

# ▶▶ Gender equality

Today, in contrast to the past, it is safe to say that this is the time for women in the Roma community. Through dialogue, reflection, effort and their increasing participation in society, women are giving new meaning to Roma identity, they are becoming role models for other members of their communities and are transmitting everything they are learning to future generations.

**Roma women today have no qualms about claiming their rights and their role in society.** They want to be visible, participate and encourage young girls to help them realise that they are the driving force behind change. And that is just what they are doing and at a very swift pace at that.

Roma women have chosen the path towards progress and mainstreaming and this is posing a challenge to men and fostering change and advancement for the community as a whole. We

are convinced that the possibilities which Roma women have today in the world of education, training, work, social participation, etc. will benefit them and the entire community.

Modern society is immersed in the implementation of 21<sup>st</sup> century feminism and the Roma community is not immune to that process. However, if we analyse the social context, we will discover that this is not necessarily in the best interest of women in general. The collective memory of women shows us that change in what have traditionally been women's roles are few and far between within the Roma community. A close look at the relevance which Roma women have gained over the last several years and the changes taking place, quite similar to those occurring in the society at large, shows that this is just one more example of the mainstreaming of the Roma community and our increasing degree of incorporation into all aspects of Spanish society.



10TH MULTIDISCIPLINARY INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON WOMEN ENTITLED *MUNDOS DE MUJERES/ WOMEN'S WORLDS 2008*, AT THE UNIVERSIDAD COMPLUTENSE DE MADRID.



DIRECTOR OF THE WOMEN'S INSTITUTE, ROSA M<sup>a</sup> PERIS, AND EX-MINISTER CARMEN CALVO ALONGSIDE PARTICIPANTS IN THE FSG SEMINAR ENTITLED "ROMA WOMEN AND GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION: EMPLOYMENT MAKES US EQUAL".

## Roma women today have no qualms about claiming their rights and their role in society

Despite obstacles, there are aspects favouring improvement of the situation of Roma women such as the changing attitude of a growing number of Roma women, their increased motivation to take part in training, employment and leisure activities, the rising number of Roma women entrepreneurs and larger amounts of time spent in open and intercultural environments are all giving rise not only to changes within the Roma community but in the whole society.

However, we must draw attention to the situation of multiple discrimination to which Roma women are subjected as an ethnic group within Spanish society and, as such, are suffering a different situation with respect to the majority, the result being three-faceted discrimination: for being women in a patriarchal society, for belonging to an ethnic minority which is the one most negatively viewed by mainstream society and for belonging to a culture which considers women almost exclusively as mothers and wives thus limiting their possibility for advancement.

Gender and culture specificity entails bearing in mind those issues which diminish opportunities for Roma women vis-à-vis Roma men and the society at large. Therefore, these are the guarantees which a society should put in place to address specific problems in the understanding that the point of departure is not the same for all

women and therefore the route to be followed can and should be different.

Roma women are a heterogeneous group among which we find diverse situations, ages, desires and lifestyles. In order to address this diversity in working for equal opportunity between women and men, the Fundación Secretariado Gitano implements projects with different approaches targeting women and girls of all age groups and different academic levels and interests.

Our intervention is based on the following principles:

- | Inclusion of the gender perspective in all of our actions and programmes.
- | The comprehensive advancement of Roma women based on attention to their most specific needs.
- | An intercultural work model fostering references to Roma women in equal opportunity initiatives between non-Roma men and women.
- | Access to mainstream equal opportunity resources.
- | Awareness-raising of social agents, public administrations and mainstream society with a view to eliminating stereotypes.

- 1 Foster the participation of Roma women in the different areas of public life such as education, employment, associationism, etc.

In order to respond to the needs described and based on the lines of action set forth, the Area of Gender Equality set the following objectives for 2008:

#### A. Training:

- under conditions of equal opportunity for Roma professionals** who have reached a certain level of personal advancement so that they can transmit their advancement to other women and to the groups they lead.
- of non-Roma professionals who work with Roma women** to ensure that they are in touch with the emerging needs and thoughts of these women.

In this connection, the Foundation embraces social participation networks and is working along these lines with the development and participation of different conferences and seminars organised by the FSG itself and by taking part in those organised by other organisations thus promoting contact, relationships, debate and the social participation of Roma women and greater insight into the current situation which they are undergoing and the effort they are all making to improve it.

