

## **HDIM 2012**

### **Working Session 6: Roma/Sinti and, in particular, empowerment of Roma women**

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Working Session 8 was devoted to the empowerment of Roma women. ODIHR's Contact Point on Roma and Sinti Issues Andrzej Mirga emphasized the importance of education for Romani women and girls. Monika Šimůnková, the Czech Human Rights Commissioner, stressed that Roma integration is a priority of the European Union and includes a special focus on Roma women. She stressed that participating States must engage Roma women in the fields of child protection, health care and education. A critical task for many participating States is to achieve the desegregation of Romani children in schools. Romani women are important agents of social change and the government must address their social exclusion in the education and employment sectors. Additionally, governments must address their negative past, e.g. forced sterilized cases.

24 interventions were made after the introducer, of which 13 by non-governmental organizations (NGO). In addition, 4 participating States made use of their right of reply in response to prior interventions.

A group of 39 participating States reiterated its commitments to implementing the OSCE Action Plan and the National Roma Inclusion Strategies and improving access to health care, education, housing, employment. A number of the participating States discussed their respective National Roma Inclusions Strategies and the attention in those strategies devoted towards gender issues.

Many speakers emphasized that education is fundamental for empowerment and highlighted that Romani women face multiple forms of discrimination – facing prejudice as women and Roma. Many NGOs and one participating State condemned the segregation policies which exist in the schools across the OSCE region. NGOs urged states to acknowledge this segregation and take necessary steps to integrate schools.

Many NGOs and one participating State voiced grave concern about the housing crisis and the impact on wellbeing and health when one is lacking running water, trash removal, heating, and sanitation. Many NGOs and one participating state raised the issue of forced evictions; and the lack of consultation with the community about the process of resettlement. One NGO discussed a particular incident in December 2011 where seventy six families were relocated from the city to the outskirts near a garbage dump. These families continue to face obstacles ensuring access for their children to local schools.

One participating State and many NGOs noted significant concerns about the violence facing Romani communities across the OSCE space. Numerous NGOs noted that law

enforcement resources need to be allocated to include safeguarding Romani communities.

Many speakers raised the problems of documentation for Romani persons and emphasized that this continues to be a critical issue to resolve – and that many Romani persons are stateless and unregistered. Numerous NGOs called on governments to recognize Romani, Sinti, as well as travelers as national minorities.

Many participating States and NGOs emphasized that Romani women must be involved in designing the implementation of policies and research efforts which affect them.

Two NGOs emphasized that the economic crisis adds additional strain to the situation facing Roma women and to governments' ability to support Roma. One NGO called for reforms to the EU Fund for Roma to ensure its effective administration.

### **Recommendations to the participating States:**

- Bring an end to the segregation of Romani children in schools and integrate schools so that Romani children can benefit from the equal opportunity for education;
- Support Roma integration strategies with adequate funding. EU Roma Integration strategies need specific targets and a monitoring mechanism;
- Intensify efforts on the housing crisis;
- Intensify efforts to ensure that Romani persons have identification documents;
- Improve data collection and ensure Romani persons are involved in the design and implementation of policies and research efforts;
- Ensure a gender perspective in policy documents and budgeting;
- Intensify efforts to address all forms of violence directed at Romani persons including timely investigation and prosecution.

### **Recommendations to the OSCE, its institutions and field operations:**

- The Permanent Council should review and update the Gender Action Plan and ensure it reflects consideration of multiple forms of discrimination;
- ODIHR should increase its efforts to address the housing crisis especially the phenomena of forced evictions and in examining the particular impact on women and girls.