

BUILDING A NATIONAL ROMA PLATFORM

News 2/2017

What's going on in the project Building a National Roma Platform

Dear reader,

This is an information letter summing up the topical matters in the project Building a Roma Platform. The letter provides information on a two-day gender equality event organised in May. Also, have a look at the Roma platform blog on equality among Roma women and men which analyses the special features of gender equality work within the Roma community.

At the end of this letter you can find contact information to persons working on the project. The next newsletter will be issued in August.

Gender equality as a resource – a consultation of Roma women and men on equality

The Building a Roma platform project organised a two-day event focusing on gender equality and its implementation. The first day consisted of a hearing of Roma women and men. The second day provided Roma organisations, and other stakeholders in the field of gender equality, opportunities for networking and exchange of ideas on joint objectives.

The hearing started with a presentation on gender equality legislation and its main concepts. Meija Tuominen from the Gender Equality Unit of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health talked about gender mainstreaming and its benefits. The presentation provided a number of practical examples.

Building a National Roma Platform: from Policy to Practice

“Building a Roma Platform: from Policy to Practice” is a project financed by the European Union. The aim of the project is to promote and monitor how well the National Policy on Roma (ROMPO) is known at local and regional levels, to create local and regional networks between Romani people, authorities and other stakeholders for the implementation of ROMPO, and to disseminate information of good practices for local and regional implementation. The project is carried out together with regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs.

Sarita Friman-Korpela, the project manager of the Building a Roma platform project, presented the project and its objective to mainstream gender perspective as part of the implementation of the Policy on Roma. The different kinds of gender challenges faced by women and men serve as the starting point of this effort. Roma activist Tino Varjola made the participants think about gender equality in the everyday life of Roma families. Gender equality should be seen as a resource on which the families can draw upon.

The event offered different workshops for Roma women and men. Both groups discussed issues relating to the inclusion and representation of Roma, equality in employment and education, wellbeing and health, prejudice towards the Roma and ways to tackle them, and cultural changes in the area of gender equality.

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In the afternoon, discussion focused on the representation of Roma women and men in different organisations and forums. The proportional representation of men and women is usually well balanced and Roma organisations have employed Roma women – but they rarely hold management positions. It would be important to see more women holding chairmanships, too. In non-Roma organisations, the representation of Roma men and women is very weak. Discussions on the roles of Roma women and men also touched on the ensuing impact on occupational choices, education and prejudice towards the Roma. Women wearing the traditional Roma clothing may face many kinds of prejudice, whereas Roma men are often associated with the dealing of horses and cars. In modern occupations, Roma girls are often directed to the care sector and boys to take up, for example, logistics. The reporting of concrete discrimination was considered difficult.

The event also discussed the employment of Roma men and women. In contrast to men, the employment of Roma women may be hampered by their traditional clothing. Employment brings pressures to reorganise family life. There are signs of such reorganisation taking place as in many families fathers are participating more actively in family life.

Education was a lively discussion topic. In principle, opportunities for education are open for all Roma women and men. Occupational choices are affected by training opportunities, own attitudes and motivation. In practice, men usually apply to technical sectors and women to the care sector. It was also voiced that a better awareness of the Roma culture would lower the threshold to use public health services. The discussion showed that work focusing on discrimination faced by an ethnic group as a whole may overlook related gender differences and the ensuing challenges.

The event provided interesting material for further discussion and efforts to increase information on gender equality among the Roma.

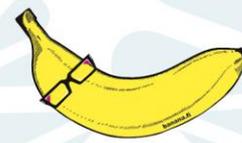
Cooperation is the key to work on gender equality



Picture: Henna Huttu introduced the themes of discussions.

The aim of the second day was to bring Roma organisations and other stakeholders in the field of gender equality round the same table to discuss joint goals and means of cooperation. The day started with Sarita Friman-Korpela's presentation of the Building a Roma Platform project and of the work done in Finland and Europe to promote gender equality. Milla Sandt, General Secretary of the Council for Gender Equality under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, gave a presentation of the Council's work and objectives. Based their own experiences, Tuula Lindgren (Roma NGO: Kromana), Tuula Åkerlund (Roma NGO: Romano Missio) and Päivi Majaniemi (Roma NGO: Suomen romaniyhdistys) told about the Roma NGOs' possibilities and means to promote equality between women and men. The remarks were considered excellent due to their balanced and honest account of the related problems, and constructive proposals for their resolving.

Most of the debate on gender equality among the Roma takes places outside the Roma community and the inclusion of the Roma has not been given enough attention in this connection. For that reason, the event offered a good ground for discussing gender equality by sharing and building cooperation together. Discussions also drew attention to interpersonal and domestic violence encountered by the Roma. Currently, there are support services for women but men are often left outside such measures. There is a clear need for low threshold measures and services. According to a study conducted by Kromana in 2015, a number of Roma women do not report experiences of discrimination as the process was considered cumbersome.



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When faced with discrimination, it would, however, be important to contact, for example, the Non-discrimination Ombudsman. Multiple discrimination poses a particular challenge: Sometimes it is unclear whether the matter falls within the mandate of the Non-discrimination Ombudsman, Ombudsman for Equality or authorities responsible for handling issues concerning discrimination at work or what would be the right authority to contact. The remarks put forward by the Roma participants show that discrimination is mainly addressed from an ethnical point of view, not as a gender issue. Therefore, it is necessary to increase information on ways to identify gender-based discrimination among the Roma activists.

As a concrete means to increase dialogue between the Roma organisations and gender equality authorities, it was proposed that the Roma organisations appoint a representative of a gender equality organisation as a board member. This would make dialogue a permanent and everyday function. The event finished with a tour de table during which each participant told what kind of concrete action he or she will personally take.

Blog: [From policy to practice in gender equality between Roma women and men](#)

Contact details

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Ask me about: Building Roma platform -project, National Policy on Roma (ROMPO), drafting of a new Policy on Roma and National Advisory Board on Roma Affairs

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Ask me about: Building Roma platform -project and Roma policy in the EU

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Ask me about: Building Roma platform -project, website (romani.fi/sanoista-tekoihin) and events of the project

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Ask me about: National Advisory Board on Roma Affairs, travel and finance management