

Local engagement for Roma inclusion

Locality study Córdoba (Spain), 2016

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1. Executive summary

Based on the idea of Roma participation in the design and development of public policies as a main priority, in Córdoba LERI contributed to changing the way policies for the Roma community were developed at local level. It did so through a specific action – the drafting of **a local Roma strategy** – in line with the Spanish National Strategy for Roma Integration 2012–2020, that involved the community to which these policies were addressed, both at the design and implementation phases.

In addition, **stable participatory mechanisms** were designed and implemented between the Roma population and the local government. Thematic round tables with the participation of Roma and non-Roma civil society and representatives of the municipal authority of Córdoba were established, each focusing on one of the five main policy areas (education, health, gender-based issues, housing, employment) identified in line with the National Roma Integration Strategy 2012–2020.

In Córdoba, the LERI local team also worked with **women and mediators of the Roma community** adopting the participatory processes to achieve the marked objectives. In particular, Roma women received training and capacity-building in exchange. This work was considered essential to support Roma women in the fight for equal rights in their community and in the wider society. All measures implemented were provided to the Roma people through NGOs and other stakeholders at local level.

To ensure the implementation of measures designed with the participation of the whole community, a full commitment from the local authority is needed. Nevertheless, mechanisms to promote active collaboration among the NGOs and associations in the local context can be set up and continue working without the full support of the local administration. The importance of establishing networks and synergies within the civil society and of promoting engagement of Roma was indicated as a new approach to design and develop effective interventions that could produce concrete results.

Keywords/Tags: thematic round tables, local strategy, women, learning communities, capacity-building

2. Description of the local context

The socio-demographic context of the Roma population in Córdoba

The majority of the Spanish Roma population have been living in Spain for centuries and are deeply rooted in the society. In the 1970s, a significant movement from the countryside to the city affected the entire population, including the Roma community.

With regard to Roma, Spain is both an important and contradictory case. The Roma minority has experienced very ambivalent processes of integration and exclusion from the time it reached Spain during the 15th century. Following the

1978 Constitution, equal rights were granted to all citizens, commencing a period of change for the entire country, which included the setup of a democratic and highly decentralised State, and the strengthening of social welfare, hitherto weak and not universal. Since 1985, together with sectoral policies in health, education, housing, employment, social services, etc., a series of policies and programmes to promote the development of Roma have been implemented. These specific social policies, which are particularly embodied by the Roma Development Programme and the plans of several autonomous regions, are implemented by a variety of stakeholders, notably local entities and non-profit organisations.

Between the creation of the Roma Development Programme 1989 (Programa de Desarrollo Gitano de 1989), and the National Roma Integration Strategy in Spain 2012–2020 (Estrategia Nacional para la Inclusión Social de la Población Gitana en España 2012–2020), there have been over 20 years of general, sectoral and specific policies, implemented at various levels of government administration. These have transformed – or have claimed to transform – the situation of Roma in Spain. Although great improvement has been observed in the areas outlined above (health, education, housing, employment, social services), there are still problems in relation to unemployment, substandard housing, high rates of school failure and dropout, the existence of ghetto schools, a lower life expectancy compared to the rest of the population, the discriminatory representation conveyed by the media and discrimination against the Roma.

A significant issue is that in Spain there is no official government statistical data referring exclusively to the Roma population, as it is considered to be against the Constitution to collect ethnic-sensitive data. Nevertheless, there is a reliance on unofficial sources such as surveys and research undertaken by academic institutions, NGOs, international organisations, etc.

From a political point of view, Córdoba was ruled by the United Left (Izquierda Unida, IU – a left-wing party) for 20 years, up to the elections in 1995, 1999 and 2010 when the Popular Party (Partido Popular, PP – a right-wing party) came to power. In the May 2015 local elections, although the PP obtained most votes, it was not able to secure an absolute majority to form a government. The government is therefore formed by a coalition between IU and the Socialist Workers Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, PSOE – a centre-left party). The role of the local government within the local research will be further analysed in the sections below.

In the past 30 years, Roma have seen their traditional jobs such as cattle dealers, blacksmiths, etc., gradually disappear. Itinerant selling (both registered and informal) has become the most widespread occupation (approximately 65 % of the population is engaged in this activity). A small percentage owns small businesses and the rest of the employed population works in other sectors. It is remarkable that the number of Roma professionals and academics in Córdoba is higher than in most Spanish cities, especially in northern Spain where there are just a few university graduates.

Since 2009, the population of Romanian Roma has significantly decreased in Córdoba, presumably because of the economic crisis in Spain that has led to a general decrease in the number of migrants moving to Spain. Currently there is

a small settlement of Romanians on the outskirts of Córdoba (Carretera de Madrid) in a segregated area without access to social services or infrastructure (not even basic sanitary services such as public toilets), which is undoubtedly the most excluded area of the entire city.

The economic level of the Roma population has deteriorated in recent years, as a result of the economic crisis and, for most street vendors, the arrival of Chinese products has significantly decreased both profit margins and total sales. In 2010, 11.5 % of the total population in Córdoba was excluded and in poverty, with an income per capita among the lowest in Spain. According to the City Council's social services, the Roma community represents a large proportion of this population. They are the poorest of the poor. In general, improvements have taken place in all areas, especially in education (97.5 % of Roma children up to 12 years old are enrolled in school), healthcare and access to social services, although there are still 'systemic' problems. About 80 % of children drop out before finishing secondary school, more than half of the Roma population is in the lowest socioeconomic level, and there are problems with substandard housing. In general, there are no visible problems with the majority of society, even though indirect and hidden discrimination persists, for example by parents preferring not to send their children to schools that have a lot of Roma students, by refusing to allow Roma entry into nightclubs, and in the difficulties they experience to find a job.

The greatest progress that has occurred for the Roma population is not due to specific policies (except perhaps in the field of education). It is the result of general policies aimed at improving conditions for the whole society.

Córdoba, political context and precedents of the LERI research

The situation of the Roma population at the beginning of LERI

At the beginning of the LERI research, four Roma groups were identified in terms of socioeconomic level:

- a sedentary, middle-class group who own businesses or are professionals with a high level of integration (despite belonging to this well-integrated group, they can still suffer from discrimination);
- a group with a low social status, located in poor neighbourhoods (e.g. Fuensanta, the historic old town), who experience higher levels of economic uncertainty and have been affected by the economic recession being, most commonly, street sellers. This group rarely has professional qualifications and is sensitive to economic change;
- a group with a very low social status, located in Guadalquivir, Moreras or Palmeras, affected by the economic crisis, insecure living conditions and problems at all levels, experiencing poverty and exclusion;
- a Romanian Roma group, who used to live in a settlement outside the city, without any services – the most rejected and discriminated group.

Spain is still suffering from the **impacts of the economic crisis**, with considerable levels of unemployment among both Roma and non-Roma, and with serious consequences in most areas: education, housing, etc. as well as in terms of their own personal expectations. This has led to the perception that the Roma population is stagnating or in decline.

Another characteristic, in common with the rest of the Roma population in Spain, is the **heterogeneity** of the Roma population of Córdoba. Roma groups in Spain are diverse and plural at all levels, and significant differences exist in terms of geographic, religious (Catholics and evangelists) and cultural aspects. There have also been important generational changes, especially as regards women, who have often been identified as the driving force of change in the Roma communities because of their greater openness and advancement.¹ Since 2005, Roma women have been the main actors of a social evolution in the education sector as well as in the labour market: at national level, there were still very few Roma graduates in 2005 but eight out of ten graduates were women. Although some very traditional Roma groups remain in Córdoba, there are also Roma, especially women with higher educational backgrounds or engaged in associative movements, who are struggling to carve out a new role within their community and society as a whole. Furthermore, the gap between the most educated and wealthy groups and the most disadvantaged within the Roma community has increased in the past 10 years.²

In Córdoba, the **LERI local team** was composed of the LERI field expert, Carmen Santiago Reyes, and one main co-researcher, Cristina Acosta Garcia, a member of the Kamira Federation, which was the main local partner of the LERI local team in Córdoba. In addition, a selected group of Roma women residing in some of the neighbourhoods of Córdoba (relevant to the research) contributed to its implementation.

