

Roadmap to Equality – Empowerment and Access to Justice An EU Progress project 2011

Executive Summary

Short description

The aim of Roadmap to Equality – Empowerment and Access to Justice was to make it easier for individuals who experience discrimination to seek advice or to file a complaint concerning discrimination. The main target group was the local level in the civil society which needed to be strengthened in order to better serve the task of giving advice in discrimination matters to their memberships or local target groups. Other important target groups were civil servants producing public services in terms of adult education, labour market measures, housing schemes, health services or civil servants responsible for dialogue between the public sector and the civil society. The main activities within the project were methodological seminars with the civil society, four pilot projects in four different cities, a national conference, production of a book, web site development and some training seminars.

Main objectives

One of the main objectives of the project Roadmap to Equality – Empowerment and Access to Justice was to build new contacts between the Equality Ombudsman and the local arena for discrimination work. The aim was to start or strengthen local human rights networks that could be developed also after the project. Another objective was to define concretely some of the mechanisms behind structures that can lead to discrimination and some good practice that can help combat discrimination. The focus was set on four different socio-political themes: adult education and labour market measures, housing discrimination, equal health services and the involvement and influence on the part of the civil society in municipal decision making.

Key results

The project made it possible for approximately 700 people to meet and discuss these questions in depth in various local meetings, training sessions, seminars, workshops, panel discussions and at the national conference. The project engaged 95 different organisations or public services in active meetings or dialogues. New networks were built between individuals and organisations in the civil society who are active in the field of equal rights and opportunities but who had not met before. The findings, both in terms of mechanisms that shape structures of discrimination and in terms of good practice to combat discrimination were written down and edited into a useful manual or handbook that could inspire many more people in the local discrimination work. Also, methods already used in the civil society to combat discrimination and fight for equal rights and possibilities were

edited into the book. The book was printed in 4000 copies, which means that important parts of the local NGO:s will have access to it free of charge. When followed up in the next year the project will have laid a whole new basis for local discrimination work, not only in the cities involved in the action but also in many other cities through the national cooperation between the antidiscrimination bureaus and different organisations in the civil society strengthening their local branches. Likewise, the methods of good practice developed within the municipalities and the regions in terms of human rights responsibilities will be spread throughout the country to inspire many others. The book can be downloaded through this link: <http://www.do.se/sv/Material/Vagar-till-rattigheter-/>

Description of the project, its aims and goals

Since 2009, when the new Discrimination Act came into force, an important question has been to properly define the role of the civil society in terms of discrimination matters. Not only in terms of promoting equal rights and opportunities, which have always been an important task for many of the NGO:s, but also in terms of the new legal possibilities to give advice to complainants and when needed bring an action on behalf of a complainant into litigation or to court.

In April 2010 the Equality Ombudsman made a report to the Government (IJ2009/1452/DISK) about “experiences of discrimination”. The report concluded that there is a great need for more effective information spots and local support structures if individuals should have real access to redress and justice.

Given this framework, the main strategy of the project Roadmap to Equality – Empowerment and Access to Justice was to reach out to relevant parts of the civil society and at the same time have a local focus to be able to strengthen the daily arena for discrimination work. The Equality Ombudsman also chose a qualitative approach, with less activities but spending longer time and giving more attention to each activity, in order to reach the main goals of the project:

- the concrete building of local networks between different NGO:s working with discrimination matters,
- better understanding of the mechanisms behind discrimination, with a special focus on the structures in the local arena,
- collecting of good practice in relation to the selected themes of the project.

To meet these ends five different types of activities were organised:

- 1) A workshop (two days long) with representatives from the local antidiscrimination bureaus (ADB) in Sweden to have a joint planning of the project. There we selected the four cities that should

be pilot cities further on in the project period. We also discussed experiences with the Litigation Association in Austria, to get a better understanding of what is needed to enable the antidiscrimination bureaus to bring a legal action on behalf of a discriminated person.

- 2) Two seminars (three days each) with the same representatives from NGO:s especially relevant for the Ombudsman's aim to help build a broader network of organisations that engage themselves actively in antidiscrimination campaigns and other forms of discrimination work. The seminars processed discussions and exchanged ideas about methods already used within the civil society to obtain rights and possibilities for their membership base or target groups.
- 3) Four visits to different pilot cities, arranged in cooperation with the local antidiscrimination bureaus, in contact with local NGO:s and local and regional authorities responsible for different public services and affairs. In one city also local companies in the housing market was a target group.
- 4) An educational seminar with folk high school teachers and Human Rights lawyers to dissemination the findings during the project.
- 5) A national concluding conference directed to the responsible authorities, politicians and civil servants to disseminate the results of the project and engage the responsible party in discussions with representatives of the civil society around the themes processed in the project.

