



Overview of the integration of Roma citizens in Spain and some transferable lessons for the EU

NESET ad hoc question No. 4/2019

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Please cite this publication as:

Carrasco, S; Poblet, G. (2019). 'Overview of the integration of Roma citizens in Spain and some transferable lessons for the EU', *NESET Ad hoc report no. 4/2019*.

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INTRODUCTION

Spanish Roma or ‘*Gitanos*’ are one of the largest Roma populations in any European country. Although the Council of Europe (2012) *Estimates and official numbers of Roma in Europe*, updated on 2 July 2012¹, established that the Roma populations in Spain, Romania and Bulgaria each numbered around 750,000, estimates of Roma nationals in the Romanian and Bulgarian National Roma Integration Strategy 2012-2020 (2015) are lower, at around 633,000 in Romania and 350,000 in Bulgaria, while official Spanish estimates indicate that between 500,000 and 1 million Spaniards are Roma.

The idea of a “Spanish model of integration” for Roma people has gained popularity over the last decade. In 2010, even the *New York Times* used this expression to highlight that Spain had invested more in Roma integration than any other country in Europe². In 2012, the Fundación Secretariado Gitano or Spanish Roma foundation (hereafter, FSG)³, the most important non-profit social organisation working for the inclusion of the Roma people in Spain, also referred to a “Spanish model of Roma inclusion” that could provide a positive blueprint for other countries, with its emphasis on active citizenship and the co-responsibility of all the social actors involved⁴. Moreover, the comparative findings of the Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey (EU-MIDIS II) carried out in 2017⁵ show that the situation of Roma in Spain is better than in other EU member states, in relation to certain aspects of key social integration areas such as access to health services and participation in education. In comparison with its previous survey in 2011 survey, improvements in the areas of housing and employment were minor.

Research conducted in Spain also confirms that the Spanish Roma population’s quality of life has improved over recent decades as part of an overall improvement in the living conditions of the country’s population as a whole. Since the early 1980s, important public policies have been implemented in the development of the welfare state. The pace of progress has varied during different periods, but achievements include universal healthcare and the expansion of all levels of public and state-funded education, social housing and slum clearances, and minimum income systems. This reform process ran in parallel to the expansion of the labour market until the 2008 economic crisis. Rather than creating targeted policies in specific fields, for most of this period one could speak about strategies that focused on promoting the participation of Roma citizens in social resources – that is, access to their rights as Spanish citizens, although within somewhat assistentialist dynamics (Bereményi and Mirga, 2012). This promotion was largely carried out by the Fundación del Secretariado Gitano, enhanced by the creation of a large number of local Roma associations across the country⁶.

¹ <https://rm.coe.int/1680088ea9>

² <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/13/opinion/lweb13spain.html>

³ Although originally created in the 1960s and linked to the Catholic Church, the organisation’s current structure was developed in the early 1980s, and its name was changed to the FSG in 2004. The Fundación del Secretariado Gitano (FSG) is funded by European, national, regional and local administrations and defines its mission as “the comprehensive promotion of the Roma community based on respect and support for their cultural identity”. It provides guidance and technical assistance to the government and develops programmes and services to improve living standards and create equal opportunities for Roma people. See: https://www.gitanos.org/que-hacemos/areas/international/partner_organisations.html

⁴ Políticas de inclusión social y población gitana en España. El modelo español de inclusión social de la población gitana (2012) [Social inclusion policies and Roma/Gitano population in Spain. The Spanish model of social inclusion of the Roma/Gitano population]. See: http://www.gitanos.org/upload/18/83/Políticas_de_inclusion_social_y_poblacion_gitana_en_Espana_ES.pdf

⁵ https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings_en.pdf

⁶ Roma activism and associations developed earlier, like neighbours’ association in general, as methods of political struggle under the late dictatorship and during the political transition to democracy. Later, indirect promotion of associations by the

However, several studies point to a continuing gap in equality between the Roma population and the rest of the Spanish population that has been exacerbated during the last decade of economic recession, which also affected other vulnerable groups. For example, a survey carried out in 2018 by the foundation Fomento de Estudios Sociales y Sociología Aplicada (hereafter, FOESSA) revealed that during the crisis, social exclusion intensified among Spain's Roma population, and around one-third of Roma went from situations of moderate exclusion to situations of severe exclusion (Hernández Pedreño, García Luque and Gehrig, 2018). In fact, poverty, inequality and racial discrimination continue to affect a segment of the Roma community in all social areas (Laparra, 2011; FSG, 2013; FOESSA, 2014). It is interesting to note, however, that certain segments of Roma households in Spain have been able to avoid the worst effects of the recent crisis and economic changes, and have maintained or slowly moved towards a more integrated position, although 26% of Roma remain in a situation of "precarious integration", and only 9% are in a "fully integrated" position (Hernández Pedreño, García Luque and Gehrig, 2018). This means that between 2007 and 2018, social polarisation within the Roma population has increased

On 3 April 2018, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights urged Spain to take action against the "disproportionate inequality and pervasive discrimination affecting Roma people" in the country⁷. But while alarming levels of exclusion were estimated to affect 54% of Spain's Roma population, the situation for Roma in Spain was still much less negative than for those in some other EU countries.

Drawing on existing studies and research literature, this report provides an overview of the social integration of Roma in Spain, and briefly reviews evidence on the progress made and some effective, related policies and approaches within the areas of employment, education, housing and health. It also includes brief sections on political representation, associationism and activism as part of the processes of social integration of Roma in Spain. For the purposes of this report, 'social integration' is understood according to the terms of Ferguson's background paper for the United Nations⁸ (Ferguson, 2008), inspired by a human rights and social justice approach, as an inclusionary goal implying equal rights in practice, resources and participation in the interdependency between recognition, redistribution and representation (Fraser, 1990 and 1996). This approach therefore also aligns both with research and within third-sector organisations in Spain in regarding economic, political and social-relational dimensions as essential dimensions for social inclusion (FSG, 2012).

Methods and data

Ethnic identification is forbidden by law in Spain. As a result, no accurate data exist on the number of Roma people in the country, and representative samples cannot be determined on the basis of the census. This also affects the availability of official data on all specific areas of social integration. All studies and reports that focus on Roma rely on estimates and apply indirect techniques. Since the mid-1970s, researchers and successive governments have worked on the basis of figures ranging between

government has not been free of controversy, as it may be regarded as responding to the government's own desire to deal with a reduced number of parties.

⁷ https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/document_gem/official-document-system/reports-to-the-economic-and-social-council/

⁸ Report commissioned by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) for the Expert Group Meeting on Promoting Social Integration, Helsinki, Finland, 8-10 July 2008.

570,000 and 1,100,000 people (Laparra, 2011). The Council of Europe, in its last update in 2012⁹, estimated that there were approximately 705,000 Roma in Spain (1.57% of the country's total population), and the National Roma Integration Strategy in Spain (European Union, 2012) adopts this figure as its working reference.

Paradoxically, one shortcoming of this well-intended anti-discrimination philosophy¹⁰ has been that the lack of official statistics and constitutional regulation to avoid labelling and discrimination makes it very difficult to apply standard tools of analysis to detect and assess crucial issues such as the evolution of discrimination in practice or social integration indicators in different areas. One example of this is a recent study into the population that is especially vulnerable in terms of employment (Felgueroso, 2018). This research was carried out with the collaboration of many third-sector organisations, and includes special acknowledgments to the FSG in its published materials – but does not refer explicitly to any data concerning Roma. Roma are overrepresented in the target population of the study, and the FSG assisted in accessing these of hard-to-reach sectors of the population, but no data disaggregated by declared ethnic affiliation is provided. This is not uncommon.

Differences in findings concerning the situation for Roma in Spain may also be attributed to the fact that surveys and studies have focused on different segments of the Roma population, or used different methods. For example, the EU MIDIS II, the second wave of the European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey launched by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) in 2015, focused on trends in the discrimination experienced by Roma over time in nine member states including Spain. The study applied sampling and interviewing methods based on the principle of self-identification, following the human rights-based approach to data collection recommended by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)¹¹. The IV FOESSA Report (2014), in contrast, revealed some of the complexities and misrepresentations of Roma when it comes to gathering survey data. Stereotypes and prejudice may influence the pollsters, resulting in variations in estimates. During fieldwork, some pollsters may 'over-identify' individuals and households in poor neighbourhoods as being Roma. Conversely, some individuals and households may not be asked to participate in surveys because they are perceived as too "integrated" or to have too high an income to be Roma. At least one instance of this has occurred, in the housing conditions report of the Ministry of Health, Consumption and Social Welfare in 2016.

