



Merima Podžić

Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area

The Roma and Sinti populations in Europe migrated from India between the 9th and 14th centuries. They dispersed across Europe and developed diverse communities, some with their own dialects. Several million Roma live in Europe today, making them the continent's largest ethnic minority. Often linked together pejoratively under the term Gypsies, alongside ethnically unrelated groups, Roma have been persecuted throughout their history and were victims of the Holocaust. Discrimination and exclusion still characterize the lives of most Roma today, reflected in racist violence and high levels of unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, and infant mortality.

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What is an action plan?

An action plan outlines a set of principles to be followed in dealing with a particular issue. While action plans are often used by governments to formulate strategies for tackling social issues, such as poverty or racism, they can also call on other groups to take action, such as police officers, prosecutors, and judges; teachers; journalists; members of non-governmental and international governmental organizations.

It is important to remember that an action plan is not binding legislation. While an action plan aims to improve the lives of individuals, it does not confer any legal rights upon anyone.

OSCE Action Plans

- * Bucharest Plan of Action for Combating Terrorism (2001)
- * Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area (2003)
- * Action Plan to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings (2003)
- * Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality (2004)



Vladimir Cvejic

Scope and objectives

The Action Plan:

- * Aims to ensure that Roma and Sinti are empowered to play a full and equal part in society and to eradicate discrimination against them;
- * Is based on existing OSCE commitments and international and regional human rights law, especially the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, as well as on existing practices in the area of Roma- and Sinti-related policy making; and
- * Is to be implemented by participating States together with OSCE institutions.

Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area

The OSCE's Roma Action Plan provides the governments of all 56 OSCE participating States with guidance in their development of strategies aimed at eliminating the effects of discrimination against Roma, Sinti, and other related groups. Such discrimination is widespread, creating disparities that affect the ability of Roma and Sinti populations to participate fully in political and public life, to gain access to social services on equal terms, and to enjoy the same economic opportunities as others.

'For Roma, With Roma'

Roma have played an integral role in all stages — preparation, adoption, and implementation — of the Action Plan, which is reflected in the document's subtitle: "For Roma, With Roma".

The Action Plan also calls for partnership with Roma groups in the implementation of all activities carried out in fulfilling the Plan.

General context

Each policy and implementation strategy should be elaborated and implemented with the active participation of Roma and Sinti communities, with a special emphasis on the equal participation of women.



Vladimir Maceura

Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues

The ODIHR's Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues took the lead in the development of the Action Plan back in 2001. Since its adoption in 2003, the Contact Point has been carrying out activities in support of the participating States and NGOs in the implementation of the Action Plan, as well as facilitating information-sharing and exchange of best practices. It is also responsible for reporting on how participating States have been fulfilling the promises made in the Action Plan, and advising them, where necessary.

Key Areas for Action Envisaged by the Action Plan

Combating racism and discrimination

Participating States are urged to take action in the following areas:

- Legislation and law enforcement
- Police
- Mass media

Addressing socio-economic issues

To promote the rights of Roma and Sinti and to combat marginalization, the following areas should be targeted:

- Housing and living conditions
- Unemployment and economic problems
- Health care

Improving access to education

The participating States should promote school attendance, combat illiteracy, and develop policies to curb existing practices of school segregation by

integrating Roma and Sinti into mainstream education by providing full and equal access at all levels, while remaining sensitive to cultural differences.

Enhancing participation in public and political life

The participating States should uphold the rights of Roma and Sinti people to vote, stand for election, participate in public affairs, and form political parties without discrimination. The participating States are encouraged to hire qualified Roma and Sinti, including Roma women and youth, for positions in agencies dealing with policy on Roma and Sinti issues.

Roma and Sinti in crisis and post-crisis situations

The participating States should ensure that, in crisis and post-crisis situations, all fundamen-

tal rights, including the rights of refugees and internally displaced persons, are secured without discrimination.

Enhancing co-operation and co-ordination with other international organizations and NGOs

The ODIHR should strengthen its contribution to the activities of the Informal Contact Group on Roma, the European Travellers Forum, the International Roma Contact Group, and other relevant international organizations.

Implementation: review and assessment

The Action Plan is reviewed at the annual OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, during other relevant OSCE events, and at regular intervals by the OSCE Permanent Council.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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