

## Evaluation of the results and impact of the "Acceder" Programme 2000-2019. Active employment policies for the Roma population managed by a social organisation.

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**Summary:** "Acceder" is the employment programme of the *Fundación Secretariado Gitano*; a model of intervention for the labour insertion of Roma people in a situation of vulnerability and low employability, with responses that are highly adapted to each person and to the labour market. After 20 years of existence, an evaluation shows the wide coverage of the Programme and its impact on the Roma community; how it has contributed to improving the lives of Roma people; to revaluing the role of training; to catalysing changes for the advancement of Roma women; it has also been a good antidote to discrimination and antigypsyism, helping to break down prejudices, to promote knowledge of the Roma community and to raise awareness of their citizenship rights.

**Keywords:** Roma; discrimination; exclusion; itineraries; employability.

**Index:** 1. Introduction 2. "Acceder" programme: for the employment of the Roma population 3. Methodology of the evaluation of the results and impact of the "Acceder" programme 2000-2019. 4. Development of the evaluation of the results and impact of the "Acceder" programme 2000-2019. 5. Conclusions: lessons learnt, proposals and recommendations. 6. Bibliography.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Starting from the importance of employment as a central element for the social development of the individual and the community (Bascón, 2022: 25-28; Bengoetxea, 2020: 32; Sánchez, 2020: 58); from the special needs demanded by the most vulnerable social groups in terms of employment (Bengoetxea, 2020: 45; Bascón, 2022:50; Sánchez, 2020: 61) - especially in a scenario of systemic labour vulnerability (Mora and Cabra, 2017: 157-158) - and the concept of active inclusion in which the European Union is committed to the existence of quality social services that achieve the necessary support for the labour inclusion of the people who are furthest away from the world of work (Rodríguez, 2017: 133-137), the aim is to analyse the labour inclusion strategies for a specific group such as Roma people.

There have been authors who have analysed in a general way the existing public policies with the Roma community (Gutiérrez et al., 2020). In our case, we will focus on the work carried out by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG), which has been working since 1982 for the comprehensive promotion of the Roma population in Spain and Europe.

Estimates<sup>6</sup> of the Spanish Roma population range from 800,000 to 1,500,000; 725,000 according to recent estimates (Hernández, 2019: 4). According to the Council of Europe, Spain, together with Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary, accounts for 65.2 per cent of the European Roma population (Hernández, 2019: 4).

In the case of Spain, we are talking about a very young population, 66% of whom are under 30 years of age. Only 17% of Roma people have completed compulsory secondary education (compared to 80% of the general population). Fewer Roma women have completed Compulsory Secondary Education (15%), and more Roma women are illiterate (14% compared to 6% of Roma men and 2% of the general population). In the case of Roma between 16 and 29 years of age, 66% are neither studying nor working, compared to 15% of the general population (De la Rica, 2019: 13-18).

Despite the fact that the percentage of adults in the Spanish Roma population who are linked to employment (either because they are employed or unemployed)<sup>7</sup> is 56.6%, very similar to that of the rest of the population (58.6%), their employment rate is only 30% (20% less than the population as a whole), and it is noteworthy that 47% of employed Roma people are self-employed (compared to 16% of the general population). The barriers and difficulties faced by the Spanish Roma population in relation to employment can be seen in the following data (De la Rica, 2019: 28-35):

- Their unemployment rate is three times higher than that of the general population, although their activity rate is very similar. This indicates that the Roma population is not completely disconnected from the labour market.
- More than 70% are long-term unemployed (more than 1 year) and more than 35% have been unemployed for more than 4 years. Such a high percentage of long-term and very long-term unemployment in the Roma population has serious consequences such as poverty and social exclusion, and others such as the loss of professional skills.
- The rate of temporary employment is 73%, compared to a 27% for the general population. Temporariness is therefore much higher in the Roma population.

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<sup>6</sup> The data on the Roma population in Spain are estimates made by different methods and sources, as there is no census of ethnic minorities in our country, as stated in the Working Document *Situación social de la población gitana en España: balance tras la crisis*, of the VIII FOESSA Report.

