



## OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2008

Working Session 6: Tolerance and non-discrimination I (continued)  
(2th October 2008)

### EU Statement

Mr. Chairman,

1. The complex and persistent challenges faced by Roma and Sinti populations, especially in the field of social integration, are a matter of serious concern at OSCE level, as well as for the EU and its member states.

2. The European Council acknowledged in December 2007 and confirmed in June 2008, the very specific situation of the Roma people across the union. Member states and the union were invited to use all means to improve the inclusion of the Roma. The European Commission was mandated to examine the existing relevant EU policies and instruments and to report until the end of June 2008. The European Commission published a staff working document on 2 July 2008, which will serve as a basis for future action of the EU. The European Parliament adopted two resolutions (15 November 2007, 31 January 2008) urging for a comprehensive European framework strategy on the social inclusion of Roma.

3. Referring to the need for coherence and to avoid duplication in the work of other international organizations, the EU welcomes the existing cooperation between the OSCE and the Council of Europe. The EU encourages both organizations to enhance and strengthen their cooperation in all fields possible, especially regarding the tolerance and non-discrimination. The EU extends its appreciation to the finish chair, for setting the implementation of the OSCE action plan on Roma and Sinti as one of its priorities in the human dimension. To this end, the supplementary human dimension meeting in July this year represented a good opportunity for an exchange of good practices and lessons learnt. The EU and its member states contributed in an active manner to this

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meeting. The meeting showed the continuous problems faced by Roma and Sinti, persistent ones and new ones, as well as the commitment of the participating states to find ways for solving these problems, through sustainable policies for their integration. The EU is looking forward to the final version of the status report on the implementation of the action plan, with elaborated recommendations, report which is currently elaborated by ODIHR. this status report can be a useful tool for furthering a comprehensive policy towards Roma and Sinti.

4. Experience demonstrates that improving the situation of Roma requires the adoption of coherent and sustained policies aimed at promoting their economic, social, political and civic inclusion. In order to achieve this objective, Roma people must enjoy equal opportunities to participate in the democratic process, together with equal access to education, social services, employment and housing. Strong support for various non-governmental initiatives targeting Roma communities is of no less importance. At the same time, it is crucial to integrate in these policies the acknowledgement and respect of the specific Roma and Sinti cultures and languages.

5. We should strive to provide for the Roma and Sinti the opportunity to participate fully in the economic, social and political life. As a first step, we need to work together to overcome the any instances of prejudice, discrimination and social exclusion this group of people may be faced with. Over the past years, unfortunate incidents, involving Roma and Sinti in some EU member states, exposed the risk for inappropriate reactions such as blaming and rejection towards the group as a whole. Therefore, we should endeavour to make the best use of all available means, in order to prevent and fight manifestations of racism and discrimination against Roma and Sinti, including at the highest political level.

6. Secondly, the assistance-oriented mentality must be discouraged, while extending appropriate support to initiatives stemming from within the community. An inclusive grassroots Romani movement, focused on providing equal opportunities, needs to replace the existing project-based approaches.

7. Thirdly, the complex task of improving the situation of Roma and Sinti requires coordinated action in a number of fields, in particular those of education, employment, housing and social services, including health. The responsibility for finding a solution to these issues lies mainly with democratically elected national, regional and local authorities, where Roma are able to influence the decision-making process. At the same time, any integration policy cannot be successful without the active involvement of the civil society and the Roma themselves.

8. Last, but not least, the EU stands ready to play its part in particular by ensuring the respect of the principle of non-discrimination throughout the

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union and facilitating the social inclusion of the Roma population. The member states always bear the primary responsibility in the implementation of human rights of their citizens. However, we must remember that all EU citizens, including Roma, are equally entitled to move freely across Europe.

9. In order to facilitate the EU member states' coordination and cooperation for the social inclusion of the Roma, the European Commission organized a EU Roma summit on 16 September, attended by all the actors involved: member states, European Parliament, European Commission, NGOS. The objective of the meeting was to offer a framework for a fruitful exchange of views and good practices within the member states, in the perspective of the further conclusions on the Roma social inclusion at the European Council in December 2008.

10. The EU has already an advanced legal framework which provides for protection against discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin, as set forth in article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty. The scope of the legal protection includes the area of employment, social protection, education, access to goods and services. In the framework of the 2007 European year of equal opportunities for all a total of 19 actions focused on Roma issues were carried out in 12 of the 30 participating countries. These actions were aimed at changing negative attitudes among the general public towards Roma people. The fundamental rights agency, as the EU body specialized in the field of human rights, will issue a comparative report on the housing conditions of Roma and travellers in the EU.

11. Since 2004, the European Commission 'inter service group on Roma' has acted as an intra-institutional platform for the exchange of information with regard to instruments and policies which are relevant for Roma inclusion. Policy coordination on education, employment and social inclusion addresses specific issues, such as segregation in schools, limited access of Roma to health care and labour market etc.

12. Furthermore, gender mainstreaming and actions designed specifically to improve the situation of Roma women in all policies are important step towards gender equality and social cohesion.

Since 1997, the daphne programme funded 412 projects to fight violence against women and children, of which 3 were targeted explicitly on Roma women and children. Overall, multiple discrimination faced by many Roma women and girls deserves our serious attention accompanied by practical measures.

13. Urgent actions are necessary to provide training and employment programmes for Roma, in order to help them meet the needs of the labour market. The European Social Fund is already funding targeted, but non-

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segregated projects, to raise the employability of Roma women and men by offering them tailor-made vocational training, culturally sensitive job centres or accompanying measures after getting a job. Micro-credits may be particularly useful to respond to the preferences expressed by Roma towards self-employment or setting-up cooperatives and firms.

14. In order to achieve a satisfactory level of health in Roma communities, it is necessary to increase sanitary standards and to intensify programmes of health literacy. The involvement of Roma in the design and implementation of these programmes, as well as cultural sensitiveness towards their needs are important factors.

Recruiting Roma to act as mediators or intercultural agents has proved to be effective in ensuring that Roma are aware of, and can use a variety of services including healthcare and other social and legal services.

15. Finally, the EU stresses the importance of close coordination, mutual learning and sharing between other regional organizations experienced in Roma rights, such as Council of Europe and, in particular, with Roma organizations, including the European and travellers' forum.

EU recommendations are circulated separately.

The candidate countries Turkey, Croatia\* and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia\*, the countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate countries Albania, Montenegro and Serbia, the European Free Trade Association country and member of the European Economic Area Norway, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Armenia.

\*Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process