



REGERINGSKANSLIET

Memorandum

31 March 2010

Ministry of Integration and Gender  
Equality Sweden

*Enheten för diskrimineringsfrågor*

Thank you Mr/Ms Chair,

Before I am turning to the topic of this intervention, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the ambitions of the Spanish Presidency to use, and develop already existing structures within the EU for improving Roma inclusion. Too often in the past too much energy has been spent on inventing possible new structures or fora.

During the past Swedish Presidency the situation of the Roma was especially highlighted on a number of occasions.

One of the major conclusions from these conferences was the need to better implement international treaties and policies at local level.

Today I have been asked to talk about two issues:

1. What is the role of municipalities in Roma inclusion?

and,

2. What participative structures can be developed at the municipal level to give Roma population relevance and make their voice be heard?

I will highlight some of the Swedish experiences and lessons learned.

The difficulties facing Roma extend to all areas of society – education, health, employment, housing, social services. These services are in large parts handled at municipal level.

In 2007 the Swedish Government appointed a special committee, the Delegation for Roma Issues. One of its main tasks has been to promote and support municipal projects and services in various parts of the country. Several municipalities had previously contacted the Government and sought support in their work. Thus the Government concluded that there was a great need to support local activities and methods to better integrate the Roma population.

So what are the lessons learned so far? It takes time and the municipalities need support. The Delegation has worked for three years. They have

functioned as an “engine” - encouraging, arguing and supporting the municipalities in finding the relevant actors – both Roma and local NGOs.

In the beginning, several municipalities hardly knew there were any Roma living in their area. They also had little knowledge of their situation – and if, the knowledge was very fragmented within the administration . Today they have a much better picture, not least of the total situation, which is essential for a successful approach.

The Delegation will deliver its final report in June this year with proposals on how to improve the situation of Roma.

The Swedish Parliament has also recently passed a bill on a new Swedish minority policy. This also put some additional pressure on the local level to realise the human rights of Roma and develop structure for dialogue and influence.

The Delegation has been of great value as a central governmental body to

1. Make the Roma, their history and their special current conditions visible,
2. Develop different methods and tools for inclusion and participation,
3. Develop structures for communication and dialogue, both visavi central and local government.

Mr/Mrs Chair,

In the past ten years several countries have worked with developing more participative structures especially at the local level. In a vivid democracy it is necessary to create such structures. It is necessary to create possibilities for all citizens to participate and influence the decision-making also between elections.

I believe we also in this area need to mainstream the Roma issue. In general Roma issues should be dealt with in ordinary structures. However, I also believe we need to make special efforts and sometimes take specific actions to improve Roma participation.

To successfully mainstream we need some special efforts.

1. Specific actions to improve Roma participation .
2. Educate local civil servants and local politicians about the special situation the Roma are living under after generations of exclusion and open oppression and persecution.
3. Discriminatory structures and discriminatory activities have to be highlighted. Mainstreaming means e.g. that Roma children – and

their special need – shall be met in ordinary schools. Special schools and special classes are part of the exclusion. This is heavily affecting both the self-image of the children as well as by the surrounding environment.

4. The victimization by many Roma is understandable but also an obstacle to a continued process of integration. We need engagement from society as a whole but also a responsive Roma community. The more deliberative and participatory methods created at local level should also be used for raising the voice of the Roma - sometimes as a group, sometimes as parents, sometimes as citizens.

To conclude, the crucial role of local government is to manage both to mainstream Roma issues in all their areas of responsibility as well as to develop adequate strategies to face the special concerns of the Roma in the same way as it faces every other citizen with their special needs.