<sup>7</sup> The employment status of a person of working age can be active (employed or unemployed) or inactive (student, retired, etc.). The activity rate refers to the percentage of all adults who are active. It is calculated by multiplying by 100 the ratio of the active population to the working age population.

- 39% of Roma feel that they have been discriminated against, and 53% of Roma feel that they have been discriminated against in job interviews.<sup>8</sup>

Long-term and very long-term unemployment coupled with the high temporary nature of employment has a major impact on poverty rates. The poverty situation of the Roma population is alarming:

- 46% of households are in extreme poverty.
- 86% are at risk of poverty (despite the fact that 19% are in the labour market).
- The child poverty rate is 89% (compared to 31% child poverty in the general population).

After the COVID-19 crisis, the employment situation of the Roma population worsened (FSG, 2020: 8). In the case of the participants in FSG programmes, 64% were already unemployed at the beginning of the crisis. And 58% of these unemployed people were not receiving any kind of benefit and were therefore in a situation of serious vulnerability. Of the 14% who were employed, more than a third lost their jobs, another third was included in an ERTE, and the rest had their working hours reduced. Of the 21% who were engaged in street vending, the vast majority were forced to stop their activity during the pandemic.

The FSG, as established in the Mission, values, principles and vision of its Strategic Plan, wants to contribute to the construction of a fairer society in which Roma people enjoy the same rights as the rest of the population and can access social services, goods and resources on equal terms.

To this end, it pursues equal access to employment, education, health and housing for the Roma population with the greatest difficulties, through three main programmes:

**Promociona Programme: support and educational guidance for young Roma and their families.** The aim of this programme is to ensure that young Roma people complete their compulsory studies and continue studying in order to reduce the number of early school leavers and improve the conditions of access to the labour market for the Roma community by promoting equal opportunities.

**Calí Programme for the equality of Roma women.** The aim of this programme is to improve the socio-occupational inclusion of Roma women by promoting equal opportunities, gender equality and the fight against all forms of discrimination, with special attention to the multiple discrimination suffered by Roma women and victims of gender violence.

**"Acceder" programme, for the employment of the Roma population.** The aim of this programme is for Roma people in a situation of social hardship to enter paid employment, as a gateway to social inclusion, through a methodology of personalised insertion itineraries.

In 2019, on the 20th anniversary of the "Acceder" training and employment programme, the FSG decided to carry out an evaluation of its impact with two main objectives: on the one hand, to generate evidence of the results of the impact that this programme has had on the Roma population and, on the other hand, to learn lessons for the improvement of the programme. These two objectives, in turn, contribute to accountability and transparency in the use of public funds received by the programme.

## **2. THE "ACCEDER" PROGRAMME: FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF THE ROMA POPULATION**

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<sup>8</sup> "One of the possible explanations for the gap in employment rates between the Roma population and the general population, even when we consider that the general population has similar characteristics to the Roma, is that there may be patterns of discrimination against Roma in society" (De la Rica, 2019: 96).

"Acceder" is the FSG's employment programme whose aim is the incorporation of the Roma population into paid employment<sup>9</sup>, as employment is considered to be a fundamental dimension for access to citizenship rights for the most vulnerable population.

In order to achieve this objective, the Programme envisages different lines of action, which can be divided into three:

- **Direct intervention:** integrates all the actions carried out with the participant after the initial employability diagnosis. These actions are employment guidance, accompaniment in the active search for employment, training and labour intermediation. All of them make up the "Acceder" pathway of insertion as an employee, which is the basis of the programme.
- **Intervention with companies:** a key action of "Acceder" from the very beginning; it is essential to obtain the collaboration of companies not only for the recruitment of participants, but also to train these participants and to guide our actions.
- **Transversal actions:** the aim is to influence public policies and raise awareness in society in order to facilitate access to employment for Roma people. These are mainly awareness-raising campaigns and studies on employment and the Roma population.

When "Acceder" was launched in 2000, after two years of piloting in a neighbourhood of Madrid, it did so with an innovative approach: to work with the Roma population from the perspective of activation for employment, as opposed to the welfare policies that were predominant at that time.

