https://www.eeagender.org/good-practices/How-prevent-gender-based-violence/combatting-negative-gender-stereotypes-in-roma-communities/

Combatting gender stereotypes in Slovakia

"It is important to raise awareness about gender inequality, especially in eastern Slovakia where the higher unemployment rate is closely linked to alcohol abuse and physical abuse, which often result in men behaving violently towards their wives," explains project manager Natalia Kotulakova.



The panelists discussed the role of women in regional politics during the festival “FemFest" in 2022. From left: Ria Gehrerová (journalist), Silvia Porubanová (CEO of the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights), Renáta Fedorčíková (member of the Prešov city council) and Andrea Turčanová (mayor of the Prešov city council in 2022). (Photo: Tereza Sejková).

The "Various ways to equality" project started in 2021 and concentrates on prevention and educational activities in primary and secondary schools and the realization of two infotainment campaigns in Slovakia (see more in fact box).

More about the project

The project is focused on raising awareness about gender equality, exposing and eliminating negative gender stereotypes, and promoting gender equality among teachers as well as primary and secondary school pupils, many of whom come from marginalised Roma communities," writes Kotulakova from the Ministry of Investments, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic in an email.

Read also: Gender equality for Roma communities

How does this project help to combat domestic and gender-based violence?

The project promoter, MyMamy, is an NGO that has been helping female victims of domestic abuse and their children for the past 20 years. Over this period, MyMamy has, among other things, established the MyMamy Women's Safe House, started to provide specialised personal, legal and online counselling, and has also increased the prevention of domestic violence.

"They firmly believe that gender inequality and negative gender stereotypes are the main causes of this social phenomenon," explains Kotulakova and elaborates:

"It is considered essential to raise awareness about this topic, especially in eastern Slovakia, mainly because of socio-economic factors of this area. There is a higher unemployment rate and this is closely linked to many pathological phenomena, such as widespread alcohol abuse and physical abuse, and it often results in men behaving violently towards their wives or partners," writes Kotulakova.

"Women often become mothers at very young age, miss out on a proper education, and remain socially isolated and unaware of their human rights. Women often tolerate violent behaviour from their partners because they have previously been exposed to violence in their own families. This is very common in Roma communities, where it is common for men to behave violently towards women, and there is a widespread belief that "if a man doesn't hit his woman, he doesn't love her," Kotulakova explains.

"This trend can only be reversed through the systematic education of the future generation, to address the myths and prejudices surrounding gender equality," she adds.

Campaigns and theatre to raise awareness about stereotypes

The project will produce different material for various age groups in order to target primary school pupils, whose values are being shaped, and secondary school pupils, who are entering and experiencing their first relationships.



The project is focused on promoting gender equality in schools. "The aim of the educational material is to combat negative stereotypes about men and women, both in public and in private life, behind closed doors," explains project manager Natalia Kotulakova. (Photo: Archive, MyMamy).

The project is also aimed at teachers, the main purpose being to foster gender-sensitive behaviour in the teaching environment.

"The aim of the educational material is to combat negative stereotypes about men and women, both in public and in private life, behind closed doors," writes Kotulakova.

The project has two main campaigns that take place every year – “FemFest” and “16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence,” Kotulakova explains, and elaborates:

“The main goal of the FemFest festival is to raise public awareness about gender equality issues, to eliminate gender stereotypes, and to increase women´s participation in decision-making processes in public life.”

"The festival in 2022 featured the screening of various movies depicting this subject, discussions with personalities engaged in this topic, and concerts, including female artists that actively promote gender equality."

"Thanks to the project, MyMamy could join the worldwide campaign “16 Days of Activism against gender-based violence”. Their campaign comprised an art exhibition about domestic violence, a theatre performance about women existing in a man´s world, workshops with feminists, and book readings,” writes Kotulakova (see more in fact box).

Who collaborated in the project, and why is collaborating across sectors and countries important?

"There are three main collaborators from Slovakia – EsFem, Žena v tiesni and PRERAG. They share their know-how and best practices for preparing campaign information and educational material, which is very helpful."

What pitfalls and successes have there been in this project?

"The project has been implemented in a very conservative part of Slovakia and it was therefore very difficult to attract a new audience to promote the subject of domestic and gender-based violence."

"It requires lot of creativity and new ideas to make the subject of gender-based violence ‘attractive’. The project promoter was able to successfully engage many interesting people who are passionate about the topic. Integrating the social and cultural spheres was a novel and very brave act, which the project promoter would like to continue in the future."

In what way has the SYNERGY Network been an important tool for combating domestic and gender-based violence?

"SYNERGY helps countries and relevant stakeholders to share their know-how and best practises in tackling domestic and gender-based violence. It is therefore an effective tool for coordinating our efforts."

The project article is reported by ***Natalia Kotulakova****, project manager in the Ministry of Investment, Regional Development and Informatization of the Slovak Republic* ***(the programme operator)***

By Vibeke Hoem, vibeke@kilden.forskningsradet.no | Published 12 May 2023 | Download | Share
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