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Romani CRISS welcomes the OSCE commitment towards dedicating the Special Day's sessions to the topic of participation of Roma and Sinti to education and, in particular, to access to early education of Roma and Sinti children.

Welcoming the initiative of Romanian legislative to include in the Law on education the prohibition of school segregation

taking into account the ODIHR 2008 Status Report on the implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area, which states that lack of equal access to education of Roma and Sinti is still a stringent issue to address

Romani CRISS expresses its concern regarding the restriction of access to education of Roma children in Romania, as well as the extremely poor implementation of the Order on prohibiting school segregation. Not only that the implementation of the Ministerial Order that banes segregation is not implemented, but it is not known by the schools, which have to implemented.

We express our concern regarding the fact that many Roma children are still assigned to segregated schools, which lack quality.

We would like to draw your attention on cases when kindergarten directors refuse the enrollment of Roma children, claiming they have special needs. We would like to emphasize the pressing issue of *de facto* segregation- many and many non-Roma parents protest and move their children to other schools, when measures such as desegregation are taken. As a consequence, it is proofed that more measures need to be taken before initiating a desegregation process, starting from the very beginning, which is the early childhood education.

Early childhood education represents a foundation of the lifelong learning and one possible answer to matters such as discrimination. Higher education and employment are directly influenced by early childhood education, especially for disadvantaged groups, such as Roma. Enrollment rates for Roma in early childhood education are very low: in Romania only 17% of Roma children are enrolled in this level of education¹.

We recommend the participating states to focus their efforts into designing and implementing early education programs inclusive, in order to assure the Roma children participation in learning with non-Roma children from preschool age. This type of approach might very well combat future *de facto* segregation or discriminatory attitudes among children enrolled in school.

¹ UNICEF- Breaking the Cycle of Exclusion: Roma children in South-East Europe

We recommend the states to continue their efforts in order to assure equal opportunities for Roma children to attend early childhood education, regardless factors such as ethnicity, cultural, linguistic.

In the field of early childhood education, as the ODIHR 2008 Status Report states, little progress has been made regarding proper changes in the system. We call upon the Romanian Ministry of Education to turn the existent best practices into systemic changes.

The actual project of the Romanian Law on education includes the concept of early childhood education, assuring a satisfactory framework for this approach. We call upon the Romanian delegation to reaffirm the principle of equal rights and non-discrimination in this area also.

Nevertheless, we call upon the participating states to assure proper policies for training pre-school and school personnel in areas such as intercultural dialogue, non-discrimination, prohibition of segregation, early childhood education.

To conclude, we recommend the participating states to address early childhood education by approaching the intercultural environment for development, as well as a non-discriminatory one, promoting equality of opportunity and treatment in this field. If well addressed, this type of approach assures an opportunity for learning and appreciating different cultures, functioning as well as preventing discrimination campaigning.