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**REPORT OF THE FINAL CONFERENCE OF ROM UP PROJECT.  
21 FEBRUARY 2013**

The ROM UP Project Final Conference was held on 21 February 2013 at the European institutions headquarters in Barcelona. The event was attended by Roma people from six European countries and set out the impact of the successful educational experiences on the academic outcomes being achieved by Roma children in these countries. The conference provided first-hand accounts by the direct participants in the experiences. The scientific evidence presented in person by students, teachers, family members, Roma volunteers and Roma community stakeholders clearly expressed the following message: the educational success of Roma children is possible if we put in place those measures that are already yielding the best educational outcomes worldwide.

Several representatives of the Catalan government, the Castilla La Mancha government, local authorities, the education community, Roma associations and researchers took part in a number of roundtables and in the subsequent discussion, adding data to the educational evidence and talking about the various challenges in the struggle to overcome school failure.

Below are the main points made at the various roundtables:





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## 1. Opening session

**Ferran Tarradellas.** Head of the Regional Office of the European Commission in Barcelona

**Ana Contreras Fernández.** President of Romani Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen

**Juan de Dios Ramírez-Heredia.** President of Romani Union

**Neus Munté i Fernández.** Ministry of Social Welfare and Family of the Government of Catalonia

**Ferran Tarradellas. Head of the Regional Office of the European Commission in Barcelona**

- Discrimination is a violation of human dignity incompatible with the fundamental principles of the European Union.
- Europe is fully committed to combating all forms of discrimination within the scope of its powers.
- The Romani communities that constitute the largest ethnic minority in the European Union are constantly exposed to discrimination and segregation, and therefore the inclusion of the Roma community demands serious, continuous and ongoing efforts.
- It is in this context that the Commission has established a European framework for the social and economic integration of Roma and urged European Union member states to develop or revise their national strategies for Roma integration.
- On 23 May 2012 the Commission published its assessment of national strategies and the Commission will annually evaluate the progress made by Member States.  
(...Remember the displacement of Roma in France...). Right to freedom of movement.
- We believe that the integration of the Roma community has a European dimension, and precisely for this reason it is a responsibility of both host and home countries. Removal may be an easy solution;



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however, it is not in fact a solution but simply shifts the problem elsewhere.

- Displacement is inefficient, expensive and has no lasting effects. All Member States should integrate the Roma and may use European Union funds provided for that purpose.
- At the European level, €26.5 million has been made available to Member States to support their national strategies for Roma integration in the period 2007-2013. We hope that the negotiation of the current multiannual financial framework can maintain an important item specifically earmarked for the integration of the Roma in the Union as a whole.
- Integration of the Roma has to be an ongoing effort and not limited to a specific action in time.
- Investing in Roma integration may not be politically appropriate in some Member States, but it is without doubt in the EU as a whole and it is also an economic issue. In times of crisis, better social and economic integration of Roma is crucial. Otherwise, they will remain an important untapped talent in the EU.
- The Roma community is a growing part of the labour force in the European Union. According to research conducted by the World Bank the full integration of the Roma could provide €0.5 million in savings in some countries through increased productivity and reduced social assistance costs.
- - The Europe 2020 programme, which is the Bible, the charter of the European Union, is designed to deliver sustainable and inclusive growth in the European Union to turn it into a knowledge-based society. What is taking place with disadvantaged communities does not always give us the outcomes we might want. This happens in many cases owing to a combination of poverty, racism in society... In short, it is due to reasons that fly in the face of the spirit of Europe itself. Hence in 2010 a Plan of Action was set up that is explicitly but not exclusively for the Roma communities in Europe and which has



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produced two communications, one in 2011 and one in 2012, that established a common European framework within which Member States can develop their national Roma integration strategies. These are to include a Lifelong Learning Programme which should be open to all disadvantaged communities, including Roma communities.

- We all have an interest in the success of these programmes and hence I believe that holding this conference organised by your Department is so important and timely. The Representation of the European Commission is honoured to host this event and trusts you will have discussion sessions about this important issue that yield specific results in the task of ensuring a full life for all members of the Roma community in the European Union.

### **Ana Contreras Fernández. President of Romani Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen**

- *Lachó Divés* (greetings and welcome to the people at the table and in the room)
- We were extremely proud and happy when the ROM UP project was approved by Europe as only seven are awarded in the entire EU.
- In the course of this conference we are going to show you all the work that has been done, the main contents and results of the project, which I'm sure will be of interest to all of you.
- The content because the project is about educational measures with successful results for the Roma. The results because they mean the chance to improve the quality of the education our children receive and thereby improve their future. Two things that we all care deeply about. I think that it will help them to overcome the inequalities that the Roma suffer.
- I would like to thank everyone who has come along to talk about the selected experiences and in particular those who have come from far away due to the extra effort they have had to make. Many thanks to them and to all of you for being here.



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## **Juan de Dios Ramírez-Heredia. President of the Romani Union**

Lachó Dives. (*greetings and welcome to the people at the table and in the room*)

I would like to mention some ideas that for us, the Roma worldwide, are of particular concern. The first is the tremendous upsurge in racism and xenophobia, of all those things that persecute us, that hurt us, that sacrifice us and even kill us. Because they are killing us in Hungary, they are killing us in Greece, because they continue sterilising Roma women in the Czech Republic to ensure that no more Roma children are born, because we are victims of a terrible persecution.

