prior to the survey, earning income or receiving in-kind benefits, or was temporarily absent from their regular job (e.g., due to illness, paid or unpaid leave), is classified as employed. Any activity that provides monetary income or in-kind benefits, regardless of its legal framework, qualifies as income-generating work.

Based on this, the following classification categories are applied:

- **Active learners** are individuals engaged in income-generating activities who are not retired and do not receive income under childcare allowances or other similar entitlements. Income-generating work includes any activity that provides monetary income or in-kind benefits, such as traditional occupations, formal employment relationships, activities requiring an entrepreneurial license, as well as regular unpaid family labour performed in a household or related family business.
- Active earners also include those employed while receiving pension contributions, and child care benefits (GYED, GYES), but exclude individuals working while receiving unemployment benefits.

**Unemployed** individuals are those who are willing and able to work, actively seeking employment and have been without a job for more than a month. Registered unemployed individuals are those who have recorded their status with the laborauthority.
Recipients of unemployment benefits include those receiving unemployment allowance, assistance, or income replacement support.

**The Economically Inactive Population**

The economically inactive population consists of **inactive earners** and **dependents**.

- **Inactive earners** are individuals who do not work as active earners but have independent income from other sources (such as pensions, childcare allowances, or other benefits). This

category also includes those who are not seeking work and those living on income from non-employment sources.

- **Dependents** are those who do not fall into any of the three main groups (active earners, inactive earners, or unemployed) and rely on others (either individuals or institutions) for their livelihood.

Initially, unemployment benefits provided a relatively high-income replacement for registered unemployed individuals experiencing temporary unemployment. However, Roma people received only a limited share of these benefits. The reasons for this include the fact that many became unemployed before these benefits were introduced, a high proportion of Roma remain unregistered (and thus ineligible for benefits), and wage-derived benefits are particularly low for Roma due to their wages typically clustering around the minimum wage level (Gere, 2000).

In recent years, the significant increase in private businesses has barely impacted the Roma labour force, which has been almost entirely excluded from the public sector. Non-Roma entrepreneurs generally do not want to employ Roma, and the Roma themselves rarely succeed in starting their own businesses due to their living conditions, lack of capital, inability to obtain credit, and limited access to information (Gere, 2000).

Exclusion from the labour market has led to the development of individual and community strategies. These strategies affect not only legal income generation and survival but also the range of authentic statuses held in the division of labour. While in the case of non-Roma, household income primarily comes from work-related earnings, among Roma, non-work-related income predominates.

This latter category includes illegal, untaxed jobs in the grey and black economy, referred to in the literature as informal economy, shadow economy, subsistence sector, or sub-market economy, depending on the perspective used to classify them.

Income from non-full-time activities predominantly originates from activities such as foraging, scavenging, salvaging, and trading.

Entrepreneurial opportunities among Roma are only minimally utilized. This stems from educational barriers, as managing a business, accounting, taxation, and administrative obligations require basic qualifications that are often lacking.

**Causes of Labor Market Failures**

In the following section, we analyze labour market data based on several social indicators, highlighting various elements of the employment difficulties faced by disadvantaged and/or Roma populations.

1. **Low Qualifications**
2. One explanation for this phenomenon is the lower level of qualifications among these groups. During the economic crisis, layoffs and rationalization processes disproportionately

affected the unskilled workforce first. The relationship between educational attainment and labour market success was already highlighted in the previous section.

Data also demonstrate this connection: in the early 1990s, only 9% of Roma who had not completed even one grade of school were employed. Among those who completed 1-7 grades, only 11.82% were employed. For the Roma population over the age of 15, the employment rate was 19.59% (Dupcsik, 1997).

Therefore, one of the most critical elements of the labour market situation is **education and qualifications**. This is clearly illustrated in Tables 9 and 10, which show that both in the Roma and non-Roma populations, higher levels of education are associated with lower unemployment rates—both in terms of registered unemployment and unofficial data derived from surveys on actual employment.

However, differences in educational attainment alone do not explain the significant disparities within the same educational groups between the Roma and non-Roma populations.

**Age** is also an important factor in labour market success. In the market economy conditions that emerged after the regime change, there was a significant increase in the value of young, mobile, and more flexible labour, while the value of older workers decreased. In both ethnic groups, employment is highest among those in their thirties, begins to decline in the forties, and significantly drops among those over 55 years old.

