



Better inclusion of the Roma community through civil society initiatives

Final report

EN



European Economic and Social Committee

**BETTER INCLUSION OF
THE ROMA COMMUNITY THROUGH
CIVIL SOCIETY INITIATIVES**

FINAL REPORT

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Support for Roma integration has long been an EESC priority. The European Commission's communication on an EU framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020¹, adopted on 5 April 2011, and the development of such National Roma Integration Strategies (NRISs) have given new impetus to the Committee's consultative and monitoring activities. Alongside a number of exploratory and own-initiative opinions, the Committee launched a project at the start of 2014, entitled "Better inclusion of the Roma community through civil society initiatives". Its aim was to examine the impact of relevant European legislation from an (organised) civil society perspective, to identify its shortcomings and to come up with proposals regarding the next steps to be taken.
- 1.2 Project participants had the opportunity during hearings to get first-hand information from experts, civil society interest groups and EU policy makers, and to gain valuable experience from study visits to various countries and from their meetings with government and civil society representatives. We were fortunate enough to be welcomed very warmly, and would therefore like to thank all the stakeholders for their infinite willingness to contribute their indispensable knowledge to our work. It was very important to us to see that so much knowledge that could ensure the future success of Roma integration had been gathered. This report and the accompanying proposal are based on the knowledge and information provided by our partners. We would like to place particular emphasis on their ideas and on their recommendations and, in some cases, demands for the future, thereby representing the interests of civil society and creating a fairer Europe with greater solidarity.

2. Basic observations

- 2.1 Despite the various strategies that have been developed, few have been implemented hence the situation for Roma people, in terms of poverty and vulnerability, is not improving in most Member States. Some of the Member States have not progressed beyond words in documents.
- 2.2 Despite the launch of a number of large-scale general strategic projects, many Member States have not been able to counteract the everyday negative impact of segregation and discrimination.
- 2.3 Specifically women and children within the Roma community suffer from multiple discriminations, which puts an additional burden on them. In fact the situation of Roma women in core areas of social life, such as education, employment and health is worse in comparison to that of Roma men².
- 2.4 We therefore need to address the phenomena of segregation and discrimination with real determination and commitment, including the use of indicators and monitoring processes that involve the Roma community itself.

1 COM(2011) 173 final.

2 <http://fra.europa.eu/en/news/2014/education-employment-and-gender-roma-survey-results-focus>

- 2.5 In the majority of countries where Roma experience segregation, the economic crisis has reduced their opportunities on the labour market, their quality of life and the practical possibilities for implementing the strategies even further, and discrimination indicators have deteriorated. The situation is particularly negative for women, children and young Roma.
- 2.6 The relevant key targets of the Europe 2020 strategy have not been achieved, and the number of people suffering exclusion has even increased.
- 2.7 It is incomprehensible that the European Semester does not contain any specific reference to the Roma Strategy. The EESC suggests that the Roma Strategy be included in the European Semester in order to strengthen its political objectives.
- 2.8 Neither the European Union nor civil society organisations really have the means to exert a direct influence on the development and implementation of national policies.
- 2.9 The project has brought us to the important realisation that positive results can be achieved through hard work and a coherent policy based on a high degree of political commitment that extends beyond governments, as well as through the ongoing participation of the parties involved at all levels, with the acceptance of the majority culture (as is the case in Finland, in particular).
- 2.10 Perhaps the most convincing aspect of the Finnish example which was the most proactive of those we viewed – and at the same time its main message – is the fact that those concerned are actively involved and help to take decisions. Representatives of the Roma community were present at all meetings relating to Roma policy at all levels and to a significant degree, in both qualitative and quantitative terms.
- 2.11 It is vital for Europe's new political leaders to recognise the value of the framework strategy and step up their efforts to implement and monitor it.
- 2.12 The EU's fundamental rights model is based on a set of core values such as democracy, equality between citizens, and respecting universal human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs). For Roma, their access to economic, social and cultural rights is blocked by systematic discrimination that is not addressed in EU and national policy. The violation of these rights can no longer be overlooked. Where the EESC witnessed positive developments in the situation of Roma, it was in cases in which the focus on these rights had improved the situation for the Roma. Furthermore, the specific barriers facing Roma that are non-EU citizens also remain largely unaddressed within Roma integration strategies.
- 2.13 The commitment and preparation of organised civil society form the guarantee and foundation for the future, especially when the political climate is favourable.
- 2.14 In countries where the situation is deteriorating, the following features can be observed:
- there are particularly strong anti-gypsy attitudes and feelings, and the ways in which institutions function are influenced by those attitudes and feelings;

- NGOs representing civil society and Roma are insufficiently (or not at all) involved in the implementation process of National Roma Integration Strategies (NRISs);
- monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the strategies and programmes have major shortcomings (or are completely missing);
- aid and resource allocation procedures are neither transparent nor accountable, and recipients are not end users, but rather representatives of normative society (service providers, contractors);
- the number and proportion of social enterprises involved and the amount of subsidies they receive are extremely low;
- activities to combat discrimination and guarantee equal treatment, and the activities of media supervisory authorities, are rarely independent or consistent, and a significant level of political cronyism can be observed;
- the official position of the state on the content or implementation of the strategy differs significantly from that of civil society;
- there is insufficient data collection or analysis, the reliability of the data is uncertain, and the country reports show that governments' own interests are being pursued;
- the extent of segregation is not being reduced;
- implementation of the strategies is generally not systematic, but random;
- at local level grants/funding are sometimes only awarded for projects focusing on certain aspects of the national strategies and do not include Roma participants;
- in general, there is a lack of awareness within non-Roma society of the existence and importance of the Roma strategy;
- Roma organisations continue to have a significant degree of political dependence, and Roma parties are still largely based on patronage;
- indicators of socio-economic status and discrimination suggest that elderly people, women and children are particularly vulnerable, and at the same time it is generally recognised that women are the drivers of social change;
- access to social benefits is not improving, and in some areas is even deteriorating. In all cases, institutional segregation is a factor reducing longevity and quality of life;
- in addition to significant disparities, young Roma people have a very low level of participation in the education system – at all levels of education, their participation rate is appreciably lower than that of young people in the non-Roma society. High drop-out, truancy and vagrancy rates are a clear sign of segregation;
- there continue to be serious instances of institutional discrimination (forced evictions, segregated schools, special schools, inequalities in access to services, etc.).

3. Recommendations

3.1 Policy deliberations

- 3.1.1 The EU's fundamental rights model is based on a set of core values such as democracy, equality, and respecting universal human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights (ESCRs). The access of Roma to economic, social and cultural rights is blocked by systematic (legal, institutional and contact-based) discrimination and anti-gypsy feelings that is not addressed in EU and national policy. The violation of these rights can no longer be overlooked.

- 3.1.2 The Member States need to pay particular attention to the implementation of Social rights in the field of Roma integration: the European Social Charter (ESC), drawn up within the Council of Europe, sets out social rights and freedoms and establishes a supervisory mechanism guaranteeing their respect by the States Parties which includes monitoring and collective complaints procedures³.
- 3.1.3 Discrimination and anti-gypsyism, which is inherent in every level of policy making, society and project, is due to the absence of Roma in the decision making process, and the fact that they are prevented from making their voices heard. To overcome this, in all areas which affect their community, their measurable inclusion has to be ensured.
- 3.1.4 Women and children within the Roma community are specific targets of multiple forms of discrimination and therefore additional measures for gender balance must also be consistently implemented at all levels of the decision making process in areas which affect the Roma community specifically.
- 3.1.5 Systematic planning and implementation, policy coordination, awareness-raising and monitoring of local policy-framing, preference for differentiated approaches based on genuine needs, representation of the evidences and facts, and consistent, permanent and systematic evaluation are indispensable and have to be addressed with the inclusion of Roma throughout the process.
- 3.1.6 Member States have to strive in all cases for consistent implementation of the "full access" criterion. Member States should address legal discrimination and regulations that limit access to essential services according to residence, migration or citizenship status. "Full access" also encompasses ensuring administrative processes facilitate access, meeting requirements for physical accessibility and usability, adjustment to needs, affordability, and quality in line with standards also for inhabitants of residential areas where the Roma population is highly concentrated, and to improve transport connections to institutions and services to which they have a right to easy and convenient access due to their circumstances. The public service should include a percentage of Roma dealing with Roma-specific issues and Roma persons to ensure true understanding of the issues being faced.
- 3.1.7 The commitment of the new EU political administration must be guaranteed to secure full implementation of the framework strategy. The Roma integration policy must remain part of the European semester, and country-specific recommendations (CSRs) must be rigorously followed-up.
- 3.1.8 Only systematic implementation of system-oriented strategies can deliver results.
- 3.1.9 The key element of affirmative policies is enabling people belonging to a minority to make their voices heard and ensure that their interests are represented. We need to support tools and

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Member States should show political commitment and become parties to the additional protocol to the European Social Charter ([Council of Europe, Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter providing for a System of Collective Complaints CETS 158, 1995](#)). As Roma integration has a wider European dimension including considerable Roma population living in non-EU countries in Europe, EU members' accession could encourage States member of Council of Europe to follow that lead.

approaches helping them to highlight their social disadvantages as well as political efforts to overcome these handicaps.

- 3.1.10 All stakeholders must acknowledge empowerment as a tool for enabling Roma to become equal citizens.
- 3.1.11 Those claiming to share the same identity must be able, on their own initiative and together with their chosen peers and as a community, to choose their own path and preserve the language, culture, customs etc. constituting the basis of their identity. This is why the national Roma integration strategy has to pave the way to enabling those who claim Roma identity to develop their own communities, and their own public forums (media) and organisations and to make them secure and sustainable (as in the case of any other minority groups suffering from social exclusion).
- 3.1.12 The network of national Roma contact points planned by the European Commission must be made genuinely operational. The network only makes sense if it has the requisite powers and resources, especially funding. These contact points must operate on the basis of close, institutionalised cooperation with civil society organisations. The implementation process needs to be reviewed at regular intervals to identify failings or improvements immediately.
- 3.1.13 A network of independent experts must be established in each Member State in order to ensure sound evaluation of the NRISs. Member States must also allocate funding for EU monitoring and (independent) evaluation by civil society organisations, for example under the operational programmes. Monitoring and evaluation activities must certainly be taken into account in programme funding throughout the process.
- 3.1.14 Given the conclusions reached in the explanatory memorandum of the proposed recommendation⁴ and given the deterioration of the socio-economic situation due to the crisis, the Committee considers that the Council should make use of its power to adopt legally binding acts in order to alleviate the distress and great poverty that endangers people's lives and to combat the most extreme effects of discrimination, racism and anti-Roma prejudice.
- 3.1.15 Especially in cases of extreme disadvantage, clear frameworks for the implementation of human rights and the long-overdue introduction of benchmarks and indicators to enable this kind of situation to be assessed must be established.
- 3.1.16 Groups of independent researchers equipped with legal instruments and the necessary safeguards in terms of research ethics should carry out assessments of the implementation of the strategies and be backed up by guaranteed funding and transparency in the use of funds.
- 3.1.17 The EU decision making bodies should consequently make use of the OMC possibilities in implementing integration policy.

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Council recommendation "... while Member States have had the legal possibility to act to address the issue of Roma integration, the measures planned so far are not sufficient. Due to the lack of a coordinated approach to the issue of Roma integration, there are growing discrepancies among Member States."

- 3.1.18 Roma should not be given special rights, but fundamental rights and all their rights as EU citizens must also be fully guaranteed. Guaranteeing rights includes proactive measures to ensure that rights are enjoyed in practice and any violations of rights are penalised, particularly where people responsible for law enforcement act in an unfair and discriminatory way.
- 3.1.19 Identifying solutions is preferable in all cases of extreme forms of poverty that violate human rights and failure to meet basic needs (e.g. lack of access to drinking water, healthcare or basic sanitation for people living on the outskirts of towns, camps, child starvation, human trafficking, extremely harmful labour environment and forms of labour etc.).
- 3.1.20 It is vital to properly involve and mobilise the Roma in all areas of action, to broaden the conceptual framework for cooperation, creating a culture of consensus-seeking that goes beyond consultation alone.
- 3.1.21 Current Member State monitoring and evaluation practices are often limited to reports drawn up without any real evaluation method, sometimes based on unreliable data, and it is not unusual for them to produce entirely biased outcomes. The establishment of indicators and benchmarks, as well as the relevant methodologies and requirements on which proper and independent data collection and reporting depend, are prerequisites for evaluating strategies and intervention programmes. Therefore, the Committee urges the Member States to finally adopt and effectively implement the framework of rights-based indicators for monitoring the implementation of the NRISs established by the Working Party on Roma Integration Indicators⁵ and involve the national Statistical Institutes, line ministries, local authorities, Roma communities and other relevant stakeholders in its implementation.
- 3.1.22 Evaluation tasks at Member State level should be entrusted to groups of researchers and institutions selected by open calls for tender. They should be professional and free of political links, and their independence should be further upheld by a range of legal instruments (e.g. introduction of a declaration of absence of conflict of interest, transparency rules for finance and use of funds, verification by the scientific community, monitoring of research methods, etc.).
- 3.1.23 In addition to the programmable, transparent and appropriate funding of equality bodies, the legal situation of such bodies must also be strengthened; at the same time, equality authorities must also maintain permanent and close links with the relevant associations representing the Roma.
- 3.1.24 Indicators must be set for accurately measuring the degree of Roma integration and involvement (e.g. employment rate in local or central administration, data on school attendance, levels of involvement in programme implementation, etc.).
- 3.1.25 In order to tackle the segregation and discrimination that goes back generations and weighs on all facets of the lives of those concerned, implementing programmes in the form of projects focusing on one particular problem area is not enough. It is now vital to opt for a systematic approach to achieving the strategic objectives which also fully respects the importance of a multi-agency and multi-stakeholder approach.

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A subgroup of the European Commission's network of National Roma Contact Points

3.1.26 It is vital to support the introduction of a basic income instrument, so that a certain proportion of the minimum wage, linked also to the number of children, is provided, and thus a secure standard of living can be guaranteed for families living in extreme poverty.

3.1.27 It is unacceptable that children suffer from hunger. Food should be made available across the board at national level to ensure that meals can be provided in schools (also during holidays).

3.2 Specific policy recommendations

3.2.1 *Education*

- Legislation must explicitly guarantee the right to equal access to all levels of education for all children – including early childhood education and care and vocational training - regardless of residence, migration or citizenship status;
- Supportive programmes in public education (assistance with registration, programmes for enrolment in the first class, mediators, programmes to prevent and tackle non-attendance and early school leaving; support for multiculturalism; teacher training and awareness-raising with an emphasis on Roma children's rights, the challenges they face, and the positive aspects of integration; targeted support for newly arrived children);
- Provision of financial assistance for low-income families, regardless of status, to meet costs relating to education (e.g. uniforms, books, transport, and exemption from payment where there are fees for education);
- The drafting and adoption by schools of plans for equal opportunities, which will also be a condition for requesting aid;
- Development, implementation and dissemination of collaborative curricula (involving active participation and focused on the child). Awareness raising and training of the relevant stakeholders (teachers, parents, representatives of the institutions responsible for organising and managing education establishments);
- Getting Roma families involved in their children's education: mediation between families and schools, raising awareness and understanding of the importance of education, informal discussions, conflict management, building trust in schools;
- Extracurricular programmes, activities, developing talents. Launching remedial programmes in all relevant schools, school assistance programs;
- Consistently promoting a view of education that promotes integration, and refining programmes: parental environment, "first and second chance" programmes, early childhood education, teacher training, extracurricular activities, programmes encouraging further education, specialised teaching materials, measures in favour of accessibility to training for adults, civic education and training on rights and combating discrimination, etc.;
- Identifying, preventing and eliminating school segregation of all kinds (in particular, special schools and segregated schools) nevertheless providing targeted support to newly-arrived migrant children within the mainstream education system.

3.2.2 *Employment*

- The Roma Strategy's objectives should be strengthened via European employment policy tools, using indicators and clearly-defined targets. The European Social Fund should increase funding;
- Agreements between businesses and Roma NGOs should be stepped up, in order to stimulate vocational training and employment, especially under the Youth Guarantee Scheme;
- Entrepreneurship among the Roma community should be promoted: informal economic activities should be helped to become businesses, and Roma NGOs should be provided with business consulting and guidance services;
- Promoting social enterprises, by guaranteeing microcredits and providing training for the relevant stakeholders. Drawing up mediation programmes in this area too. Targeted capacity-building programmes to develop entrepreneurship;
- Job creation and adaptation programmes (such as ACCEDER⁶), "learning by working" (on-the-job training);
- Supporting recruitment programmes for the public sector and law enforcement; at the same time, introducing programmes to address discrimination and prejudice;
- Establishing individual career paths, setting up peer-based careers advice services; raising awareness in workplaces, drawing up contracts (training, internal professional mentoring, on-the-job training, professional mobility management, etc.); supervised and assisted creation of recruitment environments.

