



Greece 2009

Peer Review: Integrated Programme for the Social Inclusion of Roma

Minutes



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



Peer Review: Integrated Programme for the Social Inclusion of Roma Athens, 27-28 May 2009

The Peer Review was hosted by the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection and the Ministry of the Interior, Greece.

Day 1

Welcome addresses

Welcoming the participants, **Peter Lelie** (European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) said that 8-10 Peer Reviews in Social Protection and Social Inclusion are organised each year. The major aim is to bring together a host country, a number of peer countries, some thematic experts, stakeholder representatives and the European Commission for an in-depth discussion of a good practice or a policy problem related to social protection and social inclusion issues. The general objective is to encourage mutual learning between Member States and to support the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on social protection and social inclusion. More specifically, the aims of the programme are threefold:

- To contribute to a better understanding of Member States' policies and strategies on social protection and social inclusion, as they are laid down in the National Action Plans, and their impacts
- To contribute to more efficient and effective policies by learning from other countries' experiences
- To facilitate the transfer of key components of certain policies that have proved to be effective in certain contexts, to other relevant contexts.

To ensure effective discussion, the number of participants in each meeting is limited. This presents two challenges:

- To better disseminate the meetings' results, in order to reach as broad an audience as possible. In 2008, the website www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu was totally revamped. It contains the results of the Peer Reviews and the associated Newsletter, together with all of the papers that go into each Peer Review, short reports, synthesis reports and minutes. He hoped that the participants would also help to disseminate the results of this review.
- To take up the results of the reviews in policy-making. In 2008, the EU Social Protection Committee held a discussion on better use of the Peer Review results, and decided on a more systematic take-up of them in its activities. So he encouraged the host country to bring the results of the present review to the attention of the Committee. This could be the start of a broader discussion of the issue concerned, with the presence of all the Member States.

In 2010, the Commission plans to introduce additional ways of improving mutual learning, through funding of Member States' exchanges in a much more flexible format. There will also be OMC

Workshops, with broader participation and better dissemination. He thanked Greece for hosting the present review.

Marie-Anne Paraskevas (European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) said the Commission has been discussing the Roma issue with the Greek authorities for some time. Within the Peer Review exercise, not only good practices are examined, but also practices that have not worked as expected, and an effort is made to seek solutions, together with other countries. Since 2004, and the accession of the new Member States to the EU, the problem of the Roma community has become even more of a priority than before. This is a matter of numbers. Demographic projections show that, although the Roma population has a life expectancy 10-15 years lower than that of the majority population, the Roma have a higher fertility rate. So, within a few years, they will be the majority in many of the countries in which they already form 5-10% of the population. Particular attention needs to be paid to the young people and the children, because they represent the majority, and we need to break the vicious circle of the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

The fight against poverty and the social exclusion of all vulnerable groups, particularly the Roma, requires cooperation between different ministries and also the participation of other actors, particularly the local and regional authorities, and the people themselves. So increased capacity-building is needed for the NGOs that work with the Roma, and the Roma people themselves should be involved in the design and implementation of the policies that concern them. This is the principle being followed within the social OMC, particularly as regards social inclusion. The Commission's role in this area is to provide guidance and foster the exchange of good practice, but also the comparison of bad practice. But the main responsibility lies with the Member States. It is up to them to take the appropriate measures to put in place the necessary structures and earmark the appropriate budget for combating Roma poverty and exclusion.

A stronger link should be established between the anti-discrimination policies that are already available and the social inclusion policies. Much remains to be done in order to protect Roma people's rights through the anti-discrimination directives that have already been transposed in all Member States. Action is needed to combat stereotypes and stigmatisation. This is important for all vulnerable groups, but for the Roma in particular. We need action addressing not only the Roma but also the whole of society. There are many campaigns by mayors and ministers saying "Vote for us and we will cleanse your town of Roma". This is not the way to apply a social inclusion policy. It should also be highlighted that many Roma in Greece and other countries have moved away from their settlements and become successful members of mainstream society.

Sophia Kalantzakos (Deputy Minister of Employment and Social Protection, Greece) recalled that, in September 2008, the first summit on Roma was organised by the EU, which has the will and the means to achieve Roma inclusion through the reinforcement of social cohesion. Lifelong learning and social, health and education services will lead Roma towards a high-quality way of life and high-quality jobs. The tools exist to achieve very good results at both the European and the Greek levels. Roma representatives have emphasised the education issues, pointing out that children must be at school right from the beginning of the school year and must be able to attend all classes. This is key to social inclusion and the creation of better opportunities in future. Cooperation between Roma and the State, at the central and local levels, is of paramount importance. In Greece, many steps have been taken to improve Roma access to education, and there is the political will for better-targeted policies. That is why Greece asked the EU Member States to take part in this Peer Review. Peer Review is aimed at coordinating the policies of the different States. Recognising the problems that the Greek Roma face, the Greek State launched the Integrated Programme for the Social Inclusion of Roma in 2001. This was the first coordinated

action by the Greek State to tackle the interconnected aspects of Roma inclusion. The programme was carried out by the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection, in cooperation with all other relevant ministries. The two main axes of the programme are firstly Roma housing and secondly Roma healthcare, culture, education and sport. The Ministry of Employment took up the issue of integrating Roma into the job market and raising awareness throughout the community. In 2007-8, action carried out for Roma included accompaniment services, promotion of integration into the job market and the creation of new jobs, support for self-employed people, and programmes for integrated action. This related to 67 action plans and programmes involving over 1,300 Roma. Within the framework of the new operational programme, targeted actions are included to support vulnerable groups of people. The organisation responsible for employment in Greece also promotes programmes for creating new jobs, and combating unemployment. The participation of vulnerable groups in these programmes is very important. Programmes have been promoted for self-employment by 500 Roma. The beneficiaries must have free access to the programmes and be able to express their needs and interests. So the policies are implemented on the basis of specific targets. Evaluation of the various actions pinpointed some weaknesses. This is why the Greek Ministry is seeking a dialogue with the other Member States. By putting Roma and other excluded groups at the top of the agenda, we will be able to offer inclusion and employment for everybody.

Chryssoula Bravou (ESF Actions Coordination and Monitoring Authority, Greece) said the coordinating committee on education and social inclusion issues had produced, in cooperation with the Greek Ministry of the Interior, a study on the Greek Integrated Programme. The results of this study would be part of the inputs into the Peer Review. **Patroclos Georgiadis** (Secretary-General, Ministry of the Interior, Greece) believed the results of the Peer Review and other meetings would make it possible to see what went wrong, what was done right, and where more effort is needed. Combating social exclusion is a serious concern for the governments of all EU Member States. However, the rapid changes in social structures require new means of action and new analytical tools. The exclusion of the greater part of the Roma population is a phenomenon seen not only in Greece. Everywhere, difference is too often regarded as inferiority. Through their own organisations, Greek Roma themselves emphasise that they are first of all Greek, and secondly Roma. They participate in the institutional structures of local government. Some of them are scientists and businessmen living in permanent houses, and they send their children to school. However, an important part of the Roma population are socially excluded. For them, it is imperative to have long-term inclusion policies. But this is not just a matter of funding. Inclusion involves employment, education, training, healthcare, housing and access to the various organisations and institutions on an equal footing. It also entails respect for everybody's cultural identity and heritage. Roma themselves must understand that they have not only rights but also obligations. They must understand that harmonious relations with the rest of society cannot be achieved unless they respect the rules equally. Under the Interministerial Committee, the Greek Integrated Programme developed a range of measures for gradual integration. The Ministry of the Interior takes part in this effort and gives priority to projects aimed at improving housing conditions. It acquires land and provides the municipal authorities with national funding for infrastructure projects. It grants housing loans, 9,000 so far, to Greek Roma and at the same time strengthens local authorities' ability to mobilise the whole population around social programmes. The impact of these interventions so far is deemed positive. But much remains to be done. Actions should take account of the special features of the target group and the need both for integration and for cultural balance. Everyone, especially the representatives of the State, must understand that many years of constant, systematic work will be needed, involving concerted, cohesive action. In view of the new programming period, the experience of the Member States in

this two-day meeting will enrich the Greek Government's own conclusions, so that it will be able to improve the scope and effectiveness of its actions for Roma.

Presentation of the Greek national integrated programme for the social inclusion of Roma – the policy background

Louiza Kyriaki (Ministry of the Interior, Greece) recalled that up to the end of the 1990s, Greek action to tackle Roma exclusion and poverty was rather fragmentary. It was decided that an integrated programme, in the sense of offering a comprehensive approach to problems at the local level, and interventions that could be adjusted to local society's needs. So both local and national involvement would be needed. An Interministerial Committee was established with representation from all of the ministries that had activities within the programme. In 2001, the Integrated National Action Plan for the social inclusion of Greek Roma was adopted, an important step in primary policy, taken after social consultation between central government, the Roma representatives and the Intermunicipal Roma Network of municipalities with Roma among their inhabitants. The plan comprised sectoral and interdependent interventions aimed at Roma social inclusion and empowerment, and at improving living conditions. It provided for individual initiatives by local authorities, to be financed from national and structural funds. The programming period was from 2002 to 2008 and the plan was structured around two priority segments which would support immediate relief and empowerment and would consist of large-scale interventions. It was to be managed by the Interministerial Committee under the supervision of the Deputy Minister of the Interior.