Thanks to funding from the European Social Fund<sup>10</sup>, the programme is implemented in 32 cities, extending in 4 years to a total of 57 cities, which required the support of different Spanish public administrations through co-financing agreements. At present, "Acceder" is present in 63 cities in 14 Autonomous Communities. It is not present in La Rioja, Canary Islands, Balearic Islands and the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla.

In the first eight years, a methodology based on personalised insertion itineraries was consolidated with companies as key agents in the process of Roma inclusion. In 2009, this intervention methodology was systematised with the publication of the "Methodological Model for the socio-occupational inclusion of Roma people". At the same time, the first results of Roma people's inclusion into employment were achieved, as well as the first adjustments of the actions, as it was found that Roma women participated in a very low proportion. In this sense, the FSG sets out in its strategic plan the objective of incorporating at least 50% women in all "Acceder" actions.

In 2008, the economic crisis, which caused high rates of unemployment and poverty, made it necessary to provide a response adapted to the situation of Roma people and the labour market (Susó et al., 2021: 18-20). To this end, the work of prospecting companies and attracting job offers is reinforced, and two strategic lines of intervention are created: insertion companies (providing protected employment for Roma people in the worst situation), and self-employment itineraries (providing a response to Roma people who wanted to set up their own business).

Since 2013, with serious crises (pandemic, war), an attempt has been made to adapt the methodology and actions to the changes that have occurred in the socio-economic environment in general, and also to the changes in the Roma community itself (Susó et al., 2021: 18-20). Thus, training courses adapted for the youngest Roma people have been set up, such as the "Learning by Doing" initiative, in line with dual training experiences; the competency-based approach has been incorporated into job orientation, in line with the demands of the labour market; the path towards

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<sup>9</sup> The Roma population in Spain has been mainly self-employed: 47% of the employed Roma population has been self-employed compared to 16% of the general population (data from the Comparative study on the situation of the Roma population in Spain in relation to employment and poverty, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> In addition to the European Integra programme with which "Acceder" started, the FSG has been a managing entity of European funds in two programming periods (2001-2007 and 2007-2013) of the ESF Operational Programme to Combat Discrimination and a beneficiary of the Operational Programme for Youth Employment and the Operational Programme for Social Inclusion and the Social Economy, also in two periods from 2016 to the present.

digitalisation has been deepened with the programme Empleando Digital (which has enabled the improvement of the digital skills of professionals and participants, and the development of insertion pathways in collaboration with technological companies such as Google and Accenture); and the "MercaEmprende" initiative was launched which, at the time of the evaluation, was implemented in eight Spanish cities (Alicante, Castellón, Córdoba, Granada, Málaga, Madrid, Salamanca and Zaragoza), and which aims to improve the competitiveness, professionalisation, modernisation and digitisation of street trading.

The results of "Acceder", in figures, in these 20 years have been the following:

109,875 people registered (people who have at least undergone an initial diagnosis but may not have carried out any activities) and 82,091 participants (those who, in addition to the initial diagnosis, carry out at least one activity).

Of the 82,000 participants, 93% have carried out an employment guidance activity and 41% have taken part in training.

91,733 contracts have been signed, enabling 30,000 people to gain access to employment.

360 people have completed their pathway in one of the 4 FSG Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) and 1,591 have completed a self-employment pathway. It should be borne in mind that these two initiatives are in the minority and that they will be launched in 2019.

Almost 16,000 companies and 110 public administrations (state, regional and municipal) have collaborated.

The profile of "Acceder" participants over the last 20 years has been that of a Roma person (71% are Roma), with a balanced participation of men and women, young (69% are under 30 years of age) and have not completed compulsory secondary education (78% of Roma participating in "Acceder" have not completed compulsory education).

After this 20-year trajectory, an attempt has been made to ascertain the impact that the programme has had on improving the living conditions of Roma people through the evaluation presented below.

### **3. METHODOLOGY FOR THE EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS AND IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME "ACCEDER" 2000 – 2019**

The evaluation covers 20 years of a programme that has been developed in 14 autonomous communities. "Acceder" has been active, in the period from 2000 to 2019, in 57 localities. The evaluation collects information on 109,875 registered people, of whom 82,091 have started a personalised pathway of labour insertion.