- I was an MEP for 12 years. My main enemy was Jean Marie Le Pen and another 25 racist MEPs alongside him. I remember that at first Giorgio Almirante was there. Today, right now, as I speak here in the European Parliament, there are 59 racist extreme rightwing MEPs who say we have to get out of Europe and leave to go and live all together in India. We cannot ignore this reality.

- I would like to mention Günter Grass. He says and argues that the Roma are the true representation of the character, idiosyncrasies and European way of being. To him we are the genuine expression of Europeanness.

- I was lucky enough to be in the European Parliament when we all voted unanimously for the disappearance of borders in Europe. That day Europe became the great territorial area where we could all live in absolute freedom, enjoying the same concept of citizenship. When it was my turn to speak I could not help saying: "But what we are doing today in Europe is not new to us, the Roma. We already did it a long time ago. We felt that we were living in an area without borders, we saw ourselves as being citizens of the world."

- The second message I would like to convey is this: this is a project that seeks to improve education. The education of our children and young people is the finest foundation on which we can build any future vision of our community. I'm very happy with that, absolutely identified with this idea.



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- If I could solve any issue that affects our people, first of all I would resolve the issue of education. Only education and culture make you free, only education and culture provide us with the same weapons that the majority society has in order to defend our cultural identity, our history, our customs. Everything that makes us Roma and happy to be Roma. I congratulate you on this programme, which I have followed very closely and which will be a very important step in the struggle that we are waging for the dignity of our people [the speaker is referring to the *Palabra de Gitano* (The Roma Speak) programme on TV channel Cuatro. Roma women are the sacred tabernacle which preserves the essence of our history, of our customs. In this programme Roma women have been crushed, abused, turned into something for entertainment and even for low, cheap and poor quality sexism].

- We are going through a very hard, very difficult time and this initiative by the Catalan Government, which has today honoured us with the presence of its Minister, is a source of optimism and hope and a belief that all is not lost. If we work together we can achieve the aim of living together, of mutual respect, which some of us have been working towards for so many years. Thank you very much.

**Neus Munté i Fernández.** Ministry of Social Welfare and Family of the Government of Catalonia

- *Lachó Divés* (greetings and welcome to the people at the table and in the room)
- Importance of the project.
- Institutions and government working together with organisations and the Roma community.
- Spirit of building Europe, building a common and shared identity that can encompass the identities of the different peoples of Europe.
- Governments have been taking on commitments to combat the inequality that the Roma have faced over the course of history.
- Europe 2020. Improve the situation of Roma in four main areas: health, work, education and basic essential services.



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- Roma women have shown they are a key player in transformation. They need to take this leading role.
- Greater inclusion of the Roma in Catalonia because it is a country that welcomes different cultures, which helps us to be receptive to the cultural demands of the communities that make up Catalonia.
- Cultural diversity enlarges Catalonia as a nation, being one people.
- Catalonia is a pioneer in recognition of the Roma. It has put in place major measures to protect their identity and enhance their inclusion.
- These measures have been carried out due to the commitment of community organisations and the Roma.
- ROM-UP is a tool that stresses successful educational experiences, one of the most important challenges facing society. In addition to education, more progress and more inclusion.
- Congratulations to all the organisations and people who have contributed to this project, and especially to the Romani Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen for the determination they have shown not only in this project but also for their track record in working for Roma girls, young women and women across Europe.
- Roma women are a key player in transformation. They need to have a leading role.

## **2. The ROM UP! Project. Objectives, methodology, main activities, mechanisms to ensure the quality and results of the project..**

[Redacted content]

[Redacted content]



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**Manuel Heredia. Advisor on Roma Issues of the Department of Social Welfare and Family.**

- *Lachó divés* (greetings to everyone)
- The vast majority of Roma in Catalonia are committed to this task. We have been working at it for many years but we are slowly getting there. We still have a long way to go.
- We would never dream of a project for woman that is created by men. We need to do the same thing with the Roma issue. If we as Roma do not get involved in our problems, believe me we will never emerge from obscurity.
- The main players in Roma projects must be the Roma themselves. I am very happy with this government and this European project. There is at this moment a Rom, myself, leading the Comprehensive Plan, and that is very important. It could be any of you. The important thing is that this Rom is able to mediate between the two communities. It is important to have the confidence of the community and the Roma associations in the area which means you can negotiate.



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- I know that in this project (ROM UP), and especially in the experiences in Catalonia which I follow closely, the first thing has been to enable the Roma to take part. In my view this means the belief and hope that this really is going to work. This project involves mothers, children, the elderly, etc. We need to examine all of this and put it into practice.
- We Roma will often sell our cars and even our houses when we get sick and we want to be seen by a particular private doctor because we've been told that they are good. The same is true of education; we Roma have to see the good experiences in education and put our children in the best hands. In the best hands there will be absolutely no school failure. I would like us to look at all this so that in dialogue with the government we can implement these experiences in the various countries to get the best results. School failure among Roma children must be reduced, and there is no other choice as we've tried everything else. Let us not squander this opportunity and make sure we take our children to good doctors and to those schools where the teachers truly care about their education. Thank you very much

### **Ana Contreras Fernández. President of Romani Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen**

- The ROM UP project is funded by the European Commission, coordinated by Drom Kotar Mestipen and its partners are Roma associations and other organisations from a number of countries, including KEPKA DIEK in Greece, ROMANI CRISS in Romania, ERIO from Belgium, the AMALIPE CENTRE of Bulgaria, CREA at the University of Barcelona, PAVEE POINT TRAVELLERS CENTRE in Ireland and the Government of Catalonia's Department of Social Welfare and Family.
- The objective of ROM UP is to set up an international Romani network to raise awareness of successful educational experiences among Roma that have already shown that they are effective. We see them as effective when Roma children get good marks, when they achieve



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greater school success. And also when they reduce truancy; reduce or even eliminate truancy.