The first priority segment was **housing and infrastructure**, whether temporary or permanent. The main concern was to achieve the most rapid improvement possible in living conditions, through housing rehabilitation. The legal framework for public works projects already existed and was binding on all the actors involved. Construction both within existing Roma settlements and in new, integrated settlements was provided for. Funding for the housing infrastructure was drawn directly from the State budget, while the active parties were the local authorities. One aim was to acquire plots of land which would be transferred to the municipalities and then to the Roma. A Monitoring Committee was put in charge of the evaluation and supervision of the projects within this priority segment. It included central government, municipalities, the Intermunicipal Roma Network and Roma experts. In 2003-4, the first results in this priority sector took the form of 9,000 loans provided for mortgages on main residences. The loans were of up to €60,000 each. They were covered by the existing legislation on social lending and were granted on favourable terms. Under a major reform in 2006, social assessment criteria (family size, presence of people with disabilities in the household etc.) were applied in granting the loans. An evaluation committee was set up in each municipality with a Roma population to assess the applications for loans. The legal framework has been continuously reviewed, in close cooperation with the local authorities, the banks and the Roma beneficiaries, in order to deal with any problems encountered in the disbursement of loans and the construction of the dwellings. Emphasis was placed on gender equality, by giving priority under the loan scheme to women, and to the protection of minors. To date, women make up 47% of the Roma mortgage loan beneficiaries. This has been an important contribution to the empowerment of women and their families within Roma society. Almost 95% of all the loan beneficiaries are in households with 1-8 children.

The second priority sector was **Roma empowerment and access to basic services**. This was in the fields of health, employment, education, culture and sport.

- The main **health** goal was to ensure Roma access to primary health services, by establishing first of all mobile socio-medical units that would operate in the settlements and then fixed socio-medical centres providing a range of preventive services, vaccinations and health education, but also counselling on issues such as civic rights. The socio-medical units are co-financed by the European Social Fund. The appointment of **Roma mediators** was an important step in ensuring effective provision of services to the Roma population.
- On **employment**, the main goal was to ensure equal access to the labour market, reduce the unemployment rate, empower the Roma community and assist them in their capacity-building. Vocational training, counselling and Greek language teaching were some of the projects undertaken in order to prepare them for the labour market.
- The main **education** goals were to increase school attendance by Roma pupils and promote their integration into the education system, notably through the establishment of a network of fixed and mobile schools and the provision of additional educational and recreational workshops. Teacher training and a “mobile student card” for children following itinerant families were further measures, as was the reduction of the administrative requirements for school attendance. Also important was the emphasis placed on adult education. Lifelong learning helps to combat illiteracy and social exclusion.
- **Culture and sports** activities were aimed mainly at promoting social integration and active participation through the study and dissemination of the Roma culture. Culture Houses were established, and material was developed to awaken primary school children to Roma culture. In sport, the emphasis was on bringing Roma and the wider community together.

At the end of the programming period, she said, the Integrated Action Plan has confirmed one thing – that social integration is a dynamic process in a rapidly transforming systemic environment. This is a multifaceted process that involves human beings. It requires a lot of time and it must be considered from a long-term perspective. Otherwise, we risk a return to a fragmentary process which would be a waste of time and resources.

Recording of the existing situation of the Roma population in Greece on the basis of the National Research of 2008

Chrisostomos Kalogirou (National Expert, OIKOKOINONIA – Citizens’ Initiative for the Social Residence and the Support of Social Inclusion of Roma, Greece) summarised the findings of the 2008 study (the following figures and percentages concern the number of Roma people surveyed):

Housing is a major problem facing the Roma population. 50% live in prefab hamlets, shanties, cabins and generally congested makeshift accommodation, deprived of basic technical and social infrastructures and essential facilities. The study’s main conclusion is that 43% of Greek Roma face a direct or indirect lack of housing. They frequently live on sites that are unsuitable for residential use or are too remote from the urban web. Infrastructure, service provision and basic sanitation are often lacking. The land on which Roma live is privately owned in about 45% of the cases. In about 21% of the cases, the plot has been conceded by the municipality or the prefecture, while in 11% it has been conceded by relatives. The percentage of the housing structures themselves owned by their Roma occupiers is reportedly fairly high, but ownership is often not documented by a legal title (66% of cases). Rentals are rare (1.2% of the total).

As to the **social parameters**, Greek Roma are incorporated into the administrative framework to a significant extent. The overwhelming majority have recognised the need for registration of births, marriages and deaths and for inclusion in the population registers. The decline in mobile lifestyles, the policy of the municipal authorities, and the need to have proper civil status in order to access State benefits are the reasons cited for this change in Roma attitudes to registration. Over 97% of those surveyed were registered, meaning that they have Greek nationality and have adapted to Greek administrative reality.

On **employment**, the picture is one of exclusion from the formal labour market and of the entrapment of the majority of the Roma in an informal "grey market" without financially viable prospects. In essence, they are in an intermediate state between employment and unemployment. The Roma unemployment rate is 44.3% of the economically active population. The corresponding rate for Greek society as a whole was 8.3% in the first quarter of 2008. 77.3% of Roma are recorded as being employed on an occasional or seasonal basis only. Over half of those surveyed had remained unemployed for more than 2 years. Just three activities accounted for three-quarters of all Roma employment: trading (20.8%), scrap dealing (30.4%) and agricultural labouring (23.4%). Exclusion from the labour market leads to marginalisation. As their income is both low and seasonal, the vast majority of Roma households are far below the poverty threshold. Roma women's involvement in the labour market is still very low or non-existent. Illiteracy and isolation from the education system, including vocational and technical education, have a clear impact on the Roma's employment situation. They face a constant struggle to survive and a continuous recycling of ineffective employment choices rather than a stable employment framework. Only 32.8% of self-employed Roma report that they are insured. 28% of uninsured persons are covered for healthcare by the prefectural Social Welfare Directorates.

Health and hygiene. Health problems are directly connected to living and working conditions. The Welfare record booklet used provides elementary health services that do not cover Roma needs. The most common chronic diseases reported are cardiovascular diseases, disabilities, mental and neurological diseases, diabetes mellitus, and backbone diseases. 4 out of 10 Roma women know about the Pap test but almost all those who have had the test state that they have undergone it only once. 1 out of 2 Roma women knows about mammography but only 1 out of 4 has had the test done once. 1 out of 4 received no medical assessment during pregnancy. 1 out of 10 reports that at least one of her children has died, most of them before completing their 10th month. As for prevention, 1 out of 2 adults has not received all vaccines required; 3 out of 4 children have not received all vaccines required; and 3 out of 10 children have no treatment card. 1 out of 10 persons includes fresh fruits and vegetables in their daily diet, while fish is seldom a part of the daily menu. Any kind of food that needs to be kept in a fridge is also a rarity, due to the lack of electricity. 1.3 out of 10 households had experienced some kind of accident during the previous year. 45.9% were traffic accidents, 27% were domestic and 24.3% were occupational.

Access to social services. To a great extent, the Roma use basic welfare services. The Socio-Medical Centres, as a newly established institution for the multilateral social support of Roma, are apparently being used by a significant number of households. Services aimed at the general population (centres for the elderly, day nurseries, home help) are less used. There is intense prejudice against the Roma among the employees of state and municipal services. One in 10 surveyed households has used the advice and education programmes and the Mobile Prevention Unit that carry out activities at Roma settlements.

Education. The majority of Greek Roma, particularly the older generations, are effectively or functionally illiterate. 54.7% did not attend school at all, 33.4% only finished certain grades of

primary school, 7% finished primary school, 3.4% attended certain junior secondary school classes, 0.5% graduated from junior secondary school, and approximately 1% attended certain secondary school classes. Among school age children, non-attendance seems to have progressively decreased from generation to generation, but their participation in education does not appear to be sufficient to enhance and improve their vocational mobility and status. 54% of parents state they have children that have never gone to school. 25% of the parents invoke economic reasons for this, while 22% attribute it to travelling. About 25% invoke personal reasons particular social (cultural) characteristics. Another major reason is that for many Roma groups, school attendance does not lead to any decrease in the unemployment rate. Roma say regard education as just another form of coercion, the quality and prospects of which leave them unsatisfied. Many Roma parents think that school is hostile to their culture and dignity. But the study did not find that Roma avoid school attendance in order to preserve their cultural identity.