The main features of this assessment are:

- It is an external evaluation, as it has been carried out by an independent team of external consultants with expertise in the field of employment policies and evaluation methodology.
- It is an ex-post evaluation, since its period of analysis is between 2000 and 2019, so it will analyse information from a period that has already ended. However, bearing in mind that the "Acceder" programme is still underway and that the learning that emerges should have a focus on proactivity and improvement, it may have the characteristics of an intermediate evaluation.
- It is a summative evaluation, i.e., its main purpose is to analyse and assess the results and impact achieved and, thus, to issue global assessments on the usefulness and success of the Programme. In this sense, this approach determines the merit, value, significance and validity and facilitates decision-making about the Programme.

A criteria-based evaluation approach was chosen. The six criteria that guided the development of the evaluation questions, indicators and data collection techniques were:

- **Efficiency criteria:** this is the ability to achieve a desired and/or expected effect with the least possible resources or in the shortest possible time. In other words, it analyses the rational use of means, resources and time to achieve an objective.
- **Effectiveness criteria:** understood as the degree to which the proposed objectives are achieved.
- **Sustainability criteria:** understood as the development of mechanisms (alliances, synergies and resources) necessary for the sustainability of the results and effects of the intervention, but also of the intervention itself over time.
- **Impact criteria:** it allows measuring the changes achieved in the social, cultural, political, etc. dimensions, positive or negative, expected or unexpected.
- **Relevance criteria:** this criterion aims to identify the degree of importance of the Programme, and whether it is transcendental and useful in the context in which it is inserted.
- **Human Rights and Gender Equality Criteria:** the aim is to measure the degree of compliance with norms that guarantee the wellbeing of the most disadvantaged groups of the population, as an equitable treatment of the user population in order to correct possible injustices. It will also provide an understanding of whether gender differences exist.

The initial approach envisaged an impact assessment using social security data.

Through the analysis of work life histories, the aim was to compare what has happened with those people who have followed an insertion pathway in "Acceder" and with people with a similar socio-demographic profile but who had not participated in "Acceder". In the end, it was not possible to obtain this information for reasons beyond the control of those who carried out the evaluation.

Instead, the information recorded in the programme's own database was analysed. This has shown certain limitations because information from the early years was not collected in a comprehensive way, especially insertions, as the original database was more of a working tool for technical staff. Since 2013, what was an "Acceder" database has become a professional platform: the current Portal de Programas which collects information on participants, courses, job offers and companies.

Key documentation has also been analysed, with an extensive review of all kinds of documents: methodological documents, resolutions on the granting of subsidies, project forms, annual reports, annual accounts, etc.

On the other hand, new information has been generated through different quantitative and qualitative research techniques, a summary of which can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of fieldwork carried out during the assessment (Source: Suso et al., 2021:18)

Technique	Agent	Observations	Dates
Semi-structured interviews.	Responsible of FSG	4 interviews were carried out with reference agents in the "Acceder" programme.	From 13 January to 04 March 2021
	Heads of Public Administrations	A total of 5 interviews were carried out with representatives of different public administrations, both national (1), regional (3) and local (1).	From 16 to 23 March 2021
	European agents	Three written interviews were carried out with three European agents who have been in contact with the "Acceder" programme over the years: one contact at European level and two at national level (Italy and Portugal).	From 16 to 23 of March 2021
	Social organizations	A group interview was carried out with two social organisations familiar with the "Acceder" programme, which work with the Roma community.	10 of March of 2021
Focus groups.	Participating people	Two focus groups were carried out, one in Talavera de la Reina with men and the other in Madrid with women.	24 and 25 Of March of 2021
	Relatives of participants	Two focus groups were carried out, one in Talavera de la Reina with women and one in Madrid with men.	24 and 25 Of March of 2021
	Technical staff of FSG	Two focus groups were developed with staff from different locations, one with people with more than 10 years of experience in the organisation, and the other with staff with between 3 and 7 years of experience.	5 of March of 2021
	Collaborating companies	A focus group was carried out with 5 companies collaborating with the "Acceder" Programme.	16 of March of 2021
	Work Integration Social Enterprises	Focus group with the Territorial Directorates of the three Autonomous Communities where the WISEs are established.	11 of March of 2021
Survey	«Acceder» participants	A telephone survey was carried out with a sample of 400 participants in "Acceder" over the last 20 years.	From 22 to 29 of February of 2021
	Public administration	An online survey was carried out among the public administrations that collaborate or have collaborated with the programme "Acceder" programme in its 20 years of existence.	From 15 of March to 7 of April of 2021

