

**2010 OSCE REVIEW CONFERENCE**  
**Introductory Speech for Session 7: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination I**  
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**Roma and Sinti realities: The unfulfilled promise for social inclusion**

Honorable Representatives, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honor to address you in this session with regard to the implementation of the OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti. Today we have the exceptional opportunity to take a critical look at the efforts made and evaluate the actions undertaken by OSCE participating states in implementing the OSCE human dimension commitments relating to Roma and Sinti over the last decade. We should be encouraged not only to assess the programmes or projects and institutional progress, but also undertake a reality check with regard to the current situation of Roma and Sinti.

More than a decade since the last Review Conference and nearly two decades after the international community expressed its serious concerns with regard to the human rights situation of Roma and Sinti in OSCE area, their situation today can be summarized as reflecting an unfulfilled promise for social inclusion.

The last decade was the most prolific from the point of view of policy-development and commitments towards Roma and Sinti. To enumerate the most important ones, besides the Maastricht MC Decision No. 3/2003 on the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti Within the OSCE Area, I will mention the international initiative for a Decade of Roma Inclusion, the resolutions and recommendations of the Council of Europe, the EU reports and the 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion, and the two EU Roma Summits, in 2008 in Brussels, and in 2010 in Cordoba. Moreover, dozens of States have developed Roma-related policies and have adopted national strategies, action plans and governmental programmes to improve the situation of their Roma and Sinti population.

There has been good reason for many Roma and Sinti to believe that better times are approaching for them and that all these initiatives and state programmes will bring positive outcomes.

Though there is no comprehensive data available to monitor the situation in key areas such as education, employment, access to services and housing, the indicative data, reports and surveys demonstrate no progress and worrying trends.

I would like to reiterate here the words of Ambassador Lenarčič in his opening speech for this conference: “Today, despite the commitments and good intentions included in all these documents, the picture is bleak. Progress in integrating Europe’s Roma population has been minimal and often does not extend beyond the adoption of legal frameworks and policies.” The huge gap between Roma communities and the mainstream society is visible in all areas of life such as housing, education, employment and access to public services. These gaps are also reported in the 2008 ODIHR Status Report on the Implementation of the OSCE Action Plan for Roma and Sinti.

On a number of occasions the ODIHR has expressed its concerns with regards Roma and Sinti in recent years. We shall mention here the following: there has been an increase in hate crime attacks against members of this community in some participating States, some of these attacks resulting in killings of Roma victims; the new walls built just recently in some localities to enclose Roma settlements or separate them from their mainstream neighbors are a symbol of their isolation within societies; there has been a resurgence of past stereotypes and prejudices against Roma and Sinti, characterizing them as uncontrollable nomads, associated with illicit or illegal activities and stigmatized as the “undeserving poor”. Even more, in many societies they are perceived as a burden to the mainstream or they undergo the process of ‘securitization’, that is Roma and Sinti are perceived as a matter of public security; we have also seen mobilization of extreme-right groups or political forces ready to instigate and exploit hate-speech associated with Roma and Sinti.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please let me recall here that Roma migrants are a tiny group, though visible, within global migration trends or even within the migration movements towards or within the OSCE area. The recent examples of the mainstream public discourse on Roma migration as well as actions of some countries aiming to expel Roma migrants from their territory have shown that governments are not ready yet to handle the issue of Roma migration adequately and in line with OSCE values and international human rights standards.

It has not been coincidental that two additional MC Decisions addressing Roma and Sinti issues were adopted by participating States in the last two years,

in Helsinki in 2008 and in Athens in 2009. It very well reflects the fact that governments are not satisfied with progress achieved in implementing OSCE commitments with regard to Roma and Sinti and that there is a need to remind governments that they need to enhance its action. That's a positive sign. But it is not enough, obviously.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me conclude: time is now for action. Participating States cannot waste another decade of producing new commitments but taking no serious and resolute action to improve the situation of Roma and Sinti. We all cannot wait before it will turn to an un-resolvable situation. The 2008 Helsinki Ministerial Council Decision suggests a solution that would bring a sustainable change in long-run: promoting equal access to education and early education for Roma and Sinti children. What we expect from governments in this regard is to take a more pro-active approach and ensure achieving progress in access to early education for Roma and Sinti children, effectively combating segregation in education and ensure equal access to quality education for Roma and Sinti children. Building such a foundation will bring a fruits in the future.