

STATEMENT OF OPINION BY THE ADVISORY BOARD FOR ETHNIC RELATIONS ON
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 8 March 2019

The Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations ETNO wants to hand out a rose on International Women's Day to all women in Finland, especially to immigrant women. These women work in different professions, care for their families, pass on cultural heritage from one generation to another and participate in different ways in society. However, there are a number of obstacles on their path. ETNO calls upon various actors and communities in society to identify and tackle these obstacles as well as to strengthen women's participation and integration.

Promoting the inclusion and involvement of immigrant women needs comprehensive action. It includes adequate income and welfare, a safe living environment as well as equal opportunities to participate in different community activities and working life. Immigrant women still face a number of different challenges in the private, educational and employment sectors. This is why ETNO finds it very important to undertake concrete measures to advance their rights and equal opportunities in Finnish society. ETNO emphasises the importance of gender impact assessments as part of integration measures, the prevention of violence and support for victims as well as employment and inclusion measures.

It is three times more difficult for immigrant women to gain employment (Economic Survey of Finland 2018, OECD, 2018) than for native Finnish women. The status of women in the labour market is influenced by direct and indirect discriminatory attitudes experienced, which can easily lead to exclusion. Various campaigns to influence attitudes have been carried out to reduce discrimination, but they often do not lead to concrete and effective results. ETNO also highlights that labour market actors do not always have sufficient capacity to identify immigrant women's skills. ETNO requires concrete measures to support the employment and entrepreneurship of immigrant women. TE-services must ensure that immigrant women receive the same strong support for employment as immigrant men.

Immigrant women undervalue their language proficiency and level of education, which has an impact on their employment (UTH Survey, 2014). In addition to employment, language learning is important for women's well-being and social interaction. Opportunities for parents, who care for their children at home to gain an education, have improved as part of the immigrant training in liberal adult education. ETNO welcomes this improvement but emphasises on adequacy of adult education that integrates child-care opportunities. ETNO also stresses that the integration of women caring for their children at home must be systematic and flexible, taking into account their different life situations.

Civil society organisations play an important role in reaching out to women and families with activities that aim to increase employment, language skills and participation. Resulting from numerous projects, civil-society organisations have developed good models and practices for promoting the employment of women in cooperation with authorities. Mentoring is a good example of this. ETNO emphasises that civil-society organisation activities that promote the rights and equal opportunities for immigrant women must be safeguarded. Long-term funding should be guaranteed for these organisations.

ETNO is especially concerned about violence and harmful traditional practices experienced by women in Finland. These harmful practices prevent the realisation of equal rights and opportunities. In addition to national laws, Finland has ratified international conventions such as the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). ETNO points out that the implementation of international conventions has not been sufficient and necessary actions are required in combating violence against immigrant women. ETNO calls on national government to provide necessary resources to implement the conventions.