Another type of shortcoming in the data can be seen with regard to education. Here, the 'invisibility strategies' employed by some students and families in order to be less distinguishable from the general population, add to the lack of data disaggregated by ethnicity. In a well-known comparative study (Abajo and Carrasco, 2004) on successful academic trajectories of Roma youth in five regions, most of the informants revealed that they had used 'invisibility' to cope with the stress of feeling alone, and as a defence strategy against racism¹². This included, for example, not revealing their ethnicity to their classmates, and trying to dress and behave in ways they associated with the mainstream student

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-and-eu/roma-integration-eu-country/roma-integration-spain_es

¹⁰ The same criterion is applied in other countries, for example in France and Portugal. Comparative international research frequently has to deal with this issue, especially when applying quantitative techniques.

¹¹ https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/stats/documents/ece/ces/ge.15/2016/Sem/WP20_FRA_ENG.pdf

¹² It is worth mentioning that there are no clearly identifiable physical characteristics of Roma or non-Roma in Spain as perceived by Spaniards, beyond performed or attributed styles mostly relating to social class, age, etc. Moreover, while "Gitano" and derived words are definitely employed with a negative connotation when referring to behavioural stereotypes, they do not retain this negative connotation when used to describe the physical appearance of non-Roma men and women. Quite significantly, virtually no research has been carried out on this issue, which may also be the case in other EU countries.

population. This strategy was confirmed by several participants in a study by FSG (2008) that collected successful life-stories of Roma youth.

The FSG keeps an up-to-date documentation centre, compiling research publications and reports, but reduced financial support over the last decade due to the economic crisis has made its task more difficult, and the number of studies produced or commissioned by the foundation has declined abruptly. While the FSG's focus has widened to include the struggle against systemic discrimination and gender inequalities¹³, no up-to-date and accurate data are available on the socioeconomic conditions of the Roma population. The assessment of those programmes that have been implemented has been limited to impact among participants or beneficiaries, but not in terms of the whole Roma population. It is worth noting that the existence of diverse regional plans, each of which depends on the region's individual policy priorities, coexists with a number of national programmes (for example, ACCEDER, a programme for the promotion of access to the regular labour market). As will be shown later, these divergent priorities also relate to heterogeneity in the situation of Roma people in different areas and regions. In the absence of statistical data, this heterogeneity further complicates the possibility of drawing overall conclusions on the impact of policies on the Roma population in Spain as a whole.

Finally, given the lack of a national research plan to fill the knowledge gaps that exist in relation to the situation of Roma people in Spain, the availability of data largely depends on the preferences and choices of individual researchers for particular topics and priorities of basic, rather than applied, research in certain areas.

HETEROGENEITY OF ROMA IN SPAIN

Shortly after their arrival in the Iberian Peninsula via the Pyrenees at the beginning of 15th century, the Roma became the target of a long history of persecution and attempts at ethnocide and genocide, together with forced settlement and assimilation laws¹⁴. In contrast to the experience of Roma in other European countries, however, Roma in Spain were never enslaved. Before Spain's Constitution was enacted in 1978, Roma were considered stateless by default, although they could register to become Spanish. Many Roma in industrial and urban areas did so during the economic development of the 1960s, shifting from old subsistence niches (for example, horse dealing and as a temporary labour force in agriculture) to unskilled jobs in industry, construction and tourism, together with the expansion and further regulation of street markets and access to motor vehicles (San Román, 2010). Automatic equal citizenship was granted to Spanish Roma by the 1978 Spanish Constitution, Article 14 of which officially makes ethnic discrimination illegal. Since then, improvements in the social integration of Spanish Roma have been the result of a combination of general and targeted policies. Above all, however, it has been the result of access to the universal welfare state that has been developed over recent decades, especially since the mid-1980s.

Not all Roma across the country have benefitted equally from these improvements, however. This disparity has given rise to an internal process of regional polarisation, in addition to the process of social polarisation already referred to. For a proper understanding of the differences in the social integration of Roma in Spain, it is important to pay attention to regional, local and social contexts. First is the case

¹³ https://www.gitanos.org/upload/14/89/Informe_de_discriminacion_2018_ingles_.pdf

¹⁴ An overview of these laws includes the first persecution law in 1499 enacted by the Catholic Queen and King; forced settlement (Charles I, 1539); prohibition of language and culture (Philip II, 1560-1570-1586); prohibition from living in communities (Philip IV, 1633); consignment to serfdom and being forced to work in agriculture (Charles II, 1695); decree of total extermination (Ferdinand VI 1749).

of Andalusia, the region with by far the highest percentage of Roma in Spain. Here, levels of integration are not homogeneous, but are higher than in other regions of Spain. Andalusia is also unique from the perspective of its culture and historical heritage, to which important contributions have been made by Roma culture and folklore. Second are those Roma on the peripheries of large urban areas throughout Spain – either those who have migrated from rural areas during several waves of industrial development, or those few who still make their living travelling between different areas, relying on temporary work. In some of these urban peripheries, Roma have integrated as part of working-class neighbourhoods, although some have experienced significant processes of marginalisation and ghettoisation. Finally, the case of migrant Roma from other EU countries is radically different from that of Spanish Roma. In spite of being EU citizens, Roma from Eastern European countries are considered to experience the greatest exclusion and stigmatisation, not only due to their dual status as Roma and as poor immigrants, but also due to their mobility, which makes them optimal targets for a new, global racism (López Catalán and Aharchi, 2012)

The case of Andalusia

According to estimates, more than one-third of Spanish Roma lives in Andalusia, both in urban and rural areas. Since the early 1990s, Andalusian Roma associations have celebrated November 22 as the day of Andalusian Roma, a date officially recognised by the Andalusian Parliament in commemoration of the first historical record of the arrival of Roma to the city of Jaén. The contribution of Roma/*Gitano* to Andalusian culture is evident, and it is even difficult to identify the boundaries between the Roma and Andalusian roots of several modalities of music and dance, a phenomenon unique in the world. Many Roma groups or individuals, including Roma women and educated, middle-class Roma, have long played an important role in promoting and defending Roma rights, participation and visibility in Andalusian cities and villages. An interesting, positive example is the village of Lebrija¹⁵. Here, Spanish Roma are estimated to account for 15% of the local population, Roma work at the same variety of jobs as non-Roma Spaniards, and mixed marriages are not uncommon. While it is true, however, that the Roma population in Andalusia can be regarded as enjoying generally higher levels of integration than in other parts of Spain, they still experience discrimination and racism. Complaints about issues of misrepresentation are also present. For example, as Miguel Ángel Vargas notes¹⁶, the number of Roma prison inmates is usually publicly known, but the number of Roma university graduates is not. Likewise, several genocide attempts against the Roma are still not included in Spanish history textbooks¹⁷.

Large urban areas

By far the most concerning situation is that of Roma people living in the working-class neighbourhoods of large cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia or Seville, or in nearby smaller towns within their metropolitan areas. These are the areas in which part of the Spanish Roma community continues to be a clearly marginalised segment of the population. Serious problems include substandard housing, with

¹⁵ “Lebrija integra a sus cuatro mil vecinos de etnia gitana, que hacen crecer los matrimonios mixtos” (Lebrija integrates its four thousand Roma neighbours, which make mixed marriages grow”. Available at: https://sevilla.abc.es/provincia/sevi-lebrija-integra-cuatro-vecinos-etnia-gitana-hacen-crecer-matrimonios-mixtos-201511200744_noticia.html.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ On April 8, 2017, with the celebration of the International Roma Day, the Consejo Estatal del Pueblo Gitano (National Council for Roma People) launched a campaign with the title “La pregunta de Samuel” (Samuel’s question) to raise awareness about the absence of the history of the Roma in Spanish textbooks. See: <https://www.gitanos.org/actualidad/prensa/comunicados/120410.html>

shanty towns (which have not yet been eradicated in some urban areas) often linked to neighbourhood conflicts and criminal activities. One example of this is La Cañada Real, a succession of settlements located on the outskirts of the cities of Madrid and Getafe that spans several municipal areas. The first Roma arrived here in 1994 after being evicted from the slums of Madrid's San Blas district. Since the economic crisis, illegal settlements have persisted. Now, impoverished Spanish Roma and non-Roma, as well as immigrant populations from other origins including Romanian Roma, coexist in La Cañada Real (Piemontese, 2017).

Despite universal access to education, health, and several minimum income modalities, targeted social integration policies in these areas first needed to address marginalisation. Instead, however, a combination of poor labour market conditions and reduced public investment in housing and education during the economic crisis have contributed to making marginalisation a chronic problem.

