

Good morning,

it is a real pleasure to be here amongst all of you and first of all, I would like to thank the Organization for inviting Fundación Secretariado Gitano, to participate in this important and necessary conference.

During this presentation, I will try to give a brief overview of the different actions that Fundación Secretariado Gitano is doing in Housing Area in Spain. Later I will present two specific examples of improving housing access in Andalucía, whose results we think they are worth being considered to transfer to other similar situations.

At the end of my presentation, I will try to show you the principles and guidelines which would bring improvements in this area.

## 01

Let me then introduce *Fundación Secretariado Gitano* (FSG), a non-profit intercultural social organisation, which provides services for the development of the Roma community throughout the Spanish territory as well as at the European level. It started its work in the 60s and was constituted as a Foundation in 2001.

Apart from the housing programmes I will explain in a few minutes, FSG also implements different and numerous programmes regarding social incorporation of Roma citizens, from an integrated vision which includes areas such as employment, health, education, equal treatment, and so on... So, to carry out all these actions, at this moment we have 76 local offices all around Spain, and even several groups have been created in other countries like Romania where we are transferring our practices.

## 02

From Fundación Secretariado Gitano we are improving life quality of Roma Community in housing area through different initiatives such as:

- Settlements and shantytowns eradication programmes in cities like A Coruña, Málaga or Avilés, where we are engaged in providing full support to families undergoing the process of resettlement within the framework of local plans for the eradication of these shantytowns.

Today, between 10% and 12% out of the Roma population continues to live in segregated settlements and in a host of undignified or unsuitable habitats (shanty towns, bunkers, modular and pre-fab dwellings, *special types of neighbourhoods and so on...*); settlements isolated from the cities and from opportunity.

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- We are also involved in initiatives regarding the purchase of houses by the Foundation and their subsequent rental to Roma families, for instance in Barcelona, Huesca or Córdoba, where normalized housing access supporting programmes are being developed successfully.

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- Through agreements signed with the city councils of different cities like Madrid or Murcia, we are participating in the monitoring and supporting of families relocated, and in the solution of disputes arising among the neighbours.

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- Rehabilitation and social actions in marginal neighbourhoods of cities like León, Burgos or Navarra, where a Integrated Housing Programme by the Government of Navarra took a decisive step with our participation mediating in the purchase of second-hand homes and assisted families throughout this process.

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Focusing now my presentation on ANDALUCÍA, I think it is important to underscore previously some data. Just as it is shown in the *Geographical Study regarding housing and the Roma community in Spain*, around a 40% out of Spanish Roma citizens are living in Andalucía, which means around 270.000 (two hundred seventy thousand) people. That is why FSG has 10 offices which cover all of the 8 Andalusian provinces.

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Now, I am going to comment on one of the programmes I referred before, which is being successfully developed in CÓRDOBA, since 2007. Eastern Roma Community is increasing in some cities of Andalucía, such as Málaga and Córdoba.

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And it is in this city where FSG is developing the “Bridge-Appartments” Programme, through a collaboration agreement with the City council of Córdoba, which is renewed year by year.

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This is a *PROGRAMME FOR ACCEPTANCE AND SUPPORTING OF FOREIGN FAMILIES IN A SOCIAL VULNERABLE SITUATION*, where the economic support of the local government through its Social Welfare Area, allows our Foundation to find several suitable apartments, amongst almost 50 private apartments and state agencies, where we can work along with these relocated families.

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This programme means to be a middle-step for a period of 6 or 12 months, until the families can find a standard and normalized home, but it is complemented with other programmes of our Foundation, just like employment and social integration projects, education, “Communication in Spanish” courses, and so on.

In spite of successful results, it is not an easy way to cover, because of the difficulties that unfortunately always exist, just like discrimination when it comes to renting, or the step once the family have to move to a normalized house after programme ends.

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Another experience in Andalucía I wanted to present is at this moment taking place in Málaga, at the south coast of Spain, where there is an almost 25 years old shantytown. This was born originally as a provisional pre-fab dwellings solution to people who already lived in other settlements. Today, they are around 260 families living in such substandard conditions, but thanks to Regional and Local Governments efforts and, needless to say, to urban pressure, a resettlement programme is being nowadays developed.

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It is because of the work of FSG for so long at the settlement that last July 2010 began to collaborate with the Integrated Rehabilitation Office of the Regional Government, through a Programme for Supporting and Monitoring the Resettled Families. From that date, 12 families have been resettled in different neighbourhoods and even in other towns.

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It is also important to underscore that our activity does not begin once the family leaves the shantytown, but before. We are also involved in advisory and diagnostic activities regarding the situation of families and housing.

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And in the same way that happens in Córdoba, difficulties are neither few nor easy to meet.

- Urban pressure is a double-edged sword, because while it is useful sometimes to arrange definitely a resettlement process, most of the times it makes it rush.
- Unfortunately, social rejection is usual at receptor neighbourhoods of resettled families, if there has not been a previous work with them, preparing them and erasing stereotypes and prejudice.
- To seek suitable and tailored houses to their conditions is not always easy, and it sometimes happens that the apartment does not fulfil all the needs, or the family which could move to, is not prepared enough yet.
- It has also happened that due to emergency reasons, a family has been resettled, not being well prepared for it... so the results are always unsuccessful.

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Now, I would like to present some of the fundamental principles and guidelines for resettlement and access to guaranteed housing.

**1. THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF THE GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION.** Collaboration between City Councils, Regional Departments dealing with housing issues and Social Affairs offices is therefore indispensable.

**2. IMPLEMENT A GENERAL RESETTLEMENT MODEL WHILE PAYING ATTENTION TO SPECIFICITIES.** In some cases it is advisable to seek solutions individually tailored to their conditions while also social support initiatives with them are undertaken.

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3. It is usually difficult to keep a successful result after a programme ends, because it is absolutely necessary to monitoring families beyond their resettlement, according to individual needs and not dating previously a general ending, especially if we talk about multi-problematic families.

4. INVOLVEMENT OF OTHER SOCIAL AGENTS. When rejection is often the response, this can be remedied or palliated by encouraging participation and dialogue with the different stakeholders, and this is when an intercultural intervention can be the key, based always on a decision and the firm will of the government to seek solutions.

5. Another aspect to consider at the same level of importance is working in coordination with mass media, and with receptor neighbour communities, just to avoid the social rejection that too often has at its final part destroyed, long processes of resettlements.

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Finally, I would like to finish my presentation remembering a sentence of Marco Polo taken from the book "Invisible Cities" by Italo Calvino, which contains the essence, from my point of view.

So, Marco Polo said to Grand Kan at the end of his journeys to the cities which appear in our nightmares...

*[...] There are two different ways to avoid suffer the hell we live in everyday. The first one is easy for a lot of people: to accept this hell and become part of it until they no longer see it. And the second one, which is dangerous and demands permanent attention and learning: to search and to be able to recognize, in the middle of hell, who and what is not hell... and making it endure and giving it enough space."*

*Thank you very much.*