Source: (Suso et al., 2021: 18).

#### 4. DEVELOPMENT OF THE EVALUATION OF THE RESULTS AND IMPACT OF THE "ACCEDER" PROGRAMME, 2000-2019

The main results of the criteria-based evaluation, which have been carried out according to the six criteria listed below, are as follows:

##### a) Efficiency criteria

The efficiency criteria tests the ability to *achieve a desired and/or expected effect with the minimum possible resources or the shortest possible time, i.e. it analyses the rational use of means, resources and time to achieve an objective.*

This is an efficient programme, given that the average cost per participant is less than €2,000, which is three times lower than the cost of similar public initiatives.

The analysis shows that the cost has varied over time, with an average cost of €1,925.52 per participant, with three distinct periods:

In the first period (2000 - 2008), the cost of the intervention was higher (€2,113) due to a higher investment needed to set up the Programme, a phase in which the "Acceder" programme is growing, both territorially and methodologically, in order to adapt to the needs identified in the different territories.

The second period (2009 - 2015) has been the most efficient (€1,665), with a reduction in cost, which can be attributed to two main reasons: on the one hand, "Acceder" has gotten more consolidated, since it has already been established in many localities, which means that it requires less initial investment; on the other hand, the economic crisis that began in 2008 means that the number of people participating in the programme increases, while the resources they have access to do not.

In the third period (2016 - 2019) the unit cost (€2,093) is similar to that of the first period, despite the fact that the number of people participating is similar to that of the previous period. In this case, the explanation for the increase in cost derives from the increase in investments made in a training model and pathway more focused on the development of skills for all users, as well as the implementation of much more intense training actions, of longer duration and with training aids, which translates into a higher investment.

The evaluation highlights that 90% of the budget is allocated to direct intervention, i.e. the implementation of insertion pathways. And to a lesser extent to transversal advocacy and awareness-raising actions (4.5% dissemination campaigns, 4.3% technical assistance and studies and 0.8% transnational advocacy).

##### b) Effectiveness criteria

The effectiveness criteria shows the degree to which the objectives are achieved.

It is an effective programme. In this sense, **almost 4 out of 10 Roma people participating in "Acceder" have found a job** within 4 years of entering the programme<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> By methodological decision of the evaluation team, only the insertions produced in the 4 years following the initial diagnosis have been considered. In this way, it is guaranteed that inclusion is an effect of the programme. The population universe for calculating the insertion rate is thus reduced to 64,894 people assisted between 2000 and 2017.



The analysis of the programme's insertion rate (average rate of 37%) reveals some important aspects:

- **The socio-demographic variables that most affect the insertion rate are ethnicity and level of education.** It is noteworthy that the insertion rate of Roma people who participate in "Acceder" (35%) is 8 points lower than that of non-Roma people. However, this difference by ethnicity is diluted when the Roma population has finished the Compulsory Secondary Education (the insertion rate of Roma and non-Roma is very similar, 48% and 47% respectively). The effect of secondary education on the insertion rate is higher among Roma women, who achieve an insertion rate of 48%.
- **The type of pathway is important, as well as its duration and continuity over time.** The reference pathway for the Roma population is the one that includes the most activities (guidance, support for active job search, training and labour intermediation) and the longest duration, at least 2 years. Completing the full pathway raises the insertion rate of Roma people to 44%, almost 10 points above their average rate for the programme.
- **The people who carry out training activities of the "Acceder" programme have above-average insertion rates.** This is especially true for vocational courses or specific training such as "Learning by Doing". This training model, aimed at young people under 30 years of age, has a duration of 6 months and alternates theoretical training with practical training in companies. This training achieves an insertion rate of 55%. In addition, it dilutes the barrier effect of not having completed the Mandatory Secondary Education.

