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FAGIC'S REPORT:

SITUATION OF ROMA IN SPAIN AND CATALONIA – OVERVIEW OF WHAT HAS BEEN DONE AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The Federation of Roma Associations in Catalonia (FAGIC) is a non-profit non-governmental organisation, founded in 1991, which aims at the equal treatment and social inclusion of the Roma in Spain and in Europe. FAGIC federates fifty-eight Roma NGOs in the region of Catalonia, acting as a primary interlocutor with the regional and central public administrations, coordinating the activities and advising on management and organisational issues. Since its creation, FAGIC has been one of the most important actors, representing the over 80,000 Roma community in the Catalan region¹. FAGIC was created in response to the increasing number of associations with the objective of uniting and coordinating actions aiming at the promotion of the Roma culture, carrying out activities for the defence of our interests. Our main goal is to improve the policies and programmes that affect the Roma, drawing together the aspirations and concerns of our people and establishing a channel for communication between the Roma community and Catalan society.

Roma in Spain

Historically, the presence of Roma in Spain is dates back to the fifteenth century. The oldest historic document which mentions the Roma is from 1425, when King John II of Aragon granted a certificate of passing through the Pyrenees. John Thomas accounts of those who call themselves “*lower Egyptians*”, which gave birth to the word *gypsy – gitano*, a name still used

¹ According to Fundación Secretariado Gitano.

by the Spanish Roma. From that time on, the Roma scattered throughout the rest of the country.²

Today, according to the Ministry of Equality, “the estimated population of Spanish Roma is estimated between 650,000 and 700,000 persons, representing 1.6% of the total Spanish population”³, although NGOs in Spain give higher estimated numbers. The majority of Spanish Roma are sedentary and are distributed unevenly throughout the Spanish territory. The Autonomous Communities of Andalusia, Valencia, Madrid and Catalonia and large cities like Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Granada, Valencia, Zaragoza and Murcia are home to 70% of the Spanish Roma population. In the recent years, the migration flows of Roma from Eastern Europe has increased the Roma population in Spain and diversified it greatly.

Since the entry of the Roma into the Spanish territory, they have faced prejudice and discrimination, both from the population and from the authorities of the moment.

These are some of the discriminatory and assimilations’ policies implemented against the Roma in Spain throughout the history:

² www.unionromani.org/docgit.html

³ <http://www.migualdad.es/ss/Satellite?blobcol=urldata&blobheader=application/pdf&blobheadername1=Content-disposition&blobheadervalue1=inline&blobkey=id&blobtable=MungoBlobs&blobwhere=1244652152556&ssbinary=true>

- 4 March 1499, the First *Pragmatica* imposed by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand, the Catholic Monarchs against the Roma population in the state

- 1539 Charles’s *Pragmatica* dictated condemning Roma people to forced labor in the galleys

- 30 July 1749, the army of Ferdinand VI of Spain throughout Great Raid

detained and imprisoned some 12,000 people of Roma origin. Of these, over 40% died imprisoned.

- Since the reign of Elizabeth II to the 1978 Constitution Roma people had the obligation to carry appropriate documentation to prove their properties and transactions under charges of crimes against property.⁴

As a consequence of these discriminatory policies, the Roma have been pushed to the margins of the Spanish society. The *Pragmaticas* have forbidden the Roma to live according to their traditional nomadic lifestyle. The Catholic Monarchs also forbidden them to use their language – *Rromanes* – and throughout the centuries it has been lost. However, the Spanish Roma have conserved a variation of the *Rromanes*, known as the *Caló*, which combines the Spanish grammar with words that derive from *Rromanes*.

⁴ “Estudi sobre la població gitana de Catalunya. Informe final”, Generalitat de Catalunya 2006, http://oliba.uoc.edu/gitanos/images/stories/espai_documentacio/informes/info_est_pob_cat.pdf

The adoption of the Spanish Constitution in 1978, and of subsequent Statutes of Autonomous Regions, granted the Roma with equal rights as the rest of the population, assuming that the Roma living in the Spanish territory are in fact of Spanish nationality⁵.

