



# Local engagement for Roma inclusion

## Locality study Madrid (Spain), 2016

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# 1. Executive summary

The LERI research in Madrid supported the organization and planning of a Roma Feminist Congress in Spain, led by a recently established Roma feminist association. The LERI participatory needs assessment revealed that the position of Roma women within the Roma community, and the position of Roma people within society, are closely related themes. No progress could be made in the Roma community without recognizing the power and equality of its women; yet no advance would be possible for Roma women without the full recognition and equality of their people. Hence, participation leads to the conviction that feminism, a “post-colonial” feminism<sup>1</sup>, is one of the means to change public policies which have transformed European Roma into a “social problem”.

The participation process, based on interviews and followed by consensus conferences, reached a wide group of Roma leaders and association members in a fruitful and intense debate to work together and lay the foundations of the future Congress, which was to be held with the support of the Equality Department of the City.

Unfortunately, after a conflict among Roma organizations, the Equality Department of the City Council withdrew its support for the Congress. Despite this setback, the Roma Feminist Association has the support of the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and funding from the Madrid Region, and was still determined to carry out the Congress in October 2016 (at the time of writing the report, and delayed tentatively for early 2017).

The conclusions of the LERI research in Madrid are clear: First, participation is key for having better and more equal public policies, but it requires time and a specific set of resources. Uncertainty and risk-taking must be accepted. Therefore, support and flexibility are needed, and this is precisely what the LERI research offered. The presence of a major human rights institution (FRA), detached from the local debates, can support more complex projects, “break the deadlock” of certain situations, and endow the local politics with greater ambitions. Secondly, participation is a political issue, not a technical one. Without a clear political will of the local authorities, it will fail. Furthermore, when the government services do not have a project of their own, participation does not work. Thirdly, when a project is innovative, consensus among all possible stakeholders must not be sought from the beginning. The search for unanimous support for a specific project at an early stage can create conflicts and put it in danger. Therefore, it is more useful to allow the avant-garde or those stakeholders with more innovative ideas to advance and then invite other organizations to join them.

In spite of this outcome, all the participants valued positively the LERI research in Madrid. Through LERI, it was possible to understand that participation of the interested parties in public policies is not only a democratic prerequisite to

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<sup>1</sup> The feminism from countries of the Third world or of national minorities, such as Native American, latinas, black and Arabic women, is called “post-colonial”.

improve the quality of these policies. It is also crucial in order to write new rules of the game, surpassing paternalism with a dialogue with the European Roma people. This new dialogue will lead to an important debate on the political basis of European citizenship and its institutions.

**Keywords/Tags:**

Roma feminism, Madrid, conflict management, Equality Plan, local strategy.

**Picture 1: First Preparatory Conference in Madrid, 30 January 2016**



*Source: LERI Field expert, 2016*

## 2. Description of the local context

### The Socio-demographic context of Roma in Madrid

Madrid is the capital city of Spain with three million inhabitants. Studies estimate that 60,000 to 80,000 are Roma<sup>2</sup>. Two main aspects characterize the situation of the Roma population in Madrid and in Spain is by: on the one hand, the profound social change lived by Roma families and individuals following the transition to the democratic state since the 1978 Constitution<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, and concurrently, a stagnation in their living conditions that makes them the social group with the lowest income and the lowest access to social benefits (jobs, healthcare, housing, education, public image, etc.), despite the general improvement of the living conditions of all Spaniards in recent years. This ambivalence between the undeniable changes and the profound inequality describes the situation of Roma men and women in Madrid.

What are the most important changes? The fundamental feature is the demographic transition<sup>4</sup> since the 1960s: lower infant mortality rates and the upturn in longevity resulted in an increase of the Roma population, with a peaking birth rate in the 1960s and 1970s, and a shrinking birth rate from the 1980s until the present. In one decade, the size of the family has decreased from five or six children on average to three or even fewer children, extending family planning to Roma population<sup>5</sup>.

The main effect of this change has been a population settled in cities, and much younger than the Spanish average<sup>6</sup>, with deep cultural changes in the family's reproductive and educational strategies, and in the relationship between men and women, since having fewer children "liberates" Roma women's potential. In marriage patterns, the defining characteristic is diversity. In some contexts or families, there is a rise in adolescent marriages (15 or 16 years), but also many

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<sup>2</sup>The numbers refer to Spanish citizens, not to the "Romanian Roma". In Spain, there are no statistics on ethnicity of a general nature or based on censuses. Nor do national surveys on health or employment collect data on ethnicity. The Fundación Secretariado Gitano estimates the Roma population in Spain at 680,000 in its study *Población gitana y empleo* (2005). Higher figures are provided in the FOESSA reports: 970,000 Roma in the 6th report. The statistics used in this report are based on these studies. Ministerio de Sanidad, política social e Igualdad (2011), *Diagnóstico social de la comunidad gitana en España Un análisis contrastado de la Encuesta del CIS a Hogares de Población Gitana 2007*, Madrid [http://www.msssi.gob.es/ssi/familiasInfancia/inclusionSocial/poblacionGitana/docs/diagnosticosocial\\_autores.pdf](http://www.msssi.gob.es/ssi/familiasInfancia/inclusionSocial/poblacionGitana/docs/diagnosticosocial_autores.pdf) Grupo Pass (2001): *Mapa de la Vivienda Gitana en España*. Madrid, Asociación Secretariado General Gitano.

<sup>3</sup> The 1978 Spanish Constitution consecrates the equality of all the citizens. <https://www.boe.es/legislacion/documentos/ConstitucionCASTELLANO.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>Gamella, J, (2000): *Matrimonio y género en la cultura gitana de Andalucía*, Junta de Andalucía, Secretaría para la Comunidad Gitana.

<sup>5</sup> This means the average Roma household has 4.7 people, as compared to 2.8 in the general population. Ministerio de Sanidad, Política Social e Igualdad (2011): *Diagnóstico social de la comunidad gitana en España. Un análisis contrastado de la Encuesta del CIS a Hogares de Población Gitana 2007*.

<sup>6</sup> The population's youth is reflected by various figures: The average age of the Roma population is 27 years, reaching nearly 40 years in the general Spanish population; half of the Roma population is under 25 years old, and 33% are under 16 years old. Adults aged 65 and over comprise between 4 and 5% of the total population. FSG (2005): *Población Gitana y Empleo. Un estudio comparado*.

couples delay their marriage, there are also many singles, and others marry outside the Roma community<sup>7</sup>.

As for the socioeconomic situation<sup>8</sup>, the main changes can be summarized in three terms: "normalization of poverty", advancement and/or stagnation, and heterogeneity. **Normalization of poverty** refers to the administrative normalization, the reallocation from neighbourhoods of sub-standard housing<sup>9</sup>, almost absolute school enrolment of boys and girls in primary education, access to the national healthcare system and its services<sup>10</sup>, the possibility to claim social benefits for unemployment, old age or poverty. All the previous achievements are common for the Roma and non-Roma population and help reduce the absolute disparities with the national population.

