



## Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

Office of the Secretary General/ Gender Section

### Women as Agents of Change

#### in Migrant, Minority and Roma and Sinti Communities in the OSCE Area

Expert roundtable, Vienna, 6-7 September 2012

In the past few years there have been numerous prominent examples of women working as agents of change; such as the Arab Spring where women have used their influence to help bring about democratic change, at great risks to themselves and their families. The objectives of this expert roundtable are not as dramatic, but are equally important. Every OSCE pS and OSCE field operation has experience of marginalized communities that live within their own isolated communities within the larger society. Migrant, minority and Roma and Sinti communities, in particular women within these communities, face significant barriers with regard to social, economic and political integration. At this roundtable we will identify tools and mechanisms to assist women in overcoming these obstacles with a particular focus on the most vulnerable to discrimination and violence, and try to highlight encouraging policies that provide women of these communities the support, guidance and the opportunities they need to become agents of change.

It has been acknowledged by a number of international and OSCE documents that gender equality and the full integration of women in all spheres of society can essentially contribute to security. This is equally - or even more - true for women in migrant, minority and Roma and Sinti communities. These women can be catalysts for social integration and coherence and important contributors to the economic development of the individual communities and the overall society. However, at times they are also vulnerable to violence and exposed to inequality in their own communities. Almost 50% of migrants worldwide are estimated to be women.<sup>1</sup> Because of their gender, social identities and national origin, these women are not always easily integrated socially, economically or politically in their host countries. Similarly, women of Roma and Sinti communities face multiple forms of discrimination based on their ethnicity, gender, race and social class. They are often treated as a cheap source of labor, with a limited choice of temporary jobs paying low wages or jobs of irregular nature, without social security or health insurance.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, some women, especially those living in closed communities with specific cultural practices and traditions, are more vulnerable to discrimination and abuse as they often have limited contact with the authorities that have the means to assist them.<sup>3</sup> As such, they become legally invisible with no recourse to the justice system. In some instances, women from these communities are exposed to the most extreme human rights abuses and gender based violence such as coercive sterilization which has been documented in several OSCE pS.

Despite the various challenges faced by women in migrant, minority and Roma and Sinti communities, there are many examples of successful women who have contributed to social inclusion and to promoting human rights and gender equality. They have proved to be important catalysts in a number of countries where civil society and/or governments are actively creating opportunities for them. That women can be

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<sup>1</sup> World Development Report : Reshaping Economic Geography, 2009

<sup>2</sup> OSCE "Guide on Gender Sensitive Labour Migration Policies", 2009

<sup>3</sup> CoE Resolution 1697, 2009.

outstanding agents of change was not so long ago emphasized through the award of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize to three women, who have in their societies – also as members of minorities – essentially contributed to the development of democracy, human rights and equality.

The pS recognize these challenges and have reinforced their interest in fighting gender-based discrimination in several decisions and commitments. By endorsing the 2004 Action Plan for the Promotion of Gender Equality (GAP), the pS have committed themselves to promoting gender equality, empowering women and combating discrimination in the OSCE area. Other decisions aimed at fighting discrimination against women include the 2003 Action Plan for Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE area<sup>4</sup> and the 2006 OSCE Ministerial Statement on Migration<sup>5</sup>.

By bringing together representatives and experts from the respective communities, the OSCE, ODIHR, other international organizations, governments, civil society organisations, academia and think tanks at a two-day expert roundtable, the Gender Section seeks to encourage pS to develop and review policies promoting the empowerment of women from migrant, minority and Roma and Sinti communities as agents of change. These policies should be tailored to the specific situations of each of these women groups - migrants, minorities and Roma and Sinti – and should take into account the community backgrounds, contexts and specific issues faced by these women. The participants will share lessons learned and best practices on equal opportunities and empowerment. These are important ingredients for strengthening the role of women as agents of change and for facilitating their integration and social inclusion. Following the expert roundtable discussions, the Gender Section will develop a set of recommendations and best practices embodied in guidelines on how to address multiple forms of discrimination and how to strengthen the role of women as agents of change from migrant, minority and Roma and Sinti communities. The outcome of the expert roundtable will be shared with the pS at the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) Special Day on Roma and Sinti. The Special Day, scheduled for 27 September in Warsaw, will have a particular focus on empowering Roma and Sinti Women.

**Aim of the expert roundtable:**

The two-day expert roundtable aims at creating awareness among pS of the situation of women from migrant, minority and Roma and Sinti communities and encouraging pS to develop and/or revise relevant national policies on combating discrimination against these women.

The expert roundtable will specifically address:

1. The current situation and obstacles for integrating women from migrant, minority and Roma and Sinti communities;
2. Good practices when combating various forms of discrimination (in the labour market, in accessing social benefits or at home) in migrant, minority and Roma and Sinti communities, including synergies between OSCE, other international organisations and civil society;
3. Policies and tools for empowering women from migrant, minority and Roma and Sinti communities to strengthen their role as agents of change.

Presentations will be made by ODIHR, HCNM, FRA, UNHCR, government representatives, civil society organisations, academia and think tanks.

For additional information and registration please contact Paulina Piotrowska  
[Paulina.Piotrowska@osce.org](mailto:Paulina.Piotrowska@osce.org)

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<sup>4</sup> MC.DEC/3/03

<sup>5</sup> MC.DOC/6/06