Evaluation of actions of the Greek Integrated Action Programme for the Social Inclusion of Roma 2000 - 2007

Chrisostomos Kalogirou summarised the evaluation of the programme:

Housing

- Failure to obtain the required public funds
- Insufficient exploitation of ESF funds
- Absence of clear preconditions and criteria for the approval, ongoing evaluation and control of the interventions
- On the provision of prefabricated houses: poor structural quality, inadequate size and high costs, which were an obstacle to the development of an integrated housing policy
- Vague financing criteria
- Insufficient examination of the existing housing conditions and lack of detection of problems and needs prior to the implementation of local projects
- Housing measures were not incorporated in a local integrated Programme
- Insufficient participation of the interested parties (Roma households) in the decision-making process
- Insufficient promotion of the issue of Roma obtaining a permanent residence
- Problems of operational design, organisation and implementation of the interventions.

Employment

- Lack of continuity and connection with other complementary measures of employability enhancement
- Lack of effective time-planning
- Insufficient intersection of the interventions with the existing needs of Roma and the local labour market needs
- Difficulties with Roma access to programmes of subsidised labour
- Low level of flexibility and adaptation of the interventions to the special characteristics of the Roma population, its potential, knowledge and special abilities, needs and expectations
- Counselling focused mainly on psychosocial support without addressing employability enhancement and labour market entry issues
- Difficulties in regard to the coordination of the partners and partnership management
- Delays in the commencement and implementation of interventions.

Education

- Higher school attendance at urban centres
- Higher drop-out rate in non-urban areas (population movements, poor housing conditions etc.)
- Insufficient additional tutoring
- High number of inscriptions, for financial reasons (provision of educational allowance)
- Insufficient exploitation of educational material.

Health: Socio-medical centres

- Intermediary institutions, user-friendly to the Roma population
- Small, flexible units of social intervention targeting both the Roma and the local community
- Local character: knowledge of local community and specific Roma living conditions
- Delays in infrastructure establishment and in provision of medical/pharmaceutical supplies
- Insufficient connection with the hospital network at regional and local level
- Financial dependence on EU support framework and not on permanent national funds - need for institutional fortification, stability and viability insurance
- High number of Roma people vaccinated
- Improvement of Roma knowledge and attitudes on health issues
- Lack of a mechanism for recording hygiene parameters and conditions
- Lack of research implementation re the effects of living conditions on the population's health.

Overall evaluation of all the actions implemented

- Positive initiative and overall contribution – creation of a cohesive policy and a frame of reference in regard to the Roma issue in Greece
- Acknowledgement of the different categories of Roma population problems and needs in regard to the different types of residence

But.....

- Lack of homogeneity of interventions
- Lack of a mechanism for following up, evaluating and recording the interventions' results
- Priority not given to tackling the most important problems and needs
- Interventions were not implemented on the basis of the Roma population's special characteristics - insufficient knowledge of Roma particularities
- Insufficient addressing of Roma's real needs
- Lack of an integrated approach to intervention design and implementation
- Insufficient promotion of regional and local partnerships
- Insufficient organisational and technical capacity among the implementing parties
- Insufficient participation of the interested parties (especially in the Roma community) in the decision-making and implementation process
- Lack of progress control and evaluation of interventions
- Lack of financing continuity and consistency
- Quality factors and continuity of interventions not predicted during design phase
- Lack of funds and fluctuation of financing mechanisms with regard to implementation and fund absorption progress in each field
- Design of Integrated Action Plan after the completion and approval of Operational Programmes – inability for measures to be incorporated and financed by them
- Absence of a unified centre for the overall coordination of the Action Plan interventions.

Discussion

Rainer J. Irlenkaeuser (Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Germany) asked what had been done to tackle prejudice among the majority population? Are there new settlements for Roma people only, or for a mixed population? He had been surprised to hear figures about the unemployment rate among Roma in Greece. In Germany, the employment office does not mention the nationality or the ethnic background. **Louiza Kyriaki** replied that there are also mixed settlements, but people in these do not need the same support. So they were not covered by the Integrated Action Plan. **Chrisostomos Kalogirou** explained that the unemployment data come from the national study, which drew them from the replies given by Roma people. He added that the programmes for Roma people are a type of positive discrimination. They do not aim at any kind of ethnic segregation. The lack of awareness-raising activities for the general public had been a weakness in the previous plan.

Isabel Alonso Luzuriaga (Ministry of Health and Social Policy, Spain) congratulated the Greek Government on its plan. The problems that Greece is having to tackle now are very similar to those faced by Spain twenty years ago. Housing is a particularly difficult issue, requiring a lot of coordination and a high budget. Not all housing areas can be remodelled at the same time, so there are overlaps and it is difficult to plan very far ahead. Distance from schools, medical centres and social services is another difficulty. So if Roma housing is remodelled but is still in the same place, many problems remain. Integration does not necessarily mean assimilation, and this difference should be made clear to the Roma. The first step should be to provide them with legal documents, without which they are not really citizens, with a citizen's rights and duties. In Spain, the rapid spread of the cities has actually helped to promote Roma integration, as their settlements are now part of the suburbs. In 1991, 31.9% of those in Spain's Roma settlements were living in very bad conditions. By 2007, just over 11% of the settlements still needed remodelling in order to provide decent conditions. 3-4% of the Roma slums in Spain are still in existence today, and priority is being given to eradicating them over the next four years. So everybody involved should realise that these are long, systemic processes. The Greek evaluation had shown that one of the constraints is the lack of a continuous budget. One feature of the Spanish action had always been the government's earmarking of a valid, continuous budget. This is important, because if the processes have to be halted for lack of money, they will have to be started again from scratch. The regions and the municipalities should be directly involved, in terms both of money and of professionals. The Greek reports had emphasised the importance of being close to Roma needs. Those needs are very clear. Employment is a particular difficulty, because modern society has less and less need of the Roma's traditional skills. A central unit for coordination of the programme would be essential. There must be government commitment. And commitment implies money on the table and a continuous flow of money.

Michael Guet (Council of Europe) said the integrated nature of the Greek programme, and the interministerial involvement, are strong points, as is the local and Roma involvement. In combining national funding with funds drawn from EU sources, countries like Greece and Spain are setting a good example for others. Also, Greece has given top priority to housing for Roma. This is not so common in Roma action programmes across Europe, probably because it is one of the most difficult and costly components. He asked if the Cretan example given in the Greek discussion paper had been a success that might be reproduced in other parts of Greece. Is the Greek policy intended to end nomadism? On employment, does Greece intend to introduce a system of validation of professional experience, so that Roma who have relevant experience but no diploma can take some tests and receive official certification of their skills? Are Romany culture and history taught as part of the school curriculum? He wondered how the Greek

government had managed to develop a Roma strategy while having an official policy that there are no minorities in Greece. **Marie-Anne Paraskevas** emphasised that the housing provided should be of good quality and spacious enough to avoid overcrowding. Transport is another important factor for social inclusion. If settlements are on the edge of the conurbations, but the road ends a kilometre from the settlement and there is no public transport available, how can children be expected to go to school? On childcare, she pointed out that compulsory education in Greece starts at the age of six. So what is to be done about the years 0-6? One widely used means of preventing the transmission of poverty from generation to generation is early intervention.

Viveca Arrhenius (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland) asked how Greek Roma are organised. Do they have NGOs? If so, are they funded by the State or the municipalities? Do Roma take an active part in political decision-making? **Sarita Friman-Korpela** (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland) said that, where Finland had reduced educational attainment requirements for Roma children, it had been found that they face problems when they reach the higher levels of education and vocational training. Had the same happened in Greece? On the last point, **Louiza Kyriaki** explained that the reduction had been in the administrative requirements for Roma access to schooling – not in the curriculum. Regarding participation in political life, the Greek Roma do have NGOs, some of which were attending the Peer Review. There are also Roma councillors in local authorities, which were also taking part. Roma take part in every aspect of public life. Roma candidates stand in both local and national elections. At one point, there had been a separate Roma political party. In Greece, anybody can set up an association for the defence of human rights, and Roma participate in some of these. Greek Roma are Greek citizens, and therefore do not form a minority. But this does not prevent the adoption of positive measures. Those are taken to promote social inclusion, so there is no contradiction here.

