



Pavee Point Statement – Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2012 – September 27 2012.

Pavee Point – Ireland.

Pavee Point is a non-government organisation committed to the attainment of human rights for Irish Travellers and Roma. The group is comprised of Travellers and Roma and members of the majority settled population working together in partnership to address the needs of Travellers and Roma as minority ethnic groups, experiencing exclusion and marginalisation. The aim of Pavee Point is to contribute to improvement in the quality of life and living circumstances of Irish Travellers and Roma through working for social justice, solidarity, socio-economic development and human rights.

Pavee Point welcomes the opportunity to address this important working session. We welcome the focus by the OSCE on the experiences of Roma and Sinti women and the acknowledgement of experiences of multiple discrimination. We commend the Irish Chair of the OSCE for ensuring that a working session will focus on the important issue of Roma women's empowerment at this human dimension implementation meeting.

At this point we urge that Travellers are also given visibility in the language being used and in the documentation of this important working session; and that reference is explicitly made to Traveller, Roma and Sinti women. The backdrop to our discussion today is the reality that the Irish Government has not recognised Travellers as a minority ethnic group. **We use this opportunity to urge the Irish Government to officially recognise Irish Travellers as a minority ethnic group as recommended by human rights bodies.**

We recognise the importance of the human dimension implementation meeting and welcome the opportunity to be part of a valuable discussion between representatives from Governments of the OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation, civil society and OSCE institutions. We look forward to seeing effective follow up to the recommendations of the working group sessions, in light of further discussions in the Permanent Council on the results of the HDIM as well as with regard to the preparations of the next OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting.

We acknowledge some of the important initiatives that the OSCE have taken to address discrimination against women, migrants and Roma. In particular we note the 2004 Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality, the 2003 Action Plan for improving the situation for Roma and Sinti within the OSCE area and the 2006 Ministerial Statement on Migration.

We would like to use this opportunity to raise some important issues and recommendations in relation to the empowerment of Traveller and Roma women, based on experiences in Ireland.

Travellers and Roma are among the most marginalised groups in Ireland. Traveller women in Ireland live 11 years less than the majority population. Seminars held by Pavee Point with Roma women and service providers have highlighted that many Roma women in Ireland have no access to work or social protection and are living in extreme poverty. Travellers and Roma women face multiple discrimination in Ireland. This discrimination is experienced at the intersection of multiple factors including as minority

ethnic groups, as women, and as migrants in the case of Roma. The intersections of racism and discrimination need to be acknowledged in relation to experiences of Traveller and Roma women.

Approaches to Empowerment

Pavee Point has developed as a Traveller led movement since 1983 and has since 2000 also worked to support Roma leadership. The approach of the organisation is to work from a community development perspective and this model has supported Traveller women and more recently, Roma women activists to advocate on their own behalf for their rights. There are a number of elements to this work.

- The approach focuses on working in solidarity to achieve outcomes for Traveller and Roma communities and address structural inequality, rather than working from an individual perspective
- Projects work at policy levels and link the grassroots to policy at regional, national and international levels.
- Projects develop out of needs articulated by Travellers and Roma .
- Traveller and Roma participation is a fundamental building block of the projects.

In considering how to promote Traveller and Roma women as agents of change, we believe these elements are crucial.

Barriers to Roma and Traveller Inclusion

However, this positive work is taking place in the context of State policies which serve to further marginalise Travellers and Roma. The policies of States are placing Roma women in insecure positions and placing them at risk of poverty.

If we are going to speak about Roma and Traveller women as agents of change – policies that exclude and marginalise need to be changed. The barriers faced by Roma women as agents of change are very often as a result of State policy – examples across OSCE states include forced evictions, collective expulsions, segregated education, restrictive social welfare entitlements, restricted access to labour markets – alongside broader racism, vigilante attacks and a lack of accountability for such attacks.

In Ireland, current social welfare restrictions provide an example of a policy that impacts on Roma as migrants, a minority ethnic group and as women. These restrictions also impact upon Irish nomadic Travellers. What is called the habitual residence condition necessitates that potential welfare claimants prove an established link with Ireland. One of the areas for consideration is pattern of work. Many Traveller and Roma women face huge discrimination in accessing the formal labour market and have also faced discrimination in accessing education and training. Furthermore, in Ireland until recently, citizens of Romania and Bulgaria needed work permits to work and which effectively excluded them from the formal labour force. Many Traveller and Roma women are primary caregivers for children and this also affects their work record. Effectively a woman could have been working in the home for years, but this is not counted or valued as ‘work.’ This is an example of how Traveller and Roma women face huge difficulties in the face of policies that are presented as ‘neutral’ but have not been equality proofed.

The Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) has impacted upon women experiencing violence also. Where a women may be leaving a situation of violence and applies for social protection she has to meet the HRC. Essentially a women who is deemed not to be habitually resident may have to face destitution in order to escape violence as she will have no social protection. We have come across cases (along with other migrant organisations) of women who have returned to violent situations after taking the steps to leave – as they have not been entitled to any State support.

The National Traveller Roma Integration Strategy, which Ireland has developed on foot of the European Framework Document for Roma Integration is another example of a situation where women have been excluded. Despite the EUs explicit instruction that Roma and Travellers should actively participate at all stages in the development and implementation of such a strategy – and the European Commission’s instruction that the strategy should be developed on the common basic principles on Roma inclusion, which include awareness of the gender dimension – the Irish plan contains no actions to ensure Roma womens’ participation in Irish society. Instead, the strategy contains no actions, no funding streams and effectively excludes Roma. Roma and Travellers were excluded from the development of this strategy. So when we ask the question of how Roma women can be agents of change, we can see part of the picture is changing existing practice in policy-development.

A change in the political and social systems that have institutionalised racism is needed. We need an honest and frank analysis of this – we need to be clear that social and political decision-makers could make significant changes to the lives of Roma, Travellers and Sinti and need to ensure that States facilitate change rather than placing obstacles in front of Roma, Traveller and Sinti women.

For example, as noted previously the Government of Ireland has still not recognised Travellers as a minority ethnic group, despite recommendations for various human rights bodies, including CERD. The OSCE Action Plan on improving the situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE area specifically notes that OSCE action is based on the human rights framework and in particular CERD. In 2011 CERD ‘expresses concern at the State party’s persistent refusal to recognise Travellers as an ethnic group notwithstanding that they satisfy the internationally recognised criteria,’ and recommended that Ireland works towards recognition of Travellers as minority ethnic group.

Recommendations:

OSCE:

- Ensure that Travellers are given visibility in the language being used and in the documentation of this important working session; and that reference is explicitly made to Traveller, Roma and Sinti women.
- We call on the OSCE to use its powers to urge Governments to meet their human rights obligations.
- Many community organisations have based their work and practice on the principle of active participation and have built up expertise in this area. The importance of this is now echoed in the OSCE’s commitment to the ‘active participation’ of Roma and Sinti in policy and all decisions that impact upon their lives. This needs to be backed up with sustainable funding for such organisations and we urge the OSCE to encourage States to take action in this regard.

We urge Member States to:

- Uphold their human rights obligations under international frameworks – this includes applying a human rights and gender perspective to all policies and practice in relation to Travellers ,Roma and Sinti women.
- Ensure State policies do not serve to marginalise Travellers, Roma and Sinti women.
- Equality proof policy and practice to ensure the inclusion of Roma, Traveller and Sinti women and to address institutional discrimination.
- Ensure austerity measures do not impact disproportionately on Traveller, Roma and Sinti women. Ensure that human rights principles underpin budget decisions and ensure that the most vulnerable do not bear the brunt of austerity measures.
- Include gender budgeting in all programmes.
- Ensure that disaggregated data, according to gender and ethnicity, is collected across all administrative systems and used to inform policy development. Such data collection must be undertaken in line with human rights principles.

- Adopt and targeting and mainstreaming approach – while including Travellers, Roma and Sinti in mainstream policies, also target groups that are particularly marginalised.
- Acknowledge and support the role of Traveller, Roma and Sinti organisations working to promote womens' empowerment, by ring-fencing funding to support such initiatives.
- Provide spaces for Traveller, Roma and Sinti women to actively engage in policy and decision-making in relation to policies that impact on their lives.
- Develop Roma integration strategies that will have a meaningful impact on Traveller, Roma and Sinti womens' lives:
 - o Explicitly address racism as part of these strategies
 - o Ensure a gender perspective as highlighted in the Common Basic Principles on Roma inclusion
 - o As per the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020, strategies should set achievable national goals with targets for Roma integration and should include time frames, funding mechanisms and strong inclusive monitoring and evaluation methods.
 - o Roma, Travellers and Sinti should be actively involved in all stages in the development and implementation of the strategy.
- These recommendations are not new and we implore States to take civil society recommendations on board and take action. Such action also needs to be monitored and evaluated for impact.

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