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Municipal programme of shanty towns eradication in Avilés (Asturias)

Minutes



On behalf of
European Commission
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities



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Hosted by the City of Avilés, the Principality of Asturias and the Government of Spain, this peer review examined the Avilés municipal shanty town eradication programme, which was presented in the Kingdom of Spain's 2005 National Action Plan on Social Inclusion as a best practice. Its possible transferability to other countries was discussed, notably in relation to the social inclusion of Roma people. The full PowerPoint presentations are included in the Appendix.

Day 1

Opening session

Welcoming the participants to Avilés, **Santiago Rodríguez Vega** (Mayor of Avilés) gave the floor to **Manuel Porras Muñoz** (Director General of Social Inclusion, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Kingdom of Spain), who thanked the European Commission, the Spanish Government, the Government of the Principality of Asturias and the City of Avilés for this opportunity to study an example of best practice in the field of social inclusion. He also thanked the experts from the host country and the peer review countries, and most particularly the Roma people, for their participation. Avilés is part of a region that has always been very active in the field of social affairs, and the scheme under examination is one of the most advanced examples of what are known in Spain as horizontal projects. These entail the coordination of many different agencies and many different people, from both the public and the private sector. His Ministry is placing the emphasis on a new way of working, which is to focus on the phenomenon of poverty in all domains. This entails a great effort by the different levels of administration in a decentralised country such as Spain. Within the area of social protection, thirteen ministries work together with the private sector, and particularly the tertiary sector. However, the policies developed at the level of Spain, as part of a broader EU strategy, could not have been effective without the existence of well-constructed plans in the country's autonomous regions and municipalities. The Avilés programme is a good case in point. Asturias is the only autonomous region in Spain that has placed housing and social welfare under the same Ministry, thus emphasising the importance of the link between these two factors. The most significant minority population group within Spain is the Roma community. Together with the municipalities and the autonomous regions, his Ministry has been elaborating the Roma Development Plan. A State Council for the Roma Community has been established, and it is hoped that similar consultative structures will exist within each municipality and autonomous region where there is a Roma population. Social work cannot be carried out without the participation of its beneficiaries. He hoped that, under the EU's open method of coordination and bearing the differences in national situations and resources in mind, elements of the programme under review would be found to be suitable for adoption in various territories within other Member States.

Hugues Feltesse (European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) expressed deep appreciation to the Spanish authorities for this contribution to the Peer Review Programme. The 2005 report on social inclusion in EU 15 and EU 10 stressed that a large part of the Roma people are among the most vulnerable individuals in the EU countries. Their social situation has, for a long time, been determined by a high rate of unemployment, in particular long-term unemployment, dependency on social benefits, a low educational attainment level and poor living conditions. Members of this community continue to experience widespread, even extreme, poverty and social exclusion. He was convinced that this review of the Avilés Ethnic Minority Integration Scheme, and in particular its municipal programme of shanty town eradication with the support of the Principality of Asturias and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, focussing particularly on social inclusion of former shanty town dwellers through an integrated programme of action addressing not only the housing issues but also the other key aspects of education, health, employment and multicultural co-existence, will be very useful to other Member States in tackling an area where past efforts have often failed. The European Union is based on fundamental rights and freedoms and the principle of non-discrimination. It is a Union where all citizens have the right to be treated equally, a Union that strives to combine economic competitiveness and prosperity with social cohesion and inclusion. Roma people stand to benefit from these rights. The EU is a Union of Diversity. One of the criteria for EU membership is the quality of the protection which is provided for minorities. Yet the exclusion and discrimination of Roma communities are well documented and, despite all the available legislative and financial instruments, often remain extreme. The National Action Programmes on social inclusion presented in 2004 by the national authorities of the new Member States highlighted continuing serious problems in access to employment, education, housing, health care and other services. The EU has encouraged Member States to develop strategies to address these challenges, and is one of the leading international donors with regard to Roma inclusion. More than €100m have been devoted to this issue through the PHARE programme. But Roma communities continue to face serious problems. This is not surprising, since we are trying to reverse the effects of centuries of prejudice and exclusion. While the protection and advancement of minorities are primarily the responsibility of Member States, this is an urgent issue which also demands a response from the EU. We must look ahead to see how EU policies and programmes can address these challenges most effectively.

He recalled the three main aims of the peer review exercise:

- Mutual learning, a process which entails frankness and objectivity on all sides.
- Improving the effectiveness of policies and strategies in this area for all the Member States – a vital challenge, as social inclusion policies still meet with scepticism if not open criticism in many circles, which tend to see economic and employment growth not only as a condition but also as the only way to reduce poverty and exclusion.
- Facilitating the transfer of key components of policies or of institutional arrangements which have proved effective in combating poverty and social exclusion – the most ambitious objective.

Each seminar participant, and particularly those closer to policy-making at the national level, bears a special responsibility as a key actor in enabling the effective transfer of policies, as a result of privileged access to information. Policy transfer can also be supported by the wide dissemination of seminar results, for example through the programme's newsletter, website (www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net) and specific reports for each peer review session. An annual report is also planned,

drawing key lessons from the eight peer reviews carried out each year. The objective of the Peer Review Programme is not competition or a ranking of policies. However, the factors that lead to the success of a policy in one country can be replicated elsewhere, if appropriate care is taken in adapting them to different cultural, institutional and economic contexts. So even if the word “success” is to be used sparingly, the programme should be looking for success stories, or at least inspiring stories. Mutual learning and the exchange of good practice are *raison d'être* of the EU's open method of coordination. He and his colleagues at the Commission, as well as the consortium in charge of the logistical arrangements and the Social Exclusion Programme Committee, will be following the results of the seminar attentively, both in order to learn more about the shanty town eradication strategy in Avilés and to improve the whole process of the open method of coordination. He asked for participants' collaboration in evaluating the peer review process by giving their feedback to the evaluation surveys.

Laura González Álvarez (Ministry of Housing and Social Welfare of the Principality of Asturias), who is from Avilés, said the city began to work on the eradication of shanty towns just after the advent of democracy in Spain. Ten years as a Member of the European Parliament taught her that peer reviews and the exchange of best practice are effective means of promoting progress. The clearing of shanty towns in Avilés is now complete but much remains to be done and we can all learn from each other. As the seminar documents point out, the four keystones for success in this field are employment, housing, education and health. In Asturias, the minimum insertion wage has been a great help in this connection. More than 8,000 people benefit from the social wage introduced in the autonomous region in 2005. This is helping some minorities to move out of exclusion. Combining responsibility for housing and for social welfare within the same ministry is an advantage in combating social exclusion. The directors of both departments were among those attending the seminar. Social housing promotion goes hand in hand with the eradication of shanty towns. People in shanty towns elsewhere in Asturias are being moved into standard housing. There is also close cooperation with the Department of Education in ensuring the integration of Roma children, and of immigrant children, into the autonomous region's education system. Great efforts have been made, but they must continue, because integration has not yet been completed. The experience of Avilés could be useful to Europe, also with respect to the inclusion of immigrants, and at the same time, Asturias has much to learn from the experience of other countries and other autonomous regions.

Santiago Rodríguez Vega (Mayor of Avilés) said the people of Avilés and all involved in the shanty eradication project are pleased and honoured that such a strong representation from all over Europe had come to learn from the Avilés experience. In turn, Avilés has much to learn from the peer review. The first meetings that he attended in the City Hall in 1983 were about tackling the shanty towns. At that time, there were about 100 shacks in seven or eight settlements, a large number for a small city like Avilés. About 500 people were then living in the shanty towns – roughly 6-7% of the population of Avilés. Nobody could have imagined then that, a little over 20 years later, Avilés would be the subject of a peer review of a successful shanty eradication. The process took a long time, a good deal of patience and a lot of determination and, of course, mistakes were made. At the beginning, Avilés was working alone and was trying to invent something. It then developed specific projects which would be presented in the course of the review. The original decision to eradicate the shanty towns was a difficult one. The year 2000 marked an important step forward, when a second programme was approved and a task force was created. This process was facilitated by a political consensus within the City Hall and a social agreement with all the various agencies involved. As a result, it became possible to develop a detailed methodology. The financial framework was also reinforced, in

coordination with the autonomous region and central government. Over 17 years, almost €9m have been invested in the programme. The shanty towns have now been eradicated and the city has moved forward in terms of social inclusion, as regards not only housing but also education, health care and employment. All of those working on the programme introduced a dynamic in a coordinated way. In times of crisis, it was always possible to reach agreement, even though it was not easy. In particular, the relocation of Roma to standard housing proved problematic in some cases. So it had been necessary for City Hall to keep demonstrating the political will to tackle these issues. Otherwise, it would not have been possible to defuse conflicts with other residents in some areas. Importantly, since 2000, the eradication of shanty towns has been presented as one of the key policy aims of Avilés as a municipality. Formerly one of Spain's main centres of heavy industry, Avilés went through a major structural crisis in the 1990s. This meant that economic and social renewal had in any case become essential, so it was possible to move forward with shanty town eradication as part of a wider strategy for improving the city. The peer review will help Avilés to continue moving forward in that spirit.

