

SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING

'Sustainable Policies for Roma and Sinti Integration'

10 – 11 July 2008
Hofburg, Vienna

ANNOTATED AGENDA

While institutional and legal frameworks necessary for integrating minorities have been successfully developed, serious problems remain with regard to the realisation of human rights of Roma and Sinti groups, including economic, social and cultural rights, throughout the OSCE region. A number of countries are witnessing the emergence of new trends, stemming from isolation, poverty, and lack of socialisation as much as from intentional discrimination of Roma and Sinti. National responses to these negative phenomena have been largely inadequate. Even though some countries have adopted specific programmes and strategies for Roma and Sinti – often encouraged by international organisations, donors and human rights groups, the implementation of undertaken commitments has been lagging behind the rhetoric.

The Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti Within the OSCE Area (*Action Plan*) adopted at the Ministerial Council in Maastricht in November 2003 sought “*to reinforce the efforts of the participating States and relevant OSCE institutions and structures aimed at ensuring that Roma and Sinti people are able to play a full and equal part in our societies, and at eradicating discrimination against them.*” In addition to the participation of the Roma, best practices between participating States, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, Roma and Sinti representatives, and local authorities is of utmost importance in the process of improving the situation of the Roma.

The implementation of the *Action Plan* by participating States has been the subject of several OSCE conferences and meetings. The 2005 Warsaw and 2006 Bucharest Conferences addressed the limited progress reached in pursuit of policies and actions plans by governments, inter-governmental organizations, and initiatives focusing on Roma and Sinti issues (i.e. Council of Europe, European Union, and Decade of Roma Inclusion) and the need for harmonization of their efforts, to avoid duplication.¹

¹ *Joint Conference on the Implementation of Policies/Action Plans for Roma, Sinti and Travellers, and Measures Against the Anti-Gypsyism Phenomenon in Europe'* (Warsaw, October 2005) and the conference on *Implementation and Harmonization of National Policies for Roma, Sinti and Travellers* (Bucharest, May 2006).

The *Action Plan* makes further references to the importance of involving local government, stressing that “[i]mplementation strategies should also include mechanisms to ensure that national policies are implemented at the local level.” It also urges participating States to “assess on a regular basis, especially at the local level, the results of these strategies and involve Roma and Sinti communities in the evaluation process.”

There is growing concern among many actors and stakeholders that despite the numerous Roma-related programmes and initiatives, the intended changes and results have not been achieved. Focus should be moved from rhetoric to action; from central government to local authorities and administration; and from comprehensive programmes and policies to concrete implementation, in particular in a local context. Indeed, many of the problems faced by Roma and Sinti can be remedied by local authorities. Processes of decentralisation allow the local level to take on the competencies and services which are crucial for the improvement of the situation of Roma and Sinti. This is particularly relevant in the fields of education, housing, security and police, and employment.

This SHDM seeks to review existing initiatives and practices and recommend measures to ensure effective implementation of the *Action Plan* at the municipal and community levels. The main focus will be to discuss how regional and local authorities can be more pro-active in supporting practical realisation of human rights of Roma and Sinti groups, including economic, social and cultural rights in particular and how to ensure sustainability of Roma-related policies and their effective implementation. In addition, means to ensuring that an effective partnership with Roma and Sinti exists throughout this process will be debated. The first session will seek to answer some more general questions about the mandate, role and responsibility of regional and local authorities. In the second session, local authorities should share experiences and present their perspective on Roma and Sinti integration. The third session will focus on the perspective of Roma and Sinti themselves on how to best access public services.

Session I: Role and responsibility of regional and local authorities to assist in integrating Roma

The concept of integration, respecting the diversity of populations and promoting mutual respect and understanding between these, is a principle of the human dimension commitments OSCE participating States have adopted. Regional and local authorities are encouraged to actively include minorities in the political, social, economic and cultural life of mainstream society, while providing means for preservation of their own identity and culture. For this approach to be viable, specific integration models which encourage and promote respect for diversity, while addressing the practical needs of integrating minority communities are necessary. Regional and local level input from both officials and minority communities, such as Roma and Sinti, are therefore crucial in designing effective integration approaches.

Challenges remain in many countries with large Roma and Sinti populations for achieving successful integration. Yet, Roma and Sinti remain rather passive, lacking involvement in processes of decentralization and are not well

informed of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Regional and local authorities need to work with local Roma representatives to translate national programs for integration into everyday practices.

This session will discuss the role and responsibility of regional and local level authorities to implement national integration strategies towards Roma and Sinti communities. Discussions will focus on the mandates of regional and local authorities and how these translate into practical implementation of Roma-related policies. Emphasis will be placed on examining how regional and local authorities address the challenges faced by their local Roma communities, within the national relevant frameworks, and assess if key stakeholders – including community and Roma representatives – are meaningfully involved.

