

Participation of Roma and Sinti Youth

OSCE participating States have acknowledged *“the important contribution youth can make to the fight against intolerance and discrimination [...]”*. (Brussels, 2006)

Participating States have also committed to *“enhancing the participation of Roma and Sinti in the elaboration, implementation and evaluation of the policies that affect them, including by fostering Roma and Sinti political participation,”* as well as *“promoting the effective and equal participation of Roma and Sinti women in public and political life, including through the promotion of women’s access to public office, public administration and decision making positions”*. (Kyiv, 2013)

Who are Roma and Sinti youth?

Roma and Sinti youth represent a population of growing importance in the OSCE region. The average age of Roma and Sinti in the European Union is just 25 years, compared with an average age of 40 for non-Roma and Sinti people.

Roma and Sinti youth continue to be stigmatized and experience unequal access to opportunities.

Marginalization and discrimination often prevent them from fulfilling their potential and discourage them from

participating in public and political life.

Roma and Sinti women have even more limited access to participation, due to multiple forms of discrimination they face by virtue of their ethnicity and gender.

When Roma and Sinti are not involved in politics their views and interests are not represented in relevant decision-making bodies and processes, which further isolates them.

Why does the participation of young Roma and Sinti matter?

Young people across the OSCE region contribute to their societies by engaging in political activities alongside established structures and institutions, whether through civil society organizations or political initiatives for young people.

It is essential that diverse youth voices are listened to in public and political processes. This not only strengthens democratic institutions, but also helps to build more accountable and representative political environments.

Roma and Sinti youth participation is important to ensure that their interests and views are taken into account as well as to reduce stigmatization

against them and their communities.

By becoming involved in public and political life at a young age, Roma and Sinti youth will be in a better position to address the challenges their communities are facing. They may also be empowered to become political actors and decision-makers, who can credibly represent Roma and Sinti interests in the future.

Why are the OSCE and ODIHR involved?

The work of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on improving the situation of Roma and Sinti youth is grounded in OSCE commitments.

Ensuring the active participation of Roma and Sinti in public and political life is one of the

priorities under the 2003 OSCE *Action Plan for Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area*.

The focus on improving the situation for Roma and Sinti youth was reinforced by the 2013 Ministerial Council Decision on “Enhancing OSCE Efforts to Implement the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area, with a Particular Focus on Roma and Sinti Women, Youth and Children”.

Since 2013, the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, based at the ODIHR headquarters in Warsaw, implements a Roma and Sinti Youth Initiative, which provides opportunities for civil society organizations to encourage Roma and Sinti youth to engage in their communities.

Its three areas of engagement are:

- Empowerment and social inclusion of Roma and Sinti communities through youth activism and volunteerism;
- Public and political participation of Roma and Sinti youth in politics and democratic processes; and
- Roma and Sinti youth and security.

How does ODIHR assist Roma and Sinti youth?

The aim of ODIHR’s work with Roma and Sinti youth is to create opportunities for Roma and Sinti youth to become active members of their communities through grassroots engagement, volunteerism and political and public participation.



Andrea Ignácz, a young Roma from UCCU Foundation in Hungary, presenting a project about Roma youth, which was supported by ODIHR, during the side event “Roma and Sinti Youth Initiative: Youth as Agents of Change” at the 2017 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. (OSCE/Ewa Jasinska)



Jumberi Alimovi, a young Roma from Georgia making an intervention during the 2017 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. (OSCE/Ewa Jasinska)

Support to civil society organizations

ODIHR supports civil society organizations in carrying out youth projects in OSCE participating States via implementing partner agreements.

These projects tackle concrete challenges that Roma and Sinti youth encounter in their everyday lives and empower them to find solutions to their problems, by building their confidence and teaching them important skills. Through these projects Roma and Sinti youth learn

how to actively practice public and political participation and improve the quality of life in their communities.

Professional development opportunities for young Roma and Sinti

ODIHR provides professional development opportunities for young Roma and Sinti by hiring junior experts to work for six months at the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues on programmatic activities, including those

relating to Roma and Sinti youth.

The junior experts become familiar with the work of an intergovernmental organization and gain relevant knowledge and practical skills.

Raising awareness on the situation of Roma and Sinti youth

ODIHR raises awareness among OSCE institutions, participating States and the wider public about the situation of Roma and Sinti youth. It does this

by supporting participation of Roma and Sinti youth activists in OSCE Human Dimension events and conferences.

ODIHR also provides them with a platform to speak about issues that concern them and their communities.

“Participating States of the OSCE have to ensure full and effective participation of young Roma and Sinti in public and political processes. This benefits not only the individuals, but also their communities, the participating States and society as a whole.”

Roland Ferkovics, young Roma from Hungary.

“Young Roma and Sinti women can serve as valuable leaders and role models in communities throughout the OSCE area. The way forward is to ensure mechanisms for their active and effective participation, especially in policy processes that concern them.”

Natalia Duminica, young Roma from Moldova.

Partnerships

ODIHR works with a range of partners on Roma and Sinti youth issues, including:

- Participating States – governmental structures responsible for Roma and Sinti and other minorities;
- Civil society organizations;
- OSCE Field Operations; OSCE institutions, including the High Commissioner on National Minorities, and the OSCE Secretariat; and
- International organizations, such as the Council of Europe, the European Commission and the United Nations.



Atanas Stoyanov a young Roma from Bulgaria, making an intervention at a workshop “Strengthening diverse leadership, participation and representation of Roma, including women and youth, in public and political life” hosted by the OSCE/ODIHR on 27 and 28 March 2017 in Brussels. (OSCE/Michael Chia)



In 2014 ODIHR organized an international Roma and Sinti Youth Conference in Belgrade, Serbia. The conference report “Activism, Participation and Security among Roma and Sinti Youth” (2015) includes six background papers from young Roma and Sinti activists.

Scan this QR code using your smartphone to access our work on Roma and Sinti.



For more information about ODIHR's work with and about Roma and Sinti, please visit: <http://www.osce.org/odihhr/roma-and-sinti>

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