



Human Dimension Implementation Meeting ODIHR activities

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Working session 15: Tolerance and non-Discrimination II

Including: Roma/Sinti; Implementation of the OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti Issues.

Recent years have seen increased hostility toward the Roma and Sinti community, preventing access to employment, education, housing, and health care, despite the adoption of anti-discrimination legislation by states. The OSCE is paying increased attention to these phenomena, exemplified by its Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area (2003). Roma and Sinti continue, however, to be victims of violence and racially motivated crimes and have suffered abuses at the hands of the police.

Obtaining legal residence with secure living conditions is a prerequisite for Roma and Sinti to the fulfilment of other rights. Problem areas that have resulted from insecure residence include: forced evictions, lack of secure land tenure, inadequate alternative housing, lack of civil registration, difficulties in accessing the labour market, and the inability to attend school.

The increase in trafficking in Roma and Sinti communities, particularly children, is believed to be linked to endemic poverty, social marginalization, the collapse of institutional support structures, and discrimination. Such patterns of discrimination have prevented Roma and Sinti from playing a significant role in the public and political life. There is also lack of awareness about how their votes and political participation influence their lives. Particularly affected are the internally displaced, refugees, returnees, young people and women. .

ODIHR activities relating to this Working Session/issue

The ODIHR activities are focused on the following areas:

- Combating racism and discrimination;
- Challenging social issues, gender-related, cultural practices and current trends involving Romani populations in transition societies: awareness-raising and capacity-building for Roma and Sinti activists;
- Enhancing participation in public and political life; and
- Ensuring that fundamental rights of Roma and Sinti and Sinti in crisis and post-crisis situations are respected.

The ODIHR has been involved over the last years in addressing discrimination of Roma and Sinti communities. In an effort to analyze and highlight discrimination in the **media**, a report has been commissioned by the ODIHR that examines acts of anti-Gypsism in the European mass media.

The ODIHR has conducted workshop trainings to raise awareness among law enforcement institutions and officers of human rights, minority rights and international standards and commitments regarding policing in democratic and multi-ethnic societies. Trainings were organized in Romania, Poland and the Russian Federation. A self-assessment exercise was conducted by the Romanian Police Inspectorate as a part of a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the ODIHR, the Romanian Ministry of Interior and a Roma organization. This

systematic review exercise is intended as a model for replication throughout OSCE Area.

The ODIHR has piloted a number of projects that deal specifically with **legalizing informal settlements**. This has included an analysis of the legal and administrative obstacles to integrating Roma and Sinti settlements into urban plans; as well as financial support and advice for legalizing land of Roma communities.

With regards to **trafficking**, ODIHR's activities in South Eastern and Central Eastern Europe aim to raise awareness of discrimination against Roma which threatens to undermine anti-trafficking prevention work. This includes portrayal of Roma as traffickers, unequal access to social protection, justice and education, employment and community development. A fund for support of grass-roots projects and capacity building of Roma NGOs was launched at a recent international meeting in Tirana.

A project has been launched to evaluate the identification of protection measures for **unaccompanied minors**, in particular those who have been victims of trafficking and repatriated from EU countries. In addition, a project has been launched in cooperation with a Roma NGO representing traditional Roma communities and with a OSCE-wide, informal Roma Contact Group on Gender issues. The main goal of the project is to open a **public discourse on early marriages and related cultural practices**. Emphasis is put on how to protect the rights of children, in particular teenage girls and identify ways to harmonize tradition with the rule of law.

The ODIHR has tailored its project activities **to increase the participation of Roma and Sinti in public life** at all levels of the decision making processes. Local and regional task forces of Roma and Sinti representatives have been created to work with local, regional and national elected bodies and officials, including promoting awareness about and implementation of the OSCE Action Plan on Roma and Sinti.

As **participation in the electoral process** is a core element of a democratic society, the ODIHR has facilitated Roma and Sinti participation in ODIHR Election Observation Missions as short-term observers, long-term observers and members of the Missions' Core Teams. A series of seminars and trainings on topics such as civil registration and advocating and lobbying elected officials have been carried out.

The ODIHR is engaged in a number of projects that **develop capacity of Roma and Sinti representatives and communities in crisis and post-crisis situations** in order to better represent their interests in relation with the relevant local and national authorities. Special emphasis has been placed on ensuring proper consultation before decisions are made that affect lives of Roma and Sinti. These activities focus on Kosovo, in particular issues faced by the internally displaced and refugees. The ODIHR co-operates with UNMIK, the OSCE Mission in Kosovo and local authorities to find solutions to the humanitarian crisis faced by displaced Roma displaced persons in Mitrovica are facing, by providing the technical and confidence-building expertise required to reconstruct the large Roma neighbourhood in southern Mitrovica, according to the interest and the visions of the Roma themselves.