

Health

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Inadequate housing, deficient education, insufficient income, etc. all have an important bearing on health and are important factors determining the state of well-being and living standards of a population group living in a specific environment. In this sense, the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups exhibit characteristics making them susceptible to poor health. Other variables such as gender, age, ethnic background, social class or geographical area may also be **risk factors** when it comes to health.

It is safe to say that belonging to a minority ethnic group has a bearing on the emergence of specific health inequalities. In this case inequalities are not only rooted in socio-economic variables but also in access to health-care services and the effective use made of such services affected by poor adaptation of the latter or even discrimination. In this connection, if we bear in mind that a high percentage of the Roma population is in a situation of social exclusion or vulnerability, it should come as no surprise that the percentage of the Roma population affected by the lack of equality in health is also very relevant. Moreover, the Roma community as an ethnic and cultural minority, features a series of cultural elements which also have an influence over the state of health of its members and condition the way they react and behave when faced with disease.



Actions in the Area of Health are designed to improve the health and living standard of the Roma community and to reduce health inequalities. Greater insight into the health situation of the Roma community, the launching of active policies to compensate for inequalities in the area of health, consolidation of actions focusing on training the Community itself in prevention and health education and the training of health-care professionals and intercultural agents are the priority objectives of the Fundación Secretariado Gitano's Health Area.

In this regard, the following lines of action were implemented in 2007:

- › **Analysis and research.** Within the framework of the Collaboration Agreement signed with the Ministry of Health and Consumer Affairs in 2006, plans were made to conduct a study in order to collect more objective information regarding the health status of the Roma population. This would pave the way for work to enhance the health status and living standards of the Roma community while also boosting

active social policies to compensate the inequalities suffered by this Community in the area of health. The objective was not only to gain insight into the reality facing this population but more importantly to compare the data obtained with those of the Spanish population at large. To this end, in 2007 a report was compiled outlining the methodological design of the study and comparing the results with the National Health Survey. Also having regard to the report, a recommendation and intervention proposal document was drawn up with the help of experts in the field of health and the Roma community and professionals from Roma organisations throughout Spain. The preliminary conclusions of that document were presented in Valencia, Barcelona and Vigo.

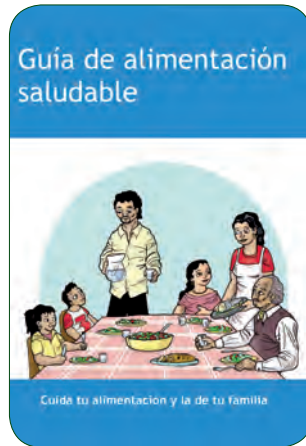
Along these same lines, in December 2007 the European project entitled “Health and the Roma community, analysis of the situation in Europe” got under way with European Union funding for the purpose of gaining insight into the health situation of Europe’s Roma community. This is a two-year project coordinated by the Foundation’s Area of Health involving organisations from Portugal, Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

» **Development of tailored materials.** Thanks to the support of the Ministry of Health and Consumer Affairs and the Health Department of the Castile-Leon Regional Government, three tailored materials targeting the Roma community were developed with a view to addressing the issue of capacity building among the Roma community in aspects relating to prevention and the acquisition of health habits.

- Nutrition handbook.
- Exercise and health handbook.
- Domestic accident prevention and driving safety handbook.

These materials were designed to support social-health professionals and all others working with the Roma community on health issues.

» **Technical assistance and advisory support actions.** The Area of Health has been engaged in ongoing technical assistance and advisory work with public and private organisations and institutions (at national and international level) and with the different offices of the Foundation regarding health intervention with the Roma community. Close to 600 actions have been undertaken in this connection in 2007 – dissemination of technical documentation and materials published by the Foundation, information on specific aspects relating to health and



PARTICIPANTS IN THE “TRAINING COURSE FOR HEALTH AND ROMA COMMUNITY MEDIATORS”

the Roma community, support in project management, etc.

Training and awareness-raising actions targeting field professionals.

A number of different seminars and conferences have been held throughout the year designed to raise social-health professionals' awareness of the Roma community and health and to provide these professionals with strategies and tools which are tailored and adapted to work with the Roma community. In October the yearly Madrid conference on "Training for field professionals working with Roma adolescents and youth" was held and in December the city of Vigo hosted the seminar entitled "Roma Community and Health-care Services". And Valladolid hosted the "Training Course for Health and Roma Community Mediators" in November. Close to 100 professionals participated in training sessions organised by the Area of Health (teachers, mediators, physicians, social workers, medical assistants, youth empowerers, etc.).

Health promotion actions. Direct intervention with the Roma community aimed at awareness-raising, capacity-building and the acquisition of health habits has been on the rise over the last several years. Today group actions and/or individual interventions are carried out with children,



youth and adults in most of the territories where the Foundation is operating.

Drug addiction prevention actions. The *Romano Sastipen* Programme has continued to develop in 2007 in conjunction with the National Drugs Plan. This programme, implemented in 26 territories throughout 10 Autonomous Communities, seeks to support the development of prevention and care initiatives adapted to the Roma population, to enhance protection and decrease the risk to which Roma minors and youth are subjected and to facilitate Roma's access to mainstream drug dependency resources. A total of 111 activities involving 1,316 Roma children, adolescents and youth were implemented through the Programme in 2007. Also, as mentioned in the foregoing, two seminars were organised for professionals working in the social-health field on prevention with the Roma population.

Prevention and awareness heightening actions within the Roma population with respect to HIV-AIDS. In collaboration with the National Plan to combat AIDS, a number of actions were carried out to promote general health among the Roma community and to specifically prevent the transmission of HIV-AIDS. Specifically, actions have been undertaken through the "HIV/AIDS Roma population awareness-raising and empowerment programme" to inform, educate, combat myths, counsel and raise the awareness of youth and adults regarding HIV/AIDS in 22 territories in 9 Autonomous Communities. A total of 727 minors, 1,237 young people and 452 adults (both men and women) benefitted from this initiative.