3.2.3 *Access to healthcare*

- Where the right to healthcare is a universal right, healthcare for the Roma community and for all those at risk of exclusion should be improved (Spain);
- It is important to recognise that good health for the Roma community is more than just access to healthcare. Social inequalities in health arise because of inequalities in the conditions of daily life and the fundamental drivers that give rise to them: inequalities in power, money and resources. Differences in the social determinants result in health inequalities⁷. All planned and implemented public policy measures must try to reduce these inequalities;
- Exclusion from the healthcare system constitutes a fundamental violation of human rights and seriously undermines people's quality of life and life prospects. Withdrawal of a fundamental right is unacceptable. In addition, having a part of the population excluded from health services undermines public health objectives and professional ethics. We therefore need to guarantee access to healthcare for all people, regardless of their residence, migration or citizenship status;
- Legislation should be explicit about the right for all people, regardless of residence, migration or citizenship status, to access health care services on equal terms, including those with financial subsidies. This should include a ban on the sharing of personal information between health care institutions and migration authorities, and of enforcement actions near health care institutions;

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http://www.gitanos.org/publicaciones/memoria07English/pdf/activities_02.pdf

<https://www.gitanos.org/que-hacemos/areas/employment/acceder.html>

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http://ec.europa.eu/health/social_determinants/docs/healthinequalitiesineu_2013_en.pdf

- Targeted removal of barriers to access to healthcare systems (lack of knowledge, linguistic and administrative barriers, discrimination);
- The experience gathered from the operation of Roma health mediators is convincing. We should use the administration of aid schemes to strengthen these programmes, to ensure that they are accepted and to guarantee their viability;
- Disseminating and applying the Roma Health Integration Policy Index (Rhipex) as a planning and evaluation tool;
- Using and disseminating the mobile health units that have been set up in a number of countries, and expanding the range of services provided;
- Providing the necessary additional funding to meet the requirements for medical examinations and supplies observed in the course of diagnostic procedures, guaranteeing that travel expenses are granted;
- Medical caravans (where medical doctors and students offer free, on-the-spot consultations for poor communities, including Roma) could encourage and support the poor, including Roma people, who are found to have the most serious health problems to continue with their medical investigations;
- Ensuring that all children, in all situations (and despite their situations) have access to national vaccination programmes and paediatric care;
- Monitoring full and equal access to healthcare, identifying cases of institutional discrimination and publicising negative differences in treatment. Independent health monitoring (body authority), building research capacities;
- We need to have much more extensive, accessible and higher quality data in order to improve access to health data and to healthcare, and in order to plan targeted, evidence-based programmes. Supporting research and more accurate data collection;
- In the case of undocumented refugees, we need to recognise and safeguard fundamental rights, professional ethics and public health aspects, and to ensure the provision of basic services;
- The ability of people (including Roma) living in extreme poverty to get proper access to healthcare is also affected by the fact that they have no way of getting eye examinations or of buying adequate glasses or contact lenses. Monitoring the eye health of the Roma population and considering cost-efficient corrective measures to improve the lives of those Roma at risk of and those with vision impairment.

3.2.4 *Housing*

- Legal safeguards to enforce tenants' rights and prevent forced evictions without due notice. Prior consultation, contact with social mediators and the involvement of civil society organisations should all be mandatory;
- Effective, independent complaints mechanisms to tackle discrimination in the provision on housing on the basis of ethnicity, race, residence, migration or citizenship status (including decriminalising the provision on accommodation and renting to irregular migrants);
- There is no doubt that poverty and ghettos seriously violate fundamental rights and social justice. Launching social housing programmes, developing existing programmes;

- Establishing legislative and case-law safeguards so that it is not possible to relocate tenants to neighbourhoods that do not meet standards, regardless of the situation⁸;
- Need to check that the procedure for allocating and assessing housing is subject to strict controls in terms of legal measures and in relation to preventing institutional discrimination;
- Monitoring, identification of slums, intervention by mediators, construction of social housing, support for relocation, support programmes, evaluation;
- Constructing affordable social housing. Making use of contractual guarantees;
- Making use of mediation programmes;
- Inadequate housing conditions have a significant impact on the chances of success of policies in other areas. Priority must therefore be given to housing assistance in the context of support policy.

3.2.5 *Support policy*

- Verifying the distribution of European Structural and Investment Fund (ESI Funds) support more carefully, including with the involvement of civil society, tackling distortions and irregularities and, at the same time, simplifying practices;
- Increasing transparency and accountability as regards the distribution and use of resources in all cases. Consequently amending the regulatory operating arrangements;
- In the course of implementing ESI Funds, Member States should make more effective use of the ESI Funds' technical assistance budget to involve civil society in evaluation;
- Providing information on EU funding (websites, information material, training, knowledge databases, information centres, etc.), including for local communities (municipalities, civil society organisations);
- Independent evaluation of the effectiveness, relevance and procedures for use of EU structural funds;
- Monitoring mechanisms should also ensure that Structural Funds cannot be spent on any programmes that exacerbate the phenomena of segregation and discrimination;
- Creating an emergency fund, on the lines of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, providing direct aids in extreme situations of segregation is crucial.
- Investing in the research and provision of innovative and inclusive services to all Roma residents, regardless of status, at local level where services are developed.

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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, "An adequate house must contain certain facilities essential for health, security, comfort and nutrition. All beneficiaries of the right to adequate housing should have sustainable access to natural and common resources, safe drinking water, energy for cooking, heating and lighting, sanitation and washing facilities, means of food storage, refuse disposal, site drainage and emergency service".

3.2.6 Participation

- Two structures are currently in place to give Roma the opportunity to be heard at European level. The first is the European Platform for Roma inclusion. Created in 2008, it brings together national governments, EU, international organisations and Roma civil society representatives. It aims to stimulate co-operation and exchanges of experience among all stakeholders on successful Roma inclusion and integration policies and practices. The other one is the European Roma and Travellers Forum, which has been set up in 2004 by the Council of Europe with the objective to allow Roma space for debate at European level;
- The participation of Roma in all stages of the decision making process is essential in order to achieve effective policies that can make a real change for the situation of Roma in the EU. The tools that we have at present are not sufficient in this respect;
- The Roma must be heard within a formalised structure where their views cannot be ignored by decision makers and where Roma can provide input in all policy areas and not exclusively in matters that directly concern the Roma population. At EU-level, a permanent structure should be established within the EESC that enables a clear and focussed input from the Roma population that can be followed up within a formalised framework;
- The European Commission recommends that the Member States set up national platforms for Roma integration, which would be open to civil society organisations and in which all organisations could take part. These platforms would operate on a regular basis. The organisation of their operations and the agenda of their meetings would be worked out jointly by the contact point for Roma and the organisations representing them;
- The European Commission, the EESC and NGOs should launch the European Roma Forum, in order to involve civil society in the development and implementation of policies (the European Migration Forum is one such example);
- Develop networks of local coordination forums, which can drive local initiatives by promoting cooperation between representatives of local authorities, the state and civil society;
- It is a priority to strengthen the capacity of NGOs working on Roma inclusion (as regards human resources, advocacy, absorption of resources and communication);
- It is essential to promote Roma culture and language, together with a positive Roma identity (preserving culture, language and festivals, supporting cultural and media products, etc.). The right conditions need to be established so that the people concerned can take pride in their Roma identity;
- In order to promote participation, creating indicators that would put into practice the principle "nothing without us", from conception, via implementation, to evaluation.
- Churches can play an important role in stamping out personal and institutional segregation. We need to raise awareness among churches, to empower them, to support programmes for this purpose, and to ensure that they can participate in local consultation processes. It is necessary to take measures to counter anti-gypsy feelings that are, in some cases, also present in churches, using appropriate instruments (educational programmes, awareness-raising campaigns, training courses, mediation etc.);
- It is also important for coordination mechanisms (horizontal and vertical) to be systematically based, at all levels, on consensus and the consistent involvement of the people most affected. There needs to be a culture of consensus that goes beyond simple consultation, and platforms for continuous dialogue.

3.2.7 Evaluation

- Binding legal instruments/measures, or other means of enforcing policy commitments, in particular in cases where independent evaluation systematically shows negative developments (e.g. extreme poverty, a rise in the number of children suffering from hunger, an increase in unemployment among the Roma, the proliferation of cases of discrimination);
- Collection and sharing of qualitative data regarding environments characterised by discrimination and segregation, systematisation and provision of such data in the context of local and central coordination mechanisms.

3.2.8 *Anti-discrimination dimension*

- Discrimination and anti-gypsyism need to be recognised by all stakeholders as the main reason for the exclusion and segregation of Roma that must be addressed in order to achieve equal rights for Roma in the EU. This requires educating mainstream society about Roma society and civil servants must be informed of their obligations under human rights legislation;
- Both the EU and Member States must take all necessary measures to ensure that Member States comply with the Racial or Ethnic Discrimination Directive⁹ and the Equal Treatment Directive in Employment and Occupation¹⁰;
- Including social rights in the mandate of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA);
- Safeguarding fundamental European freedoms for nomads and travellers, and in particular for children, women, the elderly and the sick;
- Strengthening tools for legislation, professional recommendation, monitoring and implementation, supporting training regarding the possible expression of biases in the media. Strengthening the independence of media supervisory authorities and safeguarding their resources;
- Raising awareness among Roma of their rights and making it possible to access justice easily;
- Access to legal assistance, support for other advocacy mechanisms in order to strengthen the reporting process;
- Both the EU and Member States should ensure transposition and implementation of the Victims Directive (which applies to all victims of crime equally, regardless of residence status) effectively provide protection and access to justice for Roma victims of crime (e.g. safe police reporting; appropriate investigation and prosecution, including of potential bias motivations and other aggravating factors; access to residence status, access to support services);
- Supporting strategic alliances with the cooperation and assistance of the media (promoting a change of attitudes, substantiated information/culture, presentation of the history of the Roma, combating stereotypes, interculturalism and multiculturalism, awareness-raising);
- Opening local Roma information and knowledge centres, in order to combat negative stereotypes;
- Documenting and sharing best practices, exchanging information on them and improving their accessibility¹¹;

⁹ (2000/43/EC)

¹⁰ (2000/78/EC)

¹¹ For example: <http://goodpracticeroma.ppa.coe.int/en>.

- Setting up bodies – independent if possible – responsible for equal treatment in the judicial and criminal law fields, and ensuring that they run smoothly;
- Raising awareness of Roma identity, values and culture, providing the tools required for this (radio and television channels and broadcasts, training, financing, etc.);
- Systematically and severely punishing instances of segregation in education and in living and working locations, establishing means of redress.

4. **Involvement of the EESC**

- 4.1 The EESC should continue its activities regarding the EU framework strategy and the implementation of NRISs, and provide as broad a platform as possible for sharing experiences between civil society organisations and dialogue with representatives of the EU institutions. The EESC, in cooperation with NGOs and the European Commission, should launch the European Roma Forum, to enable civil society and the European institutions to work together on governing the strategy.
- 4.2 It should contribute to the recognition of the best initiatives through its communication tools. It should champion the issue of Roma inclusion in negotiations with EU institutions.
- 4.3 As the experiences of the project show, the Committee should facilitate a permanent structure within the terms of reference to prepare impact assessments with the Roma community on the implementation of EU policy and whether all these objectives have been achieved. This framework of further activities should have the potential to inform the Commission and Parliament of non-compliance with national strategies and negative impacts of projects or policies. This could include an audit of the number of Roma participants in Roma-related issues, and an impact assessment of EC projects supporting Roma which reviews the process of defining and allocating funds for projects.
- 4.4 The Committee should take part in the organisation of the activities of the Roma Platform.
- 4.5 It should maintain close contact with national ESCs, in particular for those countries with a large Roma population or where shortcomings have been identified. It should take the initiative of organising meetings between these organisations, joint meetings of experts and conferences at local level, and ensure the involvement of stakeholders in the process.

ANNEX I

CONCEPT NOTE OF THE PROJECT

I. BACKGROUND

- *PROJECTS*

At the initiative of EESC President Henri Malosse and following a decision of the EESC Bureau of July 2013, the EESC has started to work on **projects**. The term "project" should be understood in the "Jean Monnet method" sense: Europe-wide actions or pilot actions that could have an impact at European level.

A SOC Section project has been established on "**Better inclusion of the Roma community through civil society initiatives**".

The purpose of the project is to highlight the impact of EU legislation, programmes and policies from civil society's perspective. In particular, it is aimed at assessing what are the proper and effective instruments to achieve a greater involvement of civil society organisations as a means to improve the social inclusion of Roma. An exploratory coordination group consisting of 9 members (including a president) has been set up to look into possible gaps in the work already being done at European, national, regional and local levels to improve the social inclusion of the Roma, in particular gaps where a greater involvement of civil society could function as a remedy and/or where EESC opinions have already offered solutions. External stakeholders working in the field will be invited to attend to inform the working group of the practical action being currently undertaken.

II. WORKING METHODS

- *OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT*

The aims of the project are:

1. to gain a better understanding of and evaluate the policies that are put in place to implement the **EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020** (COM(2011) 173 final) as well of the strategies of the Member states - from the point of view of all relevant stakeholders relating Roma inclusion policy but especially of the organised civil society;
2. to understand the level of involvement of the Roma representatives and organised civil society in in planning, implementing and assessing the programs at local, regional, Member State and EU level; and to give them an opportunity to express their comments, ideas, recommendations and to be heard at EU level;
3. to identify and share good practices or difficulties encountered in a selection of Member States;
4. to report to and possibly make recommendations to the EESC, the European institutions and other actors involved in Roma integration policy.

The exercise reflects the specific features and added value of the EESC: a **bottom-up approach** and the full involvement of members who genuinely represent active citizens on the ground throughout Europe. It is also in line with the Committee's **Going Local activities**.

- **EXECUTION OF THE STUDY**

A) Group Meetings

The working group will meet at least once at the beginning of the project to organise its work and discuss its objectives. Relevant stakeholders (EU Institutions and NGOs) will also be invited to enlarge the discussion.

B) Hearings

Hearings will be held to analyse the four “crucial areas” of the framework strategy as well the situation and the eligibility of the anti-discrimination measures that have been already taken in the Member States.

C) Country visits

The working group (in sub-groups of three members) will visit four EU Member States in order to meet civil society organisations and public authorities working on the ground with Roma issues to ascertain the extent to which the National Roma Integration Strategies are being implemented.

The Countries chosen because of their specific situation in the field of Roma inclusion policy are **Romania, Bulgaria, Spain and Finland**.

Beyond the structured meetings held in the relevant countries, a questionnaire will help to assess the situation of the Roma and policies relating to their inclusion.

D) Civil society round table

Based on the information gathered, the Committee is going to organise a civil society round table to summarise the experiences gained from the project. It will involve the EESC's institutional partners (Commissioner, MEPs, EU Presidency), the social partners and civil society organisations, stakeholders from the visited Member States, think-tanks and other relevant organisations.

- **OUTPUTS OF THE STUDY**

After each mission, a concise **mission report** will be prepared, under the responsibility of a rapporteur, who will be one of the three members carrying out the mission.

After completion of the four missions, a **draft final report** will be prepared under the responsibility of the working group's President. It will primarily be based on: the mission reports, the information collected during the meetings, from visiting local programmes and by means of the questionnaire disseminated among the NGOs. Its aim is to formulate a number of overall conclusions and recommendations.

The draft final report will be communicated and finalised in the **civil society roundtable** in Brussels.

After this event, the resulting **final report** will be communicated to the European institutions (MEPs, Commission, Presidencies), the Committee of the Regions, national Economic and Social Councils and other relevant stakeholders.

ANNEX II

COMPOSITION OF THE COORDINATION GROUP

Ákos Topolánszky, President

Emilio Fatovic

Lubomir Hadjiysky

Waltraud Klasnic

Ivan Kokolav

Eugen Lucan

Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños

Madi Sharma

Anne-Marie Sigmund

Valeria Atzori, secretariat

Joëlle Doudard, secretariat

ANNEX III

EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES OF THE PROJECT

1. MEETINGS AND HEARINGS

1.1 6 March 2014

First Meeting of the Coordination Group

First meeting: discussion and agreement about objectives, schedule and results. Definition of the European general framework in the 4 pillars of the European Framework for the integration of the Roma (Education, Employment, Health and Housing) as well as the non-discrimination as horizontal element.

Participants :

Coordination Group

Lubomir Hadjiysky, member
Ivan Kokolav, member
Eugen Lucan, member
Ján Oravec, member (replacing Waltraud Klasnic)
Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños, member
Ionut Sibian, member (replacing Anne-Marie Sigmund)
Ákos Topolánszky, President

European Commission

Hana Horka, Unit for Health Determinants, Directorate General for SANCO
Ilona Negro, Unit for non-discrimination policies and Roma coordination, Directorate General for JUST
Dominique Bé, Unit for Social inclusion and poverty reduction, Directorate General for EMPL
Frank Pierobon, Unit for Education and training in Europe 2020 governance, Directorate General for EAC

NGOs

Ivan Ivanov, European Roma information (ERIO)
Gabriela Hrabanova, European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network (ERGONET)
Zoltán Massay Kosubek, European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
Julie Pascoet, European Network Against Racism (ERPC)

On 12 May 2014 and on 7 November 2014, the Coordination Group on Roma organized a public hearing in Brussels in the context of the EESC project on "Better Inclusion of the Roma community through civil society organizations". For the first hearing, a **special focus was put on health policies and antidiscrimination**. For the second one, a **special focus was put on education, employment and housing strands of the EU Framework for Roma Integration**

For both hearings, the aims was to:

- highlight the impact of EU legislation and, programs from the perspective of civil society.
- assess appropriate and effective instruments to more closely involve civil society organizations as a means to improve the social inclusion of the Roma.
- look into possible shortcomings in the work already being done at European, national, regional and local levels

1.2 12 May 2014

Second Meeting of the Coordination group

1st Public hearing : Focus on health and antidiscrimination

Programme

- 2:00 – 2:30 Registration
- 2:30 – 2:40 **Opening**
Ákos Topolánszky: Presentation of the work of the EESC Coordination Group
- 2.40 – 3:00 **The Roma and Health: state of play, evaluation of measures adopted, main challenges, future developments**
Isabel de la Mata, European Commission, DG SANCO, Principal Advisor for Health
Isabelle Beauclercq, International Organization for Migration (IOM)
- 3:00 – 3:40 **Statements of relevant NGOs**
Zoltán Massay Kosubek, European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
Stéphane Heymans, Doctors of the World
Liliana Keith, Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants
Violeta Naydenova, Open Society Institute
- 3:40 – 4.10 Questions & answers
- 4.10 – 4.20 Coffee breaks
- 4.20 – 4:40 **The Roma and anti-discrimination: state of play, evaluation of measures adopted, main challenges, future developments**
Ilona Negro, European Commission, DG JUST, Unit for Non-discrimination policies and Roma Coordination
- 4:40 – 5:30 **Statements of relevant NGOs**
Ivan Ivanov, European Roma Information Office (ERIO)
Baudouin Janssens, Amnesty International (AI)
Adam Weiss, European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)
Anne-Sophie Parent, Age Platform Europe
Julie Pascoët, European Network against Racism (ENAR)
- 5:30 – 5:50 Questions & answers
- 5:50 – 6:00 Conclusions by Ákos Topolánszky