The data on Roma and non-Roma youth (ages 15-19) show similarly low employment and high inactivity rates, but fundamental differences behind these similarities are highlighted by István Kemény (1998). Among non-Roma youth in this age group, 70% are students, with 55% attending high school, 5% attending college or university, and 6% in primary school, making up the majority of the inactive group. In contrast, only 25% of Roma youth are students (and of these, 3.4% attend high school). Among those aged 30 and above, the proportion of students is negligible, and inactivity is notably lower in the non-Roma population compared to the Roma population. A significant portion of Roma youth, therefore, do not live from active employment but rely on various forms of support due to their inactivity. Among those aged 50 and above in the total population, inactivity increases, and early retirement benefits also contribute to this. However, in the appropriate age group among Roma, the proportion of inactive individuals is much lower, with a significant number of individuals in this age group likely classified as dependents rather than in any of the examined categories.

The table clearly shows the differences in economic activity between the non-Roma population and the Roma population, broken down by age. In the 15-19 age group, the overwhelming majority (70%) of the non-Roma population are still studying, a small percentage are working, and only a few experience unemployment. In contrast, although Roma youth have a similar inactivity rate, only 25% are studying, and their unemployment rate is more than twice the average for this age group.

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The most active working-age group (30-54 years) in the Roma population is characterized by much higher unemployment, inactivity, and lower employment rates compared to the non-Roma population.

However, it is important to note that some of the inactive individuals are actually unemployed. Among 15-19-year-old Roma youth, the unemployment rate is 48% — of which 11% are registered unemployed, and 37% are not registered. In addition to difficulties with livelihood and family formation (as marriage and family formation tend to occur earlier among Roma youth), severe personality disturbances can also result from young people starting their careers while being unemployed.

In addition to education and age, we must not overlook a third factor: **territorial and residential factors**. A large portion of the Roma population lives in the northern, eastern, and lowland regions, or in the South Transdanubian area, where the unemployment rate is already higher. 40% of Roma live in the two counties (Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg) that produced the most unfavourable indicators for employment and unemployment during the years of transition (Gere 2000).

Both the non-Roma and Roma groups have lower unemployment rates around the capital and in Transdanubia, while facing more serious challenges in the counties east of the Danube, compared to the national averages. However, the difference in unemployment data between the non-Roma and Roma labour force is significant even among those living in the same region, and this cannot be explained by the regional differences in development levels or economic structure.

It is important to mention the disadvantages related to residence, as the differences in settlements at various levels of the settlement hierarchy strongly impact the job search prospects and the opportunities for connection to the labour market for those living there. As mentioned earlier, 60% of the Roma population lives in rural areas, with 40% living in small villages, where job opportunities are already limited. During the transition to a market economy, companies were primarily trying to rid themselves of rural branches in order to maintain competitiveness.

Discrimination is also a significant factor in the development of unemployment, although its impact is difficult to measure precisely. The lesson that can be drawn from the data above — is that there are significant differences in the employment data between Roma and non-Roma workers of the same educational level, living in the same type of settlement and region, and belonging to the same age group, with Roma facing disadvantages — allows the conclusion to be drawn that ethnic origin, and the resulting discriminatory treatment, is a hidden factor in the labour market. However, this is difficult to capture and challenging to substantiate numerically.

In 1999, with the support of the National Employment Fund, we conducted research in the Southern Transdanubian region, with the central location being Baranya County, in collaboration with the Department of Romology at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pécs. The research aimed to explore and improve the labour market situation of young Roma unemployed job seekers. During the research, we surveyed Roma minority self-governments and civil organizations working with the Roma community to understand their role in mediating between Roma individuals in their jurisdiction

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and employers, and how they view the issue. We also conducted surveys with unemployed Roma youth. This study was repeated in 2006.

During the study, we asked whether, based on their experiences, they saw a difference in the chances of finding a job between young Roma and non-Roma job seekers with similar qualifications. Most of the responses were general, with respondents typically referring to stereotypes commonly expressed in public discourse, the media, and scientific literature regarding the employment difficulties of Roma workers: “Non-Roma youth have a better chance on the labour market compared to a similarly qualified Roma counterpart,” “They have a hard time finding work.” A typical response was: “This happened to a friend of mine.” It seemed noteworthy that they could not list numerous cases but only mentioned individual incidents they had heard of: “During a job interview, the non-Roma candidate was given preference,” “It wouldn’t be trustworthy to employ a Roma person in front of their clients,” “Based on the name or appearance, the employer immediately said the position was filled.” Therefore, the phenomenon of labour market discrimination seemed somewhat mythologized, where rather than systemic issues, respondents described sporadic or isolated incidents.