Policies of shanty town eradication in the Avilés experience

Purificación García (Social Services Councillor, City of Avilés) said the Avilés programme took time, like any process that attempts to break certain patterns and establish different dynamics of peaceful coexistence amongst the inhabitants of an area. Avilés covers just 25km², but it is densely populated. The Roma have always been there, but their problems were not taken into account until democratic city governance came into effect after the end of the dictatorship. A democratic city government could no longer deny the basic rights of part of its population, such as housing, employment, education and health care. This is why the shanty town eradication programme was developed. The programme required political determination, and at times political risk-taking. Sometimes the programme moved forward, sometimes it moved back, but in the end, with the firm commitment of all the political parties and the involvement of other administrations, it began to advance along the pathway of social inclusion. What marks this programme out is the capacity for political and social consensus. This is an experience involving all the citizens of Avilés. Its day-to-day running is in the hands of City Hall, but without the commitment of the citizenry as a whole, it would not have been possible. There is always a fear of the unknown, and people did not previously have the opportunity to get to know their Roma neighbours, who used to live in ghettos. In the year 2000, the greatest economic and social effort was made, and this was when the greatest momentum was injected into the programme. And finally in 2004, the politicians, the social agencies, the Roma and all the citizens of Avilés were able to celebrate together the fact that there were no longer any shanty towns in the city. However, there is still what might be termed a vertical shanty town, as a result of a decision which was felt to be the proper one at the time, but which with hindsight was perhaps not. This was the establishment of transitional accommodation in a separate settlement. But since 2004, the municipality, the autonomous region and the national authorities have been working to eliminate this settlement. Only nine families are still living there, and it is hoped that by 2007, they will be accommodated in standard housing elsewhere. Her take-home message from the programme is: political consensus and the networking of all agencies and bodies with common objectives. Politicians may make the decisions, but without the involvement of many other people – technicians, NGOs and others – their implementation would not be possible. While money is also a factor, it is the least important one. Relationships, and what is derived from the investment, are the key issue. The €9m spent in Avilés so far have, she felt, produced an excellent outcome. Avilés now has greater cohesion. It is a more tolerant city, with a much higher quality of life for all of its citizens, and while there is still a long way to

go, it is hoped that in time, everybody – the Roma people, the immigrants and all the citizens of Avilés – will have the same rights and obligations. The experiences provided by seminar participants from other countries will help the city in this effort.

Manuel González Orviz (Director General of Housing, Vice-Ministry of Housing and Social Welfare, Principality of Asturias) emphasised the close cooperation between housing authorities at the municipal, regional and national levels. Shanty town eradication is now included in the housing policy and regional housing plan of Asturias for 2007-2008. Guidelines have been prepared for the 17 municipalities that have shanty towns, in cooperation between his department and the one dealing with social welfare. The cooperation of municipal administrations is also necessary. Access to housing is a problem not for minorities alone but for most citizens in Spain. Housing is often too expensive in relation to the incomes available. Groups requiring preferential attention include those living in shanty towns and other run-down environments, among which are the transition settlements. Fifty actions per year are carried out in this regard, at a cost of about €1.7m. The beneficiaries include minorities and other groups at a socio-economic disadvantage. For Roma people but also for others, the eradication of shanty towns is regarded as a prerequisite for social inclusion. It requires coordination between regional and local departments of housing and social welfare. Developing the civil and human rights of the Roma community is a further priority, and is in fact more important than the cultural element. The involvement of local authorities is essential, and requires a long-term policy such as the one that has been in place in Avilés for more than 20 years. Censuses are needed in order to have reliable information about the population of shanty towns. Naturally, those concerned also have to make an effort themselves, in order to achieve social inclusion, but accompanying measures are needed for all families in the process of reaccommodation. A general model of reaccommodation for all citizens is the various types of social housing, which in Spain is promoted by the private sector, but at fixed maximum prices for those in special circumstances. Both national and regional public housing subsidies are also available, but this is a controversial issue. When families are moved out of shanty towns into standard housing, the accompanying measures needed include intercultural mediation. This entails integrated responses and the dissemination of information and awareness-raising amongst all citizens. In Asturias, data gathered by local social services indicate that in 2003, some 450 people in 120 families were living in shanty towns in 17 municipalities. In 2005, 370 people in 98 families in 16 municipalities were affected. The immediate goal now is to work with the three municipalities that have 65% of the shanty town population.

José Justo Tinaut Elorza (Deputy Director of Housing Policy, Ministry of Housing, Spain) began by apologising on behalf of his Director General, who would have liked to attend the seminar but was unable to do so due to an emergency. Just as there is a housing plan at the Asturian level, so there is one at the national level. Spain has 17 autonomous communities, plus two cities which are geographically located in Africa. They have their own governments, parliaments and courts, so that, without being a federal state, Spain is now nonetheless a diversified state. Specific housing responsibilities belong to the autonomous communities. However, the national government has its own competencies in the area of coordinating the bases for overall economic policy. As the housing industry is an important one in economic terms, the national government is also involved with this sector, not only on the basis of economic variables but also bearing in mind this sector's very important social aspects. The current State plan runs from 2005 to 2008. It does not cover the construction of housing, which is not among the State's competencies. Rather, it offers aid and subsidies to other agencies, via the autonomous communities which can thus take highly diversified action, from the construction of social housing either for rent or for purchase to the refurbishment of

older housing stock for later rental, particularly in run-down areas. This is why the national plan does not include specific references to shanty towns, as they are a highly specific problem in Spain. The priority is to define target groups such as young people, first-time buyers, older people, victims of gender violence or terrorism, large families, single-parent families, people with disabilities or – and this is the category that may be of most interest for the topic under discussion – other groups in situations of social exclusion or at risk of social exclusion. “Priority” does not necessarily mean more money for the target groups, but it can mean that they have first call when resources are scarce for a certain action. There is now also scope within the national plan for each autonomous community to designate other groups for priority protection, in order to take account of regional circumstances. So the national plan effectively reinforces the autonomous communities’ policies, or at least those aspects of such policies which require greater resources, such as the national government can provide. Another article in the relevant national decree permits social housing to be temporarily lent to groups in situations of social emergency, such as victims of gender violence. A further specific exception is in the area of integral rehabilitation. Here, national government together with the autonomous community and the local administration focuses on rehabilitating often large areas within a city, in order to regenerate not only the urban fabric but also social life and coexistence. In these cases, at least 40% of the cost of these actions must concern the refurbishment of buildings, and if there is a need for total or partial relocation of the population, the percentage contributed by national government increases. So, although there are many calls on national resources in the field of housing, the law does permit the targeting of some specific groups.

The municipal programme of shanty town eradication in Avilés

José Manuel Fresno (National Expert, Director of the Luis Vives Foundation) recalled that the Roma population of Spain has progressed and changed more in the past 40 years than over the five previous centuries. There are several reasons for this progress. One is the advent of democracy in Spain. Another is that income levels and the quality of life have greatly improved in Spain in recent decades, and some though not all of the Roma have benefited from this. The modernisation of the social agencies has also been of benefit to the Roma community. Two other reasons for this progress are the universality of the Spanish welfare system and the deployment of measures to tackle social disadvantage. Since the 1970s and 1980s, the Spanish welfare system has been an inclusive one. It has reached all citizens and has been based on principles of redistribution. By 1990, 50% of the Roma community had moved into the regular social housing used by the general population of Spain. The same goes for education, health coverage and pensions, as also for social services, of which Roma are among the main beneficiaries. In employment terms, however, the system has been less impressive. So a key question is how far general, universal services available to the Spanish population as a whole are suited to the needs of the Roma community. Specific programmes have also been implemented for those of the Roma not covered by these general services. This is why the measures taken in Avilés are very important. They represent both a mainstreaming approach and a targeted approach. One of the lessons learnt from the Avilés experience is that Roma people should be assisted wherever possible through generally available services. Only when these prove inadequate should special measures be contemplated. In 1978, only 23% of the Roma were living in decent housing, whereas the corresponding figure for 1991 was 72%. Today, about 8% of the Roma live in segregated settlements or shanty towns. There have been both good and bad experiences during this process. One thing that has been learnt is that tackling a housing problem quickly is cheaper, because the price of accommodation is continually increasing in Spain. The eradication of shanty towns contributes to the general improvement of cities and neighbourhoods. Moreover, the inclusion

of the Roma population within standard housing helps to overcome stereotypes concerning the Roma community.

Ten lessons to be learnt from the Avilés experience are listed in the host country paper for the conference, and he wished to comment upon three of them:

- **Clear leadership** was given in the case of Avilés, and this is essential. Partnership between agencies is necessary but is not enough when implementing such programmes. In the case of local government, a capacity for such leadership has to be clearly demonstrated, both on the basis of political conviction and on the basis of expertise - in this case, a good knowledge of the Roma community.
- A **commitment to long-term, continuous action** is vital. Mistakes may, of course, be made. In the case of Avilés, the approach had to be changed at a certain point. But the programme was not halted. Continuous action leads to improvement, but if action is temporarily abandoned, it becomes more difficult to restart it later, because the Roma will have lost their belief in the possibility of change.
- **Positive expectations of the Roma themselves**, and their willingness to change, are also essential. After 23 years working with the Roma community, he sees the real problem as the lack of expectations towards the Roma, particularly among the policy-makers, sometimes among the technicians, and sometimes among the Roma themselves, who are used to living in exclusion and do not always believe that they are capable of changing. So they need encouragement.