Roma in Catalonia

According to different studies, it is estimated that there are between 55.000⁶ and around 80.000⁷ Roma living in the Catalan region. The population in Catalonia is more concentrated in industrialized areas and is located close to large cities. Thus, we find that the Roma population inhabits

especially the urban areas, like cities or larger towns, primarily around the metropolitan area of Barcelona.⁸

⁵ Article 14 of the Spanish Constitution: "*Spanish people are equal before the law without any discrimination on grounds of birth, race, sex, religion, opinion or any other condition or personal or social circumstance.*"

⁶ "Estudi sobre la població gitana de Catalunya. Informe final", Generalitat de Catalunya 2006, http://oliba.uoc.edu/gitanos/images/stories/espai_documentacio/informes/info_est_pob_cat.pdf

⁷ According to Fundación Secretariado Gitano.

⁸ "Estudi sobre la població gitana de Catalunya. Informe final", Generalitat de Catalunya 2006, http://oliba.uoc.edu/gitanos/images/stories/espai_documentacio/informes/info_est_pob_cat.pdf

But although the Roma live in Spain and in the Catalan region for more than 600 years, they are still in many ways facing obstacles in their everyday lives.

Discrimination

According to the study on the Roma in Catalonia, the primary barrier for the full integration of the Roma community is the still-persistent and ever-present racism and discrimination. According to different data, between 45,4%⁹ and 48%¹⁰ of the Roma at certain times feel discriminated against. This proportion translates into 215,000 Roma who say they suffered directly from discrimination.¹¹

The Roma are one of the most negatively evaluated groups in Spain. As proven by the latest barometer of the CIS, developed in November 2005, one in four Spanish would not like their children in class with Roma

⁹ "Report on Roma population and employment", Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2006,

<http://www.gitanos.org/publicaciones/estudioempleo/estudioempleofolletoUK.pdf>

¹⁰ "Estudi sobre la població gitana de Catalunya. Informe final", Generalitat de Catalunya 2006,

http://oliba.uoc.edu/gitanos/images/stories/espai_documentacio/informes/info_est_pob_cat.pdf

¹¹ "Report on Roma population and employment", Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2006, <http://www.gitanos.org/publicaciones/estudioempleo/estudioempleofolletoUK.pdf>

students and over 40% of Spanish consider that it would be very or quite annoying to have Roma as neighbours¹².

It is argued that the negative image that the Roma have among the general population is strengthened largely by the media, which still portray the Roma in a stereotypical and often pejorative way.

As a consequence of the still existing prejudice against the Roma, the cases of discrimination are encountered in all areas – education, housing, employment, health, etc. Recently, even the political scene has not lacked discriminatory statements. In April, the president of the Popular Party (PP) of Badalona had distributed pamphlets with the phrase “*we do not want Romanians*”, with the photos of Romanian Roma on the cover. The title of the pamphlet reads: “*Is your neighbourhood safe?*”¹³.

It must be noted that while it is true that not all Roma people find themselves in a situation of marginalization and poverty¹⁴, they all

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<http://www.gitanos.org/publicaciones/discriminacionGuiaAsoc/asociaciones-06.pdf>

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For more information:

<http://romanetwork.ning.com/forum/topics/conmotion-about-the>

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“The relative rate of poverty between the Roma population and the majority population in Spain is 5/1, according to the FOESSA report (1998), and the 51.6% of the Roma population that live in poverty fall into the category of grave or extreme poverty, while in the case of Spanish society as a whole the figure for those living in this category is 16.7%.”http://www.gencat.cat/governacio-ap/ACCIO_CIUADANA/DOCS-FORMULARIS/Pla_poble_gitano.pdf

experience social exclusion in the sense of living on the fringes of the dominant society and feel separate from and/or rejected by the majority.¹⁵

Housing

Housing is an important factor that contributes in the fight against social exclusion. Thus, it is important to analyze the housing conditions of the Roma and the urban layout of the districts inhabited by the Roma.

