

# ▶▶ Health

The social circumstances into which a person is born, grows up, lives and grows old have a bearing on health. Belonging to a particular ethnic group, social status and one's surroundings are determining factors for health and life expectancy.

In the case of the Roma community, social conditions have generally been worse than those of the majority population, especially in terms of education, housing, economic resources and scant social and political participation. Although it was plain to see that the health situation of the Roma population was also worse than that of the majority population, this fact was practically unknown due to a lack of studies and research.

The invisibility of Roma has been a constant over time. To date, a group of roughly between 500,000 and 700,000 people (exact numbers are unavailable due to a lack of official registration) in Spain have been invisible to a public services system which, despite being universal, still has to develop its attention to diversity.

In 2006, the then Ministry of Health and Consumer Affairs and the Fundación Secretariado Gitano conducted the **first National Health Survey of the Roma population** with the specific aim of obtaining a diagnosis of the health status of Spain's Roma Population and detecting health inequalities affecting this community. The survey was conducted thanks to a collaboration agreement between the Ministry of Health and Consumer Affairs and the Fundación Secretariado Gitano in 2003 (2003-2008) with a view to improving the health and living standards of the Spanish



INAUGURATION OF THE NATIONAL SEMINAR ENTITLED "TOWARDS HEALTH EQUALITY, REDUCING INEQUALITIES WITHIN A GENERATION"

Roma community and promoting more active social policies to compensate for inequalities between the Roma community and Spanish society as a whole.

In 2009, after analysing the data collected in the survey, a document was published entitled *Hacia la equidad en salud. Disminuir las desigualdades en una generación en la comunidad gitana. Estudio comparativo de las Encuestas Nacionales de Salud a población gitana y población general de España 2006* (Towards health equality; reducing inequalities within a generation in the Roma community, a study of national health surveys comparing the Roma population to the overall population in Spain), mainly showing that the Roma community is particularly vulnerable to the effects of certain social factors on health, that health indicators paint a bleaker picture of the Roma Community compared to the overall population and, in some cases, even compared to groups in vulnerable social and economic situations, and that the health of Roma women is worse than that of Roma men and Spanish women in general.

With a view to disseminating the results of the survey and to raising the awareness of the different key stakeholders in the health-Roma community binomial regarding the situation of inequality suffered by the Roma community,

a seminar entitled “Towards Health Equality, reducing inequalities within a generation” was held on 28 April at the conference hall of the Ministry of Health and Social Policy. The seminar was inaugurated by Trinidad Jiménez, Minister of Health and Social Policy, Pedro Puente, President of the Fundación Secretariado Gitano and Antonio Vázquez, Vice-president of the State Council of the Roma People. 150 professionals from public and private organisations from all over Spain took part in the seminar.

Of the Seminar’s main conclusions, special mention should be made of the need to implement specific actions designed to reduce and subsequently eradicate the situation of inequality suffered by the Roma population in the area of health bearing in mind that, while the public authorities are responsible for eliminating obstacles standing in the way to health equality, all stakeholders must work together to solve the problem.

In parallel with the study conducted in Spain in 2009, work continued on the **European project “Health and the Roma community, analysis of the situation in Europe”** which, financed by the European Commission’s Directorate-General for

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Health and Consumer Protection and based on the experience gained in Spain, has been instrumental in the collection of data on the health status of Europe’s Roma population, the identification of real needs and the establishment of priority actions.

This project began in 2007 and ended in November of 2009 with the publication of the document *Health and the Roma Community, analysis of the situation in Europe; Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain* featuring a comparative analysis of the health status of the participating countries’ Roma populations and a chapter with recommendations for the key players in the health-Roma community binomial. The report also contains an annex with a summary of the results from each of the surveys conducted in the participating countries. On 1 and 2 April the international seminar entitled “Health and the Roma Community, analysis of the situation in Europe” was held at the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs as the closing act of the European project. 126 representatives of public and private organisations from 11 European countries took part in that seminar where, in addition to presenting the main results of the project,



PARTICIPANTS AT THE INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR  
“HEALTH AND THE ROMA COMMUNITY,  
ANALYSIS OF THE SITUATION IN EUROPE”

discussions revolved around the measures needed to eradicate widespread inequality suffered by the Roma population in the area of health.

In addition to studies and research, **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 individual intervention are carried out with children, youth and adults in most of the territories where the Foundation is operating.

The *Romano Sastipen* Programme has continued to develop in 2009 in conjunction with the National Drugs Plan. This programme, implemented in 24 locations throughout 9 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. In 2009 a total of 1,763 people (mostly Roma adolescents and young people) have benefited from programme actions.

Also thanks to support from the National Drugs Plan, a capacity-building seminar was held for

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Foundation professionals undertaking actions to prevent drug abuse. In December the seminar entitled "Development of personal competences and skills among Roma adolescents" was given to 22 professionals.

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. Concrete 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 20 locations throughout 10 Autonomous Communities. A total of 1,947 people benefited from these initiatives, the majority Roma of all ages.

The Area of Health has also 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. More than 500 actions were undertaken in this connection in 2009 – dissemination of technical documentation and materials published by the Foundation, information on specific aspects relating to health and the Roma community, support in project management, etc.

