

Women



Today, especially in comparison with a few years ago, it would be fair to say that this is the time for Roma women. It can likewise be said that Roma women are leading an empowerment process by gaining an awareness of their capacities, skills and attitudes to seek their own development in society, participating in a process of change for the better in terms of their own opportunities and those of their entire community.

Roma women are aware that society today requires us to redefine Roma identity and culture involving a process of blending tradition and modernity, and those managing to achieve this serve as examples for other Roma women who also want to broaden their horizons without renouncing their culture.

Continued support for these efforts to favour the overcoming of obstacles related with the dual discrimination for reason of gender and ethnic group should be one of the principal objectives of the actions targeting Roma women and should focus on recognition mechanisms, the re-thinking of imposed behavioural patterns and tools to establish their identity as women and as Roma.

Although great progress has been made over the last several years, Roma women still have hurdles to overcome in terms of access to employment, education, social and political participation and entertainment and free-time activities. Many of these barriers are the result of stereotypes and prejudice which hinder further education for young Roma girls, the hiring of women in the



WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN ROMI.NET

labour market and the development of equal relations.

The Women's Area has what is called the Roma Women's Group comprised of some of the women workers with the highest qualifications in equal opportunity issues, undergoing a personal transformation process in terms of their identity and/or are fostering and multiplying these changes. This group provides consulting services and support for the Area as well as providing the opportunity for social participation and exchange of information and best practices.

In 2006, specific actions were implemented focusing on Roma women, but a priority was also placed on the implementation of transversal inclusion strategies incorporating the gender perspective into the FSG's different areas of work. The main areas of action have been:

› **Formal education and personal development.** Adult education workshops and basic training and personal development

“Roma women are aware that conciliation today implies the redefinition of Roma identity and culture and striking a balance between tradition and modernity without renouncing values.

initiatives in the different territories have provided a forum for meeting and reflection for women where they can enhance their interpersonal skills and raise self-esteem while also working on reading, writing and other basic subjects. Also, advantage has been taken of the school support programmes to encourage Roma girls to stay in school. We would stress the undertaking of the pilot programme Romi.net which, funded through the Avanza Plan of the Ministry of Industry, Tourism and Trade, encourages access to new technologies for Roma women through IT classrooms coordinated by a group of Roma empowerers (women) who received specific training in this connection from the Esplai Foundation.

› **Combining labour, family and personal responsibilities.** In our quest to support Roma women's access to employment, it is both necessary and vital to implement initiatives which favour the sharing of housework and free them from the burden of playing the role of caretaker

and educator within their families. In this context, we employ awareness-raising actions, school enrolment of children, referrals to other specific resources and educational and entertainment activities for minors such as the creation of recreation centres with schedules coinciding with the mother's and father's normal working hours or training activity timetables.



TRIBUTE TO ELDERLY ROMA WOMEN WITH THE PRESENTATION OF THE VIDEO "WOMEN WITH HISTORY" IN MURCIA

› Health promotion.

One of the most important lines of action is the promotion of the health of Roma women who are traditionally occupied with their role as community caretakers but less concerned about taking care of their own health which, in most cases, is considered as the lack of illness. Workshops and health programmes are organised with a view to addressing the needs of women from a psychosocial perspective and to improve the living standard of other members of the community.

Although great progress has been made over the last several years, Roma women still have hurdles to overcome in terms of access to employment, education, social and political participation and entertainment and free-time activities.

› Training, counselling and

accompaniment in employment. Labour market access is one of the barriers which Roma women commonly come up against and in this connection work is being done through the Acceder Programme with actions focusing on vocational training and familiarity with mainstream employment resources with a view to enhancing Roma women's scope of opportunities in the labour market.

› **Individualised attention.** Roma women are a heterogeneous group, meaning that the needs and interests of each of them are also diverse and this is why each one requires individualised attention so that tailored support adapted to each situation can be given. Our teams try to respond to all of these calls for support either with our own means or, as necessary, in coordination with and/or referral to other social entities and resources.

› **Social participation.** The Foundation prioritises social participation networks involving the organisation of and participation in different workshops and seminars. This encourages interaction, personal relationships, debate and the social

participation of Roma women and better insight into the current situation they face and the effort everyone is making to improve that situation.

In light of the interest generated among the participants and the high level of participation, mention must be made of the 10th State-wide Conference on Roma Women entitled *Reconciliation of labour and family life: an issue affecting both genders*, organised in collaboration with the Women's Institute, bringing together 176 women from different Autonomous Communities to discuss difficulties encountered in reconciling salaried work and domestic work, the need for personal free time, the sharing of housework between women and men and the importance of acknowledging the value of housework.

Also fruit of the Collaboration Agreement concluded between the Women's Institute and the FSG was the Seminar entitled *Roma women weaving networks* which brought together Roma women working at our entity to debate and reflect on the role of Roma women as permanent creators of solidarity, support and communication networks. This Seminar brought participants in contact with new forms of communication and ways of conceiving the identity of Roma women today.

We would also draw attention to other events such as the Andalusian meeting entitled *The role of Andalusian Roma women from the time of the Spanish transition* (organised by the FSG in collaboration with the University of Cadiz and the Town Hall of Jerez) and the *Best Practices Seminars on gender violence perpetrated against Roma women* which took place in

Castile-Leon (in collaboration with the Castile-Leon Regional Government).

› **Awareness-raising.** In addition to FSG events per say and for the purpose of awareness-raising, the Foundation attends and participates as a speaker in events organised by other entities in order to familiarise others with the reality of today's Roma women and promote the elimination of stereotypes. In this connection we would highlight our participation in the II Women's Conference *Sim Rromni: Woman and Roma* organised by Kale dor Kayikó, and the course given at the Emergency Centre of the Corazón de Jesús Apostolic Association on gender violence.

› **Technical support and assistance.** In 2006 the Women's Area responded to 66 requests from public administrations, other social entities, social services centres working with women and private individuals. The majority of these requests had to do with the inclusion of equal opportunity and ethnic minority issues in plans, programmes and projects and also with collaboration and support in different situations related with Roma women. In addition to these requests, we must also include those that are addressed directly through the FSG's different territorial centres.

› **Healthy leisure and culture.** Entertainment and cultural activities provide the ideal setting to promote the creation of and involvement in networks between Roma women and their access to mainstream cultural resources. Activities undertaken in this connection include: song and dance workshops (bulerías), cultural visits, sports activities, etc. which have facilitated transversal work focusing on many other educational aspects..

› **Materials and publications.** The following materials were compiled in 2006 to support the integral advancement of Roma women: *Romnâ* (compilation of poems written by Roma women from Zaragoza), *The other face of Roma Women* (based on the life experiences of women from Alicante), the mobile photography exhibit entitled *Participating Women* and the handbook entitled *Roma Women and New Technologies* to be published in 2007 within the framework of the Agreement with the Women's Institute.



MEETING OF THE COORDINATORS OF THE
FSG'S INITIATIVES WITH WOMEN