This situation exists for many Roma living in high levels of exclusion on the outskirts of large urban areas. But all these cities also contain other Roma populations, long established in popular mixed neighbourhoods. One example is the community of Catalan-speaking Roma living in the popular/upmarket area of Gracia in Barcelona, or the Spanish Roma in other popular neighbourhoods in the city such as Hostafrancs, where mostly Andalusian immigrants, including many Roma, settled in the 1960s and 70s. The joint action of universal policies and targeted programmes promoting the social integration of Roma, as well as the strategies of Roma families with higher expectations for their children through education, may be having a positive impact but reliable, extensive data to support this conclusion are lacking.

Roma nationals from other EU countries

In recent years, Spain has become one of the main countries receiving Roma citizens from other EU member states, especially from Romania and Bulgaria (Gamella, 2007; Tarnovschi, 2012), who are entitled to the rights to free movement, residence and work in Spain under the conditions established by EU law¹⁸. According to estimates included in the EC National Roma Integration Strategy (European Union, 2012), around 50,000 non-Spanish Roma from other EU countries live in Spain, although many families are usually on the move in and out of the country. Romanian Roma are the largest group among them, but are still estimated to constitute only a very small percentage of the nearly 700,000 Romanian citizens in Spain –, by far the largest national group of immigrants. However, although many Roma immigrants may be regarded as socio-economically vulnerable, the EC National Roma Integration Strategy in Spain (European Union, 2012) only partially addresses the specific challenges that relate to them. The recommendations of the Spanish ECNRIS appear to have been designed with only the Spanish Roma population in mind, whose situation differs fundamentally from that of non-Spanish Roma. Apart from the issue of language, which the Romanian Roma overcome easily, non-Spanish Roma differ in terms of mobility patterns, family organisation, economic situations and activities carried out for a living, and visible differences (not in physical appearance but in women's clothing), all of which require specific policy approaches to promote inclusion and prevent discrimination.

The first available studies on Roma immigrants in Spain were limited to describing the situation of Roma communities coming from Romania. Such studies came in response to the need to better understand this “new” phenomenon, which was very quickly highlighted in the media. While often in relation to conflict or crime, this coverage mainly concerned the visible presence of non-Spanish Roma as beggars,

¹⁸ Since 2012, EU nationals can legally reside in an EU country other than their country of residence for longer than an initial three-month period only if they register and prove that they have either employment or sufficient economic resources to live on.

street sellers or car cleaners at traffic lights, as well as on public transport or around the tourist areas in big cities. Public administrations and civil society associations undertook reports to determine the needs of Roma immigrants and to provide answers to what was presented as a social conflict (ACCEM, 2007; FSG, 2008; 2011). Other research has addressed the problem more thoroughly, and contributed to an analysis of the effects – or lack of them – produced by public policies; for example, Piemontese (2017) in Madrid and López Catalán (2018) in Barcelona. In his thorough ethnographic study, Piemontese analyses the experiences of mobility among young Romanian Roma between the marginalised settlements on the outskirts of Madrid and Romania. He confirms that while Romanian Roma are the potential beneficiaries of specific policies aimed at marginalised sectors of the population, which include marginalised Roma as a priority target, their specific needs are not really addressed due to their lack of a fixed address. López Catalán (2018) points to institutional racism on the basis of access to rights in practice: although legal solutions already exist to overcome the difficulties that Romanian Roma experience in providing a fixed address (for example, using *ad hoc* reports by the Social Services), such solutions are seldom applied¹⁹.

Although the situation of Roma from other EU countries could be addressed through the use of universal policies that apply indiscriminately to all citizens and residents in need, such as the minimum income scheme (in Spain, Minimum Insertion Income), residential instability is also connected with negative experiences such as interrupted schooling. This limitation on Roma integration is underlined by Gutiérrez-Sánchez (2019) in his assessment of a social intervention program to promote health, education and housing for Romanian Roma families in El Gallinero, the most excluded area in La Cañada Real (Madrid). El Gallinero was used by Romanian Roma as a shelter and transit station between moves, since mobility is part of their subsistence strategy. They occupy an ambiguous position between a ‘new’ and an ‘old’ minority in the Spanish nation-state (Magazzini and Piemontese, 2016).

BETWEEN EXCLUSION AND INTEGRATION

In the following sections, we will focus on employment, education, housing and health, as well as on political representation and associationism, to identify comparative gaps and policies to tackle them.

Employment

During the acceleration of industrialisation in Spain during the mid-20th century, a segment of the Roma population began to access wage labour, although much later and to a lesser extent than the rest of the population. This process stagnated during the 1970s and 80s, with the delayed effects of the 1973 oil-related economic crisis, together with industrial modernisation and restructuring. It began again in the late 1990s, a period of sustained economic growth and expansion that demanded low-skilled jobs, during which Spain received immigrant labour from almost every continent.

The economic crisis that began in 2008 represented another reversal for Roma labour insertion (FOESSA, 2014). According to EU MIDIS II (European Union, 2017), on average, 34% of Roma household members in the nine countries surveyed declared themselves to be ‘unemployed’, with this percentage rising to more than half of those surveyed in Croatia (62%), Spain (57%) and Bulgaria (55%). In contrast, self-declared unemployment in Romania was 5%, followed by Portugal with 17% and Hungary with 23%.

¹⁹ The ROMEST network (<http://nonprofit.xarxanet.org/tags/romest-network>) in Catalonia includes third-sector organisations and local councils, and is devoted to tackling the multiple challenges experienced by the Romanian Roma population in the region.

Self-declared unemployment is a problematic indicator, even more so when used to compare between very different national labour markets, but the figure for Spain differs little from other sources.

Before analysing data on the insertion of the Roma population into the labour market in Spain and the kinds of policies designed to promote it, it is necessary to clarify a series of concepts drawn from qualitative research with regard to Roma and work. First, when referring to the Roma and the socio-historical processes that have influenced their living conditions, it is important to distinguish between marginality and poverty. Drawing on her well-known extensive research on the Spanish Roma, San Román (1996 and 2010) reminded how marginality that was prevalent among a large share of Roma implies the absence of standard relationship with the economic system – something that does not apply to the non-Roma working poor. Marginalisation represents the opposite process to social integration; it excludes segments of the population from participation and its legal, social, cultural, economic and political benefits. Second, when considering the employment situation among Roma in Spain, it is necessary to distinguish between employment in formal economy and informal economic activities such as underground work (regular work activities that are neither declared for taxes, nor protected by contract), marginal work (for example, collecting and selling scrap metal) or illegal activities (explicitly forbidden, for example drug dealing or engaging in “monkey business”). All of this shows how only a limited ceiling of employment (Ogbu, 1983) was actually available for the Roma for a long time.

Labour statistics measure only formal employment; therefore, many Roma (as well as other groups in situations of exclusion) lie outside the formal labour market, but are not without paid activity. The specific diagnoses and quantitative studies carried out on the Roma population have taken this situation into account, and have tried to combine different instruments to obtain data on employment, work, economic activities and income.

In the Report on the Social Diagnosis of the Roma community in Spain, coordinated by Laparra (Laparra, 2011), an analysis of the 2007 Survey of Roma Population Households carried out by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (Sociology Research Centre, hereinafter CIS) was combined with surveys carried out by the FSG in collaboration with Equipo de Investigación Sociológica (EDIS), which applied the methodology of the Active Population Survey (Encuesta de Población Activa, EPA). Although these surveys differ in the data they present and even provide contradictory evidence, the combination was useful in contrasting formal employment with the self-perceptions of the Roma people surveyed in relation to their activities, which are reflected in the CIS survey. The most surprising finding from the data is the high level of participation among Roma people in the labour market and, therefore, in the Spanish economy. Members of the Roma community have traditionally worked from an early age, but because their economic activity was relegated to the margins of the formal labour market, this participation had not previously been recognised. Although high rates of working activity could be taken as an *a priori* indicator of integration, this activity is not what it seems, nor does it mean that Roma enjoy the same working conditions as the rest of the Spanish population. The high rates of activity are explained by early incorporation into the labour market and later withdrawal. In turn, entry to the labour market soon means less investment in education, which means many Roma can only gain access to low-skilled jobs that are often carried out in the informal economy, with low wages and precarious working conditions.

Waged labour entails access to many areas of social protection and benefits (unemployment, retirement, sick leave, etc.) and labour rights. The rate of wage labour among Roma is 38.4%, compared to 83.6% among the working-age population as a whole. Nearly a quarter of Roma (24.1%) declare themselves as dedicated “family help”, which means they work informally within the family business without labour or social protections while “family help” as an occupation is practically irrelevant within the Spanish population as a whole. Another situation that stands out among Roma (and in other impoverished or excluded groups) is self-employment: 48% of the Roma population are engaged in

activities on their own, compared to a rate among the working-age population as a whole of 18%. The activities or sectors most prevalent among the Roma population are trade (34.7%), mostly in street markets; construction (17.7%); and agriculture (13.8%).

