

Recommendations and Statement for Working Group Session 16: *Roma and Sinti participation in public and political life* by LOIS BROOKES-JONES

Recommendations to OSCE:

- 1) More funded programmes for the education of Roma and Sinti by OSCE states, especially in terms of political education, to be leaders of their own change and be represented in political and/or public positions.
- 2) Counteract mainstream media negative representation of Roma and Sinti people by OSCE states through policy intervention, allowing more editorial power to communities over their experiences, and more funding towards training Roma and Sinti youth in journalism and film. This further includes more funding and public amplification of Roma and Sinti-owned media platforms.
- 3) OSCE states need to educate elected representatives and authorities on Roma and Sinti issues, and be held wholly accountable for expressing antigypsyism. This includes allocating paid positions by members of the Roma and Sinti community as educators.

Roma and Sinti participation in public and political life is growing, however as an international society we need to recognise that there are current and historic mechanisms in place which have made being visible, both in public and political realms as a Roma or Sinti person is a question of survival. To improve these circumstances, I will not beg as a young person who deserves rights, but make these recommendations as demands. There is constant focus on perpetrators of antigypsyism to be educated on our mutual humanity, and not enough focus on empowering members of the Roma and Sinti community through training and education to take ownership of their experiences and be leaders of their own change. This will need to include funding to aid marginalised members of our communities to gain accessibility by OSCE states, to be represented in future political and public institutions and life. These education programmes will also help Roma and Sinti communities to participate in local political issues through an understanding of political vocabulary which in itself can be exclusionary, and be fully educated on aspects of public life such as voting. We cannot continue to consistently give our stories and experiences unpaid to gadjo political representatives to be paid to express to other institutions. Roma and Sinti are experts, and OSCE states need to integrate funded and targeted education programmes and training to allow this group to be empowered and access spaces previously closed off. We will no longer blindly accept the bare minimum, we deserve public and political positions by the community and for the community.

In the same breath, our public and mainstream media representation is one of the challenges in Roma and Sinti participation in public and political life. For those members of society who are not politically engaged, media sources are the main source of wider world dialogue, and topics surrounding Roma and Sinti are typically negative and misrepresented, as well as being wrote by non-members of the community. This contributes to stereotypes and racism towards the Roma and Traveller community and makes public and political participation difficult because of the dangers it can ensue in terms of safety, as well as a lack of trust in media platforms to represent those Roma and Sinti who wish to engage in political or public life well for them to gain success. In response to this I believe that educating and funding Roma and Sinti youth in journalism and film in OSCE states not only to represent their communities in mainstream institutions and be publicly engaged, but also to create their own media which is owned by the community to wider educate non-Roma or Sinti on community issues that aren't being discussed by mainstream media outlets. Policy intervention also needs to be done in terms of holding media platforms accountable for inciting antigypsyism to give the community more ownership over their representation and voices.

On a final note, current political representatives need to be educated on and held accountable for antigypsyism by OSCE states, and this needs to be done by community members who are experts on their own lived experiences. We need to ensure that political spaces aren't gatekeeping Roma and Sinti from wanting to participate, and that representatives aren't simply using the community as either a tool for inciting hatred or as a token minority to exploit for votes.