Mercedes Capa (Insertion Programme Officer, Avilés City Hall) said the experience of Avilés over the past 18 years has been a complex one, because many different kinds of people and organisations took part in the process. The involvement of the Fundación San Martín, which the next speaker would explain in detail, has been very important in the purchase and construction of housing for the programme. The eradication of shanty towns was a political and social concern for Avilés right from the start of democracy. At the time, Avilés had seven shanty settlements. The shacks were built with waste materials on the outskirts of the city, and on wasteland between roads and railways. These were certainly inappropriate areas for housing. In 1989, the City Hall proposed the municipal plan for the integration of ethnic minorities. Within that plan, a programme was proposed for the eradication of shanty towns. At that point, the programme included social intervention in the shanty towns themselves, by posting municipal personnel such as social workers in the settlements. The relocation of the shanty town inhabitants to transitional housing was also envisaged, as well as the relocation of some of the people to standard housing. During the first ten-year eradication programme (1989-99), the choice made was to build a special settlement – 36 homes in two-storey buildings. There were social services and education personnel on site. This social housing was built in an isolated area of the municipality. In 1993, the first cooperation agreement between the City Hall and what is now the Fundación San Martín was signed, and up to 2000, twenty shanty town families were relocated into standard housing. In 1997, the social housing town of Valliniello was inaugurated. It was financed by the Principality of Asturias. At that point, 36 families from shanty towns were relocated there.

From 2000 onwards, after an evaluation, it was decided that the programme should not continue to use special settlements, which did not foster coexistence and social inclusion. So a second programme for the eradication of shanty towns was drawn up, in which the major decision was to

relocate shanty town people into standard housing. This plan was adopted unanimously by the various political parties on the City Council. This was important, as such unanimity had not been achieved when the first programme was put to the vote in 1989. The second programme has run from 2000 to the present time. It was decided to promote access to standard housing for those families still living in shacks in the year 2000, but also for those who had been relocated to Valliniello. This was possible because the municipality set the permanent eradication of shanty towns as a priority. The key to this was the creation of the Working Group on Ethnic Minorities, established as a participation forum by the Department of Social Welfare. Four areas for work with ethnic minorities in Avilés were identified: housing, education, health and employment. During a series of meetings, the municipality approved 28 indicators for the work with shanty dwellers.

Milestones since then have included the signing of two agreements, one between the City of Avilés and the Fundación Secretariado General Gitano (FSG – a Roma foundation) and the other between the City and the Principality of Asturias, in order to facilitate funding for two programmes, one of which ran for three years while the other is still ongoing. In 2002, the Avilés experience was presented to Spain's Hábitat Committee, which selected it as a best practice, and the Fundación San Martín was constituted in its present form, providing it with more scope to seek, purchase and rehabilitate homes. In 2004, a new cooperation agreement between the City and the Fundación San Martín was signed and is still in force. It was also in 2004 that Avilés celebrated the end of the shanty towns and published a study of the eradication programme, in cooperation with the University of Oviedo. Now that the shanty towns have been eradicated, the current task is to transfer those families still living in the social housing town into standard housing.

The characteristics of the programme are, she emphasised, political consensus, the participation of important social actors and the involvement of the people directly concerned, the Roma families themselves, through their representatives and their various associations. Technical coordination between all the different municipal services, working as a network, and the involvement of the different levels of administration, has been another important factor. The Working Group on Ethnic Minorities is made up of Roma organisations, the Fundación San Martín, the Red Cross, Caritas, family representatives from Valliniello, the trade unions, municipal political groups and the municipal education, employment, technical, social and police services. Funding for the programme comes from the City of Avilés, the Principality of Asturias and the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs.

The most important outcomes achieved by the programme are the elimination of the shanty towns and the decision to give up the idea of special neighbourhoods. 112 families have been given access to standard housing and a more normal life, particularly as regards access to education and health care. The urban areas where the shanty towns were previously located have been improved. The plan now is to relocate the nine families still living in Valliniello and then demolish it. Part of it was torn down the week before the seminar, and it is hoped that the rest can be demolished in 2007. Custom-made education programmes for the relocated families will continue for the time being. Opportunities for improvement are to be found in the promotion of education and training for most of the Roma community, in order to increase their employability and social inclusion. Measures will be taken to avoid school drop-outs, particularly during the transition from primary to secondary education, and adult education will be promoted. An effort will also be made to change attitudes by fostering the idea of Roma co-responsibility for their own processes of social inclusion.

María José Fernández Antuña (Manager, Fundación San Martín) explained that the Fundación is the agency in charge of reaccommodating shanty town families in standard housing. The shanty town eradication programme is the most important of several activities in which the Fundación is engaged. The shanty programme should have ended in 2006, but there are still nine families to accommodate. It is likely that five of them will not be relocated until 2007. The Fundación conducts the shanty programme with funding contributed by local and regional government, as also by the national Ministry. Another programme, currently less important in economic terms than the shanty eradication but likely to become more significant in future, mediates between landlords and Roma families in Avilés. At present, it has an annual budget of €90,000. Some Roma families do not have sufficient income to rent a house, and those who do sometimes nonetheless have difficulty finding accommodation, as some landlords believe that Roma are high-risk tenants. So the mediation programme was started in 2005, and is working well. The funding, which comes from regional government, is used to make up the difference between the going market rate for accommodation and the rent actually paid by each Roma family, which is determined on the basis of their income. The programme may also intervene when a family has difficulty in raising the deposit for a rental, or if it fails to pay the rent. This programme has been expensive and difficult to implement, but currently most landlords are satisfied with it and are willing to offer property for rental. There have, however, been some exceptions where the integration of the families has not been achieved. While the eradication of the shanty towns is now completed, in the sense that there are no shacks in Avilés anymore, it is also true to say that the social housing town of Valliniello is a ghetto. Even though its inhabitants are better off there than they were in the shanties, the environment is neither decent nor acceptable. The Fundación used to be a construction company, and it has acquired more than a hundred buildings in and around Avilés since the 1960s. Some of these are now being refurbished. The Fundación subcontracts some of this refurbishing work, but also now employs some building workers directly. Once a building has been refurbished and is ready for occupation, the Fundación informs the social services, who have the responsibility of deciding which family should occupy it. This will be determined in part by the nature and location of the accommodation. For example, a family with children will be assigned a house that is close to a school. A written application is then submitted on the family's behalf to the Fundación, which interviews the family and explains the terms of the contract. The rent, set by the social services, is €40-60 per month. One problem which can arise after a while is overcrowding. When Roma families' children get married and have children of their own, they tend to remain in the same house. Generally, although other residents have some concerns when a Roma family moves into a neighbourhood, these worries are dissipated after a few years. However, if overcrowding occurs, the concerns are revived. So the Fundación is very strict on this point. Each house is available for a certain number of inhabitants and this number cannot be changed. Most families become used to this way of life, but in some cases there have been difficulties and families have been evicted. However, less than 10% of the families have serious difficulties, and less than 5% are actually evicted. Most Roma families do not need any kind of intervention.

Questions and answers

Andor Ürmös (Dept. of Roma Integration, Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, Hungary) asked how far Roma families were involved in the decision to relocate. Could they have changed that decision if they had so wished? And are there any longer-term plans to focus social and housing policy on the poorest sections of society in Avilés, Roma or otherwise? **Savelina Danova** (European Roma Rights Centre and European Network Against Racism) commented that a crucial aspect of the Avilés

programme is the decision to dismantle the segregated temporary township and to integrate the Roma families among non-Roma. She inquired about the arguments in support of this decision and commented further that policies in various parts of Europe have tended to replace one Romany ghetto with another. **Slavka Macakova** (ETP Slovakia – Centre for Sustainable Development) asked if the Roma families had participated financially in their relocation. How many Roma, if any, purchased their standard housing? **Czeslaw Walek** (Governmental Council for Roma Community Affairs, Czech Republic) sought more details of how Spain had adapted its social benefit policies and active employment policies to the situation of the Roma.

Mercedes Capa replied that the Roma take part in the development of the programme. They are represented in the Working Group on Ethnic Minorities. The representatives are those among the Roma who wish to be involved. When a house is offered, the Roma do not take any part in that decision. A house is offered by the city administration and there are no other options. As for the dismantlement of the social housing town, it was found that 50% of the families living there already had the ability to move into standard accommodation. It was therefore felt that they would be better off in standard housing, where they could take part in normal social life. Avilés also learnt from the experience of Madrid, where special social housing for Roma led to continued segregation. Another factor was that 90% of the pupils at the school in Valliniello were from Roma families. This situation was disliked both by the Roma and the non-Roma citizens. **Purificación García** added that, when the policy aim is to achieve social inclusion, it is also important to reflect upon the things that have not worked. This is the case for Valliniello and the transitional settlements. The inhabitants of Valliniello became isolated and were unable to move forward towards their own social inclusion. On the contrary, the only contacts that they had were with people of their own group. Although the decision to demolish this town was a difficult one, it was felt that it had to be done because the place now has negative connotations. Interaction between different social groups is the way forward, and Valliniello was preventing that. Work is in progress on a social plan for affordable rents and for ethnic minorities' access to subsidised housing. But the creation of ghettos must be avoided. **Manuel González Orviz** felt that, to ensure proper access to housing in Spain, work is needed with all groups who do not have sufficient income levels, whether they are minorities or not. In Asturias, this issue goes beyond housing policy. There is a minimum social wage in Asturias, and this constitutes a minimum guaranteed income for all groups. Income is a major factor in ensuring decent housing for all. About 3,000 rent agreements are currently subsidised in Asturias. This is the outcome of some 8,000 applications for subsidies, out of which around 3,000 applicants had annual incomes of less than €5,000. In Spain, that is not enough to live on. About 50% of these cases are one-parent families headed by a woman. Work on infrastructure is required, and there has to be a commitment to citizens in need. Concerning the transitional settlements, it should be remembered that the conditions in the shanty towns during the 1980s were such that people needed to be moved out of them immediately. But of course, transitional settlements are transitional. They must not be allowed to become permanent housing. However, they are still needed in some cases. **José Manuel Fresno** pointed out that the choice of criteria is important. If cities base their housing plans on criteria such as the length of time that somebody has been resident in the city, or regular employment, then most Roma will be excluded. On the other hand, if large families receive housing priority, this will tend to work to the benefit of the Roma.