Given the interest of the participants and their level of participation, mention should be made of the XII National Conference on Roma Women entitled “The image of women in the media” and the seminar “Roma women and gender-based discrimination: employment sets us free”.



XII STATE-WIDE CONFERENCE ON ROMA WOMEN FOCUSING ON “THE SOCIAL IMAGE OF ROMA WOMEN IN THE MEDIA”.

**B. Promote networking and support among women** with a view to reflecting on their needs and possibilities and analysing obstacles standing in the way and strategies to move forward.

**C. Consolidate the “Roma women’s Group** (Spanish acronym GMG) as a stable social participation structure (based on the ideas, planning, implementation and evaluation of the actions undertaken by the Gender Equality Area).

**D. Promote co-education** as a basic resource for professional guidance in equality and enhancement of professional choice.

To promote this objective the *Guía para mujeres gitanas: Coeducación para la mejora de la elección profesional. Perspectiva socio-emocional y desarrollo profesional* (Handbook for Roma women: co-education for the enhancement of professional choice; socio-emotional perspective and professional development) was compiled.

**E. Promote reflection on and implementation of strategies** having regard to labour identification, professional diversification, discrimination against Roma women in the labour market and self-employment. Labour market access is one of



PARTICIPANTS AT THE “XII STATE-WIDE CONFERENCE ON ROMA WOMEN”.

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.

**F. Overcome prevailing stereotypes** by publicising Roma women role models. In addition to its own events, the Foundation raises awareness by attending and participating as speakers in events organised by other organisations with a view to familiarising others with the reality of Roma women today and encouraging the elimination of stereotypes. In this connection we would highlight our participation in the 2008 Conference for Teachers Teaching Roma and the “Women’s World” International Congress.

**G. Motivate Roma women** who are embarking upon training, labour market integration and personal and professional advancement processes and help them to

become more keenly aware of their own situation and how they can improve it.

This was the aim of the XII State-wide Conference on Roma women “The social image of Roma women in the media” which primarily focused on discrimination suffered by Roma women and how the media can collaborate in reducing stereotypes.

**H. Raise the awareness of professional teams and public administrations as to the reality and needs of Roma women** by facilitating dialogue between the two parties and attempting to improve policies and actions targeting this sector of the population.

The Gender Equality Area responded to requests from public administrations, other social entities, social services professionals 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 to Roma women.

### **THE FSG’S ROMA WOMEN’S GROUP (GMG)**

The Roma Women’s Group (Spanish acronym GMG) which celebrated its 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year has made great qualitative and quantitative strides and in 2008 was comprised of 16 women. This is a heterogeneous group formed by Roma professionals of different ages, levels of training and styles of expressing their identity as Roma women. This year, at the initiative of the group, we decided to enlarge it to make it more intercultural. What all of the members have in common is their determination and interest in improving the condition of all Roma women both within and outside of their community by



MEMBERS OF THE ROMA WOMEN'S WORKSHOP  
"ROMI SINELO" IN SESTAO.

seeking the strategies considered most suitable and giving rise to different profiles which are complementary and mutually enriching.

These FSG workers are in contact with other Roma women through their professional experiences (literacy groups, employment programmes, etc.) but also through their life experiences as women and as Roma. This gives them a broader view and more detailed awareness of the situation of their peers and of their needs, problems and contributions to society. That is why their contribution to the Area of Equality is key when it comes

The GMG is a heterogeneous group formed by professional Roma women of different ages, levels of training and styles of expressing their feminine identity as Roma.



WORK SESSION OF THE ROMA WOMEN'S GROUP (GMG).

to reflecting on the most crucial needs and the activities and strategies which must be implemented to respond to these needs.

Today we are witnessing a very strong shift in the situation and role of Roma women. The GMG is a forum for meeting, debate and participation where members mutually support one another in the arduous task of bringing about change and overcoming resistance from the majority society and the Roma community to the change processes being initiated.

This last year the GMG has been working on the current situation of Roma women and their most important needs today. The issues specifically addressed include: the socio-emotional health of Roma women, group work from the perspective of gender, the new professional profiles of Roma women and gender-based violence against women.

Group members are aware of these points through their direct work with Roma women in the territories and also through their personal experience and reflection and sharing processes which give them an overall perception of Roma women throughout Spain.