

## A LONG ROAD TO FULL INTEGRATION

While many Spanish Autonomous Communities are welcoming and supportive to immigrants, it takes time and effort to receive the necessary papers and to find work in the mainstream economy. An immigrant has to stay in Spain for three years before he or she can be officially recognised and receive a work permit. As the last stamp on a passport is taken as the date of entry, this prevents anyone returning home during this period to meet up with family and friends. It is a long time to spend on your own, often in very basic accommodation, whilst trying to pick up odd jobs in the black or grey economies.

This reality is reflected in the title of a Spanish EQUAL Development Partnership (DP) which is [LUNGO DROM](#) or the Long Road. The DP provides a variety of services to smooth the path for the social and vocational integration of Roma people coming from eastern Europe, mainly Romanians or Bulgarians. The work of the DP is making a contribution to the realisation of a specific proposal in the Council's Recommendations ([2004/741/EC](#)) on the implementation of Member States' employment policies, which states that Spain should ensure greater access to, and efficiency of, active labour market measures for disadvantaged people, in particular young people, disabled people, immigrants and long-term unemployed.



*"For our region, the LUNGO DROM project is of great significance because of the lack of awareness of the characteristics of this new wave of immigrants and also because of the unfounded negative image that they have in the eyes of the local community,"* says Antonio Garcia - Nieto Gómez - Guillamón from the General Directorate for Immigration, Volunteering and Other Collectives at the Regional Council of Murcia. The DP also operates in three other Spanish Regions along the Mediterranean coast - Catalonia, Valencia and Andalusia. This means that the project can follow the pathways of Roma migration from the Pyrenean Mountains in the North right down to the very south of Spain. Thus, support is available as the Roma people move from region to region to seek some work picking crops during the harvests that take place at different times and in different places.

### LINKING THEORY AND PRACTICE

LUNGO DROM combines an investigation of the causes and processes of the social exclusion of the Roma population with a programme of positive measures to facilitate their integration.

In addition to the direct involvement of the Regional Governments or Autonomous Communities, the other members of the DP are four NGOs that have a long and wide experience of dealing with immigrants and ethnic minorities and of combating social exclusion. These are:

- ASPROSOCU, the leader of the DP, which was initially located in the Murcia Region, but is now also working at national level on issues concerned with Gypsies and the immigrant population;
- CEPAIM is the National Consortium for Integrated Action with the Migrant Population;
- ALHORA KETHANE works with educators and educational professionals who focus on the Gypsy and Roma communities;
- FAKALI is the Federation of Gypsy Women Associations in Andalusia.

These NGOs wanted to use their experience and skills in a different way by addressing the needs of the latest wave of immigrants from eastern Europe. They were, however, anxious that their new approaches should be based on the best possible evidence that was available and so they decided to establish a Permanent Observatory of Roma People to continually inform the work of the DP.





This Permanent Observatory is carrying out a survey at national level in the four participating regions which is reinforced by information from the transnational partners in Belgium, France, Ireland and Slovakia and by contacts that have been established with Romania and Bulgaria. Analyses are made of the causes and consequences of the streams of migration and on the basis of these analyses, the observatory proposes dynamic, socially and culturally sensitive strategies for intervention.

This information is continuously reflected back to the main action-oriented activities that are based in the DP's Integrated Territorial Centres. The observatory also monitors and evaluates the centres' activities with a view to making positive changes to the approaches that they use. The observatory covers both qualitative and quantitative issues but it is very difficult to determine actual numbers of migrants, as Spanish law prohibits the creation or storage of records that reflect an individual's ethnic origin. So, the DP has to rely on "best guesses" and second-hand information and, on occasions, the local police have the most reliable overview of the size of certain migrant populations. However, the information that was gathered helped the Integrated Territorial Centres to establish certain geographical districts as priority areas for intervention. This continues to be the way things operate and when the data provided by the Permanent Observatory points up new needs, the centres try to change their services accordingly.

### **Concrete Responses to identified Needs**

The Integrated Territorial Centres have adopted an holistic approach to the needs of migrants. They offer a range of activities designed to help "new citizens" to adapt to life in Spain and these include language learning. Employment is also covered through guidance and counselling and the provision of pre-vocational training in aspects such computer literacy and communication and social skills. In addition, the centres support the creation of social enterprises or other entrepreneurial developments based on the traditional activities of the Gypsies or on new forms of ethnic or bi-cultural businesses. Help and assistance are also given on the very important matters of health and housing. Finally, in the city of Seville, there is a Reconciliation Centre which operates a crèche for children up to the age of three and also looks after older children at the end of the school day. This enables both of the parents of these children to take on full-time or part-time jobs.

