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The Spanish
Roma population
The transformation



Gaining access to the labour market is the gateway to social inclusion and equal opportunity

There are approximately 700,000 Spanish Roma out of a total of nearly 45 million inhabitants. The situation of the Roma community has changed considerably over the last 30 years; more than during the five centuries they have been living in Spain. This is mostly due to an across-the-board improvement in living standards in Spain and especially because the Roma population has benefited from the universal nature of the Welfare State. However, in order to achieve this improvement in standard of living it was necessary to set up positive mechanisms guaranteeing de facto access to their legally recognised rights.

The issue here is more than a group of individuals with low income levels facing difficulties integrating into the labour market or with needs in key areas such as housing, education and employment. We are referring to people who form part of Europe's principal ethnic minority (over 9 million) as well as Spain's for whom recognition and promotion of their culture, the direct and indirect discrimination they suffer, the negative social image and the scant awareness that the society at large has of this community are all vital issues which have never been seriously addressed.

It is no less evident, however, that the Roma population continues to suffer from high levels of rejection from today's Spanish society and is one of the most socially and economically excluded groups. Despite the fact that, generally speaking, members of the Roma community share a series of

common characteristics allowing for mutual recognition, we should note that this community is also characterised by its heterogeneity and diversity.

A significant number of Roma today encounter difficulty gaining access to employment and vocational training and this is one of the main causes of inequality and social exclusion. The decline of their traditional professions and activities together with their lack of qualifications has contributed to their being banned from the labour market. The prejudice and stereotypes with which the majority society has stigmatised the Roma has also had a negative influence on this situation.

The gap between the Roma population and the labour market is a key aspect contributing to a scenario of social discrimination and therefore, in keeping with the importance afforded this issue by the European Employment Strategy and the European Social Inclusion Strategy, the Fundación Secretariado Gitano dedicates a large proportion of its efforts to addressing this problem.

That explains why priority is given to labour market integration in promoting the social integration of the Roma community and this integration should not be limited to support for Roma in improving their employability but should also envisage the elimination of red tape and barriers standing in the way to access to training and paid employment so as to effectively uphold the equal opportunities principle.

“It gave me a solid background and I am especially grateful for the counselling I was given in finding salaried employment and striking out on my own as a self-employed person”

Adolfo García. Sales representative for a work clothes outlet. Madrid.

Adolfo is 36 and lives in Madrid. He first took part in the Acceder programme in 2001 and has always been an industrious person willing to learn and take advantage of the opportunities that come his way in a process of constant self-improvement. He has undergone various training courses, has gained experience in different companies as a salaried worker and has launched several projects as a self-employed worker. He is currently a sales representative for a work clothes outlet.