The Cretan scheme, in Nea Alikarnassos, had provided a large number of loans, 133 in all. This was one of the first projects, and the initial idea was to create a new settlement in an area where Roma were already living in substandard accommodation. But after the 2006 reform of housing loans, people had simply wanted to get loans and use them within mainstream society. So it was decided to give people the choice. The great majority had opted to buy houses on the mainstream market. Many had chosen to move away from the area, and even out of Crete. This case might well hold lessons for future housing action in favour of excluded Roma and other disadvantaged groups. **Marie-Anne Paraskevas** said she had happened to meet the municipal authorities of Nea Alikarnassos in Brussels just before the Peer Review, during a conference on an EU-backed project for the integration of migrants. They had told her that people bought houses with the loans, but then went back to the settlement. And now there is a problem, because the municipal authorities want to clear the settlement and use it for another purpose, but the people are still there. She had been expressly asked to raise this problem during the Peer Review. **Louiza Kyriaki** commented that Roma must realise that social integration cannot just be a one-way process of taking. Benefits without obligations would take us back to a form of begging. In any political system, that is a dead end. On integrated housing, she replied that not all housing projects under the new Integrated Action Plan will be for integrated settlements. In each case, the wishes both of the people in the settlement and the plans of the local authorities must be taken into account. Roma families tend to be large, extended units that want to stay close to each other. This may be one explication for what has apparently happened in Nea Alikarnassos. And for project planners, it creates a dilemma. It is not possible to have huge plots of land which will provide housing for hundreds of people at a time. So the emphasis in the Integrated Action Plans has been on smaller-scale projects.

Katerina Toura (Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, Greece) said there are plans to provide better transport between Roma settlements and schools. Other new measures planned by the ministry include cooperation with mediators. Preferably, these mediators will speak Romani. However, in Greece it is not easy to find Romani-speakers who have the necessary skills. The inclusion of Roma culture and history in the Greek school curriculum is now under discussion for implementation as part of the new actions, in cooperation with the Council of Europe. A Greek translation of the Council of Europe's Romani glossary is also planned. Pre-school intervention is a major issue right now within educational circles in Greece, and also at the European and global levels. Her ministry sees it as one of the major steps to be taken in order to tackle Roma exclusion and the problem of school drop-outs. **Marie-Anne Paraskevas** felt that not so many mediators would be needed in order to introduce Roma history into schools. The point is that it should be taught to Greek students, in order to raise awareness of Roma specificities and the richness that the Roma bring to Greek society. **Katerina Toura** agreed that mediators should not necessarily be Romani-speakers. They can be people who have had a special education on dealing with minority issues.

Isabel Alonso Luzuriaga noted that the Greek reports had made little mention of NGOs. In Spain, Roma NGOs play a crucial role in promoting employment for Roma. **Chrisostomos Kalogirou** felt that Roma need both a long-term policy and short-term solutions. Roma infant mortality, for example, is eight times that of the majority population in Greece. This requires emergency action. But without a long-term strategy, the problem will not go away. Greece will have a 20-year plan which also includes emergency action. He agreed that education is a critical factor, as it will ensure the social inclusion of future Roma generations. Basically, the Greek policy had been headed in the right direction on this, but action had been fragmented and schools had not been under any obligation to implement the inputs. As for identity, he argued that this is a non-negotiable private matter for the individual. Social inclusion policies have nothing to do with social levelling or assimilation. They are about ensuring access to social benefits, namely decent housing, civil status, employment, healthcare and welfare. Nomadism was interrupted not by the Greek state but by the Greek Roma. Seasonally, they may still move around, but they always return to a fixed residence, which they may occupy for about one-third of the year. He confirmed that Greece has both Roma NGOs and NGOs of mixed composition dealing with Roma issues. They have not been reinforced by the State as much as they should. The NGOs survive thanks to volunteering, and they are heroes.

Zeljko Jovanović (Open Society Institute) drew attention to the Roma Decade, an intergovernmental initiative by 13 European governments, both EU and non-EU. Launched by the Open Society Institute and the World Bank in 2003, this initiative has many weaknesses, but it also includes some best practices that can be learnt from. Officially, the Decade runs from 2005 to 2015. Its Steering Committee includes the participating governments as well as a number of partners, such as the European Commission, UN agencies, the OSCE and the Council of Europe. Almost five years into the Decade, most of the countries have developed policies on Roma and important experience has been gathered concerning national budget contributions to projects for Roma and local-level implementation. The Decade has also defined a number of political and administrative arrangements within countries and governments. He invited the Greek government to consider joining the Decade, of which Spain has recently become a member. It is an opportunity to contribute and receive experience. Housing, which is a strong element of the Greek policy, is currently a priority of the Serbian presidency of the Decade. However, without other social inclusion elements, housing provision on its own will not work.

Sonia Vila Nuñez (European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) asked why the evaluation had concluded that Greece's Roma programmes were making insufficient use of EU structural funds. Also, how many applications for housing loans were received under the previous action plan? As well as social criteria, are there economic criteria for granting the loans – such as employment or other indications of financial stability? If so, what is done to help people who are not accepted for loans? And are there any programmes in Greece for Roma who do not have the status of Greek nationals?

Kostas Paiteris (Municipality of Agia Varvara, Greece) said that he is a Roma and is Deputy Mayor of his municipality. He emphasised that the collective organisations of Roma have declared to the Greek Government that the country's Roma are Greeks. They have made the same declaration to the European-level collective bodies of Roma. Greek Roma have told them that they are willing to cooperate on all issues, but their Greek identity is non-negotiable. They are adamant on that. The Greek Roma are not a minority. They are a sensitive social group, and the Greek Government has been taking steps to help this group reach the level of the rest of the population. The main problems are in housing, education, employment, health, sports and culture. The steps taken by the Greek government are not enough. There needs to be a continuous flow of assistance, as well as cooperation with the NGOs and the collective bodies of the Roma people. Roma realities are changing all the time, so a body needs to be established that will monitor, evaluate and plan solutions to the problems that Roma face. Roma mediators do exist. They have been trained by the General Secretariat for Popular Training. So he could not understand why the State and its services do not have recourse to people who do have certified qualifications, who speak Romani and who could make themselves useful in promoting this whole programme. He did not think that Roma history and culture should be taught separately in Greek schools. Roma are part of Greek history. Roma preserve their culture and habits, but these are quite close to those of the rest of the Greek population. There should be a five- or ten-year timetable so that all the agencies that have been sensitised can plan with the Roma to step up efforts to eradicate the problems that are of concern to the Greek government and to the Roma themselves. **Michel Digne** (Adviser on the "French travellers" and the European Roma issue, France) said many programmes fail due to the lack of a social environment and social support. Without social support both for the Roma and for the mainstream population in accepting the measures, is there not a danger that the Greek plan will fail? He also asked if Roma people had been employed in building the houses in the projects. **Marie-Anne Paraskevas** clarified that the call for education about Roma in schools had been made with the aim of avoiding cultural discrimination. **Alekos Tolakis** (European Commission, DG for Regional Policy) asked how far the Greek Roma are involved in designing and building new settlements, so that they can acquire the skills that will help them to become normal active citizens. Also, is there any evidence so far that the people who have benefited from social housing subsequently have better socio-economic inclusion indicators? And are there any data that show whether segregated housing has negative, neutral or positive impacts on progress towards inclusion in mainstream society? **Jan Diedrichsen** (Federal Union of European Nationalities, taking part in the German delegation to the Peer Review) felt many good initiatives are being taken at the European level on Roma issues. But are these initiatives well enough coordinated? Is the information from all the various conferences getting out? He pointed out that Greece signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities at the beginning of the 1990s. Is there any progress in ratifying this document, which provides a very good mechanism for measuring improvements?

Christomos Kalogirou replied that the Roma community in Greece is not homogeneous. It has various social layers and classes. There are urban Roma who are socially included and who are well-off professionals. But at the bottom of the pyramid are the great mass who live in total social

exclusion. Any social inclusion policy has to tackle all of their interrelated problems. He recalled that the housing interventions had used exclusively national funds, although EU resources could have been used. Resources from the European Social Fund (ESF) were utilised to a certain extent, but the national programme for Roma was designed and approved after all the operational programmes (OPs) for the ESF and the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) had already been approved. Now, the new Greek strategy is just starting to be discussed when the OPs of the fourth programming period are already closed. So the future utilisation of EU resources will encounter the same difficulties. On housing loans, he commented that these had gone to those who were higher in the Roma social pyramid and had not solved the housing problems of the great mass of socially excluded Roma. As for Roma participation in planning, he agreed that this is crucial. **Louiza Kyriaki** pointed out that the social assessment criteria for housing loans are legally defined, and they include low income. So she did not agree that priority goes to the better-off Roma. 15,665 applications were received between 2002 and 2004. When applications were resubmitted after the 2006 reform, 17,704 applications were received. However, it has been found that several applications have often been submitted by the same person, using different identity card numbers. There are also cases of applications from different members of the same household. So some applications simply do not qualify. The programme provides for 9,000 housing loans, of which 7,716 have already been granted. Of those, about 80% have so far actually been used to buy a house. This means that some 6,600 people have been housed. The economic criteria for loans do concern ability to service the debt. Annual incomes of between €3,000 and €12,000 qualify, with an addition of €1,600 in the case of families containing minors. However, people in Greece often do not declare all their income, so in many cases, applicants will increase the figure once they realise that their initially declared income was too low to qualify. The 9,000 loans were never intended to solve the whole of the Roma housing problem, but rather to meet a specific demand from some Roma. Many other types of housing scheme are also open to them. On the issue of nationality, she confirmed that the programmes for Roma are available to Greek Roma only. There are also integration programmes for migrants of whatever origin, Roma or not. Concerning the use of Roma labour in the construction of Roma housing, she believed that future programmes will make greater provision for this, although it already happens on an informal basis. As the loan process is still underway, there are not yet any statistics showing its impact on social inclusion.