Participants

Isabelle BEAUCLERCQ	International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Richard BERENDSEN	Council of Europe
Morgane COULON	European Association for the Defense of Human Rights
Isabel DE LA MATA	European Commission, DG SANCO, Unit for Health Determinants
Emilio FATOVIC	EESC Coordination Group's member
Lubomir HADJIYSKY	EESC Coordination Group's member
Stéphane HEYMANS	Doctors of the World
Lilana KEITH	Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants
Ivan KOKALOV	EESC Coordination Group's member
Maria KRISLOVA	Belgian NGO "Fébul"
Eugen LUCAN	EESC Coordination Group's member
Zoltán MASSAY KOSUBEK	European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
Maria MELCHIOR	Doctors of the World
Nele MEYER	Amnesty International (AI)
Violeta NAYDENOVA	Open Society Institute
Ilona NEGRO	European Commission, DG JUST
Anne-Sophie PARENT	Age Platform Europe
Luis Miguel PARIZA CASTAÑOS	EESC Coordination Group's member
Marta PINTO	European Roma Information Office (ERIO)
Agnieszka Ewa PYRZYK	European News Agency
Amanda RASOLOFOTSARA	European Association for the Defense of Human Rights
Madi SHARMA	EESC Coordination Group's member
Anne-Marie SIGMUND	EESC Coordination Group's member
Georgi STOEV	EESC Coordination Group's member
Ákos TOPOLÁNSZKY	EESC Coordination Group's President
Miranda VUOLASRANTA	European Commission, DG JUST
Jessica WANKE	German Federal Employment Agency

1.3 7 November 2014

2nd Public hearing: Focus on education, employment, housing and antidiscrimination

Programme

- 9.00 – 9.30 Registration
- 9.30 – 9.45 **Opening by Ákos Topolánszky**
Presentation of the work done so far by the EESC Coordination Group
- 9.45 – 10.15 **The Roma and Education: state of play, evaluation of measures adopted, main challenges, future developments**
Szilvia Kalman, European Commission, DG EAC
Michael Guet, Council of Europe
- 10.15 – 10.45 **Statements of relevant NGOs**
Dan Pavel Doghi, Roma Education Fund
Dorottya Atol, European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)
Sandra Zep, ERGO Network and Centre de Médiation des Gens du Voyage Roms
Eszter Pasztór, ERGO Network and Fresco Village Hungary
- 10.45 – 11.15 Questions & answers
- 11.15 – 11.30 Coffee break
- 11.30 – 11.45 **The Roma and Employment: state of play, evaluation of measures adopted, main challenges, future developments**
Dominique Bé, European Commission, DG EMPL
- 11.45 – 12.25 **Statements of relevant NGOs**
- 12.25 – 1.00 Questions & answers
- 1.00 – 2.30 Lunch break
- 2.30 – 3.00 **The Roma and Housing: state of play, evaluation of measures adopted, main challenges, future developments**
Andor Urmos, DG REGIO
- 3.00 – 3.40 **Statements of relevant NGOs**
Mauro Striano, FEANTSA
Dorottya Atol, European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC)
Ahmet Akim, ERGO Network and Centre de Mediation des Gens du Voyage des Roms
- 3.40 – 4.10 Questions & answers
- 4.10 – 4.20 Coffee break
- 4.20 – 4.40 **The Roma and Antidiscrimination: state of play, evaluation of measures adopted, main challenges, future developments**
Axelle Cheney, European Commission, DG JUST, Unit for Non-discrimination policies and Roma Coordination
- 4.40 – 5.30 **Statements of relevant NGOs**
Helen Gould, European Roma Information Office (ERIO)
Violeta Naydenova, Open Society European Policy Institute (OSEPI)
Gabriela Hrabanova, ERGO Network
- 5.30 – 5.50 Questions & answers
- 5.50 – 6.00 Conclusions by **Ákos Topolánszky**

Participants

Coline ACH	European Roma Information Office (ERIO)
Joana AGUDO I BATALLER	EESC Coordination Group's member
Ahmet AKIM	ERGO
Louise ANDRIEU	Espace Interrégional Européen
Dorottya ATOL	European Roma Rights Center (ERRC)
Dominique BÉ	European Commission
Axelle CHENEY	European Commission
Lena Pengel DE VOLDER	European Federation of Community of Sant'Egidio
Dan Pavel DOGHI	Roma Education Fund
Marit ERDAL	United Nations Human Rights Office
Emilio FATOVIC	EESC Coordination Group's member
Helen GOULD	European Roma Information Office (ERIO)
Michael GUET	Council of Europe
Lubomir HADJIYSKY	EESC Coordination Group's member
Gabriela HRABANOVA	ERGO
Szilvia KALMAN	European Commission
Ivan KOKALOV	EESC Coordination Group's member
Agota KOVACS	EFTA
Eugen LUCAN	EESC Coordination Group's member
Sylvain MOSSOU	High Commissioner for Human Rights
Violeta NAYDENOVA	Open Society European Policy Institute (OSEPI)
Eszter PASZTÓR	ERGO
Anneleen PIRARD	European Federation of Community of Sant'Egidio
Alessia ROGAI	European Federation of Community of Sant'Egidio
Serena ROMEO	Issues Without Borders
Ingrid SCHULERUD	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mauro STRIANO	FEANTSA
Ákos TOPOLÁNSZKY	EESC Coordination Group's President
Andor URMOS	European Commission
Marie VAUGEOIS	CCI Pays de la Loire
Miranda VUOLASRANTA	European Commission
Urpo VUOLASRANTA	Finland Roma Forum
Sandra ZEP	ERGO

1.4 3 February 2015

Final conference on Better inclusion of the Roma community through civil society initiatives

Programme

8.30 – 9.00 Registration and coffee

9.00 – 12.00 **Opening**

Ákos Topolánszky, President of the EESC's Coordination Group on Roma

Debate with representatives from EU Institutions, International Organizations and NGOs: European Commission (DG JUST, DG EMPL, DG EAC, DG REGIO, DG SANCO), European Parliament, Council of Europe, European Union Agency for Fundamental Right (FRA), Latvian Presidency, Committee of the Regions, European Roma Information Office (ERIO), ERGONETWORK, European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), European Public Health Alliance (EPHA).

12.00 – 13.00 **Session 1 – The Roma and Education: good practices**

Presentations

- **Raluca Negulescu**, Alternative Education Club - Policy Centre for Roma and Minority in Romania
- **Viveca Arrhenius**, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health
- **Juan M. Reyes Campos**, Promociona Programme - Fundación Secretariado Gitano in Spain
- **Daniela Petkova**, Center Amalipe in Bulgaria
- **Nevsija Durmish**, Roma Education Fund

General discussion

13.00 – 14.30 Lunch break

14.30 – 15.30 **Session 2 – The Roma and Housing: good practices**

Presentations

- **Javier Ramírez and Maria José Alonso**, Instituto de Realojamiento e Integración Social in Spain
- **Sarita Friman-Korpela**, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health - Advisory Board on Roma Affairs

General discussion

15.30 – 16.30 **Session 3 – The Roma and Employment: good practices**

Presentation

- **Juan M. Reyes Campos**, Acceder Programme - Fundación Secretariado Gitano in Spain

General discussion

16.30 – 17.30 **Session 4 – The Roma and Health: good practices**

Presentation

- **Dilyana Dilkova**, National Health Mediators Network in Bulgaria

General discussion

17.30 – 18.00 **Conclusions**

Ákos Topolánszky, President of the EESC's Coordination Group on Roma

Ahmed AHKIM	Centre de Médiation des Gens du Voyage et des Roms (CMGV)
Aurora AILINCAI	Council of Europe
Maria José ALONSO	Istituto de realojamiento et Integración Social
Cornelia ANDREI	European Commission
Viveca ARRHENIUS	National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs
Dominique BE	European Commission
Gianluca CESARO	Open Society European Policy Institute
Anna DEFOUR	European Roma Information Office (ERIO)
Ruus DIJKSTERHUIS	Ergonet
Dilyana DILKOVA	National Health Mediators Network in Bulgaria
Mariarosa DI NUBILA	European Commission
Teresa DOCIO	Castilla y León Permanent Delegation to the EU
Nevsija DURMISH	Roma Education Fund
Emilio FATOVIC	EESC's Coordination Group on Roma
Carolina FERNANDEZ	Fundacion Secretariado Gitano
Sarita FRIMAN-KORPELA	National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs in Finland
Lubomir HADJIYSKY	EESC's Coordination Group on Roma
Dora HUSZ	European Commission
Szilvia KALMAN	European Commission
Lilana KEITH	Platform International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)
Waltraud KLASNIC	EESC's Coordination Group on Roma
Ivan KOKALOV	EESC's Coordination Group on Roma
Deniss KRETALOVŠ	Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia
Philip LANDON	Council of the EU
Allyson LOWE	Carlow University
Eugen LUCAN	EESC's Coordination Group on Roma
Katharina LUDWIG	Representation of the Rhineland-Palatinate
Zoltan MASSAY-KOSUBEK	European Public Health Alliance (EPHA)
Martina MENEGHETTI	Equinet
Valérie MITTEAUX	Caravane Films
Gonzalo MONTAÑO	Fundacion Secretariado Gitano
Gabriella NAGY	Embassy of Hungary in Belgium
Raluca NEGULESCU	Policy Centre for Roma and Minority
Nemanja MICIC	Labor and Employment Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina
Luis Miguel PARIZA CASTAÑOS	EESC's Coordination Group on Roma
Daniela PETKOVA	Center Amalipe
Soraya POST	European Parliament
Agnieszka PYRZYK	European News Agency
Zeljko RAJIC	Labor and Employment Agency of Bosnia Herzegovina
Javier RAMÍREZ	Istituto de realojamiento et Integración Social
Juan REYES CAMPOS	Fundación Secretariado Gitano
Alessia ROGAI	European Federation of Community of Sant'Egidio
Monika SAMOVA	European Roma Information Office (ERIO)
Rocío Ariño SERRANO	IRIS
Madi SHARMA	EESC's Coordination Group on Roma
Anne-Marie SIGMUND	EESC's Coordination Group on Roma
Kadri SOOVA	Platform International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)
Marek SZILVÁSI	European Roma Rights Center (ERRC)

Ákos TOPOLÁNSZKY

Massimo TOSCHI

Andreea TUDOR

Andor URMOS

Solvita VĒVERE

Miranda VUOLASRANTA

EESC's Coordination Group on Roma

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

Romanian National Contact Point for Roma – Ministry of European
Funds

European Commission

Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia

European Commission

2. COUNTRY VISITS

2.1 Helsinki, Finland 2 and 3 June 2014

Programme

Monday 2 June

11.00 Visit to the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

- Information from the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs
Sarita Friman-Korpela / Anssi Pirttilahti
- Information about regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs
Henna Huttu
- Education of Roma pupils – National Board of Education
Satu Blomerus
- Information about Roma language – University of Helsinki
Henry Hedman
- Discrimination of Roma people in housing and working life in Finland – Minority ombudsman's office
Pirjo Kruskopf
- Equality work and combating discrimination; Roma portal – Ministry of Interior
Panu Artemjeff

14.30 Meeting with a group of older Roma in Helsinki

Meilahti recreation centre

- Information about a project on elderly Roma
Tiina Pirttilahti,

Tuesday 3 June

9.00 Visit to the city of Vantaa and meeting with the city and Roma NGO's

- Information about the local working group of Roma in Vantaa
Vice mayor Heidi Nygren,
- Information about local projects in Vantaa
Riitta Dincay
- Information about Roma activities in the city of Turku
Väinö and Tuula Lindberg

- Information from Romani Missio ry
Tuula and Valfrid Åkerlund
- Information from the Finnish Roma Association (Suomen romaniyhdistys ry)
Tiina Pirttilahti and Katja Vauhkonen
- Information from the National Roma Forum of Finland (Suomen Romanifoorumi ry)
Tino Varjola
- Information from the Finnish league for Human Rights
Päivi Majaniemi

Participants

Tuula Åkerlund	Romani Missio ry
Panu Artemjeff	Ministry of the Interior
Valeria Atzori	EESC Coordination Group secretariat
Satu Blomerus	National Board of Education
Sarita Friman-Korpela	National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs
Henry Hedman	University of Helsinki
Henna Huttu	National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs
Ivan Kokolav	EESC Coordination Group member
Pirjo Kruskopf	The Minority Ombudsman's office
Väinö Lindberg	Regional Advisory Board on Romani Affairs
Paivi Majaniemi	Finnish League for Human Rights
Heidi Nygren	Vice mayor, city of Vantaa
Tiina Pirttilahti	Meilahti recreation centre / Finnish Roma Association
Madi Sharma	EESC Coordination Group member
Ákos Topolánszky	EESC Coordination Group President
Tino Varjola	National Roma Forum of Finland
Viveca Arrhenius	Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

2.2 Bucharest, Romania

30 June – 1st July 2014

Programme

Monday 30 June

11.00 Strategy of the Government of Romania for the Inclusion of Romanian Citizens Belonging to the Roma Minority - The National Agency for the Roma

- The Foundation for an Open Society
Daniela Tarnovschi
- Civil Society Development Foundation (CSDF)
Stefania Andersen / Raluca Simbotin / Ionut Sibian
- Policy Center for Roma and Minorities
Florin Botonogu
- "Impreuna" Agency for Community Development
Gelu Duminica
- Romani CRISS
Marian Mandache

15.00 Romanian NGO Agenda regarding Roma community c/o Romanian Economic and Social Council

- Roma Culture Museum of Romania, Romano ButiQ Association
Nicoleta Bitu
- The Roma Center for Health Policies – SASTIPEN
Daniel Rădulescu
- Carousel
Marian Ursan
- Roma Secretariat Foundation
Adrian Marin
- The Community Development Association "Together for the Future"
Cristina Costea

Tuesday 1st July

10.00 Visit to Alternative Education Club: meeting with Roma Women and Policy Center for Roma and Minorities

- Policy Center for Roma and Minorities
Raluca Negulescu

Participants

Stefania Andersen	Civil Society Development Foundation (CSDF)
Valeria Atzori	EESC Coordination Group secretariat
Florin Botonogu	Policy Center for Roma and Minorities
Gelu Duminica	"Impreuna" Agency for Community Development
Emilio fatovic	EESC Coordination Group member
Marian Mandache	Romani CRISS
Adrian Marin	Roma Secretariat Foundation
Raluca Negulescu	Policy Center for Roma and Minorities
Anca Radu	The Foundation for an Open Society
Madi Sharma	EESC Coordination Group member
Ákos Topolánszky	EESC Coordination Group President
Marian Ursan	Carousel
Daniel Vasile	National Agency for Roma (NAR)
Georgian Viorel Lunca	Romano ButiQ Association

2.3 Madrid and Sevilla, Spain

15 – 16 September 2014

Programme

Monday 15 September

9.00 Strategy of the Government of Spain for the Inclusion of the Roma Minority Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality

- Directorate General for Services to Family and Childhood
Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equity
Salomé Adroher Biosca
- Social programs - Directorate General for Services to Family & Childhood
Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equity
M^a Dolores Ruiz Bautista
- Directorate General for Equal Opportunities
Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equity
Carmen Plaza Martín
- Directorate General for Public Health, Quality and Innovation -
Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equity
Elena Andradas Aragonés
- Directorate General for Public Health, Quality and Innovation
Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equity
Inmaculada Navarro Pérez
- Council for the Promotion of the Equal treatment
Ignacio Sola Barleycorn / Juan de Dios Ramírez Heredia

10.30 Meeting with organizations members of the Permanent State Commission of Roma Population (CEPG) - Strategy of the Government of Spain for the Inclusion of the Roma Minority Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality

- Federación de Asociaciones Gitanas Extremeñas - FAGEX
Antonio Vázquez Saavedra
- Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG)
Humberto García
- GAZ KALO Federación de Asociaciones Gitanas de Navarra
Ricardo Hernández Jiménez
- Asociación Promoción Gitana de la Rioja
Enrique Jiménez Gabarri
- Asociación Mujeres Gitanas ALBOREA
Rosalía Vázquez Barrul
- Asociación gitana de Asturias UNGA
José Antonio Jiménez Jiménez
- Adjunto 1º de la Defensora del Pueblo
Francisco Fernández Marugán

13.30 Meeting with the Instituto de Realojamiento e integración Social (IRIS)

- *Francisco Javier Ramírez Caro*

14.45 Meeting with FSG: presentations of programmes and visit of Cañada Real

- Employment Department of ACCEDER
Álvaro Gutiérrez
- Education Department of PROMOCIONA
Mónica Chamorro
- Department of Social Inclusion - Housing
Maite Andrés

Tuesday 16 Septemberst July

9.00 Meeting with Junta de Andalucía

- Dirección General de Servicios Sociales y Atención a la Drogodependencia de la Junta de Andalucía- ecretaría para la Comunidad Gitana (Sevilla)
Ana Conde Trescastro / Juan Carlos Navarro Zafra

11.15 Visit of the Project of Torreblanca

- Presentation of programmes : Aula abierta (education) - Getting families closer to school - Gadyé (Education) - Kerelo Buti (Employment)
Guadalupe Quirós / Belén Vázquez