Regardless of the population analysed, women are less active in the labour market than men. But according to data collected during the worst years of the economic crisis, the rate of unemployment among Roma women (39.1%) was lower than that among women as a whole (46%). However, the 2018 FOESSA survey, which compares the situations in 2007 and 2018, reveals that the situation has now been reversed – and by a significant margin. Unemployment among non-Roma women now stands at 18.8%, while among Roma women it has risen to 51%. It is interesting to note that according to the FSG/EDIS 2011 survey, women represent a greater proportion of those receiving social aid (67%) than men, but this may be partly explained by them being the ones in charge of the paperwork required for social services on behalf of the household.

In terms of territorial distribution, rates of economic activity among the Roma population not only reveal the heterogeneity of that population, but also highlight differences in the impact of social policies (FSG/EDIS, 2012). Madrid has the lowest rates of economic activity and employment, well below the Spanish average. The area with the highest rate of activity is the South (Andalusia and Murcia), followed by the Northeast (Aragón, Navarra, the Basque Country, La Rioja) and the central regions (Castilla La Mancha, Castilla y León, and Extremadura). Madrid also shows a much greater prevalence of self-employment (which is an indicator of precariousness among the Roma population) than other regions and a wage rate of 33%, compared with 74% in the East (Catalonia, Valencia and the Balearic Islands) and 70% in the South. These indicators relate to the situation of the Roma population on the peripheries of Madrid, to whom we referred earlier.

An analysis of universal and targeted policies to promote Roma insertion into the labour market can explain these regional variations, and points to social integration (or the lack of it) between Spanish Roma and other vulnerable groups. The NeuJobs report *Active labour market policies with an impact potential on Roma employment in five countries of the EU*, coordinated by Messing (Messing et al., 2012), discusses the most important programmes in five EU member states (Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Spain) and the contexts of their application and practice. Among these countries, only Spain had a programme at national level to promote access to the labour market that is aimed at the Roma population, the Programa ACCEDER²⁰.

ACCEDER is a training and professional qualification programme coordinated by the FSG. It has been operating since 2000 in 14 Autonomous Communities, and has become a benchmark for good practices at EU level. Although no data are available to assess its impact in the most recent years, according to data provided in 2015, when the programme had been running for 15 years, 27% of participants gained their first access to the regular labour market as a result of its training. Working in close cooperation with local firms, the programme specifically targets personalised training, counselling and monitoring of the insertion of Roma into wage labour in the regular labour market. In addition, it also focuses on those who are most in need of promotion among the Roma communities, such as women²¹ and, more recently, Roma nationals from other EU countries. The programme has issued flyers in several languages that

²⁰ Programme web page: https://www.gitanos.org/que-hacemos/areas/empleo_y_formacion_profesional/acceder.html. The acronym ACCEDER in Spanish means “to access”.

²¹ The recent book *La lucha por un futuro mejor* (2019) [‘The struggle for a better future’], which collects the stories of 60 women in the region of Castile and Leon, reports that an increasing number of Roma women are interested in accessing waged labour but lack formal education to do so.

summarise its achievements²². These read: “Over 22,000 persons have found a job since its launch (a total of 57,916 labour contracts signed) and always with a balance between men and women, the latter accounting for 53% of the total participants. During the lifetime of the programme, over 2,800 training courses have been given; we have worked with 19,694 companies, and a total of 82,402 people have participated (32,788 under age 30).” ACCEDER is present in all cities and towns that have a significant estimated Roma population.

ACCEDER is undoubtedly the star among targeted programmes aimed at promoting the social inclusion of Roma in Spain. The programme is designed to monitor individualised professional/vocational itineraries, with specific programmes and budgets depending on regional and local adaptations. For example, ACCEDER in the Madrid region in 2017 had a budget of EUR 1,863.209 to develop 24 programmes that reached 3,105 participants²³. As well as the allocation of economic and human resources for training, grants to participants, counselling personnel and staff from social services, the programme relies for its success on the implementation of a joint strategy that includes the FSG, local councils and Roma associations, regional departments of employment and business networks in surrounding areas.

Education

In Spain, education is a competence shared between the central government and the Autonomous Communities. The latter adapt and develop the general normative framework to produce regional laws according to the specific characteristics of each region (for example, in relation to the choice of linguistic models and languages of tuition). Basic education is compulsory in Spain between the ages of 6 and 16. It is free of charge, including post-compulsory academic and vocational tracks in public schools and in some privately-owned, state-funded schools. Higher education is not free. University fees and grants available to low-income students vary according to regional regulations.

The EU MIDIS II (2018) results indicate that low levels of educational achievement persist among the Roma population surveyed. Although Spain compares well with other EU members states according to other educational indicators it is, along with Greece, Portugal and Croatia, one of the countries that has the highest proportion of Roma without formal education, in contrast to the low proportions found in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Bulgaria. However, results show that, of the nine countries surveyed, only Spain (95%) and Hungary (91%) have participation rates in education that come close to the Education and Training (ET) 2020 target. According to the study’s results, in other countries, with the exception of Bulgaria (66%), less than half of children between the age of four and the compulsory education starting age participate in early childhood education. The results also reveal that in only three out of the nine countries do almost all Roma children who should be in education (pre-primary, primary, lower secondary or upper secondary) actually attend school – 99% in Spain, 98% in the Czech Republic, and 98% in Hungary. In Romania and Greece, the percentages of Roma children of compulsory-school age who attend school are 77% and 69%, respectively. The results show that the proportion of Roma children attending schools in which all schoolmates are Roma ranges from 27% in Bulgaria to 3% in Spain. In addition, the results of the EU MIDIS II Report (European Union, 2017) also show that segregation at the level of classes appears to be similar to school segregation: the proportion of Roma children attending classes where ‘all classmates are Roma’ ranges from 29% in Bulgaria to 4% in Spain.

²² See flyer in English: https://www.gitanos.org/upload/52/37/Folleto-ENG_qr.pdf

²³ <http://www.gitanos.org/informeanual/2017/madrid/index.html>

Even so, Spanish Roma have a much lower level of formal education than the Spanish population as a whole (Laparra, 2011; FSG, 2013a), despite education indicators not being especially good for Spain, which has the second highest rate of early school leaving²⁴ in the EU (around 20%, according to Eurostat 2018). A high level of polarisation exists between native-born and non-EU born young people; polarisation is also found among Spanish youth, since 42% of the same age group have achieved higher education.

All educational indicators comparing adult Spanish Roma with non-Roma adults show a systematic gap, although illiteracy is no longer found among Roma below the age of 50. Many adults have returned to education as part of the requirements of the Minimum Insertion Income, or due to the involvement of Roma associations in the organisation of literacy classes (Abajo, 2017). However, Abajo (2017) reports that despite increasing educational aspirations for their children on the part of Roma parents, as well as great advances in participation, both in non-compulsory pre-school education (universally free in public schools between the ages of 3 and 6) and in universal compulsory primary and secondary schooling, massive improvements beyond the age of 15 appear to have stagnated. At the age of 15, according to FSG (2013a), 86% of Roma students are attending school, but this percentage declines to just 55.5% by the age of 16 (the end of compulsory education), compared with the 93.5% of Spanish students as a whole who remain in school.

Education is by far the most important area requiring attention and intervention in order to promote Roma inclusion. It is here that younger generations of Roma are being left behind in the face of a knowledge-based economy that increasingly demands a skilled and trained labour-force. The EU Roma Strategy for Spain also declares education to be its number one priority. Important studies and reports (FSG, 2002; Abajo and Carrasco, 2004; FSG, 2013a; Bereményi and Carrasco, 2015) have provided sufficient evidence that education policy requires urgent changes both in terms of investment and approach, with the close cooperation of local Roma communities. Resources for educational support; targeted grants; universal schemes offering free school meals to those in need; peer-mentoring; close monitoring of cases in the safe, out-of-school spaces of existing programmes – all of these may have long-term impacts that cannot yet be assessed, but the majority of these resources and initiatives do not reach a significant proportion of Roma children and youth, and little time is left to catch up and cope with the already obvious effects of accelerated technological and economic changes. Evidence supporting this is that the numbers of students engaged by ongoing support programmes are very low compared to the total size of the Roma student population.

PROMOCIONA²⁵ is an example of a programme that, while promising, is completely insufficient in scale to meet the needs of the Roma population overall. Launched by the FSG in 2009 to focus on “academic achievement and retaining young Roma in school”, PROMOCIONA has since proved quite successful, according to the data provided. On average, 77% of students who participate in the programme during their final year of secondary school complete their secondary school successfully and go on to continue their studies; however, in the whole of Spain, only around 1,000 families and students from over 300 schools benefit from the programme each year.

