

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting- Session 14
Enhancing the implementation of OSCE commitments regarding Roma and Sinti: Effective responses to intolerance directed at Roma and Sinti: the role of public discourse, the media and civil society

Mr./Ms. Chairperson,

Romania supports the OSCE set of comprehensive commitments in combating racism and intolerance, especially those regarding Roma and Sinti. The OSCE's *Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area* contains firm pledges of the 56 participating States to combat intolerance and negative stereotyping of Roma and Sinti in cooperation with the civil society and international organizations. According to the document's recommendations, the participating States should take concrete action to fight prejudice and negative stereotyping of Roma and Sinti in the media, by launching information and awareness-raising campaigns and organizing round tables with mass-media and Roma and Sinti representatives, respecting the commitments regarding freedom of the media.

Combating discrimination of Roma is an issue statuated by the policies aimed at improving the situation of Roma, including the new Strategy for Roma Inclusion 2011-2020.

During the past years we have witnessed an intensification of intolerance against Roma and Sinti in the public discourse and in the media. Severe terms regarding these people are frequently used in mass media, while the themes were mostly the same: migration, crime or violence. After a short analysis of the content of articles in newspapers or TV news show, we can see that almost always, the picture of the Roma is still insubstantial and, generally, based on stereotypes. Romania has

On these lines, I would like to mention 2 institutions, special designed in this field: **the National Council for Combating Discrimination**, specialized body of the central public administration, which fights all forms of discrimination. Through its specific functions and competence, the Council is the first institution of this kind in Central and Eastern Europe. The second one, it is **the National Audiovisual Council**, the only regulator for the audio visual sector in Romania, set up to ensure that Romania's TV and radio stations operate in an environment of free speech, responsibility and competitiveness.

Experts say the reduction of negative attitudes against Roma is possible only in case of interactions, with a better knowledge between majorities and minorities. But because most people do not have direct daily contact with the Roma, their image is often taken over by the media and stereotypes conveyed by them.

That is why media should disseminate information not only focusing on the negative aspects but also on the positive aspects, and should promote good practices, recommendations, background information (collected directly from the field), monitoring and evaluation reports, programs' achievements and failures, feedback of Roma target beneficiaries, etc.

This type of focus should result in bringing long term benefits for the image of Roma in the media, and also in strengthening of current and future Government policies and programs.

We should help the media to write about the Roma, not only in difficult times for the Roma, but also in times of reconstruction of the communities. We **need to inform** the journalists on specific projects which aim to solve crises (ex. projects financed by the European Social Fund). National Agency for Roma is partner in organizing a biannual event which aims to become tradition: roundtables on the topic of "Roma: between stereotypes and best practices. The role of media in presenting Roma issues ".

They have to learn about our efforts to get rid of the bad mark and to integrate the Roma without giving up their main identity. Our message is that **we need to learn to live together while enjoying the beauty of being different**. It is our firm belief that this needs to be a joint effort of the authorities, civil society, including Roma and Sinti representatives, and the mass-media. For that purpose, we need to:

- Enhance monitoring of the implementation of commitments regarding combating discrimination against Roma and Sinti and enforce rigorously the legal provisions in this respect;
- Develop joint campaigns of national/regional/local authorities and civil society to counter prejudice and negative stereotyping of Roma and Sinti and carry them out including via mass-media;
- Involve public figures in the promotion of these campaigns calling for combating discrimination and intolerance against Roma and Sinti.

We look forward to ideas on how to better counteract / counter-balance intolerance and discrimination against Roma and Sinti, suggestions coming from the media and civil society representatives attending this event.

Thank you for your attention!