- ROM UP is based on recommendations and input from previous research on educational inclusion, such as the INCLUDED project.
- The project is innovative because it has a Romani network that involves everyone and gives the Roma a say.
- The approach is based on working through successful experiences and not best practice. Successful experiences are ones that have been scientifically proven to give results, which are backed by results. They are not called good because someone says they are good but because of the results they achieve.
- It is also innovative because throughout the project process, in everything we have achieved this year, we have done it together with ordinary Roma. They have taken part in the working groups, in the evaluation group which has decided on measures, project meetings and in all decision-making areas.
- Based on these criteria we selected 22 educational initiatives in Europe of which 11 were chosen based on their compliance with the criteria. The 11 initiatives chosen will be presented at the next roundtable.
- We have drawn up 2 European reports that you can download unabridged from the project website. The first contains the successful initiatives and the second the voices of the people taking part in the experiences.
- We have run national working groups in all the countries composed of teachers, Roma from grassroots communities and government officials. The national groups looked at ways of implementing the initiatives in their countries.
- We are also setting up an international Romani network open to everyone who is interested in the educational inclusion of Roma. I would encourage everyone here to take part in it.
- Finally I would just say that we are drawing up a Final Guide that will be on the website soon.



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- As for promotion we have produced newsletters in all the languages involved, including Romani, and have run national seminars and a website.

<http://www.rom-up.eu/newsletters.htm>

- In terms of the quality and usefulness of the project, which are crucial for us, we have set up the quality evaluation group and an advisory council which a wide range of Roma have taken part in.
- Finally, I would highlight the transparency of the project. We have published the minutes of the meetings that have decided all matters relating to the project.
- I invite all of you to send the successful educational experiences that you know about to be examined by the future Observatory and included in the list of successful experiences if they meet the requirements mentioned before.

### 3. The 11 selected successful educational experiences that have been scientifically proven to be effective for the inclusion of Roma in and through education

#### 1. Decisive family/community participation (Spain)



**Sarai Santiago Cortés (Mother. Volunteer on La Paz School, Albacete)**

- I'm from Albacete. I'll tell you briefly how families take part at La Paz school, both in the classroom and in the school. I was a pupil at the school before the Learning Communities were set up, where cooperation by families was practically nil. I'd never seen a family member go into the school. There were cases of mothers who didn't even know who their children's tutors were.
- The learning communities opened the school up to families and volunteers. Everyone had a say in the meetings. Families play a key role. For example, we have now set up an adult and secondary school there which was a real struggle for the families. It's very nice, every time I see it I'm touched, seeing the Roma parents go into the school holding hands with their children and no one leaves the school because some parents go to a classroom to study, others will help in the kids' classes and others stay there chatting with the teachers. Also in mediation cases, the mediator asks the parents to help to see what's best for their kids.
- We help to improve relationships at the school because Roma families can better understand Roma children. When Roma see us and especially Roma women, they realise that studying is something that is not only for non-Roma.
- We teach them how to behave and they see how adults from the neighbourhood can also sort things out by talking.
- Thank you, I've summarised the information, we're here supporting the school because we see it as ours and there we're going to be.

**2. Family and community education (Spain)**

**Pedro Bermúdez (Father. Volunteer La Paz school, Albacete)**



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- My name's Pedro and I volunteer at La Paz school. I'll summarise my time at the school. I start doing social service in the community and because of that I got into the classes with the teachers. I do all the activities with them in class, we do everything. We feel at home at the school.
- A mediator, Antonio, who was with us before gave me the chance to get my leisure instructor licence and I did it. I've worked in summer school for 3 months at La Paz. The FINDE CENTRE coordinator offered me the chance to work with him and now I'm with him. The FINDE CENTRE opens when the school closes from Friday until Sunday. We open it so that the children can be there doing activities and not out there doing things they shouldn't be doing. There is a computer room, crafts, magic, leisure facilities, Wi-Fi rooms, a computer assembling workshop, and a recording studio where local people record their demos. It's all non-profit, everyone gets in free.
- The parents wanted to set up an adult school at La Paz school and we managed to do it. It's inside the school. I come out of my classroom and I bump into my daughter and my granddaughters. I say, "Oh, I'm late", and I get my granddaughter who's in the classroom next to me. Getting my school certificate is very important; it's very important that we Roma study to change a lot of things in the Roma community. For me it's a gateway to achieving many things we need and want.
- An example: I went to take my daughter her sandwich and the teacher said to me: "Pedro, can you hang on here in the classroom for a moment as I'm off to make some photocopies". And I was left with all the children until she came back. I told her I had to go to study as well! It's like our second home.
- Previously the teachers just called us at home because our kid had broken a window or because they had hit someone, but not now. Now the teachers talk to the mothers to tell them their kids are doing well and getting good marks. It's very important for us to be in the classroom, and they even change the way they behave. I would encourage anyone who



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isn't a Roma volunteer to become one because it's very rewarding for everyone and a great benefit for your children. Thank you all very much.