84% of the respondents were unable to provide any meaningful information in response to this question. Of course, despite this, the phenomenon should not be trivialized, but it must be handled with caution (Cserti 2008).

The leaders of the organizations mention discrimination against Roma youth more frequently than the respondents themselves. There could be several reasons for this: the greater insight into the issue, among others, substantiates its reality, but one must also consider the legitimization efforts of political and politicized Roma leaders, who may seek to portray the problem as more significant than it actually is (Forray 2000).

Our research also included interviews with employers in the region. The results of the two studies conducted seven years apart clearly demonstrate that there is a significant difference in the frequency of Roma employment between the two years examined. Only the frequency of occasional employment remains the same, meaning that even after several years, the same number of people are employing Roma workers on an occasional basis, but not necessarily the same individuals. However, it can be noted that by 2006, businesses had reached a point where fewer – nearly half as many – stated that they would never employ a Roma worker. At the same time, the decrease in the "never" response is almost identical to the decline in the "quite often" response. These two shifts are counterbalanced by a strong, nearly two-and-a-halffold increase in the frequency of Roma employment. Summarizing the positive and negative trends, it is noticeable that the situation improved compared to 1999, meaning that in 2006, the proportion of positive responses was higher than that of negative responses (Székely 2008). Discrimination in the labour market, therefore, cannot be measured or proven, but it is a likely fact based on everyday experiences.

**The situation of Women and Roma Women**

"The requirement of equal treatment is a constitutional principle, which represents the legal manifestation of the prohibition of discrimination and guarantees the right to live free from harmful

discrimination. However, equality of opportunity policies also demand that the state, beyond the prohibition of discrimination, take concrete steps to ensure the actual equality of disadvantaged individuals" (Gyulavári 2004).

In order to talk about gender equality, women first had to fight for their equality, which, through centuries of historical, economic, and social changes and movements, they were able to claim as their own by the 20th century. Despite this, women still face inequalities in several areas compared to men, which significantly affects economic and social cohesion, development, performance growth, and competitiveness. In the member states of the European Union, an equality policy is being promoted that helps women achieve equal opportunities in various areas of life (e.g., labour law, public participation, protection against domestic violence, and sexual exploitation).

**Legislative Framework**

**EU Legislation for Promoting Gender Equality**

Discrimination against women is a problem that also exists in the member states of the European Union. For this reason, the Union has outlined several measures for the member states and has enshrined the necessity of actions against inequality in various treaties. It is important to address gender equality structurally by involving a wide range of social actors in the planning and implementation of solutions.

The European Union considers the promotion of equality of opportunity across all areas of life and for all groups or communities affected by discrimination to be a priority. To this end, the Union has created both primary and secondary legislation, as well as made recommendations in collaboration with member states. The 1957 Treaty of Rome was the first piece of legislation to articulate the principle of equal treatment. The final sentence of Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome provides authorization and encouragement for positive programs: "For the full gender equality in the world of work, it is not contrary to the principle of equal treatment if Member States maintain or adopt measures that provide special advantages to underrepresented genders so they can practice their professions and prevent or compensate for career-related disadvantages."

Since 1975, the European Union has enacted 13 directives under which gender-based discrimination can be addressed. The most prominent form of discrimination occurs in the employment and the labour market. Therefore, the 1957 directive on equal pay and the 1976 directive on equal treatment in employment were very important, as they are linked to the principle of equal pay for equal work, as well as equal access to employment, vocational training, career progression, and appropriate working conditions. In addition to these two directives, others have been established in areas such as employment, social security systems, maternity and parental leave, part-time employment, and access to goods and services.

In December 1979, the UN Committee in New York adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which has been in effect in Hungary since 1981. The convention outlines the social policies of member states aimed at achieving full gender equality. It also defines gender discrimination as any form of differentiation based on gender, resulting in violations of fundamental human rights in social, political, cultural, economic, and all other areas of life.

The 1999 Amsterdam Treaty, Articles 2 and 3, continues to prioritize the achievement of gender equality between women and men as one of the Community's main tasks, requiring the Community to focus on promoting gender equality as a horizontal objective in all its activities. The application of gender equality in all areas is a legal obligation for member states, including Hungary.

