
Status report 2004



The Roma community in 2004



General elections were held in Spain in 2004. The Foundation made its proposals known to all of the parties represented in Parliament and took part in meetings addressing issues having to do with social policies. The party now heading the Government incorporated some of our measures specifically addressing the Roma minority into its platform, commitments that it has subsequently ratified at some forums and, if put into practice, could spell an important step forward for Spain's Roma community.

Some of these commitments are already being implemented: creation of the **State Council of the Roma People**, an advisory body at the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the drafting of the new **Roma Development Plan**, a set of initiatives that we hope to see implemented in 2005 and that contribute to improving the situation of the most disadvantaged.

Another of the challenges emerging during the course of this term is the **institutional recognition of the Roma minority** and this would finally be in compliance with the recommendations of international organisations on matters concerning the rights and protection of minorities. The third electoral promise was the creation of the **Romani Cultural Institute**, an aspiration of Roma organisations dating back some time, by which the State would promote, dignify and recover Roma culture not only for the benefit of this community but for the entire Spanish society.

While these initiatives foster hope, the present reality faced by a large proportion of the nearly 700,000 Spanish Roma remains difficult and a far cry from the standards of well-being and exercise of citizens' rights of the majority:

- Between 10% and 12% of Roma families still live in shanty towns or sub-standard housing, the very existence of which is a violation of the rights of those living there.
- Unemployment rates that are above the national average and a high percentage with precarious employment. The largest percentage of families living below the poverty line or in serious situations of exclusion.
- Early school dropout, a high illiteracy rate and lack of skills all stand in the way to the new generation's social advancement and their access to the labour market.

- Poor social image and discriminatory practices which making Roma the most rejected group of citizens.

The start of 2005 was marked by the regrettable events that took place in the town of Cortegana in the province of Huelva, indicative of negative attitudes towards Roma and an example of how easy it is for some events to turn into violent episodes of racism.

In this connection we are concerned with the slow progress being made in complying with European Directive 2000/43 on Equal Treatment prohibiting discrimination of persons based on their racial or ethnic origin. Although this Directive has been incorporated into our legal system, not enough is being done to implement the measures it envisages such as the creation of the Council for the advancement of Equal Treatment, legal assistance for victims of discrimination or the promotion of social awareness-heightening actions.

Roma throughout Europe

Over the last several years it has been the European institutions that have contributed the most to raising awareness as to the situation of exclusion and discrimination facing the Roma minority and it is also within the European context that initiatives are emerging to involve States in the implementation of more pro-active policies to remedy this situation and promote their participation.

- In November 2004 the European Commission published the **report** entitled **"The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union"** furnishing information on the current situation facing Roma in the 25 European Union countries and makes a series of recommendations to Member States with a view to advancing in the institutional recognition of the Roma minority, the incorporation of specific measures into the National Inclusion Plans, the development of studies furnishing reliable data for policy design, the implementation of measures envisaged in the Equal Treatment Directive, etc.

- Along these same lines, during the first months of 2005 **the Report by the Commissioner of Human Rights of the Council of Europe on the Situation of Roma** was released and called attention to the serious obstacles that persist in the majority of European countries to recognition of their fundamental rights and urges the European authorities and States to implement urgent measures to guarantee the human rights of those belonging to this minority group.

- Possibly one of the most important events was the **Resolution delivered by the European Parliament on the situation of Roma in the European Union** on 28 April 2005. This Resolution contains a long list of considerations regarding the situation of Roma and urges the Council, the Commission and the Member and Candidate States to adopt measures to combat discrimination and racism perpetrated against the Roma people and to develop social-economic and integration policies designed to palliate the situation and guarantee equal opportunity for this Community.

