



Dto. de Métodos de Investigación  
y Diagnóstico en Educación

# Higher Education Internationalisation and Mobility: Inclusion, Equalities and Innovation

## Supporting Roma Students to Access Higher Education

### *Good practice for widening the participation of Roma in Spanish Higher Education*

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## Report

**A Project funded by Horizon 2020: The EU Programme  
for Research and innovation Marie Skłodowska-Curie  
Actions (MSCA)  
Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (RISE)**





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To Cite:

Padilla-Carmona, T., Soria-Vílchez, A., A. 2015. Supporting Roma Students to Access Higher Education: Good practice for widening the participation of Roma in Spanish Higher Education. *Report as part of the Higher Education Internationalisation and Mobility: Inclusion, Equalities and Innovation Project. Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, Research and Innovation Staff Exchange, Horizon 2020. Grant agreement No. 643739.*

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## Executive Summary

### Project Aims

HEIM is a collaboration between three universities (Sussex, Umeå and Seville) and the Roma Education Fund (REF), based in Hungary with additional offices in Romania, Slovakia, Montenegro, and Serbia. The project comprises of a number of different components, or Work Packages, delivered over a 3-year period from January 2015 to December 2017, including secondments, staff exchange, research training and capacity-building, co-authored papers, and collaborative inquiry.

The HEIM Project has the following Research and Innovation Objectives:

1. To develop research and innovation capacity by building teams and sharing knowledge between early stage and experienced researchers.
2. To share knowledge about internationalisation programmes in the partner organisations via co-written papers, statistical datasets, literature reviews and workshops.
3. To investigate data comparatively on who is participating in selected internationalisation programmes e.g. student and staff mobility schemes.
4. To produce accounts based on literature, statistical data and empirical research, of potential equity and inclusion issues that need to be taken into account for internationalisation programmes.
5. To create a set of guidelines for reflexive and inclusive approaches to the internationalisation of higher education.
6. To contribute to methodological innovation across different fields.

The specific work package informing this report on Supporting Roma Students in Higher Education involved experienced and early stage researchers from Sussex, Umeå and Seville, and a residency at the REF head offices in Budapest, Hungary in March 2015. The intention was to learn from REF and their partners' expertise in order to produce country-specific briefing reports on higher education internationalisation and mobility, with a particular focus on access and inclusion of Roma students. The reports scope broad issues and policies and synthesise key resources in order to frame further research on Roma students and international higher education for the remainder of the HEIM project and to suggest recommendations for best practice in relation to country-specific issues, policies and initiatives.



## Report Scope

This report aims to identify and debate key aspects concerning Roma community participation in Higher Education. We introduce several initiatives developed in Central and Eastern European countries related to increasing the rate of Roma students in Higher Education. The analysis is focused on identifying good practice in order to include it in the operational plan developed within the National Strategy for Social Inclusion of the Roma Population in Spain 2012-2020. This information may be useful for those governmental and non-governmental organisations interested in developing new means of social inclusion of Roma community within Spanish society.

## Summary of Report Findings

Our research has identified the following good practice in Spain but also areas that need attention:

### Good Practices in Spain

- Tendency of improvement in all educational indicators. We highlight the apparent increase in the completion rate of Roma students in post compulsory education.
- The rate of early dropouts is high in Spain (64%) though not as high as in others countries with a significant Roma population (85%-98%).
- More than 25 years of policy, plans and institutions that carry out inclusion strategies.
- Cross-cutting between some aspects of the inclusive strategies.
- High participation rate of Roma community in the design, implementation and monitoring of inclusive plans and measures.
- There are specific and financial supported programmes made to encourage participation in Higher Education among Roma populations (e.g. *Programa para facilitar el acceso y la continuidad de estudios medios y superiores de jóvenes estudiantes gitanos y gitanas* of the Fundación Secretariado Gitano).
- Awareness of the importance of giving visibility to Roma people's achievements.

### Areas to be developed

- The lack of specific statistics about the Roma community in Education as well as their lack of comparability and regular updating.
- The lack of a specific focus on Higher Education which is mainly located just as a part of post compulsory education



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- The national strategies for widening participation in Higher Education among non-traditional groups do not identify Roma as a target group.
- The need for more qualitative research that would lead to identify not only what should be increased but also how to do it.



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## Introduction

The Roma<sup>1</sup> population in Spain still faces significant challenges to complete compulsory secondary education, and therefore fostering Roma students' participation in University might be considered a high ambition that requires short and medium-term goals like reducing early dropout rates. However, it is important to recollect that this report has been developed within the HEIM Project, whose scope is higher education inclusion; hence the emphasis is on specific actions at this level.

Moreover, this goal is important in itself, since although unemployment is a pressing issue for all people in Spain, graduates have an unemployment rate (14.80) well below those of professionals with a vocational education (25.60) or high school (23.20) qualification. Whether other actions at lower levels are developed, promoting access to university will have a greater impact on the employability of Roma.

