



**OSCE ODIHR
Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2019
September 26, 2019**

***Statement on Roma leadership and participation
by European Roma Grassroots Organisations (ERGO) Network***

Excellencies,

Public and political participation is a human right. Committing to the empowerment of a systematically disempowered social group to achieve equal participation in various societal and political affairs would play a crucial role in advancing democratic governance, the rule of law and socio-economic development.

ERGO Network firmly believes that Roma leadership and participation contribute to mitigating the imperfections of democracy and to bringing a fairer representation. It also brings an extended deliberation over preferences, needs and agendas, increased legitimacy of public authorities and more public trust. More Roma participation would lead to more efficiency in decision making and to finding feasible and, if necessary, more alternative solutions.

Considering its extensive experience in participating in policy-making processes, ERGO Network is of a position that Roma participation results in appearance of important early warnings, a greater knowledge production, problem-solving capacity, and quicker learning.

A challenge is that Roma participation has been acknowledged to some extent (much greater extent than Roma leadership). Yet it is not a powerful enough policy objective and tool used by the OSCE participating states. In addition, while acknowledging that there have been developments regarding the ladder climbing from non-participation to tokenism, Roma are exceptionally rarely on the level of citizen control. Roma leadership is a precondition for pursuing diverse forms of quality participation.

ERGO Network calls upon the OSCE Participating States

EMPOWERMENT

- To develop measures with direct Roma empowerment as an objective and address empowerment as a multi-dimensional social process, that helps people gain control over their own lives, use and enhance their capacities to shape their communities and their society by acting on issues that they define as important.

ALL LEVELS ALL STAGES

- To envision and foster quality participation at all levels (local, national, regional, European) and all stages (design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) of policy making, by establishing protocols of participation at different stages of policy processes. Authorities at each level shall

enrich and diversify regular policy consultation platforms, and develop *more advanced* and *issue-specific* forms of partnerships.

WITHIN PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

- To develop national policies addressing Roma participation, including in administrative personnel at all levels, by positive actions while being conscious that Roma should be part of not only processes narrowly defined as 'Roma issues'. Roma being employed and present in the decision-making structures in institutions such as equality bodies can fairly contribute to fighting antigypsyism, for example. Different opportunities such as internships, traineeships and employment opportunities should be created for young Roma, especially overcoming ethnic and gender gaps in employment. Importantly, the future policies should offer more systematic solutions related to employment of Roma in public sector, to counter the trend of employing Roma only for the duration of the Roma-related projects.

INVESTMENTS INTO CIVIL SOCIETY

- To devise tools and resources for empowering civil society organizations, including for small grassroots organisations, while acknowledging civil society actors as advocates and safeguards of basic democratic principles and enriching the independent civil society monitoring mechanisms and capacities of assessing national governments' policy performance. Such funding should cover, as appropriate, the variety of activities of CSOs, such as service provision, watchdog activities, advocacy, litigation, campaigning, human rights, and civic education and awareness raising.

ROMA TARGETED POLICIES

- To develop indicators to measure the frequency and quality of Roma participation and leadership. Participation and leadership are a policy matter and can be measured by using both quantitative and qualitative indicators. Relevant policies should be assessed in terms of objectives, targets and indicators. In order for Roma to climb the ladder of participation, policy work has to be focused on different steps, including assessing the developments and defining challenges, hindering factors and factors that help quality participation. Relevant policies should aim at overcoming the understanding of Roma participation as 'civil society consultation'.

POLITICAL INTERSECTIONALITY

- To contribute to diversifying Roma participation while embracing an understanding that besides 'women's' and 'youth issues', Roma women and youth have diverse expertise and should also occupy high level positions. The same understanding should be applied to other social groups on the intersections of different categories of difference such as sexuality, class, disability, geographical location. Marginalised groups' representation affects other people in similar positions to get more confidence to voice their needs.