

Organization: Bernard Rorke, Advocacy Officer, European Roma Rights Centre

Working session 14: Tolerance and non-discrimination I, including: equal opportunity for women and men in all spheres in life, including through implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality;

Title: Intersectional forms of exclusion faced by Romani women and girls

Concerning the multiple discrimination faced by Romani women across Europe in general, I would like to address the situation of Romani women in Slovakia in particular, and amplify the concerns expressed 8 months ago by UN CEDAW.

These include persistent discrimination in access to employment, health, education and the barriers Romani women face when accessing justice in Slovakia.

We remain concerned about the inability of the justice system to provide appropriate, effective and gender-sensitive remedies in a timely manner to Romani women who were subjected to forced sterilization.

I would also like to draw attention to the continued practice of segregation of Romani women and girls in Gynaecological and Obstetrics wards in hospitals in eastern Slovakia.

Romani women reported concrete instances of discriminatory treatment, which included women and girls being prevented from using the same bathrooms and toilets as non-Roma.

Field monitoring also found that Romani women and girls reported incidents of being slapped and verbally abused with racial connotations by medical personnel in a number of hospitals in this region.

I would like to stress that these problems are not confined to Slovakia, and the European Roma Rights Centre's research, advocacy and litigation reveals that this is the experience of too many Romani women in too many participating states. So while the recommendations are directed to Slovakia, they have a far wider relevance.

Recommendations

My recommendations are that the State:

-) Introduce a bespoke compensation scheme for victims of forced sterilisation that does not require them to go to court.
-) Establish clear procedural guidelines to follow up on complaints of rights violations and strengthen administrative accountability mechanisms at hospitals;

-) Introduce clear guidelines for medical staff and provide long term and systematic training of healthcare personnel on how to ensure informed consent for any medical intervention including sterilisations.
 -) The training should also focus on the practical aspects of respectful communication and on overcoming any prejudices of healthcare providers against Roma and other marginalised groups.
 -) The State party should also monitor the implementation of the current legislation by healthcare providers and introduce effective sanctions if violations occur.
 -) And finally, all participating states should revise their Roma National Integration Strategies to fully mainstream gender equity; to adopt comprehensive policy interventions, with adequate budgeting, that address the intersectional forms of exclusion faced by Romani women and girls; policies that affirm their reproductive rights; that combat the multiple forms of discrimination inhibiting their access to health care, education, employment and housing; to empower them to participate as active and fully equal citizens, and accord them the respect and recognition that is their due.
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