Numerous **organisations, Roma and pro-Roma**, are very active in working to improve the situation of the Roma population in Córdoba. Certain organisations focus on the issue of employment, some on education and others work from a more comprehensive perspective. In contrast, the **City Hall** has never been very active in this field, with the exception of a few social initiatives (notably setting up helplines for some NGOs such as Kamira, the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG), Asociación de Mujeres Gitanas Panyabi, Asociación Secretariado de Desarrollo Gitano de Córdoba, and Asociación Encuentro en la Calle).³ Furthermore, the municipal authority did not have a specific action plan for the Roma population, nor had it acted in a coordinated way with relevant stakeholders to assure Roma participation in all matters that affect their lives. During the initial phase of the LERI research, the field expert organised several meetings with the civil society, namely Roma and non-Roma NGOs, associations, mediators and representatives of the municipality, to understand the needs of the Roma population. During the early stages of the LERI research, a participatory action research (PAR) needs assessment phase took place. During this phase the lack of a specific action plan both for the local authorities and the NGOs working on Roma issues emerged as the main need to be addressed in Córdoba. All participants at these meetings realised that the city of Córdoba did

¹ El País (2005), '*La mujer, motor del cambio Gitano: Las Romaníes protagonizan el avance de un colectivo con carencias en salud, educación y empleo*', 22 May 2005.

² Giménez, S. and Sáez, J., Federación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) (2012), *Discrimination of Roma communities: Spain national report*, available at: www.gitanos.org/upload/16/68/Discrimination_of_Roma_National_Report_SPAIN_Net_Kard.pdf

³ Government of Andalusia, Social inclusion of Roma people, available at: www.juntadeandalucia.es/organismos/igualdadypoliticassociales/areas/inclusion/comunidad-gitana.html

not need additional individual actions or measures, but a wider local strategy to promote the inclusion of Roma at all levels. In addition, the LERI local team carried out numerous surveys with Roma women to identify their specific needs.

For this reason, following a number of meetings involving both Roma and pro-Roma civil society organisations, it was decided that the LERI research would support the local community to define a strategy that would promote the social inclusion of Roma in four main areas (education, employment, housing and health) and one cross-cutting area (women and non-discrimination). The methods used to identify the needs and to implement the measures developed by the LERI research are presented in the section below.

3. PAR methodology employed

The LERI field expert started by identifying the stakeholders to be involved in the research (different actors that the LERI local team understood should be involved in the design and drafting of the local Roma strategy).

A number of different participatory action research (PAR) methods were used. Most of these were light PAR methods, as they offered different levels of participation, action and research. None of the methods used was a 'pure' PAR method in the sense of all participants having an equal level of decision making power and control over the direction of the research. Nevertheless, the techniques applied were all participatory in nature.

In order to ensure the engagement of all stakeholders in the research, the LERI field expert, with the assistance of co-researchers, organised a series of **formal meetings** to identify work areas. These first meetings were initially attended by Roma organisations and various experts. Subsequent meetings were extended to institutions and individuals who were identified as crucial stakeholders for the participatory process.

The methods used to define work areas were **focus groups and meetings**. Originally four areas were identified: education, employment, housing and health, in line with the areas defined by the National Roma Integration Strategy 2012–2020 and the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies. Later on, an additional crosscutting area was added: women and non-discrimination. In order to develop the local strategy in each of the policy areas identified, the Roma and pro-Roma NGOs and associations, along with teachers, mediators, parents and Roma women from the community (that were involved in the research from the beginning) agreed to organise one **round table** for each of the policy areas identified (education, employment, health, housing and the cross-cutting theme on women and discrimination). Participants joined at least one round table, based on their particular interest or expertise.

The local authority that had been active during the PAR needs assessment phase was less involved in the implementation of the research due to the change in local government following the elections in May 2015. The main PAR methods used to involve the local authority included participation in round tables, formal meetings and a conference. The reduced commitment of the municipality towards LERI slowed down the progress of the research until October 2015. The role of the local government within the research will be further analysed in the sections below.

Finally, **the LERI local team used surveys, interviews and focus groups with the Roma community**, to understand their point of view and identify their needs. More specifically, the following activities organised with and for Roma women used different PAR methods:

- **cooking workshops**, held in Albolafia School, with the participation of representatives of the health area of the City Council who previously undertook a health check of the students and showed them healthy habits;
- **Fitflamc workshops** (flamenco fitness), a sports and health activity for Roma women, including a course for teachers of Fitflamc for 14 young Roma women, so they can teach Fitflamc to other people;
- **informative talks** on a number of topics considered interesting for Roma women in the community;
- **surveys with Roma women** focusing on investigating gender-based issues;
- three **videos** produced by Kamira, with the LERI local team's support, on domestic violence – gathering the opinions of men and women on this issue; on early dropout of Roma young girls (at both primary and secondary schools); and a video in which young Roma women from the neighbourhood of Guadalquivir highlight the need for interventions in the area of housing.

The video on gender-based violence was used as a tool to enable women to talk about this sensitive matter. Anonymised surveys were also used. This was very effective because it showed Roma women that others were in a similar situation, which enabled some of them to feel more relaxed when asked about this topic (during the film production phase and also during the surveys).

As for the surveys conducted with Roma women, **these were designed by age group. Information collected through these surveys was used to design and deliver training and to contribute to the empowerment of Roma women.** The main goal was to attain women's involvement in the design of policies that mattered to them. Ultimately, the goal was to support these women in becoming the main actors in their fight to ensure equal rights within and outside the Roma community.

In the following phase, the LERI local team used thematic **round tables as a tool to facilitate participation**, with the final aim to agree on a **local Roma strategy designed for and with the Roma population of Córdoba**. The strategy was planned to be designed in alignment with the national Roma integration strategy, which seeks to implement effective measures based on good practice and evidence-based solutions.

4. The local intervention description - Goals, partners, process and results

Stakeholders involved

Apart from a meeting with the Mayor at the beginning of the LERI research (mid-March 2015), the LERI local team mainly cooperated with the town councillor for social services, with the head of service and with technicians from different policy areas within the municipal government. Throughout the research, the LERI local team was in contact with all municipal officials, indicated above, with different

levels of commitment.⁴ For instance, some of them participated in various round tables. The experience of each of the Roma NGOs in the different fields of action was deemed valuable, given that Kamira works primarily in education, health and with women at local level, while the FSG works primarily on employment projects. Thus, the lead for each round table was based on each stakeholder's main field of competence.

In December 2015, a draft of the strategy, in which priorities and lines of action were set out, was adopted by all involved stakeholders. The duration of this strategy will coincide with the entire legislature, and it is considered essential to find the necessary funds for its implementation. In this regard, the City Council included some of the proposals elaborated within the participatory process implemented by LERI in a call for proposals for a project under the Strategy for Urban and Sustainable Development of Córdoba (Estrategia de Desarrollo Urbano Sostenible e Integrado de Priego de Córdoba - EDUSI) under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) (in the area of sustainable urban development) submitted in January 2016. Moreover, on 3 June 2016, within a local LERI conference, a session on European funding was organised by the local team to provide continuity to the interventions and to identify the possibility of securing funding for the local strategy through ERDF and ESF funds.