Peer country comments

Dimitar Bojilov (Directorate for Demographic Policy, Social Investment and Equal Opportunities, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Bulgaria) said Bulgaria has two key strategy documents concerning the Roma community. The first, adopted in 1998, concerns their integration into Bulgarian society. The second is a contribution to the Decade of Roma Inclusion, of which Bulgaria currently holds the presidency. Bulgaria has a national plan to improve the housing conditions of the Roma community, and he asked the host country for more details of how local financial resources were found for such programmes. In Bulgaria, all programmes concerning the Roma community have been adopted at the national level.

A recent study in the Czech Republic was summarised by **Czeslaw Walek**. It mapped the socially excluded areas where Roma live, and found more than 330 such areas throughout the Czech Republic, with more than 80,000 Roma living in them. In most of them, unemployment is running at more than 90%, people have minimal school-leaving qualifications and housing standards are very low. More than 50% of the accommodation has no hot water or heating. The law assigns competence for Roma integration to the municipalities. The State has no competence in this matter and can contribute only finance or some kind of conceptual framework. In 2000, the Czech government did adopt a policy concept on Roma integration, setting basic goals among which is the integration of socially excluded areas. However, this has little impact on the municipalities, which are largely autonomous in the field of Roma integration. He felt that the biggest factor influencing the transferability of the Avilés experience is political will. During the Czech Republic's recent municipal elections, many parties and politicians played the anti-Roma card, by calling for the forced evacuation of Roma from the municipalities and using anti-Roma slogans in their campaigns. Unfortunately, those who played this card won the municipal elections and would probably also win the forthcoming elections to the Senate. No other politician actually opposed this line or proposed alternatives to the anti-Roma card. This is the major obstacle to transferring to the Czech Republic practices such as those used in Avilés. Although there is a national concept on Roma integration, only 1% of Czech municipalities have such a concept. So at the local level, a strategic approach is lacking.

Andor Ürmös reported that Hungary launched a specific, targeted project on Roma settlements in 2005. Nine municipalities were involved at the outset and by the end of 2006, sixteen more will be participating. The main objective is to eliminate segregation. The project has two main elements – housing integration and social integration. The most important issue of social integration is how Roma children can be brought into the mainstream education system. As finance is being made available from EU structural funds, it will probably be possible to expand the project to more municipalities in 2007. In the meantime, changes are needed in social policy and housing policy. Hungary's social housing system is quite weak and does not really target people who are living in segregated conditions. Efforts are now underway to target segregated groups, including the Roma. In 2002, the Hungarian government launched a project for the educational integration of Roma. It is hoped that this will produce good results, ultimately leading to the end of segregation in Hungary.

Ioannis Georgiou (Research Fellow, University of Ioannina, Greece) said that in Greece, people of Roma origin like himself tend to feel a double identity. They are Roma Greeks, because the Roma had long been present in the Byzantine Empire and were among the many population groups drawn into the formation of the modern Greek nation. This historical context means that various layers of identity affect the implementation of any programme for the Roma population. What he liked most

about the Avilés programme was its emphasis on integrating Roma into diverse neighbourhoods. This does not put the Roma identity at risk. It puts it into dialogue with the rest of society. It is a challenge to coexist with others. He is against attempts to place Roma culture in opposition to Gadjó culture. This is an outdated view. Transculturality is what is needed. A recent programme in Greece makes available subsidised loans of about €60,000 per family, to enable Roma to buy houses. A notable, and good, outcome of this is that the Roma choose to buy or build houses among other Greek people. As regards the transferability of the Avilés experience, a problem would be that Greece lacks continuity of policy, due to an emphasis on clientelism rather than the common good. The Greek system still regards the Roma mainly as a source of votes, and therefore promotes political patronage instead of a sense of civic duty.

Sérgio Aires (Portugal) said his country is a centralised state, with little scope either for local policies or for locally controlled implementation. This obviously limits the transferability of the Avilés experience to Portugal, which also continues to be one of the poorest countries of the European Union. The poverty rate is still 20%, and almost all of the Portuguese Roma are within that percentage. So, inasmuch as the number of Roma people in Portugal is known at all, they do not show the same social stratification as the Roma in Spain. Almost all Portuguese Roma are poor. Achieving a political consensus like the one in Avilés would also be very difficult in Portugal. In 30 years, the country has had 17 governments. This raises problems of policy consistency in general, and there is in any case no strategic plan for intervention with the Roma communities. Over the last 20 years, with structural funding available, NGOs and some State services have been involved in projects for direct community intervention, and these also concern the Roma community. A discussion is ongoing about the relative merits of mainstreaming and targeting. Most politicians continue to say that there should be no measures targeted at the Roma, as they are Portuguese and should have access to the same programmes as other Portuguese people. There is no culture of citizen participation by Portuguese Roma. Even in the area of social inclusion and the fight against poverty, the programmes are always top-down, although this is now beginning to change.

Slavka Macakova said that, according to the UN Economic Commission for Europe, housing was not considered a political priority in Slovakia during the transition. In the experience of NGO – ETP Slovakia – Center for Sustainable Development, which deals among other issues with housing for socially excluded people, and particularly Roma, that continues to be the case up to the present day. An unofficial mapping exercise in 2004 estimated the number of Roma in Slovakia at 320,000. Approximately half of them live in segregated towns or shanty towns. Social housing is the responsibility of local government, but the State supports the construction or rehabilitation of apartments through Housing Development Fund. Local authorities can apply to the State Housing Development Fund for subsidies in the case of rented accommodation for lower-income families. Unfortunately, most new social apartments for Roma people are being built on the outskirts of towns or villages. This means that new segregated settlements are emerging. The written report from Slovakia describes the experience of the village of Nalepkovo, and the partnership between local actors, ETP Slovakia and wider donor community (European Social Fund, Habitat for Humanity, UNDP, Dutch Embassy) there to support the Roma community in a complex way. This approach is bearing fruit. Not only are the Roma being relocated, but supporting services are being provided for them – for instance, social counselling, assistance with vocational training, and assistance in finding employment or inclusion of unemployed people into activation work program (public works program) to increase their income. However, Slovakia still lacks an active debate on this topic, and still needs to seek solutions. Otherwise, the problems will be passed on to the next generation.

Stane Baluh (Director, Office for Nationalities, Slovenia) reported that local elections in his country, the day before the seminar began, resulted in the election of 20 new Roma local councillors. Slovenia adopted a programme of measures to assist the Roma in 1995, and further measures have been brought in since then. The Roma community is recognised in the Constitution. A Roma Community Act is in preparation. This will regulate the organisation of the Roma community in Slovenia and will guarantee its rights, also at the municipal level. Slovenia has put a lot of effort into organising Roma associations, of which there are now 23. These will take on added importance with the passing of the new Act, and will provide support for the newly elected Roma local councillors.

NGO statements

Savelina Danova said the European Roma Rights Centre and the European Network Against Racism have identified several serious challenges to the effective implementation of policies on the integration of the Roma, both in the present EU and in the accession countries. One is the lack within national law of positive obligations, through which State institutions would be required not only not to discriminate but also to proactively take measures to achieve equality of opportunity for disadvantaged groups. Experience so far indicates that anti-discrimination legislation, which is already a fact in most Member States, is a strong tool for challenging discrimination, but it is not enough, especially in cases of systemic discrimination affecting large groups such as the Roma in most countries. Such legislation relies primarily upon individual enforcement, but thousands of individuals are unlikely to go to court in order to challenge discriminatory treatment. What is needed is an obligation for State institutions to monitor, assess and implement measures that will tackle the problem of systemic discrimination affecting numerous individuals. The positive duty to promote equality which has so far been most effectively introduced in the United Kingdom, can apply to public organisations but also, in the case of Northern Ireland, to private employers, who are required to integrate excluded minorities into employment. For the Roma, positive duty on public authorities to promote equality is particularly relevant in the areas of education and employment. So far, the Hungarian government has developed the most systematic policies for the desegregation of Romani education. However, despite this well-conceived policy at the national level, implementation at the local level is difficult. It is often obstructed by local authorities, who are not under much pressure from national government to implement desegregation. A public duty to integrate Roma in education would at least partially resolve such problems. In many countries, Roma are massively excluded from the labour market. Here too, there is a need for proactive measures and diversity policies, to be implemented by the employers. Recent research by her organisation in Central and Eastern Europe suggests that most public and private employers there do not even know what diversity policies and equality policies are. Sometimes too, more general policies have a disproportionately negative impact on Roma. This is, for example, the case for housing rights, which have been significantly eroded in several Central and Eastern European countries, especially during the transition period. A further problem is widespread anti-Romani racism. Government policies cannot be implemented effectively in an environment of pervasive stigmatisation of Roma. If Roma are represented in the public space either as systematic abusers of social benefits or as a homogeneously marginalised group, then the message will be that all resources spent on them are wasted. Governments should conduct public awareness campaigns in order to fight anti-Roma racism and explain government policies. There is a need to collect more data on the impact of policies specifically on the Roma. Particular measures are also needed to address those within the Roma community who are exposed to multiple vulnerability factors, such as elderly people, women and Roma people with disabilities.