Andalusia is known as the "Home of Gypsies" because it has over half of the 800,000 people in the Spanish, Roma population. Trini Muñoz Vacas, from the Federation of Gypsy Women Associations believes that "Spanish policies do not work with our people because they are immigrants but the immigrant policies that Spain has developed also do not work because we are Roma!" Trini feels that the link between the observatory and the DP's activities is particularly relevant because this interactive relationship between theory and practice could lead to the development of more effective policies.

### **New Tools for Teachers and Educators**

Another important action is the creation of an Educational Pack and this work is being undertaken by ALHORA KETHANE. *"There can be lots of problems for teachers or social educators in working with Roma"* says Jesús Salinas Catala from Valencia and he explains that *"some of these are idiomatic difficulties or cultural difficulties and sometimes there are difficulties in convincing parents of the value of education but one of the good points is that young Roma learn languages very quickly."* However, the DP believes that educators need additional help with training, products and methods if they are to provide effective formal and non-formal programmes for this target group. So a social educator has been visiting a total of just under 100 schools from all of the four regions to identify their requirements and also to record any examples of good practice in working with Roma pupils. The resulting Educational Pack, which will provide the basis for 'Training the Teachers' courses, will be distributed widely throughout the four regions and will also be made available to the other 13 Autonomous Communities in Spain.



In addition, the DP has a wider dissemination programme that includes the production of graphic material in order to promote a more realistic image of the Roma people that are living in Spain. Much of the on-going awareness raising activities are focused on the [project web site](#) and the DP is also planning a final conference that will be used to showcase all of its achievements and successful approaches.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF INITIAL CONTACT

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The headquarters of the DP promoter, ASPROSOCU, is in the town of Murcia and looking at the situation there provides an initial understanding of the lives of the new immigrants to Spain, as arrangements are similar to the other regions involved in the project. When they first arrive in Murcia, immigrants can have access to shelter and support as they can stay at a hostel called 'Jesús Abandonado' that is operated by the Catholic Church. Here they have a roof over their heads, they are fed and they receive some advice about the future. However, the demand is so great that the maximum permitted length of stay in the hostel is two weeks. After that the Roma migrants have to find their own way and, being in a new country without the necessary papers and knowledge of Spanish, this is a very difficult task.



Many have to make the best of what they can find. For example there is an ever-changing Roma population living in a block of stables on the outskirts of the town. While they have managed to rig up an electricity supply, there is no running water, no waste collection service and the toilet is a hole in the ground surrounded by a screen made from old sacks. Some Roma may find lodging with family or friends but others live in caravans, sheds or cars or even on the street. *"That is why we must go out and find them,"* says María Angeles Sevilla Bernal, who is the Director of the project. She adds that *"it's really important to get them to come to our centres and then we can make sure that they get access to the services and the help they need."*

Who better to undertake this initial contact work than someone who has lived through the same situation? Stefan Domnu is an immigrant who originally came from Romania. He was lucky when he arrived in Murcia, as he found space in a flat with another family and his wife and children were able to join him. He worked as an agricultural labourer or played his accordion for money. Thanks to the new regulations in 2004 for regularising the situation of immigrant people and also to the fact that he had found an offer of a job with a building company, he was able to get his papers. However, this job finished in 2006, so he went to the DP for help and advice. The very next month he was called for an interview for the post of inter - cultural mediator and was successful in gaining the job. Like other people working in the project Stefan had some initial training in aspects such as:

- Spanish legislation on immigration;
- Existing measures for immigrants from eastern Europe;
- The gender perspective;
- Intercultural mediation with Roma people.

This has prepared him for his outreach work and his daily contacts with people from Roma communities in Murcia but the whole experience of being part of this EQUAL DP has also brought him significant benefits. Stefan feels that *"this job has changed my life. We have our own flat now and everything is more calm and normal and life is much fuller."*



The topic of Mediation with Roma People is one of the three Working Thematic Groups for the [TRIALOG](#) Transnational Partnership of which LUNGO DROM is the coordinator. This partnership involves DPs from Belgium, France, Ireland and Slovakia and, strangely with such a mix of countries, its



"lingua franca" is Spanish. The partnership is also concerned with training for Intercultural Mediation with Roma People. Linda Bujor is one of the beneficiaries of the Irish [Roma Cultural Mediation DP](#) and she participated in the TRIALOG Launching Initial Conference in Granada, in October 2005. Linda became a mediator in her DP after a 13 week training course. She now realises that *"cultural mediators are a bridge, as they are the key to many of the questions that service providers might have and a great source of information to clients,"* and she wants *"to use what I have learned to help other Roma parents to encourage their children to go to school and promote education as much as possible."*

