

Intervention on Working session 9, HDMI 2014

Nesime Salioska from Macedonia, on behalf association ROMA S.O.S.

26.09.2014, Warsaw.

On behalf of Romani women, I would like to reinforce the fact that Romani women and girls in Europe are increasingly discriminated, based both on ethnic and gender grounds, which puts them in a cycle of insecurity, sexual and psychological harassment.

For the purpose of this session, I am going to address only two aspects that have been overlooked for a long time by governments and local authorities and which have been addressed largely as private or cultural matters of Roma communities.

The first is domestic violence. While other women or minority women may be victims of violence, Romani women lack protection against violence since they may be not eligible for shelters, where they exist, due to the discriminatory conditions in accessing shelters such as the request for holding certain documents, language barriers and the number of children they have. This is why Romani women stay in violent relationships and do not report violence.

The second issue is early and child marriage. Many countries still lack domestic legislation specifying 18 as the minimum age to marry as a means to prevent early marriages. But, even if countries have established the minimum age at 18, many Romani girls may be informally married as young as 12-14 years old, thus under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child they are still children. In many cases sexual relationships between a minor girl and adult men constitute rape under national ordinary law, but these cases are not taken in consideration by child protection departments or law enforcement bodies when a Roma girl is in the case.

In relation to the mentioned issues, we make the following Recommendations to OSCE participating states:

- ✓ Firstly, support and fund establishments of hotlines and shelters with legal, psychological services for victims of domestic violence and eradicate discriminatory administrative obstacles as a way to encourage victims to report cases and seek protection from relevant institutions.
- ✓ Secondly, revise national legislation, including settings of 18 as the minimum age for marriage, according to international human rights standards and cooperate with other stakeholders, such as child protection, social workers, educational professionals, Roma, civil society and international organisations for addressing child marriages both in its prevention and eradication, as it is an issue of child rights violation.