In addition, while the inclusion of Roma children at school is familiar in many countries, the idea of Roma students at university remains rare. A cohort of university Roma would be a powerful stimulus to a) provide a model for other Roma, and b) to change the traditional stereotype the general population continues having of them. Furthermore, a growing pool of Roma graduates that identify themselves as Roma and that return to their communities, could lead to creating new opportunities for other Roma people.

Convinced, therefore, of the benefits of increasing participation of Roma in higher education working towards social inclusion, this report develops the following sections:

- A description of existing statistics in Spain (compared to other countries with high percentage of Roma population) to determine the characteristics of Roma in our country, including a review of the attitudes of the general population towards this group.
- Description of the plans and main procedures undertaken by the Spanish state to encourage the life improvement of this group and its inclusion as full members of society.
- The presentation of a set of programmes developed in other countries (Central and Eastern Europe) specifically focused on increasing access to higher education for Roma, under the assumption that they might provide insight to Spanish policies.

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<sup>1</sup>We use here the term "Roma" to include different groups in Europe like Gypsies, Kale, Sinti, Travelers, and others. However, the Spanish Roma population claims for the use of the term *gitano/a* which better represents their specific characteristics and nationality.



- The formulation of recommendations for Spain derived from the research activity carried out during the stay at Roma Education Fund (Budapest) as part of Work Package No. 4 of HEIM project.

## **Roma People in Spain: Issues of Participation in Higher Education and Social Inclusion**

According to EURoma report (2010), Roma are the largest ethnic minority existing in Europe, with a more pronounced localisation in Central and Eastern Europe countries. They are estimated to be a population of between 10 and 12 million people. The Spanish Roma community is one of the largest in the continent. According to Laparra (2007) they may be the second largest, after the Romanian. In relative terms, between 1.6% and 1.9% of the Spanish population is Roma, while the percentage of Roma compared to the general population in EU27 is 1.2% (Laparra, 2011).

The Spanish Roma population is unofficially estimated to be made up of 725 to 750 thousand people, of which 40% live in Andalusia, although there is also a significant percentage of the Roma community in Madrid, Valencia and Barcelona (Laparra, 2007). In recent years, however, there has been an increase of Roma from Bulgaria and Romania, as these countries entered the European Union. However, it is impossible to know exactly which number they represent, as they are identified as a part of the general population of both countries that have migrated to Spain.

Compared to other ethnic groups, Roma are one of the most disadvantaged and marginalised clusters and can be considered a discriminated group in Spain, where there exists a stereotypical and prejudiced view of Roma by the general population (Open Society Institute, 2002). If we consider a recent study by the Centre for Sociological Research (2013), many non-Roma Spaniards would feel uneasy to have Roma people as neighbours. In fact, compared to other groups (LGBT, Muslims, elderly, disabled, etc.), their neighbours feel uneasy with Roma people at a higher percentage. As well, the survey respondents always considered Roma among the first three groups (of a total of 19 options which included women, foreigners, young people from other religions, disabled, etc.) to be most negatively affected in law procedures, in access to public services and housing, or in job recruitment and appointment.

The study carried out by the *Panel sobre discriminación por origen racial o étnico*<sup>2</sup> (2012) shows that, along with the Maghreb, Roma people perceive themselves as

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<sup>2</sup>Panel on discrimination due to racial or ethnic origin.



having the worst image among Spanish society. They perceive that the rest of Spaniards consider them thieves, vagrants and bad people. Other ethnic groups included in the survey (Afro-Latinos, Andean, Oriental, etc.) agree with this perception and believe that Roma are the worst treated by non-Roma: around 60% of respondents think that Roma are treated badly or very badly.

As well as these important signs of discrimination due to ethnicity, a significant sector of the Roma population is affected by processes of social exclusion and discrimination and has difficulty accessing social protection systems (education, housing, employment, health, etc.). This leads to below average participation in the educational, employment and social sphere.

Nevertheless, Laparra (2007) warns of the risk of falling into a stereotyping of Roma and affirms that the cases of people experiencing deprivation are much more visible despite constituting only 20% of the Roma community. According to him, the reality is that many Roma do not live in conditions of marginalisation and poverty and that they belong to different social sectors that are not as visible to society. "These Roma people today represent 80% of the Spanish Roma but their appearance of normality does not interest the media" (p. 78).

Existing statistical indicators, however, report a systemic inequality between Roma and *paya*<sup>3</sup> populations with regards to participation and social inclusion. Focusing exclusively on education, the area where most of the progress has been achieved, there are still many gaps between groups. Thus, the progress has been quantitatively important in Early Education (87% of Roma children, according to FSG, 2010a), and in Primary Education, with a percentage of 96.7% schooling (CIS, 2007), which is only about 3 points below the Primary schooling of the general population. In spite of this, the study of FSG (2013a) concludes that "Roma youth (12-24 years) are in disadvantage in terms of education and training when compared with the general population" (p. 173). Early dropout is the main problem affecting the Roma: 64% of Roma students (compared to 13% of the general population) do not finish compulsory secondary education. This finding is striking, since surveys (CIS, 2007; FSG, 2013a) suggest that among Roma the idea of education as being fairly or very important as a vehicle for success is widely accepted. Additionally, it is in the educational field where Roma population shows lower levels of perceived discrimination (*Panel sobre discriminación por origen racial o étnico*, 2012).