The completion of basic or digital skills courses increases insertion by 6 to 14 percentage points when added to the completion of vocational training courses.

- **Labour intermediation and collaboration with companies has proved to be fundamental for the labour market inclusion of the Roma population.** Four out of every ten jobs obtained have come about thanks to the work of the professionals involved in the prospecting process. And, in the case of Roma women, almost half of them have accessed employment through labour intermediation.

### c) Sustainability criteria

The sustainability criteria refers to *the development of mechanisms (partnerships, synergies and resources) necessary for the sustainability of the results and effects of the intervention, but also of the intervention itself, over time.*

It is a sustainable programme. The evaluation has demonstrated its ability to be sustained over time. This is largely due to **the stability of European funding and the continued support of many public administrations.**

Seventy percent of the programme's funding comes from the European Social Fund, which has provided continuous support from the outset. It has been the characteristics of these European funds which has enabled its sustainability. The long periods of funding (6 years as opposed to the annual calls for proposals), which have had a significant economic endowment, the stability of funding and the ability to secure the funding of other Spanish public organizations, since in this manner it attracts money to its territory.

This European funding has allowed us to launch pilot actions, implement medium and long-term measures and evaluate their results.

### d) Impact criteria

The impact criteria allows the *measurement of the degree of change in social, cultural, political, etc. dimensions, positive or negative, expected or unexpected.*

It is a programme with a social impact, as it has generated changes in the lives of the people who have participated in it and in their immediate environment. It has improved their living conditions: having a stable income makes it possible to have access to housing, maintain a family, etc.

The "Acceder" programme has contributed to the revitalisation of education and training among Roma families. More and more families consider that "being educated and trained" increases opportunities in the labour market, which contributes to their support for their sons and daughters to complete their studies. It has raised the future prospects of many Roma people who see that employment (and in occupational sectors other than the traditional ones) is not only possible, but that they increasingly perceive it as a citizenship right.

The programme has also generated changes in the rest of the key agents.

In companies, by incorporating Roma people into their workforces, it has contributed in a very effective way to the breaking down of stereotypes and prejudices among employers on the one hand, and among workers on the other. Regarding other social entities, it has contributed to generalising a reference methodology in working with Roma people: one that moves away from a welfare approach and focuses on employment, that bases the intervention on personalised itineraries, and that understands work with companies and labour intermediation as another phase of the person's pathway. As far as public administrations are concerned, "Acceder" has contributed to making visible the problem of discrimination suffered by the Roma population (and it has done so on the basis of data and information generated by the programme itself), it has provided an approach centred on activation for employment as opposed to the aforementioned welfare approach, and it has carried out important institutional advocacy work at both national and European level.

#### **e) Relevance criteria**

As the Final Evaluation Report itself indicates, the relevance criteria *aims to identify the degree of importance of the Programme, and whether it is relevant and useful in the context in which it is embedded.*

It is a relevant programme, which has proved to be important for the Roma population, in that 1 in 10 Roma people have attended the programme and it has been able to provide adequate responses to their needs.

It is a programme with a high degree of coverage which, in some autonomous communities, has reached 31%, as is the case in Extremadura. The programme's coverage of the Roma population with the greatest difficulties has increased in times of economic crisis. Even so, many Roma are still not being reached.

The capacity to provide adequate responses to Roma people has been explained by the evaluation team in terms of what they have called the programme's signs of identity. These would be:

- specialisation: actions are specifically targeted at the Roma population with the most difficulties in accessing training and employment,
- professionalisation: with multidisciplinary and intercultural teams formed by the Intercultural Agent, Employment Guidance, Job Intermediation and Coordination functions,
- and the production of relevant information on the Roma population assisted.

