

» International

Over the last several years we have witnessed how the *Roma issue* has been included on national, EU and EU institution agendas as a relevant topic. One of the reasons for this is that Roma communities are suffering violent and xenophobic attacks in some European countries where the racist discourse of extremist parties can be heard.

The Roma minority in Europe totals approximately between 10 and 12 million, many of whom live in situations of exclusion and continue to suffer from unstable living conditions and restricted access to fundamental rights such as education, health-care, housing, employment and others.

It was in this context that the EU Platform for Roma Inclusion saw the light in 2009, a European Commission initiative which seeks to bring together the major players involved in

the social inclusion of the Roma population: European institutions, national governments, experts and Roma representatives. Under the auspices of the Czech Presidency of the EU, the first meeting of the Platform was held in Prague where *10 Common Basic Principles* were identified and approved and, while these do not constitute a binding instrument, they do serve as a benchmark for Member States in the implementation of actions leading to the social inclusion of the Roma population.

Also within the framework of the EU, 2009 saw DG Regional Policy's growing commitment to the social inclusion of the Roma population through new and interesting initiatives, the growing weight of Structural Funds as the main European economic instrument for social inclusion, the dynamic role of the European Parliament and the contribution in the form of analysis and data on the Roma population

from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights through its housing and migrations studies.

As provided in the *FSG 2009-2013 Strategic Plan*, the international dimension is gaining more and more weight in the actions and development of our organisation and is engaging more departments and territories in the intense international activity we carry out.



INAUGURATION OF THE EUROMA MEETING (MADRID, FEBRUARY 2009).

THE FSG'S LINES OF WORK

The FSG has been working for over 15 years to incorporate a European vision into its activity by taking part in transnational projects and initiatives. The main actions undertaken have always been closely linked to the activities implemented in Spain and the capacity, experience and value added we can contribute to the European context.

Within this framework of activity, the FSG's main lines of international action in 2009 have been:

- } The empowerment and promotion of the EURoma Network through the FSG's coordination of the Technical Secretariat within the framework objective of participating in and fostering European networks and platforms to encourage the sharing of experiences and work methodologies and mutual learning;
- } The transfer of the *Acceder* training and employment programme to Romania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, representing a new challenge for our organisation insofar as goal-oriented actions in other countries are new to the Foundation. A firm commitment has been made, especially in the case of Romania where the FSG is expected to become increasingly present and active and, to that end, we have created the figure of a Permanent Representative there;
- } The implementation of projects in collaboration with other institutions or entities mostly to develop advisory and technical assistance activities targeting key players with a view to providing support and sharing our know-how with public

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administrations, NGOs and other social organisations working to improve the situation of the Roma population;

- } International institutional activity with active presence and participation in European events sharing our experience and know-how for the development of new initiatives and, in short, trying to influence the European political agenda.

THE EUROMA NETWORK

These lines of action translate into specific projects: One of the FSG's priorities has been to boost the EURoma Network (*European Network for the Social Inclusion of the Roma population within the framework of the Structural Funds*) acting as its Technical Secretariat. This joint initiative, between the Spanish Government (Administrative Unit of the European Social Fund - Ministry of Labour and Immigration) and



the FSG, was launched in 2007 and now has 12 Member States on board plus support from the European Commission.

The aim of this initiative is to promote the use of Structural Funds for the social inclusion of the Roma population through a more efficient use of the funds and, to that end, Network partners are from two different sectors of the public administration: the Administrative Units of the European Social Fund and the organisations responsible for policies affecting the Roma population.

In order to achieve its proposed objectives, the Network has a Management Committee, theme-based working groups focusing on employment, education and social inclusion and the Technical Secretariat run by the FSG and responsible for empowering and launching activities, organising actions and both internal and external communication.

In 2009, the Management Committee held scheduled meetings in two Network member countries, Hungary (May) and Sweden (September). There the partners exchanged information on the development of actions and policies in their respective countries, planned the activities of the Working Groups and discussed subjects of common interest such as the Social Inclusion Plans and their ties with European financial instruments. Progress was likewise made in reaching a common position regarding the need to collect ethnic data on actions financed with the Structural Funds with a view to implementing policies more closely tailored to the reality and needs of each country.

The three Working Groups also met to delve deeper into specific subjects. The Education

Group analysed different proposals on how to combat the segregation of Roma children in the educational system taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the Structural Funds; the Employment Group did a study visit to gain greater insight into a project identified as a best practice, i.e. the *Acceder* access to employment programme run by the FSG; lastly, the Social Inclusion Group progressed on how to enhance administrative capacity when implementing projects using these funds for the social inclusion of the Roma population and identified coordination mechanisms and monitoring actions used in each of the Member States.

These meetings not only allow for the sharing of experiences and different methodologies between Network partners but also serve as a forum for the creation of knowledge and the production of materials and tools whose purpose is to increase the impact of Structural Funds targeting the Roma population. All of these materials can be found on the Network's web page at www.euromanet.eu, a very useful internal and external communication tool along with the EURoma e-bulletin available in English and Spanish which is becoming a model in Europe as a source of documentation and news.

ACTIVITY IN ROMANIA AND BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The main activity carried out in Romania in 2009 was the transfer of the *Acceder* model to 8 Romanian cities within the framework of the *Împreună pe piața muncii* programme (Together in the labour market) which commenced work on 1 November 2008 and is led by the National Agency for the Roma (ANR) with the participation of the FSG as a transnational partner.