All leading NGOs in Córdoba were engaged in the LERI research. They were also involved in the selection of the participants to ensure that all stakeholders who should have been included in the consultation process were present. For instance, one of the leading NGOs and key stakeholders in the LERI research was the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG), responsible for several projects developed in the local context. Staff of the faculty of Education within the University of Córdoba also represented a key stakeholder in the research. The Government of Andalusia, through the forthcoming 2014–2016 operational plan, played a very important role, not just as a source of funding, but as a participating agent and a facilitator of good practice. "Encuentros en la Calle" was another key organisation involved, for its leading role on social issues. This association was present within the community in Córdoba, but its relationship with the City Council was not always easy. The president and some of the staff of the Panyabi Association of Romani Women, mainly working on projects for women, along with the FSG, organised events and other activities for the Roma community with the City Council, although its capacity to influence policymakers was low. The Kamira Federation of Romani women and its staff maintained very good relations with the City Council; Kamira was also in charge of promoting the implementation of the local LERI research.

These stakeholders were also engaged in the identification of the problems affecting the Roma population and their causes. After that, all stakeholders involved were asked to define lines of action and measures that could potentially be implemented.

As for the participants in the activities, they varied depending on the activity in question (the group of mediators participated in all the activities). The participants were mostly Roma women from the disadvantaged neighbourhoods of Córdoba. There were no conflicts or tensions between them, the relationships

⁴ Some councillors participated in a range of round tables, others participated only in the one relevant to their competence.

were cordial. Kamira played a major role in preventing potential tensions within the group of participants.

Intervention 1: The thematic round tables

The LERI local team used the participatory round tables by area to seek to implement effective measures, based on successful projects and evidence-based solutions.

Each round table was composed of representatives of NGOs, Roma and non-Roma people, academics and experts – including members from different social services' offices and municipal officials/technicians. There were four round tables in total, one for each of the areas identified during the PAR needs assessment phase.

Each round table met at different stages throughout the LERI implementation until the final conference in June 2016, when the local strategy – designed by all participants of the four round tables – was presented to the whole community (Roma and non-Roma people) in Córdoba.

As for the participants of the round tables, relevant stakeholders that were willing to join the round tables were identified at the PAR needs assessment stage. During the first meeting of each thematic round table, participants were asked to indicate the main problems that affected the life of Roma and to identify the possible causes and potential solutions. This was the method used to identify the main thematic objectives for each area of work.

At the end of the participatory round tables, a common feeling emerged, which can be summarised as follows: *"despite all the measures and policies in place, there has been no great advance"* (Carmen Santiago, President of the Kamira Federation). This is why the LERI local team and all relevant stakeholders decided that a local Roma strategy could be an important tool to promote real and effective change in the lives of the Roma community.⁵ Since the measures and policies implemented so far had not provided the expected results, the interventions undertaken through the LERI research did not aim to produce another policy but to change the method used to design and implement social policies addressing the Roma community's needs. LERI in Córdoba was oriented towards identifying the needs and setting goals and actions through a **participatory approach** in which the opinions of the Roma community were crucial and led to genuine participation by the population directly affected by these policies.

A summary of the reflections shared by participants of the round tables is provided below, including a list of practical measures to include in the local Roma strategy. Good practices in each of the round-table areas developed during this intervention were collated in **individual documents**; these were very useful for everyday work.

⁵ These conclusions reflect the findings of Kamira's work within the Roma community. Kamira challenges the common idea that in Spain most actions to improve conditions for the Gypsies are successful. Nevertheless, the Roma community continues to live in disadvantaged conditions in many areas.

Education round table

Reflections on the social disadvantages of the Roma indicated the lack of education as an important cause of social exclusion. During the different meetings of the education round tables, there was broad consensus among professionals and representatives of the Roma community itself on the crucial role of education in social promotion. Academic results and access to secondary and higher education in the case of the Roma population still register important deficits. Early dropout from the educational system (notably in the transition from primary to secondary school), the high rates of absenteeism and limited access to early childhood education (kindergarten) were identified by all stakeholders as the main problems for Roma.

Based on recent statistics,⁶ it appears that absenteeism is decreasing. However, even when there is continuity in the students' attendance, Roma students often do not achieve the desired results in the acquisition of knowledge. Improved attendance levels are not necessarily accompanied by an improvement in results, which might have encouraged pupils to continue attending school. During the round tables focusing on education, which were very rich and participative, the Roma expressed their ideas, thoughts, concerns and reflections. Some quotes from these meetings are provided below:

"Why are there only Roma in my school?"

"Non-Roma do not want our children to study with theirs"

"When non-Roma want to take their children out of school, they can, but for Roma it seems that there is only one school"

"Why are we going to study if, then, we do not get jobs?"

The need for coordination between the various actors (NGOs, institutions, Roma families) was highlighted along with the need to exchange information and experience to achieve these objectives. The LERI local team worked with various experts, social workers and Roma individuals and families – not only to benefit from the resources, but to ensure that all participants could contribute with their expertise and knowledge in the field of education.

During these meetings there was particular emphasis on the importance of addressing the problem of ghetto schools (schools with mainly Roma students), providing a new opportunity for discussions with the new municipal delegates for education, given that this situation has often been refuted by the local (and national) authorities.⁷

The main objectives⁸ identified by the stakeholders for improving educational outcomes for Roma were:

- O1: NURSERY EDUCATION
 - o Increasing the number of nursery places according to actual demand within the areas of action.

⁶El Periódico (2003), 'Primary school absenteeism of Roma children is 19%' ('El absentismo escolar en Primaria de los niños gitanos es de un 19%'), 29 July 2007.

⁷ This is currently under investigation by the Ombudsman.

⁸ Some of these measures are already implemented in a selection of Córdoba's schools.

- Designing and implementing formative actions and promoting the benefits of early entry into the education system.
 - Training and intervention of Roma mediators.
 - Promoting learning communities.⁹
 - Campaigning to raise awareness on early enrolment.
 - A parents' school.¹⁰
 - Promoting the direct involvement of students from educational sciences (nursery and primary school), social education, etc.
- O2: PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
- Promoting learning communities.¹¹
 - Providing support programmes and educational guidance for young Roma and their families through individualised curricula and educational itineraries.¹²
 - Designing and implementing a programme to support school success.
 - Increasing the number of social workers involved in the centres.
 - Ensuring participation of Roma mediators in school success programmes and/or programmes combating absenteeism.
 - Mentoring programmes (to answer the need for Roma referents).
 - Opening school canteens using existing infrastructure.
 - Studying the areas of intervention with Roma students.
 - A proposal to revise the current registration system and the allocation of centres by area (to combat ghetto schools).
- O3: POST-COMPULSORY EDUCATION
- A programme for continuity and success in undergraduate studies.
 - Financial aid programmes for post-compulsory education.
 - Designing and implementing dual training programmes.
 - A motivational programme for Roma students.
 - Tutoring or mentoring programmes for Roma students.
 - Involving Roma mediators in all programmes.
- O4: ERADICATION OF ILLITERACY AND ADULT EDUCATION
- Providing basic professional training for adults.

⁹ The learning community is a project involving the social and cultural transformation of a school and its environment to achieve an 'Information Society' for everyone, based on dialogic learning and through participatory education of the community, which materialises in all its spaces, including the classroom, available at:

www.juntadeandalucia.es/educacion/colabora/web/cda/inicio

¹⁰ To improve educational outcomes is essential to raise awareness and convince parents of the importance of education; therefore within the school we run workshops, called 'Parents' School', with parents to raise awareness and offer training.

¹¹ Given the success of the learning community, Kamira is currently promoting the establishment of this method in areas where the Roma population has special needs, (based on their experience gained within LERI).

¹² These itineraries are about the creation of individualised itineraries for students and their families, with measures based on the problems, needs and capacities identified during the work with students and their families.