#### **f) Human rights and gender approach**

The human rights and gender approach is a criteria that *aims to measure the degree of compliance with norms that guarantee the well-being of the most discriminated groups of the population, such as equal treatment of the user population in order to correct possible injustices.* This criteria also *makes it possible to understand whether there are gender differences.*

The gender approach has been present from the very beginning of the programme. When in the first years it was detected that the participation of women in the training and employment activities was very low, measures such as the reinforcement of the role of intercultural mediation, the intervention with the family, and the visibility of female referents, among others, were put in place to encourage the participation of more Roma women.

These measures allowed the participation in the "Acceder" programme of women (53%) and men (47%) to be balanced. At the same time, the insertion rates of Roma women (34%) are very similar to those of Roma men (36%). One out of 3 women participating in the programme enters employment. This percentage is higher when they have graduated from the Compulsory Secondary Education (48%) or when they follow the reference pathway (44%).

These positive experiences, and the upsurge of an increasing number of Roma women referents who are entering the labour market, have sometimes brought about, and sometimes accompanied, far-reaching changes within the Roma community. Roma women also perceive education, training and access to paid employment as real opportunities to improve their living conditions and gain greater self-reliance and independence.

The human rights approach has also been present from the beginning because of the target group: the Roma population with greater difficulties in accessing training and employment. Also by considering access to paid employment for the Roma population as a key factor for social inclusion. And, more generally, because of the effects of this approach in the fight against the structural discrimination suffered by the Roma population.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS: LESSONS LEARNED, PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The main conclusion of this evaluation is that the "Acceder" programme has achieved its objectives, favouring access to paid employment for the Roma population with the greatest difficulties, and has also contributed to generating social and institutional changes that have led to progress in the fight against discrimination against Roma people.

The evaluation has made it possible to reflect upon the intervention carried out over these 20 years and to extract relevant lessons which, on the one hand, can be applied to the improvement of the "Acceder" programme itself and, on the other, can be taken into account in the design of public employment policies aimed at the Roma population.

### **a) Specialisation of employment programmes aimed at groups in a situation of social exclusion.**

In this sense, the specialisation of the programme in access to employment for the Roma population is recognised as a success factor, while at the same time it is recommended that a more specific definition be made of the profile of the Roma population these actions are aimed at, taking into account the socio-demographic and socio-economic variables that can condition access to employment.

In order to adapt actions to the characteristics and situations of different groups within the Roma population, a greater profiling is required according to age (prioritising actions with young Roma people), gender (focusing work on Roma women) and socio-economic situation (recipients of the Minimum Income (MI) or minimum income programmes).

Our proposals for public employment and social protection policies are as follows:

- Promote the guarantee of vocational training and access to quality jobs for an increasingly diverse Roma youth, better prepared than the previous generation and with clear expectations and motivation to enter the labour market,

- Extend specific and innovative responses for training and accompaniment to employment, and to more qualified employment for Roma women,
- Implement comprehensive active inclusion measures for people from households receiving the IM or insertion income, which complement social accompaniment, training and employment pathways for adults and educational guidance and support pathways for minors.

#### **b) Prioritise the development of complete pathways.**

One of the recommendations made by the evaluation team to the FSG is to reinforce the specialisation focus of "Acceder", concentrating its intervention on the reference pathway, i.e. the pathway that has proven to be the most effective for the insertion of the Roma population due to its high insertion rate.

This is the insertion pathway for employment, which includes guidance actions, support for active job search, training and labour intermediation, with a duration of at least 2 years.

In this sense, our proposal for active employment policies is to make the most of these experiences of social entities that two decades of European funds have made it possible to implement, such as "Acceder". It is proposed to integrate specific programmes such as "Acceder" as part of the offer of the Public Employment Services, focusing on people with more difficulties in finding employment.

#### **c) Improving the educational level of the Roma population.**

The evaluation has shown that whether the Roma people who participate in the "Acceder" programme have a Compulsory Secondary Education Certificate or not is decisive when it comes to their inclusion to the labour market.

In this sense, more actions are recommended to increase the educational level of the Roma population and, at the same time, to re-evaluate the importance of studies for access to employment. It is recommended that activities aimed at obtaining a Compulsory Secondary Education Certificate be integrated into the employment action programmes.