14.00 Meeting with Fakali - Federation of Associations of Roma Women

- *Beatriz Carrillo*

Participants

Salomé Adroher Biosca	Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality
Elena Andradas Aragonés	Directorate General for Public Health, Quality and Innovation
Maite Andrés	Roma Secretariat Foundation (FSG)
Valeria Atzori	EESC Coordination Group secretariat
Beatriz Carrillo	Fakali - Federation of Associations of Roma Women
Mónica Chamorro	Roma Secretariat Foundation (FSG)
Ana Conde Trescastro	Directorate General for Social Services and Drug
Juan de Dios Ramírez Heredia	Unión Romaní
Carolina Fernández	Roma Secretariat Foundation (FSG)
Humberto García	Roma Secretariat Foundation (FSG)
Álvaro Gutiérrez	Roma Secretariat Foundation (FSG)
Ricardo Hernández Jiménez	GAZ KALO Navarre Federation of Roma Associations
José Antonio Jiménez Jiménez	Asturias Roma Association (UNGA)
Juan Carlos Navarro Zafra	Directorate General for Social Services and Drug
Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños	EESC Coordination Group member
Carmen Plaza	Directorate General for Equal Opportunities
Guadalupe Quirós	Unión Romaní
Francisco Javier Ramírez Caro	Institute for Relocation and Social Integration (IRIS)
Eugenia Relaño Pastor	Consultant in the fields of migration and equal treatment
Madi Sharma	EESC Coordination Group member
Ignacio Sola Barleycorn	Council for the Promotion of Equal Treatment
Belén Vázquez	Unión Romaní
Rosalía Vázquez Barrul	ALBOREA Association of Roma Women
Antonio Vázquez Saavedra	Extremadura Federation of Roma Associations - FAGEX
Francisco Virseda Barca	First Deputy Ombudsman

2.4 Sofia, Bulgaria

20 – 21 October 2014

Programme

Monday 20 October

9.00 Strategy of the Government of Bulgaria for the Inclusion of the Roma Minority Council of Ministers

- Secretariat of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues
Rositsa Ivanov
- Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
Spaska Petrova
- Centre for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities at the Ministry of Education and Science
Lilyana Kovacheva
- Public Health Inspector of the Republic of Bulgaria - Ministry of Healthcare
Angel Kunchev
- Commission of Protection against Discrimination
Ana Strashimirova

12.30 Meeting with Ministry representatives - National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues

- *Rositsa Ivanova / Ahavni Topakbachian / Daniela Nikolova / Nikola Petkov*

14.00 Meeting with NGOs – Part I

- Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
Ilona Tomova
- Diverse and Equal Association
Radostin Manov
- Health and Social Development Foundation
Elena Kabakchieva
- Ethnic minorities Health problems Foundation
Ivailo Tournev (tbc)
- Gulchai Foundation
Maria Stoimenova
- Chitalishte (Community Center) Simona 2000
Georgi Bakov
- Open Society Institute Sofia
Tsanko Mihaylov
- Aretee Youth Foundation Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
Radostina Chaprazova

Tuesday 21 October

9.00 Meeting with NGOs – Part II - EU Permanent Representation in Sofia

- Integro
Lilia Makaveeva or Milen Milenov
- Amalipe
Deyan Kolev
- Trust for Social Achievement
Maria Metodieva
- National Health Mediators Network
Dilyana Dilkova / Ivailo Tournev
- GlaxoSmithKline Bulgaria/ Bulgarian partner organisation
Vassilena Vizeva / Mariela Marcheva
- Health of the Roma Foundation
Stefan Panayotov
- SOS Health Association
Petar Petrov (tbc)
- Bulgarian Association for patients' Rights Defence
Plamen Taushanov

11.30 Visit of the Community Health and Social Center in the Fakulteta suburb of Sofia with HESED

14.00 Visit of the Project "Every student can be a winner" with Amalipe

Participants

Bistra Andreeva	Youth and educational projects
Valeria Atzori	EESC Coordination Group secretariat
Mikel Bachravov	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
Georgi Bakov	Chitalishte (Community Centre) Simona 2000
Bogdan Bogdanov	National Statistical Institute
Radostina Chaprazova	Aretee Youth Foundation
Rositsa Ivanov	National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues (NCCEII)
Elena Kabakchieva	Health and Social Development Foundation
Victoria Kirilova	Ministry of Education and Science
Elena Kiurova	Department for Equal Opportunities, Anti-discrimination and Social Assistance Benefits, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
Ivan Kokalov	EESC Coordination Group member
Lilyana Kovacheva	Centre for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities at the Ministry of Education and Science
Tsanko Mihaylov	Open Society Institute Sofia
Nelia Mikushinska	Public Health Directorate, Ministry of Healthcare
Alexandrina Modenova	Employers Organisation – Economic Initiative Union
Daniela Nikolova	National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues (NCCEII)
Nikola Petkov	National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues (NCCEII)
Pavlina Rusinova	Roma Integration Centre
Maria Stoimenova	Gulchai Foundation
Ahavni Topakbashian	National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues (NCCEII)
Ákos Topolánszky	EESC Coordination Group President

ANNEX IV

COUNTRY REPORTS

REPORT OF THE FIRST COUNTRY VISIT – FINLAND 2 and 3 June 2014

Members: Ákos Topolánszky (Gr. 3), Ivan Kokalov (Gr. 2), Madi Sharma (Gr. 1)
SOC Secretariat: Valeria Atzori

As part of the project on "Better inclusion of the Roma through civil society initiatives", three members of the coordination group and one member of the SOC secretariat took part in the first country study trip to Helsinki, Finland, on 2 and 3 June 2014.

The visit was made possible by the very generous and professional support and assistance of Ms Viveca Arrhenius, the Roma National Contact Point for Finland, who also stayed with us for the entire length of the visit and interpreted where necessary.

The programme began with a visit to the **National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs**. This structure brings together representatives of different ministries (foreign affairs, education, social affairs, health, etc.) and Finnish national Roma organisations. The great majority of the representatives of the government advisory bodies on Roma issues were Roma, which was a strong sign of the developed political culture and commitment of the Finnish government when it comes to implementing their Roma policy.

The first to speak were **Sarita Friman-Korpela**, senior adviser at the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs, and **Väinö Lindberg**, deputy chairman of the Regional Advisory Board on Romani Affairs. They outlined the main achievements of the last 50 years of Roma policy in Finland. The Roma population in Finland is rather homogenous: they settled here 500 years ago and there have been few travellers due to the harsh winter conditions and difficult language. However, it took time to build mutual trust and understanding between the Roma and non-Roma communities. Participation of Roma was paramount and in the Finnish system they were represented at all levels of policy making. Equality had to be seen and perceived in everyday life and should not be a mere formality. Finland had also had a president who was very supportive of the Roma cause: committed politicians were an essential element of success. Finally, sufficient financial resources were needed. According to Ms Friman-Korpela, many mistakes had been made but they had tried to learn from them and make the necessary policy changes. The breakthrough was the first dedicated housing programme in the late 1970s in order to set minimum standards in housing policy, as well the commitment to implementing it to ensure appropriate living conditions. This made it possible to stabilise the general social and living conditions and educational opportunities for Roma, who until then had been itinerant.

Then, **Ms Sarita Friman-Korpela and Ms Henna Huttu** presented information on the National and Regional Advisory Boards on Romani affairs: the structure was established in 1956 and is composed of 16 members, half of whom are nominated by Roma NGOs and Regional Advisory Boards and half by the government ministries. Its main tasks were to monitor the development of the situation concerning Roma, make proposals, fight discrimination and promote the Romani language and culture. There were also Regional Advisory Boards and Local Roma working groups. The local Roma working groups were established in 2001 and were present in 20 municipalities. They focused on activities and services for the local Roma population and were voluntary.

The main achievements of the last 50 years of Roma Policy in Finland were:

- The Roma Housing Act (1970s) to address the problem of housing.
- An universal approach to welfare policies, where all citizens, including the Roma are included on an equal basis.
- The establishment of a Roma Education Unit in 1994.
- The Constitution guaranteed the Roma's right to maintain and develop their own language and culture in 2000 (Basic Right in 1995).
- The establishment of a four (4) Regional Advisory Boards in 2003 to improve Roma participation
- The integration of Roma in broad terms in Finnish society today.

The Finnish Literature Society had published a book on the history of Finnish Roma funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The main challenges ahead were to widen the scope of Roma policy and to secure more resources.

Ms Satu Blomerus gave a presentation on the **education of Roma people**. The Finnish education system provided all children with a free education in Finnish or Swedish from the ages of 7 to 17. All children from the age of 6 are entitled to pre-school education free of charge. Pre-school education became compulsory for all children on 1st January 2015. The early-education, pre-school and basic education programmes include free lunches (also free breakfast and afternoon snack in early-school and pre-school education) for all children. The children must also see the school doctor and school nurse a minimum of once a year. This service is free of charge.

A Roma education group was founded in 1994. It had three employees, two of whom were Roma. Moreover, the government provided financial assistance for the basic education of Roma people. In the period 2008-2014, 37 municipalities with the largest numbers of Roma residents received such assistance. This aid reached an estimated 85% of Roma pupils. Municipalities had to apply for the grant and the final amount depended on the number of Roma living there. Different teaching methods were used, there was cooperation between home and school and every pupil received carefully planned support. The programme offered a number of examples of best practice:

- Roma parents' seminars: to foster cooperation between home and school and build confidence
- Further education of teachers and other staff
- School assistance for pupils with special needs given by people with a Roma background (also provided to non-Roma children)
- After-school activities (always on a voluntary basis): homework support, sport activities, snacks and meals. Activities for parents as well (information about school, parenting, etc.)
- Support for further studies

With the Romani language in an increasingly precarious position for different reasons (better conditions in the labour market, assimilation, urbanisation, families of mixed ethnic background, etc.), the Finnish government had decided to protect it by providing two hours of class tuition per week for a minimum of two pupils, in addition to what they called "language nest activities" (for persons of all ages – mainly verbal activities).

A survey on the education of Roma was conducted in 2010-2011. It was addressed to headmasters, Roma parents, caregivers and pupils. 1 341 schools took part. The results were encouraging. A majority of Roma pupils perform well at school and 94% of the headmasters felt that cooperation between Roma homes and schools was good. Bullying exists but was not felt to be a big problem by Roma children. The biggest problem remained absenteeism. Over the last 10 years, the number of pupils going on to vocational training after basic education had doubled.

Henry Hedman, a professor at the **University of Helsinki** of Roma background, spoke about the Romani language. There were two main dialects spoken in Finland and considered by UNESCO to be among the most endangered languages. As few as 13% of Roma now spoke their original language. 80% of Roma children had not received any Romani language instruction. The main obstacles were the lack of teachers and written learning material. Language revitalisation was one of the objectives of national policy on Roma. Romani was now being taught at the University of Helsinki as an optional subject, and there were six doctoral students carrying out research on it. Own broadcasting time on television in Romani would be a big achievement.

Pirjo Kruskopf from the office of the **Ombudsman for Minorities** spoke about discrimination against Roma in housing and working life. She also discussed the legal situation: citizenship was granted on the basis of the Nationality Act of 1919. Cultural and linguistic rights were guaranteed by the Constitution and the Non-discrimination Act of 2004.

Statistical data on Roma is limited because of Finnish law on the protection of personal data (no sensitive information, such as ethnic origin, can be collected). The available sources show that they are generally in a weaker position than the rest of the population. The Ombudsman for Minorities prevents and tackles ethnic discrimination. Roma are one of their largest groups of clients and they face most of the problems in housing. A survey took place in 2013 based on 250 interviews on housing and working life, and showed that 69% of Roma have experienced discrimination but they also have a very keen awareness of their rights, which is considered to be one of the most important drivers of progress in anti-discrimination policy. 54% had experienced some discrimination in working life. This affected young Roma in particular, or Roma with traditional clothing and who did not have any vocational or higher education. Proposed measures included improving the educational level of Roma, increasing transparency in the recruitment process, teaching job seeking skills, and dialogue with employers on a diverse dress code. With regard to housing, 50% had experienced discrimination when applying for rental housing. This rate was higher than in other countries, especially for the private market. Despite that there was no segregation; a lot of complaints were presented to the Ombudsman. Stronger action and commitment by politicians was needed.

Panu Artemjeff and **Maria Friman** of the Ministry of Interior illustrated the **work on equality and measures to tackle discrimination**. A number of legislative acts and agreements had been put in place. Within the Ministry of Interior, an Equality Team coordinated government equality policies. Guidebooks for equality planning for the public sector and NGOs had been produced, and a number of officials in the administration, police, etc. had undergone training. A specific website which collects information on Roma policies, culture, history and language had been created (Roma Portal).

In the afternoon, we went to the **Meilahti recreation centre**, where we met a group of elderly **Roma women and men who participate in a project**. The project allows them to meet regularly and organise a large number of activities. Our contact point, Ms Arrhenius, had discussed our visit with their group leader **Tiina Pirttilahti** who beforehand had explained the purpose of our visit. They were very pleased with the interest in their stories and were very willing to talk about their past experiences. All of them agreed that until the 1950s, the situation was very difficult. Most of them had experienced discrimination at work, and had no education or housing. Most of them were travellers at that time that had been forced to move each day with their tents. Some had even been arrested for begging in the street and their children taken into custody. The situation had improved by the 1960s. They were given access to housing and received income support. Access to healthcare services was now good as the healthcare centres provided assistance for a small client fee. The messages they wanted to pass to the younger generations were: get an education, a job and a family, in order to preserve the Romani language and Roma religious values.

In the evening we were invited to dinner by Ms Arrhenius and we had the opportunity to speak with two Roma and listen to their experiences, which enriched our understanding of Finnish Roma policy. It was important evidence of the balanced and integrated policy measures and public policy culture existing in Finland.

On the second day, we left for the City of **Vantaa**. The vice mayor **Heidi Nygren** presented some data about the city: 205 000 inhabitants, 2 000 of whom were Roma. The local Roma working group had been set up in 1993. The Roma unemployment rate is much higher than that of the majority of the population and transition from basic education to upper secondary education is low (only 2% of Roma youngsters go to high school compared to 50% of mainstream youngsters. The Roma families prefer vocational training thus academic routes needs to be encouraged). The main achievements of the local group had been the Roma Day celebration, initiatives to ask for funding for Roma children's education from the national Board of Education, and preparation of a pilot project for the European Social Fund. On this point, at the moment they were looking for partners in neighbouring cities. Education, employment and participation were the themes and the target group was Roma between 18 and 40 years of age. There would be public hearings and outreach work.

Väinö Lindberg spoke about the **situation of Roma in Turku**. Measures targeting Roma were introduced as early as the 1970s, in cooperation with the local Lutheran church. The city council had adopted a strategy for Roma integration as well as equality plans, and they encompassed all branches of life.

We then met various representatives of Roma NGOs:

➤ **Tuula Åkerlund** from **Romani Missio ry**.

This organisation was the oldest in Finland and has 400 members. They offered advice on housing, employment, education and social issues. They awarded scholarships and had two large houses for children. They also provided information to schools and local authorities. Moreover, they published a newspaper called *Romani boodos* ("Romani message"). The funds came from local municipalities and churches. They were currently working on a project which targeted women in prisons. The aim was to prevent crime among imprisoned women and offer a rehabilitative programme. The results had been excellent.

➤ **Tiina Pirttilahti** from the **Finnish Roma Association**.

This organisation was created in 1976 and currently had volunteers and one employee. They offered consultation to Roma, gave lectures and published books. They often worked with other NGOs (for example, on a project on domestic violence). Now they had two projects: one for elderly Roma (that we visited the previous day) and one for young people.

➤ **Tino Varjola** from the **National Roma Forum of Finland** (Suomen Romanifoorumi ry).

The Forum was established in 2007 and now included 8 NGOs. Their main activity was capacity building for NGOs, such as training in how to apply for funds. They also cooperated with ecclesiastical bodies and were involved in Roma policy in Finland. In general, Finnish Roma were happy in Finland and had faith in its institutions, but it was felt that populism was a growing phenomenon in Europe and Finland was no exception.

➤ **Paivi Majaniemi** from the **Finnish League for Human Rights**.

A project on Roma was begun in 2007 with the purpose of making Roma aware of discrimination and their rights. Training had been offered for that purpose. Discrimination also sometimes occurred inside the Roma community (along gender lines, among others).

At the end of the morning, we had time to talk freely with the other participants: we were told that the Roma in Finland were in a relatively strong position in comparison with those in other Member States, and that education of Roma children was crucial.

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

- An important message from Finland is that it is possible to pursue determined and effective public policies based on a comprehensive approach to the social situation of the Roma, and thus achieve fundamental changes. Important lessons can be learned from this, even though the Finnish example appears to be one of a kind.
- The main factor is the kind of political will which is embedded in a highly developed and uncontested general culture of democracy, with commitment from successive governments over the decades. For such a policy, which deals with the social group most severely exposed to segregation and discrimination, it is important to avoid the trap of thinking in terms of electoral cycles and maximising votes.
- This requires not only insight but also consistent implementation of long-term political commitments transcending individual governments' terms of office - a common concern in relation to Roma policy, but one which is not addressed elsewhere. Political will among decision-makers and political leaders (prime ministers, heads of state, ministers) can bring about change; by contrast, its absence may perpetuate the situation or lead to its deterioration.
- Acknowledging this fact and systematically acting on it means policies which can learn from mistakes.
- The breakthrough came with a radical rights-based change in housing policy, leading to gradually improving housing standards. Proper social and existential conditions are helping to improve educational opportunities too.
- Coordination mechanisms more or less systematically coordinate all levels with consistent involvement of all stakeholders. There is a culture which goes beyond consultation, and platforms for continuous dialogue.
- Together with an integrated approach to education, it is also important to maintain efforts to fine-tune educational programmes, with the involvement of parents, initiatives to give pupils a second chance, teacher training, after-school activities, programmes supporting further education, development of special teaching aids, etc.
- It is essential to promote Roma culture and language, together with a positive identity (preserving culture, language and festivals, supporting cultural and media products, etc.). Taking pride in one's Roma identity offers great potential.
- Uncompromising action against discrimination is needed, with consistent representation by decision-makers at national and local level, supported by authorities responsible for equal treatment, ombudsmen and law enforcement agencies generally. Continuous efforts are needed to make those concerned aware of their rights. Mechanisms to enforce rights must be as easily accessible as possible.
- Perhaps the most convincing aspect of the Finnish example and its main message is the fact that those concerned are involved and help to take decisions. The Roma were well represented during all our encounters with Roma policy.