The Roma population in Catalonia have abandoned the nomadic lifestyle years ago. Today, most Roma in Catalonia live a sedentary life, mostly thanks to the social housing created by the government. It was found that 64,7% of apartments owned by the Roma are of social housing.¹⁶

This situation leads to the marginalization of the city districts inhabited by the Roma. As a result, these districts face problems such as drugs, delinquency and are considered ugly and dirty. The Roma themselves see this as a form of discrimination, considering that the government policies aim at marginalizing them, converting their districts into ghettos. In case of Barcelona, these districts are mostly peripheral, and often, poorly

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http://www.gencat.cat/governacio-ap/ACCIO_CIUADANA/DOCS-FORMULARIS/Pla_poble_gitano.pdf

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“Estudi sobre la població gitana de Catalunya. Informe final”, Generalitat de Catalunya 2006,
http://oliba.uoc.edu/gitanos/images/stories/espai_documentacio/informes/info_est_pob_cat.pdf

communicated with the rest of the city (for example La Mina, Camps Blancs, St. Roque, San Cosme, etc.) Many argue that the problems of social exclusion of Roma are caused by the segregation in housing, separating the non-Roma from the Roma and other vulnerable, mostly immigrant communities. Indeed, the difference in living conditions between the Roma and non-Roma remains significantly large. All of these factors contribute to the formation of the ghetto-like neighbourhoods that are inhabited by the Roma.

The Roma also point out that in housing they face direct discrimination – it is much more difficult for the Roma to obtain a credit in a bank, they also face hostile attitudes from their potential neighbours.

Although the regional government is implementing housing policies that enable the Roma to live in dignified conditions, there are still small Roma settlements where the Roma live in the barracks, without the access to basic services such as water or electricity. It is outrageous that in one of the richest regions of Spain there are Catalan Roma (Spanish citizens!) that live in such conditions. Such settlements can be found for example in Santa Perpetua de la Mogoda o Abrera.

These settlements are slowly being forcedly evicted into social housing. FAGIC is mediating in the process of eviction of a Roma settlement in Lleida. At The moment, there are at least 15 families that live in the

barrack settlement in Lleida. This is what the Roma settlements in Lleida look like:



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Photos by FAGIC.

It also must be noted, that the increasing number of Roma migrants from the Eastern Europe cause that these type of temporary barrack-like settlements are increasing in number. It is thus necessary for the local authorities to act in order to guarantee the minimum of human living conditions for these people which in their great majority are citizens of the EU.

Education

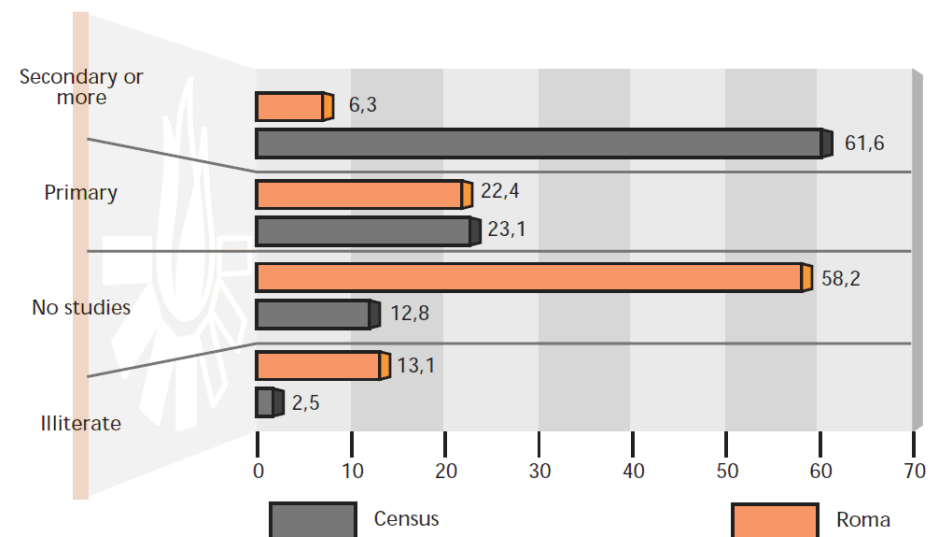
According to the data of the Ministry of Equality, 7 out of 10 adult Roma are completely or functionally illiterate¹⁸. More 58,2% of the Roma population in Spain have not completed any type of education (for the general population it is 12,8%)¹⁹. The percentage of Roma who have completed secondary education is minimal (6,3%), and the number of Roma who have completed higher education is even less.