The appointment of a new coalition Government in Romania following the December 2008 elections and its subsequent decline and motion of censure followed by presidential election in November-December 2009 have notably delayed project activities this year.

Despite these setbacks, the experts of the Central Team and the 8 Regional Teams were selected and several offices have been rented. The rest of the activities are expected to get under way at the beginning of 2010.

Work has continued on the translation and adaptation of the tools to the Romanian context and context analyses have been conducted at national and regional level as concerns the labour market situation of the Roma community in each area.

In April the formal process was initiated for the creation of a Romanian Foundation which will be officially recognised in September with the name «*Fundația Secretariatul Romilor*». The Board of Trustees is currently composed of three members: Pedro Puente (President), Jesús Loza (Vice-president) and Daniela Marinescu (Secretary) and we expect activities and projects to get under way next year.

Lastly, pilot study visits were made in September to two Romanian towns (Murgeni and Țândărei) by the person responsible for international programmes and the head of the intervention team working with Roma from Eastern Europe in Barcelona, to take a first-hand look at the reality left behind by families they are currently working with in Barcelona who are mostly from those two towns.

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The transfer of the *Acceder* model to Bosnia and



Herzegovina began in 2008 and, following several stages of adaptation to the context and reality of the country, 2009 saw the consolidation of the work carried out through the office opened in the city of Sarajevo. This initiative is financed by the Spanish International Development Cooperation Agency (AECID).

The *Acceder* team in Sarajevo is comprised of 4 professionals (coordinator, intercultural mediator, labour counsellor and enterprise mediator). The International team has coordinated training both in Spain and on-site and both formal and informal follow-up visits were made to monitor activities. Institutional relations were consolidated in 2009 and the programme was introduced to the main local stakeholders (employment agencies, companies, social organisations, politicians and others) and programme activities were undertaken to recruit users and commence



FSG-NAR TEAM IN ROMANIA

training and the first labour contracts were signed.

OTHER PROJECTS

In 2009 the Foundation worked on the project entitled “Respect, protection and promotion of the right of free movement and residence in the European Union: the case of the Roma population” with funding provided by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) and partners from 5 countries. The aim of the project, in response to a new reality in Europe, was to analyse the situation of the immigrant Roma population in countries of origin and destination within the EU.

The FSG conducted the Spanish part of the survey as a recipient country of immigrant Roma population by interviewing immigrant Roma in 5 locations and also by speaking with local administrations and entities that work with immigrant population. The project produced a report from each country plus a final joint report whose conclusions were presented in a public ceremony in November

2009. The conclusion reached from those reports is that “the right of all European Community citizens to move and reside freely is hampered in the case of the Roma ethnic group which is frequently subjected to discrimination, racism and exclusion”.

This report recommends that the European Union and its Member States create specific policies to guarantee equality in the exercise of the right of free movement.

The project entitled “Analysis of the situation of the Roma population in Turkey” is carried out within the framework of the European PROGRESS call and in collaboration with two partners (the ERRC and the local partner EDROM). The aim of this project is to analyse the context of the Roma population and come up with political action proposals for their social inclusion and possible measures to combat the discrimination Roma are suffering. This initiative provides a golden opportunity to gain insight into a country with a significant Roma population and which is also an EU candidate country. The Commission envisages the organisation of a final conference to present the conclusion and recommendation report to guide European institutions in the design and execution of policies in their negotiation process with Turkey.

The FSG has also worked on the project entitled “Building inclusion” led by the Ministry of Labour and Immigration’s DG for Immigrant Integration and financed by the European Commission. This is a project based on the exchange of experiences and knowledge between different players and countries regarding access to housing and social protection for immigrant groups and ethnic minorities. Its conclusions will contribute to

enhancing the design of policies to provide access to public services on an equal footing with the rest of the population.

INSTITUTIONAL ACTION

Institutional action is a significant part of the FSG's international activity, i.e. pro-active engagement in all initiatives, events and relevant fora at European level focusing on issues relating to the Roma population and which contribute to moving these up on the political agenda. One way to achieve this is by participating as a member in the *European Roma Policy Coalition - ERPC*, an informal network of European organisations with a proven track record in the defence of human rights, combating discrimination and work with the Roma population (AI, ENAR, ERIO, ERRC, ERGO, OSI, REF, Spolu). The Coalition closely monitors decisions taken by the Community institutions and drafts proposals so as to better coordinate actions targeting the Roma population allowing for a more efficient use of all existing European instruments and resources.

The FSG also participates in the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN-EU) which promotes joint actions, teamwork and taking advantage of synergies from work with other groups in risk of exclusion.

The Foundation is also a member of the Fundamental Rights Platform created by the European Union Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) involving other non-governmental organisations devoted to the defence of human rights.

From the time of the preparatory meetings, the FSG has participated in the constitutions of the new European Integrated Platform for Roma Inclusion, a European Commission initiative which seeks to bring together the main European players working in favour of the social inclusion of the Roma population (European institutions, national governments, experts and Roma representatives).

It has also participated in a number of meetings organised by European public administrations, national governments and other organisations that share methodologies and objectives with the FSG in the area of social inclusion and defence of the rights of minorities.

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EUROPEAN ROMA POLICY COALITION