

# Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting III

Vienna  
29 October 2015



Opening remarks by

**Michael Georg Link**

**Director of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Over 20 years ago, ODIHR received a very specific task following the recommendation of Max Van der Stoel, OSCE's first High Commissioner on National Minorities. He recognized that the severe human rights challenges that Roma and Sinti face in the OSCE region require a multilateral response and also joint efforts from both the HCNM and ODIHR. In his special report from 1993, Max Van der Stoel warned about the dangerous effect that systematic discrimination, racism and hate crimes have on Roma and Sinti, and particularly women and youth, and its impact on migration. Following his recommendation in 1994 the ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues was established to complement the work of the HCNM from a human rights approach and to particularly address widespread racism and discrimination these communities face.

If we take today's situation of Roma and Sinti, one of the largest ethnic minorities in Europe, as an indicator on how much we have

progressed on implementing relevant OSCE commitments on minorities, including the Roma and Sinti Action Plan or particularly the Ljubljana Guidelines on Integration of Diverse Societies, the picture remains bleak. Despite numerous efforts, there is a huge gap between the mainstream population and Roma and Sinti. They are disproportionately affected from social and economic exclusion; they face discrimination and obstacles for equal participation in public and political life while very concerning challenges in the area of security and law enforcement remain.

ODIHR and HCNM have jointly addressed this with field visits to a number of countries, where we have identified severe human rights challenges facing these communities. These challenges range from ethnic profiling of Roma migrants, racism and hate crimes, included mob-style killings of Roma people, segregation in education and police violence.

Another good example of the good co-ordination and complementarity between the two institutions concerns the case of Ukraine. Last year, ODIHR published a comprehensive report on human rights situation of Roma there, a minority which in many areas of life suffer from widespread discrimination and obstacles in accessing fundamental rights and freedoms.

Moreover, let me underline that forced evictions or inadequate housing solutions for Roma and Sinti, which ODIHR observes across the OSCE region, puts their human security at risk and leads to further deterioration of their situation. This is in contradiction to socio-economic inclusion and the standards established with the Ljubljana Guidelines.

Given the limited progress done in fostering Roma and Sinti integration and existing challenges ODIHR will further put emphasis on building trust and understanding between police and Roma and Sinti and on enhancing public and political participation of Roma and Sinti, and particularly women and youth.

The recent session on Roma and Sinti at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting has demonstrated the potential of Roma and Sinti women and youth as agents of change for their community and the wider society. In particular young Roma and Sinti demonstrated at the meeting that they are willing to become active partners for policy making of their concern and promote non-discrimination and equality.

Roma and Sinti youth represents a demographic of growing importance, as they make a considerable proportion of the school-age population and the future workforce in many OSCE participating States. The new data ODIHR presented recently in its report *Activism, Participation and Security among Roma and Sinti youth* demonstrate a worrying existing gap between Roma and Sinti youth and their peers and hints to the particular vulnerable situation of young Roma and Sinti women.

In most of the twelve countries assessed, the data show that young Roma and Sinti lag behind in education, particularly at the level of secondary and upper education which negatively impacts on their economic integration and employability. This in addition, puts their human security at risk leaving them out of any assistance scheme.

These data are concerning and demonstrate that the last decade has not brought the envisaged results and call on the participating States to redouble efforts with regard to Roma and Sinti and work for an inclusive society promoting non-discrimination and equality for all.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the two decades that have passed since Max van der Stoep made his recommendation, his assessments remain as valid as ever. The challenges Roma and Sinti continue to be faced with can only be effectively addressed through concerted, international and multilateral efforts. In this, ODIHR stands ready, together with our

colleagues in HCNM, to further strengthen our efforts in this very important area.

Thank you for your attention.