One of the biggest problems faced, is the very high level of school drop-out and absenteeism. Although the education is obligatory for all until the age of 16, there are numerous cases of school drop out, generally at the age of 14 and mostly by the girls.

¹⁸

<http://www.migualdad.es/ss/Satellite?blobcol=urldata&blobheader=application/pdf&blobheadname1=Content-disposition&blobheadvalue1=inline&blobkey=id&blobtable=MungoBlobs&blobwhere=1244652152556&ssbinary=true>

¹⁹ "Report on Roma population and employment", Fundacion Secretariado Gitano, 2006, <http://www.gitanos.org/publicaciones/estudioempleo/estudioempleofolletoUK.pdf>



In order to improve the school attendance and performance of Roma pupils, there are various measures introduced, for example the compensatory education for the Roma with difficulties. Also, the figure of a Roma school mediator has been introduced in order to facilitate the

²⁰ "Estudi sobre la població gitana de Catalunya. Informe final", Generalitat de Catalunya 2006, http://oliba.uoc.edu/gitanos/images/stories/espai_documentacio/informes/info_est_pob_cat.pdf

dialogue between the school and Roma parents and pupils. The figure of the Roma school mediator generally has been evaluated positively; however, there are voices of critics that point out that this is an obstacle to full integration of the Roma pupils.

Discrimination is still persistent within the school environment. Often, the non-Roma parents do not want their children to share the classroom with Roma pupils and the rejection of Roma pupils by their non-Roma peers is very common.

It is also worth pointing out that although the Roma is the largest minority living in Spain, the school curriculums do not include any information about the Roma history or culture.

Employment

The Roma still face difficulties when entering the labour market. The great majority of Roma majority are less qualified– the low levels of education and fewer professional skills are an obstacle while searching for a job. Roma women are even more vulnerable in this sector. Sin doubts, Roma still face discrimination in the labour market - the negative image existing within the general society causes that the potential employers are not keen on hiring Roma.

The analysis offered by Roma people in Catalonia²¹ is that racism is the principal obstacle impeding their access to the job market, but at the same time, work is the principal need identified by the Roma people in Catalonia.

Due to these factors, the percentage of Roma working part time or on temporary contracts is much higher than among the general population.

It is important to stress that a very large percentage of Roma (almost 50%²²) are self employed, mostly as part of the family business. In Spain, one of typical Roma professions is peddling (street selling). In such family business, the employees are not subjected to the Social Security payments, thus their pensions and other social benefits are largely limited, contributing to the increasing marginalization and poverty of the Roma community in Spain.

It must be noted that during the current economic crisis, the Roma are more vulnerable than ever. Due to all the factors mentioned above, the Roma are first in line to be out of the job, and in many cases, due to their labour conditions, are not in position to demand unemployment benefits.

²¹ “Estudi sobre la població gitana de Catalunya. Informe final”, Generalitat de Catalunya 2006,

http://oliba.uoc.edu/gitanos/images/stories/espai_documentacio/informes/info_est_pob_cat.pdf

²² “Report on Roma population and employment”, Fundacion Secretariado Gitano, 2006,

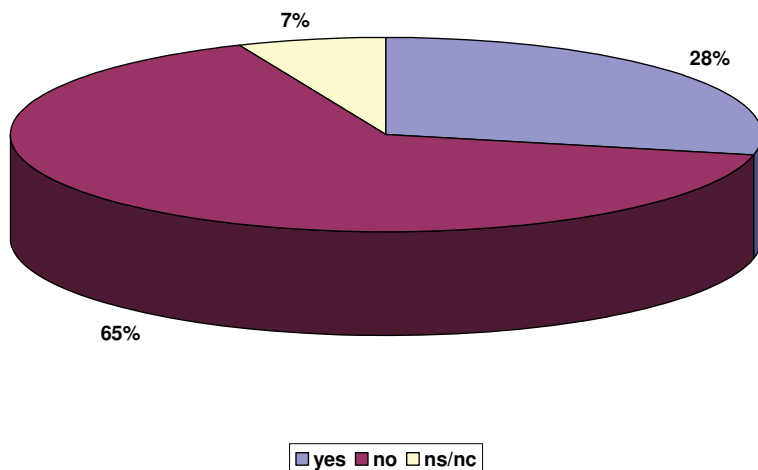
<http://www.gitanos.org/publicaciones/estudioempleo/estudioempleofolletoUK.pdf>