- Positive Spaces Programmes, Town Hall.
 - Offering a support programme for the gradual and continuous learning of adults.
 - Extending school hours and making human resources and facilities for adult education available.
 - A parents' school.
- O5: TEACHER TRAINING IN INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION
 - Courses in the CEP (training centre for teachers).
 - Travelling exhibition Sharing Cultures, FSG.
 - Dissemination of awareness campaigns, FSG.
 - Annual courses and specific training on Roma community interventions aimed at college students.
 - O6: INCLUSION OF DIVERSITY IN SCHOOL CURRICULA
 - Using existing materials on the Roma community.
 - Creating additional materials on the Roma community.

All the main objectives (O1–O6) are already included in existing policy documents at local and national level. However, the sub-objectives were more specifically defined by the stakeholders of the education round table. The main idea was to include these objectives in the local strategy.

Employment round table¹³

When analysing the employment situation of the Roma population in Córdoba, participants of the round table identified that the main issue was the lack of a socio-economic analysis of the current unemployment situation in the municipal area (ideally divided by neighbourhoods or areas). More accurate data was required to decide how to start the intervention. The participants in the round table felt that the assessment on employment needed to make use of existing data without getting 'lost' in it.

Therefore, the round-table participants initially focused on identifying data available to assess the rate of unemployment within the Roma community in Córdoba. Participants were able to rely on data compiled by the FSG (data based on people who voluntarily seek FSG employment services). The active working population is between 17 and 70 years old. The data – complemented by data from NGO "Encuentros en la Calle" – was still limited to those of the most marginalised areas and those registered at the Andalusian Employment Service.

A large percentage of the Roma population was employed as street sellers, with the particularity that these businesses often include whole families. In this respect the IMDEEC (Instituto Municipal de Desarrollo Económico y Empleo de Córdoba) recently reached an agreement with the Córdoba Association of Street Sellers (Asociación Cordobesa de Vendedores Ambulantes; UVACO) to provide training and advice on legal matters.

¹³ Participants from the following organisations: City Hall, IMDEEC, Asociación Panyabi, FAKALI, Upre Romja, Asociación Secretariado Desarrollo Gitano, Kamira. Meetings were held between 5 and 11 November 2016.

During the round-table discussions, a recurrent issue concerned the future of street selling (as this is the main job for Roma) and the difficulties entering the labour market due to discrimination. Below are some of the opinions expressed during the round tables:

"Non-Roma say we do not want to work, but ... how do they know if they do not want to hire us?"

"In a job, a Roma must always do better than a non-Roma, and even then they look at us with scepticism"

"There are no longer profitable revenues in the street-market business. Some days we sell only €10 worth of merchandise"

"The market is very bad. There are months where we do not cover expenses. We pay a lot of taxes".

The following objectives and actions were indicated by stakeholder consensus for inclusion in the local strategy. To avoid duplicating actions and thus be less effective, coordination is a basic requirement.

The main goals in the area of employment were to:

- G1: PROMOTE AND STRENGTHEN A SYSTEM OF COORDINATION FOR THE SOCIAL INCLUSION OF PEOPLE AND GROUPS OF THE ROMA POPULATION AT RISK OF EXCLUSION;
- G2: IMPROVE QUALIFICATIONS OF DISADVANTAGED POPULATIONS, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE ROMA POPULATION;
- G3: PROMOTE AND IMPROVE SELF-EMPLOYMENT;
- G4: PROMOTE AND IMPROVE ACCESS TO HIRED-HAND EMPLOYMENT (AGRICULTURE).

Housing round table

As mentioned above, the Roma community has experienced significant progress over the last 40 years, due to their own efforts and to accessing social welfare systems in fundamental areas such as health, education, housing and employment.

In fact, access to housing and more standardised urban environments, which occurred in the 1970s and 1980s, is one of the key factors in improving the living conditions and making significant progress in combating the social inclusion experienced by the Roma community. It has also had a particular impact on other economic, educational and social factors that have been a real boost for social promotion.

Recent studies¹⁴ show a significant improvement in the residential conditions of the Roma population in recent decades through accessing housing, both public

¹⁴ Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality (2012) *National Roma integration strategy in Spain 2012–2020*, Madrid, Ministerio de Sanidad, Servicios Sociales e Igualdad Centro de Publicaciones, available at www.msssi.gob.es/eu//ssi/familiasInfancia/inclusionSocial/poblacionGitana/docs/SpanishRomaStrategy.pdf

housing and private, usually in standard neighbourhoods, even though of a low socioeconomic profile.¹⁵

However, there are families that have not benefited from this context or who have suffered the consequences of inadequate measures in this field. Today, they continue to endure the effects of exclusion: the creation of special district typologies, the persistence of slums, being relocated to neighbourhoods without proper services, etc., essentially situations that aggravate conditions that are already unfavourable, further complicating social problems and reinforcing the negative stereotypes and social rejection that has historically persecuted the community.

The economic crisis has affected the whole society, but has predominantly affected the most disadvantaged sectors – particularly the Roma community. Hence the need to establish a series of objectives and lines of action that would enable the design and implementation of measures to address this and alleviate the unfavourable situation, in addition to facilitating work in other areas such as health, education and employment.

In the housing round tables, technicians and Roma shared views on how to act and how they would like to see their neighbourhoods. Below are a few comments made by participants:

- technicians:

"We must complete the improvement of equipment and public spaces with specific actions for the Roma community"

"It is necessary to introduce the principle of need for cooperation between administrations"

"We must find a common public space that causes or allows participation"

- Roma:

"Why in the neighbourhoods where we live are there no swings?"

"I wish in front of my house there was a green park and not rubbish"

"The neighbours of my community say that we do not seem Roma because we meet our obligations just as they do!"

"Nobody cares about what happens in this neighbourhood".

The main objectives identified by stakeholders in the housing area were to:

- O1: REDUCE THE INCIDENCE OF SUBSTANDARD HOUSING (PUBLIC AND PRIVATE);
- O2: REDUCE THE NUMBER OF OR ELIMINATE SLUMS;
- O3: IMPROVE URBAN SPACES AND URBAN EQUIPMENT;
- O4: REDUCE OVERCROWDING.

¹⁵ Instituto Municipal de Desarrollo Económico y Empleo de Córdoba (IMDEEC) (2007), *Urban South Córdoba Project (2007-2013)*, (*Proyecto urban sur Córdoba 2007-2013*), available at: www.imdeec.es/ofertas_proyectos/URBAN%20SUR%20CORDOBA%20WEB.pdf

Health round table

When comparing the findings of the second national Roma health survey, undertaken in 2014,¹⁶ with a 2006 Spanish study on Roma health conditions¹⁷, the difference in the health situation of Roma over time is negligible. Significant health inequalities remain between the Roma community and the general population:

- the health of Roma is comparatively worse than those groups at the worst socioeconomic level across the whole population of Spain, e.g. their state of health, limitation of usual activity, chronic health problems, dental and eye health;
- significant inequalities in lifestyles, emphasising the consumption of tobacco, poor eating habits and obesity;
- the greatest use of health services, general medical visits, hospitalisation and emergencies is related to the worst health conditions in the Roma population;
- inequalities in accessing the health services that are not covered by the public system (i.e. oral and visual health).

These inequalities are mainly explained by the following factors:

- difficulties linked to poverty and social exclusion, discrimination and lack of full access to social goods and resources;
- factors linked to culture, because the perceptions of the Roma population of health, disease and death can have a negative impact on habits and preventive practices, as well as follow-up treatments. In the case of women, their position in the family, the excessive workload and efforts in the care of others, negatively impacts on their own health;
- the failure of the public health system to adapt to the social and cultural diversity of the Roma community. More flexibility and cultural sensitivity from health staff is needed (e.g. in the hospital or in the emergency rooms) towards Roma and the avoidance of discrimination. Generally health professionals are very competent and sensitive to such issues however there are some cases where Roma are treated differently from non-Roma.