²⁴ Early school leaving or Early Leaving from Education and Training (ELET) is defined by percentage of youth 18-24 who have completed at most a lower secondary education and are not in further education or training. See: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Early_leavers_from_education_and_training

²⁵ <https://www.gitanos.org/que-hacemos/areas/education/index.html.en>

Like working class non-Roma, Spanish Roma children and youth usually attend public schools. At certain schools in deprived urban areas, however, it is not uncommon to find a concentration of Roma students, whose experience of segregation is greater than that of the children of working-class immigrants who mostly arrived in the intensive immigration flows at the turn of the century. A comparative study of the situation of Roma students in secondary education carried out by FSG and the Ministry of Education in 2013 (FSG, 2013a) produced some clear findings: absenteeism and dropout rates are pervasive in lower-secondary education; more girls than boys never transfer from primary to secondary school; and a high proportion of Roma students do not graduate from compulsory secondary education. According to data from the PROMOCIONA program, during the school year 2014-2015 “64% of Roma students between the ages of 16 and 24 fail to complete their compulsory studies, compared with an average 13% of the overall student body in that age bracket.” Roma students are overrepresented in compensatory formal and non-formal education, and estimates of early school leaving among Roma put the figure at over 90% (Eurostat 2018)²⁶. Although the participation of Roma students in post-compulsory academic and vocational tracks as well as in higher education has definitely increased, their presence remains very low. Among the reasons given for leaving education at different stages in the FSG 2013 study (FSG, 2013a), around 28% of respondents mentioned the need to work (higher among boys and men) and the need to take care of family members (higher among girls and women), but also being required to leave by their parents, or due to lack of motivation. In spite of these discouraging answers, respondents expressed high aspirations, thought education was important, planned to re-engage with education in later life, and liked their teachers and schools. It is interesting to note that over 80% denied having experienced racism or exclusion at school, and the majority said they had both Roma and non-Roma friends.

Some successful experiences, including those of schools with a high concentration of socially vulnerable Roma students, have been found within specific primary schools and initiatives. Although such initiatives have been proven to transform the motivation, participation and performance of students, their models of intervention have not been generalised.

Some positive examples were provided by the **INCLUD-ED EU project**²⁷ (DDAA, 2012), which developed a ‘whole school’ approach aimed at transforming the expectations of primary school teachers, students and families in marginalised neighbourhoods and schools, with regard to education. Some of those involved were Roma – although the target of the project was schools, rather than specific groups of students. From a different perspective, another example of positive transformation can be found at a highly segregated²⁸ high school (90% of students were Roma) in an impoverished neighbourhood, the **IES La Mina Project**, close to Barcelona. The case involved very heavy engagement from teachers, together with seven Roma professionals acting as educational coaches, and close contact between the management team and students’ families. The scheme’s success has attracted attention both from the media and government, because it is still a rare experience²⁹.

²⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-semester_thematic-factsheet_early-school-leavers_en_0.pdf

²⁷ http://creaub.info/included/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/D25.2_Final-Report_final.pdf

²⁸ Spain is the EU country with the third-highest school segregation, and it has worsened in recent years, from 74 points in 2012 to 69 points in 2015, according to the PISA index of social inclusion in schools (OECD, 2015). *PISA 2015 Technical report. Sample design*. <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/data/2015-technical-report/>

²⁹ <https://www.elperiodico.cat/ca/societat/20170321/institut-escola-sant-adria-besos-mina-desafia-fracas-escolar-5915357>

Research on educational policy in Spain and the educational trajectories of Roma youth (Abajo and Carrasco, 2004; Gamella, 2011; Bereményi and Carrasco, 2017) show that a combination of access to universal public services and targeted measures, properly coordinated, can make a difference. However, it is still necessary to gain in-depth knowledge of the possible negative effects of applying certain universal policies to vulnerable populations. This was the regrettable experience for Roma students when a progressive, comprehensive and inclusive education law (LOGSE³⁰) was implemented in Spain in the mid-1990s. Compulsory education was extended from 14 years of age to 16, with the transition from primary education to secondary education coming at the age of 12. Public schools teaching pre-school years and primary education were separated from those teaching compulsory and post-compulsory secondary education. Although the level of education among younger generations in Spain as a whole definitely increased, the policy had a negative impact on the majority of Roma children and youth: after decades of struggling to encourage Roma children to complete what had previously been the years of basic education up to the age of 14, the change produced a regression to former lower levels of education, since fewer Roma students (especially girls) made it to the new lower-secondary education leaving age of 16, with higher barriers to reach upper levels of the education system – a sour outcome after the EU Decade of Roma Inclusion 2004-2014 (Bereményi and Carrasco, 2015; 2017). A lesson can be learnt from this experience: intervention policies need to take into account the perspectives of vulnerable groups in order to identify and avoid unintended negative effects. The problem here is not the higher leaving age itself – 16 is not particularly high across the context of Europe; in some countries the leaving age is 18 – but the lack of support given to Roma children within the education policy to continue their schooling, especially Roma girls.

Regarding curricular content, current education law does not require the teaching, as part of Spanish history, of content relating to the arrival in Spain of Roma, their subsequent persecution, and their position in Spanish society. Although intercultural education is championed by teachers' associations and Roma activists, its ability to increase the sense of belonging among Roma students and improve their academic engagement remains a subject for debate – despite more recent theoretical frameworks and evidence regarding the conditions required to retain Roma children in education for longer. The issue has, however, gained important recognition as an aspect of social justice (Fraser, 1996), although it is also crucial to avoid the risk of teaching cultural traditions that can be easily essentialised and stereotyped (Carrasco and Bereményi, 2011). A recent initiative on this issue is the inclusion of content on the “culture and history of the Roma people” in the school curriculum of the autonomous community of Castile and Leon.³¹

Finally, it is also important to acknowledge the decision, as of June 2019 (personal communication by José Eugenio Abajo), of the education working group of the State Council of the Roma/*Gitano* people (Grupo de Educación del Consejo Estatal del Pueblo Gitano), with the participation of representatives from the Roma associations and the Ministry of Education, to implement a series of measures to meet the urgent needs identified. This will begin with the gathering of accurate and useful data on the situation of Roma students. The education of younger Roma generations is no longer navigating between “progress and regression” in relation to social integration (Carrasco and Bereményi, 2013), but

³⁰ Ley de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo, designed by the social-democrats and implemented by the conservatives. Later reforms and counter-reforms did not modify this structure. Although LOGSE is no longer in force, it was replaced in 2006 by the LOE (*Ley orgánica de educación*), and then in 2013 by the LOMCE (*Ley organica para la mejora de la calidad educativa*), but none of these subsequent laws has modified this barrier.

³¹ The regional government created a working group, reaching agreement in 2018. The region's Roma association subsequently awarded a prize to the regional government for its efforts: <https://www.europapress.es/castilla-y-leon/noticia-hermandad-gitana-andalucia-premia-consejeria-educacion-cortes-cyl-20181204112227.html>

is at serious risk of contributing to higher levels exclusion and division. As a matter of urgency, a new and massive step forward must be taken in this area.

Housing

One of the goals of the National Roma Integration Strategy in Spain is access to dignified and high-quality housing, and the eradication of shanty towns and substandard housing. To achieve these goals, a new version was created in 2015 of the *Map on Housing and the Roma Community in Spain*³², first elaborated in 2007. The work was commissioned by the Directorate General for Family and Childhood Services (Ministry of Health and Social Services, hereinafter MSSSI), and carried out by the FSG. It is worth noting that between 2007 and 2015, the wider context of the housing situation in Spain became critical as a result of the housing bubble and the financial crisis (Observatori DESC/PAHC, 2015).

According to this study (MSSSI, 2015), the housing conditions of Spain's Roma population have significantly improved over recent decades as part of general advances in this area, but also due to the systematic initiatives of national and regional governments, as well as local councils, to eradicate shanty towns in many of Spain's big cities, coupled with subsequent re-housing plans. Many families have gained access to standardised housing, and basic housing equipment has also improved considerably. That is to say, there has been no targeted policy specifically to address Roma housing problems, but instead there has been a general policy to upgrade low-standard housing conditions, rehousing initiatives, etc., in which Roma were overrepresented, although none of these programmes were specifically "for Roma". However, some re-housing programmes involving local Roma communities have aggravated residential segregation because large extended families and communities were offered new houses but in concentrated areas. In some cases, the design of new housing was not suitable for the families' use of domestic space. Meanwhile, other problems have persisted, mainly the continuing existence of shanty towns in certain areas and the high degree of occupation in some houses that causes overcrowding (Tapada, 2002).