Early dropout has been explained as a method of general resistance to policies that promote inclusion, since they are perceived as further assimilatory forces (Carrasco and Bereményi, 2007). In this sense, we can see how there is still a certain mistrust of Roma against the school itself, which is perceived as alien to their own culture, as

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<sup>3</sup>"Payo/a" is the word that Roma people use in Spain to refer to a non-Roma man (payo) or woman (paya).

a space built on patterns of the cultural majority in which they do not feel represented or recognised (Fakali, 2012).

However it is important to note that early dropout<sup>4</sup> is even higher in other countries with big Roma populations, as indicated in the report of Brüggemann (2012) in which dropout rates fall within the range of 85% (shown in Moldova) and 98% (for Albania).

Given this situation, the Roma participation in post-compulsory levels is very small, although related statistics are quite incomplete and not always updated. The general reference data are those provided by the study of Laparra (2007) based on different demographic studies which reported that only between 0.3% (data from the study of CIS, 2007) and 1.2% (data from FSG / Edis, 2005) of the Roma population has a university degree, whereas for the rest of the population the percentage is 22.3%. Likewise between 3.1% (data from the study of CIS, 2007) and 6.2% (data from FSG / Edis study, 2005) of Roma have completed non-university post-compulsory education (vocational training or high school).

It seems however, that the prospects allow us to be a little more optimistic. Fakali (2012) states that there is a minority but growing group of young Roma that access and finishes higher education. Similarly, a more recent study focused on the Roma population aged 20-24 years (FSG, 2013a) provides a more optimistic estimate that would indicate that participation in post-compulsory education is increasing in recent years. This paper found that:

- Only 8.9% of Roma (compared to 39.9% of the general population) completes the vocational training or the baccalaureate schooling.
- Only 2.2% of young Roma (21.5% in the general population) graduate from university

Nevertheless, the availability of statistics in Spain on Roma in general, and in particular regarding their participation in higher education, is unfortunately very limited. This is important when analysing the educational progress of this group because it makes it difficult to assess the advances that have been made to its inclusion in quantitative terms.

Nor is it easy to locate more detailed statistics on access to higher education and academic progress of Roma in other countries with a high proportion of Roma. Here we use the values provided by the most recent diagnoses made by Roma Education Fund (REF, 2009a and 2009b; 2010; 2012a, 2012b, 2012c and 2012d) in countries where this organisation operates –sometimes working with unofficial estimates and

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<sup>4</sup> Early dropout refers to leaving the educational system before completing the compulsory education that in Spain comprises 6 years of Primary Education as well as 4 years of lower Secondary Education.



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data that are not directly comparable. However, these statistics let us get a general idea about the limited Roma participation in university education.

In Macedonia, the estimated percentage of Roma who have completed university education is 0.3% (compared to 13.3% of the general population) although according to Velzovski (2011) the number of college students is experiencing a steady increase. In Hungary, 1.2% of young Roma people have higher education (Bello, 2011). In the case of Romania, between 0.6% and 0.8% of Roma have university degrees (compared to 8.2%-10.8% of the population). Similar values were found for Slovakia (0.2% vs. 11%), Albania (0.2%) and Bosnia-Herzegovina (0.2%). In Montenegro there is discordance between official statistics, which estimate that 8% of Roma have completed university studies, and unofficial data which lowers this value to 0.3%. In Serbia, the estimated graduation rate is 0.9% for Roma.

The above presented statistics are similar to those found for the Spanish state, ranging between the same values of 0.3%-1.2% of the Roma population having university education.

## **Spanish Strategy and Key Actions to Promote the Social Inclusion of Roma**

This section deals with the main issues related to policy actions developed in Spain in order to promote the inclusion of Roma, after a brief description of the territorial organisation is presented as the decision making process is peculiar and complex in the country.

Spain is a highly decentralised country in which decision-making is distributed between the General State Administration and the authorities of the Autonomous Communities. The central education administration executes the general guidelines of the Government on education policy and regulates the basic elements of the system. Regional education authorities develop the State regulations and have executive and administrative competences for managing the education system in their own territory.

In education, for instance, the State keeps the power to establish the educational system organisation as well as the conditions for delivering academic titles. However, the Autonomous Communities can make decisions about schools, teachers, students as well as other issues. They have financial autonomy and can decide on the tuition fees and even create additional grants and scholarships others than those of the State.



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The Conference on the Sector of Education is the body for cooperation in education policy between the Ministry of Education and the Educational Authorities of the Autonomous Communities, and it aims to achieve the maximum coherence and inclusion of the Spanish Education System. The Minister and those responsible for education in the Autonomous Communities meet to exchange points of view, discuss draft rules and adopt territorial distribution criteria for the subsidies to finance different education programmes with the Autonomous Communities.