Participation and representation

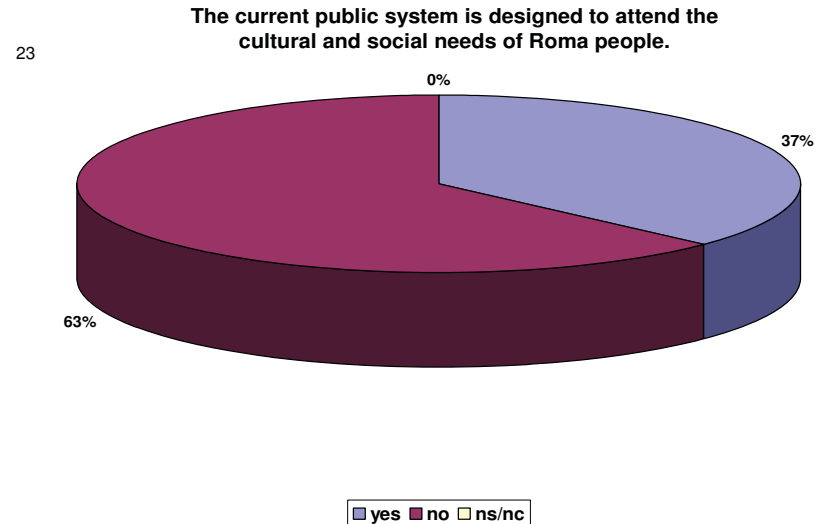
The Roma still face numerous obstacles in their full and effective participation in the political and social life. According to the study conducted by FAGIC, as part of the European project “Enhancing Roma participation”, financed by EACEA, the Roma feel underrepresented in the current public system.

A great majority of people feel that the current public system is not design to attend the cultural and social needs of the Roma people (63%). As for the political participation, the findings show that the current political system in Spain does not guarantee the participation of Roma in the decision-making process, and thus, does not answer the needs and interests of the

The current politics in Spain guarantees the participation of Roma in the decision-making process, answering to the needs and interests of the Roma people.



Roma people (65%).



Indeed, Roma are not present in the political scene in Catalonia, and thus cannot protect their own rights and interests during the decision-making process. The links between Roma civil society and political parties is greatly limited and there are few governmental spaces opened for debate, where Roma can make their voice heard.

The associative movement has been the most direct medium of Roma participation in the wider society. Thanks to the network of Roma organisations, the Roma population is more in step with society than ever

before, and may be in a position to contribute to the development of its networks of social relations and solidarity between members of the community.²⁴

ROMA IN CATALONIA – WHAT HAS BEEN DONE

The Autonomous Region of Catalonia has been pioneer in recognizing the rights and values of the Roma community within the Catalan society.

In 2001, the Catalan Parliament has adopted a historical Resolution which recognizes the Roma identity and culture. The Resolution 1046/VI states that the Catalan Parliament:

“1. Recognizes the identity of the Roma people and the value of their culture as a guarantee of the historic reality of this people.

2. Calls on the Government to take the necessary steps to contribute to promoting the recognition of the Roma culture and its value for Catalan society.”²⁵

This institutional act has led to the creation of a special governmental Commission in order to give a specific answer to the needs of the Roma people in the region.

²⁴ http://www.gencat.cat/governacio-ap/ACCIO_CIUADANA/DOCS-FORMULARIS/Pla_poble_gitano.pdf

²⁵ <http://www.parlament.cat/activitat/bopc/06b240.pdf>

After this institutional act of the Catalan Parliament, others followed.