- Also in 2004, two relevant initiatives were launched to foster improvement in the conditions faced by Roma in the Central and Eastern European countries sponsored by the World Bank and the Soros Foundation and supported, inter alia, by the European Commission. On the one hand it focused on the **"Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015"** which includes the political commitment made by eight Eastern European countries to advance in the social inclusion of Roma, each one of the Governments establishing national objectives to improve the situation by 2015. The official launching of the Decade took place in Sofia (Bulgaria) on 2 February before a good representation of Prime Ministers and high-ranking officials of the governments involved. The most visible consequence of the Decade is the creation of a **Roma Education Fund**, based on the belief that education is a key element in social inclusion. However, this strong institutional support does not coincide with the weak economic

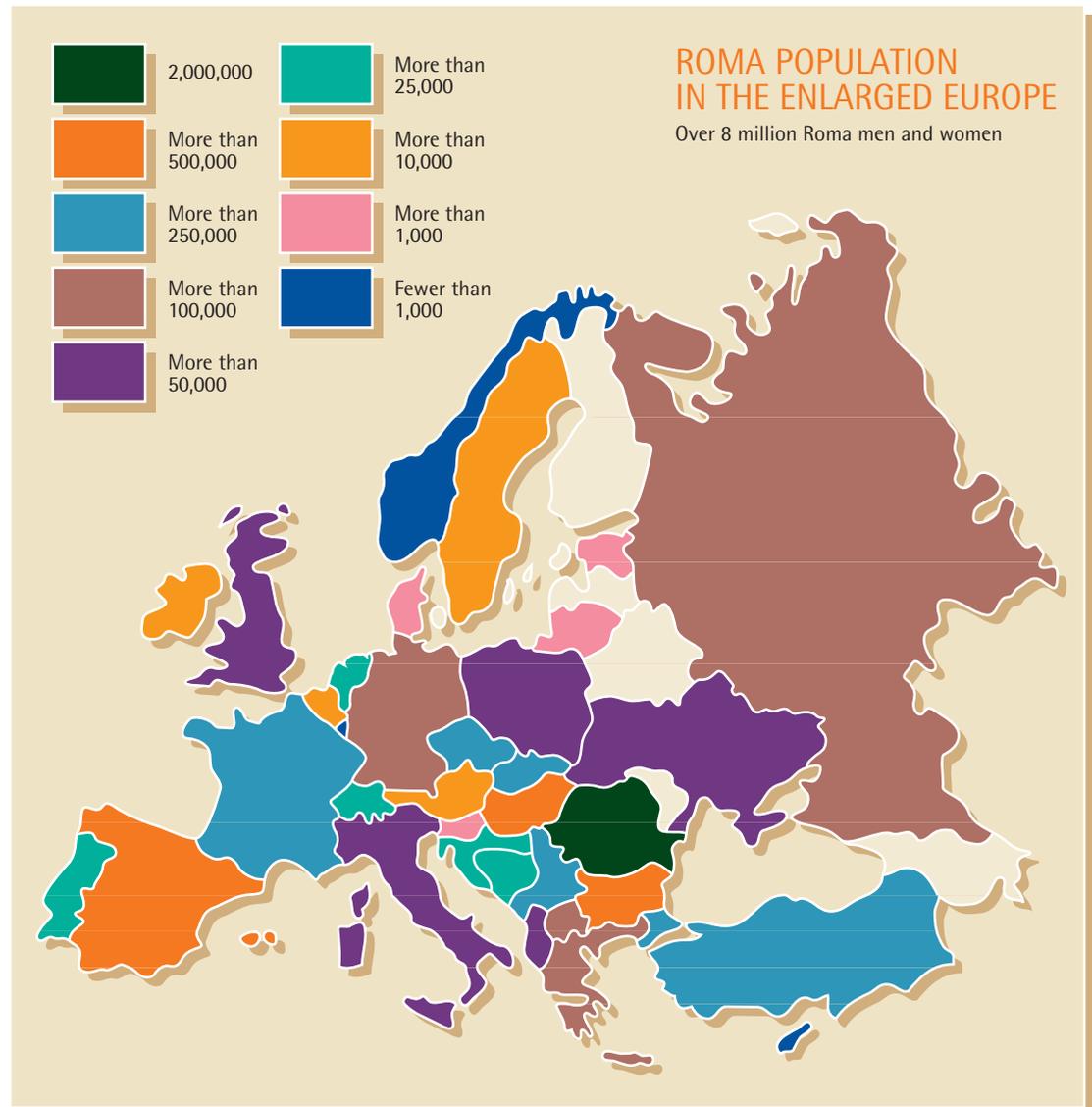




support at the donors conference (Paris, 2 December).