As a consequence, the Autonomous Communities government is important to be taken into account as many of the policies for Roma inclusion are created, designed and delivered at this level.

The political and institutional commitment for the inclusion of Roma in Spain began in 1989 when the *Plan for Roma Development* was launched. This Plan aimed at promoting social development and improving quality of life of Roma. Later on, in 2005, the State Council of the Roma was created. It is a cross-ministerial body that provides the institutional basis for the collaboration and cooperation of the Roma associations with the Central Government in order to develop the social welfare policies aiming at the integral promotion of the Roma community.

Spain also participated in the **Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015)**, a political commitment of several countries aimed at eliminating discrimination against Roma as well as reducing the existing gap between this group and the rest of the society. The Decade's main areas of intervention were: education, employment, health and housing. Other key issues such as poverty, discrimination and integration of gender perspective were also addressed.

The twelve countries participating in the initiative have a high proportion of Roma: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Spain. Slovenia, United States, Norway and Moldova had observer status.

More recently Spain signed the European Commission recommendations<sup>5</sup> and developed the **National Roma Integration Strategy for 2012-2020** (Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, 2011) which also deals with the above mentioned areas for the inclusion of Roma (education, employment, health and housing). The National Strategy sets out quantitative goals scoring as percentages of population to be reached in 2020, as well as some intermediate goals for 2015. In addition, complementary lines of action are set in social action, participation, improvement in knowledge of Roma group, women's equality, non-discrimination, promotion of culture, and special attention to the Roma population from other

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<sup>5</sup>Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions *An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020* (COM(2011)173 final).

countries. The development of the Strategy followed a participatory process including eight Ministries –all autonomous regions and the most representative Roma organisations.

As indicated, the Strategy sets out the objectives to be achieved by 2020 and its operational development is carried out by launching successive triennial plans that specify the measures and actions that will contribute to the goals' fulfilment. Currently and after the evaluation of the previous Action Plan for the Development of Roma Population 2010-2012 (Laparra, Fernández Hernández, Salinas, and Tsolakis, 2013), the first Operational Plan 2014-16 (Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality, 2013) has been designed.

We now consider the specific contributions of the National Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma in Spain 2012-2020 in relation to higher education, as well as the actions planned to achieve short-term goals (Operational Plan 2014-16).

The **overall objective of the Strategy for the area of education in relation to higher education** is number 4 which states the need to increase the educational level of the Roma population (all other objectives apply to Early Childhood Education, Primary school enrolment, and enhancing the performance of Roma at the compulsory Secondary level). This overall objective is linked to the specific target number 4.3: "Increasing the rate of Roma who have completed further education". Table 1 presents the goal in quantitative terms.

**Table 1**

OBJECTIVE 4: Increasing Educational Attainment of the Adult Roma				
Specific target 4.3	General population data	More recent data of Roma population	Goal for 2015	Goal for 2020
Increasing the rate of Roma who have completed further education	42,1,% (2006, EPA)	2,6% (2007, CIS)	5%	8%
(1) National Statistics Institute: "Active population survey 2006" (Annual data 2006). (2) Centre for Sociological Research (2007). Sociological survey in Roma population homes.				

Looking at the setting out of goals, it seems that there is no defined approach that advocates a greater presence of Roma at university, this objective being just part of the general idea of "increasing the level of education of Roma". Hence, when it is specified in more concrete targets we find that all post-compulsory education level



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(high school, middle and upper vocational training, college) is considered in the same way, failing to set out a specific focus on higher education.

The strategic actions that should enable the objective 4 are two (National Strategy 2012-2020): the promotion of programmes for career guidance and for transition from lower secondary education to vocational training; and measures to facilitate the access to university of Roma, including scholarship programmes. If we pay attention to the specific actions listed in the Operational Plan 2014-16, only one is related to higher education, though not limited to it: Activities to improve access and continuity of Roma young people in post-secondary education through individual and group support to the students themselves as well as their families.

Furthermore, a look at the measures associated with objective 4, especially those that at first glance may appear more linked to the specific objective number 4.3, identifies that some of the actions planned are focused on reducing early dropout, compensating inequalities and promoting vocational training. That is, it seems that there is a greater tendency to promote vocational training rather than other post-compulsory options (high school and college). While we understand that the priority is firstly, that Roma students complete their compulsory education and, secondly, to increase their presence in all post-secondary training options, higher education, as the ultimate goal, is the most overlooked in the Spanish plans and strategies for Roma inclusion. No concrete measures leading to increasing the number of students in higher education are even listed; a number which, moreover, is unknown, as it is lost in the generic category of "further education".

### **Some Notes on Spanish Widening Participation Strategy**

In spite of not being the focus of this report, it is important to mention the central aims of the Spanish strategy for widening participation. Following the London Communiqué (2007), significant advances have been made in Spanish universities, especially aiming at two goals: to improve the access of some groups that have been excluded from higher education, and to enhance their participation and progress in academic life.

