

# Advancement of Roma culture



EXHIBIT "SHARING CULTURES. ROMA TODAY".

FSG actions to promote culture seek to make Roma culture visible in society.

The Roma people arrived to Spain after a long and tortuous trip dating back to the 11th century in India. After making their way to other European countries, they entered the Iberian Peninsula in the 14th century. Their presence here is documented in the year 1425. In Zaragoza on 12 January of that year King Alfonso V, the crowned monarch of Aragon, signed a safe-conduct pass authorising Juan de Egipto Menor, the first known Romani in the Iberian Peninsula, to travel throughout the kingdom.

Despite nearly 600 years of co-existence, we cannot claim that the Roma integration process has been satisfactory. The fact is that the history of Spanish Roma is plagued with persecution, despise and misunderstanding. Ever since the time of their arrival to the Iberian Peninsula, Roma have endured only rejection and marginalisation at the hands of the majority society which has enacted laws and provisions to try to assimilate them into the majority society or political regime.

Their condition as a nomadic people and the marginalisation they have endured down through the ages has led to a great deal of cultural diversity between different groups of Roma in Europe and in Spain. However, this has not kept them from sharing a series of common characteristics as Spanish Roma,



EXHIBIT ENTITLED “ROMA WOMEN PARTICIPATING”.

product of their clinging to tradition to keep their identity intact in light of that situation of rejection.

Roma culture is unknown to the majority society which has only stereotyped and prejudicial notions but is not aware of all of the contribution it has made to shared acquis.

For this reason (and others) it is important to recognise and celebrate the existence of Roma culture. A people’s cultural past and present is the best tool to eliminate stereotypes and achieve full incorporation into society. That is why the work done by the FSG in promoting Roma culture focuses on:

- } *“Fostering knowledge of Roma culture”*.  
 This knowledge can then be used as an integrating element to transmit positive images and disseminate their contributions while making manifestations of Roma culture visible in different areas so that the Roma and non-Roma communities are able to gain

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greater insight into this culture and value it. This is in addition to drawing attention to Roma cultural elements that exist in Spanish traditions. Spain is an example of both failed co-existence and success stories and neither should be forgotten.

- } *Promoting the visibility of the Roma culture and enhancing the image of the Roma people.* Culture is a tool whereby to highlight essential and positive elements of Roma ethnicity to contrast with stereotypes related to social situations and the aesthetics of poverty.
- } *Promoting cultural capacity-building within the Roma community.* The Roma community should be the one to take charge of the production and investigation of its culture. A capacity-building effort needs to be made so that they can lead and enrich it.
- } *Stimulating Roma cultural production.* This means developing projects to facilitate cultural production in general ranging from traditional fields such as flamenco in all of its different aspects to any other type of cultural manifestation.

In this area of cultural promotion, the main actions in 2009 were:

- **Empowerment of the exhibit “Culturas para compartir. Gitanos Hoy”**

**(Sharing Cultures. The Roma Today).**

This permanent teaching exhibit is housed at the Adalí Calí Social-labour Centre in the Vallecas neighbourhood of Madrid. The main purpose of the exhibit is to confirm the full citizenship of the Spanish Roma community by revealing, especially to the school community, its history, culture and current reality. Through the 12 theme-based areas featuring texts, images and objects, children, adolescents and adults alike can find information on the history and current situation of the Roma community focusing on its traditions and culture: didactic panels, images and short texts inviting visitors to take part in activities such as the map puzzle, the music corner, story-telling and the consultation area with a small sample of materials, literature, magazines, etc.

In addition to the permanent exhibit in Vallecas, we have two travelling replicas which are lent out to organisations, schools, libraries, cultural and social centres, etc. for different events. Some of the territories also have similar replicas used as a support tool for cultural dissemination activities.

The exhibit comes with a teaching guide which contains some methodological guidelines designed as an educational resource for teaching professionals and can be used as support material for the development of any type of content, especially on the topic of values education and interculturalism. Flyers on the awareness-raising campaigns carried out by the FSG on Roma culture are also distributed.

Approximately 2,500 people have visited one of our exhibits: the permanent one (located at FSG headquarters in Vallecas, Madrid) and



POSTER FOR INTERNATIONAL ROMA DAY 2009

the travelling one which is taken around to the rest of Spain.

- **Empowerment of the exhibit entitled “Roma women participating”.** This exhibit focuses on the participation of Roma women in society. This FSG resource is used all around Spain at events and cultural initiatives related with the Roma community, interculturalism or human rights.

Recently, the exhibit has been frequently used at fora, meetings and celebrations focusing on women.

- **Publication of the magazine entitled “Gitanos. Pensamiento y Cultura” (Roma, Thought and Culture).** This is a bimonthly publication which disseminates, informs and raises awareness with regard to the experiences, resources, history, culture and other aspects having to do with the Roma community. [For further information see the “Communication and image” section].

- **Publication of materials related to Roma culture.** The cookbook compiled by



PERFORMANCE BY LOS CHICHOS AND LOS CHUNGUITOS AT THE APRIL 8TH CELEBRATION IN VALLECAS.

the FSG in Valladolid and videos entitled “Roma Expression” and “Past Times” done by the FSG in Barcelona.

- **Resources and services of the FSG’s documentation centre.** This is an information and reference centre for use by other institutions and researchers taking part in different initiatives. It specialises in subjects relating to the Roma people (history, culture, reports and sociological studies, etc.). [For further information see the “Documentation and Publications” section].

- **Institutional relations with cultural organisations** such as libraries, cultural

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centres, community centres, NGOs, associations, etc. Referrals are made to many of these by FSG staff who are constantly working in collaboration with these types of organisations.

- **Actions at schools and other organisations.**

Cultural programmes and activities revolving around song and dance (bulerías), percussion and story-telling targeting children and adolescents at several FSG

centres. Organisation of a series of seminars, courses and meetings which have become reflection and debate fora such as the youth meetings held in different provinces and towns on intercultural mediation and education or specific topics regarding Roma culture. [For further information see the “Youth and Education” sections.]

- **Promotion of the main Roma celebrations.** Over the last several years the FSG has developed and progressively consolidated the celebration of cultural events in the different Autonomous Communities where it works. Gradually, this has given visibility to the Roma culture and promoted its incorporation into the cultural acquis of several Autonomous Communities and municipalities.

The FSG has promoted and actively participated in the commemoration of Roma Day in the different Autonomous Communities and the April 8th festivities in all of Spain (International Roma Day).