

Ismael Cortés, Member of Parliament, Spain

### ROMA & SINTI PARTICIPATION

I would like to call on the competent OSCE institutions responsible for democracy and equal participation, to commit to the following 4 priorities when it comes to Roma and Sinti participation in elections:

- To increase the visibility of Roma & Sinti citizens in electoral census; still in many countries Roma and Sinti are underrepresented in the census; and in some cases Roma are not represented at all.
- To focus on political education for Roma and Sinti citizens, in order to get clear understanding on their rights as voters and as potential candidates.
- To promote the inclusion of Roma candidates in electoral lists.
- To support Roma candidates by include them in different political forums; whether organized by media corporations, intergovernmental organizations or Civil Society networks.

I also would like to call on the Spanish competent authorities, to foster a meaningful involvement of Roma citizens in political structures; to my understanding a good model to follow would be the quota system that enables women participation.

If we look back to the late 80s, the percentage of women in Congress was 5.6%. Since 2007, with the adoption of the Gender Equality Law, popularly known as the quota law, some parties decided to apply parity criteria for electoral lists. Such a measure has led to restructuring the composition of parties' leadership, parliamentary committees and executive cabinets. Today, women are 47% of the Spanish Congress and 80% of the current government.

The last elections, in April and May, included local, regional, national and European levels; only 0.08% of the overall candidates were from Roma background. However, some estimates say that the Roma represent around 5% of the overall population in Spain. These figures show a clear disparity or asymmetry between the Roma citizens and their non-Roma fellows in accessing democratic power structures.

In anthropological and sociological terms, "**integration**" is a problematic concept; nevertheless, in political terms, "**integration**" should rather be thought of as a set of inclusive decision making processes to fight against exclusion and to promote equal participation; making sure that no one is left behind when we as a society perform economic growth and social progress.