Regarding the first objective, the current legislation establishes affirmative action in access to university studies, by reserving a quotas for adult students<sup>6</sup> (who do not

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<sup>6</sup> In this context, "adults" students are grouped in three categories: 1) Those over 25 years that have not gone through any Secondary Education, who must pass an especial examination and a quota of 2% of all university places are reserved for them; 2) Those over 40 years that can accreditate work experience related to the field of study they want to access to; 3) Those over 45 years and without a Secondary diploma also have to pass an especial examination. The over-40 and over-45 groups are reserved 1 to 3% of all university places.





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meet the requirements of the traditional path) and for students with special educational needs (those who can prove to have a disability). These special conditions when accessing the university do not mean financial support as these new students can benefit from the general grants system which is conditioned on the basis of the economic situation of the candidates as well as their performance.

As regards the latter objective, the most important milestone is the *University Student Statute* (RD 1791/2010) which, among other things, includes improvements in the services offered by the university to non-traditional students. This Royal Decree strengthens the already existing tutorials by a) creating new roles such as the Degree tutor and the tutor for students with disabilities, b) integrating the guidance activities into coordinated tutorial systems, and c) facilitating the compatibility between study and work through specific measures aiming to ensure adaptation to the needs of all students.

However, factors such as ethnicity and social origin are not specifically identified in these measures. Thus, Roma students who enter university are not considered as subjects of affirmative actions which might suggest that they are not getting access to the support they may require. In other words, once a Roma student (or, if preferred, a student from a family with low socioeconomic and cultural background) has entered the university, he/she is observed as equal as his/her non-Roma peers and, if the barriers he/she finds are economic, they are supposed to be covered by the general grants system<sup>7</sup>.

### **One Example of Spanish Practices: Programme to promote the Access and Progress of Roma Students at University Level**

In addition to other good practice carried out in Spain, we want to remark in this section one specific initiative concerned with the access to Higher Education of Roma students supported by Fundación Secretariado Gitano<sup>8</sup>. It is the *Programa para facilitar el acceso y la continuidad de estudios medios y superiores de jóvenes*

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<sup>7</sup> The national system of grants represented the 0.13% of the GDP in 2012/13 academic year. The average amount of grants was 3.342€. The percentage of new coming granted students was 38.2%, and they represent the 22.1% of the total number of university students. These data only account for the national grants since there are also specific grants provided by the regional governments as well as the higher education institutions (source: Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports, 2015).

<sup>8</sup>Fundación Secretariado Gitano is an NGO that actively works towards the inclusion and promotion of Roma community both at the national and the European level. Its main areas of intervention are: employment, social inclusion, education, health, gender equity, young people, housing, culture and international cooperation.



*estudiantes gitanos y gitanas*<sup>9</sup>, which is targeted at high school, vocational education and bachelor students (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, n.d.). Therefore, it is not exclusively focused on higher education, since in general it aims to promote the continuation of training after the compulsory education.

The programme was launched in the 1990s in view of the need to decrease the dropout rate during secondary education (EURoma, 2010). Fundación Secretariado Gitano has developed another programme called *Promociona*<sup>10</sup> in order to promote Roma students' transition from primary to secondary compulsory education (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2009).

The *Programa para facilitar el acceso y la continuidad de estudios medios y superiores de jóvenes estudiantes gitanos y gitanas* is coordinated by the Education department of Fundación Secretariado Gitano and financed by the Ministry of Health, Equity and Social Services in Spain.

According to Pérez (2010), the programme unfolds two fields of action: the first one focuses on economic support through a specific grant scheme; the second one is concerned with guidance support through individual tutoring, cooperative work with the families, and the participation in students' meetings organised by several Roma communities. The process involves several stages and activities:

- **Grant phase:** In this period the candidates can apply for the grants. They are selected on the basis of a merit criteria system. Cooperation and collaborative work with other Roma organisations are promoted in order to attract and select candidates.
- **Intervention:** Work at this stage includes tutorials with students and individual monitoring of their progress. The intervention also points to include the students' families as part of their learning process.
- **Assessment:** After the implementation of the activities, a monitoring of the programme is made through the analysis of all the information collected during the intervention. The assessment aims to change/improve any possible problem or mismatch detected.
- **Dissemination and impact:** In order to achieve greater impact within society, the programme's results, advances and progress are disseminated through media. This stage is decisive to achieve greater promotion among other Roma candidates..

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<sup>9</sup>Programme to promote access and retention in upper secondary and university studies of Roma students.

<sup>10</sup> "Get promoted" programme.



Table 2 shows the programme's evolution regarding the number of students granted and supported in the different post-compulsory educational levels since 2009 (FSG, 2009; 2010b; 2011; 2012; 2013b; 2014).