- As for fostering the participation of Roma in political life and in the affairs that affect their future as a people, the Council of Europe has fostered the creation of the **European Roma and Travellers Forum** as an opportunity for Roma and Traveller communities from all countries to participate and make their voices heard in the taking of European and national decisions.

Roma remains a non-priority issue on the Spanish Government agenda but it is gaining in importance within the European context. Addressing this situation in many cases requires urgent action but it especially requires clear political commitment and a middle-term strategy to make social inclusion a reality for Roma within the next several years.



Source:
Own production

The FSG in 2004

In 2004 the Fundación Secretariado Gitano had 58 centres located in 13 regions and carried out activities in 72 cities and towns. This year 11 new Foundation centres have been opened or commenced operation (Salamanca, Palencia, Cuenca, Talavera, Oviedo, Santiago de Compostela, Lugo, La Línea, Jaén, Jerez, Cáceres...). This nation-wide presence makes our Foundation a point of reference in the sector of social action with the Roma minority and allows it to promote innovative issues in a flexible and far-reaching manner in the majority of the regions (in the fields of employment, education, culture, inclusion plans, housing, health, etc.).

The majority of our activity is carried out through long-running action projects run with public funds from different administrations (European 45%, Spanish central government 12%, Spanish regional government 27% and local government 15%). In 2004 the Foundation carried out a total of 118 projects.

In order to maintain this rhythm of activity, the Foundation has a large staff (over 700 workers during some periods of the year) with a very stable and highly qualified and experienced core group of professionals totalling approximately 400 workers, 35% of whom are Roma and 57% women.

Highlights of our action in 2004

- **Awareness heightening focusing on our society.** To date, the actions implemented by the Foundation have basically addressed

Roma but a large number of the barriers standing in the way to the Roma Community's advancement today can be traced back to ignorance and the persistence of deeply-rooted stereotypes and a secular rejection and negative image that this society still has of Roma people.

In 2004 the FSG launched the **"Get to know them before judging them" Campaign** thus initiating a line of work that we will continue with in the future and the objective of which is the denunciation of this sort of rejection and making the Spanish society an ally in the advancement of Roma.

Television and radio spots, posters, events in the majority of the Spanish cities... have, for the first time, brought this message to the attention of over 7 million Spaniards.

- **Access to employment, the key to social incorporation.** The ACCEDER Programme, implemented by the FSG within the framework of the Anti-Discrimination Operational Programme of the European Social Fund (ESF 2000-2006), was recognised this year by the European Social Fund as an example of a best practice and, as such, is being viewed as a model that can be transferred to other countries with large Roma populations.

Thanks to **ACCEDER**, over 23,000 individuals have received training (over 200 courses), counselling or have benefited from work accompaniment and over 15,000 have found employment.

Year after year this initiative continues to prove the efficacy of employment access methodologies tailored to those persons who are disenfranchised and separated from the labour market. It also serves as a good example of how to use Structural Funds in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and the role that we as non-governmental organisations can play through the effective management of these initiatives.

- **FSG social action.** The Foundation's social actions throughout all of Spain in 2004 have benefited over 17,000 direct users through the different programmes that we carry out in different areas of social action and which are listed in this Report: Education (educational mainstreaming, compensatory, adult education), Health (drug abuse and HIV prevention, promotion of health habits), Youth and Minors (encouragement of youth participation, training initiatives), and Roma Women (social advancement and capacity building specifically addressing women).

