

**OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Working session 16:
Roma and Sinti participation in public and political life, 26 September 2019,
Warsaw**

Excellencies,
Dear colleagues, and
Distinguished guests,

It is my pleasure to participate for the third time in the OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. Sincere thanks to the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues for supporting me and other Roma rights activists to take part in this event.

My name is Natalia Duminica and I am a Roma rights advocate from Moldova. Today I would like to bring to your attention **the barriers that limit participation and representation of Roma women in political life.**

Roma women want to sit at the tables and vote on the decisions concerning their communities, but they have **to follow gender-assigned roles** inside their family and community. They assume and carry household responsibilities from an early age. Most women regard men as head of the family while they take care of the children and household. Inequalities in the division of parenting duties **leave them at the margins of political and civic life.** Experiences of daily discrimination in social, cultural and economic life deters their motivation to get politically and civically active.

So, what can be done to ensure that Roma women are not left behind political processes?

I call upon Moldovan Government:

1. To endorse and respect the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti and the Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life; and to **ensure that recommendations regarding political participation are being implemented** accordingly;
2. To ensure that **Roma inclusion policies address the specific issues related to the participation of Roma women in politics**. These measures should be properly budgeted, monitored and assessed;
3. To **design and deliver training programs aimed at developing leadership skills of young Roma** girls, with particular focus on civic education and education for democracy;
4. To **solve the political and legal nature of incompatibilities** which will allow Roma mediators, most of them women, to run for local offices and hold the local councillor mandate;
5. To **promote positive examples of successful Roma women** which were and are engaged in political life.

Roma women face a variety of obstacles within their community and in the broader society that limits their political engagement. Illiteracy, poverty and lack of official jobs make Roma women an **easy target of manipulation during electoral campaigns**. The political mainstream parties invite Roma women to collect signatures and campaign for them, but they **hesitate to include them in their list of candidates**. Once the women agree to run, it is often difficult for them to get an electable spot on the list of candidates.

High levels of endemic corruption and political instability are demotivating Roma women from participation in political life. They fear that political involvement **may further endanger the Roma community instead of bringing positive changes**. Roma women witness that top-five spots on district lists of candidates are dominated by wealthy men with hidden interests. As a result Roma women do not even have a chance to do the exercise of running for local office.

However, there are signs of progress that I would like to share. For instance, during local elections in 2015, two Roma women won seats in Local Council. At the moment, only one woman exercises the local councillor mandate and she works as a community mediator as well. Due to discrepancies and contradictions in Moldovan legislation, the position of Roma mediator is incompatible with local councillor mandate. As a result the only Roma woman local councillor is currently facing a court case. Also, she reported sexist and racist behaviour towards her by male colleagues.

Increasing the representation of Roma women in decision making processes remains a bullet point only on the agenda of Roma civil society and partners for development. The **State fails to draft and adopt adequate policies** aimed at supporting effective participation and representation of Roma in a democratic society, such as I consider to be in Moldova. Through the support of partners UN Women and Swedish Embassy in Moldova, over the past year, my colleagues and I were able to train a group of Roma women, resulting in 10 women registered as candidates in the upcoming local elections in October 2019.

Roma women should not be left behind but given the opportunities to realize their right to be elected.

Thank you for your attention.

Natalia Duminica