**Belinda Siles (Head teacher CEIP Mare de Déu de Rocío a Sant Vicenç dels Horts)**

- How can we open up a school's classrooms?
- When we run a school we think that we're smarter than others and we have to decide the things that are done. When you walk into a school that is a learning community, it's not like that: it is they who decide what will be done in the school; they are interested in training, for example.
- If there is significant participation in the school, then it will work.
- I'm going to focus on a successful initiative called Dialogic Literary Gatherings. It's a scheme whereby non-academic adults, people who haven't been to university, read classical literature and then we talk about the books. These discussions for adults change interaction with the child at home because the parents start to read at home and this has a very positive effect on the child

**Núria Marín. Professora del CEIP Mare de Déu de Montserrat (Terrassa)**

- Parents are very important in learning communities. I will talk about the joint committee. It consists of a Roma mother, an Arab mother, a non-Roma mother, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year students and a teacher. This year we created the Commitment to Education Charter, in which all the issues have been considered from different standpoints. It's important to make joint committees the norm; you can't have teachers meeting in one place and parents in another. When we're all together participation improves, education and school success improves, which is what we're looking for.

**3. Decreasing the drop-out rate among Roma children. (Bulgaria)**



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### **Evgeni Angelov (Head teacher- Bulgaria)**

- The programme is designed to make schools into an attractive place for children and families.
- We have worked in 180 schools and the main concept of the project is to help teachers so they can work better with students and ensure they all succeed at school.
- The main components of the programme focus on students, families and teachers. We work as a team and do different activities and that way we get a school that everyone finds attractive.
- At first sight our school (shows photo) looks like any other school but the difference is we only have Roma students. We are proud to be called a Romani school because we're there to get the best results. We're a team of professionals focused on what's best for the children and trusted by parents.
- The person I share a table with is a mother at the school. Children see the school as a place that belongs to them. Parents are empowered to take part in the decision-making process. All the children have the chance to get a quality education and achieve something in life. The children are always doing something useful; they are always engaged in activities that develop their skills.



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- Since 2003 we've had a process in place to attract new people, for example a summer school for students who do not speak Bulgarian well. We also run activities with these student parents.
- Our children get very good results not only in music and dance but also in literature, Bulgarian and history.
- We work in partnership with other schools. We are part of a large network of 180 schools. When we dream with others it marks the beginning of reality.
- We've also set up a parents' club where we work to engage parents in school life.
- Our extensive experience shows that partnership between parents and the school gives the best results.

#### 4. Roma culture classes in state school curriculum (Bulgaria)



#### **Krasimira Blagoeva (Head Teacher – Bulgaria)**

- This programme is run in 30 schools in Bulgaria to introduce Roma grammar and culture into schools.
- Our school has three ethnic groups (Bulgarians, Roma and Turks). The programme's aims are firstly to get the various groups to be more tolerant of each other to find a way to learn from other cultures, and



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secondly to prevent Roma children dropping out by making the school more appealing.

- We also aim to enhance the identity of Roma children so that the other children are more aware of Roma culture and to improve language skills.
- We've been working on this programme for ten years.
- Parents help at the school by running activities and also together they take decisions about problems, the doors are always open and we always have a close connection with the teaching staff.
- We have focused our impact on the community in different ways: 1) tolerance, 2) a presentation opportunity (we make ourselves visible and get recognition from institutions) and 3) we have a lot of training and connections with other schools. This means we can have better trained and more professional teachers. We can share and exchange everything.
- Families are central to the school.
- Our kids get very good results.

### 5. Socio-medical centres for Roma (Greece)



#### Eirini Fragkouli (mediator at community of Aliveri-Greece)

- Women's Place provides services to the Roma. We are in a disadvantaged area where there are thousands of Roma. Against this backdrop the centre became a self-organised and self-managed centre, a meeting place.



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- Over 80% of children did not go to school. So we worked on education and inclusion at school as a value.
- We decided to turn things round by working with both the children and the women and so we set up a useful programme. We also provided a meeting place outside their homes.
- The main aim was to develop greater confidence and skills. Getting ready for a future job, internet training, literacy, cooking, dance, sports, discussion, visiting markets, inviting experts, visiting cooperatives.
- The women have realised the power of their voices and have learned to use the services offered by the local authority.
- The women have done a range of training schemes. They have grasped the value of education for their children through their own involvement in the educational process.
- The number of children enrolled has increased since 2006 and the dropout rate has fallen from 40% to 10%.
- The joint activities between women and their children are also important to interact with people who are not Roma.
- We work with the girls to try to prevent early marriages. One of the girls in our area is doing secondary education.
- Now a lot of the women work outside the community. Recently three women decided with their husbands to set up a cooperative in Aliveri. So I think that women are critical if you want to transfer this experience to your situation.
- It is also important to point out that there is a local political commitment to the initiative.

### 6. Interactive Groups (Spain)

**Loli Santiago** (volunteer Roma woman working with interactive groups at the Mediterrani Infant and Primary School in Tarragona)

- Good morning. I'm here to present my experience as a Rom and volunteer with the interactive groups in the learning community at the



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Mediterrani Infant and Primary School. The Mediterrani is in one of the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Tarragona.