- In Finland the Roma do not only participate in processes but also confidently shape their destinies through formal and informal communities. Their environment not only accepts but also supports this situation. Prospects for integration are significantly improved as a result. However, one warning sign is that despite these positive developments we can still see significant levels of the mutually reinforcing phenomena of segregation and discrimination.
 - The progressive attitude of the churches and their involvement in developing local communities should be acknowledged.
 - These issues are systematically managed as a government policy, translating into an integrated approach based on coordination in all relevant areas, rather than mere project-based programming.
 - This policy has to be adapted to individuals and small communities, in line with living conditions, needs and capacities in local communities.
 - To ensure that the policy is not just a communication tool and goes beyond mere declarations, adequate funding is needed, enabling forward planning. Programme support should be neither "excessive" nor symbolic, but realistic.
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REPORT OF THE SECOND COUNTRY VISIT – ROMANIA
30 June - 1 July 2014

Members: Ákos Topolánszky (GR 3), Emilio Fatovic (GR 2), Madi Sharma (GR 1)
SOC Secretariat: Valeria Atzori

Meeting with Government and civil society representatives including:

- **Daniel Vasile - National Agency for Roma (NAR):** he presented the Strategy of the Government of Romania for the Inclusion of Romanian Citizens Belonging to the Roma Minority

He spent 20 years working in sector with NGOs and since 2004 had joined the public institution to accelerate integration of Roma community.

They had a budget for 2013 of 1.1m EUR, plus access to external funds. – Around half of these funds are disseminated to NGO for projects. Their focus was on housing projects, to purchase homes, as over 60% of Roma do not have deeds of their home.

The National strategy is being implemented, monitored and evaluated. This Ministry does not implement, nor is it currently able to monitor or evaluate the Strategy as there have been few actions.

However, they are now trying to identify key measures and priorities on which to focus long term as funding becomes available – so that budget can be targeted. Indicators are essential, hence a revised strategy is needed. Additionally they are starting data collection to define concepts for monitoring.

Overall Political will is still needed with relevant funding and there is an essential need for NGOs to be listened to, especially by EU Commission.

Meeting with Ministry included interaction with representatives of public authorities and CSO :

- **Gelu Duminica, "Impreuna"** Agency for Community Development. The agency was established as a legal entity on 24 September 1999 under Court Ruling 93 of Brasov County Court. Its mission is to preserve and assert Roma identity through research and the dissemination of studies, as well as through the elaboration and implementation of social policies aimed at the Roma.

The list of weaknesses in the National Strategy are quite large, but not the fault of anyone specifically. The multilevel approach adds challenges because local authorities need to establish the budgets for direct implementation, and lack of budgets is a common reason, along with political will, for not delivering. Examples were given of housing and infrastructure failings.

There is confusion of who is allocating budgets, who is collecting and monitoring the data from a local level – and hence there are no results. However, work of the NGOs in delivering the local monitoring and supplying reliable data is the added value needed to show implementation. NGOs used to be part of the consultative process, but changes in policy now exclude participation of NGOs. Funds to NGOs delivering expertise is missing and successful projects often lose funding. Government does not allocate relevant funds for Roma.

The Government is not accounting for, nor declaring its funding for the Roma inclusion. Other EU member states blame the Romanian Government; the Romanian government blames EU countries. The vicious circle is helping no one, least of all the Roma.

- **Anca Radu, The Foundation for an Open Society** was established in 1990 under an initial form of association and in 1997 in its current form. To date, the Foundation has developed most of its programs in the fields of sociological research, education, migration, social inclusion, good governance, civic culture and integrated community intervention. Pleading for Roma inclusion is being made in the Decade of Roma Inclusion, a regional initiative inspired by George SOROS through

the Open Society Institute and World Bank, through which new governments from Central and Eastern Europe engaged to reduce the precipice between Roma life conditions and the majority population.

- **Stefania Andersen, Civil Society Development Foundation (CSDF)** is a non-profit organization founded in 1994, at the initiative of the European Commission, actively involved at both national and European level in the public dialogue between civil society and authorities, and between national and international organizations. CSDF research helped the public sector and the major international donors active in Romania, to design their policies, based on relevant information regarding the impact of the NGO projects in society. CSDF acts as a monitoring of public policies and some financing. The same frustrations were felt by all the NGOs.
- **Marian Mandache, Romani CRISS.** It's a non-governmental organization established on April 4th, 1993, which defends and promotes the rights of Roma in Romania by providing legal assistance in cases of abuse and works to combat and prevent racial discrimination against Roma in all areas of public life, including the fields of education, employment, housing and health.

The 1990 Inter – ethnic conflicts started the building of relations and integration. Romani CRISS particularly utilized the qualities of women in non-conflict and negotiation to develop mediators, working directly in the communities.

CRISS were clear that it was wrong to focus on the Strategy; the focus should be on the local activities by NGOs in driving change. Education as an example was showing positive steps: School mediator, mother-tongue education, affirmative actions. There was a need for the Roma cultural teaching in all mainstream education, so that children learn from an early age that Roma have existed in EU for centuries, this will overcome the media and political stereotypes. Adaptable policies for all. There should be a debate on best mechanisms to integrate Roma into schools and decrease the drop-out rate.

Additionally the forced evictions and demolishing of communities by Mayors, the lack of identity papers and the lack of structural funds for the development of communities were increasing the problems. It is essential to include Roma in the structural development to support integration. The creation of jobs does not touch Roma.

Reality is lack of action targeting Roma communities!

Discussion with Civil Society Development Foundation (CSDF):

- Raluca Simbotin, Stefania Andersen, EESC member Ionut Sibian

A general discussion on politics in Romania and in EU, policies and support for Roma and civil society organisations and how the funding and projects are disseminated.

Meeting with Romanian NGO Agenda regarding Roma community:

- **Florin Botonogu, Policy Center for Roma and Minorities**
Policy Center for Roma and Minorities is a non-governmental, non-profit, think-tank organization founded in 2008 in Romania, which acts towards solving social inclusion related issues of Roma and other ethnic minorities. The organization was established as a follow-up of Roma Diplomacy, a program that had as a main purpose the creation of a highly qualified, articulate group of European Roma with diplomatic skills.

- **Georgian- Viorel Lunca, Roma Culture Museum of Romania, Romano ButiQ Association**
The Romano ButiQ Association was created on April 18, 2011 in order to promote non-discrimination by developing cultural and educational activities. The association was founded in the need to present in a realistic way the Roma minority and to create the space for people to discover experimentally the value they bring to society, beyond the negative stereotype or the victim paradigm.
- **Daniel Rădulescu, SASTIPEN - excused.** SASTIPEN's mission is to promote dialogue, participation and community involvement in the decision-making structures regarding public policies addressed to Roma and non-Roma citizens by improving communication between authorities and administrative structures of local communities, national and international, as well as notifying the competent bodies, in terms of human rights violations, related to the objectives of the association. SASTIPEN aims at designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating policies to improve the situation of disadvantaged groups as well as protect human rights based on the principle of non-discrimination and equality between citizens.
- **Marian Ursan, Carousel** is a volunteer based organization and the drop-in center functions strictly on a volunteer run basis due the lack of finances. Worryingly, ARAS is going to be closing the needle exchange program in June this year due to a lack of finances.
- **Adrian Marin, Roma Secretariat Foundation** - The mission of the Foundation is the integral promotion of the Roma community on the basis of respect and support for their cultural identity. To this end, the FSG develops all kinds of actions that contribute to achieving the full citizenship of Roma, to improving their living conditions, to promoting equal treatment and to preventing any form of discrimination, while promoting the recognition of the cultural identity of the Roma community. The diversity of our society renders interculturalism increasingly relevant, so we must project adequately the intercultural character of our organisation, both as our hallmark and as a proposal for society as a whole.
- **Cristina Costea, The Community Development Association - excused** "Together for the Future"-excused. The organization was founded in January 2012, in Spantov, from a group of Roma youth initiative, running several local activities per year. It operates in the country of Călărași, aiming primarily at the economic, social and cultural development of Spantov. The organization has experience in the implementation of projects for children and young people at risk, including projects in rural areas.

The overall discussion included:

- A focus on young people and how the values skills and talents of these young people as a project could be used to keep them in schools. Much good work was being done but not recognized nor supported by the Government, EU or private business.
- There needed to be more help for poorer communities to have access to structural funds – housing, access to water, electricity and security. Ghettos and segregated housing or education conditions were fuelling discrimination.
- Ignorance and lack of information brings the racism and discrimination. Neither Roma nor non-Roma were looking to integrate and learn more of each others cultures.
- Majority desire for Roma to be part of Romanian and EU society, but not the other way around, and there were prejudices on both sides at all level which meant few real results were ever visible.
- 90% of Roma in Romania living in extreme poverty and exclusion.
- No mapping of Roma communities or their living conditions.
- National Strategy created without mapping, knowledge or evidence.

- No evaluation report of the strategy known. Unknown if coordination meetings have taken place regarding the Strategy or implementation.
- Many actions funded only by EU Commission, no evidence of funding from National Government.
- Helping in field of social economy, co-operatives and craftspeople could and was creating some jobs and economic opportunities but little funding to create sustainability or long term growth or stability.
- In the worst cases it was an issue of just trying just to keep the people alive. Where poor health, alcoholism, drug use etc were rife essential social work was needed and was given by the few and often without any funds or minimal project support. Training for the Police was also given but it remained a difficult task.
- Swiss funded project on educational support for Roma, counselling and mediation services, were also invaluable in providing support for families.

The wish list of the Roma civil society representatives and project coordinators was to be listened to, utilized for the expertise and knowledge and to receive a fair distribution of funding so that long term sustainable changes could be made. There was a comprehension that much of the money was EU tax payers funds and that it needed to be audited and monitored, but at the same time, Government projects and discrimination in the dissemination of funds was never taken into consideration – they hypocrisy needed to be dealt with to bring about sustainable change in a country which faced the worst Roma issues in the EU.

Visit to Alternative Education Club: meeting with Roma Women and Policy Center for Roma and Minorities: Raluca Negulescu, Executive Director

- **Policy Center for Roma and Minorities** is a non-governmental, non-profit, think-tank organization founded in 2008 in Romania, which acts towards solving social inclusion related issues of Roma and other ethnic minorities. The organization was established as a follow-up of Roma Diplomacy, a program that had as a main purpose the creation of a highly qualified, articulate group of European Roma with diplomatic skills. For more information please visit www.policycenter.eu/en
- **The Alternative Education Club** is a new, safe, open, creative and challenging space for the children living in the Ferentari ghetto area in Bucharest. Currently, the club is set up at the Elementary School no. 136, but for the future, we plan to extend the project to other schools in the neighborhood. The club was created in June 2010 and represents a first for Romania, while in Europe there are only a few similar initiatives.

We experienced directly the alternative education club where we learnt about the challenges, and opportunities in working with young, and often excluded or drop out students from one of the worst ghetto areas in Romania.

The organization's mission is to empower Roma and other ethnic minorities so that they become active citizens of the society they live in and to stimulate the majority to actively participate in the social inclusion process. Education is the only exit these children have from the cycle of marginalization and poverty. The lessons used are sports, arts and remedial education to change their perspectives and their prospects. The approach takes into account not only the children's education, but also the needs of their parents and the local community and the need for increased interracial dialogue and tolerance in Romanian society. The students are both Roma and non-Roma children aged 7 to 15, with around 20 teachers from two area schools.

The project has achieved the following results:

- ✓ Continuous presence in one school for two years and extension to a second community since the end of 2011
- ✓ Recruitment and retention of a total of 150 children

- ✓ Recruitment of seven educators and 20 regular volunteers
 - ✓ Direct and constant involvement of 20 parents and 20 teachers
 - ✓ Football (boys' team), basketball
 - ✓ Dozens of football and basketball matches involving children as either players or supporters and displaying messages against racism
 - ✓ Participation and awards secured by street dance team in national street dance champions
 - ✓ Participation of 27 children in the basketball camps
 - ✓ Improvement in the children's educational performance: better grades, lower drop
 - ✓ Improvement in the children's behaviour and a decrease in violent incidents (71% of the children enrolled in activities do not display aggressive behaviours)
 - ✓ All children and parents involved characterize the experience as positive.
 - ✓ practice street dance lessons, theatre and tutoring in core academic
- A short video about the street-dance activities.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qaN5YrwZt7A&feature=youtu.be>

Recommendations:

Romania has one of the highest numbers of Roma in Europe. This poses many challenges for the government, the Roma community and the non-Roma community, especially in times of austerity. Additionally, Romania and its government is criticized and blamed by other Member State Governments for the lack of action in addressing its Roma problem and thus passing on the challenges to the rest of Europe.

Whilst lip service is being offered to address the issues being faced, there was little evidence of any substantial action to change the situation of the deprivation faced by the majority of the Roma community, despite the efforts of many grass roots NGOs.

Indeed whilst a National Strategy has been developed and established, little consultation, dialogue or prioritization of the issues had taken place, and hence any funding that has been allocated may be ineffective as it is may not be addressing target areas or priorities.

The EESC delegation heard numerous calls for more dialogue with the Roma community, more funding for essential local projects (as opposed to continual research) and relevant instruments to engage and enable NGOs to carry out the essential projects to avoid waiting for Government intervention.

Furthermore the EESC recognized that little is being done to address a generational change as the young Roma are being raised in similar excluded conditions to their parents. This was evident from the ghetto areas in which many Roma were forced to live without minimum standards or facilities.

The EESC would recommend that the EU applies pressure on the Romanian government to correct this situation, to implement and action its National Strategy; and in turn other Member States to support the Romanian government to more rapidly implement positive steps which will remove much of the discrimination faced by the Roma community in Romania.

The challenges faced by Roma in Romania cannot be addressed in isolation as they are multifaceted, but working together in coordination with other Member States if the challenges can be addressed there would be benefits across the EU... and more of the positive stories we heard about would be exposed.

REPORT ON THE THIRD COUNTRY VISIT - SPAIN
15 and 16 September 2014

Members: Anne-Marie Sigmund (Gr. III), Luis Miguel Pariza Castaños (Gr. II), Madi Sharma (Gr. I)
SOC secretariat: Valeria Atzori

Meeting with representatives of the National Strategy for the Social Inclusion of the Roma Population in Spain:

- **Salomé Adroher Biosca, Director General** - *Directorate General for the Family and Childhood Services, Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality.*

Ms Adroher Biosca is the national contact point for the strategy for the inclusion of the Roma population in Spain. She informed the EESC delegation that the common European framework had been incorporated into the 2012-2020 national strategy, adopted on 2 March 2012. Furthermore, on 8 April 2014, the first operational plan was adopted, for the years 2014-2016.

The ministry also oversees the CEPG (State Council of the Roma People), a participatory and consultative body representing various Roma NGOs or those working with Roma.

Spain's strategy has been welcomed by the EU. Spain is furthermore a benchmark in the EU, but due to the economic crisis and budgetary adjustments, the current challenge is to pursue the same policy, but without the same financial resources.

According to estimates, there are some 750 000 Roma in Spain today, accounting for between 1.6% and 1.8% of the country's total population.

Spain has a welfare State that is inclusive and open to all, and also has specific policies for Roma.

This model was created in the 1980s, with the transition to democracy, and has been built on by successive governments since then. A number of fundamental social rights were established for the whole population: compulsory and free education, universal public healthcare, a solidarity-based pension system, public employment services, public housing policies and the creation of an extensive network of social services. As a result, the quality of life for everyone in Spain, including the Roma, has improved significantly.

Specific policies for Roma include the Roma Development Programme, which started in 1989. This programme is co-financed by the central government, the Autonomous Communities (regional governments) and the local authorities. It is managed through interinstitutional cooperation between government ministries and regional and local authorities. It supervised 76 co-financed programmes, with 12.587 beneficiaries in 2014, the largest contribution to which comes from the regions and municipalities. It should be noted that state funding increased in 2014 compared with the previous year, despite the economic crisis.

State financial and technical cooperation also applies to the third sector (NGOs), in two ways:

- Grants to develop programmes, known as IRPF [income tax] grants. In their income tax returns, taxpayers may put an X for social programmes. This procedure ensures that some tax revenues are channelled towards social projects through NGOs. Some of these funds are used to finance activities benefiting the Roma community, and this works very well. There are both specific and general programmes. A total of 7,5 million euro were awarded for Roma projects in 2014.
- Grants to support organisations.

The national strategy: in addition to the four areas it covers (education, employment, health and housing) projects are run to improve understanding of Roma culture, combat discrimination and, among others, to ensure a gender-based approach. In Spain, these policies all have a regional focus.

The programmes also receive financing from European funds, in particular from the ESF and ERDF.

The operational plan of 8 April 2014 was drawn up in a highly participatory way. This is a practical operational model, with an emphasis on the local level. The involvement of civil society organisations is a key aspect of the programme. In addition to the CEPG, there are other instruments, such as the working groups on technical cooperation between regional governments. It is worth highlighting the importance of the Council for the promotion of equal treatment and non-discrimination on grounds of race or ethnic origin (Directive 2000/43), whose members represent the various public authorities and civil society. Spain also participates in international fora at EU level, in the Council of Europe, United Nations, etc.

