

Presentation by LOIS BROOKES-JONES: *Roma and Sinti Youth Initiative, Youth as Agents of Change*

I would like to thank OSCE for allowing me, a young Romni from the UK, the opportunity to speak at this event in terms of youth participation by the GRT (Gypsy Roma Traveller) community.

1) **Challenges and Issues** (3 minutes)

- Corruption and gatekeeping within NGOs have been an issue for youth participation in political and public life. This includes problems spanning from corrupt governments and councils giving monetary contributions to Roma and Sinti NGOs in return for lack of radical action on particular policies, and gatekeeping by older or more experienced activists within the Roma and Sinti community. This limits accessibility to Roma and Sinti youth, especially those without the agency of political or activist connections to work independently, and further marginalises those youth from the Roma and Sinti community who are less privileged in terms of wealth. We should be empowering our youth to have voices and be radical, instead of tone policing them and/or silencing them due to a perceived threat either in terms of going against government and risking financial aid, or to one's own position in the movement and plight of Roma and Sinti rights. We are teaching our youth to be silent, even at events which are supposedly there to amplify our platform.
- Roma, Sinti, and Travellers are not represented enough in positions of power, particularly paid, even on positions surrounding the welfare and education of GRT (Gypsy Roma Traveller) issues. At a recent Cheshire Council meeting regarding roadside encampments in my local area, I was the only Roma person present, and the only person below the age of 35. This is a challenge not only because of wider gadjo society robbing us of our worth in terms of our experience on our own lived existence, but because it also stops youth from feeling empowered by seeing versions of themselves in power to go against the stereotypes that wider society applies to you. This also means less opportunities in terms of jobs due to a lack of those from the community to provide it, and issues with accessing work due to discrimination. This stops youth from political activism because they aren't able to access funded positions, and therefore are limited in their participation due to having to find work elsewhere.
- There is not enough funded training of Roma and Sinti youth in OSCE areas so as to counteract mainstream racism and antigypsyism which can be found in media, film, and political dialogue. We are teaching our youth to be grateful for the bare minimum, and give their experiences to media without editorial ownership. As Roma and Sinti youth we are experiencing antigypsyism not just from general adults, but those of authority and influence, and there is not enough being done to amplify our own youth into these areas, and even create their own platforms. Roma and Sinti youth deserve to be radical and to be educated, and maybe this includes bridging generational divides to help the youth navigate their lives as well.
- Intersectionality amongst OSCE understandings of antigypsyism further need to be recognised. As Roma and Sinti youth, more needs to be done to challenge antigypsyism within the LGBT+ movement, within religious groups, and within feminism. Multiple discrimination is harming Roma and Sinti youth, such as myself who stands before you all today as a proudly Romani, LGBT+, Jewish, working class young woman. This lack of support comes from both wider diverse movements and within Roma and Sinti groups, and impacts issues spanning even to mental health. We as Roma and Sinti youth are individuals that encompass a variety of identities, which deserve equal attention and no less simply because we are Roma, Sinti, or Traveller.

2) Developments and Good Practices (3 minutes)

- In the UK I have currently been working with other Roma and Sinti youth on creating a more radical stream of GRT (Gypsy Roma Traveller) activism based in direct action and protest similar to that of the Civil Rights Movement, which is in its starting stages. I have been working on this to counteract gatekeeping by allowing a space of inclusive solidarity, and to build a network of people who simply want to express themselves in a more creative, aggressive, and direct way. This is also a response to political representatives simply not acting due to a lack of mass mobility and organisation, and realising that we shouldn't have to ask for equality, and should demand it.
- I am personally a co-founder of Traveller Pride, a group formed to participate in London Pride, and did for the first time this year, bringing four new ethnicity groups to London Pride. We have created this to form a campaign surrounding LGBT+ Roma and Sinti youth, created both for and by the community. We are hoping that this space can both educate GRT and non-GRT equality movements to provide better support, and a space where there is an understanding of Roma and Sinti culture and how that may impact LGBT+ identity. This also comes with being visible and proud as LGBT+ members of the Roma and Sinti community.
- I have personally been working with GRT based media platforms to amplify my voice as a Roma youth on various issues. This has included writing articles for Travellers Times on beauty standards and activism, Irish Broad Left on LGBT+ Romani identity, and being a writer and actress in an upcoming short film based on bereavement and mental health in the Roma and Sinti community with Its Kushti to Rokker. I have engaged with vlogging workshops and with the mainstream media to criticise antigypsyism publicly, and have found that by working with and amplifying GRT-founded media platforms, we can grow as a force for change as Roma and Sinti youth.

3) Recommendations to OSCE on the subject of Roma Youth participation in political and public life:

- OSCE areas need to facilitate and fund more training for GRT youth in terms of media, film, and political education. This includes more provisions of paid positions of power, especially regarding Traveller Liaison and issues, to the GRT community. This is to allow Roma and Sinti Youth access to spaces with financial provisions and to provide more representation in spaces of authority.
- OSCE areas need to create branches of scrutiny and transparency on how companies and government officials are funding GRT NGOs, and on the inner mechanisms of these organisations to prevent gatekeeping.
- OSCE areas need to allocate more funding and provisions to multiple discrimination work and groups, and scrutinise NGOs and movements on double discrimination.
- OSCE areas need to hold representatives of authority and media accountable for antigypsyism, with awareness training provided by members of the GRT community to sustain this. This may include policy intervention.
- OSCE areas need to facilitate and further support more radical and direct action by GRT youth to counteract the lack of changes coming from governments and within GRT events from authorities present.