



Opening Address by Ambassador Janez Lenarčič
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Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on the
Implementation of the OSCE Action Plan on improving the
situation of Roma and Sinti in OSCE Area

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Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you to this year's third and last Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting focused on the Implementation of the OSCE Action Plan on improving the situation of Roma and Sinti in OSCE.

Today and tomorrow we can look back at the decade of efforts implementing the Action Plan on Roma and Sinti and other relevant OSCE commitments. This is an opportunity for us all to review the impact of measures taken for Roma and Sinti integration and to identify concrete recommendations for the way forward to address more effectively existing implementation gaps and persistent forms of racism and discrimination against Roma and Sinti.

In this context I would like to pay tribute to the enormous and extraordinary contribution of Nicolae Gheorge, the first OSCE Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues in 1999, who was also the architect of much of the OSCE work on Roma. As you know, Nicolae passed away this year and I wish we would all honour his life-work by renewed commitment to improve the situation of Roma and Sinti.

Five years after its adoption, in 2008, ODIHR published its first Status Report on the Implementation of the Roma and Sinti Action Plan, which assessed efforts by participating States to ensure Roma and Sinti integration. The main conclusions of the first Status report were that despite the number of initiatives undertaken by participating States, no real breakthrough took place in any of the key areas contained in the Action Plan. Serious problems remained in the implementation, funding

mechanisms, lack of political will and lack of attempts to measure progress. Moreover, a failure to implement national policies at local level was identified.

Today, at the time when we mark the tenth anniversary of adoption of the Action Plan and five years since ODIHR issued its first Status Report, our Office presents its second Status Report on the Implementation of the Roma and Sinti Action Plan.

On a positive note: the findings of the new Status Report demonstrate that integration strategies or policy measures for Roma and Sinti inclusion have become a standard in many participating States. There are now more policies, institutions and financial instruments available to tackle the broad range of problems facing Roma and Sinti communities. We can see that, increasingly, local authorities are engaged in developing local action plans and implementing initiatives.

In addition, more funding for Roma and Sinti programmes has been made available, including by the European Union through its assistance programmes for implementing integration strategies and action plans for its Member States as well as for countries aspiring to EU accession. Moreover, the consolidation of the EU policy on Roma and Sinti with the adoption of the EU Framework Strategy for National Roma Integration Strategies in 2011 is a visible progress in this area.

On a less positive note we have identified worrying trends which seriously hamper the prospects for social inclusion of Roma and Sinti communities: against the background of the global economic downturn over the last five years, there has been an increase in anti-Roma rhetoric

by populist politicians and extremists, violent manifestations against Roma and Sinti, mobilization of citizens to march with discriminatory slogans targeting their Roma neighbors and the scapegoating of Roma migrants.

During the review period, there has been little change in the quality of data about Roma and Sinti gathered by the participating States. In addition, there were few satisfactory results were achieved to close the gap between Roma and Sinti and the mainstream society, especially in the areas of education, employment, housing and access to social services.

I would like to highlight two issues in particular:

1. We believe that education has been identified as a key vehicle for changing the future through giving equal opportunities to the Roma and Sinti population by both national authorities and the international community, including the OSCE. Let me recall that education is a fundamental human right and a precondition to exercise many other human rights. It is further a powerful tool by which economically and socially marginalized communities can lift themselves out of poverty and participate fully as citizens. Yet, when we look at the situation of Roma children across the OSCE region we see that, they still face discrimination in education by being channelled to segregated, often inferior, education. Of particular concern remains the practice to send Roma children to so called “special” education.

2. Further, I would like to underline that especially Roma and Sinti women and girls are vulnerable to multiple forms of discrimination in all areas of life. While this is recognized by many international and national stakeholders, their issues are still not fully accounted for both in policy design or implementation, and their participation remains often symbolic at best. In 2012 the HDIM Roma and Sinti special day confirmed that Roma and Sinti women can and should play the role of agents of change for their community but also for the wider society to promote equal opportunity and inclusion for all.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Most participating States have arrived at a stage where Roma policy has become a standard. However, the key challenge today is how to ensure effective implementation to produce tangible outcomes with regard to Roma and Sinti integration and with regard to the persistent forms of discrimination, racism and violent attacks against them.

I wish you a fruitful but also honest and critical discussion to reflect on the achievements and the absence thereof, from the last decade. Hopefully this will result in concrete and realistic recommendations on how to address the existing challenges and ensure that Roma and Sinti have equal opportunities and are full and equal partners in our societies.

Once again thank you for your participation.