As the findings of EU-MIDIS II (European Union, 2017) suggest, all countries have improved on the 'availability of space' indicator in comparison to the 2011 Roma survey, with the largest improvements observed in Romania, Portugal and Spain. The share of Roma living in households without tap water inside their dwelling remains much higher than in the general population, with the exception of the Czech Republic and Spain, where the percentages of Roma households deprived of basic sanitation amenities are 4% and 1%, respectively. The housing programmes implemented in Spain two decades ago appear to have had a positive impact, although deterioration is also reported in both the homes and their surrounding urban environments, which received little attention or investment during the years of the recession.

Housing was an overriding concern during the crisis. The FOESSA and the MSSSI reports mentioned earlier (FOESSA, 2014; MSSSI, 2015) indicate that along with the economic crisis came a loss of housing among Roma people in all of Spain's Autonomous Communities, both of mortgaged property (evictions for non-payment of mortgages or foreclosures as a result of endorsement), and due to unpaid rent. Big cities in Spain have become very difficult places to find affordable housing in the free market, given high rental prices and mandatory requirements such as third-party financial statements and employment contracts. These affect the Spanish population as a whole, but may be even more damaging to Roma families, who also face racism and discrimination when it comes to finding a home to rent, as reported in the FSG 2012 Annual Report on Discrimination and the Roma community (FSG, 2013b)³³. Over the last

³² https://www.gitanos.org/centro_documentacion/publicaciones/fichas/117552.html.es

³³ http://www.mitramiss.gob.es/oberaxe/ficheros/documentos/Informe_discriminacion_2013_FSG.pdf

four years, local councils in urban areas have attempted to design and develop public housing, as well as to limit rental rates, but the situation is still pressing for young people and vulnerable sectors of the population in general.

Health

Health is another issue of concern that is reflected in the EC National Roma Integration Strategy 2012-2020 as a topic directly linked to the socioeconomic conditions of the population, as well as to universal public policies. According to the WHO, the health of the population is "the result of the situation in which people grow, live, work and age, and the type of systems used to combat disease"³⁴.

The results of the EU MIDIS II (European Union, 2018) survey show that 95-98% of Roma in Spain, Portugal and Slovakia are covered either by the national health insurance scheme or additional insurance. In contrast, only 45% of Roma in Bulgaria and 54% of Roma in Romania indicated that this is the case. The report also notes that Spain is the country in which the lowest rates of unmet medical care needs were recorded. In line with these findings, the MSSSI survey³⁵, coordinated by Daniel La Parra (2014), perceives the state of health among the Roma population to be generally good, like that of the Spanish population as a whole. Closer analysis of the indicators reveals, however, that the results for the Roma population are worse than those for the rest of the population. Health inequality had already been identified in the first comparative study carried out in 2006 by the Ministerio de Sanidad y Política Social (MSPS) and the FSG. Eight years on, these inequalities had not decreased significantly. This can be explained by the social processes that generate these inequalities, beginning with the socio-economic and political context. The estimated gap in life expectancy between Spain's Roma and non-Roma populations is 10 years, very similar to the gap identified between the portions of the population with the highest and lowest income in the country after the economic crisis.

The MSSSI survey gathered data on the health problems and diseases reported by both the adult and young Roma population. Among the problems mentioned by the adult population – osteoarthritis, asthma, diabetes, depression, mental health problems, migraine, high blood pressure, cholesterol, allergies, and problems relating to the menopause (in the case of women) – there was little variation in comparison to 2006, except in the case of self-reported diabetes among the Roma women surveyed, which increased from 8.7% to 14.5%. In terms of lifestyle indicators (smoking and alcohol consumption, diet, physical activity and body weight) different patterns were observed in Roma men and women and, in some cases (such as alcohol consumption) healthier lifestyles were identified among the Roma population than in the population as a whole. The percentage of Roma who reported having suffered an accident was twice as high the average percentage among the general population, both for men and women. This figure had not decreased since 2006 and, in the case of women, showed a rise (unfortunately, this also an indirect indicator of normalisation since an increasing number of Roma women are becoming drivers in comparison to previous studies). The Roma population reported a higher frequency of hospitalisation and emergency visits than the general population, which is consistent with their health status. The study also found that the oral health of Roma men and women is poorer than that of the general population, and also in comparison to the average among social sectors with poorer socioeconomic conditions.

While oral health is the only area not fully covered by the Spanish public health system, preventive health and systematic screening programmes for women over 50 are automatically activated based on residence. It is essential to consider the sexual and reproductive health of women from the perspective

³⁴ https://www.who.int/social_determinants/final_report/key_concepts/es/

³⁵ National Health Survey in neighborhoods with a high concentration of Roma population.

of gender and class inequality. According to the report's findings, Roma women reported engaging with preventive practices (gynaecological visits and mammograms) less frequently than women from sectors of the population in better socioeconomic situations, but at a similar level to women among the lower classes as a whole. Moreover, it is worth noting that this frequency has increased in comparison to 2006, and the number of Roma women who have never attended a gynaecological consultation has decreased from 24.4% to 17.3%. Despite these positive results, the study shows a large number of 'non-responses' to questions relating to preventive practices among women. These results should therefore be interpreted with caution, especially when taking into account the survey methodology. In order to better understand the preventive practices and aspects of health among Roma women, it will be necessary to carry out studies with a more appropriate methodology, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods and cross-disciplinary approaches.

Obesity among all age groups is an increasingly worrying factor in relation to the prevention of disease and the promotion of health that is especially prevalent among the Spanish Roma. A study carried out by Ester Rebato³⁶ from the University of the Basque Country between 2011 and 2013, in collaboration with the Roma association Kale Dor Kayiko, found that 50% of the 380 individuals from 50 Roma families in the study were significantly overweight, even in comparison to the already high rates of obesity seen among the general population (between 15% and 20%). This can be explained by both nutritional and sociocultural patterns: consumption of processed foods is higher among low-income populations, both Roma and non-Roma, but is over-represented among the former; meanwhile, a prevailing association of obesity with beauty, fertility or success exists among populations who have experienced severe deprivation in former times. A joint prevention programme was implemented on the basis of the study's results, in order to prevent diabetes and heart disease among both men and post-menopausal women. Similar initiatives have been identified among the public health services of other autonomous communities. Although this is a small-scale experience, it is a very good example of a targeted study and intervention strategy carried out in collaboration between research institutions, Roma civil society and the regional government.

Finally, it is interesting to note the way in which traditional cultural practices of family-oriented care among Roma play a protective role in relation to the comparatively poorer health status of Roma elders. Heredia Amador (2018) shows how the experiences of major health problems on the part of Roma elders are alleviated due to a positive perception of their centrality in the family's priorities in comparison to non-Roma families. Hospital rules should be sensitive to the benefits of certain traditional practices.

Social inclusion and political representation

Political representation is an indisputable indicator of the social mobility and social integration of any group within a society. In the case of the Spanish Roma, it is also an outcome of organised activism over the 40 years of Spanish democracy, and of the struggle against discrimination and for the right to equal participation in all spheres of society. Since the mid-1980s, national and regional governments in Spain have collaborated with the FSG to promote the development of Roma associations at all levels, many federated under and supported by the Unión Romani³⁷. Moreover, during the last two decades, many Roma women-led, feminist and some youth-led associations have also proliferated within and beyond the umbrella and framework of policy. According to the 2018 FOESSA survey, 23% of Roma interviewees

³⁶ <http://www.kaledorkayiko.org/>

³⁷ <https://unionromani.org/>

declared that they had participated in some kind of association (especially those related to religion³⁸), a much higher rate of participation than among the Spanish population as a whole, although their political participation (for example, going to demonstrations) is much lower. However, this may be changing.

The first Roma to serve in the Spanish Parliament, Juan de Dios Ramírez-Heredia, entered the Congreso de los Diputados or Spanish lower chamber in 1977, initially for the UCD party, and from 1983 for the PSOE. He later served in the European Parliament (1986-1999). In 2019, Roma achieved their greatest level of political representation so far, with four elected members of the Spanish Congreso de los Diputados (national lower chamber); in the previous legislature there were two. These parliamentarians come from different Spanish regions and have been elected to represent different parties, reflecting the social heterogeneity of Roma citizens. In Madrid, Sara Giménez, a member of the FSG, was elected on behalf of Ciudadanos (a centre-right liberal party); in Seville, Beatriz Carrillo, vice-president of the Consejo Estatal del Pueblo Gitano (State Council of the Roma People), was elected to represent the PSOE (a social-democratic party); in Tarragona, Ismael Cortés, a university professor, represented Podemos (a left-wing party); and in Huelva, Juan José Cortés, an activist and Pentecostal pastor, was elected on behalf of the Partido Popular (conservative party). All of these parliamentarians are well known for their Roma activism and participation in various social organisations, but none had previous experience as a professional politician. This confirms that the political representation achieved by Roma is not so much a product of higher levels of social mobility including access to higher education, but of the activist “boom” among younger generations, as well as the growth and consolidation of the movement of Roma associations, which has provided greater visibility and collective empowerment or ethnic mobilisation, as Mirga-Kruszelnicka (2016) demonstrated in her thorough study *The associations are all we have*. Whatever the cause, access to frontline political representation is always positive, and contributes to the removal of glass ceilings and stereotypes on behalf of the entire group – hence the remark of the FSG director, Isidro Rodríguez, that “the presence of these four new deputies in the Parliament offers an image of competence and modernity about all Roma and will contribute to a change of our collective image in Spanish society.”³⁹.