**Table 2**

	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
<b>Applications received</b>	238	277	347	380	432
<b>Grants</b>	224 (132 girls)	263 (103 girls)	300 (164 girls)	304 (174 girls)	323 (167 girls)
<b>Students in High School</b>	44	72	93	95	105
<b>Students in Vocational Education (lower)</b>	24	58	61	51	31
<b>Students in Vocational Education (upper)</b>	44	33		31	79
<b>Students in Higher Education</b>	108	91	126	127	108

One example of how dissemination is made to attract new Roma students into the programme is in the book titled *Historia de vida de 50 estudiantes gitanos y gitanas*<sup>11</sup> (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2008). With a direct and attractive style for young people, the publication presents the experiences of fifty Roma university students. All testimonials and accounts are narrated in first person, remarking the Roma identity of each protagonist as well as the benefits of getting into Higher Education.

## **Good Practice Examples for Widening Participation of Roma in Higher Education**

In this section we describe several programmes and experiences that we have identified as part of the secondment in Roma Education Fund (REF), Budapest. The

<sup>11</sup>Life stories of 50 Roma students



examples' selection as good practice are based on the following criteria: a) The initiatives are focused on widening the participation of students in universities, and therefore are aligned with HEIM goals; b) Evaluation studies of these initiatives have been made having evidence about their success and benefits available; and finally, c) The compatibility between the features and structure of the initiatives in the Spanish context. In addition, there are several other government-led practices aimed at widening access to higher education for Roma (in countries such as Romania, Macedonia, Montenegro, etc.) that we do not mention according to the above mentioned criteria.

### **Scholarship Programme In Roma Education Fund (REF)**

Roma Education Fund (REF) is a private organisation aiming to close the gap between Roma and non-Roma community with regards to the access to education. As for higher education, REF focuses on supplying and managing several scholarship programmes to support the access of Roma community to university. REF works in different countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Moldavia, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Turkey and Ukraine.

All programmes provide economic support for Roma students (depending on the specific scholarship scheme) who want to carry out a university degree (Bachelor, Master, Doctorate). The grants generally cover both tuition fees and living costs, and are compatible with other grants or scholarships from state institutions (Ministry of Education, Universities, etc.). An important feature of all these programmes is that the grants are not automatically renewed<sup>12</sup>, so applicants are expected to reapply the following year on the basis of their academic progress.

It is important to highlight two additional criteria to be met by candidates: they must declare themselves openly as Roma and provide evidence of extra-curricular activity in at least one Roma organisation in order to secure the link between Roma students and their communities.

The main role of REF consists on informing about the scholarship programme, assuring that selection criteria and procedure are fair and transparent, and following up all candidate beneficiaries of the grants.

The scholarship programme of REF has four schemes, according to the country of application or the specialisation field:

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<sup>12</sup> Some preference is given, however, in the case of renewals.

- **Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program (RMUSP)<sup>13</sup>**: provides grants for students pursuing Bachelor, Master or Doctorate degrees at state-accredited universities in their home country. An applicant may benefit of this scheme for a maximum of 8 years. Since 2001, 1.072 grants were provided under RMUSP.
- **Law and Humanities Program (LHP)**: is specifically oriented to applicants from Moldova, Ukraine and Russia and in its first years provided grants in the field of Law and Humanities though currently is open to students of all fields (up to 10% of grants can be placed at students pursuing vocational-level courses with a further academic orientation). This initiative is co-funded by the Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future” and REF. The program exists since 2004. The total number of people supported so far is about 500.
- **Roma Health Scholarship Program (RHSP)<sup>14</sup>**: is focused on Roma students pursuing Medical Education at state-accredited Medical Universities or Medical-vocation schools in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia. The program was opened in 2008 and it has supported 521 people so far.
- **Roma International Scholar Program (RISP)**: targets Roma students from several Central and Eastern European countries aiming to study a degree outside their home country. Therefore, its focus is to promote academic mobility of Roma students and support their integration in international environments. Since 2007, the program has provided grants for 137 people.

Additionally, beneficiaries are also eligible for further complementary support as language courses, international internships, small scale projects, etc. depending on the type of scholarship they have.

According to the REF’s annual report in 2013, between 2008 and 2013 there have been an increasing number of participants for the access to higher education programmes. In the academic year 2008-2009, a total of 813 scholarships were granted in comparison with the year 2013-2014 where the number of the beneficiaries almost doubles this amount (1,453). Within REF’s scholarship programme in 2013/14, 888 students studied Bachelor degree, 336 did Master degree, 103 belong to other programs within tertiary education and 42 students were enrolled in Doctoral programs.

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<sup>13</sup> The funds for the first two years of this Programme were allocated from recuperated gold looted by the Nazis during the Second World War. The Open Society Institute (OSI) with grants from the C.S. Mott Foundation was the main financial source of the Program for its 3rd, 4th and 5th year of existence.

<sup>14</sup>The funds for RHSP are made available by Open Society Foundations (OSF), through the Roma Health Project of the Public Health Programme



As an indicator of success of the scholarships funded and managed by REF, we can mention the high completion rate of the Roma students granted, which is 79% for the last two complete academic years (2012/13 and 2013/14) (REF, 2015), in comparison with an average of 72% in European countries (EACEA, 2012). In addition, the dropout, studies interruption or graduation postponement rate is 16% for REF's students in the same period (REF, 2015), while it is 28% across EHEA countries (EACEA, 2012).