Each year the Foundation makes a greater effort in the area of Housing. Social accompaniment initiatives designed for Roma families undergoing resettlement processes, actions fostering neighbourly relations and our participation in second-hand housing access programmes touched over 600 families in 2004.

These services that we lend in practically every corner of the nation clearly make us the most dynamic and active social organisation in terms of the social advancement of the Roma community in Spain.

- **The international dimension of the Fundación Secretariado Gitano.** European involvement has always been one of the FSG's aims given the European nature of the Roma minority and the concern on the part of institutions to eliminate discrimination, protect the rights of minorities and combat exclusion. The FSG has been participating on an ongoing basis in transnational projects for over a deca-

de now and has managed to put together a cooperation network with an array of partners from other social organisations and public bodies from seven different European countries.

We are currently carrying out initiatives in the field of Education (Socrates-Comenius and Gruntvig), Health (Phare Project "promotion of cooperation networks regarding drug abuse within the Roma community"), Youth and the fight against exclusion and other cooperation projects with countries such as Hungary, the Czech Republic and Russia.

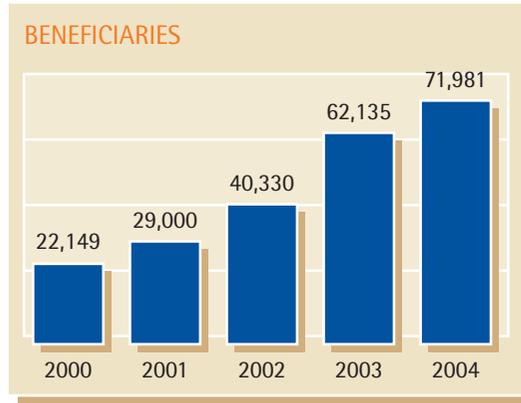
- **Political and institutional action.** The Foundation does not circumscribe its services to solely improving the living standard of Roma; a fundamental part of our activity focuses on awareness heightening and promoting more pro-active policies in favour of our Community.

The Foundation has drafted proposals and has held interviews with the main political parties running for the elections that were held in March; proposals which in one case, that of the party now heading the Government, were included in the electoral platform and regarding which a commitment has been made to address them during the course of the current term of office.

An aspect that we believe to be especially relevant is the progress made in the field of Equal Treatment and especially the creation of the Council for the Promotion of Equal Treatment. The FSG participates in and leads a working group in conjunction with the Spanish Red Cross, CEPAIM and ACCEM to monitor the development of Spanish legislation in this connection.

The FSG remains active among social organisations. We are members of the State Council for Social Action NGOs through which we participate in three working groups. We are also collaborating in the creation of the State Council of the Roma People which we hope will become a reality in 2005.





The beneficiaries of the social awareness-heightening campaign "Get to know them before judging them" do not figure in the tally

One of the Foundation's lines of work this year has focused on the establishment of collaboration agreements with different Ministries with a view to encouraging the development of measures focusing on the Roma Community within their scope of competence. In this sense, the Foundation has signed an agreement with the Ministry of Health for 2004-2008 which will foster measures to reduce health inequalities faced by the Roma population. Collaboration agreements are also under way with the Ministries of Education, Culture and Housing and are scheduled for signing during the course of 2005.

agreements were signed with over 100 governmental departments at all levels (local, autonomous community, national and European).

In general terms, the FSG makes an effort to collaborate closely with the different administrations and other social actors which translates into greater involvement of the latter in the development of measures addressing the Roma population over and above the mere financing of activities. In 2004 collaboration

• **Cooperation with other social organisations and Roma entities.** The FSG maintains its commitment to support the Roma associative movement based on the conviction that coordinated and responsible action of organisations in this area is a determining factor in the process of achieving our common goal; i.e. the advancement of the Roma Community. Permanent collaboration was established this year with 19 Roma associations from different Spanish towns and cities. This collaboration has been through three different programmes (Access to New Technologies, the Pre-labour Training Courses and the General and Social Interest Work Programme) thus contributing to the consolidation of these organisations and improvement in the quality of our activity.