Natasa Bila (Ministry of the Interior, Greece) has briefly described the plan of a housing public scheme for the Greek ROMA. The aim of the scheme's first step was to improve the miserable living conditions (e.g. relocation from Gallikos Banks River to Agia Sophia settlement-Echedoros) of many Roma population groups. So, an immediate measure to address the problem was to provide approximately 1700 prefabricated houses to Roma families. The next step was to provide a scheme which includes mortgage loans, construction of permanent settlements and other measures, in order to support Roma families to acquire their own house. Under the above scheme, many families moved from prefabricated houses to their own permanent ones. Finally she also noted that within the above scheme rehabilitation programmes were also included. **Katerina Toura** emphasised that education programmes for Roma pupils are conducted inside the formal education system. The programme is supervised by the Ministry of Education.

Dimitris Ziomas (Network Expert, National Centre for Social Research, Greece) felt that integrated approaches are particularly difficult to achieve in Greece. For Roma as for other groups, social exclusion is multidimensional. So a coordinating mechanism is needed for actions to help them. How many Roma are there in Greece, he wondered. The statistics are confusing. One estimate puts the Roma population of 60,000, but many other different figures are also given – a point also emphasised by other speakers. Action must be planned on the basis of proper

data. There must also be targets, especially quantitative ones. These have been lacking so far. Although Greece has been spending a great deal on social policy, there are no results. The poverty rate remains much the same, at 21%. Action is probably being mistargeted. There are no monitoring mechanisms to check on this. An integrated programme presupposes both vertical and horizontal cooperation. A national framework is certainly needed, but the planning of action should be bottom-up and not top-down. The beneficiaries must be involved, but so must the local societies that surround them.

Nikos Antonakis (Panhellenic Network of Socio-Medical Centres, Greece) said that indications had been seen, under the previous operating programme, of corruption between beneficiaries, banks and the public sector. This is why the targets could not be achieved. What action will be taken to avoid these problems in future? Clientelism had played a role in the granting of loans.

Maria Dimitriou (Roma social worker, Greece) said Roma do not want a separate school textbook. They have tried to create educational materials that permit every child to see itself as different. That said, the mainstream textbook could be amended to include some details of Roma history. Roma should perhaps themselves bear some responsibility for housing deficiencies. But how can they take on that responsibility when whole generations of Roma have been raised in settlements, without education? Greek Roma do not claim to be a minority. But they do want to be equal citizens. And if she also wants to say that she is a Roma, that is up to her.

Christosomos Kalogirou said that Roma are not listed as such in official population statistics. He agreed that the data are inadequate, although much of the information drawn from the questionnaires in the study could be used in the planning of action. The local authority role in action for Roma had initially been an important one, but once the State became involved, it made a major mistake. It overcentralised, thus limiting both local authority participation and the results. The mechanisms for the implementation of the integrated programme are very weak. The centre responsible for monitoring and coordination is so small that it creates deficiencies. **Effika Katsigaraki** (Ministry of Justice, Greece) reported that there are quite a large number of Roma inmates in Greek prisons, especially women and juveniles. Mostly, their offence is selling drugs. She advocated a special action plan to help this group of prisoners.

The participants then visited socio-medical centres in Acharnon and Ano Liosia, two communities near Athens. They also saw two very different facets of Roma housing – an illegal slum settlement and high-quality houses purchased by Roma on a new suburban estate.

Day 2

A renewed Long-Term Strategy – Action Plan for Territorial and Social Policies – administrative set-up: coordination and management structure for the new Integrated Programme

Christosomos Kalogirou said the new strategy must be uniform, cohesive and multifaceted in order to develop a sustainable housing policy and measures for long-term social support. The formulation of the objectives is governed by the principle of institutional promotion. This entails the settlement of outstanding issues of registration and other civil status matters.

The **strategic objectives**:

- **Housing:** ensure the consolidation of viable housing, resulting in permanent settlement and the right to land and property. Such housing must be linked to the urban fabric.
- **Education:** integrate the Roma people into the school system and support Roma pupils as a special policy of the education system, with clear targets and well-developed methods and materials; encourage Roma children to continue to higher educational levels.
- **Employment:** develop a basket of initiatives to support employment, including passive measures such as counselling and information and active measures such as subsidising new jobs, funding new business start-ups, supporting the development of new forms of business activity such as cooperatives, and developing the social economy with the participation of Roma, local government and NGOs.
- **Health:** interconnect the social health framework with interventions for the improvement of living conditions and the provision of infrastructure; ensure assistance to Roma from intermediate structures so that they have access to the health system.
- **Social welfare:** promote the Roma as citizens with equal rights in social welfare and policy institutions; develop a safety net for children in Roma communities; link social benefits with employment.
- **Culture:** support and promote cultural expression, but also encourage the Roma to become acquainted with other forms of culture, thus fostering social inclusion.

A new policy model also requires new **administrative methods**. This involves three levels:

- The **political** level aims at sectoral collaboration, policy specification and diffusion. It in turn must have three levels: the Council of Ministers and local government bodies; the Council of Ministries' General Secretaries and public bodies' Presidents (mainly as regards policies on housing, education, employment and health); and the Assembly of the Regional Authorities' General Secretaries, as the regional dimension is of major importance.
- The **authorities'** level of responsibility is the management mechanism, which should be an independent centre, accompanied by a staff committee on interministerial cooperation and cooperating with a decentralised network of services.
- The responsibility level of **democratic planning** is ensured via a broadly based collective representation body, and the social partners' participation in the planning and strategic decision-making process, through its functioning as a Monitoring Committee. The State, local government, independent authorities, social partners, Roma representatives and NGOs could participate, with a view to achieving social consensus, dissemination and control.

The tool for developing a new methodology is the **Operational Action Plan**. This should provide for special planning in each sector. An **integrated territorial intervention model** is also needed. In this way, there will be a link to local specificities. A different mix of interventions will be needed for each type of settlement. **Local intervention plans** should be based on a territorial approach, a multisectoral approach, partnership action, institutional promotion, participatory planning, a

bottom-up approach and social consensus. The preparation stage should include diagnosis of Roma needs in the area, setting up the partnership grouping, engagement with the local community and achievement of consensus, strengthening the adequacy of the leading agency, design of the plan, and the administrative maturing of the plan. The second phase is the implementation, involving housing support, social support and strengthening social cohesion at the local level. The basic intervention tool could be the **social support centres**, such as the socio-medical centres visited by the participants.

There are a number of **prerequisites for a successful strategy**:

- Unify and systematise existing know-how
- Disseminate good practice, while identifying and learning from negative experiences
- Develop methodologies, standards and instruments
- Codify and integrate the legal framework, which is extremely deficient
- Develop human resources through lifelong learning.

Social dialogue, awareness-raising and consensus should be achieved through horizontal support actions such as a forum, a campaign and the highlighting of positive Roma models. Detailed plans also exist for strategy specialisation in each sector.

How are European countries tackling the kind of Roma integration problems confronting Greece?

Will Guy (Thematic Expert, University of Bristol, UK) emphasised that, as in Greece, Roma and Sinti people in countries across Europe vary greatly, ranging from nomads to firmly integrated families which nevertheless retain their Roma identity. There have been some dangerous oversimplifications in policy documents. For example, in 1997, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees decided that the reason for Roma people's migrating and seeking refugee status was a reversion to their nomadic lifestyle. In 1999, the European Commission, in a document listing its aid to Roma communities, also described anti-Roma discrimination as a consequence of their nomadic lifestyle. But in fact, most Roma in Europe have been settled for decades, if not centuries. In both Eastern and Western Europe, economic development has made many previous Roma livelihoods increasingly unviable and has led to the concentration of former nomads in urban slums. But it should not be forgotten that there are also prosperous Roma traders. Roma cultures, identities and languages also vary. Just as for any other group, we should not simplify and essentialise Roma, nor limit our expectations of what is possible for them. At a workshop in Bulgaria, for example, he had heard a suggestion that training in simple handicrafts was suitable for Roma, as it was traditional. Yet, in that same country, Roma had given computer training to the officers staffing a police station set up in the midst of their settlement. By essentialising, we ignore the varied experience which shaped communities, families and individuals. This led to diverse perceptions and understandings and consequently aspirations. What are needed, within broader frameworks, are individually tailored solutions stemming from direct contact and asking people what they want. This also means the close involvement of Roma organisations in designing and implementing these initiatives.