- There are 147 boys and girls at the school and most of them are Roma.
- In the school year 2011-2012 learning communities were devised to improve educational outcomes and promote greater social cohesion. As a Learning Community the school runs successful educational initiatives such as the interactive groups.
- Interactive groups are a way of organising the classroom. The students are divided into small mixed groups. Maximum diversity in the group (gender, culture and learning rates) is important. Interactive groups are based on dialogic learning, in which children learn from interacting with each other and with adults. It has been shown that interactive groups improve learning and coexistence.
- Typically in a class we do three or four activities, each lasting 20 minutes. All the groups rotate to do all the activities. In each group there will be an adult (a family member, a volunteer, an ex-student) who helps organise the group's interactions. I'm a volunteer for the interactive groups in Primary 3 for two days a week. I'd like to talk about the impact of me taking part as a Roma volunteer in the classroom. For example, the kids are very surprised that I'm a Rom and I've been through school. A child asked me 'But you're a Rom?' and he looked at me in such a way. That child used to barely speak in class, and now there's been an enormous change. Another child, José, had a hard time talking, and now he comes to the classroom and always wants to sit next to me and do the activities. The girls, for example, tell me things differently than they do to other adults just because they know I'm a Rom. In addition to doing their work the kids talk about things that are important to them. When a mother comes along, they proudly show their mum that I'm a Rom and it encourages them. I feel that me being there as a role model in the classroom is very positive. For them it is strange having a Rom in their classroom who answers their questions about the things they're working on.



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**Juan Riera (student, 5<sup>th</sup> grade of Primary school at Mare de Déu del Rocío Infant and Primary School in Sant Vicenç dels Horts)**

- Good morning everyone. I've come along to talk about interactive groups. Interactive groups are a way to organise the classroom. At my school in a class lasting an hour and a half we make groups of four children who sit at four large tables and at each large table there's an adult who might be the tutor, learning support teacher, a trainee teacher or a volunteer (parents, brothers and sisters, cousins, etc.).
- I should say we love doing interactive groups; it might seem strange but we do two or three times as much work as we change tasks every 20 minutes. I find the time just flies.
- First the teacher tells us about the topic and then we do the activities. We do things in a dialogic way, in other words we all help each other so what we can't do a classmate can help us with; we help each other when one of us hasn't really grasped something. We explain things in our own words so we understand better. Plus you learn most not when someone explains it to you but when you have to explain it to someone else.
- The adult helps us, not in the traditional way but by drawing out lots of ideas which we share. It creates a great atmosphere in the class, and



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when we go out in the playground we have fewer conflicts because we're better friends. If someone isn't playing we ask them to come and play with us.

- We love it when the volunteers come along, who are often our relatives. That way they see how we do things at school and can help us later on at home.

### **Maria Riera (student, 2<sup>nd</sup> grade of Primary school at Mare de Déu del Rocío Infant and Primary School in Sant Vicenç dels Horts)**

- Hello, my name's Maria and I'm doing Primary 2. I also work in interactive groups. Two days a week the mothers of my classmates come along and I do maths and on another day Catalan.
- We make groups of four children and we go round all the groups. Groups with mothers are fun because they don't explain things like the teachers do but help us to answer the questions. If another child doesn't know how to do an activity we help them, we don't do it for them, because that way they learn.
- I really like working this way because I can help others, I can talk more and because I learn a whole lot better.
- We do more activities in groups and the time goes by very quickly. I like learning to read and write. Doing it in interactive groups is much easier.
- I've asked Mum several times if she could come along to do interactive groups in my class but I have a little sister and so she can't. Sometimes when she can she comes along to do other things and when my mum comes to the school I'm very happy.

### **7. Dialogic Literary Gatherings (Spain)**



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**Carlos González ( student, 6th grade of Primary school at Mare de Déu de Montserrat Infant School in Terrassa)**

- Good morning. My name's Carlos González and I'm 11. I've come here to tell you about the Dialogic Literary Gatherings.
- Dialogic Literary Gatherings are discussions about universal classic literature. They're run like this: we take the book home, we read it and note down our ideas that we want to talk about during the discussion session in a notebook. The next day we get into a circle in the classroom and have the discussion. The teacher asks us who's got any ideas, you put your hand up and they write you down on a sheet of paper. The discussion begins with an idea from a classmate and every idea generates a different discussion. All the kids in the class really get involved in the discussions and we speak in turn.
- At school we've read lots of interesting books, including The Odyssey, Don Quixote, The Aeneid, The Arabian Nights, Romeo and Juliet, The Canterville Ghost, Tirant lo Blanc, Lazarillo de Tormes, etc. Each book generates a lot of discussion: we've talked about ambition, religion, friendship, courage, love, cribs. I especially liked the love topic because it



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opens up your heart, you talk about feelings, why you're thinking about a girl and you want the best for her.

- Now I'm in Primary 6 and we're reading Romeo and Juliet. I like it because it makes us think a lot about our lives and our future. We're learning a lot of words and we're learning that at that time they used expressions we no longer use. We've also improved lots of things in the way we talk.
- Now my classmates will tell you a lot more about the literary discussions.

### **Juan Giménez (student, 6th grade of Primary school)**

- I'll continue with the Dialogic Literary Gatherings. We like these discussions because they are a place where we can express our feelings and share them with our classmates. I talk about things in my life and sometimes things about my family which is Roma. We have some different customs. I like the respect we have in the discussion. We talk about various topics and can say what we think about anything.
- We respect ideas even when we don't agree with them. I'm at ease and relaxed and I'm increasingly willing to share my thoughts.
- For example with The Odyssey the question of religion came up. In our class there are kids from lots of religions and we spoke about that not dividing us, what unites us is our friendship
- We learn to read, to think, to express ourselves better and have a rich vocabulary. We learn metaphors, expressions, puns, etc. We learn to think when we choose our idea and we learn to think when we hear someone else's idea, because that might make you change your own idea. We learn to have our own opinion about many important issues in life. We learn to enjoy reading.
- We realise that the most important thing is to listen to us and respect us.
- I've found that we all think differently and sometimes some of my classmates' ideas that I liked I've kept for myself too.
- My favourite book is The Odyssey which I read when I was 8.
- When I tell my family this they are very proud of me.



