

THE FUNDACION SECRETARIADO GITANO AND THE EUROPEAN YEAR OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

The European Parliament and the Council have designated 2007 as the **European Year of Equal Opportunities for All**. The aim pursued with this measure is to raise awareness as to how all citizens benefit from a more fair and cohesive society where everyone has access to the same opportunities. To this end, special accent is placed on the need to fight to remove the obstacles standing in the way to social participation still faced by different groups of European citizens.

The European Commission has recognised the Roma community as *the most disadvantaged ethnic minority group and among those facing the most discrimination*. And this is the perception of the citizens as well. The recent Eurobarometer on discrimination in the European Union* showed that 77% of those surveyed believe that being of Roma ethnic background is a disadvantage when it comes to *integration in society*.

In this connection we would stress that, although we have the legal instruments whereby to prohibit discrimination and promote equal treatment vis-à-vis the Roma community, political will is needed if this is to translate into positive action over the long-term and gain the support of the population at large.

The **Fundación Secretariado Gitano**, a Spanish organisation whose mission is the advancement of the Roma community based on respect for cultural identity, would like to contribute in making 2007 a year of progress for the Roma minority.

Our wish is for the recently launched **European Year of Equal Opportunities for All** to be much more than a slogan and become a real opportunity to involve political authorities and the society in general in advocating concrete measures capable of bringing about change in the situations of poverty, exclusion and discrimination suffered by Roma families in Spain and throughout the rest of Europe.

Equal opportunity must be gained in each one of the fields most affecting the current and future situation of the Roma and we therefore believe that this is the Year to set goals lining the path towards Equality:

We will advance in the conquest of equal opportunity in Education...

- If education administrations advocate concrete programmes to prevent and reduce school dropout and improve the academic performance of Roma students in disadvantaged situations.
- If care is taken in the transition period between primary and secondary education, paying special attention to keeping students in school and performing adequately at this new stage.
- If schools foster measures to promote support and involvement on the part of Roma families.
- If we avoid concentrating Roma students in certain schools.
- If we provide proper training for teaching staff based on Interculturality and focus on diversity.
- If we encourage scholarship programmes to stimulate the continued enrolment of Roma students in secondary and higher studies.

* http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/eyeq/uploaded_files/documents/eurobarometer_report_en.pdf

If we are to achieve equal opportunity in gaining access to employment and vocational training we must...

- Implement specially tailored vocational training and accompaniment initiatives paving the way to labour market integration as salaried workers.
- Provide support and training geared towards self-employment including counselling and financing of viable initiatives.
- Devise measures to protect and regulate mobile trading.
- Facilitate access for young Roma to employment training initiatives such as the *Escuelas Taller* (Workshop Schools).

We can reduce health inequalities if we...

- Promote actions to adapt primary health-care and hospital services.
- Familiarise health-care providers with the characteristics of the minorities they treat.
- Incorporate qualified intercultural mediators into health-care services.
- Draw up information documents and launch tailored health campaigns.

To make access to housing an equal opportunity right we must...

- Eradicate once and for all still-persisting segregated neighbourhoods and sub-standard housing.
- Reserve a percentage of available public housing for persons in risk of exclusion.
- Develop aid programmes targeting Roma in risk of exclusion for the rental and purchase of second-hand housing.

The conquest of equal opportunity in gaining access to justice requires...

- Training and awareness raising of justice system workers regarding the mechanisms by which to combat the cloud of discrimination which permeates the legal system and eliminate the principle discriminatory practices found in all spheres.
- Adaptation of available resources and public services to make proceedings accessible to all citizens.
- Awareness raising measures to generate an environment of trust in the institutions responsible for the administration of justice.
- Conducting studies and reports which accurately reflect the situation of the Roma community in the area of justice.

Progress will be made in equal opportunity if we acknowledge the Roma people and their culture by...

- Fostering initiatives focusing on the institutional recognition of the Roma minority such as those undertaken by some Parliaments in accordance with the recommendations of international organisations.
- Creating and implementing public institutions entrusted with the recovery, protection and advancement of the Roma Culture.
- Supporting and disseminating, at the institutional level, celebrations such as International Roma Day and other acts commemorating and celebrating Roma identity.
- Encouraging the participation of Roma organisations by means of advisory boards at all policy-making levels thus allowing them to have a say in the policies affecting their community.
- Promoting the presence of the Roma in public institutions.

We can promote equal opportunity and the construction of a fairer society by prohibiting discrimination and protecting its victims ...

- Through the widespread and effective implementation of the measures envisaged in Directive 2000/43/EC to promote equal treatment and combat discrimination.
- By providing incentive for *specialised organisations* which, inter alia, lend assistance to victims of discrimination, train key agents, guarantee the absence of discrimination in administrative practices and conduct studies in this regard.
- Through the implementation of social awareness-raising initiatives which contribute to the reduction or abolishment of prejudice towards Roma, enhance their social image and dignify the role played by the Roma community in Spanish and European society.