

**Statement from National Roma Centrum and ERTF
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OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Working session 9: Tolerance and non-discrimination II, including Roma and Sinti issues, including implementation of the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti

Paragraf 98 from the State recommendation, from the OSCE Action Plan on improving the situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE area (2003) says : "Promote Roma women's participation in public and political life; Roma women should be able to participate on an equal basis with men in consultative and other mechanisms designed to increase access to all areas of public and political life."

Nowadays Romani women still face this challenges: poverty, statelessness, lack of access to health services, lack of access to information as well as education and political participation.

Roma women and youngsters face multiple discrimination for their status as Roma combined with their status as women and young, leading to a level of oppression that can be immeasurably more difficult to overcome. They also face other types of intersectional discrimination from their status as migrants/immigrants/non-citizens, persons experiencing poverty and/or homelessness, and other aspects of their individual identities.

They also face gender discrimination from both inside and outside of their communities.

Political participation of the women and youth is totally absent from the policy designing of the political parties.

In comparison to the general population, the ratio of women in major political positions remains disproportionately low, except in Nordic countries where about 41% of MPs and Senators are women. Within that group, minority and marginalised women have minimal representation at all levels of government and are largely absent from key decision-making position.

For example in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia we have quota for women that shall be in the electoral lists but the women always remain in very low places in the list. Very often if they are given higher position in the list, by the pressure of the political party they reject the election and they give preference to the next male candidate from the list

The representation of Romani women and youth in the national parliament in FY Republic of Macedonia is equal to zero. This is the situation in other countries as well. At local level we have few women who are part of the local councils.

For example in FY Republic of Macedonia we have the Ohrid agreement which ensure the right of participation of smaller communities. The goal of the Ohrid Framework Agreement was to promote the inclusion of smaller communities in the country, that is, an agreement on the internal organization of the rights of communities. Thanks to the Ohrid agreement Roma gained places to the state and public administration. Still this number is too small comparing to the majority populations. Also we have Law on promotion and protection of the rights of the members of the communities that are less than 20% of the population.

From 2005, we have National Strategy for Roma, which was done in frame of the process for Decade of Roma Inclusion and since then the strategy constantly face lack of financial means but also proper body who will take care about the implementation and also the monitoring of the strategy.

According to the European Commission report from 2014, "Small communities remain underrepresented and the progress of protecting smaller communities remains hampered by insufficient financial and human resources and inadequate cooperation between the affected authorities. It requires proactive approach to guarantee ethnic, cultural and linguistic identity of communities." Also discrimination continues to be a problem in the integration of smaller communities or "multiple forms of discrimination against smaller communities still exist and action to combat stereotypes, including in the media, remains ineffective." The challenge is bigger nowadays with the usage of social media. The hate speech against Roma community is very strong.

Implementation, monitoring and coordination of policies related to minorities remains weak. Minorities representing less than 20% of the population remain outside the main policy and decision-making process. Consultative processes on exploring their needs and rights usually are done only by the Roma CSO's within different project activities and researches that are occasional and the government does not support them.

Most of the local strategies as well as the national strategy for Roma face the challenge of inappropriate planning finances, it miss proper data, proper measures to improve the situation and effective evaluation and monitoring. Local initiatives promoting participation of Roma in public and political life in Macedonia are local actions plans without proper financing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Member States

- * To strengthening the existing legislation in order to ensure political representation of Roma especially Roma women and young people in the mainstream political parties.
- * To implement voting education and awareness raising for political participation and representation on permanent bases, voting and electoral education to be part of the school curricula and not just part of campaigning during the electoral process usually implemented by Civil Society organizations. Special designed programmes shall be designed and implemented by the government.
- * Regular collection of updated data on the socio-economic and educational status of members of communities in order to improve the participation of smaller communities at the local level as a precondition for developing effective measures to promote effective equality;
- * Increasing the level of awareness of language and manner understandable to all, including the members of the small(er) communities for access to the basic services and rights;
- * Political representatives to have the opinion and needs of citizens, to work devotedly on a lawful and proper implementation of the responsibilities and obligations;

To OSCE

- * To create mechanism for Political parties should design measures to promote minorities' participation, including Roma women's and young people in elections, including through the inclusion of quotas. Quotas are a powerful tool to achieve better political representation. Member states should consider setting strong quota laws or parity systems (with high quota percentage, rank order rules, strict sanctions).
- * Electoral systems and the geographical boundaries of electoral constituencies matter. Proportional electoral systems with closed lists have shown to increase women's political representation, and countries should consider switching to such systems.
- * To promote minority participation, the legal threshold for parties under proportionate representation systems should be low enough.
- * Voting mechanisms should be designed to provide the possibility for Roma women to be voted all over the country in those countries where the minorities are scattered.
- * Participation of Roma, especially young people and women, as voters should be increased in order to act as a powerful electoral constituency.
- * Funding should be made available for Roma women and youth who want to campaign in elections. In every country where there is a law regarding the use of election funding, financial resources should be available also to the Roma candidates in equal proportion.

To Roma Contact Point and Sinti Issues

- * To organize political empowerment for the Roma representatives in the parliament where in order to educate them about the political skills and methods of presenting and lobby for Roma communities.