Active employment policies should facilitate integrated pathways from education to training and employment.

#### **d) More training to qualify for employment.**

Vocational qualifications are key to facilitating access to employment for people who do not have the minimum compulsory education. The evaluation team recommends that these training actions be extended to more Roma people with difficulties in accessing employment, these training actions should be extended to more Roma people.

The key to the success of these training courses is a flexible model that adapts to the characteristics of the target population and to the needs of the collaborating companies. Within this flexible model, some variables stand out that have led to a higher insertion rate: theoretical training alternating with practical training, training designed and implemented in collaboration with leading companies in their sector, with financial aid to facilitate the attendance and permanence of the student in the training.

#### **e) Expanding coverage to reach the rural world.**

One of the programme's weaknesses is its lack of impact in rural areas. The commitment for the coming years should be to bring the "Acceder" offer to the greatest number of Roma people in the greatest number of territories, including large population centres that are currently not served and

especially smaller towns that are geographically more distant and where many Roma people live. This will also represent a challenge for "Acceder" in terms of innovation and changes in the current model of care, which until now has been based on teams of professionals based in offices.

**f) Access to higher quality jobs.**

It is recommended that the programme should access professional sectors that require higher qualifications and, at the same time, offer better working conditions. In this sense, the organisation is targeting companies in emerging sectors such as technology and green jobs. The aim is to open a stable channel for the incorporation of young Roma people into these jobs and, at the same time, to raise the expectations of many other young people and break the limited field to which members of the Roma community can aspire today.

In the two years following the impact evaluation of the Acceder programme and in line with the recommendations of the evaluation team, the FSG has implemented measures related to the following objectives:

- Offering more training that qualifies for employment, aimed at young people and adapted to the situation of the Roma population. It highlights the launch, in December 2022, of the Tándem programme, a public training programme in alternation with employment whose aim is to provide professional training and facilitate the inclusion of unemployed young people under 30 years of age. It is a programme promoted by the State Public Employment Service (SEPE) and financed by Next Generation EU funds. For 12 months, 50 young Roma people from 28 different cities are being trained in four different training specialisations (22 young people in gardening, 16 in intercultural and community mediation with the Roma population, and 12 in computer systems maintenance). During the first 3 months, they received an initial training grant and in the following 9 months, they have been hired by the FSG with a training contract in alternation with employment to carry out activities of recovery of public natural spaces, maintenance activities of the FSG's computer systems and intercultural mediation activities within the FSG's teams. The fact that the training specialisations in mediation and IT systems have been delivered online has enabled training in professional profiles other than the usual profiles aimed at the most vulnerable Roma population to be extended to more cities. It is expected that, in the next call of the Tándem programme, training will be provided in new areas related to energy efficiency in buildings, solar photovoltaic installations, communication in digital environments, community health promotion and gender equality, and administrative management in NGOs.

- Extending coverage to reach the rural world with specific measures aimed at Roma women. In this sense, work is being carried out on the design of the strategy for the extension of the coverage of the Acceder programme to the rural world, with specific measures aimed at the training of Roma women and adaptations of the programme's methodology. It is expected to be implemented in the next programming period of the European Social Fund.

- The above measures will contribute to the objective of facilitating access to higher quality jobs for the most vulnerable Roma population. In its new strategic plan, the FSG is working on the incorporation of evaluation indicators to measure the access of the Roma population participating in the Acceder programme to better quality jobs.

To conclude, it can be stated that 20 years of the "Acceder" programme, and also of the other employment initiatives carried out by other social organisations (such as the Spanish Red Cross, ONCE Foundation, Spanish Caritas...), within the framework of the European Social Fund (and its different operational programmes: Fight against Discrimination, Social Inclusion and Social Economy and Youth Employment), have constituted a real social laboratory for public policies aimed at the most excluded and discriminated groups, especially in the field of employment.

A wealth of experience and knowledge has been generated on approaches, intervention processes, methodological options and their evaluation, which we cannot afford to waste, and which

should now feed into the design and implementation of employment and social protection policies over the next decade for the most socially vulnerable or excluded groups in the labour market.

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