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Statement by
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on the Hungarian National Strategy for Roma Integration

Thank you, Madame Chair.

On the basis of the recently adopted EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, Hungary, after broad professional and public consultation prepared the draft National Social Inclusion Strategy which is to be adopted in the coming days. The Strategy spans a ten-year horizon and should result in reducing the number of three million Hungarians living below the poverty line by at least half a million. During its implementation, the full involvement of Roma in all related areas of community life should be ensured and their role must be enhanced in relevant representative bodies. Developing statistical databases and systems which monitor implementation are essential to assess the effects of the Strategy.

In addition to measures in the four priority areas of the EU Framework: education, employment, healthcare and housing, the Hungarian Strategy puts a special emphasis on public security issues. Prior to drafting the Strategy, the Government conducted several surveys which showed the need to focus on Roma women in order for the inclusion policies to be successful. Indeed, through generations, the traditionally patriarchal society of Roma has perpetuated the factors that prevent integration.

Through the training of Roma women this harmful process could be stopped. Surveys show that Roma women, unlike the male members of society, clearly see the need for inclusion and are inclined to actively participate in programmes designed to achieve that goal. They are willing to take part in the labour market and therefore likely to participate in training aimed at increasing their employment chances.

One of the main objectives of the Strategy is therefore to encourage grass-root community activity of Roma women with the help of projects like the "2000 Roma women programme". Using acquired knowledge and capabilities, Roma women will become able to participate more actively in the life of society at local, regional or national levels — beyond ethnic limits.

Allow me to mention three examples of how the Strategy plans to achieve this target taking into account the specific characteristics of Roma women. Further details will be available when the Strategy will be translated to English after its adoption in the coming days.

First the Training of 2000 Roma Women project aims at training women for different professions in the social and healthcare sector with the goal of employing these women in such areas while taking into account their specific cultural background. The mentoring of participants will be conducted by 50 highly-educated Roma women. The long term benefit of the programme is that it will provide Roma women with competencies that allow them to elevate their status within their family and communities. This programme is a priority project set up within the framework agreement between the Government and the National Roma Self-government (which consists of 6000 representatives elected by the approximately 700.000 strong Hungarian Roma community) and shows the recognition by both the Roma community and the Government of the importance of the involvement of Roma women and the need to create more of such opportunities within the inclusion policy.

Second, the Government has organized a workshop focusing on the problems of Roma women with a team of specialists from the fields of science, politics and public life. The task of the team is to establish standards for the development of parental competences which can be the basis of all projects aimed at this target group in the future. The team's recommendations related to Roma women are incorporated in the Strategy.

Finally, special attention is given to Roma women with regard to health screening. Because of the high number of ill performed abortions, changing attitudes has high priority. The information aims at reducing the number of young girls dropping out of education due to early childbirth which impedes their chances of social mobility.

Conclusion

The Strategy is based upon the assumption that Roma integration is necessary and its successful implementation can also bring tangible economic benefits besides the social advantages, both for the Roma community and the society at large. The Government of Hungary is committed to implement this program even in the middle of a financial crisis affecting the whole continent, since it is key to long term social stability and prosperity.

Thank you, Madame Chair.