### Romaversitas

Romaversitas Foundation's program (RV), *Training and scholarship program of young Roma people in higher education*, was established in Hungary in 1997 to provide support to Roma community for the access to higher education (Kurt Lewin Foundation, 2011). Though we focus here on the Hungarian RV program there are 7 more programs in other 6 countries (Macedonia, Serbia, Albania, Bulgaria, Kosovo and Moldova).

The RV project has two important goals. On the one hand, to promote and encourage the access to higher education, trying to improve the future perspectives among Roma communities. On the other hand, to strengthen the social relationships between Roma and non-Roma students in order to remove the prejudices and stereotypes within society (Velkovski, 2011).

Therefore, RV does not only provide economic funding but it is also considered –and named as– a “community” and a “development” programme<sup>15</sup> (see fig. 1) that seeks to foster the Roma identity and engagement with their own communities. Its goals are to ensure that Roma students embrace their heritage and feel responsible for their Roma communities (McGarry, 2010).

Thus, direct financial support is not sufficient on the RV programme basis. Training is also needed partly due to poor previous schooling. That is why the financial support is conditioned to participation in special training programmes. Velkovski (2011) sums up the mainly educational strategies to support Roma community in RV:

- **Tutorials:** This programme establishes a tutoring system in order to guide the students during their learning process. The appointment of a tutor provides an exclusive and personalised assistance in relation to the problems students may encounter during their university studies. Another objective included in the tutorial system is that tutored students can fulfil the role of mentor for Roma students who are in the final year of Secondary education.

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<sup>15</sup> As stated at Roma Versitas website: <http://www.romaversitas.hu/?q=en/node/40>.

- **Development of Skills and Abilities:** To maximize the social inclusion and improve the academic achievement, the programme also offers language, IT and communication courses (Kurt Lewin Foundation, 2011).
- **Training:** With regards to training, the students have a wide range of activities. There are initiatives that allow participation in several research projects within different mixed groups (Roma and non-Roma). Also, they have the chance to take part in workshops and activities according to their interests and needs. These activities are conducted by specialist teachers as well as assistant teachers. Another important aspect is the creation of a virtual environment (blog), a place where students can talk, discuss and share their own feelings.
- **Intercultural Education:** The students have several training modules about intercultural aspects.

**Fig. 1. Information about Romaversitas published at its website**

It's a development and scholarship programme for Roma students in higher education.

What else?

**It's a community**

- where students can share experiences and discuss issues related to their Roma origin and identity
- where everyone will find their place
- where friendships are forged
- where young people offer and receive support to explore complex and difficult questions around Roma identity, and are encouraged to find their own individual answers to these.

**It's a development programme**

- that was established in 1997 to support an emerging Roma middle class
- that aims to support students in becoming highly qualified and confident professionals with a strong sense of commitment to their chosen field and to the wellbeing of their communities
- that has a three-stage, transparent and fair admission process
- that links support to fulfilling certain academic and programme requirements
- that builds on students' contribution and participation in all its activities
- that is developed in an ongoing dialogue with students' needs, perspectives and suggestions.



Two studies (Kurt Lewin Foundation, 2011; Gabor, 2014) have been carried out to monitor the programme. The students declared to be satisfied with the programme and the results show that the largest part of the beneficiary students in RV programme had reached with success the main goals established. The tutoring support system and the participation in different kind of activities provided the students a development of social skills (Kurt Lewin Foundation, 2011). In addition, Gabor (2014) found that students applied for the scholarship in hopes of becoming members of a community and not simply because of the financial support.

### **Roma Access Program**

The Central European University (CEU) in Budapest runs a specific initiative called Roma Access Program (RAP). In contrast with the already mentioned schemes, RAP is focused on promoting international mobility in postgraduate levels (Master or Doctorate) as it aims to help promising Roma students from Europe to realise their full academic and professional potential. The long-term goal of RAP is to prepare young, outstanding Roma students to serve as role models and leaders for the Roma community overall (Central European University, 2014).

The programme is four semesters long and the students have also the opportunity to participate in several summer courses organised by CEU. Throughout their stay at CEU, the students are trained and oriented in different aspects, for instance, how to use library resources or how to deal with computer system. In addition, guided tours through different departments inside the university are organised as well as a tutorial system that helps students with their interests and needs.

*Roma Access Program* has two different units:

- Roma Graduate Preparation Program (RGPP): It is an intensive 9-month course for access to Masters and Doctorate programmes within the field of Humanity and Social Sciences.
- Roma English Language Program (RELP) which is an 8-month English course.

The first part of the RGPP is concerned with enhancing and developing skills that will allow students to deal with the academic environment they face. Presentations and speeches, developing of academic English (writing and speaking), and how to prepare and cope with exams are part of the training process. The second part focuses on providing induction courses in relation with the fields of study each student has chosen. At the end of the programme, the students have to present a research paper.

