



PC.SHDM.DEL/46/13  
13 November 2013

ENGLISH only

## STATEMENT BY TURKEY

### **Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting Implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti**

**(Session II: Ten years of implementing the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti: key trends, developments and challenges)**

**8 November 2013**

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

I would like to give the participants, a brief overview of the Turkish Government's democratic "opening" process towards Turkey's Roma population, initiated in 2009. In December of that year, the government held a workshop under the leadership of State Minister Faruk Çelik, bringing together representatives of the Roma community with public officials to discuss issues such as employment, housing and education as these relate to the Roma community in Turkey. This was followed by a large "Roma gathering" in March 2010, attended by 10.000 Roma citizens from all over Turkey. Prime Minister Erdoğan addressed the audience, stressing how Roma belonged to Turkey as equal citizens and promising that the government would do all it could to address the community's problems, concerns and expectations.

In February 2011, the Ministry of Education held a workshop with the title "Enhancing Educational Opportunities for Roma Children", bringing together a wide range of officials, education specialists and civil society representatives in order to address the challenges related to access and attendance to primary education stemming from Roma living conditions. UNICEF was among the participants. Collecting proposals and recommendations from all working groups, the Ministry of Education developed a unique and detailed action plan to detect and monitor irregular school attendance, prevent dropping out and strengthen preschool education.

Following a September 2011 workshop titled "Participation of Roma in the Labor Market", the Turkish Employment Agency under the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy launched a mediators program which aims to select Roma and non-Roma mediators to be trained to facilitate the Roma population's access to the job market. The Agency also runs the "Work for Public Benefit" program, which provides six-month temporary jobs for unemployed people in order to facilitate their entry into the job market, teach them skills and provide them with a consistent income. Fifty-nine governorates where large Roma populations live have been instructed to prioritize this group when selecting beneficiaries. Ultimately, about 1.500 Roma are expected to benefit from the said program.

In addition, Roma are part of the target group of the European Union Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance funds in Turkey. Within this framework, in June 2012 the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy launched a program to promote the inclusion of disadvantaged persons into the labor market and eliminate discrimination towards them when seeking jobs. Among all disadvantaged groups, the Roma will be specifically targeted under the program and 30% of the project budget will be used in areas with a preponderant Roma population.

As further measures, all discriminatory and degrading references to Roma in legislation have been deleted, a Prime Ministry Circular was sent to all governorates in Turkey instructing them to issue identity cards without any fees to all Roma citizens in their jurisdiction, and the Housing Administration of Turkey has constructed 10.000 housing units in various parts of the country for Roma living in poor conditions.

Since its establishment in 2011, the Ministry of Family and Social Policy has taken over the coordination role for all Roma initiatives of the government, making the process more efficient.

Most recently, the problems of Turkey's Roma population were also addressed in the "Democratization and Human Rights Package" announced by Prime Minister Erdoğan on 30 September 2013. The package contains administrative regulations aiming to further improve the living conditions of Roma citizens and address their educational and other social concerns. It also foresees the establishment of an Institute for Roma Language and Culture.

The Roma "opening" process has been carried out in a participatory manner, making certain that the Roma themselves have a say in policies and programs that are targeting them. In virtually all meetings and events, the government has been represented at the highest level, indicating their goodwill, sincerity and the solution-oriented approach adopted towards the issues. An indirect result of the process has been a much-improved sense of self-respect and belonging on the part of the Roma community, in addition to the growing number of Roma NGOs due to the community's heightened awareness of civic participation.

Thank you.