Nevertheless, the shadows are many, as shown by overcrowded apartments, the eviction of Roma families, the frequent dropouts of Roma boys and girls from secondary schools<sup>11</sup> or, related to this, their access to the labour market, where they often suffer discrimination<sup>12</sup>. The income sources of Roma families are precarious, and they have decreased with the current economic crisis: Roma families have a very high unemployment rate (40%, almost twice the national average)<sup>13</sup> and their means of survival are threatened by laws and policies: street vending, and to a much lesser extent, scrap collecting, services and construction jobs, with a very limited role of agriculture. Furthermore, the traditional trades are disappearing, except the artistic ones.

Apart from an influential minority of Roma people who have achieved social and professional progress based on their education, there are many stories of job discrimination, debt and family overload<sup>14</sup>. Thus, family solidarity is bearing the weight of the crisis, with consequences such as overcrowded apartments or the impoverishment of the future generations.

As a result, the Roma persist in all reports as "the poorest among the poor"<sup>15</sup>. In 2007, prior to the crisis, 77% of the Roma population was **poor** as opposed to 17% of the general population of Spain. In 2013, the poverty figure remained steady. However, the most shocking development is that those who were prone to severe exclusion made up 26% in 2007, whereas today they make up a total of 54%. This means that the crisis has led more than half of the Spanish Roma

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<sup>7</sup> The Gamella study in the Granada region found 40% of marriages between relatives. Gamella, J.F y Martín Carrasco-Muñoz, E. (2008): "Vente conmigo, primita. El matrimonio entre primos hermanos en los gitanos andaluces", *Gazeta de Antropología*, nº24/2. Artículo 33.

<sup>8</sup> Laparra, Miguel, Ed. (2007). *Informe sobre la situación social y tendencias de cambio en la población*.

<sup>9</sup> Nogués, I. (2010): *Exclusión residencial y políticas públicas. El caso de la minoría gitana en Madrid, (1986-2006)*, Universidad de Granada.

<sup>10</sup> La Parra Casado, D. (2009): *Hacia la equidad en salud. Estudio comparativo de las Encuestas nacionales de Salud a población gitana y población general de España, 2006*. Ministerio de sanidad y política social, Fundación Secretariado Gitano, Madrid.

<sup>11</sup> Pernas, B. (2005): "La cuestión gitana, reflexiones en torno a la educación y el cambio social", *Cuadernos de Trabajo*, IRIS, Comunidad de Madrid. [http://www.gea21.com/publicaciones/la\\_cuestion\\_gitana\\_educacion\\_y\\_cambio\\_social](http://www.gea21.com/publicaciones/la_cuestion_gitana_educacion_y_cambio_social) .

<sup>12</sup> FSG; EDIS (2005): *Población Gitana y Empleo. Un estudio comparado*. Madrid. Fundación Secretariado Gitano.

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.gitanos.org/publicaciones/estudioempleo/estudioempleo/paro.pdf> .

<sup>14</sup> FSG (2013): *El impacto de la crisis en la comunidad gitana*. <http://www.gitanos.org/publicaciones/informecrisis/>

<sup>15</sup> *VII Informe FOESSA sobre exclusión y desarrollo social en España*. Madrid: Cáritas Española, 2014. The FOESSA studies distinguish poverty and exclusion (an index comprised of other indicators, in addition to level of income). For Roma, both phenomena occur together.

[http://www.foessa2014.es/informe/uploaded/descargas/VII\\_INFORME.pdf](http://www.foessa2014.es/informe/uploaded/descargas/VII_INFORME.pdf) .

population to social exclusion. This deterioration is especially affecting young people and children. The aforementioned "exclusion" is particularly noticeable in the work environment (78%), in education (36%) and housing (72%).

The third feature of the Roma population of Madrid is **heterogeneity**<sup>16</sup>: The Roma population has always been very diverse, geographically, economically and regarding religions (secular, Catholic and above all evangelists). Recent social change has led to significant generational differences: the impact of education, the intense and ambivalent cultural changes within the youngest Roma population and Roma women, both of whom are defined in all studies as the agents of change. Consequently, gender is the most important factor, which explains the modern values, and the will for change, beyond the income limits or even age<sup>17</sup>. The effect of social politics regarding the role of women is undeniable, given that these policies have often supported women to catch up with the rest of the family<sup>18</sup>.

As for the integration/exclusion, social rejection and discrimination against the Roma population remain persistent, although its expressions have been altered<sup>19</sup>. National surveys continue to show, steadily, that the Roma are the most rejected group in Spain, ahead of other minorities: more than 50% of the population would reject or would try to avoid living in neighbourhoods or buildings with Roma; 18% reject that their children go to school with Roma children; and 25% would try to prevent it<sup>20</sup>. At the same time, Roma are the group with the highest perception of racism, and reporting more episodes of discrimination after the sub-Saharan African population<sup>21</sup>.

A new phenomenon has substituted the interracial conflicts of the past: "the institutional ghettos"<sup>22</sup>. Particularly concentrated neighbourhoods or blocks of apartments "of Roma people" caused by hasty reallocation or social housing plans; schools with a Roma majority or educational segregating systems that, lacking the support of the whole school community, become a "dead-end" for Roma children<sup>23</sup>. The stigmatization of the help that Roma people receive and their dependence of institutions along with police and judicial control using irrefutable racial profile<sup>24</sup>. This leads us to discuss the political context.

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<sup>16</sup> Ministerio de Sanidad, Política Social e Igualdad (2011): *Diagnóstico social de la comunidad gitana en España. Un análisis contrastado de la Encuesta del CIS a Hogares de Población Gitana 2007*. Informes, Estudios e Investigación.

<sup>17</sup> Ministerio de Sanidad, Política Social e Igualdad (2011): *Diagnóstico social de la comunidad gitana en España. Un análisis contrastado de la Encuesta del CIS a Hogares de Población Gitana 2007*. Informes, Estudios e Investigación.

<sup>18</sup> The FOESSA report highlights the fact that Romani households headed by women are not at greater risk of finding themselves in situations of extreme exclusion, unlike trends among other populations (and what is said about the feminization of poverty).

<sup>19</sup> Annual reports of the Fundación Secretariado Gitano between 2004 and 2013 document 1073 cases of discrimination against Roma.

<sup>20</sup> Centro de Investigaciones sociológicas (2014): *Barómetro*, Estudio 3019.

<sup>21</sup> Consejo para la promoción de la igualdad de trato y no discriminación de las personas por el origen racial o étnico (2011): *Panel sobre discriminación de las personas por origen racial o étnico* (2010), la percepción de las potenciales víctimas. Ministerio de Sanidad, Política social e Igualdad.