The evaluation report by Rostas (2010) concluded that the students showed improvement in English fluency (writing and speaking). The largest part of students enrolled into RAP felt quite satisfied and motivated during the course. It may however be noted that some areas different to Humanities and Social Sciences were not available. Thus, when some students considered those areas as part of their interests they had to choose another field of study.

According to the same report (Rostas, 2010), RAP completion rate was 89% and approximately 50% of them enrolled in Master's programmes in CEU and also in other international Western universities. This showed a mismatch between the students that began the programme and the students that subsequently enrolled in a postgraduate program, which demands putting into action measures oriented to increase the completion rate.

## Findings

Taking into account the information discussed in this report, we identify a set of good practices as well as some areas to be developed in relation to the strategy for inclusion of the Roma population in Spain, especially with regard to higher education.

### Good Practices

- The upward trend in all educational indicators informing Roma access to higher education. We highlight the increase in the completion rate of Roma students in post compulsory education (6.2% of the total but 8.9% for younger students aged 20-24) and in university graduation (0.3% to 1.2% in total population but 2.2% among young people aged 20-24).
- The rate of early dropout is high in Spain (64%) but not as high as it is in others countries with a significant Roma population (85%-98%).
- Existence, trajectory and continuity for more than 25 years of policies, plans and institutions that foster Roma inclusion by setting out, implementing and monitoring affirmative action plans aligned with the international strategy for inclusion.
- A level of a cross-cutting perspective for the development of inclusion plans involving several ministries and all governments of the autonomous regions of the country.



- A high level of participation and involvement of Roma community (associations and NGOs) in the design, implementation and evaluation of the plans implementation which is facilitated by the State Council of the Roma.
- The existence of specific and economically funded programmes aiming to encourage participation in higher education among Roma population. These programmes go beyond the financial support addressing the need to provide other kinds of support to students in their everyday academic life at university.
- Awareness of the importance of giving visibility to Roma people's achievements such the FSG (2008) publication on *Life Story of 50 Roma students*. This is a key aspect contributing to change stereotypes and provide alternative models for Roma people.

### **Areas to be Developed**

- The lack of specific statistics about Roma community in education. The existing data lacks comparability and regular updating. This problem has been one of the main criticisms to the Action Plans developed under the Decade (Curcic, Miskovic, Plant and Ceobanu, 2014). No baseline can be drawn in order to measure the advances of the National Strategy, which is supposed to be based on quantitative indicators that are not suitable or updated.
- The lack of a specific focus on higher education as it is considered in the general group of "post-compulsory education". This implies the risk of tending to promote middle level vocational training among Roma students instead of aiming at higher educational goals, as it seems to happen in the National Strategy. While it will contribute to the general purpose of "increasing the educational level of adult Roma", it will keep on perpetuating Roma stereotypes by reducing their career options to low-skill occupations.
- Spanish widening participation strategies do not identify Roma as a target group and therefore they cannot access specific support.
- There is a need for qualitative research that moves beyond numbers as suggested by Curcic et al. (2014). Progress in social inclusion is slow and numbers do not always account for the significant advances. In addition, a focus on just "reducing the gap" between Roma and non-Roma populations could imply an assimilationist approach which advocates that Roma students have to get the same things in the same ways that non-Roma. Qualitative research would help to lead the strategic actions not only on the basis of what



to increase but also in the sense of how to do it, taking into account those factors that are central when explaining the success of some Roma people.

## Recommendations

On the basis of the above-mentioned weaknesses as well as the good practice examples, we enumerate some aspects that might contribute to enrich the current Spanish strategies for the inclusion of Roma:

- It is necessary to ensure access to higher education of Roma belonging to families with lower educational and economical background, as posed by Friedman and Garaz (2013). The availability of diverse and specific grants programmes for Roma students, alongside those already existing in the Ministry of Education and Autonomous Regions, is essential for this purpose. Additionally, these programmes must establish clear and transparent criteria selection in order to ensure a fair admission of candidates, besides being widely disseminated among the target population.
- At the same time, it is important to create initiatives such as those of RAP or Romaversitas, which go beyond achieving a university degree, and seek to create a professional/intellectual "elite" who self-identify as Roma. This may provide alternative models to their community and contribute to change the stereotype of non-Roma regarding Roma population. For Roma people it is important that they understand that education does not imply a loss of "gypsiness" (FAKALI, 2012).
- Supporting Roma university students does not have to be all about economic issues. It is necessary to include other mechanisms and services that can support the progress in the university. The development of academic skills, the increase of international mobility, the career guidance and mentorship, etc. are some of the aspects we should keep in mind.
- Finally, programmes and initiatives should be university-based and having the support of Roma civil society, since these programmes cannot be "external" to this institution, which should be more proactive in including the Spanish Roma population.

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## Acknowledgements

We would like to show our gratitude to the Roma Education Fund for all the facilities and assistance provided with this report. A special mention is to be made to Dr. Judith Szira and Dr. Stela Garaz (REF Budapest).

We also thank representatives from Roma Access Program at Central Europe University, Romaversitas, the Decade Secretariat, and European Roma Rights Centre, for their availability for meetings and discussions.