



EUROPEAN ROMA RIGHTS CENTRE

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Statement of the European Roma Rights Centre

On the occasion of the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting:
Tolerance and non-discrimination: Equality opportunity for women and men
29 September - 10 October 2008, Warsaw

Good afternoon,

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) would like to highlight the worrisome situation of Romani women because of the multiple forms of discrimination they face as a result of their gender and race, which is compounded by the lack of effective policies to combat intersectional discrimination in most OSCE countries

School segregation and employment discrimination of Roma are reported in many countries of Europe. Though Roma in general have lower levels of educational attainment than the majority population, the education attainment levels of Romani women are even lower than that of Romani men. For instance, ERRC research in Hungary showed that those Romani girls who do overcome pervasive barriers to accessing education (such as extreme poverty and early childbirth) face ridicule, physical and verbal abuse, and often receive a lower quality of education. Further, Romani girls are disproportionately placed in schools for the mentally disabled or segregated classes due to administrative bias.

Romani women face higher rates of unemployment than both the general population and Romani men, due to a combination of childcare responsibilities and widespread discrimination by employers. The ERRC's research conducted in Serbia indicates that a large number of Romani women do not have access to formal employment as a result of low educational attainment levels as well as direct and indirect discrimination on the part of employers.

In addition, Romani women experience segregation and substandard care in maternity wards, extortion and discrimination by health care professionals, and several instances of forced or coercive sterilisation were documented in a number of European countries such as Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. Some Western European governments (Sweden, for example) have established compensation mechanisms for victims, but have not yet recognized the racial-targeting aspects of these systemic harms. Some Romani women harmed by coercive sterilisation have pressed justice claims with only limited success to date and none have received compensation for the harm they suffered.

Domestic violence is also an issue which affects Romani women in OSCE region. Specifically an ERRC survey carried out amongst 237 Romani women in Macedonia demonstrated that 70% of the respondents had been victims of violence at the hands of their partners, their in-laws and other members of their families. In most cases, Romani women do not report violence to law enforcement officials due to fears of further victimisation and due to prevailing negative and discriminatory reactions by police and other state authorities. ERRC research in several countries revealed that police often refuse to help Romani women.

For these reasons, the ERRC calls upon the national governments of the OSCE region and the OSCE itself to develop and implement policies which will address the effects of multiple forms of discrimination and eliminate discrimination based on gender and race. This is crucial not only for Romani women but also for all other marginalised women that face discrimination on several grounds.

Thank you very much for your attention.

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is an international public interest law organisation engaging in a range of activities aimed at combating anti-Romani racism and human rights abuse of Roma, in particular strategic litigation, international advocacy, research and policy development, and training of Romani activists. For more information about the European Roma Rights Centre, visit the ERRC website at <http://www.errc.org>.

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