



EUROPEAN UNION

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2012 Warsaw, 27 September 2012

EU statement – Sessions 6-7

ROMA/SINTI, EMPOWERMENT OF ROMA WOMEN

Mr./Madam Chairperson,

I have the honor to take the floor on behalf of the European Union and refer to the implementation of the *OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area* with a specific focus on the empowerment of Roma women. Let us start by reiterating the EU commitment to fully implement the *OSCE Action Plan* and subsequent commitments with regard to Roma and Sinti.

The European Union has stepped up, since 2007, its commitments and actions to improve the situation of Roma and Sinti. In June 2011, our Heads of State and Government called for the rapid implementation of the Council Conclusions of May 2011 on the *EU framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020*, in particular as regards the preparation, updating or development of Member States' national Roma inclusion strategies, or integrated sets of policy measures within their broader social inclusion policies for improving the situation of the Roma.

Currently, all EU Member States have devised and started implementation of such concrete strategies and measures that focus on enhancing integration of Roma in the societies they live in especially via improving access to: education, employment, healthcare, housing and essential services. Specific targets and monitoring mechanisms are part of these strategies as means to ensure their better implementation.

Nonetheless, while some progress has been achieved, the challenges still outweigh the achievements. Challenges remain in the EU, as well as throughout the OSCE area, with regard to, inter-alia: combating discrimination and intolerance against Roma and Sinti, including violent manifestations, and ensure effective remedies; countering negative stereotyping, including in the mass-media while fully respecting freedom of expression and of the media; enhancing participation of Roma and Sinti in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies that affect them; ensuring equal access to education and combating segregation in schools; increasing participation of Roma and Sinti in social, economic and political life; improving living conditions; trafficking; domestic violence.

Most of the challenges listed above affect Roma women to a larger extent than men due to general conditions in society and/or due to traditional gender roles and expectations within their own communities. The phenomena of double discrimination - based on ethnicity and gender - or even multiple discrimination are worrying. Therefore, discussing *empowerment of Roma women* as a topic for one of the HDIM Special Days is extremely timely and necessary. We view this debate as a means to explore together - governments, civil society, Roma and Sinti communities – solutions not only to overcome the situations of vulnerability that Roma women find

themselves in, but to empower Roma women to become agents of positive change within their communities and in the societies at large. In this context, we would also like to thank the OSCE Secretariat for organizing the expert round table “Women as Agents of Change in Migrant, Minority and Roma and Sinti Communities in the OSCE Area” on September 6-7, 2012, in Vienna.

The *Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area* acknowledges the challenges faced by Roma women and acknowledged the need to take into account the particular situation of Roma and Sinti women in the design of all relevant policies designed for the population as a whole, as well as in the context of equality and non-discrimination. Indeed, specifically focused and tailored policies may make Roma women more aware of the importance of good health, education, employment for themselves, their children and families. Moreover, involving them to a significant degree in programme designing contributes to their support in programme implementation in areas such as child protection, education, healthcare. Therefore, investing in Roma women helps lay the foundations for a longer-term and effective inclusion of present and future Roma generations.

OSCE commitments also address the vulnerable situation of Roma women with regard to access to employment, health and address other particular issues related to voting rights, participation in public and political life, their needs in conflict and post-conflict situations. All of these commitments need thorough implementation and, as mentioned before, the EU and its Member States have devised specific measures to that end.

Another key area that we would like to draw attention to is the importance of education. Roma women’s levels of education are generally lower within their own communities and the population as whole and this is a significant factor in their social exclusion and poverty, with a negative impact on future generations. Education of Roma women is therefore, an effective tool for social integration and promoting mutual respect and tolerance among Roma and non-Roma communities.

Recommendations:

- 1) Ensure that Roma women are consulted with regard to the design and implementation of policies affecting them and their communities.
- 2) Step up awareness-raising efforts about the importance of education of Roma girls and women.
- 3) Measures designed for Roma women should be accompanied by measures aimed at the whole Roma communities and/or the non-Roma environment as complementary strategies.

The Accessing Country Croatia*, the Candidate Countries the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, Montenegro*, Iceland+ and Serbia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the EFTA country Norway, member of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

** Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.*

+ Iceland continues to be a member of the EFTA and of the European Economic Area.