<sup>22</sup> Gamella, J.F. (2002): "Exclusión social y conflicto étnico en Andalucía. Análisis de un ciclo de movilización y acción colectiva antigitana (1976-2000)", *Gazeta de Antropología*, nº18.

<sup>23</sup> Kamira School Segregation Report <http://federacionkamira.org.es/descargas/School-segregation-report-EN-17-Julio-2012-FINAL-1.pdf>.

<sup>24</sup> Barañí, *Mujeres gitanas y sistema penal*, Editorial Meytel, Madrid 1996.

## Political context of the LERI research

Thirty years of democracy have not been able to reverse or significantly change the situation of the Roma population in Spain<sup>25</sup>. There has been impressive progress, such as the schooling of all Roma boys and girls at compulsory level. This progress is the result of the efforts of Roma families and of the welfare system in Spain. There have also been substantial investments, in housing or in professional training among other areas, but the condition of the "Roma problem" has not changed. Roma are still a "specific group" included in "social policies", and the public debate has not managed to target the most profound causes of inequality<sup>26</sup>. Discrimination and racism are still important issues in Spain and in Europe<sup>27</sup>.

Simultaneously, during the years of democracy many Roma organizations or associations were created. In general, the most common ones are Roma associations set up and led by the Roma themselves representing the interests of Roma and mainly cultural, and pro-Roma associations. As for the latter, the Roma might take part in these associations, but they are generally managed by non-Roma people and focus on social promotion issues, mainly employment and education. Both types of organizations became professional associations in the last few years, and they represent an important social actor, although some critical voices claim that their dependence from national and European financing made them lose their political force of transformation<sup>28</sup>. Further critical voices are of the view that the existing structure of Roma or pro-Roma associations has inherent problems of patronization and has led to fragmentation and resignation of the Roma, while they should be involved in reinforcing their participation, equality and empowerment. These different ways of understanding the relationship between the Roma community and their associations create political conflicts and are the origin of some of the problems of the LERI research in Madrid.

Many of the associations focus specifically on women and are represented in different networks. Some are part of the Roma Women Federation, e.g. Kamira, others are in the Artemisa Net<sup>29</sup>, and some form part of the municipal institutions, such as the Consejo de las Mujeres de Madrid<sup>30</sup>, and are involved in the general feminist movement.

In the city of Madrid, within the Equality, Employment and Social Policies Department in the municipal government (Área de Gobierno de Equidad, Derechos Sociales y Empleo), it is the Sector for Specific Groups (Departamento de Atención a Colectivos Específicos) who deals with policies regarding the Roma

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<sup>25</sup> Estrategia nacional para la inclusión social de la Población Gitana en España 2012-2020 [http://www.msssi.gob.es/ssi/familiasInfancia/inclusionSocial/poblacionGitana/docs/WEB\\_POBLACION\\_GITANA\\_2012.pdf](http://www.msssi.gob.es/ssi/familiasInfancia/inclusionSocial/poblacionGitana/docs/WEB_POBLACION_GITANA_2012.pdf) .

<sup>26</sup> Kamira (2012) *Analysis and Assessment of the integration policies for the Romani people in Spain: What did we learn?* [http://federacionkamira.es/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Report\\_EvaluationRomaPolicy\\_Spain.pdf](http://federacionkamira.es/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Report_EvaluationRomaPolicy_Spain.pdf) .

<sup>27</sup> Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12010P&from=EN> .

<sup>28</sup> This is one of the typical criticisms of the smaller and more radical associations, such as the Roma Feminist Association.

<sup>29</sup> The Artemisa Net is a federation of associations, mostly Roma and pro-Roma, with the mission of fighting the exclusion of the population and promoting education and human rights, <http://www.redartemisa.org/> .

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.consejomujeresmadrid.org/> .

population. The same Sector, which is of a reduced size, deals also with policies on people with disabilities and the LGBT community.

Specifically since 2003, an Equality Board of Roma Women Associations<sup>31</sup> meets to discuss and promote common issues, often around the International Women's Day or on Roma People's day (8th April). This Equality Board is composed of thirteen associations: Alboreá, Barró, Casa de Paz, C.A.S.M, Comunidad Gitana, El Fanal, Fundación Secretariado Gitano, Gitanas Feministas por la Diversidad, Grupo Labor, Mujeres Opañel, Romi Sersení and the Unión Romaní.

The existence of this board, along with the strength of women's associations in Madrid, led to the proposal, through the LERI research, of a Plan for Equality of Roma women in Madrid, based on the shared idea that it is crucial to strengthen women's position in any change that affects Roma. The plan was to be developed with the associations and endorsed by the City, thus allowing further participation of Roma women in the city life in the future. As explained below, this plan was altered by the events that followed.

In spring 2015, municipal elections in Madrid resulted in the new government of a newly born left-wing party. The change delayed the government's decision on its support to the LERI research for months, as the Roma policy was suspended, and so was the call for the Equality Board of Roma women. Meanwhile, there was no City interlocutor to address, and no policy had been designed in this area yet. As for the associations, the situation was not easy. None of the associations was willing to take part in LERI research without knowing the opinion of the others. Some of the associations of Roma women were upset with the way LERI had started, reflecting previous conflicts inside the Kamira Federation<sup>32</sup>. In general, although all seemed interested, none offered a concrete commitment or activity to start actual involvement. With their own political agendas, most associations waited for a new municipal group to be settled before starting a dialogue and ensuring their support to a Plan for Equality of Roma women in Madrid.

At the same time, this delay contributed to the appearance of new actors. An association, Gitanas Feministas por la Diversidad (hereafter Roma Feminist Association)<sup>33</sup>, also member of the Equality Board, showed interest in taking advantage of the support of the FRA and the LERI research to start up its own initiative: the organisation of a Roma Feminist Congress in Madrid. The Roma Feminist Association is a young nationwide association founded in 2013. It focuses on defending equality between women and men, and the equality and human rights of the Roma. It is very active among the Roma civil society and in the feminist movement, and had led successful campaigns in the media. Its discourse is relatively new since it introduces issues such as gender violence, sexuality, institutional racism, and post-colonial feminism.

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<sup>31</sup> The equality board was a municipal initiative, it is voluntary, has no legal status and has influence but not a legal or institutional role. Its purpose is advisory.

<sup>32</sup> They consider that they should have been informed previously by the president of the federation, who is also the national coordinator of the LERI research in Spain.

<sup>33</sup> This association was not interviewed in the first round of the PAR needs assessment due to its small size and its recent existence.

### 3. PAR methodology employed

The first step of the LERI research was to design collaboratively a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology to be used as a basis for a Madrid Plan for Roma women. This was the research focus conceived at first, after consultation with the main organizations.

