



Integration helps Roma become full members of European society



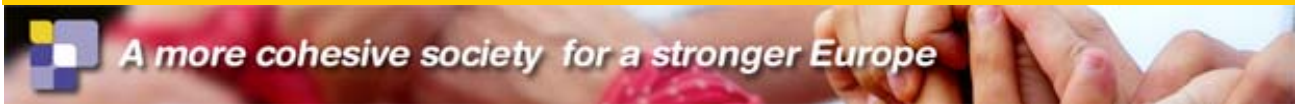
Even though Roma have been in Europe for many centuries, they have rarely been accepted as full members of the wider societies in which they live. Contrary to some common belief, the vast majority of them are sedentary rather than nomadic; in many locations there is evidence that they have been settled for centuries. In 2000, when the Lisbon strategy called for greater social cohesion, all EU Member States and new entrants were required to produce national plans for social inclusion. Some members have looked for guidance to a successful Roma integration campaign that took place in Avilés, Spain.

During the 1950s and 1960s, a Roma migration to the industrial city of Avilés in the Principality of Asturias, Spain, resulted in the springing up of five shanty towns. In 1989, the municipal government sought to better integrate their inhabitants into society by relocating them and attempting to improve their employment opportunities, educational enrolment and retention, registration in the health system and access to public services. As an intermediate stage, Roma families were moved to a separate model village. However, just a few years later, it was recognised that segregation in an isolated enclave only perpetuated the social exclusion of its residents. From 2000 onwards, the Roma families have been successfully rehoused among the non-Roma population in standard accommodation.

In October 2006, Spain hosted a Peer Review to present fellow governments the Avilés Roma integration initiative and assess how far it can be transferable to other countries. This peer review gathered decision-makers from eight countries, as well as representatives of Roma associations and Roma beneficiaries of the Avilés programme.

“The Avilés project is a remarkable achievement,” says Will Guy, a Research Fellow at the University of Bristol, in his capacity as the thematic experts chosen by the European Commission to introduce the debates and report on the meeting. “It is an example of how a clearly conceived policy implemented under firm municipal leadership, with broad-based political support and close cooperation of administrative bodies at all levels, NGO partners and Roma beneficiaries, can offer a way forward in tackling the problem of Roma exclusion.” Its transferability and opportunities for mainstreaming in Spain and beyond were addressed as part of the Peer Review.

The successful Avilés project did not come about from a short-term solution based on expediency, but emerged gradually from channeling years of experience into targeted solutions, as Spanish Roma NGOs and other partners explained. “From



the start it had been recognised that, on its own, re-housing Roma was insufficient to bring about the Roma inclusion," says Dr Guy, "It was also necessary to make significant improvements in their employment, education and health".

He adds that the success of the project encourages other EU countries where continued segregated housing for Roma communities is accepted as inevitable, to re-think their strategy and look for alternative solutions.

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Several factors have been identified as crucial for the success of the Avilés programme:

- Committed involvement of the different administrative government levels (local, regional, national) and departments (housing, education, health, employment);
- Socio-political consensus;
- Municipal resolve and leadership;
- Commitment to a long-term approach and the pursuit of permanent not temporary solutions;
- Adoption of an integrated strategy addressing multiple factors affecting exclusion;
- Client-centred services addressing specific individual problems with targeted approaches;
- Monitoring and evaluation of progress aimed at preventing the repopulation of shanty towns.

A crucial component underpinning the effectiveness of this initiative is the high-level of participation, commitment, and involvement of Roma organisations and beneficiaries, coupled with the high expectations and enthusiasm of non-Roma personnel working for it.

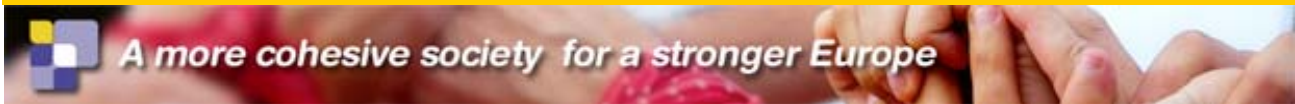
■ The European Perspective

With the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 to include new members in Central and Eastern Europe, the Roma population living in the EU now numbers several million. In order for them to benefit from the success of the Avilés project however, governments and civil society actors need to ensure that a strong political consensus for tackling the issue exists at all levels of society.

While much of the responsibility for addressing the challenges of discrimination and exclusion lies at national, regional and local levels, the EU has a range of policies and programmes which can help to support these efforts. These range from the legal framework for equal treatment and non-discrimination – the Avilés project itself is seen as a practical implementation of Directive 20 on equal treatment, regardless of racial or ethnic origin – to forums for policy cooperation and provision of financial resources. Through the PHARE programme for instance, more than €100m have been devoted to Roma inclusion. EU structural funds such as the European Social Fund are also seen as a major source of assistance.

Last but not least, the Commission is keen to ensure that the situation of the Roma is taken into account in all EU programmes and policies that could be significant in this context. This multifaceted approach to Roma exclusion, involving a wide range of actors and mainstreamed into a myriad of policies is to be replicated by other European countries if the problem is to be addressed on a sustainable long-term basis.

25 June 2007



Project information

Name of the initiative: Municipal programme of shanty towns eradication in Aviles (Asturias)

Activity: Peer Review

Country: Spain

Scope: Local

SPSI Priority theme: Inclusion of most vulnerable groups

Year: 1989 – 2005

Coordinator:

European Commission

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