Issues to be discussed:

- What function do regional and local authorities have in acting as regulators and facilitators of Roma-related integration strategies?
- What are the prerequisites for effective policy implementation at regional and local level?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages in Roma-specific frameworks (a targeted approach) and in general minority integration strategies (a mainstream approach)?
- What are the procedures and mechanisms required to develop Roma-related integration plans and measures at regional and local level?
- What partnerships are necessary for the preparation and implementation of Roma-related integration strategies?
- What are the major obstacles encountered and how can these be overcome?

Session II: Good practices and major challenges in improving the situation of Roma at local level: examples from municipalities

The importance of ensuring that local authorities take a proactive role in assisting Roma and Sinti to integrate into the wider society is outlined in the OSCE's *Action Plan*. Local authorities are specifically tasked to work with Roma and Sinti representatives and put into action national Roma-related integration strategies at local levels. As outlined in its Chapter IV on Addressing socio-economic issues: "*Action is required to ensure that Roma and Sinti people enjoy social and economic rights on a par with others. Measures at the grass-roots level, particularly those originating from Roma groups themselves, are particularly needed in order to promote the integration of Roma and Sinti people into social and economic life and to combat their isolation and poverty.*"

Widespread intolerance and discrimination against Roma and Sinti is a deplorable fact throughout the OSCE region. It contributes, for its part, to the exclusion of many Roma and Sinti from access to public services which may offer remedies to the socio-economic challenges they face. If Roma and Sinti

are to effectively integrate, local authorities have an important role to play with regard to overcoming barriers and ensuring access to socio-economic areas, including access to quality education, adequate housing, including residential security, and breaking the multi-dependency cycle created by lack of employment and economic opportunities.

This session will explore the concrete experiences of municipalities with regard to integration practices for Roma and Sinti populations. Lessons learned will be shared, as well as good practices and challenges encountered by local authorities. Emphasis will be placed on identifying both obstacles to the effective integration of Roma, and measures to overcome these.

Issues to be discussed:

- What are examples of good practices and initiatives that can be presented and promoted by municipalities in addressing the major challenges to integrate Roma and how can these practices be replicated and multiplied?
- What are the measures taken by large municipalities with Roma and Sinti that addressed emerging developments in the following areas: access to quality education, security of tenure and residence, and ensuring the right to benefit of public services that may assist with addressing issues of unemployment and economic hardship?
- How do local authorities ensure that Roma and Sinti are part of the process of formulating policies and measures towards them?
- What are the indicators of successful integration of Roma and what are the pre-conditions that lead to this success?
- What measures can local authorities take in addressing the root causes?

Session III: Policies to facilitate equal access of Roma and Sinti to public services, in particular social services and education

The overall goal of the OSCE's *Action Plan* is to ensure that Roma and Sinti are able to play a full and equal part in their societies, and eradicate discrimination against them. Mainstreaming Roma issues into wider institutional structures at both the national and local level is needed and requires the promotion of best practices among participating States, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, Roma representatives, and local authorities within States. The *Action Plan* envisages an increased level and quality of reporting regarding the progress in implementation of the *Action Plan*, and the creation of networks among Roma and non-Roma NGOs to render the implementation of Roma-related policies at the local level more effective and sustainable.

Although both national and international institutions have in the past years highlighted the need to take action to improve the situation of Roma and Sinti, their integration will be limited without direct input from the community itself. This was recognized by the OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities report on Roma and Sinti² and made subject for a Special Day on Roma and Sinti at the HDIM 2007.³

² Report on the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area (2000): "*Unfortunately, countless programs for Roma have been destined to fail because they were developed without Roma*

This session will focus on selected areas of integration which are of particular relevance for Roma and Sinti. These include education, housing, employment, civil registration and access to public services. Discussions from the perspective of Roma and Sinti towards integration strategies at the local level will be encouraged throughout this session.

Issues to be discussed:

- What are the central areas to focus on for successful integration in society? How should local authorities and Roma approach areas as education, housing, employment and welfare benefits?
- Are some areas of integration more important or urgent from a Roma and Sinti perspective than others and why? Is there a need to prioritize on some particular areas?
- How can inter-ethnic relations at the local level be effectively improved?
- From the perspective of Roma and Sinti, how can policies be designed that accommodate the State, Roma and non-Roma expectations for integration?
- How should information regarding Roma's access to legal mechanisms be disseminated more effectively?
- What is the role, responsibilities and own contribution of Roma and Sinti in the integration process? How can Roma and Sinti be empowered to increase their participation in this process?

participation, and, correspondingly, with scant awareness of the specific culture and needs of the intended beneficiaries. Equally important, programs for Roma designed without Roma are scarcely likely to earn the confidence and commitment of Roma”.

³ Working Session 6 & 7: OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti: Participation in Political Life, Overcoming Discrimination