In the health round tables the Roma shared experiences on how they are treated in hospitals. Below is a comment from one of the Roma:

"If there are four Roma visiting a sick person, it is all messed up in a hospital, they tell us to shut up or kick us out or send the security guard. If there are eight non-Roma, nothing happens because they are educated people".

¹⁶ Matrix, European Commission (2014), *Roma health report. Health status of the Roma population: Data collection in the Member States of the European Union*, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/chafea/documents/health/roma-health-report-2014_en.pdf

¹⁷ Spanish Ministry for Health (2006), *Hacia la Equidad en Salud. Disminuir las Desigualdades en una Generación en la Comunidad Gitana. Estudio comparativo de las Encuestas Nacionales de Salud a población gitana y población general de España*, at http://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/social_determinants/docs/spain_rd03_en.pdf (last access on 14 January 2017).

Hence the need to establish a series of objectives and lines of action that could mark the design and implementation of measures to address the issues identified in this thematic area. These objectives are aimed at alleviating the unfavourable health conditions of the Roma population and facilitating efforts in other areas such as education, housing and employment, in line with the National Strategy for Roma Integration in Spain (2012–2020). Most objectives identified are not only Córdoba-specific but also applicable at national level.

The main objectives in the area of health, defined by the participants of the health round table, were as follows.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE: IMPROVING THE HEALTH OF THE ROMA POPULATION AND REDUCING SOCIAL INEQUALITIES IN HEALTH IN CÓRDOBA.

- O1: IMPROVE PERCEPTIONS OF THE HEALTH STATUS OF THE ROMA POPULATION.
- O2: PREVENTION AND REDUCTION OF ADDICTIONS.
- O3: REDUCE OBESITY.
- O4: RAISE AWARENESS AND PROMOTE HEALTH CHECK-UPS OF ROMA WOMEN.
- O5: PREVENTION AND REDUCTION OF SELF-MEDICATION.
- O6: INCREASE THE NUMBER OF FAMILY PLANNING CONSULTATIONS.
- O7: COORDINATION BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE ENTITIES.
- O8: INCREASE DENTAL HEALTHCARE.
- O9: COMPLETE SCHEDULES FOR VACCINES.

Intervention 2: Drafting of the local strategy

The local Roma strategy was designed using as a starting point the National Strategy for Roma Integration in Spain 2012–2020, and building on the results of the consultations with Roma associations and certain non-Roma groups in the city as well as the results of the various round tables by thematic areas organised by the LERI local team, described above. The drafting of the strategy was initiated during round table discussions. All participants therefore contributed to the text of the local strategy, but the final drafting was the responsibility of Kamira and its employees. The document was finalised in January 2016 and presented to Alderman Rafael Del Castillo in a meeting at the municipality. The official presentation to the whole city of Córdoba took place at the conference on 2 June 2016 with the participation of all stakeholders involved in the drafting of the strategy.

The conference was attended by all relevant stakeholders, including the two political parties of the local government, the IU and the PP, which had expressed their support. Representing the Mayor, the manager of the Municipal Institute for Economic Development and Employment of Córdoba (IMDEEC) joined the event, confirming the Mayor's support.

On the second day of the conference, a session on grants and other funding opportunities took place – this was considered very instructive and necessary, a general lack of training in this area having been detected for City Council staff and most NGOs active in this field in Córdoba.

Similar to the national strategy, the local Roma strategy is based on the following approaches.

- 1. Follow-up and further development of the work lines/methods generally considered successful by scholars and experts in the last decades:** long-term approach, continuity, involvement and cooperation of the different administrative levels, participation and active engagement of civil society including Roma entities, coordination among different stakeholders, guarantee of rights and education to responsibilities, etc.
- 2. Balance and complementarity between general and specific policies** and between inclusive approaches (mainstreaming) and specific approaches (targeting).
- 3. Link to the objectives of the 2012-2020 National Roma Integration Strategy,**¹⁸ included in Spain in the National Reform Programme, especially those relating to the areas of education, employment, poverty and social inclusion.
- 4. Inspired by the Common Basic Principles for Roma Inclusion**¹⁹ (especially those referred to in Principle n° 2: '*Focus, explicit but not targeting the Roma population*' and n° 4 '*Aiming to insert the Roma in mainstream of society*') and their adaptation to the diverse realities of the Roma.
- 5. Further development of the use of structural funds, in particular the European Social Fund (ESF) and the ERDF,** through lessons learned from current experience and in line with the guidelines in regulatory drafts for the period 2014–2020.
- 6. Flexibility and adaptation** of the general principles to the plurality of the socioeconomic circumstances of the Roma population, through flexible and appropriate models (special attention being paid when adapting these principles to the original Roma population from third countries or EU Roma citizens living in Spain).

The development of the strategy was boosted by Roma organisations, mainly by the Kamira Federation that coordinated the process and the participatory tables. Kamira was supported by Roma NGOs in the city.

Examples of measures included in the local strategy that have already produced results are:

- As regards **education**, the local absenteeism plan currently in place was considered ineffective by most stakeholders in this thematic area and there were suggestions to opt for other actions, already implemented by associations and mediators.
- In the area of **non-discrimination**, the LERI local team worked transversely and held cross-cutting discussions in the areas of health, women, education and employment. The following examples of cooperation have been achieved:
 - o The education authority: ideas developed during the round tables and included in the local strategy are being considered (e.g. to

¹⁸ European Commission (2012), *National Roma Integration Strategy in Spain*, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_spain_strategy_en.pdf

¹⁹ Council of Europe (CoE) (2009) *The 10 common basic principles on Roma inclusion*, Brussels, Publications Office, available at: www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Documents/2011_10_Common_Basic_Principles_Roma_Inclusion.pdf

change ghetto schools with a twofold approach, by strengthening these ghetto schools and providing them with more resources and by seeking a balanced redistribution of enrolments to avoid a concentration of Roma students).

- The Bar Association: the LERI local team is currently liaising with the Bar Association to facilitate provision of legal aid to the Roma community in cases of discrimination.
- The police: to implement the application of the 'Protocol on hate crimes' and providing training on issues of discrimination. The LERI local team had already started contacting the police in Córdoba. A conference in Córdoba was planned on hate speech and crimes, where the LERI local team was invited to present the participatory mechanisms put in place during LERI. Exact dates were still to be confirmed at the time of the drafting this study.

The local strategy for the Roma population of Córdoba may seem like a policy document – another report – however, the LERI local team hopes and trusts it will be more than just a document. Following the presentation of the strategy at the conference on 2 and 3 June 2016 to the whole community, while it has not been formally approved by the local authority, negotiations are, however, ongoing and the LERI field expert scheduled meetings with the local authority to promote the strategy and lobby for its approval. The LERI field expert also presented the local Roma strategy of Córdoba developed by the LERI research as potential good practice at a seminar in Pamplona, organised by the Spanish Ministry of Social Services, on 28 September 2016.

Intervention 3: Working with Roma women

The LERI local team worked intensively with a group of Roma women, along with Roma mediators and their reference group, to strengthen the presence of women in community life by empowering them and building their confidence and improving their visibility.

Within the LERI research in Córdoba, a number of informal activities were carried out to motivate the community and build trust.

