

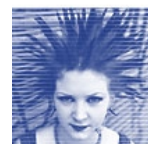


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**Field social work
programmes in
neighbourhoods
threatened by
social exclusion**

Comment Paper, Spain



on behalf of

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DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities





1. Brief assessment of the relevance of the program to Spain

Spain is a country with an estimated 650.000 Roma population (around 1,5% of 42 million total population). As in most European countries, Roma people are also in Spain one of the most disadvantaged groups suffering from high levels of social exclusion and rejection.

The Spanish Roma are sedentary and are unequally distributed throughout the whole of the Spanish territory, close to 45% making their home in Andalusia while the rest are situated typically in large urban centres.

The social situation facing the Spanish Roma has considerably changed over the last 30 years. This is fundamentally due to an improvement in living conditions for Spanish citizens as a whole but even more so to the fact that the Roma have gained from the universalisation of welfare state benefits. The advancement of the Roma in Spain was made possible thanks to social housing plans, widespread education, health services, etc. These mainstreaming policies combined with selected targeted measures have resulted in a generalised improvement of the Roma living standards, while there are still a group of Roma (estimated of around 10-15%) who live in a marginalised and excluded situation.

The intervention model proposed by *People in Need* is already applied in Spain with some differences related to the context. The program is closely related to the housing conditions of the Roma community, which, according to Spanish experience, has proved to be a main factor for the integration of the Roma. Concerning the so-called *Roma communities*, it is true that there is in Spain a high concentration of Roma people in certain urban areas and its surroundings, but the existence of segregated Roma settlements is fortunately decreasing. The Spanish development has been different than that of the Czech case, where the tendency towards the concentration of the Roma in exclusively Roma communities seems to be relatively recent and on the rise. During the 70´s most of the Spanish Roma were living in shanty towns and segregated settlements. According to the NAPincl (2001-2003), the people living in shanty towns (mainly Roma people) amounted to 48,000 in 2000. Despite this improvement, it is estimated that around 10% of Spanish Roma still live in segregated settlements or substandard housing. Access to public housing, urban planning, social pressure and political awareness has contributed to eradicate most of the segregated settlements.



The field social work mentioned in the program developed by *People in Need* has in Spain two kinds of locations: those of the remaining segregated settlements and those of the urban areas where Roma families have been relocated from settlements to high-rise flats in much better living conditions. In this last case, the wrong approach of concentration of Roma families, even if relocated, in certain blocks or neighbourhoods have given rise to urban ghettos. Fortunately, administrations have realised that this kind of policy promoting concentration of Roma was a mistake and recent developments of relocation policies tend to avoid concentration of Roma families.

The intervention priorities vary depending upon the situation being face by the Roma. In the case of Roma who are integrated in standard-type neighbourhoods, the priority is to achieve an adequate level of neighbourly relations and access to and correct use of the services available in the area. In the case of the Roma that live in shanty towns and segregated settlements, the intervention is based on social work based on minimum goals focusing on damage reduction and helping to prevent personal and family deterioration.

We should also take into account that Spain is a quite decentralised country and social services, as well as housing policies, fall into the competency of local and regional authorities; therefore, the degree of social involvement of the different regions and municipalities varies and the experiences are very diverse. It is difficult to influence local authorities to undertake measure aiming at improving the situation of the Roma when there is slight social awareness.

One more characteristic of the Spanish case is that social services are very much linked to specific groups (disabled, drug-abusers, the elderly, etc.) than in the Czech case. Even the existence of these tailored and specialised services, public administrations have difficulties to reach certain groups and to cover their social needs, that is why the NGOs play an important role in delivering specialised services. In the case of the Roma community, it is quite frequent that the administrations support NGOs to provide the Roma with specific services. In some cases it is both necessary and recommendable to implement services specifically adapted to the Roma population as the only way of guaranteeing care. In these cases attention should be put on conceiving them as strictly transitory in nature and plan them in such a way that they tend to integrate rather than segregate.



In fact, we can say that all existing Roma settlements have some kind of social support coming from public administrations or from NGOs supported by public administrations. When the intervention is carried out by a NGO, it is important to make sure that the services provided by the NGOs are closely linked to public services.

Another characteristic of the Spanish case is that what is called “field social worker” in the Czech program, we call it “mediator”, even if the role is probably the same, based on intermediary and advisory functions. The figure of the mediator, a Roma or non-Roma person, is increasingly gaining ground in Spain. Public administrations are hiring intercultural mediators to cover the gap existing between the administration and certain groups such as immigrants and Roma people. In fact, the NAPincl (2003-2005) mentions as one of the measures specifically addressed to Roma at risk of exclusion “*To carry out training courses for intercultural mediators in the fields of social action, education, housing, habitat and health*”.

The social intervention approach applied by *People in Need* in this program is shared by some of the most successful experiences in Spain:

- **Mainstreaming:** the strategy and methodology that favour the inclusion of the Roma minority should encourage the use of mainstream services provided for use by all citizens, far from creating excluded and parallel services
- **Community development:** it focuses on the development of the group itself, but it also envisions the participation of the Roma in the development of the territory where they live side by side with the rest of the population
- **Individualised social work:** this facilitates the adaptation of the response to specific needs.
- **Integrated intervention:** It includes simultaneous activities in the fields of education, health, training, access to social services, etc.

2. Potential transferability of the program to Spain

As mentioned before, even if the proposed intervention model is already applied in Spain, the Czech program has several factors which could be transferred to Spanish experiences. The intervention model itself is a very valuable experience which could be very helpful for Spain in two situations: social as-



sistance for Roma families still living in segregated settlements; social support for families who have been relocated but who still live in excluded environments.

The measures addressed to Roma people in Spain are characterised by a strong departmentalisation and lack of integrated and synergic approach. The structure of the Czech program selected shows a comprehensive approach which is not the usual way of intervention for Spanish experiences. Except for some cases, intervention with the Roma community in Spain is much more partially designed, responding to local needs, rather than a structured response as it is the case with the *People in Need* program. Both public administrations and NGOs usually have no shared approaches and objectives.

The professional profile of the “social field worker” seems to be much more adapted to the real needs of the Roma families than that of Spanish mediators. The sectorial specialisation of mediators (in the fields of education, health, labour insertion, etc.) in the Spanish case could result in an obstacle for an integrated approach of intervention. The more comprehensive approach of Czech “field social workers” could be a model for transferability to Spanish experiences.

3. Some questions about the program

- How to go beyond providing mediation and advisory services to provide specialised programs (education, health, etc.)?
- How to make more systematic the methodology of programs in order to make easier the transferability and the possibility of measuring progress?
- How to improve the coordination of specialised or tailored services with general social services? And how to achieve a strong partnership with other NGOs or social entities working on the same territory?
- How to strengthen the role of the NGOs in the provision of specialised services?
- How to move from “assistance services” to “social promotion services”?
- How to extend successful tailored measures to generalised policies?
- How to influence on local authorities in order to encourage them to undertake measures aiming to improve the social inclusion of Roma?