Over the last 20 years, many steps forward have been taken in the institutional participation of Roma, relating to the design, elaboration, development and assessment of policies addressed towards them. Several regions have implemented comprehensive plans for the social promotion of Roma and the acknowledgement of Roma culture⁴⁰. An Institute of Roma Culture (Instituto de Cultura Gitana⁴¹) has been created, and another initiative has been the creation of a Virtual Museum of the Roma People (Museu virtual del Poble Gitano⁴²) as part of the integral plan for Roma people in Catalonia. Moreover,

³⁸ It has to be noted that religious practice is much higher and more varied among the Roma population than in the Spanish population as a whole, and 40% of the Roma declared they participated in the Evangelical worship (Hernández Pedreño, García Luque and Gehrig, 2018).

³⁹ https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/09/06/eps/1536246627_030346.html.

⁴⁰ See, for example the latest plans and strategies for the promotion of Roma people in several Autonomous Communities. Andalusia: <https://www.juntadeandalucia.es/organismos/sobre-junta/planes/detalle/133404.html>; Valencia: <http://www.inclusio.gva.es/documents/610460/167669731/ESTRATEGIA+VALENCIANA+PARA+LA+IGUALDAD+Y+LA+INCLUSI%C3%93N+DEL+PUEBLO+GITANO+2018-2023/6b78937d-d25b-40b8-9fb3-5a9f6d46cefa>; Madrid: <http://www.madrid.org/es/transparencia/informacion-institucional/planes-programas/estrategia-inclusion-social-poblacion-gitana-comunidad>; the Basque Country: <http://www.euskadi.eus/gobierno-vasco/-/plan-departamental/59-estrategia-vasca-con-el-pueblo-gitano-2018-2020/>; and Catalonia: http://treballiaferssocials.gencat.cat/web/.content/01departament/08publicacions/ambits_tematicos/inclusio_i_cohesio_social/Planintegraldelpueblogitano/Plan-Integral-Pueblo-Gitano-17-20_Digital.pdf

⁴¹ <https://institutoculturagitana.es/>

⁴² <https://www.museuvirtualgitano.cat/>

there seems to be a new impetus to the work of the national Council of the Roma People⁴³, together with the new EU National Roma Strategy for Spain. The weakness of such initiatives is the risk that a gap will occur between what is planned and expected, and what is actually carried out in practice and its real impact on behalf of the Roma population (Bereményi and Mirga, 2012). Notwithstanding, it can be concluded that there are key indicators of progress in the area of participation and representation, which is essential for social inclusion.

IDENTITY AND ROMA ACTIVISM

In September 2018, the film ‘Carmen y Lola’ by director Arantxa Echevarría premiered in Spain. Over the following months, the film won a number of national and international awards. Based on a true story, the film explores the homosexual relationship between two Roma teenagers, while confronting their families’ expectations and traditional perspectives. The non-Roma director was accused by some feminist Roma associations of promoting stereotypes about the Roma community through a non-Roma feminist lens. In addition, a young and successful non-Roma singer, Rosalía⁴⁴, winner of two Latin Grammys in 2018, was accused of cultural appropriation by members of Roma associations for making use of symbols, lyrics and flamenco rhythms in her songs that recall Roma culture. They affirmed that “she intends to transmit a culture that is not her own, and falls into clichés.”⁴⁵

Controversial notions and identifications around Roma/*Gitano* culture are not new. In the mid-1990s the famous Roma singer Raimundo Amador, himself involved in musical fusions and innovation, in his song “Gitano de temporá” set out to illustrate the way in which some people tried to act like Roma, and on occasion even pretended to *be* Roma, while acting against the interests of the Roma the rest of the time. Does a non-Roma singer have the ‘right’ to use elements of Roma/*Gitano* culture? In Spain, what is Roma/*Gitano*, and what is not? How could the non-Roma director of ‘Carmen y Lola’ have told the story in a way that would not have resulted in stereotyping? Under what circumstances would this be acceptable? Roma/*Gitano* culture is diverse in itself and, like any other culture, is not a static set of elements. Neither does it have clear boundaries; instead, it is part of the common elements of socialisation within Spain, and increasingly in the globally communicated world of cultural consumption. Could that instead be part of alternative processes of recognition, or shared social experiences? Are these reactions from some Roma activists a kind of withdrawal into identity, or are they a legitimate defence of Roma image and traditions in the face of the racism, discrimination and exclusion they have experienced for centuries? Some of the reflections that emerge on identity, identifications, and socio-cultural policies in relation to the Spanish Roma need to be examined as part of social policy approaches.

However much diversity there may be among the Roma, both as a people and as a culture, over time they have been the object of contradictory representations and negative stereotyping across European societies. These representations have often ignored the difficult conditions and violence experienced by Roma people as part of their incorporation into European nation-states. Present-day Roma are often still associated with people who move freely; who possess hidden knowledge, from fortune telling to dance and music; but also with marginality and crime. These representations feed fundamentalist cultural attitudes aimed at justifying the logic of the exclusion of Roma from ‘Europeanness’ on the basis of “cultural difference”, the “intriguing difference” as San Román (2010) put it. In relation to public

⁴³ <https://www.mscbs.gob.es/va/ssi/familiasInfancia/PoblacionGitana/ConPuebloGitano.htm>

⁴⁴ https://elpais.com/elpais/2018/09/06/eps/1536246627_030346.html.

⁴⁵ https://www.elespanol.com/cultura/musica/20180531/gitanos-atacan-rosalia-usa-simbolos-pestanas-postizas/311468865_0.html

policy design, stereotypical, homogenised and static views of the Roma tend to eventually charge them with a sort of “added vulnerability”, raising important uncertainties and doubts that make Roma people appear seriously problematic (Carrasco and Bereményi, 2011). Shared experience of discrimination and rejection, and also of resistance, has reinforced the self-definition of Roma in opposition to local mainstream society (in their own self-definition as *Gitano* in Spain). As with many other historically marginalised groups, among Roma the processes of social integration may be feared as an open door to assimilation and a loss of identity, and the blurring of boundaries in any direction may appear disturbing and offensive. Policies aimed at social integration need to be aware of the overlap between the long-lasting effects of identity-based discrimination, and the effects that emerge from experiences of inequality. Beyond struggling against hate-speech and stereotyping⁴⁶, policies against antigypsyism⁴⁷ (*antigitanismo*) in Spain and elsewhere should address both, as Silvia Agüero and Nicolás Jiménez have underlined⁴⁸.

However, Bereményi and Mirga (2012) made a pertinent observation about this phenomenon in their evaluation of a plan developed by the regional government of Catalonia aimed at improving the social integration of Roma. They point out that ethnic-cultural demands ended up achieving greater visibility for the community, but in turn concealed other needs. Socio-cultural recognition could be seen as more important than demands relating to employment and housing. Even gender issues were treated in a very simplified way, and were not evaluated using adequate indicators (Bereményi and Mirga, 2012). Claiming cultural rights should not, however, prevent Roma from receiving equal treatment with regard to gender equality, in the sense of the rights of Roma women as women. In this sense, the film ‘Carmen y Lola’ may show, through art, a fresh and universal questioning of patriarchy – both Roma and non-Roma – that many young women may feel reflects their own experiences. Likewise, young people can enjoy Rosalía’s music as an example of the fact that culture is not static and possesses no borders, and that “Roma” is not foreign but part of the European “us”, as audiences across the world enjoy, learn and experience fusions with flamenco, itself a mixture. These debates are not secondary, but central, in recalling the fact that cultural policy is also a priority social policy. And as with any human group, Roma must also be seen as part of wider society – as legitimate, complex and heterogeneous as that may be in an increasingly global and interconnected world.

CONCLUSIONS AND TRANSFERABLE LESSONS FOR THE EU

Overall, the comparatively better situation of Spanish Roma cannot be regarded as the outcome of an intentionally designed integration model or strategy; however, as the FSG (2012) puts it, there has been a pragmatic approach to promoting the social inclusion of Roma citizens in Spain as the whole country has undergone deep transformations in the expansion of its social policies, enhancing Roma participation in them. But there is no doubt that an assessment of the Spanish experience can shed light on the conditions and processes required to enhance the levels of Roma integration across the rest of the EU’s member states. The case of Eastern European Roma nationals in Spain, whose situation demands more detailed study and targeted policies, cannot be left out of this reflection.