States are also diverse. They range from highly devolved systems, as in Spain and Germany, to relatively more centralised ones, as in France and Greece. However, devolved governance does not preclude national plans, as in Spain. Equally, a centralised system is no guarantee that a national policy will be applied at local level. His own research in communist-era Czechoslovakia

found that national policy on Roma was often blocked by local authorities. So even with the repressive power of a communist state, local compliance cannot be compelled.

In spite of diversity, many Roma communities throughout the EU, including Greece, share common features. These are now well documented: high levels of unemployment leading to poverty, bad living conditions, low educational attainment, poor health, lower life expectancy, social problems and discrimination. But in the late 1990s, the EU enlargement process required candidate countries to demonstrate respect for minorities. This focussed attention on the marginalised situation of most Central and East European Roma. EU funding, mainly through the PHARE programme, was provided to promote integration. The strength of PHARE was its flexibility, with projects designed for specific situations in individual countries. But its weakness was its piecemeal and short-term nature, making for an often fragmented approach. Often, this was without the context of a sustained strategy. In time, most Central and East European countries did develop long-term plans, but the evaluation of PHARE showed that there was little understanding of social inclusion and that local bottom-up initiatives generally worked much better than top-down and remote ones. Meanwhile other countries outside this process, such as Spain and Greece, also produced their own national plans.

The advent of a broader Lisbon Strategy aimed at social inclusion, and parallel Decade of Roma Inclusion, introduced a more strategic approach to national action plans. More attention was paid to monitoring and indicators. However, these require reliable data. They did, however, provide an opportunity and, more importantly, a requirement for Member States to mainstream provisions for Roma, thus fully recognising them as equal citizens. At the same time as national plans were being produced, many countries were going through a growing process of devolution. The 2007 evaluation of the impact of social inclusion National Action Plans on Roma access to social services found an impasse. Central government considered their duty to be done if national action plans had been produced. Local authorities were often unwilling to act on them. What is required is viable schemes within the framework of a national strategy, but adapted to local needs and enjoying local support. This is all the more necessary as both the European progress report in July 2008 and the European Roma Policy Coalition have noted that not enough is being done.

At a time of recession, the rise of populist extremism targeting Roma and others seen as alien is creating a highly unfavourable political climate. However, there have been some encouraging local agreements to avoid turning the issue into a political football – notably in Münster (Germany) and Avilés (Spain). There are signs of a similar attitude by the political parties in Greece.

General discussion: Key Sectors: Setting goals and defining priorities for developing an effective pathway to integration

Housing

Will Guy told of a Croatian project to provide infrastructure to the country's biggest Roma settlement. The municipality concerned had acquired legal titles for existing Roma housing, and had done so sensitively but resolutely in relation to the local population. Where no agreement could be reached, compulsory purchase was used. However, he felt that the concept was flawed because it perpetuated segregation, and there was no employment element even though many Roma had previously worked for the building company that got the contract. Another Roma settlement nearby had been destroyed by floods, and an NGO asked the inhabitants if, rather than having it rebuilt, they would prefer to move into vacant houses in adjacent villages. They

took that option and received preferential loans, and the Roma NGO and the municipality both sensitised the neighbours and supported the Roma who were moving in. Good neighbourly relations developed, and these new contacts helped many of the Roma to find jobs.

Katerina Giantsou drew attention to a hand-out that had just been passed round to the participants which gave summaries of three settlement types. She suggested that participants might try to design a local integrated policy for each type. These local policies had been lacking in the previous Greek plan, so such input would be useful for the Greek hosts. But **Marie-Anne Paraskevas** said the debate should not be limited to housing and infrastructure alone.

Sarita Friman-Korpela emphasised the need for strong participation by municipalities, as decisions directly affecting Roma are taken at the local level. In particular, Roma participation at the local level is essential. Finland has both national and regional bodies for Roma affairs, but there are now also 20 cross-sectoral working groups on Roma issues within municipalities. Half of the representatives on these groups are local Roma, and efforts are made to ensure diversity within that Roma representation – women, people with disabilities, young people, NGOs and so on. The Roma in the local groups also pass very useful information and ideas back up to the national-level representatives. She urged Greece to consider similar structures. **Isabel Alonso Luzuriaga** said three factors had been crucial to the integration of Spanish Roma. One was the commitment made in 1985 to put the issue on the political agenda and create the legal framework for devoting part of the national budget to Roma programmes. A unit was created within the general state administrative structure to ensure coordination. The second was the decision to involve the municipalities closely in the process. Money is an important factor in this. Although the municipalities are the ones who have to act directly on the problems, they are also the ones right at the end of the financing chain. The third was the decision to ensure that Spanish Roma have proper access to social services and to education. Mediators are vital to this process, as are social workers and Roma NGOs.

Tibor Derdák (Amdekar Secondary Grammar School, Hungary) recalled that more than half of all Roma in Greece have never attended any school. But it is good that the Greek government is facing the problems honestly. This is the first step towards resolving them. Segregation is the main obstacle to Roma education. In Hungary, a quarter of Roma children are in special schools for the mentally handicapped. This is one method used to keep them out of the normal schools. **Adriana Papadopoulou** (Ombudsman's Office, Greece) said a national framework can only be an umbrella. Problems have to be solved locally because they are different in each case. Her office wants to see coordination of all the agencies involved, so that they cannot pass the buck. **Michel Digne** suggested that most elements of anti-Roma discrimination are caused, at root, by poverty. Unfortunately, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. In some European countries in which he used to work, many municipalities had built good-quality new homes for Roma. But those houses were far from the villages on whose edges the Roma used to live. A good French pilot project on housing, in Alsace, had been successful due to coordination between the State, local authorities and local responsible bodies; social support for both Roma and the local community before, during and after the six-year programme; employment of Roma men in the building of the houses; and study of the relationships between the different Roma families, so that friends were housed close to each other and enemies were kept apart.

Ivan Ivanov (European Roma Information Office) explained that his organisation briefs EU officials on the situation of Roma all around Europe. During the accession negotiations, EU officials realised that Roma would become an EU issue and that they needed more information. So the idea for the establishment of his office came from MEPs and prominent Roma activists. It

also provides recommendations to the European Parliament, the Commission and the Economic and Social Committee, and every six months to each EU presidency in line with its priorities. A prerequisite for social inclusion is acceptance, and in order to ensure acceptance we have to take measures against discrimination. Participation is also very important. Most of the programmes are designed in a paternalistic way, with Roma as the passive beneficiaries. Experience has shown that this does not work. One country proudly announced, as a positive healthcare practice, a programme which taught Roma children how to use soap, wash their hands and use a toothbrush. This was no doubt well-intentioned, but it was highly stigmatising. Also, as the children did not have running water at home, it was basically a waste of money. It is important to adopt a positive action approach, as proposed by the European Commission in the race discrimination directive which has already been transposed by most Member States.

Ines Cedron (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, Spain) stressed the need for partnership not only with the different levels of government but also with organisations working in the field. This can help to prevent a duplication of effort. Coherent intervention across all the sectors is vital. Often, employment initiatives are not matched up with education and training programmes. Sitting down and talking with families is the best means of finding the right pathway to their inclusion. **Davide Bonagurio** (European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) said that creating the conditions for a local partnership with NGOs, municipalities and enterprises is a good way of attracting EU funding. **Michael Guet** said the elements for a long-term policy already exist in the Council of Europe materials. They just need to be translated into the Greek context. In particular, the Council of Europe recommends that monitoring and evaluation should be built into the strategy at the outset. He also stressed the need for practical accompanying measures. On the question of identity, he wanted to make it clear that the Council of Europe does not oblige any groups to be recognised as a minority. But identity is an individual matter. Not all Greek Roma may take the same view on the recognition issue.

Alfred Stamos (Municipality of Zefiri, Greece) was a member of the Inter-ministerial Committee which contributed to the implementation and monitoring of the integrated programme. He supported the view that action in the different sectors e.g. housing, employment etc, in order to be effective, must be interlinked. Everyone is responsible for achieving Roma social inclusion. Improvements in living conditions for Roma are improvements in everybody's living conditions. The State must have a coordinating role and the local authorities must participate in this effort, taking local Roma needs into account. Above all, social integration of Roma is a matter of awaking, sensitizing and activating both Roma and non Roma populations. **Rainer J. Irlenkaeuser** said that Germany has no national integration plans for Roma, only local ones. For example in the town of Münster, the city council decided in 2000 a special housing programme and activities for migrants, including Roma people. Instead of building great blocks of houses (up to more than 200 persons) smaller houses with up to 50 people were built in new neighbourhoods rather than old ones. Future inhabitants of these new neighbourhoods were informed in advance that they would include housing for Roma. People accepted this. That acceptance was facilitated by a mediator who helped Roma and Germans to understand each other's mentalities and to avoid difficulties. New schools with integrated classes were opened in these neighbourhoods and local volunteers helped children of Roma origin to solve educational difficulties. Conclusion: If people live together, with the appropriate help and support, discrimination can often be reduced.