The challenges facing the Spanish government are to:

- tackle policies in the context of the crisis
- strengthen administrative cooperation with the Autonomous Communities (regional governments) and local authorities
- combat discrimination and negative stereotypes

➤ **Ms Carmen Plaza, Director General for Equality of chance**

Ms Plaza informed the EESC delegation that two projects are currently running:

- ❖ Mapping discrimination: to do this, a survey is first carried out on discrimination and ethnically-motivated hate crimes. All data from the different national and local administrations are processed in order to boost the resources of victims covered by each authority. The plan is to complete the survey in the coming months and thus to better understand the phenomenon, develop prevention policies and combat discrimination, so that people are aware of their rights and have the means to defend themselves.
- ❖ The CODI anti-discrimination project, co-financed by the EU and carried out in schools and universities. Data are collected in order to strengthen the strategy to promote diversity. There has also been an awareness-raising campaign for adolescents under the slogan ‘I am you’
<http://www.mezclate.es/>

In conjunction with the Institute of Women within the strategic equal opportunities plan, programmes are promoted to integrate women - and not only Roma women - who have suffered discrimination. These include the Clara programme, which is run in collaboration with local authorities, and the Sara programme, in conjunction with the third sector, aimed at training immigrant women and supporting women’s organisations, whether or not they are Roma:

<http://www.inmujer.gob.es/areasTematicas/multiDiscriminacion/mujeresMigrantes/home.htm>

➤ **Elena Andradas Aragonés, Deputy Director General - Health Promotion and Epidemiology - Directorate General for Public Health, Quality and Innovation**

Ms Andradas briefed those present on health policies relating to the Roma and their specific situation. In 1985, a health group was set up within the CEPG to work on developing health policies. In 2005, the working group on health decided to survey the health of the Roma population with a view to targeting health policy more effectively. In 2006, the first national survey of health in the Roma community was carried out, in order to determine whether inequalities existed and, if so, how to overcome them. The results have been published online:

http://ec.europa.eu/health/social_determinants/docs/spain_rd03_en.pdf
http://ec.europa.eu/health/social_determinants/docs/spain_rd03_en.pdf

On the basis of the results, recommendations and proposals were made, particularly in the field of access to health and prevention. The Spanish healthcare system is public and universal and management is decentralised to the regional governments (Autonomous Communities). Therefore, the recommendations are aimed at the autonomous communities that are responsible for healthcare management.

This is a cross-sectorial project, which also involves the Roma themselves and includes the training of professionals in the health sector and awareness-raising campaigns.

A public health committee was set up, with members representing the health directors of the autonomous communities, to implement the recommendations made in the first survey.

A second survey was carried out in 2013. The results should be available by the end of 2014.

➤ **Ignacio Sola Barleycorn, Secretary, Council for the Promotion of Equal Treatment**

Mr Sola informed the EESC delegation that the Council for the Promotion of Equal Treatment had been created with the transposition of Directive 2000/43, and is formed of different authorities from the national, regional and local levels, business and trade union organisations, and NGOs working to promote equality and non-discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin. The Council has operated since 2009, since when it has adopted two work plans, the more recent of which covers the period 2013-2015.

Its role is to advise victims of discrimination, and issue studies, research, reports and recommendations on promoting measures aimed at achieving equality. It also prepares the Council's annual activities report.

➤ **Juan de Dios Ramírez Heredia, (Chairman of the Unión Romani) and deputy chairman of the Council**

The next speaker was Juan de Dios Ramírez Heredia, (Chairman of the Unión Romani) and deputy chairman of the Council. He agreed with the government's views, but emphasised that discrimination persists: Roma occupy the lowest position in Spanish society, suffering rising unemployment and, although health has improved considerably, infant mortality remains high among Roma children.

Furthermore, the Council has a serious drawback: it is not independent. It works well, but does not meet the requirements of Directive 2000/43.

The Council's deputy chairman stated that racism is also increasing in Spain, less so than in other countries, but here too it is alarming. He similarly condemned the fact that some judges and prosecutors fail to act decisively against discrimination. He cited the examples of attacks on Roma families in Estepa (Seville) and Castellar (Jaén). He also expressed his concern at the composition of the new European Parliament, with almost 100 MEPs representing xenophobic parties.

Discussion with the EESC:

The three EESC members held a discussion with the government representatives. The first issue discussed was the state of education in the Roma community.

The rate of children (aged 0 to 6) in pre-school education is 87% and is 95% in compulsory primary education (between 6 and 12 years). The figures are thus very positive, although the greatest problem is truancy. Things are changing in secondary education (compulsory between the ages of 12 and 16): the situation is alarming since, according to a 2012 study, 64% leave school with no qualifications. Where university education is concerned, the figures are very poor, as only 2% of young Roma complete higher education (according to estimates).

30% of all government-sponsored programmes concern education.

The EESC then enquired about the number of Roma working for government authorities and about whether school books made any reference to the history of the Roma.

In their reply, the government representatives stated that it was extremely difficult to obtain such data, since Spanish law prohibits asking people to provide information about their ethnicity. Estimates suggest that there are Roma working in public authorities, but that their numbers remain low.

On the issue of books, the answer was clear: school books make no reference to the history of the Roma, which is a failing in the education system. Publishers have enormous power and government rules are not sufficiently tough. The CEPG's working group on education is currently addressing this matter.

A question was also asked about Spain's implementation of the Council of Europe's campaign to combat stereotypes. The government representatives stated that this campaign is being carried out jointly with the main organisations representing the Roma community.

➤ **Antonio Vázquez Saavedra - Extremadura Federation of Roma Associations - FAGEX**

Mr Vázquez stated that the situation of the Roma people is highly complex and that a number of issues still need to be addressed. For example, life expectancy figures suggest that this is 8 years lower than for the rest of Spain's population. Failure at school is one of the main challenges. Where employment is concerned, the situation is very worrying, and the Roma unemployment rate is extremely high.

Spain must also tackle the cultural issue, which is that the Roma people need recognition. Roma organisations should be given the power to design policies, bringing an end to the paternalistic approach. The establishment of the CEPG represented a major shift, because it makes it easier for Roma organisations to play a part in forming public policy.

➤ **Humberto García - Roma Secretariat Foundation (FSG)**

Mr García started by looking at the employment figures, which are worrying and have worsened as a result of the current crisis.

With regard to education, the rate for completing compulsory education is extremely low; the failure to integrate into society is alarming. The crisis has had a major impact on housing, since many families have grown poorer and cannot afford the cost of accommodation. Court-ordered evictions have increased and social

housing policies have fallen in number: as a result, the number of people living in overcrowded and sub-standard housing is on the rise. Where equal treatment in Spain is concerned, problems are growing and racist incidents are multiplying.

The national strategy is to be welcomed, but its workings much less so. The 2014-2016 action plan lacks clear indicators and budgetary resources, which could make it nothing more than a declaration of good intent. The CEPG is a useful working instrument but would need to have a more active role, that is to concentrate on proposing practical measures.

➤ **Ricardo Hernández Jiménez - GAZ KALO Navarre Federation of Roma Associations**

Mr Hernández pointed out that, although Spain provides a benchmark for other countries, the problems are still considerable. The CEPG is extremely important, and the national strategy is a very positive development. Progress is being made, but on the ground, problems still remain. The Spanish model, in which social policies are decentralised in favour of the Autonomous Communities (regional governments), sometimes makes implementing policies more complicated.

As the Roma population is very young, education is crucial. Spain must invest more in closing the education and training gap faced by Roma children and young people. Greater investment is also needed in the fight against social exclusion and discrimination.

➤ **Rosalía Vázquez Barrul - ALBOREA Association of Roma Women**

Ms Vázquez stated that Roma in Spain face considerable inequality and that Roma have not started from the same point as the rest of society. Specific measures are therefore needed.

Roma women can drive change, because it is women who raise children within the family. What is essential for women is training. Women are the drivers of social change;

Ms Vázquez criticised the lack of coordination between the national and regional governments: decisions taken at the national level are not implemented in the regions. She therefore proposed that the regions be involved in the work of the CEPG.

She referred to the serious problem in housing. The crisis has resulted in more evictions and in new shanty towns. Ms Vasquez called for public housing policies to be expanded.

➤ **José Antonio Jiménez Jiménez - Asturias Roma Association (UNGA)**

Mr Jiménez stated that the situation has worsened due to the crisis and that the situation is bad for Roma, as it is for other vulnerable groups.

Businesses are hiring fewer Roma. The unions are doing nothing to address the situation, which means that most Roma operate in the hidden economy. The social economy could help create jobs; it is extremely important that the informal economy becomes a formal one. The social economy could be a useful direction to take.

The CEPG is merely an advisory body and has no legislative power. One only has to look at the laws on urban waste, which prevent Roma from working in this field.

There is the issue of business training that enables people to set up small businesses, in the retail trade, for example. Roma lack such training and to ensure they receive it, all economic stakeholders need to work together.

The EESC members asked a number of questions, including:

Are there conflicts between the different organisations representing the Roma?

The CEPG members replied that the Roma community is highly diverse and there is a north/south divide and different social classes.

There is a problem of cohesion, as the Roma population is diverse and heterogeneous. Cooperation between organisations in Spain is improving.

How can men be involved in supporting women in these changes?

Roma women need to be taught how to fight for their rights and to strive for excellence. Roma women want to get involved in politics, but need help to do so. Roma women are still lagging behind other women in the fight for equality.

Are they familiar with the organisations based in Brussels?

Yes, they are aware of some organisations working at the European level. The largest Spanish organisations are also members of European Roma networks.

Is there a common language?

There are different dialects, but across Europe, there is one language that everyone can understand: Romani, although this is not a language spoken by the Roma in Spain and Portugal.

The Institute of Roma Culture, a public foundation overseen by the Ministry of Education and Culture, is tasked with promoting the Roma language and culture.

What is participants' view on health and employment?

The health of the Roma community has improved, but the figures remain worse than for the rest of the population: Roma have a life expectancy that is 8 years lower and suffer much poorer health. Health policies and health education need to be boosted for the Roma community.

How can employment and entrepreneurship policies be used?

Some progress has been made on the employment front, but not enough. For example, Roma still tend to earn their living through itinerant selling. It is not easy to leave the informal economy and set up businesses. New public programmes should be set up, combining vocational training and jobs. The programmes run by Roma organisations to promote jobs and entrepreneurship are to be welcomed.

- **Francisco Virseda Barca - First Deputy Ombudsman**
- **Eugenia Relaño Pastor - Consultant in the fields of migration and equal treatment**

The Ombudsman is the institution responsible for protecting people's fundamental rights and public freedoms, by scrutinising the work of the public authorities. Any member of the public may apply to the ombudsman and request his or her assistance, which is free of charge, to investigate any activity by a public authority or its employees that might be deemed improper. The ombudsman's office may also take action in cases that have come to its attention, even when no complaint has been made.

Ms Relaño and Mr Virseda informed the EESC delegation that they did not receive many complaints from Roma individuals, probably due to their lack of confidence in the institutions. Furthermore, many Roma are unaware of the existence of the ombudsman, which explained why most complaints were submitted by NGOs. Only 4% of complaints submitted to the ombudsman concerned the Roma community.

The most significant cases included:

- Segregation (Roma children sent to a school in a specific area).
- Denial of access to certain types of school (private schools that receive public funding).
- Investigations into the media, in which Roma are often portrayed with negative stereotypes that promote discrimination, such as the television programme "Palabra de gitano" ["Gypsy's word"] on 4TV. It is a matter of regret that the public prosecutor did not see fit to pursue the case. The ombudsman asked the Audiovisual Council to monitor the programmes' content.
- Another investigation was opened into the Dictionary of the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language, for its definitions of the words "gitano" ["gypsy"] and "gitanada" ["gypsy trickery"], which are associated with negative stereotypes. An agreement has been reached with the Academy, under which changes will be made in the next edition of the Dictionary.

At the meeting with the EESC delegation, a close look was taken at the transposition of Directive 2000/43 on combating discrimination, which obliges every Member State to set up an independent body to deal with discrimination.

In Spain, the Council for the Promotion of Equal Treatment is not an entirely independent body, because it forms part of a government department. The Ombudsman called for the creation of an independent body, but this has not yet happened, and therefore the directive is considered to have been only partially implemented.

In 2011, the government of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero tabled a bill on equal treatment, but Parliament did not approve it, due to the elections being brought forwards. Mariano Rajoy's government has new legislation pending in this field.

The Ombudsman considers that many problems relating to poverty and social exclusion among the Roma are problems faced by all of society. Political will is needed to address these issues but in times of crisis, it is hard to increase public spending, both on policies and on institutions.

➤ **Francisco Javier Ramírez Caro, Managing Director - Institute for Relocation and Social Integration (IRIS)**

IRIS, whose task is to boost public housing policies in the Community of Madrid (regional government) and to help municipalities to rehome people living in slums - not necessarily Roma - and to eradicate slum housing, promote citizenship and rights and thereby prevent the fraudulent use of public housing. It was set up in 1998 on the basis of Law 27/98.

The entire region used to be covered by shanty towns, which have now largely been dismantled. In recent years, 110 shanty towns have been dismantled, totalling more than 10 000 shacks.

Before IRIS was established, the policy consisted of building separate neighbourhoods, far from the city centre, but over time, shacks appeared on their edges and became ghettos that did not encourage social integration.

In 1998, the creation of IRIS started a new phase. One example is La Celsa, which was dismantled a few years ago because it had become a ghetto. Now, a vocational training centre is based there.

IRIS has invested over EUR 300 million in acquiring homes and EUR 112 million in social action programmes. It purchases existing homes and then renovates them, with a balanced geographical distribution.

IRIS owns some 3 000 homes and employs 100 people, many of whom are social educators and teachers. IRIS carries out its work on the street, in places where people live in slums or substandard housing. It has cooperation agreements with other towns and cities in Spain and elsewhere in Europe.

The objectives are to:

- rehome families in decent housing and
- provide social support for social reintegration and
- enable families to improve their quality of life.

IRIS's work takes place in five phases:

Phase one: inspecting slum housing Inspectors carry out observation missions when a new shanty town develops. Existing dwellings are monitored to ensure they do not expand. Since in Spain urban planning is a municipal responsibility, information is passed on to the municipalities and agreement is reached with them on the action to be taken. The government of the Community of Madrid is not responsible for land-use - this falls to the municipalities. The last shanty town in the Greater Madrid region, el Ventorro, is currently being dismantled. Other, smaller settlements remain, such as El Gallinero, where IRIS provides educational support, but the families there cannot be rehomed, due to their specific situation. Action will also be taken in La Cañada Real, a former livestock transit area. Nevertheless, it cannot be considered to be a shanty town, built with cast-off materials, as there are all types of buildings there, including businesses, shops, bars and houses.

546 slum dwellings currently remain in the city of Madrid, with 432 in the rest of the region. There are also a few shanty towns scattered here and there.

These new settlements are occupied mainly by Roma and, in El Gallinero, by Roma from Romania. In El Ventorro, although most inhabitants are Roma, 20% are not.

Phase two: a group of social workers and trainers is sent in, 2-3 per settlement. They work with families to prepare them for their new homes.

Phase three: IRIS purchases homes on the open market, renovates them and makes them available to a housing assessment team.

Phase four: the rehoming takes place, in a way that matches the characteristics of the housing and the family. The family signs a contract and moves into the home. The slum dwelling is knocked down immediately and 12-15 rehoming are arranged to take place on the same day. Together with the rental contract, there is a social agreement with commitments on children's education, living harmoniously with the neighbours, looking after common areas, etc. Homes are located in normal apartment buildings. These homes are not located in ghettos, but in blocks of flats, in which Roma families are mixed with other people.

The price of the rent depends on the size of the family and the number of rooms. Subsidies are also provided for people with disabilities, larger families or elderly family members. If the family's situation changes, the rental conditions will change accordingly. The minimum rent is EUR 65.63 per month. The maximum is EUR 132 per month, for a four-bedroom flat, although other charges are paid separately.

Phase five: support for the family Each family is supported by a social worker for a maximum of five years. The social worker will introduce the family to the neighbours and assist them with administrative procedures. This is a successful process in 95% of cases. When families fail to meet the requirements (this applies to 4-5% of families), the legal department takes action to recover the home for IRIS. Families are never deemed non-compliant because they cannot afford to pay, but are when they prove unable to live alongside others or demonstrate a lack of commitment to the home they are given. Inspection teams check homes to avoid housing being illegally passed on to others.

IRIS's other activities

Work in other social housing not owned by IRIS. The ASIVECAM neighbourhood assistance service, which provides assistance to people living in public housing. 23 000 homes allocated by lot or in line with specific needs. In 2008, the neighbourhood assistance project started up as a pilot project in five Madrid neighbourhoods. Neighbours are listened to and a participatory assessment is carried out.
<http://tinyurl.com/opt58wv>

Helping people to organise themselves Mediation between neighbours in conflicts, to give neighbours a sense of empowerment. On-the-ground work in 533 neighbourhood communities. Workshops on recycling, gardening, sports, and acknowledging different cultures. This project operates in 19 municipalities in the Community of Madrid and employs 41 people. In 2012, more than 20 000 people took part in these programmes.

IRIS won a prize in a United Nations competition. As a result of the crisis, many different types of family have requested housing. IRIS wishes to support Roma culture, through initiatives such as the Enrique Maya prizes for contributions to the social and cultural promotion of the Roma people.
<http://www.gitanos.org/actualidad/agenda/105673.html>
<http://www.gitanos.org/actualidad/agenda/105673.html>
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Juan de Dios Ramírez Heredia, Chairman of the Unión Romaní, who accompanied us on our visit to IRIS, spoke to clarify that while in other EU Member States such as Romania, the United Kingdom and France, many Roma are still travellers, and this is not the case in Spain, where Roma communities are settled.

He also explained Barcelona's policies on housing and on eradicating shanty towns.

Mr Ramírez Heredia concluded by calling for the authorities to increase public funding for such programmes.

- **Meeting with the Roma Secretariat Foundation (FSG)**
- **Álvaro Gutiérrez, Department of Employment - Employment (ACCEDER)**

FSG gave a short presentation of its organisation and activities. FSG uses a multi-disciplinary approach to promote the integration of Roma. The EESC delegation was then briefed by the FSG on a number of programmes and visited Cañada Real.

The ACCEDER programme promotes labour mediation aimed at enabling Roma to find work. This programme is run in conjunction with the Public Employment Service. It has 26 offices in 14 Spanish regions.

It provides vocational training, raises awareness of the discrimination faced by the Roma and puts in place active employment policies. A major business network is involved with the programme in order to facilitate the hiring of workers.

Work is carried out by a team, comprising a coordinator, mediators, intermediaries and advisers.