The European Commission's 2004 report on gender equality emphasizes that "gender equality must be promoted in all policy areas, including employment and social policy, education policy, research, external relations, development cooperation, and budgetary and financial policies." Additionally, member states were required to make a political statement committing to the promotion of gender equality in policies and social programs, with the ultimate goal of achieving gender equality. However, commitment alone is not enough; clear criteria are also essential for governments to set, helping social actors achieve these goals.
Alongside the mentioned legal frameworks, the EU has created soft legal tools. The 2001–2005 Community Framework Strategy on Gender Equality, presented by the European Commission, outlines strategic action plans aimed at "eliminating gender inequalities and promoting gender equality." It seeks to achieve goals such as promoting gender equality in economic life, ensuring equal participation and representation, equal access to social rights, full implementation of social rights, changing gender roles and stereotypes, and creating decision-making mechanisms that realize gender equality.

The European Employment Strategy (2005–2008), as a key part of the Lisbon Strategy, includes goals such as full employment, quality jobs, productivity, employment, and social cohesion. These goals include ensuring that the labour market is open to both female and male workers, reducing long-term unemployment, particularly among women, and mitigating women's financial dependency by following the principle of equal pay.

In the context of Hungary, progress on implementing gender equality can be supported by the Commission's 2006–2010 Roadmap on Gender Equality, which outlines six priority areas for EU action in the 2006–2010 period:

- Equal economic independence for women and men;
- Work-life balance;
- Promoting equal representation of men and women in decision-making;
- Eradication of all forms of sexual violence and human trafficking for sexual exploitation;
- Overcoming gender-related stereotypes in society;
- Promoting gender equality beyond the EU.

The roadmap defines the primary objectives and measures for each area.

**Equality of Opportunity in Today's Hungary**
**National Legislation for Promoting Gender Equality**

There is no specific legislation solely for promoting women's equality and prohibiting discrimination against them. The primary law that highlights the importance of gender equality in all areas of life is the Equal Treatment and Promotion of Equal Opportunities Act (2003. CXXV. Act). This law states that

public authorities must uphold the requirement of equal treatment in all their relations, procedures, and actions (Section 4). The law explicitly prohibits discrimination in various areas, including based on gender, marital status, maternity (pregnancy), paternity, employment relationships, part-time status, and fixed or indefinite duration of contracts.

Based on the authorization outlined in Section 64 of the above-mentioned law, the government established the Equal Treatment Authority. In cases of violation of equal treatment, the injured party may request an official procedure or, in cases specified by the law, the authority may conduct the procedure ex officio to determine whether discriminatory practices have occurred. Through the right to public interest enforcement, individuals or groups whose rights have been infringed may initiate legal action. The authority also provides opinions on legislation affecting equal treatment, other legal tools for state administration, and draft reports, offering recommendations for government decisions and legal regulations. The authority regularly informs the public and government about the state of equal treatment and educates the public on enforcement opportunities. It also contributes to reports that must be submitted to international organizations regarding the enforcement of equal treatment in Hungary.

It is not easy to alleviate the disadvantages that women face compared to men because some of these arise from the fact that women give birth to children and only mothers are capable of caring for infants. However, as children grow, fathers can increasingly take part in child-rearing and care.

The situation of women is fundamentally improved by any tools that make it easier for them to balance their professional and maternal roles. These tools are diverse and broad in range, from kindergarten services to part-time employment and household aids. (Andorka 2006)
Women are likely to encounter disadvantages in the labour market during their lives, as well as difficulties in fulfilling family obligations, disadvantages caused by low public representation, the risk of harassment by men, or a combination of these. We speak of multiple discrimination in cases where women, in addition to discrimination based on their gender, face disadvantages in other areas due to belonging to a group with other inequality situations. Older women are even more vulnerable in the labour market. For a sexually abused Roma woman, finding a solution to her situation is even more difficult. In these cases, we can talk about multiple discrimination.

The intersectional disadvantages of Roma women are defined by their ethnic background, gender identity, and social status. They face severe exclusion in areas such as employment, education, healthcare, and housing. Furthermore, their access to long-term social services, social benefits, and financial services is highly limited, and their opportunities for public and political participation are also narrowly defined. (Balogh-Kóczé 2011)

In achieving gender equality for women, interventions are necessary in multiple areas through gender mainstreaming tools: creating family-friendly workplaces, applying atypical forms of employment, and providing active information. These efforts can help lighten the daily burdens of women and, by supporting their success, may initiate a change in public perception of women's roles. This slow process can be aided by increasing women's participation in public life.

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To protect women from violence, clear legal frameworks and enforceable practices are necessary, so that there is the possibility to help victims and change the social perception of both the abuser and the abused. Continuous training and awareness-raising are essential so that it is understood by society as a whole that creating gender equality for women is inn all of our interests and responsibilities. Its effects will positively impact not only women's lives but also the everyday lives of their male counterparts and the country's economic situation.

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