In summer 2015, a methodology with the following two actions was designed, although only the first one was actually carried out:

a series of **group interviews** and **queries** with Roma and pro-Roma organizations, which allowed us to develop a factual diagnosis of the needs of Roma women in Madrid and the priorities of the organizations and the Local Authority. The first round of interviews, held in September and October 2015 with the main organizations, led to the conclusion that the needs of Roma population were largely related to the position of women and their empowerment inside and outside their communities. a collaborative workshop suitable for the chosen goal, which was developing an Equality Plan. The workshop would be organised using the **EASW method (European Awareness Scenario Workshop)**<sup>34</sup>, since this method would enable a discussion on equal footing on the proposed issues amongst a large number of stakeholders. In this case, the EASW was designated not only to perform a diagnosis on the main needs of Roma women in Madrid, but also to make suggestions: Which modes of action and which measures should be part of the Equality Plan of Roma women in Madrid? However, the months of stagnation of the political situation following the municipal elections in spring 2015 made it impossible to complete this process, and obliged the LERI local team to think of other options. Once it was decided that the LERI research would support the Roma Feminist Association in holding a Feminist Congress, the working method changed.

The new approach was about working with a large group of leaders of the community to lay down the foundations of Roma feminism. While the overall objective of the LERI research still focused on the situation of Roma women, the research question now shifted towards finding a more theoretical, fundamental approach to eliminating the inequalities of Roma women in practice, within and outside the Roma community, and finding the most appropriate means to initiate this process of debate. The above-chosen PAR techniques, such the EASW, would have been appropriate for taking decisions or building consensus around a concrete issue or diagnosis. But this time, the field was much more open, and new risks needed to be assessed. The methodology had to be also structured but allowing for a debate. For this reason, the LERI local team decided to organize a series of preparatory conferences, in order to gather the community leaders and create together a basis for a future Congress.

Three preparatory conferences were organized following the same method, namely "**Consensus Conferences**". The goal was to identify and recall the common elements among the various stakeholders and to test them to achieve a higher goal. This method is similar in some aspects to **citizen forums**, as the civil society participates in meetings in order to reach agreements and define the

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<sup>34</sup> E.A.S.W. © Methodological Guidelines, at <http://www.resiproject.eu/community/index.php/en/deepeningcards/84-guideline-en-par2>

next practical steps. There were several reasons for choosing this specific form of participation:

First, the high **political and intellectual level** of the participating Roma women, including Roma leaders from Madrid and from the rest of Spain, specialists from the academic world, and the main Roma and non-Roma associations, and also representatives of the City and members of the feminist movement. All stakeholders involved had a very clear agenda and interests, and even though the meetings were a collective learning session, the ability of the attendants to speak publicly, discuss and coordinate did not require a very formal method. The second reason is the **ambition of the LERI research** in Madrid. The Conferences had to tackle two needs: widening the agreement as a basis of support for a Congress to provide it with force and potential; prepare the theoretical basis and the practical work to enrich it and make its impact more durable. The structure of the three preparatory conferences was similar:

1. an introduction explaining the objectives of the meeting, of the Congress and of Roma feminism, performed by the leaders of the Roma Feminist Association;
2. theoretical training given by an academic and expert in postcolonial feminism;
3. a forethought in small groups considering the main proposed questions;
4. a brainstorming session;
5. a discussion of ideas and opinions collected from all participants.

During these three meetings, there was also a "practical" session aimed at establishing the working groups of the Congress and take the next steps.

To provide an example of the methodology used, the first conference is described in more detail below. It took place on 30 January 2016 in Madrid and gathered more than 40 Roma women working together, from 11:00 in the morning until 17:30 in the afternoon. The goal was to discuss the objectives, strategy and content of the Congress. It was attended by "natural" leaders and by representatives of all major Roma and pro-Roma associations in Madrid, in addition to the General Director of Equality and the Head of the Department of the City of Madrid. Two academics, experts in postcolonial feminism, helped to guide the debate.

It was organised as an open meeting, where participants met in an open space, sitting at coffee tables. This way, it was easier to work individually and in small groups, and the ideas and the proposals were discussed in plenary at the end of the session.

After the welcome session, there was a round of presentations and the President of the Roma Feminist Association explained the main purpose of the Conference. It focused only on two main themes, which combined the desire and the need to work on a theoretical basis for Roma feminism. For each of the two topics, three questions were prepared:

### **I. Being a Feminist within the Roma Culture**

1. What does it mean for you to be a feminist and a Roma?
2. What are the mechanisms employed to maintain inequality between men and women?
3. Who defines us as Roma women? How do we define ourselves?

### **II. Being Roma in the Feminist Movement**

1. Why is Roma feminism necessary?
2. Why do Roma women not participate in decision-making?
3. How can we, Roma women, contribute to the feminist movement?

The participants worked first individually, then discussed issues in small groups, and then a speaker of each group presented the conclusions to the plenary. The conclusions were collected on large posters. The method chosen for the conferences was appropriate: People with different visions and ideas participated on equal and respectful terms to achieve the empowerment of Roma women. The theoretical and the practical results of these conferences will be explained in the next section.

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

Throughout the changing and complex lifecycle of the LERI research in Madrid, the situation of Roma women has been the basic cornerstone. The LERI research consisted of two stages: from the beginning up to November 2015, the idea was to create a plan or a strategy for Roma women headed by the City of Madrid with the support of the Equality Board - composed of 13 Roma and pro-Roma active organizations in Madrid. After many delays and a political stalemate, this idea could not be pursued further. In November 2015, it was decided instead to support a Congress on Roma feminism<sup>35</sup>. During this second stage, between November 2015 and October 2016, almost all the steps were carried out.

### First Stage: Equality Plan for Roma Women in Madrid

The idea of working on a **collaborative plan for Roma women in Madrid** was a logical commitment after the needs assessment phase (i.e. the interviews). It called for an effort to enhance Roma women's equality. The reasons for rejecting this initial idea are mainly the **political change in the City Government** in May 2015, which greatly delayed the process, and the **very institutional** nature of the initiative. To realise this idea, an agreement between the main organisations was necessary, which was to some extent not a very innovative action. Even if the LERI local team had initiated a more collaborative and thus innovative method (using techniques such as 'future search' or EASW), the idea to develop a Strategy or Plan for Roma women itself was not considered as innovative. Stakeholders were sceptical on whether the adoption of another plan could actually lead to concrete action and results.

Leaving this idea behind led the LERI local team to a far more interesting place: supporting a "minority" initiative, which takes more risks but has more ambitious goals (i.e. a fundamental approach to feminism). The LERI local team considered that precisely this type of initiative could make the most of the support of the FRA, as it needed legitimacy and resources in order to become visible and to be able to mobilize the bigger and more institutional organizations.

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<sup>35</sup> There have been important and frequent meetings, seminars and congresses concerning the situation of Roma women, and some could be called feminist. But this one has the ambition, new in Spain, to lay the foundation of a Roma feminism and to start a new Roma feminist movement. The idea to cover issues such as violence and sexual diversity, based on the clear promotion of feminism and equality allows us to speak of the first Roma feminist Congress.