Carlos Carlos Susías (EAPN-España, Unión Romani and Fundación Secretariado General Gitano, representing the Working Group on Social Inclusion and Employment of the State Council of Social Action NGOs, Spain) said the Avilés experience is an example of political and social will, and both of these need to be encouraged. But alongside willpower, what is most needed is a methodology. Clear goals and strategies have to be set. The participation of people and agencies is essential, and there must be evaluation. The necessary modification of the Avilés programme at one point shows the value of assessment. The EU's open method of coordination is very effective and is supported by the organisations that he represents. This method should not be changed but should be further developed in order to promote the participation of all the actors. The open method of coordination itself needs to be transferable to the national level in order to be useful. This is particularly true in a country like Spain, where there is strong regional and local autonomy. In Avilés, the ending of the transition settlement approach coincided with better coordination between the agencies. The existence of transitional settlements generally indicates the lack of a political or social consensus. Solidarity means working primarily at the local level, close to the people, but a general strategy, including positive measures, is also needed. Without these two elements, we will not succeed. It is important to emphasise that such measures benefit not only the Roma but all minorities, and indeed all the citizens of society as a whole. There needs to be reflection at the European level about measures to work with the Roma community, and it should be clear that national social agencies are not the only ones capable of managing European resources. While taking account of varying situations, it is important to disseminate best practice, such as the Avilés experience, throughout Europe.

Presentation of the discussion paper

Will Guy (Thematic expert, University of Bristol, UK) set out to highlight the main points of the discussion paper, while incorporating elements from the various contributions, which he had found very helpful and thought-provoking. Any lessons from the Avilés experience must be applied flexibly. Roma communities are extremely varied from one country to another, but also within countries. Roma identity is a flexible thing, which Roma themselves are creating all the time, and the authorities do not always take account of this. His own paper did not have a conclusion. He wrote one, but then decided not to include it, in order to leave the discussion more open. Many useful lessons can be drawn from the Avilés experience, but it would be a mistake to pick out just certain elements from it for application elsewhere. It has to be realised that they go together. Of course, it is not a new discovery that factors preventing social inclusion are interrelated, but this does have important consequences. Activities should be delivered together, in an integrated and sustainable way. In the past, there have been many examples of top-down attempts to eradicate shanty towns, but such an approach is unlikely to be a success without local commitment. The Avilés project combines a bottom-up approach with the involvement of agencies at a variety of levels – the State, the Principality, commercial partners, the Fundación San Martín, NGOs and the ultimate beneficiaries, the Roma. Local initiatives and involvement are also important at a time when central powers are being devolved.

The main strengths of the Avilés programme, he felt, include:

- **Employment - to reduce poverty.** He sees this as the most important element. Although this programme is sometimes presented as a rehousing exercise, the best hope for sustainable inclusion is families' being able to support themselves through active

engagement with the labour market. The 2002 UNDP survey of five Central and Eastern European countries found that the first priority of Roma was to get a job. And a 2003 World Bank study acknowledged that the reason for the impoverishment of most Roma in Central and Eastern Europe was that they had lost their previous jobs. So this was a catastrophic descent into poverty. The situation is rather different in Greece, Portugal and Spain, but it should be remembered that the main reason for Roma migration to Avilés in the first place was to make a living. Existing on social support, even in improved accommodation, is not a viable solution to the problem of marginalisation.

- **Anti-discrimination measures.** While skills development is invaluable in equipping workers for the requirements of a changing economy, the significance of discrimination should not be underestimated as a factor excluding Roma men and women from the labour market. Positive action is needed to reinforce existing anti-discrimination measures. An important report from the European Roma Rights Centre on this issue would soon be available on its website (<http://errc.org>).
- **Integrated and normal housing.** The experience of Avilés indicates that to make improvements in housing while continuing to maintain residential segregation does not promote social inclusion. The reversal of the previous strategy was a very courageous and difficult thing to do. Countries that have provided segregated accommodation for Roma should reflect carefully whether it is doing any good, or if it is just creating reservations where Roma can be hidden away. It is important to avoid rhetoric about a “culture of poverty” among the Roma.
- **Careful selection and preparation.** The positive experience of Avilés demonstrates that the anticipated resistance from non-Roma can be overcome. Some Roma themselves may be more hesitant about relocation than others. They need to be consulted carefully, their wish to be close to other family members must be taken into account, and there will sometimes be a need for a more gradual approach.
- **Mainstream education - not segregated.** This is absolutely essential if Roma children are to enjoy better prospects than their parents. National governments have not always done enough to ensure that educational desegregation is in fact carried out locally.
- **Integrated kindergartens – with support.** His recent evaluation of a programme in Slovakia had shown that acceptance of the Roma community was greater where kindergartens were integrated. But the evaluation found that EU money, from the PHARE programme, was being used to support segregated education in Slovakia.
- **Health – close link to poverty.** Registration of families and better access to services are important here, but barriers can be raised by problems with health insurance and medical charges. Inoculation campaigns and sensitively conducted screening are also important, and can be greatly assisted by Roma involvement – for example, as health mediators. And of course, Roma involvement with projects also creates Roma employment.
- **Political will and consensus.** Together with clear leadership from the municipality and adequate funding from all levels, these were vital factors in the success of the Avilés programme. They ensured that potentially controversial initiatives were sustainable. The financial involvement of local authorities is highly desirable as an expression of political commitment.

- **Active participation of Roma.** They must be involved at every stage, including planning, implementation and evaluation. Most governments do support Roma NGOs, but making this participation real is another matter.

General discussion

Carlos Carlos Susías commented that, although resources are obviously needed, it is often more a question of how the money is used. A methodology is needed to achieve the appropriate use of funds. **Czeslaw Walek** was interested in more information about the employment programme in Avilés and how it worked out. How many of the relocated people have found long-term employment? **Ioannis Georgiu** wanted more details of social workers' involvement in the Avilés project. Social work is, he felt, important to the initial stages of such projects, in assessing families' needs, and also to its longer-term sustainability, as social workers provide information to those involved. **Katerina Giantsios** (Ministry of Employment and Social Protection, Greece) asked what kind of psychological support was given to the people who were transferred to another lifestyle. Was much support needed, or was the transition an easy one? **Savelina Danova** asked about the measures taken to integrate the children into mainstream education.

Mercedes Capa replied that social work was carried out with all the families who moved to standard or transitional housing. Each family is visited by at least one social worker and one education worker, and the assistance given in various fields is adjusted to individual needs. As regards the psychological aspects, one problem encountered was the separation of extended families when Roma of Portuguese origin were moved into standard housing. In the shanty town, people were crowded together and there was a lot of social interaction. Once they were in standard housing, they saw each other less often and feelings of isolation arose. However, the Association of Roma Women tackled this problem by organising social activities. On the integration of Roma children into mainstream education, there is still a long way to go, but the policy is that they should attend the same schools as other children. Experience has shown that Roma pupils' educational attainments are higher when they are among non-Roma pupils. Attainment is monitored within each family. **Purificación García** added that changing educational habits is a complex matter. Education is a civil right, but the Roma do not always understand the need for personal development. There are action plans on this issue, but people cannot be forced to give priority to education. Another aspect is awareness among teachers. **Manuel Vizarraga Balaguera** (Unión Romani, Spain) thought that it is a good idea for Roma associations and local government to have Roma mediators on site to work with schools and families. This is done in Seville and has proved very effective in terms of follow-up. Generally, it has been decided that access to housing was the first priority, but there are still many other things that need to be done. On Roma access to employment, for example, after some municipal training programmes, it has been possible for Roma to gain regular jobs. However, racism against the Roma community is still a problem in this regard. The Fundación San Martín has taken on Roma to work on the refurbishment of housing. **María José Fernández Antuña** felt that the Roma themselves have made great efforts on the question of education in recent years. They now take their children to the kindergartens, which is not compulsory. The Spanish educational system must make an effort to adapt the curriculum to children's needs, and this is particularly the case for Roma children. On the employment side, many Roma have shown interest in training programmes, so she felt that the prospects are good.

Katerina Giatsios asked what percentage of the Roma living in standard housing have found regular employment, and what percentage of their children attend school without dropping out. However, no statistics were available on this. In response to a question from **Slavka Macakova, Luisa García Solar** confirmed that no direct allowance is paid to the families for accommodation. It is the rents themselves that are subsidised. If the family's income increases, the rent will do so too. **Purificación García** pointed out that subsidising rentals on existing, private sector properties works out cheaper for the authorities than building social housing. **Manuel Vizarraga Balaguera** congratulated the authorities of Avilés and Asturias on their programme. However, it is a very localised one, made possible by tremendous political will. If similar successes are to be achieved elsewhere in Spain, political commitment will be needed, but so will consultation with the Roma about that they really want. Shoes for everyone? But maybe they don't want shoes. Measures should be taken in line with what the Roma themselves require. On employment, for example, the municipality, the trade unions and the Roma associations have sought out spaces where the Roma can sell their wares every day of the week. At the level of Spain, the employment issue is crucial, also for housing. Some people who managed to make a living when they were living in a shack will, if they suddenly find themselves unemployed in a fourth-floor flat, go back to living in a shack. On the education issue, it was the teachers in Seville who asked to have Roma mediators, in order to deal with the problem of truancy. This created trust and worked well. He once again congratulated Avilés on its success, but reminded participants that the reality beyond Avilés is often very different and very sad.