Lines of action:

- Individual paths to employment: participation is voluntary
- Vocational training
- Collaboration with businesses
- Drafting of studies on the situation of the Roma
- Running of awareness-raising campaigns
- Technical assistance
- Social enterprises and supervised work.

The "Learning by working" programme, which is a practical course lasting 6 months, with the first month being learning-based and the following five spent at the workplace itself. Participation is voluntary and the FSG offers no payment. The "Learning by working" now running is the second of its kind.

The results are: 80 000 beneficiaries, 68% of whom are Roma and 53% are women. 55 000 work contracts, although only 3.5% of these are permanent. The average duration of contracts in 2013 was 126 days. The impact of the crisis can be seen. With regard to self-employment, of the 550 people registered, 164 completed the programme successfully.

This programme has helped bring about a change of mentality not only for the Roma beneficiaries but also for the authorities and for wider society.

- **Mónica Chamorro, Department of Education- Education (PROMOCIONA)**
- **Maite Andrés, Department of Social Inclusion – Housing**

The aim of the PROMOCIONA programme is to ensure that young Roma complete compulsory education and continue their studies. It offers educational support for young Roma and their families. The programme operates at different stages: support with enrolment, combating truancy and early school-leaving, promoting multiculturalism, and training and awareness-raising for teachers. It started in 2009, as part of the multi-regional programme to combat discrimination (funded by the ESF)

Despite the progress that has been made (80% of children enrolled in early years education and 93% in primary education), academic results in secondary education are less positive; there is truancy (20%) and early school-leaving and the percentage of young Roma (both boys and girls) in post-compulsory education is extremely low.

The programme's target group is children aged 12-16. Its aims are to: raise the success rate at the end of primary education and improve access to post-compulsory studies. Children and their families are worked with individually and in groups with educational support. In 2012-2013, there were 88 classes, 139 groups and 975 beneficiaries. Coordination also takes place with schools and work is done with the community.

- **Visit to Cañada Real with the FSG**

Accompanied by the FSG's housing team, a visit was made to this neighbourhood, in which many families, both Roma and others, live. Cañada Real is a very tough neighbourhood, containing areas of serious social exclusion. It is 16 kilometres long, with some parts that are better, while others are extremely poor, with unpaved roads and no electricity. There are rubbish dumps and an incinerator complex nearby, which also cause health problems. Furthermore, due to the high volume of drug-dealing, police operations were taking place at the time of the visit.

The FSG works together with social work teams, who encourage school attendance, distribute foodstuffs and look after children at a reception centre where they can play, study, etc. Families are asking for conditions to be improved, for public transport to be extended to the area and for electricity, water, etc. to be provided. There are some shacks, but most are houses (built without building permits); some people are calling for these homes to be legalised. This situation affects the conditions in which people live, just a short distance from the centre of Madrid. The contrast between this place and the city is huge.

- **Ana Conde Trescastro, Director General - Directorate General for Social Services and Drug Dependency Care of the Regional Government of Andalusia, Secretariat for the Roma Community (Seville)**

Almost half of Spain's Roma population lives in Andalusia and forms part of the region's identity. 70% of the Roma population live normal lives, but 30% have been seriously affected by the crisis and social exclusion and it is these people that public policies are intended to help.

The greatest problems:

- Truancy.
- Roma from Central and Eastern Europe have a nomadic culture and move from one town to another. It is difficult to quantify their numbers and there is concern about their children, some of whom end up in institutions, while others are forced to beg or are exploited in other ways.

- Roma women. In today's societies, women are paying a high price for their liberation from the patriarchy, in the form of gender-based violence. It is essential to ensure that the emancipation of Roma women does not lead to such violence.
- Ghetto neighbourhoods In Andalusia, a number of programmes aimed at everyone, not specifically at the Roma, are being put in place to prevent certain neighbourhoods, such as Polígono Sur, from becoming ghettos. These are town-planning and social support policies, some of which are aimed at the Roma community.

The EESC delegation enquired about the recent attacks in Andalusia on a number of Roma families. Ms Conde considered that the attacks were directed towards one specific Roma family, and not towards the community as a whole. The Andalusian Regional Government did not view these attacks as racist in nature.

➤ **Juan Carlos Navarro Zafra, Head of the Roma Community Secretariat**

The EESC delegation's meeting with Mr Navarro was extremely interactive, and entailed an open dialogue and many questions and comments.

Andalusia has around 8 300 000 inhabitants, of whom 350 000 are estimated to be Roma, which equates to almost half of all Roma in Spain. As public registers in Spain are not authorised to provide data on ethnic origin, these are sociological estimates. 30% of Roma live in vulnerable situations, including social exclusion. They are the policies' intended beneficiaries. Roma families have a higher birth-rate (double) but also a higher mortality rate and lower life expectancy.

In Andalusia, most of the Roma population lives in Seville, but the highest percentage is to be found in Granada (7.6% of the population). Most Roma are fully integrated into society and the population is stable rather than nomadic.

- **Education**

Primary education is universal; 90% of the population is literate. The most serious problem (as it is throughout Spain) is truancy: early school-leaving accounts for only 10% in primary education (6-12 years old), but increases in secondary school and exceeds 70% for girls.

Segregation is a major issue, with some schools having a high concentration of Roma children.

Few young Roma attend university, although data is hard to obtain, because no censuses provide information on ethnicity and the Roma population does not have specific anthropomorphic features.

- **Employment**

- Roma suffer higher unemployment than the rest of the population;
- They are also affected by greater job instability and lower-quality jobs.
- They have a higher rate of activity than the rest of the population and
- a higher proportion operate in the informal economy.
- The most traditional Roma professions are: itinerant selling (20%), work in farming, construction and cleaning and waste collection (which forms part of the hidden economy).

- **Health**

Andalusia, as everywhere in Spain, has a universal healthcare system. The most serious problems affect the 30% of the Roma population at risk of exclusion:

- the lack of a culture of health, inadequate prevention, scant use of primary care and abuse of the emergency services;
- higher rates of certain chronic diseases and those related to dental hygiene, eyesight, hearing, unhealthy lifestyle, smoking and obesity and inadequate gynaecological prevention for women (due to ignorance not a lack of trust). Andalusia's regional government, in conjunction with NGOs, is funding cultural mediators.

- **Housing**

In the last 30 years, the quality of housing for the Roma population has improved considerably in both Spain and Andalusia. Most Roma families (88%) live in apartments (flats), but many problems remain in certain neighbourhoods, such as segregation, overcrowding, low-quality housing, etc.). 4% still live in shanty towns and 8% in substandard housing. In recent years, new Roma groups have arrived from Romania and Bulgaria and a number of slum settlements have developed, along with more of a travellers' lifestyle.

- **Culture**

The first Roma arrived in Andalusia in 1492, a process of syncretism started and they became part of Andalusian culture. Andalusia cannot be understood without the Roma. Social exclusion does not occur for ethnic or cultural reasons but due to the poverty afflicting some Roma.

- **Discrimination**

Years ago, textbooks referred to the Roma's poverty but said nothing about their values, except in relation to the arts. The Roma community remains the most discriminated against in Spain and is four times more likely to face exclusion than the rest of the population (accounting for 2% of the population but 14% of those who are excluded). Although all forms of discrimination are prohibited by law, 40% of people say they would not want to live next to Roma. This rejection is linked to Roma's position on the margins of society.

In Spain, the term "gypsy" is associated with negative stereotypes (see the Dictionary debate), leading to discriminatory practices. The textbooks need to be changed, because they currently make no reference to the history of the Roma in Spain.

The way in which the media reproduce negative stereotypes is alarming. For example, the programme "Gypsy's word" on 4TV essentially bought a family in order to sell these stereotypes on a reality show. The programme was reported to the authorities, but the public prosecutor's office did not consider that any offence had been committed.

The image of the Roma suffered greatly as a result of the programme. The regional government is drawing up a set of ten good practices, which are ethical guidelines rather than legal requirements. It is also working on a social network monitoring centre.

European Directive 2000/43 makes it mandatory to set up independent bodies to combat discrimination, but the existing bodies in Spain are not independent.

In Andalusia, there is no specific body working in this area, but there are advisory councils for women, immigrants, etc. A strategy specific to Andalusia is also being developed for the integration of Roma, through a body such as the CEPG, but with a regional scope.

- **Gender-based violence**

Roma women do not use the administrative or judicial procedures available to women: few Roma women make formal complaints about gender-based violence. Women find it difficult to report someone from their own ethnic group, as this is viewed negatively by the community and could lead to the woman being ostracised.

The Regional Government of Andalusia considers women to be the drivers of change. Campaigns are run together with Roma women's organisations with the aim of empowering Roma women.

- **Social policy**

Specifically for Roma: financial support from the municipalities to carry out long-term projects in conjunction with NGOs. 60 municipalities are currently working on projects targeting Roma and which receive this support.

NGOs also receive funding, in areas such as health, equality, education and employment.

Non-specific (targeting the entire population):

- Basic guaranteed income (minimum wage), a support programme for Andalusians. Ensuring an income of 62% of the minimum wage for families in poverty, which increases with the number of children they have. This programme has been running since 1989. There are currently 65 000 beneficiary families, many of whom are Roma;
- The other programme is Decree-Law 8/2014: Urgent and exceptional measures for social inclusion through employment;
- Food aid for unsupported minors. Summer schools in marginalised neighbourhoods, providing children with activities, as well as breakfast and lunch;
- Local soup kitchens and the provision of meals for those who cannot afford them;
- A programme offering three meals at school to pupils in difficult circumstances (20 000 beneficiaries).

- **Health**

In Andalusia, as elsewhere in Spain, the public healthcare system is universal and is of high quality. The system is funded from the public purse and accounts for 30% of Andalusia's budget. The current health plan is the fourth, and contains specific measures for excluded persons, many of whom are Roma. The crisis has affected people's health and the health of those at risk of exclusion is worsening.

- **Education**

In primary education (up to the age of 12) all children go to school, including Roma. In secondary education (up to the age of 16) the problem is truancy. The policies aim to reduce truancy and school failure, which affects Roma girls to a larger extent (girls leave school for cultural reasons: to help at home and to ensure they do not become romantically involved with a "Payo" (non-Roma). Mediation work has taken place with Roma women who have continued their studies.

In 2003 a comprehensive plan for monitoring truancy rates was adopted, and remains in force. There is an action plan agreed to by schools, municipal councils and the regional government. Preventive measures are put in place, involving the families. Each school has its own plan. Truancy has fallen.

Educational support plans: programmes providing extra tuition and assistance. There is an association of Roma teachers and teachers with Roma pupils. Roma NGOs help by mediating with schools, taking children to school, enrolling children in schools and raising awareness in families.

- **Employment**

The ACCEDER programme is run in conjunction with the Red Cross and the FSG. It is co-financed by the EU and the Regional Government of Andalusia. Beneficiaries: 2 300 people, most of them Roma. The results are very positive: 71% of those hired are Roma and 29% are non-Roma. The FSG acts from the outset as an intermediary with the companies they work with.

More general employment policies implemented by the regional government: support for the creation of social economy enterprises and for bringing businesses into the formal economy.

Lastly, a study is made of cases where people abuse the benefits system. The monitoring system must be improved. In Andalusia many "new poor" have emerged as a result of the crisis, although they are not victims of social exclusion.

➤ **Juan de Dios Ramírez de Heredia – U-Romani / Manuel García Rondón and the Secretary General - Visit to the Torreblanca Project**

The EESC delegation met the President of Unión Romaní, Juan de Dios Ramirez Heredia and its Secretary General, Manuel García Rondón. They stated that the Unión Romaní is the only Roma-governed organisation all of whose members are Roma. It operates throughout Spain and runs a number of programmes in four areas: health, education, employment and housing. The speakers stressed the importance of education.

Spain is a model in terms of the measures it has taken; the policies of the past 30 years are very positive but many problems remain, because one-third of the Roma population is still at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The economic crisis is having a substantial negative impact on the Roma and many "middle-class" Roma are growing poorer.

The Unión Romaní recommends strengthening policies geared towards Roma in Spain, taking greater account of the opinions of their representative organisations. Businesses must open up to minorities and to the Roma.

The Torreblanca project is an education programme based at a school, but there are other programmes providing vocational training, even for Roma inmates in prisons.

In Torreblanca, 80% of the children at the centre are Roma.

Presentation of the programmes:

- **Guadalupe Quirós / Belén Vázquez - Aula abierta [Open Classroom] (Education) - Acercar a las familias a la escuela - Gadyé [Bringing families closer to schools] (Education) - Kerelo Buti (Employment)**
- **Juan de Dios Ramírez de Heredia – U-Romani**

The Open Classroom programme: aimed at building and developing pupils' skills. The methodology is to use play and creative and artistic activities to develop a climate of trust and a sociable atmosphere in the classroom. It promotes Roma values and culture within the education system and is geared towards primary school children aged 6-12. Most are Spanish Roma. Unión Romani has been running the project at this school since 2010.

The programme involves primary-school children, parents and teachers.

Activities: teaching healthy habits, reading workshops, learning support, the environment and recycling, coeducation and culture and workshops on Roma culture, music, games and sports activities.

With the families: they take part in a number of activities, such as carnivals, theatre performances and games. Teachers are supported in their work on different aspects of multiculturalism.

Other activities: involving Roma families more closely. Mediation between families and schools. Getting on together and trust. Raising families' awareness of the importance of education. Informal chats.

Information point and social and employment guidance. Regular meetings with the school.

Workshops and training sessions for parents. Literacy classes for family members.

Meeting places for women, theatre groups. Workshops on "Getting to know Seville". Making Christmas presents. Theatre trips.

The aim is to attract children to school with incentives: if children attend regularly, they are given the opportunity to take part in flamenco classes and performances.

Children who demonstrate talent receive training at a flamenco arts centre.

A summer school for children, where they are given three meals a day.

A project to improve dental hygiene and eating habits. Information sessions and healthy breakfasts. Check-ups showed that the average pupil had between four and five decayed teeth.

There are also other programmes that receive European funding, such as those supported by the Lifelong Learning programme and in the areas of active citizenship, raising civic awareness among young Roma, looking towards Europe.

A programme currently being developed to encourage exchanges involving European Roma artists.

A discussion took place between the EESC delegation and the Union Romani leaders on their relations with other Roma organisations in Europe.

Mr Ramírez de Heredia stated that there were considerable differences between Roma from Eastern Europe and those from the West. In Spain, before the fall of the Berlin Wall, there was little information on how people lived on the other side of the Iron Curtain. At meetings, those from the East presented an idyllic picture: they had work and education, but in fact, as became clear later, there was a great deal of illiteracy, poverty, discrimination and marginalisation. European networks are dominated by Roma from Eastern Europe and relations are not straightforward because they have different views on promoting their rights, the ongoing struggle and integration. They did not have the same freedom that Roma have had in Western Europe.

For Roma from the West, the priority is to fight for justice, end discrimination and preserve and protect their identity. Those from the East do not need to fight for their Roma identity, which is deeply rooted. Fighting for justice and against poverty must also be a priority. This is why there are disagreements and why the agendas are different.

➤ **Beatriz Carrillo - Fakali - Federation of Associations of Roma Women**

Fakali is the Federation of Associations of Roma Women. Its chairwoman is Beatriz Carrillo, who briefed the EESC delegation on her work and her views on the situation of Roma women in Spain and in Andalusia and on public policy in this field.

The association was set up more than ten years ago and runs a number of projects in the fields of education, employment, women's issues, social support, health and anti-discrimination. Its members include many young university-educated Roma women.

They believe it is extremely important to ensure that negative stereotypes do not damage the Roma community, which should be proud of its identity. Fakali complained to the Public Ombudsman and took legal action against the TV4 programme "Gypsy's word".

Its future goals include promoting the political representation of Roma and positive action policies (quotas) in some areas of public life.

Some conclusions

Spain's Roma community (approximately 750 000 persons) has in the past faced discrimination and social exclusion. But in the last 35 years there has been a marked change, with their situation improving due to the welfare state being expanded and made universal: free and compulsory education up to the age of 16, a universal and high-quality healthcare system, housing policies and an extensive network of social services.

Spain's incorporation of the EU framework into its strategy and policies has been positive, although the fact that policies are highly decentralised between national, regional and local authorities has led to problems in terms of a lack of coordination and coherence.

The results achieved on the framework's aims suggest that the situation of the Roma is improving in access to education, healthcare, housing, poverty reduction and social exclusion.

The authorities should, in cooperation with Roma organisations, develop quantitative and qualitative indicators to evaluate the results more precisely.

The economic crisis and the austerity policies being implemented are causing a substantial deterioration in all areas. Both Roma and other Spaniards are experiencing a poorer quality of life and lower levels of well-being and social cohesion.

The EESC wishes to highlight some of the challenges:

Education:

We saw that educational levels are positive at the infants-school level (up to six years old) and in compulsory primary education (up to twelve years) although a degree of segregation of Roma pupils is occurring in a number of places and too many such pupils are concentrated in the centres.

Centres must be given the resources they need to improve school results and teachers must be trained in multiculturalism. We were surprised to note that textbooks make no reference to the history of the Roma in Spain. Roma NGOs carry out a number of extremely positive programmes in the educational centres.

The main problem in compulsory secondary education (12-16 years) is that of Roma children, both boys and girls, leaving school early. This is a very acute problem where girls are concerned. Despite publicly-funded policies and the work of NGOs, the results are disappointing.

The number of Roma studying for a baccalaureate (aged 16-18) or in vocational training is low. New programmes should be set up to improve this situation. Matters are even worse in higher and university education.

Health

Although there is universal access to healthcare, the health indicators for the Roma population are worse than average: lower life expectancy, higher infant mortality, higher occurrence of disease and a culture that focusses less on health in general.

The authorities are working together with NGOs to improve health, and have put in place a number of programmes. Work on mediation and training through Roma organisations is extremely important.

Prevention and primary healthcare, as well as the health education of the Roma population, must be improved. Professionals working at health centres should receive better training in multiculturalism.