An inspiration manual or book was produced, and the web was used to follow the project. Parts of the work to establish the possibility to make a complaint by the web was done during the project.

What did we achieve?

- 1) 17 representatives from most of the antidiscrimination bureaus attended the ADB-workshop. The workshop selected and prepared the pilot city visits. This cooperation between the Equality Ombudsman and the antidiscrimination bureaus was key to be able to organise the visits in a good fashion. The workshop helped building the national coordination of the antidiscrimination bureaus through these discussions, and especially inspired the recently started bureaus in how to establish themselves. The workshop programme also contained a lecture by The Litigation Association in Austria. This contribution was a long desired exchange of experiences around the role of the civil society in terms of bringing legal actions before court in discrimination matters.
- 2) 18 people from different NGO:s working with antidiscrimination strategies attended the methodological seminars. It was important for them all to be able to discuss and exchange experiences over methods in promoting equal rights and possibilities between themselves and with staff from the Equality Ombudsman. These discussions, in combination with the six days stay in a training centre away from town, practically built a strong network between important organisations in the civil society where many of them had

never before met each other. The activity also gave an important input to the “inspiration book” produced at the end of the project, where the last chapter is built on the methods used by the civil society.

- 3) In the pilot city visits the Equality Ombudsman were able to meet with a substantial number of NGO:s and with civil servants or local or regional governments to discuss ways of working to promote equal rights and opportunities. While planning the pilot activities the Equality Ombudsman chose to limit the programme to one socio-political theme in each city. This limitation was necessary to arrive at some results in terms of good practice, but also to make it possible with qualitative discussions with the local NGO:s. Arranging these visits we worked with intersectionality as a principle – i.e. we tried to take all seven discrimination grounds, and their intersecting points, into account all the time.

3a) Thus, in the city of Malmö we discussed the question of adult education, labour market measures and job possibilities. During the week we met with ten different education sites and job seeking activities, mainly among the NGO:s in Malmö working against ethnic discrimination. We visited a special school for Roma adults and a Roma cultural centre, as well as job programmes organised by the Somaliland Association. We also had a discussion with the local government on how to take advantage of all the good practice that could be found within the civil society activities. One result of the week has been the quick growth of the newly started antidiscrimination bureau, which widely broadened its networks and contacts both with other NGO:s and with the city of Malmö.

3b) In Eskilstuna we focused on housing discrimination and the rights or accessibility to housing. Starting the week we organised open lectures at the university on the matter of housing discrimination and a panel discussion at the end. Both activities attracted some 50 participants, mainly from the housing arena. In between we met with three big housing companies in the city, discussion how non-discriminatory practice could be built within the company’s practice. We also organised three visits to different suburbs in the city, to have public meetings with tenants in the area, and one special meeting with a Roma group – as the Roma people are often subjected to direct and visible housing discrimination. Discussions were held with responsible people for discrimination matters in the local government, for instance with the civil servant responsible for dialogue with national minorities. The concrete outcome of the week was the creation of a local antidiscrimination network, containing also representatives from the housing companies.

3c) In Gothenburg the possibility to obtain equal health treatment free from discrimination was in focus. The Equality Ombudsman met and discussed with a good number of representatives for hospitals, health education sites and responsible for health matters in the local and regional governments. We also met with patient associations and other NGO:s related to health questions. The week ended with a panel discussion with 80 participants.

One result of the week was to produce more knowledge to the already prioritised work of the Ombudsman around health questions, and to give input to the inspiration book. Another result was to knit the already existing network of key people working in the health sector with the staff of the newly started Human Rights Committee in the region.

3d) In Umeå the project concentrated on the overall question of influence and involvement on the part of the civil society in political decision making and public affairs. Umeå is commissioned by the government to have Human Rights dialogues in relation to the national minorities, and especially to the Sami indigenous people. The local government has begun to build a more inclusive model for these dialogues concerning the Sami and the Sweden Finns/Tornedalers including also Finnish Roma people in the city region. The week started with a panel discussion with one of the mayors and representatives from the civil society which was attended by 45 people. During the week the project group had discussions with different Sami organisations, with a new gender equality network, with the main LGBT-organisation, with the municipality responsible for support to the civil society, the umbrella organisation for disability questions and other organisations of interest. A local HR-network was founded after the week as one result from the discussions.

