

HDIM 2012**Working Session 7: Roma/Sinti and, in particular, empowerment of Roma women (continued)**

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Continuing session devoted to Roma and Sinti was opened by Director of ODIHR, Amb. Lenarčič. He stated that Roma and Sinti face multiple discrimination and empowerment requires the assistance of states. Challenges in existing inequalities must be addressed. Moderator of session Amb. Miroslava Beham, OSCE Senior Advisor on Gender Issues introduced a short film “We want to be heard”, by Katalin Barsony and outlined few important points in addressing empowerment of Roma women. Help of pluralistic media, enhancement of targeted and standardized monitoring and reporting, sharing the participating States best practices of empowerment, involvement of men, mentoring of Roma by non-Roma women, governments’ encouragement of grassroots work and need of collaborative efforts to build on our findings was mentioned. The introducer, Ms. Rita Izsak, UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues, referred to her work with states concerning minority issues. First, she addresses governments by letter and communicates with them directly: only if this fails, she turns to media. Izsak offers guidance and technical assistance to the states to implement minority rights. To make the voice of minorities heard, Roma women need encouragement to knock on the door. The courage of women needs to be strengthened collaboratively, so they can become agents of change, therefore mentoring is important. Izsak stressed the value of role models, but pointed that Roma models do not have to be celebrities, but rather someone as small inspiration for neighborhood, such as teachers. Mentioning her personal career path, some aspects were decisive, e.g. that her mother who was an educated Roma woman served as role model for her, but also the chance to attend regular, not separated school as well as government’s scholarship helped greatly. According to Izsak, to promote specific policies, e.g. with assistance of the NGOs, the governments must listen to the voice of people on the ground.

In the following interventions, most speakers addressed key challenges to improve the situation of Roma and empowerment of Roma/Sinti women. Here are **the main recommendations for participating States**:

- Implementation should be enhanced (laws, National Action Plans etc. exist, but implementation remains often insufficient);
- Real inclusion of Roma women should be promoted;
- Under-representation of Roma women should be addressed;
- Adequate budgeting of activities for Roma/Sinti programs should be secured and thus not endangering one of the most vulnerable groups;
- Decisions of governments and comprehensive policies should be made with the participation of Roma women;
- Governments should have more will to address the pressing issues such as poverty, segregation, discrimination and other socio-economic issues and to share their best practices;
- Raising awareness against stereotypes and prejudices is needed;
- Education of Roma, including segregated education, should be addressed;
- Co-operation between central and local structures should be enhanced;

- Capacity building for Roma women, including networking, should be promoted;
- Access of Roma to public services should be improved.

The majority of representatives of participating States expressed their appreciation to continue the dialogue with NGOs in the HDIM on this important topic. Some participating States shared their view and best practices, e.g. scholarships, Roma Leaders Academy in Serbia, development of Action Plans and expressed their commitment to address this issue. It was also stated that the OSCE should do more to address rights of national minorities. Some claimed that the collection of data is a key in addressing the problems of Roma population. Council of Europe informed about their web database on the best practices.