In the afternoon, participants were shown a video about the shanty town eradication in Avilés, before touring the city to visit relevant sites. They then returned to the conference venue.

Discussion with Roma people from the Avilés programme

Luisa García Solar introduced: **Luis Manuel Montoya Montoya**, known as Atanasio, who has been a member of different training programmes run by the city council and is currently employed by the Fundación San Martín on refurbishing houses. **Beatriz de Jesús Fernández**, who is Portuguese and used to live in a shanty between a motorway and a railway. She and her family were among those who originally experienced strong rejection, by other inhabitants, of their integration into standard housing. This was a very difficult situation. Protest signs were held up when they moved into the buildings. But the programme participants, together with the media, managed to gradually resolve the problem. **Maximina Salazar Vargas**, known as Maxi. **Alejandro Jiménez Jimenez** is a mediator with the FSGG. He and his family joined the experimental programme for access to rented accommodations. He was the only one of the four Roma speakers who did not pass through transitional housing.

Luis Manuel Montoya Montoya said he and those around him in the shanty town had gone through very difficult times. They had lived in mud, without hot water or electricity. Then, the municipality of Avilés began to build a social housing city, to which they were relocated. This was a total change. In the shanty, the wind used to tear the plastic roofs off the shacks and the water seeped into the beds. So it was a fabulous experience to move into the transitional housing. They lived there for five years, and that was where he learnt how to live together with other people. He now has a job and can put food on the table every day. He thanks God and everyone in the community who has helped him to do so.

Maximina Salazar Vargas said she has been a mediator for the last four years, working with children in subsidised housing. She went through three stages: first, in the shanty town, then in subsidised housing, and now in her current accommodation. Living in a shack is the worst thing that can happen to you. Sometimes, in summer, it is all right. But in winter, sometimes at three or four o'clock in the morning, the wind would rip off the roof. The children would have to be put into the vans. Then, to get them ready for school, they had to be washed in cold water. After living for 15 years in the shanty, with three children, she was given the chance to relocate to the social housing city of Valliniello. That was a big change. The family no longer felt cold. There was hot water and a bathroom. So it was considerably better, but it was still not a normal living situation, because it was a ghetto. There were no shops nearby, to buy groceries. There were no non-Roma children to play with the Roma ones. There were no buses and no street lighting. Instead of moving forward, the Roma in Valliniello were moving backward. There were some social workers who came in and worked with the Roma, and four years ago, the Roma association UNGA set up a course for children and for women. It started with 56 children, organising activities for them with school support. This activity began at four o'clock each day, and was really the only thing that was available for children to do in Valliniello, the only thing that they had to live for. The children of the nine families still living in Valliniello are longing for the day when they can move out. A year ago, she moved into standard housing. She is very thankful for this. She is also grateful to her new neighbours, who have opened up their homes to her family. Her children, who had fallen seriously behind in the almost entirely Roma school in Valliniello, are now happy in their new school. They have caught up and are doing well.

Alejandro Jiménez Jiménez said that Roma used to experience many difficulties in finding decent accommodation. One problem was the widely believed stereotypes of the Roma population – that they are lazy, illiterate, uncultivated people without manners, who are unable to mix with other cultures. So many doors were closed to them. And the low level of education and training among the Roma had made it difficult for them to access the labour market. Their main occupations were scrap metal and cardboard collection and street trading. The income gained from this was too low for access to standard housing. So some Roma had to live outside the city in very bad conditions, without access to shops and health care, and without interaction with the rest of the population. Thanks to the Avilés programme, many Roma have achieved a better quality of life and better use of resources. It has also improved their relationship with the rest of the population. He had not lived in a shanty, but in a very damp, cold one-room flat shared by four people on the edge of town. His small son spent more time in the health centre than in school, due to the housing conditions. The child slept on the couch and had nowhere to do his homework. But now, having relocated eight months ago to accommodation in the centre of town, he wants to thank everyone involved in the Avilés programme. His son now attends school almost every day and has room to do his homework. His wife has a life of her own and is attending a training course. She no longer needs to depend on him for her contacts with the world around her. The Avilés programme has made many people's dream come true, because everybody, Roma or non-Roma, has a right to decent housing.

Beatriz de Jesús Fernández recalled that her family went through a very bad time when they first relocated to standard housing. There were many protests from the neighbours. But now, they have very good relations with the neighbours. Her children are attending school and doing well. Compared to the shanty town, the situation is very good.

Ioannis Georgiu asked why the neighbours' initially hostile attitude to **Beatriz de Jesús Fernández** and her family had changed. Laughing, she said the neighbours perhaps felt that, if her family left, an

even worse one would arrive in its place. **Luis Manuel Montoya Montoya** added that the negative reactions had taken place before the family moved in. Once they were living there, people came to realise that they did not pose any particular problems. **Alejandro Jiménez Jiménez** related his own experience of this. When he moved in, nobody told him to his face that they did not like him. They complained to the city administration. So he never had an opportunity to answer their objections and to let them know how he really was. He had been judged in advance. At first, he noticed some hostile attitudes, but after a while, the people from City Hall spoke to the local community representatives and asked them to suspend judgement for a few months. If the Roma caused any problems, City Hall would talk to them about it. Then, the City Hall told him that his behaviour would certainly be watched over the coming four months, and that discussions would be held if necessary. He said that was fine by him. But although he has now been living in the standard housing for eight months, no meetings have ever taken place, because the community association said they were not necessary. He believes this is because they are now seen as a normal family which knows how to behave and how to coexist with the rest of the population. Of course, some Roma families do behave badly, but that does not mean that all Roma families should suffer prejudice. When a Roma family shows that it has a good attitude, then the neighbours become its best friends. He has a very good relationship with his neighbours.

Yasar Ghosh (Czech Republic) had the impression that Atanasio (Luis Manuel Montoya Montoya) had taken a rather positive view of the transitional housing. How had he come to terms with leaving it? **Luis Manuel Montoya Montoya** confirmed that he had been quite comfortable in the transitional housing. But he was told that he had to move. The only disadvantage in the transitional accommodation was the lack of shops nearby. Now, he lives in the centre of Avilés and has shops right next to him. His children are now in the local secondary school. It is a plush neighbourhood, with local police, national police, swimming pools, and the football club right next to his house.

Katerina Giantsios noted that, of the Roma speakers at the conference, two were mediators and one was employed by the Fundación. Are Roma also able to compete on the general labour market, or do they need more protected jobs in the social economy? In reply, **Alejandro Jiménez Jiménez** again emphasised that many Roma lack educational and vocational qualifications. The labour market makes high demands, and Roma often do not meet its criteria. A few years ago, many Roma worked with the municipality in subsidised jobs as gardeners, stonemasons and painters. As well as generating income, this gave them work experience which they were then able to put on their CVs when applying for other jobs. So Roma can move into the general labour market, but only if a series of steps have first been taken to give them prior experience of employment. His work as a mediator with the Roma association FSGG is specifically in an employment programme mainly targeting the Roma community. The people who take part in the programme want to get a job, but have no employment experience, so they are sent on courses to acquire the skills and qualifications needed for the ordinary job market. Another problem is that a certain amount of anti-Roma discrimination still exists. For example, in the construction sector, a Roma worker first needs to gain the contractor's trust. After that, things tend to go smoothly. **Luisa García Solar** agreed that skills levels tend to be low in the Roma community. This needs to be worked on, but it is rather a long process. Roma still have a long way to go, and access to employment is one of the outstanding issues. The unemployment rate in Spain is now lower than it was a few years ago, so Roma will probably have better access to the job market. But at the same time, they will need higher and higher skills. She wanted to correct the impression that the jobs held by the Roma speakers at the conference are in any way sheltered jobs. That might have been the case at first, but it is no longer so. Some people

who previously occupied these posts are no longer in them, because they did not meet the exacting requirements. Efforts are being made to ensure that access to standard housing also becomes a springboard into normal employment for the Roma. **Maximina Salazar Vargas** confirmed that, as a mediator, she does not in any way feel that she is in sheltered employment. You sit the examination and if you are good enough, you get the job.

General discussion

What actually prompted the City of Avilés to clear the shanty towns, **Czeslaw Walek** asked. Did some kind of crisis push all the political parties into a consensus, or did public opinion turn against the shanties? **Nataša Brajdič** (Society of Allies for Soft Landing, Slovenia), as a Roma herself, asked why people have such a negative image of the Roma. What is it that the Roma are doing wrong? **Alejandro Jiménez Jiménez** replied that this negative image of the Romani dates back over many centuries. They have always been seen as lazy and criminal, and have always been rejected. Unfortunately, some people belonging to the Roma community have indeed made mistakes, but that is no justification for stereotyping the Roma community as a whole. Society tends to reject any marginalised group that lives in bad conditions. They are thought to be bad people who do not want to integrate into the education and training systems. **Roman Jiménez Jiménez** (President, Roma Association, Spain) added that Roma people have been in Spain since 1423. Often, there were attempts to exterminate them, but nowadays the situation is much better and they have a good relationship with the rest of society, due to the democracy of the past 30 years. The problem is that, although they have been in Spain for 600 years, they never shared in the non-Roma culture, which is still unfamiliar to them. In the past, their only contacts with non-Roma people was through street trading or the collection of waste materials. Now, Roma children go to schools with non-Roma, but sometimes, non-Roma parents take their children out of a school when Roma pupils arrive. Roma people are as “normal” as anybody else, but they have never had the chance to take part in social policies. When the Roma first arrived in Avilés, they had no access to affordable housing, as that was reserved for the industrial workers. Some Roma have now got into universities, even though their culture was until recently an unwritten one. Throughout Europe, Roma educational efforts must be continued and supported.