The Organic Law 6 / 2006 on Reform of the Statute of Catalonia of 2006, Article 42.7 states *“The public authorities must ensure the social, cultural and religious coexistence in harmony among all people in Catalonia and respect the diversity of beliefs and ethical and philosophical convictions of individuals, and should promote intercultural relations through the promotion and creation of mutual awareness, dialogue and mediation. Also, should ensure the recognition of Roma culture as safeguard their historical heritage.”²⁶*

On March 29, 2007, the Catalan Parliament has agreed on a common Declaration, by which it recognizes the historical persecution of Roma people in Catalonia and Spain.

The Declaration states that the Catalan Parliament:

“Affirms and acknowledges that the Roma people living in the Spanish State, and particularly in Catalonia, have been victims of historical and persistent genocide.”²⁷

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<http://www.miguldad.es/ss/Satellite?blobcol=urldata&blobheader=application/pdf&blobheadername1=Content-disposition&blobheadervalue1=inline&blobkey=id&blobtable=MungoBlobs&blobwhere=1244652152556&ssbinary=true>

²⁷ <http://www.fagic.org/imagenes/declaracionES.pdf>

Additionally, the Parliament accepts its obligation to work for the recognition of the Roma culture and to eradicate all discriminatory actions and attitudes towards the Roma people.

Integral Plan for the Roma Population in Catalonia

These acts of political and institutional recognition of the Roma people in Catalonia, have led to the creation of the Integrated Plan for the Roma population in Catalonia.

As a result of the institutional recognition of the Roma culture as part of the culture of Catalonia by the Catalan Parliament in 2001, the government initiated specific actions. First, a study was elaborated by 2003 that intended to diagnose the problems of the Romani population in Catalonia. Secondly, a plan of measures known as the Integral Plan for the Roma Population in Catalonia was approved on 2 of November 2005.

The Integrated Plan for the Roma People in Catalonia has the objective of combating from a global perspective the situation of inequality suffered by the Roma population in Catalonia, in order to put them on the same socio-cultural and economic level as the rest of Catalan society, of which they form part, and at the same time to promote and recognize the distinctive features of their culture.

There are two lines of priority . On the one hand, the Plan aims at the Roma people to be able to improve their possibilities of access and promotion within the job market, access to housing, educational attainment and access to university, promotion of young people and women: transverse actuaciones that serve to raise the visibility of Roma people in all sectors of our society. On the other hand, to make it possible for the Roma people in Catalonia to conserve, develop, study and disseminate their culture and their language.

The key element in different phases of design, drawing up, application and evaluation of the Integral Plan was the direct participation and involvement of Roma people in various ways. It has also drawn on the involvement of thirteen departments of the Government of Catalonia, together with a number of leading organizations and institutions active in Catalan society, with important benefits for the implementation of the Plan.

To guarantee the presence of Roma during the implementation of the Integral Plan, a Roma People's Advisory Committee was established.²⁸

The principal functions of this organ are:

- *“To transmit the voice and views of the Roma people directly, formulating proposals and recommendations to the public authorities.*

²⁸ DOGC no. 4397, of 2 June 2005. http://www.gencat.cat/governacio-p/ACCIO_CIUTADANA/DOCS-FORMULARIS/Pla_poble_gitano.pdf

- *To report on the actuations carried out in the framework of the integral plans and of the public authorities in general.*
- *To propose new measures and actuations in order to respond to the circumstances and needs of the Roma people.*²⁹

At the same time the Directorate General of Community and Civic Actuations (DGACC) of the Department of Welfare and Family will set up an Office of Attention to the Roma People or a Catalan Institute of the Roma People in order to promote and manage the actuations envisaged in the Integrated Plan, and to facilitate coordination between the different departments in relation to the various projects under way. It also acts as a secretariat and provides the necessary technical and administrative support for the functioning of the Interdepartmental Commission and the Roma People's Advisory Committee.

To guarantee a better effectiveness of the implementation of the Integral Plan, numerous Working Commissions have been created, divided by different topics (education, employment, health care, housing, women, culture, etc.). These groups are mixed - composed of Roma and non-Roma and are interdepartmental.

²⁹ http://www.gencat.cat/governacio-p/ACCIO_CIUTADANA/DOCSFORMULARIS/Pla_poble_gitano.pdf

One of the most important and innovative factors of the Integral Plan is the guarantee that the voices and views of Roma people remain central to the development of the different actions and initiatives implemented within the Integrated Plan.

