

## **Minutes**

**Seville, 24-25 January 2008**

### **Rationale**

In June 2007 the Spanish ESF Managing Authority, together with the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG), called Member States with a relevant Roma population to join in a European Network for a more effective use of the Structural Funds in benefit of the social inclusion of the Roma population.

This initiative was launched at the seminar held in Madrid on 7-8 June 2007, which received the explicit support of Commissioner Spidla at his welcoming speech to participants. Representatives from twelve countries attended the seminar: Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Portugal, Greece, Italy, Poland, Finland, Sweden and Spain, together with a wide representation of the European Commission.

During the seminar it was presented a document to be discussed by participants on the main objectives of the Network, the fields of action and the kind of activities to be developed within the Network. There was a general agreement on main ideas and the document was subsequently reviewed according to the suggestions made by participants. There was a wide commitment of membership by countries attending the seminar.

Accordingly, Network Members were called together to this 1<sup>st</sup> Management Committee Meeting of the European Network on Social Inclusion and Roma Community held in Seville (Spain) on the 24-25 January 2008. The same twelve countries took part at this meeting as Members, together with a wide representation of the European Commission.

The main objective of the meeting was to discuss, on the basis of two documents previously sent to all Members, the operational and organisational structure of the Network, as well as a schedule of 2008 activities. There was a fruitful discussion and agreement on main ideas.

Next Management Committee meeting will be hosted by Greece in September 2008. Before that, Network Members will meet in April in Romania to plan the composition and activities of the Working Groups.

**1. Speeches and presentations**

**2. Agreements**

**3. Agenda (Annex 1)**

**4. Participants (Annex 2)**

**1. Speeches and presentations**

**Welcome speeches**

The 1st Management Committee (MC) meeting started with the speech of **Mr Luís García**, Head of Unit for European Initiatives and Programmes at the Regional Government of Andalusia, welcoming the participants in a region where more than 40% of Spanish Roma live. Andalusia has traditionally been a melting-pot, where different cultures have found their home, according to Mr García, and Roma people are considered full citizens as the rest of the population.

**Mr Juan José Barrera Cerezal**, Director General for Social Economy and ESF at the Spanish Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, continued with the welcome speeches, reminding the audience the importance of the Structural Funds in the social inclusion of the most vulnerable groups, as it is the case of the Roma. He showed proud of the Spanish decision to support a Roma-targeted initiative within the Operational Programme to Fight against Discrimination, the ACCEDER Programme, which has proved to be a successful experience. Inequality and discrimination, according to Mr Barrera Cerezal, are the main obstacles to be faced by the Roma community and the Structural Funds are an excellent instrument to combat them.

Finally, **Ms Denise Sorasio**, Director for ESF, Monitoring of Corresponding National Policies III at the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the European Commission, showed her support to this initiative, as Commissioner Spidla had already done, which has been set up at the right moment. Ms Sorasio explained that, for the first time, the European Council had dealt with the Roma issues at the December 2007 meeting and, as a consequence, the Commission will report the European Council on this matter before June 2008.

Ms Sorasio mentioned some of the recent developments within the European institutions towards the Roma community. At the European Parliament, the Commission has recently announced some measures for combating the social exclusion and discrimination of the Roma such as the launching of an Action Programme, the drafting of a Communication, the setting up of a High Level Forum and the publishing of a Green Paper on education, immigration and minorities. Furthermore, the High Level Group on Social Inclusion of Ethnic

Minorities, appointed by Commissioner Spidla, presented its Report on December 2007 analysing main challenges and offering recommendations about the labour insertion of ethnic minorities. She also mentioned the Directive EC 2000/43 as a main legal instrument, the work to be done by the recently created Fundamental Rights Agency, the Open Method of Coordination within the Social Inclusion Strategy as ways of defending Roma rights and promoting their social inclusion, without forgetting the Structural Funds.

She suggested to the Network Members some potential outputs which could be the added value of this Network, such as the collection of Roma-related best practices and projects with the aim of their generalisation, the provision of in-depth information about to what extent the Structural Funds, in general terms, have benefited the Roma community, since we only have information about the targeted measures. This information on the real impact of the Structural Funds on the Roma community may allow us, continued Ms Sorasio, to address specific initiatives to improve the impact. Finally, she encouraged Network Members to give rise and visibility to “good news” about the Roma community.

### **Presentation of the meeting**

**Mr David García**, Deputy Director of the Spanish ESF Managing Authority, made a short review of the objectives and expected results of the meeting, presenting the programme and its contents. Going back to the origins of this initiative and the seminar held in June 2007, he highlighted the main objective of the Network being the promotion of the use of the Structural Funds to enhance the effectiveness of policies targeting the Roma community and their social inclusion.

