

# » Presentation

---

T

he first Nation-wide meeting of the Fundación Secretariado Gitano was held at the end of March 2009 in Alicante under the slogan *Renewed enthusiasm and engagement*. There we managed to bring together a major part of our staff - over 400 Foundation workers - in what was one of the milestones in the history of the Secretariado Gitano.

As we had the opportunity to see there in an audiovisual prepared for the occasion, the Secretariado, this huge family, has a history spanning several decades - *over 25 years of history* - engaging hundreds of people who have played a very active role. Many of them have taken other professional paths but have carried with them a seed, in the form of their particular sensitivity to the *Roma issue*, which they will plant in their different posts and professional environments.

A good example of this is the former director of our Foundation, José Manuel Fresno, who since 2009 has been the President of the recently constituted Council for the Advancement of Equal Treatment and Non-discrimination Based on Racial or Ethnic Origin, a body for which the FSG and other organisations have been clamouring for quite some time and in which we have high hopes in terms of combating discrimination against Roma.

As was evident at the Nationwide Meeting of the FSG, our organisation is alive and committed to our organisation's mission. The drafting of the new *2009-2013 Strategic Plan* was an opportunity to strengthen this commitment and define the objectives we plan to achieve during this period which lies ahead. This is our way of defining the next steps to be covered and the new challenges we are facing.

In 2009 we should highlight the consolidation of work within the framework of the new Acceder Programme for 2008-2013; a huge project in which the European Social Fund has once again placed its trust in the efficient work undertaken by NGOs. We should mention that the noticeable decrease in the amount European Structural Funds earmarked for this new period has been offset by the significant support provided by the Ministry of Health and Social Policy

through the concession of a new programme to our organisation for a total of one million euros allocated from Income Tax revenues.

In accordance with our Strategic Plan which places education at the centre of our initiatives, we have begun to implement our *Promociona* programme. The name "*Promociona*" stands for all of the initiatives carried out in the field of education with the overarching goal of having an impact on the educational situation of the Roma community over the next six years and to specifically make headway in reducing the early school leaving rate of Roma children.

This important issue will also be the focus of our new social awareness-raising campaign which we have been working hard to prepare in 2009 and which will be presented in the Autumn of 2010. In addition to raising awareness and improving the social image of Roma as in earlier campaigns, on this occasion we also seek to have a direct impact on the responsibility of Roma families regarding the education of Roma children and youth as they represent the future of the Roma people.

It must not be forgotten that in 2009 the effects of the global economic crisis have been particularly dramatic, especially as concerns the spectacular rise in unemployment which has had a particularly devastating effect on the Roma population. To tackle these effects we proposed measures to bolster training, basic family services and more intensive work with the business sector. We are happy to be able to say that this work has borne fruit and, despite a downturn in labour market integration achieved through the *Acceder* Programme, we have continued to sign work contracts for our users proving that our network of offices in most Spanish cities is contributing to softening the impact that the crisis is having on many Roma families.



I NATIONWIDE MEETING OF THE FSG

Despite this crisis situation, 2009 has been a year of growth for the FSG and our services have grown accordingly: we opened two especially emblematic centres in Valencia and the Basque Country.

In light of its huge symbolic value, mention should also be made of the historic judgement handed down by the European Court of Human Rights in favour of M<sup>a</sup> Luisa Muñoz known as "*La Nena*" in a case concerning her widow's pension. The FSG has supported this case since its initiation almost a decade ago.

And finally, speaking for myself and on behalf of the FSG Board of Trustees, I would like to express our gratitude for the support received from all of the organisations and institutions which have backed and supported the Foundation's different activities and programmes and extend a very special thanks to our team which makes all of this possible on a daily basis.

**Pedro Puente Fernández** / President