Luisa García Solar, responding to the question about what first triggered the Avilés programme, said there had been general agreement that the shanties were not only an overcrowded eyesore, but were also unworthy of the people living in them. Also, in 1999, municipal elections had just been held. The socialists, in combination with another party, had gained a working majority and, with a four-year mandate ahead of them, were able to take decisions. And, although there were considerable fears about moving Roma into standard housing, the programme’s technicians looked at the experience of Madrid and other places and prepared a report. After a heated debate, it was agreed that to construct further transitional housing would not be a good thing. That was the turning point. From then on, the politicians decided that this should not be a party political issue, and that decision has been respected to this day. Political will and leadership have been vital to the success of the programme.

Yasar Ghosh and **Katerina Giantsios** asked what had been behind the decision that the transitional accommodation was not viable. **Maximina Salazar Vargas** confirmed that the Roma inhabitants of Valliniello had seen it as a ghetto. There were no non-Roma people there. Especially for the children, this was the worst situation imaginable. They had no knowledge of what they called the “outside world”. They had never seen a swing or a park. They did not know how to join in games with other

children. And people used to drive through, looking at the Roma as if they were animals. After they moved into normal houses and schools, Roma children still sometimes had problems because the Gadjó children did not want to play with them. Seeing her five-year-old daughter sitting alone in the playground because nobody would play with her had been sad, and she had talked to the teacher about it. The teacher said it was because the non-Roma mothers told their children not to play with Roma, and another girl at the school confirmed this. So she moved her daughter to another school and there was longer a problem. **Nataša Brajdič** said that, fifteen years ago, she had the same experience at school. She asked if, in the meantime, the attitudes of teachers and children in Avilés have changed. **Cristina González Fernández**, an educator who works on situations of this kind for the City of Avilés, said that some of the educators and others who were active in Valliniello had low expectations of the transitional housing approach right from the start. They organised some outings, as a way of taking children outside of Valliniello, and some other recreational activities. But these children were marginalised nonetheless. **Luisa García Solar** added that the transitional housing was originally conceived as a five-year temporary solution which would give people a chance to adjust and learn to live in ordinary society, but this failed for the simple reason that there was no normal society there with which they could interact. **Manuel Vizarraga Balaguera** said that policy-makers in Spain should protect the Roma against racism, which is still rampant. Up to 1975, the regulations of the Guardia Civil (*national police*) stated that the Roma were criminals. After centuries of suffering, Roma cannot be asked to meet society's every expectation immediately. What is needed is for all democrats to support Roma advancement and oppose racism. **Carlos Carlos Susías** warned that, although anti-Roma discrimination has existed for centuries in Spain and undoubtedly continues to exist, its effects must not be confused with those of poverty. Both need to be fought, but two separate, simultaneous strategies must be followed to deal with them. **Manuel Vizarraga Balaguera** agreed with that analysis.

Day 2

Key elements of the strategy

Concerning ***policies and actions to promote social inclusion*** in deprived urban areas, **José Manuel Fresno** drew together six ***policy*** elements:

- A ***long-term approach*** is fundamental. Progress must be made in the short term, but it may take several generations for the policies to have their full impact. Work with the Roma requires several years before any interaction is achieved, and several years more before any outcomes are seen. Short-termism would therefore simply be a waste of resources.
- ***Integrated programmes*** are needed. This is not easy to achieve, because of the different institutional levels involved (national, regional and local) and the different administrative fields (housing, employment, health care). If fully integrated programmes are not achieved, then at the very least, synergy and continuity must be ensured between the various activities. Often, the Roma feel confused, because the messages that they receive from the various organisations and departments are not the same.
- It is important to identify where ***permanent solutions*** are possible. In housing, for example, the same standard solution should in principle be sought for Roma as for all other population groups, but this is not always possible, particularly where there are large concentrations of

Roma and a long road still to be travelled. However, it must be recognised that intermediate steps will always delay integration and will be more costly. There must be no “second-class solutions for second-class citizens”.

- A **customised approach**, with community support, is the best way forward. Measures should be tailored to the individual, and not to the person’s culture or ethnic origin. Individual rights must come first, social rights second and cultural rights only third. Otherwise, there will be a continued risk of stigmatising the Roma as a group.
- A balance must be struck between **mainstreaming** and **targeting**. In social policy (education, health care, employment), there will always be a mainstreaming approach. In many cases, this will need to be combined with targeted policies, in order to address the specific situation of the Roma, but such targeted approaches must be carefully monitored to ensure that they are leading towards standardisation, rather than establishing a parallel policy.
- **Alignment and synergy with European policies on inclusion** should be promoted. At first, only one EU country mentioned the Roma in its National Action Plan on Social Inclusion. That number has now increased, but there is still much to be done to ensure that the Roma are not excluded from European inclusion. This also goes for employment and equal opportunities policies and the use of the structural funds.

Actions should be based on the four pillars of housing, employment, education and health care, but cross-cutting issues such as gender equality must also be addressed.

- **Housing** is the springboard for Roma inclusion. In the Spanish experience, very few Roma people who were relocated to standard housing have chosen to return to segregated settlements. Decent housing is a constitutional right, and inclusion in standard housing helps to end the “second-class citizen” mindset.
- **Employment** is also a key issue, together with vocational training. The use of structural funds, and particularly the European Social Fund, is important here.
- **Education** must be as standardised and integrating as possible and must take place as soon as possible. Roma children who do not go to kindergarten are already at a disadvantage when they start school. But education must be adjusted to their needs, both by tackling their disadvantages and by acknowledging diversity. Roma, as well as non-Roma, must feel ownership of the schools.
- **Health care** must be proactive and preventive. In many EU countries, Roma life expectancy is 10 years less than the national average. Better access to health care is needed, but so is the encouragement to use that access. So an educational element is also involved here.

The question of **institutional coordination** between the different levels of public bodies involved was addressed by **Will Guy**. Decentralisation is taking place in most or all European countries, he emphasised. This may mean that it is more difficult for national governments to insist on proper implementation of national policies to assist the Roma, but it can also have the advantage of empowering local authorities to take their own initiatives, rather than waiting for instructions from on high. In fact, even very centralised systems find it very difficult to impose policies concerning the Roma without local consent. His studies of communist-era Czechoslovakia, a highly centralised state, showed that the policy at that time of dispersing the Roma throughout the country broke down due to resistance by local authorities. The PHARE programme’s

experience shows that a combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches is best, but the crucial element is bottom-up.

- **Governmental bodies** can develop overall strategies. These serve as a framework for local initiatives, so helping to promote a standardised approach. They also help to promote mainstreaming. Employment or social housing measures can be presented as initiatives to help disadvantaged people in general, so encouraging wider public identification with the problems facing the Roma. Data-gathering, a requirement of European social inclusion programmes, is another important government function. Some governments refuse to collect data on an ethnic basis, arguing that this would be an intrusion. However, the position of the UN and the EU has always been that the gathering of such data does not infringe personal rights and is essential for monitoring progress. Central government is also well-placed to disseminate information, by commissioning research, providing information on good practice and funding opportunities, and conducting public information campaigns about multicultural coexistence and the living conditions of Roma. Although ideally, central and local bodies should work together in harmony, it may sometimes be necessary for central government to monitor and challenge local actions that are in breach of the law. Governments should also help local authorities to seek funding, including from the EU. Governments can encourage Roma participation in the formulation and implementation of policy.
- **Local bodies** can themselves develop relevant and viable initiatives. In Slovakia, for example, good practice developed out of an early initiative by a local authority in very difficult circumstances at a time when national government was not at all sympathetic to the Roma. As for national programmes, so local programmes benefiting the Roma should be mainstreamed wherever possible. For example, programmes to improve sewerage provision for Roma may at the same time improve provision for a village community as a whole. Sometimes, kindergarten funding secured for the Roma may also benefit the wider community. Local action should involve all relevant stakeholders at all stages – planning, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This is rarely done, but it makes projects much more likely to succeed and more sustainable. Broad-based support for local initiatives is essential, and Avilés is an excellent example of this. Action to benefit Roma benefits the community as a whole.

The participants then split into two working groups to examine the learning elements from the peer review, before reporting back to the plenary.