Despite the change in the initial idea, the diagnosis made in the second round of interviews with the organizations and the City was of a great value. It offered the chance to explain LERI and make it known, to identify the stakeholders, to identify the obstacles that could arise in the process, and to put the focus on the situation of Roma women in Madrid. The main conclusions from this previous task are summarized below.

**The first need felt by the Roma organizations was the struggle for social visibility and the strife against the discrimination suffered by Roma men and women.** If Roma culture is undervalued or if Roma individuals feel the need to conceal their identity in order to find housing, employment and relationships, and to be part of society, the self-defence and withdrawal mechanism that automatically occurs will lead them to a greater traditionalism that will put into question the progress and the unique identification of Roma women and men. If the Roma community is, however, strong and respected, it is easier to generate and accept their version of social change. Hence, any actions serving the Roma should be performed with the participation of Roma women and men, not merely on their behalf.

Some of the interviewed stakeholders emphasized one of the great problems of the "Roma policy". The economic and employment weakness of many Roma families has confused Roma policies with policies of social assistance, and the image produced has been linked to poverty and marginalization issues. The immense contribution of Roma people to Spanish culture and economy has in this way been overshadowed or reduced to a few well-known artists. This view of the Roma issue as a "problem" determines the social gaze, the resources sharing and the self-esteem of Roma, who see their reflection in a mirror of marginality.

Any action taken must project a positive and a rich image of the Roma culture and economy, with an emphasis on diversity, internal debate and social progress, while highlighting the traditions or identity traits that have enabled their survival and their contribution to Spain as a whole.

The second essential line of work is the **recognition of women's equality, and especially their freedom, struggling against gender violence** suffered by many Roma women. There are some very interesting examples of a more Roma-focused policy regarding violence, including Roma female health mediators, with an agreement made with the Health Council, led by some Roma associations (El Fanal, Asociación Barró, Romí Sersení). Asociación Barró carries out a project for the training of Roma women leaders, which could be a great basis for a participative work against gender violence. Romí Sersení kept for some years a gender violence assistance service with a great impact, though it could not continue due to funding issues. The Roma foundation Fundación Secretariado Gitano has also initiated a project called "Líderes gitanas" (Roma leaders) all over Spain.

Furthermore, the associations raised the classic themes of intervention, employment and education and explained the interesting changes that the economic crisis produced. One example of change is the very novel situation of young Roma women who left school wishing to go back again after having had children. Another example is the necessity to propel business undertakings among Roma men and women to compensate for the lack of salaried jobs. While these issues were acknowledged by all stakeholders as essential themes that need to be addressed, there are other forums for them, with support of specific European and national funds.

## Second Stage: Roma Feminist Congress

Once the LERI local team accepted that it would not be possible to unite the Equality Board and to elaborate an Equality Plan, at least not within the timeline of the LERI research, meeting the Roma Feminist Association transformed the change of direction into a real possibility. With less institutional presence than the other organizations, yet very affirmative and with a great capacity for deliberation, work and influence, this organization suggested a change in the political strategy. If the interventions and policies "for the Roma people" have not effected any change in the destiny of the Roma community nor in the destiny of its men and women, it is because they were guided by paternalism and were not based on recognizing the political power of the Roma minority and treating them on equal footing. It follows that, from the women's associations' point of view, feminism is more than an emancipatory ideology for women. It is the real theory and practice that can support the Roma to progress in their strife for internal and external equality. It is a liberation of their efforts, and precisely for that reason a greater social promotion.

The proposal of this association was to tackle simultaneously the problem of inequality of women in the Roma culture and racism in the majority culture. Only this way it is possible to talk of real participation and of human rights of Roma. As could be noticed, this diagnosis does differ substantially from other associations' assessments: racism towards the Roma and the negation of their power and culture go hand in hand with the problem of women's inequality. The great difference from other associations however is the proposed solution: feminism as a key to initiate both processes of liberty and equality within the community, and union and solidarity with the outside world.

In order to generate change, the Roma Feminist Association suggested organizing the first Roma Feminist Congress. The aim of the Congress was to become the catalyst of a Roma feminist movement capable of shattering years of inertia, a Congress relating to the women's own stories and to a theory -Roma Feminism- which discourses with other feminisms, above all postcolonial or those of minorities, but one which was able to create and rewrite its own tradition.

FRA was informed of this change, which it accepted and supported during a visit to Madrid in January 2016. The visit helped unblock and facilitate the relation with the City of Madrid, which committed to support the Congress. From then on, professionals and the Head of the Equality Department attended the preparatory conferences and the meetings in Madrid. The LERI local team led the preparation and the dissemination of the Congress. As it was explained above, since December 2015 three preparatory conferences were organised to gather Roma women leaders from Madrid and the rest of Spain in order to lay down the foundations of the Congress:

- Madrid Conference on 30 January 2016;
- Madrid Conference on 23 April 2016;
- Granada Conference on 6 May 2016.

The method followed in these preparatory conferences was explained in the previous section. The three conferences were video-recorded for later dissemination. Some of the main ideas are summarized below, even though the richness of the discussions cannot be captured therein.

## Main Results of the Preparatory Conferences

The three intensive one-day conferences gathered altogether 100 Roma women and men. The essential results were the definition of the following objectives of the Congress. The general aim of the Congress was ultimately to change the political state of the issues related to Roma women and Roma people in general:

- to join the plural voices of Roma women and men, the ones that are leaders in their communities, neighbourhoods, employment centres and NGOs in a collective debate (Citizens' Forum) regarding the key issues that affect equal opportunities between men and women;
- to establish the theoretical basis of the Roma feminism, which tackles the fundamental themes of equality and diversity, developing its own discourse to facilitate the transformation of social relations;
- to strengthen the roots of a Spanish (and a European) Roma feminist movement which transcends disparities and works on a new agenda and a Roma feminist political strategy for the following years;
- to debate with society and its political movements, feminist and others, the political role and the status of Roma men and women;
- to transform the public politics towards the Roma population, proposing a new dialogue and a new agenda;
- to make visible and to promote an image and an identity of the Roma, above all of its women, which deconstructs the stereotypes, and emphasizes the capacity, the variety and the richness of the Roma culture and the general interests of its political initiatives.

The identified issue at the start of the project was confirmed through the participatory needs assessment process, namely through the interviews and more notably through the three preparatory conferences.

The objectives mentioned are in line with the main idea of the LERI research, in the sense that they focus on transforming the way the Roma population is treated in Europe.

Regarding the ideas and the emerging thoughts that sprang from the meetings, they were very rich and interesting. Some will be quoted here<sup>36</sup>:

### The necessity for a Union for Roma Women

Roma have the impression that they are scattered and without a common political will, and that this is one of the reasons for their weakness in Europe. Feminism is a way to unite all the Roma in a common fight.