Employment

In the current economic crisis, Spain is suffering high unemployment rates. Among the Roma, unemployment is rife. Their jobs are also of lower quality and less stable. The percentage of people working in the informal economy is also higher.

Active policies are being put in place by the authorities, some in conjunction with civil society, and these are broadly to be welcomed. The challenge is enormous, however.

Roma must be more successfully included in standard education, vocational training and university studies and policies and programmes aimed at combining education and work should be strengthened. Vocational training for young people should be supported by the public employment services, in conjunction with NGOs.

The Roma's entrepreneurial spirit should be harnessed to turn informal economic activities into businesses. New programmes designed with this aim in mind should be developed jointly between the authorities and Roma organisations.

Businesses should make efforts to bring Roma onto the labour market and overcome negative stereotypes. New agreements between the social partners should be drawn up.

Housing

Most Roma in Spain are settled and live in medium-quality housing, but one-third of the population finds it extremely hard to access decent housing. Although slum housing is being eradicated, many Roma families live in overcrowded and sub-standard housing, in very run-down neighbourhoods.

Taking account of the impact that the economic crisis is having on many Roma families and the rise in evictions, public housing policies must be strengthened and at the same time be more closely linked to other social policies.

Poverty and social exclusion

One-third of the Roma population in Spain lives in poverty and social exclusion. Government (national, regional and local) employs different policies and institutions to fight poverty and exclusion for the population as a whole and also some geared specifically to the Roma. It is the regional and local authorities that are primarily responsible for social policies, many of which are carried out in conjunction with NGOs.

It must be ensured that Spain's budgetary problems do not lead to fewer resources being available to combat poverty and exclusion. The minimum wage should prevent all families (including Roma families) from falling into extreme poverty.

Specific aid aimed at providing meals in schools and in soup kitchens should be increased in the current situation. New policies should be put in place to prevent energy poverty.

Essential social services are the most direct instrument held by the authorities for understanding the problems of the poorest families and for preventing their exclusion. Municipalities and regional governments should boost these services with new programmes that also involve NGOs.

Combating discrimination

Throughout Europe, racism and xenophobia against the Roma are on the rise. While the situation in Spain is less alarming, such behaviour is also increasing. The authorities, including the judicial authorities, must take more decisive action to prevent racism and xenophobia against the Roma community.

The dissemination of negative stereotypes of Roma that create a breeding-ground for discrimination must not be allowed in education or in the media. Legislation, codes of conduct and recommendations must be more specific.

Spain has transposed Directive 2000/43 into national legislation, but there are still problems, as highlighted by Roma organisations and the Ombudsman: there is no independent authority in this field.

The government has proposed new legislation on equal treatment (now pending adoption) and this should be enacted immediately.

The Council for the Promotion of Equal Treatment, which was set up in 2009, is a tool to be welcomed, but although it works with experts and representatives of civil society, it is a government-sponsored body and cannot carry out its duties entirely independently. The new legislation should provide for an independent authority, as required by Directive 2000/43.

Institutional recognition of the Roma community

Roma in Spain have the same rights of citizenship as the rest of the population, but are still not recognised as a specific cultural group or community.

Greater recognition should be given to the identity and values of the Roma people in Spanish society. Over the last 35 years, successive governments have promoted a number of changes that have helped improve the situation and social recognition of the Roma, but their organisations consider that progress is still needed.

Two extremely important political decisions have been taken in recent years: the creation of the State Council of the Roma People (CEPG) and that of the Institute of Roma Culture.

The CEPG is an inter-ministerial State institution that is consultative in nature and involves the Roma community in its governance. Roma organisations view the Council very favourably.

The CEPG should be given a greater role in future, at a higher level of government, and should fall under the control of the deputy prime minister's office, involving ministers at the level of Secretary of State and/or director-general. To enable it to work more smoothly, the CEPG should have a secretariat that will provide technical and administrative services on a permanent basis. This will enable organisations to carry out their work more effectively.

Since in Spain many powers are decentralised, similar advisory councils should be set up in the Autonomous Communities (Regions), involving Roma community organisations.

The policy on recognition of Roma culture is extremely important and should be expanded in the future. The Institute of Roma Culture should be given greater resources with which to carry out its activities.

Greater recognition should be given to the cultural rights of the Roma people. The Spanish national parliament could set up a commission to look at Roma cultural matters from the political and legislative points of view.

Although Roma in Spain speak Spanish and the other regional languages, the Romani language should be supported, as it is a common heritage of the Roma culture in Europe.

REPORT ON THE FOURTH COUNTRY VISIT – BULGARIA

20 and 21 October 2014

Members: **Ákos Topolanszky (Gr. III), Ivan Kokalov (Gr. II)**
SOC Secretariat: **Valeria Atzori**

Meeting with representatives of the Government of Bulgaria's Strategy for the Inclusion of the Roma Minority:

- **Rositsa Ivanov, Secretary and Senior Programme Officer** - *Secretariat of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues (NCCEII)*
- **Ahavni Topakbashian, State expert**, *Secretariat of NCCEII*
- **Daniela Nikolova, State expert**, *Secretariat of NCCEII*
- **Nikola Petkov, Chief expert**, *Secretariat of NCCEII*

Ms Ivanovna, who is also the National Contact Point for Roma Integration and the coordinator for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, presented the activities of the National Council for Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues (NCCEII). In the Council, there is a unit which acts as secretariat to the Council. The Council has a consultative and coordination role, helping the government to implement the national policy on Roma. All ministries are represented. Moreover, there are representatives of the Bulgarian academy of sciences, the National Statistical Institute and the association of municipalities. NGOs are also represented, based on criteria with which they have to comply. This year there are 44 NGOs. The presidency is held by a deputy prime minister. The Council also provides consultation and opinions on relevant international treaties signed by Bulgaria, as well as on EU, COE and OSCE matters. They are the first point of consultation before the Bulgarian government attends these bodies.

The Bulgarian Roma Integration Strategy was prepared by the unit, which coordinated the work of the working group which comprises 44 organisations (39 representing the Roma, the rest for other communities). Criteria for applying are that they should not be family-related organisations, and they have to provide information on their activities over the last three years, as well as evidence of projects that they have implemented and social initiatives in which they have participated. This is in addition to administrative ministry requirements, such as documents. The NCCEII is not an exclusively Roma council, it is also for the other ethnic groups living in Bulgaria.

- **Lilyana Kovacheva, Head of the Centre** - *Centre for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities at the Ministry of Education and Science*

The Centre was set up in 2005 but started working in 2006. 500 educational projects have been financed in kindergartens, schools and municipalities. They implement three strategic goals: preserving identity, improving access to education and working with the parents of children belonging to these ethnic groups. The centre is not only for the Roma; it also targets other minorities such as Romanians, Turks and Jews. Education has the largest budget and the centre has a director and a management board with members from various ministries. The chair is the deputy minister of education. Two members of the board are Roma.

The Centre prepares an annual plan (<http://coiduem.mon.bg/en/page.php?c=4&d=50>).

Actions: Encouraging partnerships between government and schools and having Roma parents sit on the board of schools. The centre is a unique institution in Europe. On 27 October, a delegation from Croatia will visit to see how the centre functions.

Key of success: Ethnic mix of the team, for example Ms Kovacjeva herself is Roma.

➤ **Nelia Mikushinska, Head of department** - *Public Health Directorate, Ministry of Healthcare*

The Bulgarian Ministry of Health has been working on Roma health issues since 2005. The National Strategy for Roma Integration also includes a section on health. Main objectives: improving the health awareness of Roma, their knowledge of various diseases, prevention, vaccinations, decreasing infectious diseases. The main areas of action are prevention, mother - infant care, access to healthcare, providing qualifications for Roma who can become healthcare mediators. Health mediators are very helpful: their profile is recognised and they are officially registered.

Key activities: mobile healthcare unit (<http://goodpracticeroma.ppa.coe.int/en/pdf/189>). There are 23 mobile healthcare units which travel across the country, especially in areas where the population is largely Roma. They offer childcare, mammography, primary care, mother care. These check-ups are preceded by an awareness campaign carried out by an inspector. There is an inspector for each region and they operate on site. They are the front office and interface with Roma: they talk with them, hold meetings, help the mobile unit and explain the mobile unit's objectives (to improve their health status) to the Roma.

They based this measure on good practices in other countries. Each mobile unit is linked to a specific project on the ground and to the most common Roma health problems. The final report is available. In each mobile unit, hospital staff work together and healthcare mediators support their work. Many Roma are uninsured, and the measure targets them especially. The mobile units are located so as to cover remote places where access to healthcare is difficult. The objective is to guarantee equal access to health.

➤ **Bogdan Bogdanov, Deputy chair** - *National Statistical Institute*

The information collected by means of statistics is used for policy development. The most important information source is the National Census. Main challenge: it is difficult to prove the truth of the answers given; many Roma declare that they are Bulgarian or Turkish, not Roma. This distorts the picture. The latest census is from 2011, according to which there are 325 000 Roma in Bulgaria; but there are probably more. 500-700 000 people is a more accurate number. It would be useful to carry out interim studies between the censuses but this has not been possible until now, owing to restrictions in national legislation. Statistical studies are performed on samples; it would be good to add a section on ethnicity, income level of Roma and other matters. He asked if the NCCEII could come up with a proposal for collecting more information on the Roma. A Roma-specific module would help.

Ms Kovacheva asked why the Roma are reluctant to announce their ethnicity. According to Mr Bogdanov, the reply depends on where the Roma live. They tend to give the nationality of the group which is in the majority: it is a personal preference.

➤ **Mikel Bachravov, State expert** – *Directorate for Policy on the labour market and labour mobility, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy*

He started by presenting the legal framework: employment is encouraged and discrimination is banned, but the most vulnerable group in the labour market are the Roma, and so special measures are provided for them. They encourage in particular the long-term unemployed to join the labour market. There are 63 labour offices and 78 mediators who are Roma. They must have secondary education and go through a procedure to be public servants. In 2014, 7500 people had been registered in the labour offices thanks to this work. 1500 have found employment, 250 have undergone training, and 69 have signed up for literacy courses. The majority of Roma have no education. A range of programmes are implemented jointly with municipalities, in cooperation with Roma mediators and NGOs. Every year, a Roma labour exchange is organised, where employees meet with employers. While the general unemployment rate is known, the one for Roma is not because of the problem of identification. Since 2014, Bulgarian citizens can move freely in the European labour market and so can Roma. A rise in requests for training and qualifications (especially languages) has been recorded, connected to this new option.

- **Elena Kiurova, State expert** - *Department for Equal Opportunities, Anti-discrimination and Social Assistance Benefits, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy*

There is a lack of specific data on Roma. In 2013, some polls were carried out but they are not comprehensive. A study was completed as part of a project on comprehensive measures for marginalised communities with specific focus on Roma, financed by the ESF. It is a representative social study, covering the entire country, on integration of minorities. The data was then mapped. 10% of this specific ethnicity are marginalised and need targeted activities, but the problem is that not all identify themselves as Roma. The World Bank is also working on mapping poverty, and the results are expected soon.

The results of the project were used to create a toolkit for policy development and sent to the Association of municipalities. The focus was on capacity-building. 600 officials were trained on the project and on practical implementation of the measures proposed. The outcomes were also publicised in seminars, conferences, etc. Representatives of NGOs were invited to all the events, as well as experts on integration. The results have been published on the website but only in BG.

- **Victoria Kirilova, junior expert** – *Directorate for Access to Education and Development Support, Ministry of Education and Science*

One of their key tasks is to help integration of minorities. They face the same difficulties in reporting on the activities in statistical terms reported by representatives of other ministries.

Three types of measures:

- ✓ preservation of cultural identity (training for teachers, multicultural environment)
- ✓ teaching of Bulgarian language (targeting children), extra school support activities
- ✓ Special measures for Roma community: textbooks free of charge, transportation to schools

Debate:

Rositsa Ivanova: in 2015, Bulgaria will have to report to the Commission, as they will be monitoring the implementation of the national Roma Integration Strategy

Ákos Topolánszky: two topics have not been covered: anti-discrimination and school segregation. Moreover, the survey carried out by the EESC on the involvement of civil society in the drafting and implementation of the Roma Integration Strategy showed very negative results.

Replies from ministry representatives:

The NCCEII is a body set up to coordinate with NGOs. It is an advisory body, and so the NGOs cannot monitor the government. Two years ago, some NGOs protested and boycotted Roma Day on 11 April. Those NGOs used social media and international meetings to attract attention. They wanted the NCCEII to act as an executive body but this is impossible because of the legislation. They wanted a Roma ministry to be set up. They used local TV and said they did not want to be part of the NCCEII anymore. They called for a Roma ministry to be set up. Ms Ivanov thinks this is unrealistic. Nobody listened to the government's version. The NGOs disseminated false information, for example they said 30 organisations boycotted the NCCEII when in fact there were only nine. They claimed they occupied the ministry, but the truth was that there were people asking for a meeting with the deputy prime minister. The request was granted immediately.

Regarding segregation of Roma children: desegregation started in 2001-2006 and was carried out by one NGOs (DROM). There were 31 segregated schools. There have been negotiations between the NGOs and the Ministry of Education; the strategy was approved by the ministry in 2004. In the first years, the focus was on desegregation of Roma children and working with the parents. There are measurable results, such as the number of teachers who have undergone training to work with Roma children and how many parents were reached. They also assess the gender balance among children. The financial report is performed by an external audit.

Ms Kirilova denies that there is school segregation of Roma children in schools for children with special needs. The specialised schools are for people with **impairment** or mental illness. Being Roma is not the reason.

The government did not force them to go to these schools; it was for economic reasons. Roma families sent the children there because there was free food and clothing. When they saw that they were disadvantaged when looking for a job, they started not to send their children there anymore. An educational NGOs called “Step by Step” launched a three-year programme and run a survey on segregation. . Nowadays, a panel has to screen the admission of children in these schools and a Roma has to be part of the panel. In the past five to six years, there have been no more cases of segregation: this happened thanks to the action of NGOs and also to amendments to the legislation.

Regarding equal opportunities: the report by the commission against discrimination gives all the answers online. Article 4 of the Bulgarian Constitution is open-ended so there is a broad definition of discrimination.

Meeting with NGOs

- **Elena Kabakchieva**, M.D. – Health and Social Development Foundation
- **Maria Stoimenova**, Gulchai Foundation
- **Georgi Bakov (reading centre)**, Chitalishte (Community Centre) Simona 2000
- **Tsanko Mihaylov**, Open Society Institute Sofia
- **Radostina Chaprazova**, Arete Youth Foundation
- **Pavlina Rusinova**, Roma Integration Centre
- **Alexandrina Modenova**, Employers Organisation – Economic Initiative Union
- **Bistra Andreeva**, Youth and educational projects

After a short presentation on the EESC and on the project, **Ákos Topolánszky** asked the organisations attending to give a brief presentation of them. The debate then started, touching on different points:

- **Opinion on the NCCEII and on the Bulgarian Roma Integration Strategy**

Maria Stomeionova: The Roma strategy is good but it is not being implemented; much money is given but it does not get to people who need it. The difference between rich and poor has increased after democracy. Huge discrimination, prejudice; if Roma steal it is because they are hungry and do not have work.

There are not enough funds for NGOs; the money that comes from the EU goes to the government and not to NGOs. Romania has received a great deal of money, as has Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Spain; Bulgaria has not.

Georgi Bakov: the NCCEII is not sufficiently inclusive; they held only a few meetings with NGOs.

Radostina Chaprazova: Arete Youth Foundation is not a member of the NCCEII. In her opinion, constructive ideas are suggested during meetings but there is no follow-up. There has been strong opposition to the strategy because it is just on paper and does not work in practice. Moreover, there is no evaluation by an external body, with a resulting lack of transparency.

Tsanko Mihaylov: the main problem with project management is learning how to use funds as this is quite complicated. OSI has established a free-of-charge service, providing free advice. Without this free service, the NGO needs to pay a consultant if they want to manage money for a project and normally this is expensive. Access to EU funds is difficult for small NGOs.

- **Situation regarding discrimination and forced evictions**

Maria Stomeionova: there are many episodes of hate speech by politicians, which is why many Roma prefer to say they are Turkish in the census or in other surveys. None of the governments after democracy approved any significant act to really help Roma integration. Roma votes are bought during elections; every political party in Bulgaria does it; they have a structured scheme for that. The EU should exercise more control on the use of the funds received by Roma organisations, because many of them are corrupt.

- **Opinion on Mobile health units**

Elena Kabakchieva: mobile units provide only a basic service; the main problem is funding, as they cannot cover their running costs. It is a fine idea with a low efficiency rate. Roma who have an income sometimes do not pay taxes; they prefer to make a payment once and be insured. It is not easy to convince Roma to go to these mobile units. She also thinks that the planning of the mobile units does not consider the population's needs.

Ákos Topolánszky asked those present to name the recommendations or requests they consider to be the most important:

- **Final message to bring to Brussels**

Fight discrimination in the media - hate speech

Improve access by small NGOs to funding

Improve monitoring and control of funding that enters Bulgaria (problem of corruption)

Cut red tape in the procedure for accessing funds

Set up an independent equality body

Give the Roma more information about their rights

Improve employment opportunities and education

Ensure Roma have full access to services

Verification and impact assessment of spending; need for indicators

Need for social entrepreneurial skills

Establishment of social enterprises

Better salary for healthcare mediators

Need for a special fund to provide NGOs with resources for project preparation

ANNEX V

MOST IMPORTANT RELATED EESC OPINIONS

[SOC/489 Socio-economic integration of Roma](#)

[SOC/447 Roma citizens](#)

[SOC/397 Societal empowerment and integration](#)

[SOC/337 Intercultural dialogue and the Roma](#)

[SOC/263 Integration of minorities - Roma](#)

[SOC/408 The problem of homelessness](#)

[SOC/479 A more inclusive citizenship open to immigrants](#)

[SOC/411 Cooperation between civil society organisations and local and regional authorities in integrating immigrants](#)