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### **Manuel Moreno (student, 5th grade Primary school)**

- I want to share reading The Aeneid. It's a classical book that talks about the war between the Greeks and Trojans. It reminds me of The Odyssey that looked at the war from the Greek point of view. In The Aeneid, Aeneas, king of the Trojans, founded another city to live in after Troy was burnt down. It led to discussions about wars, people's ambition. We talked about power and how ambition leads to numerous disasters. We talked about selfishness and possession which go against generosity and love.
- Another discussion was about The Trojan Horse which helped us to discuss lies and betrayal. Betrayal is also present in life.
- I like them because it's somewhere I have fun and understand everything people are talking about. When at home I haven't understood a word or an idea I put my hand up and I wait my turn. They all explain it to me.
- The mothers congratulate us on the ideas we come up with. My dad always reminds me the day before that I've got to read the book and asks me to tell him about the chapter.
- We'd like to invite you to come to our school and see our discussions

Next a video was shown featuring a dialogic literary gathering at Brians Prison, in the women's section in the SCD.

**8. A good start in school (Romania)**

**9. A good start (pre-school) (Romania)**

### **Simona Barbu (ROMANI CRISS)**

- I am very happy to see so many Romani children.
- A project which ROMANI CRISS ran in Romania between May 2001 and June 2002. It was partnered by UNICEF and the Romanian Ministry of Education. The aim was to reduce the shortcomings of Roma children when they went to school. To prepare them to join the first year with



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initial training. To provide access to quality education. The gap between Roma and non-Roma children was enormous.

- First we trained the teachers, aware of the importance of an intercultural approach, elements of Roma culture, and the curriculum and special materials for working with Roma children.
- Importance of the involvement of Roma parents in carrying out the children's activities. Bonds have to be forged between families and teachers.
- Opening an educational support centre which provided intensive training for Roma children. Development activities for language, maths skills, creative activities and civic education. Also support with homework afterwards.
- Impact: 56% of the children went on to second level studies and it became a model for early education work. The Ministry of Education used it as a model as did other organisations. We believe it would also be possible in other countries and we believe that preschool learning is very important

### **Adriana Chefalan (ROMANI CRISS)**

- June 2012-June 2012
- The scope of this project is to provide access to quality education and care for disadvantaged children to achieve development objectives and get them ready for school.
- In addition to the children, the activities included the participation of parents, grandparents, educators, local authorities and teachers.
- 90% of the parents enrolled their children in the kindergarten. We mentored them and defrayed travel costs and also delivered non-formal education at home.
- Community centre.

### **Maria Enache (Roma woman from the community)**



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- I would like to share my experience. We are very poor. We work all day and we cannot look after our children. After visiting the centre and seeing the activities that we could do at home. The children were very happy when they came back from school and were looking forward to going back the following day.
- Before the project, our kids did not behave well at home and they had no manners. They teach them how to use a fork, eat, how to behave. They are better and I also benefit from it a lot. We are looking forward to the next project. As I said we work all day and the centre is a good place for our children.
- This is what I wanted to say; thank you for your attention.

(A video is shown)

## 10. Roma Families Learning (Ireland)

### **Paul Mario (musician and community worker) i Josef Duna ( Roma community worker from the Czech Republic living in Ireland)**

- Rural town in the west of Ireland. Seventy Roma families in the area.
- There were lots of children who had stopped going to school. No adults went to adult education classes. We wanted to support families and schools.
- After our initiative, 55 parents started going to classes where they had not been before. They drew up a small booklet, or all the kids took part, which helped the parents understand the school system.
- Almost all the families came from the Czech Republic and very few were Polish. Meeting with families to talk about the importance of the education system.
- First of all we listened to the parents; we listened to what they wanted. We gave them a questionnaire and the results told us that all the parents wanted their children to be academically successful at school. There was a disconnect between what they wanted and reality because they wanted



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success but there were barriers to communication between them and educational institutions. We have managed to overcome that.

- Josef's role was crucial in getting information across and engaging the families. I'm a musician in the community, and we set up a group that initially had 5 or 6 people. Now there are 65 of us and we introduced traditional Roma songs.
- The project has helped to plant the seeds of our children's future.

### 11. Roma students meeting (Spain)



(A video of the meetings of Roma students was shown)

### Ana Contreras,, President of Drom Kotar Mestipen. Leader organization of ROM UP project

- We brought together between 200 and 300 women at the student meetings. The most important thing is the impact on women we achieved... As a result of the meeting lots of of them went back to studying or continued studying because they were empowered, they saw



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themselves in the success stories they saw at the meetings. Their target is to get to university. That's one thing. Then also the women who organised the meeting with Drom Kotar Mestipen were already taking part two or three months beforehand, deciding, specifying what they wanted the meeting to be like, making it their own. They approached it as if it were their child's *plishka*, getting their families involved, and after the meeting they themselves set up an association or took part in the Parents' Association at their school.

### **Cristina Vázquez. Participant in a Roma student meeting**

- Hello everyone.
- I'm Cristina Vazquez, I'm 29. I am one of the women who went along to the meeting in the Bon Pastor neighbourhood. I learned that it was being held at my daughter's school. People were giving out information about it and I decided to go along to see what happened. I heard the testimonies of the women and I realised they had very similar lives to mine and I thought: if they can, why I can't I?
- The meeting has given me strength of purpose and helped me break down barriers, and why not?
- The first person I told was her, my daughter, who's four. I told her I was going to go to school and I was going to make an effort. I was surprised by her reaction, she was so proud... She was telling everybody, her teachers. Now she constantly tells me she wants to study and wants to be a doctor for animals.
- The meeting has changed my life. I've realised how important it is to get an education. As a mother the best I can offer my daughter is to be an example for her; study, learn, so she can take me as an example, so she has somewhere to look to take the decision to study and strive.
- I'm studying to do the university entrance exam for the over-25s. I know it's very tough but what I get out of it will be enormous. If all goes well I'd like to study journalism.