- **Cooking workshops**, held in Albolafia School²⁰ in December 2014, November 2015 and July 2016, with the participation of the health department of the City Council, who previously undertook a health check-up of the community's children and taught them about healthy habits. Families were expected to acquire healthy habits by informing the mothers of the Albolafia pupils of the benefits of a healthy diet and how to cook healthy meals. At the same time this activity was used to attract women, motivate them and engage those who were more reluctant to participate in the rest of the activities.
- **Fitflamc workshops (flamenco fitness)** were held as a sports and health activity for Roma women, and ran a 'train the trainer' course for

²⁰ Albolafia School is a primary and secondary school. It is located in the neighbourhood Guadalquivir, where most Roma live. It is identified as a ghetto school because most of the students are Roma. The workshops took place on school premises, as they are close to where the Roma families lived and most participants felt comfortable there.

instructors of Fitflamc, in which 14 young Roma women participated. Sessions took place during February and May 2016. The trainer, Maria Carrillo,²¹ was from the Roma community. Based on the discussions held in the thematic round table on health issues, Roma women suggested that one of their most significant health problems is the lack of physical exercise. From this starting point, the field expert, supported by Kamira and the Roma cultural mediators, proposed the idea of organising the flamenco fitness class, combining elements of the cultural tradition of flamenco (typical of the Roma community) and the modern elements of fitness. These workshops were used to raise women's awareness of the importance of physical exercise through a recreational activity for which women expressed an interest. This activity was also useful for informing women about the other activities and promoting their wider participation.

- **Informative talks** on topics of their interest. Informative sessions about discrimination with women of the Las Palmeras neighbourhood, in May, June and July 2016, were undertaken to raise the awareness of Roma women about their rights in different areas and the importance of training for their personal development.
- **A video**²² produced by Kamira and the Roma women involved in LERI (with the support of the LERI local team) on gender-based violence, gathering the opinions of men and women on this issue in October, November and December 2015. In the video, Roma men and women spoke out against gender-based violence. This has always been a taboo subject in the Roma community. Due to the recent deaths of several Roma women (an unfortunate and new phenomenon), there was consensus that this is a phenomenon that affects the Roma population as in the rest of society, mainly because of changes to traditional mechanisms (family mediation) and therefore it was necessary to act.
- A **video** produced by Kamira and the Roma women involved in LERI (with the support of the LERI local team) to raise awareness of the disadvantages of early school dropout in young girls. This was a key issue in the promotion and equality of Roma women, a very important and controversial topic. The idea was to record a video designed by the young and adolescent Roma girls in primary school and early secondary school, prior to giving up formal education. This was hoped to encourage the girls themselves assess their reasons for leaving school, provided an opportunity to interview their families and to propose measures to prevent early dropout.
- A **video**²³ produced by Kamira and the Roma women involved in LERI (with the support of the LERI local team). In this video, young Roma women **from the neighbourhood of Guadalquivir** highlighted the need for housing interventions. January to April 2016. This video came from an

²¹ This teacher has a website: www.fitflamc.com/

²² The video is available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLCwkEqs2Ik. For more information: <http://federacionkamira.es/contra-la-violencia-de-genero-todos-tenemos-algo-que-decir-no-te-calles-tu/> www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLCwkEqs2Ik

²³ The video is available at: youtu.be/2AnyzZC5fU0

idea developed by the housing round table: participants decided to gather the opinions of Roma young people on what was working in their neighbourhood, what was not working and what could be done to change it. A meeting was held and young people came up with the idea of making a video to illustrate their most urgent needs. The video was shown during an exhibition organised by young Roma women from Guadalquivir.²⁴

The Roma women involved in LERI had a crucial role in the development of the research. The LERI local team did not formally select those that were most active in the research but simply organised informal meetings and focus groups in the neighbourhoods of Gualdaquivir, Las Palmeras and Calle Torre Molinos. During these meetings, the field experts and the women already working as cultural mediators for Kamira in Albolafia School and other social places within these neighbourhoods took the lead and invited other women to take a more active role in the process. This is how all activities described above took place. Some activities were also suggested by the LERI local team based on the opinions and ideas expressed by women during these meetings and in focus groups organised during the PAR NA and during the round tables.

The Roma women who were actively engaged in the process (their names are provided in the acknowledgements below) were in charge of undertaking interviews with other women and ensuring the collection of valuable information. For example, one of the latest activities conducted with these Roma women, the shooting of the videos²⁵ – one on gender-based violence and another on housing needs in the neighbourhood – were undertaken to build confidence and promote participation, as well as to show the different realities of Roma women, their concerns and expectations.

Based on data collected from the surveys implemented by the LERI local team, initial findings were confirmed: working with women (considered the driving force for change and development) was seen as a priority. The idea was to make them feel able to produce change, to identify their needs and seek solutions for their problems and, ultimately, to eradicate the lack of expectations and disillusionment that many of the women involved in the intervention felt.

It was very sad hearing the hopeless responses of these girls and young women to survey questions. A selection is provided below:

"I do not aspire to anything; do not want to be anything"

"They don't want to hire Gypsies"

"When I go to apply for a job I never say that I live in Guadalquivir"

"The non-Gypsies are much luckier than us, we cannot do anything".

The work of the mediators from Kamira was fundamental, due to their proximity to women and their ongoing work. The results included a high degree of

²⁴ The exhibition was not part of the LERI research.

²⁵ These videos were part of the activities organised by the LERI team through the local fund provided by the FRA through Specific Contract 6.

participation and engagement (especially of Roma women and the Kamira mediators) in the implemented activities.

All activities implemented by LERI were designed to 'awaken' these women, encourage them to discard their routines, get involved in their environment and take decisions on issues that affect them. This way, they were also involved in developing the local strategy for the Roma population of Córdoba, giving their opinions and highlighting their priorities. Of particular interest was that some parents (not only women) joined AMPAS (an association of parents).²⁶

The essential role of women's associations emerged during the implementation phase of the intervention, as these associations allow women to speak freely, share concerns, fears and new expectations and ultimately, challenge them to take action, something that they would not dare to do by themselves.

Ultimately, the activities with women have served to strengthen their confidence, and raised awareness that they can undertake tasks themselves. Women also learned that it is necessary to become actively involved in the community to achieve their goals and that, together, it is easier to overcome the barriers and difficulties they face every day. The relationship of these women with the NGOs has been strengthened and they now reportedly feel able to propose and implement new activities with the support of associations and City Hall. This feedback was collected through the final evaluation activities.

Monitoring and evaluation activities

Participants of LERI in Córdoba assessed the impact of the local research as very positive: it helped women gain confidence and improve their expectations and greatly improved collaboration among women, NGOs and other stakeholders, including City Hall. In fact, it seems that some activities implemented by LERI (or at least the methods used, e.g. round tables and workshops) will continue as the City Council has recently awarded a grant of €12,000 to implement activities to promote Roma inclusion with the participation of all relevant stakeholders (most of them active within LERI), regardless of whether actual funding for the local Roma strategy is secured or not. Moreover, round tables have been consolidated as a mechanism for participation and collaboration where day-to-day problems can be raised and women can find solutions together.

5. Analysis, discussion, lessons learned

The overall LERI **process can be described as very positive**, as there were Roma organisations and Roma people involved that were able to select the type of interventions they wanted to undertake. The selected interventions were proposed to the local authority that supported them in the first phase (with the City Council ruled by the PP) and the second phase (with the local government led by the PSOE-IU coalition, after the May 2015 elections). Through focus groups and the participatory round tables, needs, objectives and lines of action

²⁶ Junta de Andalucía, Association of Students' Parents, available at: www.juntadeandalucia.es/organismos/educacion/servicios/ayudas/detalle/58965.html

were identified so that the local strategy could be developed in a participatory way with all stakeholders.

Despite the lack of institutional commitment as a result of the municipal elections, flexibility and adaptation of the initial methodology to the new circumstances was ensured. Thus, despite the less active participation of the City Council for many months, the local research continued to make progress through meetings with other stakeholders.

Below an overview of the lessons learnt for each of the three main goals of the LERI research in Córdoba is provided.

