



### Open letter to ODIHR Director Matteo Mecacci

Brussels, February 5, 2021

On 25<sup>th</sup> of November, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) [launched the International Survivors of Trafficking Advisory Board \(ISTAC\)](#), consisting of 21 leading survivors of human trafficking from across the OSCE region. ISTAC aims to assist ODIHR's work in combating trafficking in human beings and was set up, as the official ODIHR webpages claim, with due attention to diversity in terms of expertise, gender and geographical location.

The International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE) welcomed ODIHR's initiative and promoted the call for ISTAC membership among its network, encouraging members and their beneficiaries who experienced human trafficking to apply. ICRSE welcomed the courage and commitment of our member Antonella Lerca, President of Sex Work Call Romania, who decided to apply for ISTAC membership. ICRSE considered this an opportunity for all of the sex working community to be heard and included for the first time in such a high-level advisory body dealing with the issue of human trafficking.

Antonella Lerca is a committed Roma, trans-gender sex worker and LGBTQI rights activist from Romania who experienced human trafficking as a consequence of intersectional discrimination. She received a letter of rejection from ODIHR early in December 2020. ODIHR justified its decision by giving due consideration to the requirements set out in the call for members to ensure **diversity of background, including in terms of expertise, gender and geographical location**.

Since the launch of ISTAC, our organization has been deeply disappointed by the decision of ODIHR. The composition of ISTAC members is strongly disproportionate with regard to geographic location:

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eight members represent the Northern American region, while eleven represent Western Europe. There are **no representatives from Central and Eastern Europe** and only two members come from the CIS region- Russia and Uzbekistan. The composition of ISTAC also indicates that there is no transgender member, nor any representative with a background in sex workers' rights.

*"Again, as many times in my life, I feel that as a member of a highly marginalized community, my view is not required for political and ideological reasons. I don't believe that diversity was genuinely taken into account. I rather believe that anti-sex work sentiment led to the decision to reject me. And because I don't embody the 'ideal victim' of trafficking that reinforces the idea that all prostitution is evil,"* Antonella said to ICRSE.

We consider the decision taken by ODIHR to reject Antonella as a missed opportunity not only for all of the sex working community, that has been systematically excluded and silenced, but also for all anti-trafficking experts and policy makers. It is a missed opportunity to hear- in the context of anti-trafficking- from a person who experiences intersectional discrimination on a daily basis for being a Roma, trans sex worker from Romania.

We therefore would like to question OSCE/ODIHR about the real reasons that led to the decision to deny the voice of a representative of sex workers' rights who has survived human trafficking. We ask how, in line with its values and mission embedded in democracy, non-discrimination and human rights, OSCE/ODIHR can justify its decision. ICRSE is deeply disappointed: in our view, the decision to reject Antonella was clearly led by ideological reasons, not by the claimed diversity in terms of expertise, gender and geography.

Still, ICRSE would like to congratulate the appointed members of ISTAC.

On behalf of the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers of Europe

Kate McGrew and Sabrina Sanchez

ICRSE Co-Convenors