



PAVEE POINT
TRAVELLER AND ROMA CENTRE

**Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre Statement – 7- 8 November 2013, Vienna.
OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting:
Implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti.**

Pavee Point – Ireland.

Pavee Point is a non-government organisation committed to the attainment of human rights for Irish Travellers and Roma. The group is comprised of Travellers and Roma and members of the majority settled population working together in partnership to address the needs of Travellers and Roma as minority ethnic groups, experiencing exclusion and marginalisation. The aim of Pavee Point is to contribute to improvement in the quality of life and living circumstances of Irish Travellers and Roma through working for social justice, solidarity, socio-economic development and human rights.

Pavee Point Roma and Traveller Centre welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Supplementary Human Dimension Implementation Meeting.

We urge that Travellers are also given visibility in the language being used by the OSCE and that reference is explicitly made to Roma and Sinti and Travellers. The backdrop to our discussions at the SHDM is the reality that the Irish Government has not recognised Travellers as a minority ethnic group. **We use this opportunity to urge the Irish Government to officially recognise Irish Travellers as a minority ethnic group as recommended by human rights bodies at the UN and EU level.**

Recent events in Europe in relation to Roma children being taken from their families, have shown the danger and prevalence of sensationalist and racist media reporting. The direct impact of this reporting can be seen in the actions of State authorities. There are two issues here. One is the media's role in this and the lack of accountability that they have faced. Secondly is the role of State authorities and as the UN Independent Expert on Minority Issues has stated, tackling what seems to be a situation of "Guilty until proven innocent". We are very concerned about these cases – it has caused huge fear among Roma in Ireland and actions based on mythical notions about the appearance of Roma children and anti-Roma stereotypes are wholly unacceptable. **Since incidents such as these are an obstacle to improving the situation of Roma, Sinti and Travellers, we call on the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to formally make a public statement on this matter.**

In relation to the implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti (and Travellers) within the OSCE area, we would like to emphasis in particular the action of "co-operation with other intergovernmental organisations". In particular we recommend that the OSCE works with the European Commission to consistently ensure close scrutiny to the content of Roma strategies and detailed reporting on States' adherence to the criteria as set out by the Commission. In particular more detail is needed on the gender dimensions of strategies. The strategies will only work if member states commit to developing them in the spirit of the EU Framework Document and the 10 Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion – evidence from Ireland has shown that this is not the case at present. **We call on member states to meet their obligations and for the OSCE to support member states and to work with the European Commission in ensuring that this happens.**

Finally, the recession in Ireland has resulted in major cuts in funding for Traveller and Roma initiatives. This combined with state policies that have a negative and disproportionate impact on Travellers and Roma are a major barrier to the realisation of Traveller and Roma human rights. The status report has referenced Traveller accommodation in Ireland and the implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Plans in Ireland. A reference is made to funding of 50 million euro in this regard.

We would like to cite information from a report written by an independent social researcher Brian Harvey in 2013, called 'Travelling with Austerity'.¹ The report states that "Travellers live in smaller and more over-crowded homes than the settled community. An eighth still live in temporary accommodation and of these a third have no sewerage disposal and one in five has no piped water."

The report shows a fall in allocations in relation to accommodation from €40m in 2008 to €6m in 2012, down 85%. A further problem is that substantial parts of the allocation are unspent. For example in 2012, 34% of the reduced accommodation budget was unspent. There have also been cuts in other areas including Traveller education (86.6%), National Traveller Organisations (63.6%) and local interagency activities (100%).

The researcher has concluded "These figures tell an egregious story of an extraordinary level of disinvestment by the Irish state in the Traveller community. One can think of no other section of the community which has suffered such a high level of withdrawal of funding and human resources, compounded by the failure of the state to spend even the limited resources that it has made available."

We call on funding to be re-invested in Roma and Traveller initiatives in Ireland We strongly state that recession does not negate human rights obligations and call on the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to emphasise this with member states.

Recommendations:

1. That the Irish Government to officially recognise Irish Travellers as a minority ethnic group as recommended by human rights bodies at the UN and EU level.
2. We call on the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to formally make a public statement in relation to Roma children being removed from their families, since incidents such as these are an obstacle to improving the situation of Roma, Sinti and Travellers,
3. We call on member states to meet their obligations in relation to developing progressive National Roma Strategies in line with the Common Basic Principles on Roma Inclusion and for the OSCE to support member states and to work with the European Commission in ensuring that this happens.
4. We call on funding to be re-invested in Roma and Traveller initiatives in Ireland. We strongly state that recession does not negate human rights obligations and call on the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to emphasise this with member states.

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¹ http://www.paveepoint.ie/tempsite3/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Travelling-with-Austerity_Pavee-Point-2013.pdf