*"What we want here is to build something for all and for each single one of us. Everything else is done with. We are separate but, just like the fingers of the hand, we are part of the same hand. If we hold the fist, power is our gain."*

*"For the dream of many to come true, it is necessary to keep determined to work for something really great that transcends the personal, converting it once and for all into a POLITICAL matter, endowing it with the STATUS which all of us and our cause deserve."*

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<sup>36</sup> All the quotes are from Roma women participating in the three conferences. They are young and old, from Madrid and other regions, leaders of associations and also "natural leaders", i.e. women with some influence in their families and communities.

### To analyse and comprehend the state of oppression, change policies and rewrite history

Like all minority groups, Roma feel that their identity and history has been made by others, and they live under the sight and interpretation of a different majority culture. They agree that they have to start rewriting their own history and deciding on the identity, they want.

*"We have to go beyond. What matters here is that we count, that we are no longer guided by those policies and those strategies, which are ill-designed, because the results are present. We have 600 years of history, that hasn't been revisited in a constructive way neither for the community, nor for the Roma women"*.

*"If you do not fulfil the rules of whiteness, you will never become a citizen."*

*"We realise that there is a constant oppression of the society of the majority, which breeds in us the Pygmalion effect which burdens us with a basic insecurity that prevents us from accepting leadership in power zones and in public spaces."*

*"We have to construct our own history, and we are responsible for recounting our own cultural identity."*

*"We are the first people-class."*

### Feminism as a tool for change

Their major idea is that feminism is the only ideology capable of reaching equality between men and women inside the community and at the same time fight for the freedom and justice for all the Roma. For this reason, it is necessary to build a specific, not mainstream feminism. Individualistic emancipation is not the answer for Roma women. They need individual freedom as well as community solidarity, or their own culture will run the risk of destruction.

*"Feminism is the only means for us to count among our people. Our group is oppressed and we are oppressed, the women with seven or eight stones, but also Roma men are socially oppressed. No matter how empowered I become, if my brother and my cousin are still oppressed, we will not be equal. This is why our feminism is different. Our feminism is the solution for the oppression of our people, all our people, not only for us women."*  
*"Feminism is necessary for the construction of a new Roma reality, based on the power of decision, so that each woman can be who she wants to be, independent of gender, race and social condition."*  
**It, however, has to be an appropriate feminism** that is the idea behind the Congress, to create a Roma feminism.

*"Let's create a feminism that accords with what we want to practice and write, as we do have to write."*

*"Roma feminism should be approached from within and we are the protagonists. Mainstream feminism is not familiar and doesn't take us as a people into recognition."*

*"To be a feminist in the Roma environment is strenuous, but it is a matter of conviction."*

*"To make the non-Roma feminist groups aware of the fact that they have to relocate far from their privileges."*

### Constructing a feminist and a Roma identity

The work of creating a Roma feminism is to understand the intersectionality of the Roma condition. They have to perform at the same time a new gender role and a new ethnic culture, without destroying any of them. They need to discuss and transform the traditions and habits that harm them, and preserve the union and the meaning of being a Roma person in the 21st century. They need the pride to perform any social change without "dissolving" their identity in the modern world. For this reason, education is highly valued by them, and at the same time, they finish all the meetings singing the hymn of the Roma women.

*"Attaining equality entails a double effort, as a woman and a Roma person."*

*"To combat the triple discrimination<sup>37</sup> from within and from without."*

*"To be one's own driving force."*

*"The costumes and traditions that we think of as culture are not, they are bad customs that the Roma people went on acquiring. This is not our culture; it is chauvinism (machismo) pure and simple."*

*"We define ourselves by ourselves, the family defines us, because society does not define us, it pigeonholes us."*

*"To be a Roma woman is to be born in a house that raises you in a specific way, making you part of an identity that has different values."*

*"Changing prejudices harboured against the Roma woman: submissive, silent, never works, never gets involved..."*

*"I am the invisible transmitter of fire." (Roma women's hymn)*

As the final and main outcome of the LERI intervention in Madrid, the Feminist Congress, has not taken place at the time of writing the present report, an account and analysis of the implementation and outcome of the event are still pending. However, the following sections describe the process that led to the current state of affairs with regard to the Congress that is considered as the actual results of the whole LERI in Madrid.

### **Situation in June 2016**

In June 2016, the situation was as follows: Four committees had been created during the preparatory conferences to organize the Roma Feminist Congress, with regard to logistics, funding, content, and communication. The Roma Feminist Congress was to be a two-day event held on 21 and 22 October 2016. The City of Madrid would provide for the venues: the cultural centre of Arganzuela, and the cultural centre of Matadero in a central and a popular location.

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<sup>37</sup> 1. From within as a woman; 2. from without as a woman; and 3. from without as a Roma.

**Picture 2. Municipal cultural centre, potential venue of the Roma Feminist Congress**



*Source: LERI Field expert, 2016*

It was estimated that 300 people would attend, men and women, of all age groups and social backgrounds, and it is precisely due to that reason that a great effort to receive funding and help for the travel expenses of Roma women without means was to be made.

As of June 2016, the Congress counted with the moral and political support of the following institutions after continuing visits from the organisers:

1. at the local level, the City of Madrid, with its political and logistic support, including the presence of the town hall's president, Manuela Carmena, for the opening of the Congress;
2. at regional level, the Dirección General de Servicios Sociales e Integración Social de la Comunidad de Madrid (Department of Social Services and Social Integration of the Madrid regional administration);
3. at the national level, the Consejo Estatal de Pueblo Gitano (Roma National Board), and the Instituto de la Mujer (Women´s Institute);
4. at the European level, Member of the European Parliament Soraya Post, who committed to attend the Conference, as well as several European feminist Roma organizations. Representatives of the FRA were also expected to attend;

The months of May and June 2016 were entirely dedicated to attract funding and support, visiting the above-mentioned institutions. The Roma Feminist Association continued their relentless efforts to "awaken consciences" through presentations of the Association itself and of the Congress in a number of Spanish cities.

Part of the content had already been decided. The Conference would start off with a round table of elderly Roma women, feminists in their own experiences, to tell their stories and receive acknowledgement. One of the most important themes of the Congress was to be "how to be a Roma male in the 21st century". Special attention was to be paid to the "invisible" issues, such as sexual diversity, transsexuality, violence, sexuality and marriage. The Congress would have at least three dimensions:

- experiences and testimonies, a celebration of Roma women's struggle (elderly, art, narration of political or social practices, etc.);
- a theory for Roma Feminism: a theoretical frame and a debate of the foundations of a useful feminism that benefits Roma women and the Roma community;

- vindication, lobbying and political agenda: drawing up a manifesto with the main points and claims. A lobby or a movement, emerging out of the Conference to keep its torch burning.