The Integral Plan for the Roma People in Catalonia has been initially drafted for the period 2005-2008. During that period, around 2.500.000€ have been spent annually³⁰.

After evaluating the four years of implementation of the Integral Plan during 2005-2008, the government has felt obliged to continue with programmes developed within the Integral Plan. Therefore, the integral Plan has been prolonged for the period 2009-2013.³¹ It is important to note, that the renewed Plan recognizes the term *Romani* (equivalent to the term *Roma* used in the European area), because “*this term identifies all Roma people beyond frontiers and political ideologies*³²”. It is fundamental, because the Roma in Spain call themselves “*Gitanos*” – the term used internationally has been rejected. This makes reference to the common origins and cultural heritage of all Roma.

³⁰ http://www.gencat.cat/governacio-ap/ACCIO_CIUTADANA/DOCS-FORMULARIS/Pla_poble_gitano.pdf

³¹ Within the same mandate of the Resolution of the Catalan Parliament 1045/VI.

³² “*Pla integral del Poble Gitano a Catalunya 2009-2013*”, Generalitat de Catalunya.

For the period 2009-2013, the Catalan Government has dedicated around 3.500.000€annually³³.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Numerously it was mentioned that while the Roma were Spanish citizens and therefore have the same rights and obligations as the rest of the population, and despite some considerable progress, there still remains a segment of rather vulnerable population. In this sense, it is true that there have been programmes and important decisions taken for the Spanish Roma, however fundamental concerns still remain the economic situation, employment, education, health and housing.

Numerous factors contribute to the fact that the Roma in Spain still face socio-economic difficulties and are one of the most vulnerable communities in the State. The living conditions, poor education and general marginalization of the Roma lead to the reproduction of negative stereotypes existing within the majority population. These factors also constitute, directly or indirectly, the main obstacles for full, effective and active Roma participation.

As a general recommendation, it was noted that there still exists the atmosphere of mutual distrust between the Roma (NGOs and leaders) and public administration institutions. Roma need to be recognized as equal and capacitated interlocutors for the decision-making bodies. In order to bring closer these actors, dialogue and regular contact needs to be seen as obligatory. Institutional and social recognition of positive Roma values is still a goal that has to be reached in the future. Such institutional declarations should be made present by all authorities, and the real effort to reach these goals should be made.

Confederation

One of the barriers identified is that small or local Roma organizations can not demonstrate their existence before large and well financed pro-Roma organizations (where the executive boards and members are not Roma) that have a monopoly on the Roma issues in terms of government financing etc. In this context, capacity building and training for the small Roma NGOs is extremely important.

There is a constant quest to find an organizational structure to respond to all needs and which would offer a unified voice to the Roma movement in Spain, so that the Roma can face their problems and demands more effectively and solidarity.

³³ “*Pla integral del Poble Gitano a Catalunya 2009-2013*”, Generalitat de Catalunya.

Thus, a creation of a future National Roma Confederation was proposed for discussion, as an institutional structure which would be open, democratic, participative and representative as well as independent. This proposal will be reaffirmed by discussion and consensus among all Roma associations.

In this regard, stressing support for the creation of the Confederation as a way to reach a unified vision of future actions and projects, be basis for cooperation and partnership between the Roma organizations all over the country and represent a common position before the government is seen as vital and necessary.

State Council for the Roma in Spain

The policies developed by the central government and the autonomous regional governments have taken a new turn with the approval of the Roma Development Plan 2006-2013 and the establishment of two reference bodies to represent Roma, such as the Institute of Roma Culture³⁴ and the National Council for the Roma in Spain, a consultative and advisory body of the Government of Spain.

Criticism has been made in relation to the National Council for the Roma in Spain. In theory, the ministries should consult the Roma Council for any matter that may affect the interest of the Roma people, but such consultations are neither mandatory nor binding. Rather, such consultation should be obligatory, and the opinions given by the Council should be binding, so that to guarantee that the needs and interests of the Roma are taken into consideration. Additionally, this organ does not dispose of any really competencies or powers, thus its possibilities for action are very limited. Another criticism concerns the composition of the Executive Board and its members. The presidency and the first vice-presidency are held by non-Roma representatives of the ministry. In the argument of the Roma, the National Council for the Roma should be composed only by the members of the Roma community. To guarantee that the Council represents only the interests of the Roma, and not those of the ministerial formations, the representatives of the government should not be part of the National Council for the Roma. Also, to guarantee full representativity and democracy of this organ, all Autonomous Regions of Spain should choose its Roma representative for the National Council (which currently is not the case).