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#### 4. Future steps and sustainability of the successful educational actions in other countries.



- Ramón Flecha. Professor at the University of Barcelona. Main researcher of INCLUDED project. 6thFWP
- Juan García. School Inspector in the Education Department of the Regional Government of Castilla La Mancha
- Teodora Krumova. Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance. Bulgària.

#### **Teodora Krumova. Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance. Bulgària**

I want to tell you about a project that was run in Bulgaria. People always think that Roma children are poor and don't go to school because they have nothing to eat. The Bulgarian government ran a programme costing millions of euro which consisted of feeding the children. The result was that it did not change anything and dropout rates did not improve. The education problem was not a matter of food. The reason was that many children in rural areas had their milk and therefore didn't need it from the school. Moreover the children, who belonged to a Roma group in Bulgaria that has enormous



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pride and dignity, stopped going to school because they were offended by the charity initiative. It was a complete failure. This happened because no one asked the Roma what they wanted. The government's view was that nothing could be done about the Roma, that even when they were offered everything they still wouldn't go to school.

- Nobody knows better than us what's good for us. You have to run projects listening to the voice of Roma. You have to engage society and get the active involvement of Roma in measures.
- I want to emphasise two important points: the involvement of society and the active participation of Roma. Roma participation should be mandatory as a human rights issue and also as a matter of efficiency and effectiveness. If you are not respected, what happened with the school food will happen again.
- Taking part at school is not going to the celebrations but sitting, talking, taking decisions and implementing them. We need to take part from the beginning. We've seen this in all the experiences discussed today.
- A practice is successful if the efforts of all parties are combined. The education system, the Roma community, academia, everyone working as a team. It's a symbiosis that involves all parties.
- The important thing is to change attitudes and stereotypes. These must be altered in mainstream society and in the community. We have to drive the potential of the Roma community.
- I would especially congratulate the children who have spoken here today; they are the change. This is the first time I've seen the children talk and I congratulate them; seeing them is really important to change stereotypes, those that most people have and the ones we Roma have too.
- We need to think how we can put these success stories, strategies, methods, etc., on the agenda of the European Union. Large institutions like the Council of Europe have recognised the importance of this project. Now is the right time to do it, in order to replicate these experiences.



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- The criteria we've used to define what a successful action is we should require in European documents and recommendations to ensure that what happened with the milk project doesn't happen again, that actions do not end in failure.

### **Juan García. School Inspector in the Education Department of the Regional Government of Castilla La Mancha**

- I work in a district in Albacete with a high unemployment rate and exclusion, marginalisation and poverty.
- I want to explain the educational policies my Region is implementing to help Roma students succeed at school.
- In 2005 the state primary school had high rates of absenteeism and early school leaving, school failure, family breakup, an untenable situation. The Department gave us a report about the situation at San Juan school. There were two options: 1) close the school and reallocate students and 2) keep the students and reallocate the teachers and choose teachers who were motivated to implement a new educational project. The Department chose the inclusive option; keep the school open and reallocate the teachers.
- State education administration is a very important tool which should be used to publish the objectives, procedures and methods for achieving this aim in official journals. The Department issued the educational policy decisions to be implemented in decrees, orders, etc. We got rid of the posts and ran an open public selection procedure to choose teachers who were motivated and involved in improving learning.
- We decided to implement a Learning Communities educational project and we published it in a resolution. An educational administration can do a lot to turn a situation of exclusion around.
- Inclusion contract: it generates dialogic interaction and inclusion between school and district. In this approach the Roma are not removed from the class. This has changed the interest and motivation of children in La Paz and of the Roma.



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- Successful measures and strategies are the key to transforming La Paz school. People have talked about these experiences this morning:  
Time slot: extending school space and time from 25 to 29 hours, with the school open for longer each day (7.30 am to 7 pm and even some activities until 10 pm).
- FINDE Centre: the school is open from Friday afternoon to Sunday with lots of activities for the children (recreation, sports, education, etc).
- The key to participation is egalitarian dialogue. This year's parents' meeting was held outside the school in the district.
- We've also run training for family members which has been crucial for the school. Literacy, computing. We now run formal educational assistant courses, which has an impact on learning and community life at the school. They ask for more and more training; through the dialogic contract, family members got a school for adults at the same time and in the same facility as their children. Once again the Department showed how the system can be flexible to respond to a need.
- The role of Roma woman has been critical in transforming the school. They have got together and carried out the project.
- The importance of evaluating the results to ensure it is a successful educational experience. We are backed by the results achieved in the assessment of the boys and girls' skills.
- For us an educational experience is successful if children have developed core skills. We set up a team that monitors and assesses skills so we have a constant stream of data about the children's performance.
- The change to compulsory lower secondary education was also a barrier. The school decided to ask for secondary education at La Paz. Last year the first class of boys and girls came out of La Paz in compulsory secondary education.
- The Learning Communities project is transferable to other contexts. In our case we have a poor neighbourhood but it is applicable to all



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situations. Plus it is sustainable because it does not entail extra expenditure.

- At La Paz school we select and assess teachers every year. We only want teachers who are motivated and committed and of course well trained.