He pointed out the three main objectives of this 1<sup>st</sup> MC meeting: to formalise the membership to the Network, to agree on the operational and organisational structure and to reach a 2008 working plan.

### **Introductory speeches (see Power Point presentations in Annexes 3 and 4)**

**Mr José Manuel Fresno**, Member of the EC High Level Group on Social Inclusion of Ethnic Minorities, presented the work done by this advisory group and the results of the recently published Report: “*Ethnic minorities in the labour market. An urgent call for better social inclusion*” (December 2007)<sup>1</sup>, analysed the main challenges facing the Structural Funds, highlighting the importance of closer links between employment and social inclusion, the need for combining the target approach with the mainstream approach and encouraging to partnership. He also called for better coordination of policies related with discrimination, social inclusion and the Structural Funds, setting specific targets for the renewed Lisbon Strategy (2010). Finally, he welcomed the setting up of this first Network within the ESF framework and some of its expected outcomes, such as the provision of better information, mutual learning, the transferring of experiences and the drafting of guidelines.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/employment\\_social/fundamental\\_rights/pdf/hlg/etmin\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/fundamental_rights/pdf/hlg/etmin_en.pdf)

**Ms Virag Sandor**, from the Action against Discrimination, Civil Society Unit at the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities of the European Commission, started her speech by providing some updated information as the before mentioned request of the recent European Council (Dec. 2007) for further details on Roma issues for next Council on June 2008, the foreseen reinforcement of the Inter-Service Group on Roma through thematic groupings and the Commissioners´ meeting on Fundamental Rights. Afterwards she made a brief review of Roma-related information at each Member State Operational Programmes. To conclude, she explained how the Commission considers the added value of this Network stressing once again the importance of providing more detailed and specific information and collecting best practice examples.

## **2. Agreements**

As regards the ***Formalization of the membership to the Network***, Members were required to present a signed Letter of Commitment, which expresses their will to be a Member of the Network.

The following countries handed over the Letter of Commitment:

- Czech Republic
- Greece
- Hungary
- Italy
- Poland
- Slovak Republic
- Spain

Romania and Bulgaria committed to send the Letters in the following days, and Portugal, Finland and Sweden, because of internal restructuring at their public administrations, have delayed the signature of the Letters.

See attached in Annex 5 a table summarising this information.

Network Members discussed on two main documents previously sent to all participants. There was a general agreement on the texts proposed.

Agreements on the **Proposal for the Operational and Organisational Structure:**

▪ **Network Members**

All agreed that each Member State will<sup>2</sup> have two members:

1. *The European Social Fund Managing Authority or the administrative body to which the latter delegates its authority; and*
2. *The body of the Member State responsible for policies targeting the Roma community or the body to which it delegates its authority.*

The European Commission accepted the invitation to participate at the Management Committee meetings of the Network.

▪ **Management Committee (MC)**

Members agreed that:

*The Management Committee is the Network's decision-taking body and is comprised of all Network Members, the European Commission and the Technical Secretariat. Each Network Member will appoint a representative who will be the main spoke person when it comes to Network activities. The Committee will meet at least twice a year.*

Network Members agreed on the duties proposed for the MC and, as a proposal from Romania, the word "directives" will be removed and replaced by "recommendations". The definitive text will be as follows:

- *issue of guidelines and recommendations on a regular basis concerning Network operations and the actions implemented within its framework;*
- *planning and scheduling of Network actions;*
- *choosing of representatives at the Network's different participatory levels;*
- *follow-up and evaluation of actions;*
- *decision-taking regarding the management of expenses for actions undertaken jointly by participating countries.*

Members also agreed that:

*Management Committee meetings will be held in each of the Network Member States on a rotating basis, based on offerings made by the latter. These meetings will be jointly chaired by the members of the host State with the support of the Technical Secretariat.*

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<sup>2</sup> Poland suggested to replace "will" by "should"

However, there was a general agreement that the role of the Presidency needs further development.

*Committee decisions will be taken by consensus and when this is not possible, by majority. Further discussion on the voting system (number of votes by State) will be needed.*

*After each Committee meeting the Technical Secretariat will draw up the official minutes.*

Network Members agreed on the organisation of Thematic Conferences, as proposed.

Greece showed its will to hold next Presidency and to host the MC meeting in September 2008.