Will Guy mentioned the Finnish law requiring municipalities to provide public housing for Roma in the midst of housing for other people. Had this caused any problems? Could it be done in other countries? **Sarita Friman-Korpela** replied that the main problem, back in the 1970s, had been to define who is Roma. In practice, municipalities mapped out where Roma were living in their areas

and enquired into their housing wishes. There was State funding for municipal housing provision, as well as State-guaranteed private loans. This ended the travelling lifestyle, which the Finnish Roma had maintained out of necessity rather than choice. Today, housing is fully integrated and there are no identifiable Roma settlements in Finland. The special legislation remained in force for 30 years. State subsidies are now available for the renovation of the housing. **Will Guy** asked if any Roma had seen this as enforced assimilation. **Sarita Friman-Korpela** replied that there had never been anything romantic about the travelling life in the Finnish climate. The Roma had been glad to get housing. She saw herself as a living example of the improvement in conditions. Her grandfather used to live in a hole in the ground, and this legislation made it possible for him to buy a house. Her father was 7 years old when he first moved into a house and was able to go to school. Now she herself has a university education. So you really have to wait for the long-term results. **Will Guy** added that, although the settlement of the Polish Roma had been a repressive measure, they finally decided that they liked living in houses, and they successfully adjusted their occupations and businesses to match.

Zeljko Jovanović said one of the key points emerging from the Decade debates is that once Roma housing becomes part of the urban masterplan, all the problems of access to schools, health and transport have a legal and policy background that increases the likelihood of the problems to be solved. **Alekos Tsolakis** cited the case of Hungary, where the government requires that municipal housing plans specify what is going to be done about desegregating Roma housing. This is a good way of overcoming local authority inertia, and the Hungarians are pushing for it to become part of the regulations for the EU structural funds. **Anne Joubert** (Social Welfare General Directorate, France) said the French State has been funding traveller sites. Each municipality with more than 5,000 inhabitants is legally required to provide such a site. Schools are required to enroll traveller children for whatever length of time their families stay in the area. However, there are problems with municipal compliance and with coordination between the State and the municipal authorities. Many French Roma are now seasonal travellers. They park their caravans in front of their houses for six to eight months a year and continue to sleep in the caravans. However, gradually they stop living in the caravans and use them only for travelling. **Christosomos Kalogirou** noted that, outside the integrated programme, Greek local authorities have taken a range of measures to ensure the sustainability and quality of social housing. The integrated strategy proposes various alternative housing solutions adapted to local needs. **Marie-Anne Paraskevas** said a legal framework is needed that makes housing a right for everyone, as in France. The EU will be trying to move in this direction.

Education

Tibor Derdák explained that Hungary's legislation against school segregation became necessary after the end of communism, when greater parental choice led to a de facto segregation of schooling. The law has had only a limited impact, partly due to the problem of defining Roma ethnicity. So the legislation defines ethnicity mainly in terms of the parents' level of schooling. Hungarian schools receive significant additional funding if they have many children in this category, provided that they are not put into separate classes. That is the carrot. The stick is that municipalities are taken to court if their schools segregate children. It took ten years to obtain the first real sentencing by the courts, but now things have improved and it has become easier to negotiate with the municipalities on this issue. There are programmes to increase Roma participation in secondary and higher education, including scholarships and extra tuition. These have been successful in a limited number of cases, and there are now Roma students in the

universities. Much had been learned from the French programme on Roma education. **Michel Digne** pointed out that French law provides for family allowances to be stopped if children do not attend school up to the age of 16. Schools have adapted to the Roma traveller children. They are required to accept travellers' children for whatever length of time their parents are in the municipality. There are also mobile schools which follow some groups of travellers around. **Ivan Ivanov** said segregated Roma education is usually a result of segregated Roma housing. In most but not all countries, bussing Roma children to school in other areas has proved a successful way of tackling segregation. However, it does not always improve the quality of education. A first step could be to improve the standard of education in the segregated schools, because desegregation is a very slow process. EU research shows that half of Europe's citizens do not want to live or work alongside Roma and do not want their children to study alongside Roma children. Special programmes are needed to change these attitudes. Teachers and principals also need training on how to work with minorities, and school curricula should be designed to give insights into minority cultures as well as the majority ones. **Sarita Friman-Korpela** recalled that Finland, as part of an ESF project, trained twenty school assistants who are Roma but who are sent into ordinary schools to assist all the children, not only Roma. **Isabel Alonso Luzuriaga** reported that education is one of the success stories in Spain's programmes for Roma. Almost 100% of Spanish Roma children attend school up to the statutory leaving age (16), although there are some problems of absenteeism at the secondary level. And almost 70% of Roma 3-5-year-olds are in non-compulsory preschooling. This achievement took a lot of work over many years, particularly by teachers, mediators and social assistants. At first, Roma families said they could not send their children to school, as the boys were needed as hawkers and the girls were needed to help in the home. So for some years, subsidies were paid to these families in order to invalidate this pretext. This is not a desirable practice, but it did produce results. School segregation was never an issue in Spain, as Roma are regarded as full citizens. Extra tuition is available for any pupils who need it, but not on an ethnic basis. She opposed the idea of education tailored to different groups. Roma need to be educated in the ways of mainstream 21st century society. They need to change their habits, not their culture. **Rainer J. Irlenkaeuser** explained that some Länder of Germany have recently introduced mandatory German language skills tests for all preschoolers, German or not. Children with poor results in the test are receiving additional tuition by specialised pre-school teachers. Furthermore it would be useful if Roma children would attend kindergarden to avoid early segregation. **Alekos Tsolakis** pointed out that EU education ministers had recently decided that, by 2020 at the latest, 90% of all European children should attend early childhood education. It would be good to ensure that Roma are not in the other 10%. This also has a bearing on Roma women's involvement in the labour market. Second-chance schools and informal education are essential for young Roma people who missed out on schooling and who are often functionally illiterate.

Institutional structures

Michel Digne emphasised the need for strong cooperation between the interministerial and local levels. **Yiannis Georgiou** (Representative of the Roma community, Greece) said such cooperation is currently lacking, in his experience. **Rainer J. Irlenkaeuser** suggested that, as a first step, the cooperation should be in the fields of housing, education, health and welfare. Employment aspects could be brought in later, as they are more difficult to integrate into the one programme. **Sonia Vila Nuñez** stressed the need for synergy with EU structural funds. She pointed to the role of the EURoma network, of which Greece is a member. **Dimitris Ziomias** suggested that, given the centralised Greek governance structures, programme management

would have to take the form of local-level pacts in which each participant-stakeholder commits to implementing certain actions. He also emphasised the need for reliable data. **Marie-Anne Paraskevas** supported the idea of pacts, which should be binding. They could also cover monitoring and assessment. **Yiannis Georgiou** felt that enough data have already been gathered. According to a recent government paper, there are 80,000 Roma in Greece. *[But a Greek Roma participant objected that there are 80,000 people in her family alone].* **Zeljko Jovanović** said most Decade countries have inter-ministerial policy coordination mechanisms on Roma issues. A few, such as Romania, Serbia and Macedonia also have agencies that coordinate day-to-day work. He recommended that Greece establishes such a unit, preferably linked to the Prime Minister's office, independent of any particular ministry. Municipal coordinating councils and local Roma coordinating offices also exist in a number of Decade countries. He offered to distribute a recent Decade study on institutional arrangements. **Ines Cedron** said EU structural funding offers many opportunities for horizontal and vertical coordination, and for exerting influence at the local level. Advantage should be taken of this. **Nikos Antonakis** stressed that local structures need to see that they have something to gain from coordination. Also, all Greek politicians should receive training about the local structures, a subject on which they currently know very little. **Anne Joubert** said France has a national commission which brings together national and local government and relevant organisations, but its meetings tend to be difficult, due to disputes between Roma NGOs. There are also similar structures at the local level, with Roma participation.