The most important preparatory work was carried out on a political level, in two parts: in the Equality Board of the City, which finally held a meeting on 18 May 2016. There was a debate regarding the political means and ends, but the Board demonstrated its interest in and support for the Congress. On the level of leaders and associations, a framework document was to be agreed on before the Congress, and was to serve as a reference for later engagements. This would be the real "Manifesto" of the Roma feminism and it would be completed during the two days of the Congress in Madrid.

Thus, the collaborative and transformative process would not end with the LERI research, but would have its own dynamic and keep on expanding in the subsequent months.

### **Situation in July 2016**

The situation took a full turn in the first days of July 2016. There was a confrontation between one of the Roma women associations and the Feminist Roma Association, in relation to the form of work of the commissions for the preparation of the Congress. The tone rose and the "offended" association requested a meeting with the Equality Board of the City Council to resolve the conflict. The delegate of the local government called the board and decided that the Council would only support the Roma Feminist Congress if the board voted unanimously in favour of continuing. She gave two days to resolve the situation. Most of the organizations of the board voted against and the Council withdrew its support.

This outcome of the conflict had several causes:

- Some Roma associations never supported the idea of the Roma Feminist Congress wholeheartedly; rather, they were dragged into it, and were not willing to make the effort of consensus needed to achieve this;
- All the associations acted in a defensive way towards what they considered a personal attack from the feminist Roma. The principle of unity is what led them to vote against the Congress. They acted as a coalition against what they considered a personal attack;
- The Feminist Roma Association raised its tone after the first serious conflict, instead of adopting a more neutral position;
- The local government delegate did not know how to solve the situation and made the decision to link the resolution of the conflict to the future of the Congress. She did not want a conflict within the Roma organizations of Madrid. Besides, she did not have a clear line of support to the realization of a Roma Feminist Congress, although she liked the idea. In fact, the Roma Feminist Congress was not a project of the Equality Board, and it made no sense conditioning its realisation to unanimous support;
- The LERI local team also took actions, which had particular consequences. The field expert insisted on following the request of the 'offended' association to convene the board, and on following the approach of the local government seeking the support of all the associations. This resulted in confusing an initiative of one association, the Feminist Roma one, with a project of the Equality Board.

The Congress was never a project of the board. The board was only a member of it. Although the LERI local team requested the support of the organizations, it just as much sought the participation of Roma women who were not organized. These points should have been much clearer from the beginning.

The solution would have been, from the very start, to de-link fully the Congress from the organizations, including the Feminist Roma Association who had come up with the initiative of the Congress, and to create an autonomous group called "Romaní Feminism", and invite all women individually. However, the LERI local team decided instead to invite and engage all organizations, which have large differences. After that, the conflict broke out. At the same time, the City Council acted wrongly in seeking an impossible unanimity, rather than maintaining its support and enforcing some good manners and a certain level of agreement.

### Situation in September 2016

In September 2016, the time of finalisation of this study, the situation was as follows: the planned dates of the Congress in Madrid still stood. The Congress would be supported by the Department of women's studies of the Complutense University and would receive funding from the Madrid Region. The University agreed to provide the venue, an assembly hall, and the Roma Feminist Association was looking for funding from other administrations and other means, for example by holding two concerts, one in Madrid and one in Granada, to raise funds.

Picture 3. Poster of the fund-raising concert



Source: Feminist Roma Association, 2016

The Congress was now to be led by the Feminist Roma Association. They looked for support in the Roma movement, signing agreements with different associations from all over Spain, and within the national feminist movement. However, the large associations with headquarters in Madrid were not among

them. Thus, the amplitude of the debate has been lost, but it is probably the only way to carry it out.

## 5. Analysis, discussion, lessons learned

The most important result of the LERI research in Madrid was to facilitate the ushering of a "dream" of a powerful and yet small organization of Roma women, i.e. in holding the first Roma Feminist Conference. This result will be finally achieved, but without the formal support of the City of Madrid. The conclusion about the LERI research in Madrid can be called "ambivalent", reflecting the impression of all stakeholders. All those involved regarded it as a good initiative, leading to a deep discussion about the situation and needs of Roma in Madrid. At the same time, the conflicts and misunderstandings made it impossible to reach a consensus. From both, the good work of the preparatory conferences and the final failure through the withdrawal of support from the Equality Board and the City lessons can be learnt:

1. Participation is an important factor to have better and more equal public policies, but it takes time and a specific set of resources. Uncertainty and risk-taking must be accepted, which requires support and flexibility. And this is precisely what the LERI research offered.
2. Participation is a political issue, not a technical one. Without a clear political will of the local authorities, it will fail. The case of Madrid is a good example: the project had not come out of the institution (i.e. Equality Board), and the City did not dare to launch it and support it. After the first serious conflict, the Equality Department of the City Council withdrew its support. One of the conclusions of the LERI research is that when government services do not have a project of their own, participation does not work.
3. Participation transforms the ones involved in it. The LERI research has helped to re-establish the relationship between the City of Madrid and the "Roma cause", and to give more content to the Equality Board which grew from an adequate political momentum. For a small organization like the Roma Feminist Association, this has also been significant. It is very affirmative and its main threat is isolation and radicalization. Thanks to projects like these, it can achieve its independence and implement its will to act and at the same time find new alliances, and connect with networks that can make its discourse more effective.
4. It should be accepted that real participation involves a certain degree of conflict which will continue into a more open process. This is how it has been with the LERI research in Madrid, above all between the more institutional associations and those with less institutional presence. Both are necessary. The first group of institutions substantiates consensus and structure, while the second group questions the status quo, which is necessary to see real progress. There have also been conflicts regarding the structure of the LERI research and that criticism should be taken into account. For instance, the question was raised why the Madrid expert was not a Roma woman. If the Roma could execute projects, why could they not also manage them?
5. Participation has to make sense: "inventing" is not possible. Support should be given to dreams or interests that already exist or resonate and have their own paths. This is exactly what happened with the LERI

research in Madrid, which caught a "whistling train": the Feminist Congress had been conceived by the Roma Feminist Association a long time ago. It was not improvised "for LERI". What the LERI research did was to identify the project and support it. But from the other side, the Madrid Council, the LERI research was not contested. It was welcomed as a chance to make "something" interesting. However, without a Roma policy, the project sank and was abandoned as soon as they realized its difficulty.

6. At the same time, this was the main threat to the LERI in Madrid: The Congress "belonged" to the Roma Feminist Association. They knew that the prerequisite to its success was to open it up and allow other organizations to be protagonists, but this was not easy for them, because they are used to struggling "alone against the world". There should have been an independent structure organizing the Conference and widening its political base, but it was very difficult for the organization to "let go" of their idea and for other others to join the project without wishing to bring them a round to their side.
7. Participation should be taken seriously: if people and organizations are asked what they want, one should be willing to deal with it. In the case of Madrid, a few months passed without making progress, and when an interesting project was initiated, it was completely different and far more ambitious than what was initially planned for. The real participation always surpasses its initial objectives, a fact that becomes problematic when dealing with projects that have a fixed frame and deadlines.

