

# Gender equality

Through dialogue, reflection, hard work and their increasing participation in society, Roma 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.

The FSG is 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 and that their progress is also challenging Roma men and promoting change and the advancement of the community.

A close look at the prominent position 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 its increasing degree of incorporation into all spheres of Spanish society.

Certain aspects of the headway made by Roma women towards mainstreaming in this diverse society are clear: they are increasingly keen on training, employment and entertainment, the number of Roma women entrepreneurs is growing and there is greater co-existence in open and intercultural areas, all of which are giving rise to change both within their community and in the entire society.

However, special mention should be made of the situation of multiple discrimination to which Roma women are subject as an ethnic group in Spanish society meaning that their situation is different from that of the majority insofar as they are affected by three factors: being women in a patriarchal society, belonging to an ethnic minority with the lowest social esteem and sharing a culture



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whose gender values have traditionally been associated with fulfilling the role of mother and wife thus lessening the likelihood of 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 in different spheres targeting women and girls of all age groups and different academic levels and interests.

In this connection, the Foundation embraces social participation networks and is working along these lines with the organisation of and participation in different conferences

“Through active participation in exchange and training fora, the FSG contributes to the objective of fostering sharing, the creation of ties and the debate regarding Roma women and gender equality and is shedding greater light on the situation in which they are immersed today and the effort they are all making to improve it.

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.

Our intervention is based on the following principles:

- › **Inclusion** of the gender perspective in all of our actions and programmes.



**XIII NATIONWIDE ROMA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE**

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

In order to meet the needs outlined and on the basis of the lines of action described, the Area of Gender Equality addressed the following objectives in 2009, some of which were met thanks to the Collaboration Agreement which the FSG has had with the Women's Institute since 2001.

## **NATIONWIDE ROMA WOMEN'S CONFERENCE**

Due to the keen interest of participants year after year and the high level of participation, special mention should be made of the XIII Nationwide Roma Women's Conference under the slogan *Education and training: key elements for labour market integration*.

This conference was held on 20 and 21 October in the conference hall of FSG headquarters with the participation of 165 women from different locations around Spain who came together to reflect and share opinions and points of view about the importance of getting an education and taking part in training, not only for women but for the rest of the Roma community as well, in order to gain access to the labour market.

## **SEMINAR FOR PROFESSIONALS WHO WORK WITH ROMA WOMEN**

We would also highlight the seminar entitled *La Igualdad es cosa de Todas y Todos* (equality is an issue involving men and women) which was held at the headquarters of the Women's Institute on 10 and 11 December 2009. The aim of this Seminar was to provoke thought and develop strategies for conciliation of home and work duties, co-responsibility, family networking in support of the labour market integration of Roma women and new gender models focusing on positive role models involving men and women, Roma and non-Roma.

In order to achieve these objectives, for the first time this year we opted to open the seminar to Roma men because we feel that the Roma women's movement is fighting for gender equality for the good of the entire community and therefore should be supported in this process by the entire group.



WITH THE MINISTER BIBIANA AÍDO AT THE UN

A total of 77 people from 25 different provinces took part in the Conference which was inaugurated by Carmen Calvo, President the Equality Commission of the Congress of Deputies and Rosa M<sup>a</sup> Peris, Director-General of the Women's Institute.

### THE FSG'S ROMA WOMEN'S GROUP (GMG)

The Roma Women's Group (Spanish acronym GMG), which celebrated its 6th anniversary and is comprised of 16 women, has made great qualitative and quantitative strides. This is a heterogeneous group formed by Roma professionals of different ages, levels of training and styles of expressing their identity as Roma women; most are FSG workers. What all of the members have in common is their determination and keen interest in improving the condition of all Roma women both within and outside of their community by seeking the strategies considered most suitable and giving rise to different profiles which are complementary and mutually enriching.

These women are in daily contact with other Roma women through their professional work, i.e. literacy groups, employment programmes, etc., but also in their everyday lives as women and as members of the Roma community. 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 to reflecting on the most crucial needs and the activities and strategies which must be implemented to respond to those needs.

Today we are witnessing a very major 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 from the Roma community to the change processes under way.

In 2009, this group received training on two key aspects of its work: gender-based violence and the women's movement down through history. The first training experience was run by María Naredo and Beatriz Sevilla who focused on the importance of equality in relationships, the de-mythification of roles in sentimental relationships and how some

of these myths create skewed relationship between women and men.

The second training experience was run by Nuria Varela, a renowned journalist, writer (*Feminismo para principiantes*) and currently an advisor to the Minister of Equality. Training revolved around the women's movement throughout history, the achievements enjoyed by women today thanks to the hard work of past generations and an introduction to the history of the Roma women's movement.

### **POLITICAL ACTION, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND RESOURCES FOR PROFESSIONALS**

On 22 July 2009 the FSG presented a report on the discrimination suffered by Spanish Roma women at the 44th Session of the Committee for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women held at the UN High Commissioner's Office in New York. Spain has ratified six of the seven main international human rights instruments, among them the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW). All are binding

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meaning that the Spanish Government must comply. The Committee's recommendations to the Spanish Government included a note highlighting the lack of data concerning Roma girls and women in its reports and this prompted the FSG to draw up a *Shadow Report* for the 44th Session of CEDAW in which the Area of Gender Equality, on behalf of the FSG, expressed its view and made recommendations concerning discrimination specifically affecting Spanish Roma women.

With a view to procuring support resources for professionals working with the Roma community on issues of gender equality, the *Guía para la promoción de las mujeres gitanas: Perspectiva Psico-emocional y desarrollo profesional* (Handbook for the advancement of the Roma women: psycho-emotional perspective and professional development) was published. This handbook includes strategies and content to work on such issues as enhancing the autonomy of Roma Women, self-esteem, personal hygiene, evolution of the role of Roma women, identity and attachment and improving employability. These aspects are presented such that their development amongst Roma women has direct repercussions on improving the living standard of the entire family and, in turn, of the Roma community and society at large.

In 2009 we responded to a total of 120 requests for technical assistance 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 Roma women issues in plans, programmes and projects and also with collaboration and support in different situations related to Roma women.