Lessons learned from working with women

As mentioned above, Roma women are undergoing a process of change²⁷ – from a more traditional role to a modern one where they have been often considered the driver of change in the Roma community. Consequently, this change in the traditional role of women led to a **necessary crisis and evolution that is currently leading to a new identity for Roma woman**. This identity is the result of maintaining the Roma cultural elements, which women still consider essential to their identity, without impairing their evolution in accordance with social changes that have been occurring for women in most Western societies over the last 50 years.

The main findings from the activities conducted within the LERI research were **the importance that women give to issues related to freedom, adaptation to modern times and improved quality of life** – areas in which women believe there has been important progress but did not realise how crucial it was to keep improving – and **those relating to the Roma culture** that Roma deemed as crucial to preserve, while adapting them to modern society.

A second important finding was that, following participation and engagement within LERI, these women changed their self-perception as regards their own culture and their role in their community. They became aware of the fact that they had gained more freedom (even if simply personal freedom) and a better quality of life. They also noted there had been personal growth and they were finally able to adapt to new times and modern society (e.g. in the way they dress or in their ability to express their opinions without fear). These women also felt more autonomous, but realised that much remains to be achieved and they have to keep moving forward in all aspects.

Their concerns and expectations focused on three themes: **family/couple, work/study, and housing**. It is striking how they barely spoke of **personal development**, of issues that affect only them, but generalised for the group they belong to: their family, their children, and their husband. Most Roma women are found to have lower aspirations, and for one reason or another are not able to qualitatively improve their living conditions.

Based on the surveys that took place in September and October 2015, and on the focus groups held with Roma women, some existing problems emerged e.g.

²⁷ *El País* (2005), 'La mujer, motor del cambio Gitano: Las Romaníes protagonizan el avance de un colectivo con carencias en salud, educación y empleo, 22 May 2005.

low level of secondary education and low rate of employment. In addition, some changes that had occurred in the last decade became evident:

- **EDUCATION:** Young women have an increased desire to study, although the reality and what they achieve has not improved much. The women (aged over 45) surveyed now realise the importance of education and would have liked to study. There is an increased desire to study and greater expectations from it, although in recent years no great progress was detected. Some very young women who dropped out have since restarted their studies.
- **EMPLOYMENT:** The results reflect the reality of the Roma woman, who do not have many options because of their lack of qualifications, which affects their self-esteem and their ability to visualise greater expectations. Added to this is the general situation in the country in recent years, which has worsened the situation in the labour market, and has undoubtedly affected Roma women, who are mainly occupied in hawking or carrying out domestic tasks.
- **PERSONAL SITUATION:** The common age of marriage has risen, with Roma women now tending to get married between 21 and 29, however most of the respondents were married between the ages of 18 and 25. The number of children desired fell for this age group, from four children per couple to fewer than four. However, the number of children continues to be higher than for the majority population. With regard to the age when they became mothers, the most frequent response in this case was that they had their first child between the ages of 20 and 25.
- **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE:** Data on gender-based violence indicated that this mostly involves shouting at women, bad manners, and clothes control (generally men telling women what to wear, especially in a couple or marriage). These issues were reported to a greater extent in the group of women between 30 and 45 years old. These results should, however, be handled with care as gender-based violence was noted to still be a taboo subject among Roma women and girls: they have difficulty speaking about it, especially when these women have experienced it personally. The LERI local team noted many signs that it occurs in the Roma community, but women prefer to go to the family to fix it.
- **FAMILY PLANNING:** There was a significant advance in family planning with around 88 % of women receiving family planning or sex education, which were valued positively.
- **HEALTH:** According to health data collected, Roma women now have more information and increasingly use health resources that, on many occasions, are accessed through health-mediation programmes conducted by social organisations working in the neighbourhoods; Roma women are caring more and more about their health.
- **FAMILY VALUES AND TRADITIONS:** Women consider it a priority to maintain family values and bonds and are aware that they are required to maintain the weight of tradition.
- **SEXISM:** most of the weight of the housework and family responsibilities still falls to women, but on the basis of the results obtained from both the responses of surveyed women and the roundtable discussions, a trend for change can be observed regarding the assuming of these tasks by men, although very timidly.

The LERI local team noted that **space for reflection was needed for Roma women to discuss their issues.**²⁸ Due to the process of change, which Roma women are also experiencing, they have to rethink their actions and methods according to a feminist approach but in light of their own particularities. Roma women have to find a balance between the demands of the current world and the cultural traditions and values they want to preserve. This is no simple task.

Lessons learned from the round tables

The round tables were key to building trust among the Roma population. Their aim was to enable the Roma population to exercise some influence on the policies that affect them. In order to do this, it was necessary to establish channels of communication with the local authority, communication that did not exist in an organised manner before the LERI local research.

One of the main barriers identified to Roma integration is that the Roma community does not use standard citizen participation channels: neighbourhood movements, associations, political parties, etc. It is not easy to encourage participation of this social group, basically because they do not see its usefulness, and have no confidence that participation will improve their lives. Therefore participation should be encouraged, enabling the Roma population to see the utility of activism.²⁹

The thematic round tables, in which participation of Roma representatives has been consolidated, will provide a public space where the City Council will be able to hear directly from Roma people and associations about their proposals, their needs and how the different actions undertaken are valued by and affect the Roma community. In turn, this will open the possibility of undertaking joint actions. If the local strategy is eventually approved, these round tables will represent the monitoring and evaluation elements of the strategy's implementation.

The work of the round tables was highly valued as rich and diverse. This proved to be a **powerful mechanism for participation and coordination** where objectives and **actions were discussed and actions and proposals** agreed on the basis of 'what works' and 'what does not'. As indicated above, there is a good chance that the round tables will continue through the funding made available by the City Council.

Furthermore, the design of the strategy and its consolidation through the 'participatory mechanism and interaction with the local authority' facilitated valuable information exchanges and the possibility for all actors to get to know each other and attain a higher level of coordination. This improved cooperation by different areas has already achieved positive results, as described in Section 3 above.

The most important aspect has been the use of this participatory methodology that has involved the Roma community and civil society from different institutions working at the same level. A high level of involvement of Roma and

²⁸ This connects the LERI research in Córdoba with the Madrid local research and the preparation of the first feminist Roma congress in Spain.

²⁹ These conclusions were drawn by Kamira, based on the data collected during LERI.

non-Roma individuals and institutions has been achieved. For instance, with regard to education and with the local institutions involved in this area, there is the intention to work from now on in a much more coordinated way, combining resources for profitable projects and the benefit of stakeholders.

Through participatory thematic round tables and focus groups it was possible to demonstrate that the Roma population can participate, develop concrete measures and monitor the implementation of such measures set down in a local plan.

Lessons learned from drafting the local strategy: a need for comprehensive projects for the Roma community

To improve the situation of the Roma population a comprehensive policy is necessary concerning all sectoral areas: housing, employment, health, education and social interventions. These policies should be sufficiently funded and focus on results. A real impact on a population that has serious deficiencies at all socioeconomic and cultural levels cannot be achieved through several different, small, uncoordinated projects implemented by different agents, as is evident in the city of Córdoba and in many other localities.

Significant advances are achieved with inclusive general, redistributive and compensatory policies that take into account the starting level of the inequalities (e.g. gender and generation, ethnicity or nationality, income). However, it is also important to go down to the local level, because this is where most problems are rooted and also where possible solutions can be found. And despite all the progress in Spain with the Roma population, LERI in Córdoba showed that engagement with the local authority is very limited and not at all systematic.

Therefore the design of the local strategy has been developed in accordance with the following principles.

Realistic

It is a strategy that starts from a situation of social exclusion suffered by a high percentage of the Roma population in our city, aggravated by the recent economic crisis that has particularly affected the most disadvantaged social groups. The actions and measures proposed include the voices of the Roma community, and moreover are real and based on a European, national and Andalusian framework.

The specific measures to be implemented are organised in the following areas: education, housing, health and employment. The gender perspective is a cross-cutting aspect that is present throughout the strategy.

