

## CASE STUDY: YWCA Komotini, Greece: Women's leadership and women's development

How women from different backgrounds, cultures and lifestyles can communicate and work together in order to empower women in isolated and marginalised communities to develop leadership characteristics.

There's a Roma settlement close to our town where people live almost isolated, marginalized and discriminated against, because of their different culture and way of living and thinking distrusting other people. Most of them, especially women, are not getting any education at all. They are getting married young and they have big families. Efforts have been made by the government for their kids to go to school and get at least the basic education.

The volunteers of the YWCA of Komotini, knowing the Roma people and the problems they face, were looking for a way to help the women of this isolated and marginalized community but communication with them looked problematic. The schoolteacher however had managed to create a channel of trust with the children and their mothers. This gave YWCA the idea to create a «path» of getting close to them through her.



All women who remain in an unequal position in relation to men, due to the culture and conditions of their community, can, if approached appropriately, empower themselves and become women leaders of their community and of the world.

The volunteers of YWCA first contacted the schoolteacher so they could be a helping hand to the problems she discovered, about kids and their families, especially mothers i.e., health matters, lack of education, antisocial behaviour.

YWCA of Komotini took action advocating for them and against discriminations by contacting the city hospital and volunteers of the Greek Red Cross so as to organize meetings with the Roma women and see how they could all together empower them and help them realize their needs and demands. A whole team of special doctors like dentists and nurses organized special sessions about health and first aid instructions.

Volunteers of YWCA of Komotini (teacher, social worker) had special sessions with them about the importance of education for themselves, as women, and their children. Empowering games were used to increase their self-confidence. Health products and educational material were also handed to them with instructions on how to use them.

This whole experience led to another advocacy step, a meeting between the YWCA volunteers and the Mayor of the city as an effort to mutually understand the barriers in communication with marginalized communities and identify the actions that the municipality could take to help improve their way of life

Women's leadership can act as a lever for equality and social justice in terms of:

- more women becoming influential so that decisions are not geared to a male view
- modelling women's leadership encourages more women to take leadership roles
- advocating for social justice goals