### **Ramón Flecha. Professor at the University of Barcelona. Main researcher of INLCLUDED project. 6<sup>th</sup> FWP**

- Thanks and greetings
- I have what might be called the scientific part. The European Commission is organised into Directorates, like Ministries or Departments. There is one that is for scientific research. It aims to collect scientific evidence about each topic and create new evidence. They want to define policies based on evidence. The important thing is not actions but results. To get results we need to work from evidence.
- The DG I'm talking about does not make policy. Rather it provides information to the people who do make policy so they have the foundations on which to base it. It decided to run a project to gather evidence about achieving success in education and also in housing, health, social inclusion. This is the INCLUDED project. The educational outcomes I am going to outline today have been presented to the European Parliament twice.
- The Commission's aim is to replace ideas by scientific evidence that gets results.
- There are measures that lead to failure and measures that lead to success. Successful measures are those that lead to success in any context where they are used, and these are the ones that should be extended to the entire population. All children have the right to quality education, a better distribution in the classroom, etc. which gives them the chance to survive in today's society.



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- A word of warning: successful measures are not best practices. There are best practices that are not successful measures. You can carry out really nice measures but if the children do not achieve good academic results, then they are not successful measures.
- Any school that puts in place successful measures will see learning take off in languages, in mathematics, in values, in music, in emotions, in everything. We are sometimes told that performance depends on the parents' qualifications, on the ethnic diversity of the school, but this is completely false. It is not true. They are elementary statistical errors. If it were true, how can a school go from a 17% to an 85% pass rate in the Catalan Government's core skills test if it has the same socio-economic level and the same parents' qualifications when it gets a 17% pass rate and when it gets an 85% pass rate? It does not depend on that. The difference is that in the interim successful measures were introduced. Once we know what the successful measures are, if there is failure it's because they're not being used.
- The European Commission defines early school leavers as people aged 18-24 who have only lower secondary education or less. All children who do not do more than this will be at risk of social exclusion.
- Articles have already been published in the Cambridge Journal of Education, the Harvard Educational Review and the Qualitative Inquiry about interactive groups and communicative research methodology.
- In Spain there are more than 100 schools which are implementing these measures, which means several thousand children. I really appreciate this work and effort to try to transfer these measures to other contexts. There are agreements with universities in South Korea, the United States. An agreement is being drawn up with eight South American governments to try to transfer these actions.
- Success is cheaper than failure. It is not a question of money. It is not true that you cannot do anything owing to the economic crisis because in fact people are doing lots of interesting things right now. The number of



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students at La Paz school has gone up and this has not involved much greater spending.

- The Regional Government of Andalucía has published an order and hopes to have 100 more learning communities by the end of the year.
- Separation is much more expensive, and especially excluding troublesome children from the classroom and school as you've condemned them to long-term exclusion.
- When you want to turn a school into a learning community the first thing you do is get everyone to share a dream. The first dream we have is to improve the school, get good results and be able to go to university. Everyone agrees about this.
- Once you've achieved educational success, new opportunities arise; at La Paz, for instance, they are beginning to set up cooperatives.
- There are many professionals who are reluctant to implement successful measures. They argue that successful measures require a lot of investment, and this is not true.

(Discussion. 43 minutes)

### 5. Conclusions and closing session

- Ramon Terrassa. General Director of Community and Civic Action of the Department of Social Welfare. Government of Catalonia
- Neus Vergés. Head of Educational Community Support Services. Department of Education. Government of Catalonia
- Ana Contreras. President of Romani Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipen



**Ana Contreras,. President of Drom Kotar Mestipen. Leader organization of ROM UP project**

- We know that the situation of the Roma in Europe is very difficult and we know that education is the way to transform this situation. But not just any education; it means the implementation of successful educational measures. Today we have seen how they are used in five different countries and we have seen the results achieved, as children learn more and faster and how we as families can study.
- Our project has ended but not the journey we have begun. The International Romani Network will continue all this work because we have a dream to get all organisations in Europe fully engaged.
- Today is a historic day because we have found the vaccine to combat the school failure of Roma children. I hope that this vaccine can be transferred to all children.



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**Neus Vergés. Head of Educational Community Support Services.  
Department of Education**

- Proof of the need to establish common policies for the inclusion of the Roma.
- Diversity helps us grow, but we must work for equal opportunities for all.
- I would highlight the importance of the participation of Roma in Roma projects.
- Only education and training can help combat discrimination; we need the identity of the Roma and we have to promote the equality of differences.
- Most of the experiences show that strategies are needed to motivate, train and raise awareness of the importance of gender. The decisive involvement of Roma families as active members in schools.
- We need to strive for inclusive and integrating education that fosters educational success and social cohesion for all students.
- I encourage you to continue in the same vein and networking with the various countries.

**Ramon Terrassa. General Director of Community and Civic Action of the  
Department of Social Welfare. Government of Catalonia**

- Thanks and greetings
- Today we have held a conference that I think we will all remember. We are leaving with the feeling that there is a way, there are options and success is possible. I think this has been amply demonstrated today.
- I would also like to thank the people who have travelled a long way to be here.
- We have a responsibility to ensure Roma students achieve academic success. We will make the effort needed. We will work together as departments to achieve more, and I am personally committed to that.
- After the funded project has been completed, it needs to continue and everyone should use this network. The project should go on and we need to have lots of successful experiences in all schools.



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Participants from different tables of the Final Conference: partners, members of the avaluation group, participants in succesful educational actions and participants in the national working group of ROM UP.