Open

Special attention must be paid to aspects such as the open functioning of institutions, with more active and effective communication: the use of a language that is accessible to the Roma population; the adequate communication of social inclusion measures that will enable Roma to clearly understand them and access their benefits; efforts that enable the Roma community to clearly understand their rights and the resources at their disposal; and allow Roma access to them.

Effective and success-oriented actions

As already specified, the actions contained in this strategy are aimed at achieving success in different areas of work. There is a clear focus on the continuous improvement of the social conditions of the Roma people and the achievement of results that contribute to the impact of the actions on the lives of the Roma. The implementation of the actions must be realised in priority action areas: those areas of Córdoba where the situation of the Roma is worst, as recommended, moreover, by the European Commission in the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies 2012-2020, which puts special emphasis on analysing the transformational elements on which expectations of improvement are high and from which good results are obtained.

Measurable and efficient

The local strategy will be evaluated through impact indicators that will allow to identify the efficiency of the actions and the achievement of the expected results. For this it will be necessary to assess the impact of the various actions to identify whether they have effectively helped to transform the current reality and to promote the inclusion of Roma in Córdoba. In addition, performance indicators will allow to confirm if the proposed actions were carried out by the different bodies involved.

Focus on results

The actions proposed by different areas in this strategy are aimed at achieving an expected result, as defined previously between the administration and Roma representatives of the various organisations involved in developing the strategy. The achievement of these results determines whether the action has been carried out optimally or not. If not, the performance should be reviewed and necessary changes made to meet the objectives. Measurements, in this case, are resources to achieve the desired social improvement.

Participatory and transparent

The decisive participation and involvement of the Roma population in policies aimed at improving their situation has been key in defining the strategy since its inception. This criterion was an element of quality and a fundamental ethical position. The best way to ensure that a project is responding to the needs of those targeted is that they themselves can express their demands and at the same time, participate in its design, management and implementation. In this strategy, processes and formulas that favour intercultural dialogue will be promoted, either within the organisation itself, among the target population or in the decision-making process.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Social intervention or political activism?

So far, Roma issues have been addressed as a matter of social intervention in Spain, through an approach called 'welfarism'. This approach has been generally adopted by the national and local government to address Roma needs and has also been used by most Roma and non-Roma NGOs.

In recent times, perhaps as a result of the economic crisis that has affected a high percentage of the middle-class population who also need social services, the focus of these policies has been diverted from certain groups to others, or expanded to include a wider group (e.g. women, migrants). The result is **that the focus of attention, of course, is not on the Roma population**, although this population has also been greatly affected by the crisis.

Currently, there are only minor actions aimed at the Roma population; the budget for these actions has been lowered, and the Roma issue has become less important, although problems persist at all levels. **Roma issues seem to have less importance on the political agenda.** The unequal status of the Roma population is taken for granted and there have been no major efforts to change this situation. In Spain the National Roma Integration Strategy 2012–2020 was approved at national level **without a specific budget**, and after more than four years there has been no progress at the level of regions, which have the responsibility for implementation of social policies. Therefore, little has been implemented in line with this strategy.

Roma issues should be on the political agenda and Roma should have **influence at a political level** to change this situation.

Work at a political level lobbying

How can civil society have an impact at the political level? Results from LERI show that participation of the Roma community is crucial and Roma should be pushed towards political activism. In Spain there have recently been relevant examples of new social movements encompassing strong political activism that have changed the outlook of the country. Without a certain degree of political activism, and without the participation of the Roma population at all levels (national and local), it will be difficult for change to occur because it has to be claimed by those directly affected.

Political will is crucial but does not always exist

A clear political commitment to support Roma policies is needed to change the situation. During the development of the LERI research, the lack of political will of the local authority paralysed activity for months. Despite progress made in working with women and through the thematic round tables, the adoption of the local strategy as a city project depends on the ruling party, the PSOE-IU coalition. Without this stakeholder, it will not be possible to complete the intervention successfully and eventually achieve fundamental change.

Coordination is crucial

Coordination of regional and local policies on issues such as employment, housing, education and health is a priority to make these policies more effective. In certain policy areas, local competencies are very limited.

At the same time, local coordination is crucial. The lack of coordination and exchange of information between stakeholders at local level hampers the effectiveness of local policies. This can be solved by creating synergies among all relevant stakeholders and networking for better results.

Need to revise and innovate

Often, interventions with the Roma population, or in many other areas, start with an impulse, with courage and political will. Over the course of the interventions, people gradually change, settle into their jobs and after a few years, relax. The project continues to develop, despite reductions in the budget, but it has changed substantially, and not for the better. It is necessary to review and evaluate.

Networking to seek alliances

A large number of organisations and institutions work on the same problem or with the same population. It is therefore very important to **work in networks and seek alliances with other** (Roma and non-Roma) **organisations** and with local government to avoid duplication of effort and wasted resources.

Difficulty of adapting timescales to projects: deadlines for positive actions

With the change in local government, it was difficult to adapt the LERI timeline to the specific situation in Córdoba, as the LERI local team did not count with the support of the local authority for almost four months, and there was no certainty that the research would continue. This was a challenge that must be evaluated a priori, as it is quite common that actions need to be adapted to changing circumstances and vary from the ones initially planned.

Additionally, the time required for each positive action can vary. Some changes require more time (e.g. changes could be effective only after at least a generation) to actually be implemented and see the first results: for example radical change of the educational situation within the Roma community (e.g. 15 years). However, the eradication of slums should not take 20 years, as happened in cities such as Madrid, nor should realities (i.e. extreme poverty or marginalisation) that perpetuate their existence be allowed.

Assuming of competencies by different areas

It is essential that each ministry and municipality comply with their competencies to achieve the objectives on the plan or strategy. Projects that prove effective should be promoted by the competent authorities of any level and included within administration policies. Two cases assessed during LERI – the learning communities and the training for health agents – could set an example for this form of action. This approach could also help to use public funding appropriately.

Sustainability

Projects should be sustainable over time and have stable teams. For example, a large portion of the results of the Acceder project are due to the stability of ESF funding (renewable periods of six years) which provides stability to the project teams, who are also able to learn from the project and correct mistakes. Social actions are limited today to annual projects, which lack long-term vision and rely on short-term contracts for their staff. This affects capacity building of organisations involved and makes it very difficult for them to grow in terms of capacity and expertise.

Participation of stakeholders

The projects with the greatest potential are 'bottom-up', which do not define the areas of intervention by their problems or risks, but by their resources and assets. Empowering people to improve their lives is what the evaluated cases have in common, either in education or in training health agents. In particular, using the power of Roma women, giving them confidence and trust in exchange, or helping them with their childcare or finances, depending on the type of action that is required. This way of working with joint responsibility generates new behaviours and progress.

Working in the territories at a comprehensive local level

As much as we tend to think in terms of sectoral areas, life goes on in specific social spaces and poverty and exclusion are phenomena with a clear territorial expression. The town, neighbourhood or district enable the work to be carried out in an inter-sectoral and coordinated manner, without putting barriers between problems and solutions that are linked. The most effective projects have a comprehensive and participatory dimension within their territorial base. Urbanism is, in this sense, a very powerful tool – a way to break and re-weave the social fabric of the city, the use of equipment and investments, the same environmental quality or care of public spaces, integrating elements that are not usually considered when talking about social policies, but that really should have special attention.

Overall, policies implemented for Roma do not often achieve the expected results due to not having been designed adequately (e.g. with the participation of the relevant social group) or not performed correctly, according to the above-mentioned recommendations. Therefore, political will, interventions covering all public policy areas, clearly defined development policies, sufficient financial resources and a focus on education could represent general guidelines for policymakers to achieve effective results and have a real impact on the Roma population.

7. Additional Information

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