In this regard, the support of the FRA has been essential. It has granted resources of legitimacy and political support to a "minority's" project within the Roma minority itself, furthering thus the level and the status of the debate. It has been done with enough time and a great deal of flexibility. A conclusion can thus be drawn that the presence of a major institution of human rights, detached from the local debates, can support more complex projects, "break the deadlock" of certain situations and endow the local politics with greater ambitions.

In Madrid, a large and ambitious project was thought of, a plan for the Roma women of the city. However, this first idea was more "conventional" and could have ended up as another interesting document but not a transforming one. **The fundamental lesson learned is that participation can transform the relationship between the actors involved and the initially expected result.** If it were not, we would be facing technical consultation, which is of no little interest and does not change the status of the Roma cause. A Roma Feminist Congress was not expected. The gigantic conceptual leap that has been made becomes more evident, when the idea behind the Congress is compared with the initial Equality Plan, a leap towards a more thorough and a more collaborative understanding of the problem. Thus, the point of arrival of the LERI research is much more interesting, but also more difficult to measure, more intricate and more risky.

It was a greater risk, and it failed. With the withdrawal of the Council's support, the LERI research became incomplete. Its target is still interesting, but it did not transform the way of dealing with local administrations and Roma associations. In fact, what characterized the behaviour of the municipal government was the lack of political action. They let the associations resolve their problems without mediating. Not having a frame of action, they abandoned the project. This shows that the political forms and habits of a relationship with the civil society are

established and are not changed with a project. The LERI research has allowed to unfold this reality and this conflict, but eventually the Roma Feminist Association will act without such support.

The future sustainability of the LERI research is assured because the people who defend the Congress will continue with the endeavour. It is theirs, it was not created "ad hoc" from an unexpected funding, and thus it does not depend on something of the sort. The LERI research has facilitated and allowed the completion of this project in a very short time-span and with more support and alliances. After the Congress takes place (tentatively foreseen for October at the time of drafting the study, and later tentatively postponed until early 2017), the project will continue beyond the involvement of LERI. The plan is to spread the results and keep on widening the Roma feminist movement in Madrid, in Spain and in Europe, and for that reason, its sustainability is evident. At the same time, changes in the Roma policies are not ensured. The LERI research failed in trying to give a political framework to the new Council team and was not able to stabilize a relationship subjected to large strains.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

Many conclusions of an initiative as extensive and as rich as LERI in Madrid can be made, but the main or the most interesting ones with regard to local and European policies are the following:

- Ambitious projects can fail more easily than simpler ones, but at least they manage to change the public discussion as well as keeping the topic of "Roma feminism" going and alive. All stakeholders agreed that LERI helped to talk about issues that were usually not on the agenda of Roma mainstream policy;
- When a project is innovative, consensus must not be sought from the beginning. It is logical that the more conservative or more traditional organizations are not going to support it. The search of a general support can create conflicts and put in danger the project. Therefore it is more useful to allow that the avant-garde or stakeholders with the most innovative ideas advance with the help of the FRA, or a similar human rights organization, and then invite the other organizations to join them;
- If participation must be based on real projects that are important for the participants and for the Roma organizations, the same is true on the other side, local authorities: a European project cannot replace the political will of national administrations. It can collaborate, raise the theoretical level, provide technical support and offer an opportunity and specific funding. Nevertheless, without political will, it will not be possible to introduce changes in the relationship between the Roma civil society and the local administration.

There are other conclusions at a more "theoretical" or policy level. The fate of the Roma people in Europe is inseparable from women's equality. Roma culture and its survival are tied to marital and reproductive practices, and to family solidarity, a fact, which leaves women at the centre of all changes and struggles. It is of no use to fight for girls' education without understanding what is at stake there. It is of no value to pressure women to "get emancipated" without having an internal debate and one with the outside world concerned with the collective future of the Roma people.

This debate should be carried out by the Roma community, and cannot be dissociated from overcoming racism. As long as the Roma are obliged to withdraw and retreat within their own community in order to live on the margins of society, equality between men and women will be much harder to achieve. On the contrary, the emancipation of Roma women will make no sense without bringing about progress and freedom for the whole group.

Only feminism, as a theory and as a political movement, and above all a "minority" feminism or postcolonial feminism, is capable of confronting the double dilemma of intersectionality, a progress on two fronts, which does not leave anyone behind. Individual liberty then must be accompanied in minority cultures with solidarity and unity, if it does not want the culture itself to be destroyed.

Women and men should conduct the debate together. Differently from many white men, Roma men have suffered first hand discrimination and can share with women their aspirations. The commitment is serious and at the same time faces great internal resistance. The fear that the social change will "destroy" the group and eliminate male privileges makes taking each step much more difficult.

The role of society and of administrations is not to "organize" the Roma, nor to think on their behalf, but rather to make them think of themselves, to fight against racism and all acts of exclusion. For example, non-Roma feminism can and should back this process but primarily learn from it, recognizing its privileges and discoursing in terms of equality with a minority feminism whose perspective is wider and richer. In the same token, the administration should analyse the causes of institutional racism, the educational ghettos, the segregated neighbourhoods and police control, etc., and transform its institutions into more inclusive and equal ones.

As for the recommendations, they are derived from the above-mentioned conclusions and the lessons learnt:

- Pro-Roma politics should be of "distribution" and "recognition". It is essential to combine structural policies aimed at changing the economic situation of the Roma population in Europe with policies that acknowledge the value and the power of the Roma people, including Roma women. In both cases, it is the general social institutions who should act upon this, and not the Roma, as was explained previously;
- The largest organizations that manage the funds for promoting the Roma population are fundamental, but they cannot be at the same time independent and call for a social transformation. This is why it is essential to support the most independent organizations, the ones with a political hue, as feminists, with the capacity to question the status quo and "awaken consciences";
- Participation is a powerful tool as long as the points mentioned above are fulfilled. It should be given time and resources, it should make sense for the participants, be willing to take risks and not mind getting into conflicts, transforming the participants and surpassing the expected results.

Ultimately, the efforts of politicians at local, national and European level should not be focused on "changing" the Roma but rather on changing society, its institutions and practices, when they are exclusive or discriminatory (school system, criminal law, labour market, etc.). It is much more than an effort to conceive more collaborative policies, even if the collaboration is positive. It has

to do with shifting the attention and recognizing that the relationship between the majority and the minority is not a marginal and a “social” issue, but rather the core of the idea of citizenship itself, and the basis for a truly democratic culture. If we can achieve an equal school, city, or labour market when it comes to the Roma minority, it means that it will be inclusive and equal for all citizens. This is the fundamental conclusion of the LERI research in Madrid.