



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

ODIHR and Roma and Sinti Issues

“We will reinforce our efforts to ensure that Roma and Sinti are able to play a full and equal part in our societies, and to eradicate discrimination against them.”

(Istanbul, 1999)

What is the ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues?

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), as early as 1990, was the first intergovernmental organization to recognize the “particular problems of Roma (gypsies)” in the context of the proliferation of racial and ethnic hatred, xenophobia and discrimination (Copenhagen Document, 1990).

The Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues was established in 1994 within the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in Warsaw. It was the first such office established to promote the human rights of Roma and Sinti and their integration in society.

Why is ODIHR involved in Roma and Sinti Issues?

The ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues is tasked with assisting participating States to effectively implement OSCE commitments pertaining to Roma and Sinti by sharing its expertise, providing assistance, raising awareness and assessing the progress in improving the situation of Roma and Sinti throughout the OSCE region.

The *Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area*, which was adopted in 2003 in Maastricht, provides the Contact Point with a comprehensive set of commitments and proposed measures,



“to eradicate discrimination against them and to bring about equality of opportunities, consistent with OSCE commitments.” Participating States enhanced these efforts in Helsinki in 2008 by committing, “to provide for equal access to education and to promote early education for Roma and Sinti children” and again in Athens in 2009 by urging participating States, “to address the rise of violent manifestations of intolerance against Roma and Sinti.”

The *Action Plan* defines the key areas to be addressed by the participating States, in particular, combating racism and discrimination, ensuring equal access and opportunities in education, employment, housing and health services, enhancing public participation and protecting fundamental rights in crisis and post-crises situations.

How does ODIHR work on Roma and Sinti Issues?

- Acts as a clearing-house and catalyst for Roma and Sinti issues, initiatives and policies;
- Assists participating States and other stakeholders in the design and elaboration of policy measures to improve the situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE area;
- Reviews and assesses progress in implementing OSCE commitments regarding Roma and Sinti through its human dimension meetings and assessment reports;
- Supports capacity building and empowerment of Roma and Sinti communities;

- Addresses violence and discrimination against Roma and Sinti, including in crisis and post-crisis conflict areas;
- Focuses attention on hate crimes against Roma and Sinti individuals;
- Works to enhance the impact of measures to improve the situation of Roma and Sinti through the sharing of expertise and co-operation with OSCE Institutions and field operations, Roma and Sinti civil society groups, and international institutions, including the Council of Europe, the European Union and relevant United Nations bodies;
- Raises awareness and promotes education about and commemoration of the Roma and Sinti genocide during World War II; and
- Conducts field assessment visits in response to human rights challenges faced by Roma and Sinti throughout the OSCE region.

ODIHR’s Roma and Sinti Status Report

Every five years ODIHR publishes a status report on *Implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area*. These status reports examine action by Participating States’ in all relevant areas for Roma and Sinti integration as stipulated by the 2003 Maastricht document. They assess progress, identify challenges and define priority areas for action. The findings are a resource for states to use in their efforts to achieve the objectives laid out in the Action Plan.



Field Assessment Visits

The Contact Point is mandated to be pro-active on Roma and Sinti issues, and this is most often exemplified by field assessment visits. Although field visits are triggered by incidents in particular participating States, the topics are strategically chosen to address developments that have occurred across the OSCE region. The recommendations made in their reports, therefore, address all OSCE participating States. Previous visits have included:

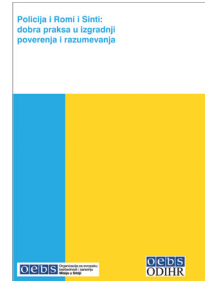
- ODIHR visited Romania to address the disproportionate and unjustified use of force by the police against Roma and Sinti and the lack of timely and effective police intervention to protect Roma and Sinti against collective violence by majority populations. As follow up from that visit, ODIHR published, *Police and Roma and Sinti: Good Practices in Building Trust and Understanding*;
- ODIHR conducted a field visit in response to concerns raised about Italian policy toward Roma migrants. The resulting ODIHR assessment report recommend ways to assist federal, regional and local authorities in providing effective protection for the human rights of Roma and Sinti and promoting their integration;
- Following a series of violent attacks against Roma, including the murders of six people in Hungary, ODIHR visited the country to assess the human rights situation of Roma and the underlying context in which racist

violence and hate crimes occurred. ODIHR's report following the visit addressed the need for adequate responses by the authorities to prevent such violence, including training of police and prosecutors to identify possible hate crimes; and

- To support and encourage equal access to quality education for Roma and Sinti children, ODIHR visited the Czech Republic. The ensuing report recommended that more be done to reform the school system and prioritize inclusive education, as well as the removal of all discriminatory barriers that prevent Roma children from benefiting from quality education.

OSCE Human Dimension meetings

OSCE Human dimension meetings play a key role in raising awareness among the participating States on the issues Roma and Sinti face in the OSCE region. These meetings provide regular forums for dialogue between governments and civil society, as well as good opportunities for Roma and Sinti organizations and activists to meet and review state programmes and action. Each year, CPRSI facilitates the participation of Roma and Sinti representatives at these meetings. The Contact Point has also supported the production of awareness-raising videos that have been shown at past OSCE meetings.



Topics addressed in the past have included:

- Sustainable policies for Roma and Sinti integration;
- Early education for Roma and Sinti children;
- Preventing racism and hate crimes;
- Effective responses to intolerance directed at Roma and Sinti; and
- The empowerment of Roma and Sinti women.

Roma and Sinti communities are found throughout the OSCE region, but predominantly in Central and South-Eastern Europe. They were persecuted for centuries and were victims of genocide during the Second World War. Often referred to collectively by the generic term “Roma”, Roma and Sinti and other groups share common cultural, linguistic and ethnic ties, and constitute one of the largest ethnic minorities in Europe. Because of the centuries-old societal prejudice, intolerance and pervasive discrimination that they continue to face, they experience problems in accessing rights and services in most areas of life and are poorly represented in public and political life in their societies.

More information

For detailed information about ODIHR’s activities on Roma and Sinti Issues, or to view its full range of publications and reports please visit: www.osce.org/odihr/roma

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