- 4) 30 people took part in the educational seminar for folk high school teachers and HR-lawyers. The project had chosen these two professional groups for the educational because they often meet students or clients that experience discrimination. A two day educational is really too short to be able to process and discuss methods of working with discrimination matters in your professional work – but a fairly good start it was.
- 5) The national concluding conference was attended by nearly 200 participants. The programme was very rich, with six different seminars and four plenary sessions covering all the lessons learned throughout the project. Discussions were being organised between the responsible authorities and representatives from the civil society on each theme. The book “Roadmap to equality – inspiration for local discrimination work” was distributed to all participants.

What lasting effects can the project bring about?

One year’s activity is too little time to achieve long term goals. The Equality Ombudsman do think, however, that the project have laid some very important basis for the necessary long term changes.

The embryos of local HR-networks are important, and will be built-up further in 2012 through new visits. The cooperation between the Equality Ombudsman and the local antidiscrimination bureaus around information, giving advice and receive complaints concerning discrimination will deepen in the coming years. The possibility to make complaints directly on the web

will be launched during 2012 – to make it easier for complainants to have access to roads for redress.

Distribution of the “inspiration book” (4 000 copies) to the core target group – local parts of the civil society that engage in antidiscrimination strategies and human rights work – will take place in 2012. It will give further input to the local civil society to act on discrimination matters and know where to turn and why.

Dialogues with state authorities and municipalities responsible for the adult education, labour market measures, housing, health services and dialogues with the civil society will be taken up in 2012-2013.

Lessons learned

One core lesson from the project is the necessity of regular, effective and democratic dialogues between the civil society and the responsible authorities and municipalities if society wants to combat discrimination and promote equal rights and opportunities. The knowledge about discrimination, about its mechanisms and effects, lies within the civil society. Also important ideas about what kind of change should be brought about and how is more developed within different parts of the civil society. If authorities and municipalities want to be accurate and use appropriate means to get good results a dialogue with organisations and representatives for individuals exposed to discrimination is key. It is also a question of building mutual trust between inhabitants and authorities.

In 2011 the Human Rights Committee in the Region of Västra Götaland was formed in order to clarify the responsibility of the region in the west of Sweden. The Committee reports directly to the Region Board. It shall support the development of systematic work for human rights in its region. The aim is to promote the opportunities of all human beings to participate in the society on equal terms in Västra Götaland. To assist this task the Committee has a Human Rights Unit of 14 civil servants and a yearly budget of nearly 4 million euros. The Action Plan of the Committee covers both internal and external tasks. Central in the Action Plan is to “emphasize the advantages of working methods based on rights...” Among the external tasks are dialogues with relevant groups of inhabitants as a means to solve concrete problems of discrimination and mistreatment in order to protect, satisfy and promote the human rights. This is the first really conscious organisation of human rights affairs as a political arena in a Swedish region. It will be very important to follow its development.

Another important lesson is the need to work very concretely in order to reveal the mechanisms of discrimination. What do we mean by discriminatory structures and practices? How are they constructed? How do they work? Why do certain regulations drive discriminatory practices? What other ingredients can we see beside rules and routines that contribute to discrimination? In this project we have tried to look deeper into the details of discriminatory practices concerning three different socio-political arenas

- labour market programmes, housing and health services. In each case we have come one little step further in understanding the methodology of discriminatory structures and practices. This understanding is essential to be able to respond to and combat discrimination.

Lastly, a very important lesson concerns the construction of the EU-projects itself. The Progress projects have meant important possibilities for state authorities and the civil society in Sweden to develop good practice and new tools to combat discrimination and promote equal rights and opportunities. But there is a sincere limitation in the one-year-based models for the Progress projects, especially since the approvals of the applications often comes very close to the formal start of the project. It would be much more effective to have 2-3 year projects with time enough to make a feasibility study, plan, organise, out and evaluate the action. Or make it possible for two or three partners to take turns, succeeding each other in taking responsibility for one year each of a longer project under the same headline, where the applications could be sent in at the same time. We hope that the next EU programmes for development projects could take these considerations into account.

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