Funding

Michael Guet emphasised the need for political consensus on the programmes, as well as stable funding. The best example of this is Montenegro, where a fixed percentage of the national budget is allocated to Roma programmes each year. **Isabel Alonso Luzuriaga** said the Spanish state funds Roma NGOs in three ways. The national budget finances the Roma National Development Programme. Also, citizens have the right to choose where 0.7% of the taxes they pay to the State should go, and one of the options is NGOs. And then there is a budgetary allocation for social action by NGOs, especially in the field of self-development. Matched funding is another important resource for local-level action, but this requires greater financial commitment by the municipalities, which have their own tax revenues. Subcontracting of ESF projects is a source of funds for organisations such as the Fundación Secretariado Gitano. **Tibor Derdák** warned that funding can create dependency, particularly in the Roma context. In some cases, funding and discrimination come from the same sources. Independent funding is vital if Roma NGOs are to be strong and non-opportunistic. **Nikos Antonakis** believed that the money is already on the table. All that is needed is the mechanism to bring the available funding together, from the EU level to the municipalities' own resources. **Ivan Ivanov** said that, even where funding is available, Roma generally do not have the capacity to apply for it. The money usually goes to state agencies or to professionals who know how to design fundable projects. Roma civil society organisations should be provided with capacity-building on this. **Marie-Anne Paraskevas** supported this point.

Lessons learned

Will Guy praised the Greek government's courage in choosing to have its proposed plan examined by other people. He summed up the points emerging from the Peer Review:

- **Are national plans necessary or appropriate?** Views on this had differed. For example, the German discussion paper had cited legal and constitutional obstacles in Germany to drawing up a national plan for one ethnic group, but had also emphasised that drawing up a national plan is time-consuming and perhaps unnecessary. On the other hand, Spain had stated that having a national plan, even in a devolved country, is key to putting the issue of Roma social inclusion on the national agenda.
- **Should initiatives be separate or complex (i.e. addressing several fields at the same time)?** There had been general agreement that complex initiatives are preferable, as Roma social inclusion entails dealing with a number of problems simultaneously. For instance, simply placing people in good houses without tackling their employment and skills issues will create benefit dependency.
- **Should policies be Roma-specific or more general and inclusive?** The meeting's preference had been for more general policies which include Roma. This approach tends to attract less opposition. The important thing is that Roma should not be forgotten. In some National Action Plans, they do not feature at all.
- **Consultation** should entail involvement of Roma organisations at the highest level, as well as on the ground. He cited the example of Spain's Fundación Secretariado Gitano, which works right at the top, with government and other relevant organisations. He suggested that similar set-ups might be a goal in all countries.
- **Identity** is a sensitive issue. The Greek Roma representatives at the meeting had stated very strongly that they are first of all Greek, but also have a Roma identity. It had also been pointed out that the Council of Europe does not insist that countries should recognise national minorities. There is room for flexibility here. People must decide for themselves who they are. Nobody else can tell them what their status is.
- Although inclusion on the basis of consensus is obviously preferable, the **enforcement of non-discrimination**, where necessary, is an issue that must be addressed. Anti-discrimination law, including transposed EU directives, should be used more often. Prosecutions in Hungary, for example, had helped to change attitudes.
- Does the Greek Interministerial Commission have enough power to ensure **coordination** of policies for the inclusion of Roma? A separate government office, or assignment of Roma issues to one existing ministry, had been suggested as viable alternatives.
- It is important to **take Roma issues out of the political arena**. There were good examples from Spain and Germany of agreements between parties not to make political capital out of Roma-related questions, particularly during elections.
- On **funding**, the Greek authorities recognise that not enough use was made of **EU structural funds** under the previous programme for Roma social inclusion. This contrasts with Spain's extensive use of such funding since the year 2000. The EU is very willing to provide funds for

Roma inclusion. This is reliable funding which makes it possible to plan ahead, unlike the less sustained funds under the previous Greek system. At the same time, an element of **locally sourced funding** is also important. Otherwise, people will not feel that they have a stake in the projects. **Roma NGOs' capacity to access international funding** needs to be developed, as they have fewer network connections than professional fundraisers. The **EURoma** network (www.euromanet.eu), currently present in 12 European countries, is promoting the use of structural funding.

- The idea underlying the Greek proposals is that **short-term initiatives should be part of a broader development plan**, and that **non-Roma people should also benefit** from the activities. This is a good principle to adopt.
- **Sensitisation** of local people to Roma issues and Roma rights is essential to social inclusion. Clear information can help to overcome fears and prejudices.
- In some countries, **market forces are driving Roma out of the areas where they used to live**, sometimes with the complicity of local authorities. Most of the Peer Review participants favour **integrated housing** in which Roma and non-Roma populations live side by side. However, the Roma themselves should be consulted on this in each case. Forced integration is counterproductive. Short-term infrastructure projects and intermediate housing schemes should be examined to see if they really do contribute to longer-term integration. Too often, social housing for Roma is on the periphery of conurbations, away from the areas where they want to work and live. Serious consideration should be given to the Finnish solution of placing municipalities under an obligation to offer housing to homeless people. Roma housing should be part of the urban master plan.
- **Enforced integration is counterproductive.** Integration needs to be carefully prepared and support has to be available for all concerned, Roma and non-Roma alike. But there does need to be **resolution in the face of opposition**.
- **Loans** for Roma housing raise various difficulties which need further consideration. However, this is a field where it has been possible to accord a certain priority to women, young people and one-parent families.
- Preschool **education** is important for Roma, and parental involvement in that education can also stimulate wider Roma social participation. However, particularly in Eastern Europe, kindergarten provision has declined in recent years. Throughout Europe, educational provision for Roma still leaves much to be desired. They need for support at the primary and secondary school levels, as well as second-chance education facilities for those who missed out. The proposed Greek programme provides for this. Scholarships, also included in the Greek programme, are an important stimulus.
- The use of **Roma mediators** is an important means of ensuring that Roma have access to the public services they need.
- **Employment** problems lie at the heart of exclusion. They are also the most difficult problems to solve. The Spanish employment programmes for Roma are probably the most successful and transferable. Training in traditional Roma skills, such as scrap metal recycling, is probably not useful, as these are declining markets. A good general education is the best way of giving Roma equal access to employment. Roma may be encouraged, as in Hungary, to migrate to

those areas where employment is available. However, to prevent exploitation, there is a need for states to regulate and regularise the grey economy in which Roma migrant workers tend to be employed.

- **Health** is a field in which immediate benefits for Roma can be achieved, for example through vaccination schemes and screening programmes. However, short life expectancy is closely related to poverty and cannot be tackled by medical means alone. It requires anti-poverty measures, notably the promotion of employment. Greece's use of socio-medical centres is a good example of structures that also serve as contact points.
- **Delinquency** is poverty-related. It is also a question of communication between the relevant bodies and Roma people themselves. He recalled a German example where help and assistance to Roma families had dramatically reduced burglaries and pickpocketing by some children of Roma refugees in Cologne. It should also be remembered that Roma parents can act as responsibly as any others. When young Roma became involved in drug-dealing in the Czech Republic, and consequently became addicts themselves, their parents sought help from the police.
- **Migration** by Roma across European borders will continue to be an issue, and is likely to increase as South-Eastern Europe integrates into the common labour market.

Concluding remarks

Marie-Anne Paraskevas thanked the Greek hosts and the participants. She emphasised that:

- **The quality of data** about Roma, notably the size of Roma populations, urgently needs to be improved if programmes are to be implemented effectively.
- A **binding framework** is needed for the development of action. It should establish an **institutional structure**, in which the beneficiaries themselves should be included and which will be responsible for project design, implementation, monitoring and assessment. It should set a dedicated budget and assign priorities, based on an integrated approach.
- A **mainstreaming** approach should be used, but with specific positive action to address existing inequalities. In particular, there is a need to **link anti-discrimination laws with social inclusion policies**.
- **Preschool education** is crucial to tackling the intergenerational transmission of poverty. It will also enable Roma women to take up jobs outside the home.
- **Employment** of Roma is mainly in the grey economy. This issue needs to be tackled, so that they can receive social security coverage.
- **Social support** for Roma is an element that is currently rather lacking in the Greek plans. The mediators are there, but they should have a more important role, particularly in raising parents' awareness of the need for their children to attend school and facilitating Roma access to housing, healthcare and all other social services.

- There should be a **two-way approach to integration**, stressing the mutual rights and duties both of Roma and of the society around them. She mentioned a very successful project that the Commission has been running in Andalusia, in cooperation with the Spanish Red Cross.
- **Participation** by those living in situations of precarity is crucial to social inclusion. They need to be involved in the decisions that directly concern them. That is why the EU holds annually, in Brussels, a meeting of people who are experiencing social exclusion and poverty. Many Roma from the Member States take part. In the same spirit, Roma NGOs need to be involved.

Katerina Giantsou said her administration will disseminate the outcome of the Peer Review to all the relevant Greek ministries, i.e. most of them, and all other appropriate agencies. The review had been of great assistance to the Greek government in launching a constructive discussion of the proposed new plan. **Louiza Kyriaki** added that Greece will take the review's outcome as the basis for the further development of reflections and experiences, adjusting them to the existing socio-economic environment. This Peer Review is a positive beginning for the development of something new that will strengthen Greek society.