Relevance and key learning elements for peer countries, stakeholder representatives and host countries

Reporting for the first group, **Katerina Giantsios** said one issue discussed was how far the project could be considered a success until employment is achieved. There was some debate about whether employment or housing is the main springboard to inclusion. Unemployment can also promote stigmatisation. Information had been given about an employment project running in Avilés since 2005, involving 224 people, of whom 113 were non-Roma. Participants had 227 contracts. 45% of those taking part were women. An awareness campaign was being conducted among companies to promote employment opportunities for Roma. A Hungarian participant had described a project similar to that in Avilés. The Hungarian project had an integrated approach, based on the four pillars of employment, education, health and housing, but today, two years after the launch of this project, it

was impossible to say how much employment had been achieved. Often, a project itself generates some public sector jobs, but once the project ends, these jobs disappear. A Slovenian participant had reported that, once her employer realised she was Roma, she was immediately dismissed and ordered to turn out her pockets before leaving. A Spanish participant had said that employment was the key issue, and that investment should be made, in cooperation with the EU structural funds, in fields where Roma have experience, such as waste material collection. Slovakia had given the example of a small village with an integrated programme similar to that in Avilés. This programme is run by a local NGO. Through Habitat for Humanity, a US project to eradicate poverty, people were given housing loans. Personal advisers were used to help Roma find employment. 90% of the jobs found by Roma were in the public sector. This again raised the question of what will happen when the project ends. A Spanish participant had pointed out that it is not easy to set priorities among the four pillars, as they are all so interrelated. It was emphasised that NGOs do important work, but all levels of government must play an active part if the underlying problems are to be tackled. The problem of stereotyping had also been raised. The Roma and non-Roma communities must gain a better understanding of each other's expectations. On education, a Slovenian participant reported that only two Roma girls in her school had completed their schooling. A recent approach to the municipality to assist Roma parents with the purchase of school materials for their children had not produced any concrete help. The issue of kindergarten capacity was also raised. Participants had emphasised that education is a basic right, but that not all Roma are currently aware of its importance. It was reported that many Roma in Andalusia are now in higher education, and this gives hope for the future. An Andalusian TV entertainment programme run by Roma is another important way of fighting stereotypes. From the Czech Republic, it was reported that, once Roma children who had previously been placed in schools for children with special needs were instead sent to standard schools, they performed very well. On structural funding, one issue raised was bureaucracy. In Slovakia, some projects have been waiting for 11 months to be reimbursed, so they end up subsidising the government rather than the other way round. Ensuring appropriate use of the funds was another issue raised. Participants had also asked whether structural funds could be used for housing. Their understanding was that the European Regional Development Fund could finance housing refurbishment in urban areas, but not in rural ones. It was suggested that funding could be made available by the European Social Fund for education, housing and health, with governments contributing most to housing actions.

For the other group, **Czeslaw Walek** reported that the discussion had concentrated mainly on the institutional aspects. The importance of a national strategy had been emphasised, but it needed to be continuously monitored and evaluated. It should also be developed by a national body, so that not only Roma social rights but also Roma political rights, identity and cultural rights are fully taken into account. This is why a participatory model is so important. Full Roma involvement in decision-making on policy is vital. A national strategy is also important for the monitoring of local actions, participants had stressed. Most participants had agreed that the main problem within the institutional framework is coordination between governmental bodies, as well as horizontal coordination with local-level bodies. In particular, horizontal coordination on such complex policy issues as housing, health, education and employment is a challenge. The Avilés programme had shown that full Roma participation also brings economic benefits. The cost of the project had come down once Roma representatives were fully involved. Funding is a problem, but it is not the only one. Personal capacity-building is also a big issue, especially at the local level. Political will is a third vital ingredient. Only when the three are combined can success be achieved. On the European Social Fund, differences between the approaches of EU countries had been noted. The newcomers to the EU see the 2007-2013 funding

period as a huge opportunity to use ESF funds for targeted projects. The older EU countries see it as the last opportunity to use these funds for targeted projects. Each country has come up with different solutions. Nevertheless, a general conclusion had been that, although mainstreaming is important, there should be a targeted approach within the ESF structure. Within their new National Action Programmes, most countries had opted mainly for a mainstreaming approach, with some targeted programmes. The important role of the NGOs was also emphasised, not only in capacity-building, but also in interconnecting the various layers of decision-making, especially in decentralised countries. On housing priorities, the Czech Republic and Slovakia had similar approaches, based on defining social housing in legal and financial terms, together with the initiation of complex projects at the local level. In Portugal, targeting has priority, as it is felt that mainstreaming would not necessarily result in outreach to the Roma. Other Portuguese priorities include integrating NGO experiences into national action plans and ensuring Roma participation. For Greece, education is the biggest priority. In terms of housing, the continuation of a loans programme for Roma was cited as another Greek priority. The Slovenian participant gave progress with EU programmes and a more active NGO role in the National Action Programme as the main priorities. For Spain, it was reported that the new State Council for Roma People has just been established at the national level. Its rapid incorporation into the institutional framework is a priority. A few autonomous regions, including Asturias, have corresponding regional structures. It was suggested that these could usefully be introduced in other regions. The Avilés programme could also be implemented in other parts of Spain. Progress in the educational field is another Spanish priority for the next seven years.

Manuel Vizarraga Balaguera commented that the contribution of the NGOs has been very valuable over the past twenty years. The Roma associations must play a key role throughout the entire process. **Sérgio Aires** confirmed that the role of the Roma associations had been emphasised in his working group. He also asked that the European Commission, when assessing the National Action Plans, should check if they include a strategy for the Roma. If they do not, governments should be asked why. **Savelina Danova** noted that the various examples of good practice that had emerged from the review are exceptions, rather than the products of coherent policy. The legislative framework in most of the countries does not place a positive obligation on public institutions to undertake proactive action to integrate Roma. Without such a positive obligation, the examples of good practice are unlikely to be multiplied. **Will Guy** thanked everybody who had welcomed the peer review to Avilés and had provided so much useful information. Avilés would be a inspiration to all in the long, difficult but essential task ahead.

Closing remarks

Hugues Feltesse thanked the hosts for the excellent working conditions, organisation and hospitality. The high-level participation in the conference bore testimony to the commitment of the City of Avilés, the Principality of Asturias and the Spanish Government. He also thanked the national and thematic experts for their excellent work, and all the participants for the wealth of analysis. The involvement of Roma participants, speaking from their own experience, was highly valued by the Commission. The peer review in Prague in 2005 produced some useful lessons on good practice in this field, and the Avilés review has now made it possible to draw conclusions about the process as a whole. Clearly, there is a need for people to know more about each other, whether at the European, national, regional or local levels, but this takes patience. It is a long process. It is difficult to convince politicians, who have to seek re-election every four or five years, of the need for a permanent approach. All the pillars – employment, health, housing and education – need to be addressed and evaluated within an

integrated process. As far as possible, Roma issues need to be addressed within the mainstream, while of course strengthening their access to rights and services through some supporting measures. This entails the full participation of all the actors. At the same time, the Irish practice of “poverty-proofing” – i.e. assessing the poverty dimension within all policies – could usefully be replicated with regard to ethnic minorities in general and the Roma in particular. This could be applied at the European, national and local levels. Success in achieving social inclusion for all would also mean success in securing the inclusion of the Roma. In their latest National Action Plans, only one-third of EU Member States assign priority to the integration of migrants and ethnic minorities. But all except one give the highest priority to active inclusion, and that goal cannot be achieved without the active integration of people of Roma origin. Tackling child poverty and the generational transmission of poverty is also given high priority in all the national programmes. This is a key priority for the EU, and in 2007, the Commission will be asking national governments to focus on this issue and report on their policies. Efforts should be made to ensure that the social inclusion of Roma children is well addressed within this priority. Work is also continuing on Member States’ capacity to assess fundamental rights, and Roma rights should be examined within this context. The suggestion of using the ESF to fund projects for Roma social integration is a good one. Also, in 2007, the EU focus “PROGRESS” programme will have the capacity to integrate social inclusion dimension with anti-discrimination, employment integration and gender issues. New calls for tenders could provide scope for the preparation of new projects in this field.

Pedro Jesús Rodríguez Martínez (Director General of Community Social Services and Benefits, Vice-Ministry of Housing and Social Welfare, Principality of Asturias) thanked the European Commission, the Spanish Government and all the participants for reviewing the Avilés experience. He hoped this would be helpful in the development of their own strategies. The Principality of Asturias is currently assessing its budgets, and the prospects are that the budget for social inclusion will be substantial. To be successful, shanty town eradication and social inclusion require the involvement of local administrations and communities. Negative attitudes at the local level are one of the main reasons for the continued existence of shanty towns in some places. Long-term planning and coordination between different levels of administration and public services are essential. Roma associations and other NGOs clearly have a vital part to play. While local initiative is important, the region must obviously also participate in the financing of appropriate programmes. Social inclusion at the regional level must be further improved. In the coastal areas of Asturias, there are still some shanty towns, but the main difficulty is that there are no local structures and policies for facing up to these situations.

Purificación García said the discussions had shown that Roma in the participating countries face basically the same problems of exclusion, and that there is a general will to tackle these. She hoped the Avilés experience would help everyone to achieve a good balance between the interests of the Roma and non-Roma communities. This is the cornerstone of the Avilés success. She thanked the participating countries, the NGOs and the European Union for the mutually enriching exchange of experience.

Juan Mato Gómez (Deputy Director of Social Programmes, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Spain) thanked the European Commission for selecting the Avilés programme. For Spain’s next social inclusion plan, a programme in the southern part of Seville, where there is a large Roma population, has been chosen because it has two key ingredients for success – political and social leadership. Another programme selected is run by NGOs, working with social funds, and is also

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having a tremendous impact on the Roma community. It is always a pleasure to work with the Principality of Asturias and the municipality of Avilés. When politicians are knowledgeable about what they are doing, it is easy to move forward with them. He thanked the whole organising team for the review and all the participants – not least the Roma participants who had provided so much first-hand experience. Spain could learn a lot from the EU method of open coordination. Also, the EU structural funds represent a very important opportunity for the Roma community. Political and social leadership are essential. A new generation of social leaders is needed who will know how to lead society as a whole, on the basis of indivisible human rights. 2007, the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All, will be a chance to increase the role played by the Roma in the European political agenda.