▪ **Working Groups (WG)**

Agreement on:

*Within the framework of Mutual Learning and based on the interests expressed by Network members during the first meeting, at least three Working Groups will be created: social inclusion, employment and education.*

*The Working Groups will be appointed by the Management Committee and will answer to the latter's mandates. They will be formed by experts in each work area. The role of the Working Groups is to contribute with greater knowledge and experience to the Committee and involve a greater number of stakeholders.*

*Each Working Group will have a voluntary Coordinator represented by a Member State. Further discussion on its role will be needed.*

Network Members also agreed that the work done by WG should somehow be coordinated so that the MC gets all this information. And, even if on a rotating basis, the coordination of a WG should have more stability than Presidency.

Agreement on the countries that will coordinate voluntarily the WG:

- Employment: Czech Republic
- Education: Hungary<sup>3</sup>
- Social inclusion: Romania

Network Members agreed to meet again in April 2008 to detail the functions and composition of the WG as well as to plan their work for the coming year. Romania offered to host this meeting.

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<sup>3</sup> It was not officially at the meeting, but at this moment it has already been confirmed by the Hungarian representatives.

▪ **Technical Secretariat (TS)**

**General agreement on the text proposed:**

*The Technical Secretariat will play the role of Administrative and Communications Coordinator and will be managed by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano.*

*Its main functions will include:*

- *Participation in the Management Committee meetings, taking charge of prior distribution of the meeting agenda and corresponding documents and taking notes during the meeting in which it may also participate. It will subsequently draft the minutes and distribute these to the members. It will likewise support the host State in the organisation of the Thematic Conferences.*
- *It will act as an intermediary in the transmission and exchange of information by coordinating the development and management of the communication tools (E-Bulletin and Web Page).*
- *It will organise and attend Working Group meetings, take notes and participate at will and will compile the corresponding reports for subsequent distribution to the members.*
- *It will support the organisation of events (seminars, conferences, study visits, etc.) in coordination with the host State.*
- *It will draw up an Annual Report of Network Activities.*

**As explained in the seminar in June 2007, the Technical Secretariat is the contribution of the Spanish Managing Authority to the Network.**

▪ **Financing.**

**Agreement that:**

*Each Member State will take responsibility for its own expense budget covering the participation of its representatives in Network activities. The Member State hosting the meeting will cover group expenses during the meeting (coffee, meals, cultural events...).*

*Given that participation in the Working Groups is voluntary each State will decide, based on its interest and available budget, what Groups it wants to participate in and will cover the expenses deriving from that participation.*

*The actions proposed by the Working Groups and approved by the Committee (organisation of seminars, study visits, analysis, etc.) will be financed as follows:*

- *Each State with its corresponding budget will shoulder the burden of expenses deriving from the participation of its representatives (meetings of the Management Committee, Working Groups, attendance at seminars, study visits...).*

- *Expenses corresponding to shared actions will be divided by tasks<sup>4</sup> among the Member States taking part in the mentioned activity (a publication, for example)<sup>5</sup>.*

The financing of actions within the Network will be decided internally between both Members of each country.

**Agreements on the Proposed schedule of 2008 activities:**

- **Transmission and exchange of information:**
  - TS will send to Network Members in March a proposed structure, objectives and stakeholders to be addressed with the E-Bulletin, which will be distributed not only to Network members but also to other stakeholders (subscription free of charge at the web page).
  - TS will also send a web page proposal to be validated by Members in March. Future modifications or improvements will be feasible. There will be also space for discussion forum with member codes.
  - TS will also provide proposals for Logo and Name of the Network<sup>6</sup>.
- **Mutual Learning:**
  - TS will send a proposal of concrete activities and data required to each Network Member before meeting in April (WG where each Network Member will participate, profile of participants, activities and outcomes proposed...). Feedback from Network Members will be sent to TS in due time.
  - TS will also gather initial information on relevant projects aimed at the Roma community regarding each WG topics. Plus, TS will make a proposal for Best Practice Grid (definition, indicators...) to be discussed and improved at the April meeting.
  - At the request of the European Commission, Members will update the information provided at this meeting by Ms Virag Sandor (DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities) on the Roma-related actions at each Member State Operational Programmes. The TS will send the table to each Network Member, who will update it and send it back to the TS before the 1<sup>st</sup> March. Then the TS will send the complete table to the European Commission.

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<sup>4</sup> Not “equally shared” as in the first text proposed.

<sup>5</sup> As regards to joint activities, the Spanish Managing Authority does not envisage the possibility of sharing expenses via the pro rata rule meaning that any mention of shared expense must be interpreted as referring to clearly identifiable activities or tasks, and not to the pro rata of these expenses.

<sup>6</sup> The Spanish ESF Managing Authority made a first proposal: EUROMA.