

Recommendations and statement for Working session 17: **Housing and Living conditions, particularly relating to the situation of forced eviction and segregation of Roma and Sinti** by LOIS BROOKES-JONES

Recommendations to OSCE States:

- 1) OSCE states need to provide policy alteration and intervention on custody of children by Roma and Sinti families living in distinctive communities and/or sites. This includes ensuring that Roma and Sinti living is not considered 'mentally damaging' to children in cases of law and custody of Roma and Sinti children.
- 2) OSCE states need to provide more intervention on companies refusing service to Roma and Sinti communities locally, and consider this when allocating sites and areas for Roma and Sinti communities.
- 3) OSCE states require policy intervention on forced assimilation of Roma and Sinti communities through responses to roadside encampments and forced evictions from historical Roma and Sinti sites and communities.

Recommendations and challenges for the Roma and Sinti community surrounding housing and living conditions could be endless, but I have selected particular challenges and areas for which I have found of priority in my country, the United Kingdom. OSCE states need to fully reflect on their own law systems and how they penalise Roma and Sinti for simply living within their own communities and lifestyles. This is particularly noteworthy when it comes to Roma, Sinti, and Traveller families in accessing custody of their own children, whereby living on a Roma, Sinti, or Traveller site or community is considered mentally damaging for children, and contributes to the assimilation of GRT (Gypsy, Roma, Traveller) people in terms of living, as well as children being then absorbed into care systems to further assimilate ethnic GRT children from their own community and family. This is also entwined with the conditions of why these children are removed from their parents being due to the poor living conditions of sites and housing provided by local authorities. These living conditions being so poor means that mothers are living in cars, such as a case in Ireland and the UK, due to reporting the conditions meaning their children would be seized by authorities.

Living conditions and allocation of GRT communities and sites is also hindered by local services and companies refusing to provide for Roma, Sinti, or Traveller people. This is particularly difficult in terms of local taxi services, such as King Kabs in my local area, who refuse to attend to sites whereby access to services such as supermarkets or schools is unattainable on foot, meaning that access to education for children, or even general access in public life for disabled or elderly members of the community is restricted. This means that OSCE states need to hold companies accountable for blatant antigypsyism through law and policy, and make sure that allocation of living accommodation isn't isolated from mainstream residents.

Assimilation of Roma and Sinti communities in terms of their living conditions also require intervention by OSCE states in terms of the shutting down of historical sites, a limited creation of new communities and sites in local areas, and difficulties of access for members of the GRT community in obtaining planning permission to own their own sites in local areas. GRT people should not be encouraged to live in housing through policies which target alternative ways of living by the Roma and Sinti community. OSCE states need to ensure that planning permissions processes are not discriminative, and that there are enough allocations of GRT communities in local areas, as opposed to forced evictions and criminalisation of roadside encampments which only exist due to discriminative policies limiting living spaces for GRT communities.