Roma and political parties

The Roma population is not fully represented in political parties and thus is not sufficiently recognized in the current legal framework. It sees its

³⁴ <http://www.institutoculturagitana.es/>

possibilities for formal political participation as insufficient and difficult to reach. The Roma still do not participate directly in decision-making process nor exist as an effective lobbying body.

The possibilities for enhancing Roma participation within the structures of political parties were debated. It was stated that the traditional form of political participation of the Roma people is outdated. It is true that there are Roma – members of political parties which participate more or less actively in the political life, but their political participation does not represent directly the interests of the Roma community. Such people can bring into debate many issues which concern the Roma, but they are obliged to represent the interests of the political party as a whole, not those of any individual.

It is evident that there is a plurality of political views and perspectives among the Roma as there is within any other community. The question of whether a creation of a Roma political party would be effective and enable Roma direct participation in the decision making process remains a question and generates debate within the Roma community. However, ultimately the idea of creating a unique Roma party was rejected.

Media

One of the biggest obstacles in Roma participation is the persistent negative stereotype of Roma. The discrimination still very present in the majority society creates barriers that many times make political participation almost impossible. In this context, the media plays a very important role as an actor that can contribute to the process of enhancing Roma participation. It is a recognized fact, that the presence of Roma in the media is majorly in the context of crime and marginalization, whereas the news covering topics of positive values (such as Roma culture, flamenco etc.) are scarce. It is essential therefore, to influence the politics of the media to promote the positive image of the Roma.

Additionally, more visibility should be given to the activities of Roma NGOs, Roma individuals, action plans for Roma etc. This recognition can serve as a motor for future activities and projects and will certainly contribute to the improvement of the image of Roma in the media and among the non-Roma population.

Participation

Regarding the Spanish citizenship in general and more specifically with the Roma, it was noted that there is a gap between citizens and institutions, therefore, emphasis on making effort from both parties, citizens and

representatives of institutions to make the political participation more accessible. A constant dialogue between the citizens and institutions should be maintained at all times.

In a wider context, based on the negative results in the electoral numbers, some refer to a crisis in democracy. In this case, the problem is not the low electoral participation - the problem is political and social. Most citizens (Roma and non-Roma) are more absent in the political process, the participation and political commitment is very weak and the general interest in politics is decreasing. This phenomenon raises a question about the character of today's politics and the failure of participative democracy, in Spain but in many other European countries as well.

Language

Regarding the language of the Roma in Spain, *el Caló*, is not considered a language in itself but a dialect of *Rromanes*. *El Caló* is not officially recognized as a minority language to be protected by the Spanish state. Therefore, an institutional recognition and a special status among other minority languages in Spain are vital for the protection and promotion of this Roma dialect.

Final remarks

It was noted, that there is a need to create a national laboratory to make a rigorous and comprehensive analysis of the situation so that political reactions can be well designed.

Additionally, to encourage the exchange of information and the consequent contribution of experience and best practices of other countries and other regions (provinces), while the implementation of a good and healthy criticism in the sense of whether the Roma associations work effectively or need improvement.

It was found that certain Roma groups that are more sensitive and in greatest need. For example, the collective of young Roma, as most of the Roma population is composed of young people, they need positive action plans. Also women need special attention to facilitate their participation in all aspects of life.

Education was identified as an important issue to consider for promoting political participation of Roma. Education is the key not only to the integration of the Roma people, but ultimately the key to a democratic society. What is done for the education of our children will bring results as citizens' conscious of their rights and obligations.

Finally, participation in democratic life and consequently in politics, is not only one of the aspirations of a Roma citizen, but also one of the fundamental pillars for building democratic foundations of a society and a guarantee for its consolidation.



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