## EXPLOITING INNOVATION

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The DP's partnership has been carefully constructed to maximize its innovative potential and the impact of its innovative outcomes. It comprises four NGOs that have considerable experience of dealing with immigrants and Roma, although admittedly not Roma from central and eastern Europe, and the Autonomous Communities that have the responsibility for social policy and



policy related to the integration of immigrants. Together, in conceiving the project, they had an understanding of what worked, both in terms of practice and policies and attempted to adapt these successful approaches to this new wave of immigration that has only become apparent over the last five or six years.

One main innovation has been the observatory, which has been crucial in establishing a sound basis for innovation. A major factor was the direct involvement of representatives of this new target group. The observatory was active in identifying leaders or reference people within the Roma communities and also members of these communities have been involved as inter-cultural mediators. These individuals are touchstones that are used, on an on-going basis, to judge the success of LUNGO DROM's activities. As already indicated, the observatory has provided factual information on the size, nature and patterns of immigration and their effect on the host communities. This has helped the DP to clarify the problems, to plan its objectives and to target its activities. The observatory also continually monitors and assesses the work of the DP.

The research staff is multi-disciplinary and in establishing the framework for assessing the nature of innovation, the observatory has drawn on methods and techniques used in anthropology, education, sociology, political sciences and communication theory. The main criteria that it uses to assess the work of the Centres are:

- Changes in the location of the target groups;
- Changes in the composition of the group in terms of size, gender, etc;
- The preferences expressed in terms of jobs or occupation;
- Changes in the circumstances of individuals from their initial interview at the Centre through subsequent supportive sessions.

In addition, the inclusion of members of staff from other agencies and institutions such as the Murcia Regional Government (C.A.R.M.) and the European Social Fund's Spanish Support Unit (UAFSE), in technical and project management meetings, add an external and objective point of view about the feasibility and validity of the innovation. Naturally there is also an external evaluation conducted, in this case, by Sociological Studies Cabinet – a consultancy firm, that makes an important contribution to the promotion of innovation.

There are many innovative aspects in the DP's work such as the application of previously successful experiences with ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and ex - drug abusers to this relatively unknown target group of eastern European Roma – a group which was also clearly at risk from social exclusion. One of these experiences is the use of the Individual Integration Pathway which is now been applied to Roma people in the DP's centres with similar success.



The other major innovation both in the DP and in its Transnational Partnership is the establishing of the new profile of the intercultural mediator and the development of training to assist individuals to play this new role. Having someone who is knows about all the services that exist in the local area and who can speak to Roma people in their own language has proved to be vital to the success of the projects. Andrés Abad, the Transnational Coordinator explains "The direct involvement and personal commitment of Roma users, becoming mediators and participating actively both nationally and transnationally, provides an added value to the visibility and mainstreaming of the success of the project, not only at the technical level, but also at the European Commission level."



The competence and experience of the DP is being acknowledged more widely and, in Murcia, it has been asked to assist in the development of health care and facilities in the areas in which it is working. Also in Catalonia and Andalusia, the advice of LUNGO DROM has been requested on the drafting of new legislation related to the Protection of Minors. With the direct involvement of the Autonomous Communities in the partnership there is every chance that the innovations that LUNGO DROM has pioneered will be generalised in the practices and policies of these regional governments.

### Three Important Conclusions from LUNGO DROM

1. Many Roma people live in relatively isolated, precarious situations and they cannot be expected to come to you. You have to reach out to them if you want to be of real assistance.
2. If you are seeking to change policies, it is important that your work has a sound intellectual basis that can be used to demonstrate both the issues involved and the solutions that have been found.
3. It would make a huge difference if there were changes to European and National legislation that enabled those immigrants, who have an offer of a job, to automatically receive a work permit without having to wait for the current qualifying period of three years.

### Contact

M<sup>a</sup> Angeles Sevilla Bernal  
Project Director  
LUNGO DROM Centre  
C/ Doctor Flores Bastida 1 - C.P. 30.100 Espinardo - Murcia  
Spain

Tel: + 34 968 308109

Fax: + 34 968 308146

Mobile: + 34 648 00 3633

E-mail: [mangeles.sevilla@lungo-drom.org](mailto:mangeles.sevilla@lungo-drom.org)

Link to DP Web site: <http://www.lungo-drom.org/ing/index.htm>

[Link to EQUAL database description](#)