⁴⁶ Among the many examples of remarkable Roma activists’ mobilisation it is interesting to include those related to unfortunately very popular TV shows such as *Mi gran boda gitana* (*My great Gitano wedding*) or *Palabra de gitano* (*Gitano word of honour*). A very striking campaign was that in which primary school age Roma children’s reactions are shown when reading the Spanish language reference dictionary *Diccionario de la Real Academia de la Lengua* (RAE) to find out the definition of Gitano as *trapacero* (tricky), “I am not *trapacero*”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C3l0ws5cm0A>

⁴⁷ See <http://antigypsyism.eu/>

⁴⁸ https://www.eldiario.es/pikara/Antigitanismoes_6_693340662.html

Three general conclusions can be drawn from this short review. First, the advances in Spain over recent decades that have led most effectively to improvements in the quality of life and sense of belonging among Spanish Roma are a consequence, above all, of *ensuring equal citizenship rights* and relying on a *single body whose only mission is to ensure that these rights are effectively enjoyed*, by means of both general and targeted policies. The current structure, dependency and mission of the Spanish Roma foundation FSG has been designed to achieve this via plans and programmes, research and funding throughout the country, cross-regionally, since the early 1980s. It is important to note that the *promotion of Roma associations* that was necessary to expand the government's action plans has played a key dual role, both as a means and as an outcome: reaching out to the Roma population to help ensure those rights locally, and constituting an asset for the Roma people as *platforms for activism*, which is in turn a form of active citizenship. However, this situation is not free from controversy: Bereményi and Mirga (2012) also warned against the 'NGO-isation' of pro-ROMA policy intervention frameworks. The powerful FSG is not part of the administration, but a social NGO, and consequently not ruled by the norms of public institutions.

Second, *raising the standards of the population as a whole* through the development of the welfare state via universal, state-funded services, has had a very positive impact on the social integration of Spanish Roma, since access to such services by Roma has been specifically promoted. For example, this can be positively identified in mainstream areas such as *universal health services*, but also in areas affecting segments of the population most at risk, such as the *Minimum Insertion Income*, which benefits both Roma and non-Roma in vulnerable situations, but can be developed jointly with specific/Roma associations to enhance closeness and trust.

A third general conclusion is that *policies that intend to introduce important positive changes* for the population as a whole cannot be designed without being analysed *from the perspective of the situation of vulnerable groups* in that specific area. It is essential to take into account the risks that changes may entail for such groups, if additional strategies are not implemented to prevent them. For example, a clear lesson can be learnt from the Spanish experience concerning the education reform (discussed earlier) that extended compulsory education for all, but split public education into schools teaching primary stages and schools teaching secondary stages – causing a tragic regression in the education of Roma children and youth that remains unresolved.

In relation to the key areas of social integration analysed, it is important to summarise and highlight the elements that appear to have worked *in the specific context and characteristics of the situation of Roma people in Spain*:

- Employment: among other initiatives and experiences, three successful strategies can be highlighted in this area.
 - Collaboration with Roma associations to implement requirements relating to access to the Minimum Insertion Income.
 - Making effective the equal rights of women as recipients of aid, since they usually carry out the paperwork on behalf of the family.
 - ACCEDER: a targeted policy programme aimed at training and monitoring access to wage labour, with the aim of improving the employability and increasing the levels of waged labour, work experience and educational aspirations among Roma young people.
- Education: although this is a key area for both the present and future opportunities of Roma children and youth, good initiatives in this area also need to expand and provide evaluations.
 - Positive experiences have been achieved even in highly segregated secondary schools by making the most of collaboration opportunities with teachers and relations with families, working hand in hand with young Roma professional coaches. Mention must also be made

- of other experiences aimed at transforming the whole school approach in primary schools, to raise expectations in relation to opportunities for all students, including Roma students.
- Universal access to pre-school education from the age of three is guaranteed within primary schools free of charge, including free meals for those in need. Almost all Roma children participate in this stage of education.
 - PROMOCIONA offers out-of-school support, monitoring and orientation for students and families. Similar programmes in the various Autonomous Communities have proved to be quite successful in helping Roma students to complete compulsory education, as well as building strong aspirations to remain in post-compulsory education. However, the programme does not currently satisfy the demands of all Roma students who need it, and the gap between educational attainment of Roma and non-Roma younger generations may be growing again, since the latter remain longer in education and training.
- Health: the life expectancy gap between Roma and non-Roma in Spain is still significant – as is the gap between neighbourhoods with higher and lower income, regardless of access to quality health services – but many programmes and initiatives in this area can be regarded as having been successful. This is also due to the fact that the Spanish National Health Service is among the best in the world⁴⁹, and provides universal coverage for all citizens.
 - Although preventive behaviour is not as prevalent among Roma, the use of health services has been almost completely normalised
 - Collaboration between Roma associations and advanced clinical research on the prevention of obesity and key related diseases that are major causes of mortality as a model for intervention.
 - A pronounced health gap exists between Roma and non-Roma elders, but if the results of recent research are taken into account, health institutions could become more flexible to traditional care practices within Roma families, which can have beneficial effects.
 - Housing: although previous decades had seen major improvements in housing conditions, the recent economic crisis has had a negative impact on the ability of Roma in working class and marginalised neighbourhoods to retain their homes.
 - Plans to eradicate shanty towns and re-housing projects in integrated areas implemented by a series of local councils have affected both Roma and non-Roma. Successful experiences have involved families and communities in the process, taking into account their needs. Such schemes have been developed as part of larger policies of social integration, as improving the quality of the homes cannot be separated from the development of the neighbourhood as a whole.

There is still a long way to go in order to reduce the inequality gaps that exist between the social situations of Roma and non-Roma citizens in Spain. But despite some critical observations being made in the review of the policy areas analysed, and taking into account the caution with which adaptations must be carried out (James and Lodge, 2003), *the most relevant contribution regarding policy transferability may be in the approach adopted, rather than in individual policy initiatives or programmes.*

Moreover, *both the approaches and the specific policies, universal or targeted, must be evaluated regularly* – but this important exercise has not been the norm in Spain. *Lost in action?* (Bereményi and Mirga, 2012) is the only thorough evaluation to date of a specific “plan for the social inclusion of the

⁴⁹ The Spanish Health Service ranks seventh out of the 190 compared in the WHO 2018 classification. Spain has the second highest life expectancy after Japan, and is also the second country in the world in the number of healthy years ahead at the age of 65, after Sweden.

Roma population” in Spain. It focused on an evaluation of the design, implementation and impact assessment applied during the six years of the Comprehensive Plan for the Roma/*Gitano* Population in Catalonia (*Pla interdepartamental del Poble Gitano*) by the region’s autonomous government. The authors concluded that the plan represented a symbolic response from the public administration of the region to the demand for political commitment, but that it had not managed to *balance cultural recognition and economic improvement in its actions* and failed to *generate collective empowerment*, which were two of its main goals. Although social and political participation of Roma throughout the autonomous community increased as a result of the activities carried out under the PIPG, the authors concluded that power relations and social status remained largely unchanged. The danger of getting ‘lost in action’ along the way beyond symbolic contributions is also a lesson to be learnt.

Social rights such as work, education, housing and health should be a priority. The claim for cultural rights should not fall into essentialist views that risk generating new stereotypes or provoke withdrawal into identity. Instead, it should *promote a sense of belonging and contribute to pluricultural identities* as a key aspect of social integration – rights, resources and participation over notions of assimilation. Social anthropologist Ana Jiménez (1999) drew attention to the deep meaning of choosing terms for self-identification: why not ‘Roma Spaniards’ instead of ‘Spanish Roma’? The same could be applied to European membership and citizenship, since this short report intends to address successful ways to overcome inequalities and exclusion that affect Roma Europeans as a whole.

As a closing remark, it is important to adopt a European perspective with the aim of *developing more democratic politics of belonging*⁵⁰, including initiatives such as the incorporation of the history of the Roma people into European history as part of the school curriculum, or the study of the influences between many languages spoken in Europe, including Romani language types. Music and art can contribute to this, too. Nor should we lose sight of *political representation as an impulse to achieve visibility and full rights*. To the extent that Roma citizens occupy spaces of power (associations, companies, etc.) and positions within institutions (teachers, MPs, etc.), their social inclusion as European citizens will become a fact.

⁵⁰ Following the analytical framework proposed by Yuval-Davis (2006), the politics of belonging refer to the participatory politics of citizenship as well as to the entitlement and status available for minority/subaltern groups in a society.

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