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## XXIII ROMA STUDENTS GATHERING OF CATALONIA



**Organization in charge of the co-implementation of the activity:**

Roma Women Association Drom Kotar Mestipen -DKM

**Date of the meeting:**

10th June 2023

16:00 a 20:00 CET

**Location:** Barcelona, Catalonia. Spain

**Host institution:**

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)

Faculty of Philosophy and Arts





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The XXIII Roma Students Gathering in Catalonia took place at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) at the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts, located in Bellaterra, Cerdanyola del Vallés, 21km from the city of Barcelona. The gathering was held from 16:00 to 20:00 hrs. It was attended by **(Seventy-seven) 77** Roma women from the municipalities of Amposta and Tortosa (Tarragona), Salt, Font de la Pólvora, Figueres, (Girona), Gavá, Badalona (Barcelona), and different neighborhoods of Barcelona, such as La Mina, Bon Pastor and San Cosme.

In the previous meetings, the women discussed on a central location between Barcelona, Tarragona and Girona, that could be ideal for the next Gathering. This is why this academic venue, on the outskirts of Barcelona was chosen. It is worth mentioning that, as always, priority is given to a place that is symbolically recognized as a space that promotes education. The arrangements with the university were made first through the university teachers who are volunteers of Drom Kotar Mestipen, and then directly with the academic vice-rectorate.

## 1- PREPARATION PHASE BEFORE THE “TROBADA”

To be able to plan the 23<sup>rd</sup> Gathering, The National Coordination Committee (NCC) invited participants to be part of the planning process. The participants were in charge of the activities prior to the Gathering, where content, logistics, and other organizational structures were discussed. The needs and interest of Roma women and girls were always prioritized.

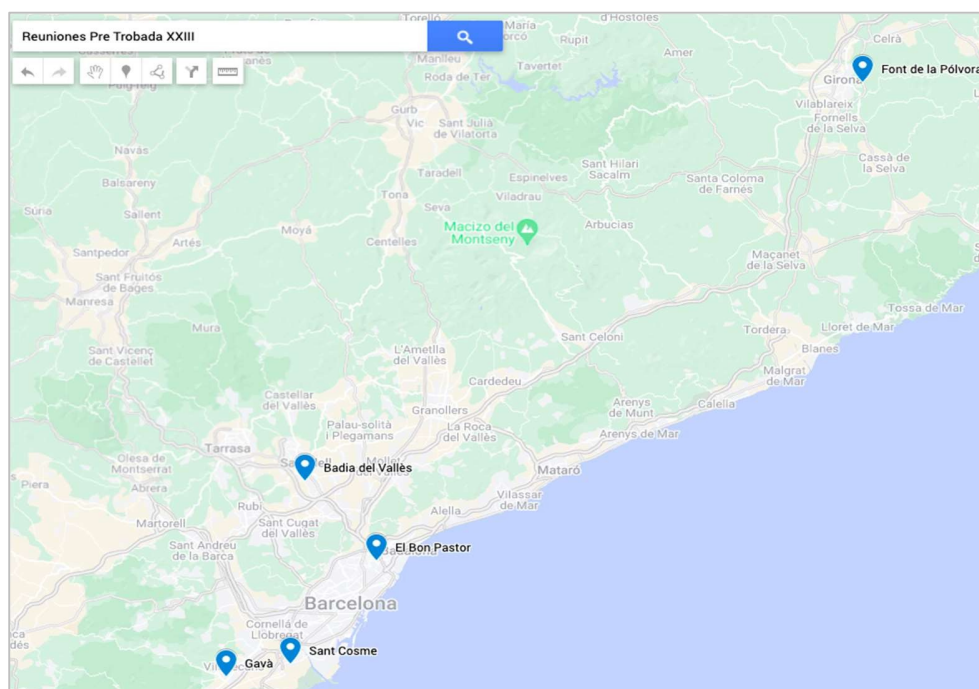


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Six (6) face-to-face meetings were held in:

| City and Province                       | Date       |
|---|------------|
| • Font de la Pólvara and Salt (Girona). | 25/04/2023 |
| • Badia (Sabadell)                      | 03/05/2023 |
| • La Mina (Barcelona)                   | 05/05/2023 |
| • San Cosme (Barcelona)                 | 16/05/2023 |
| • Bon Pastor (Barcelona)                | 19/05/2023 |
| • Gavá (Barcelona)                      | 23/05/2023 |



Visits in Catalonia April - May 2023





Salt, Girona 25/04/23



Gavà, Barcelona 23/05/23



Badia del Valles, Barcelona 03/05/23



Barcelona, Barcelona 19/05/23

### Composition of the NCC

- María Cortés Gómez
- Alegría Gabarri Moreno
- Eli Lucena Cortés
- Verónica Santiago Santiago

To plan the Gathering, two groups were created as “Motor groups” or “lead organization groups”. One of the groups was composed mainly of younger women and girls and the other group was composed of some lead participants, representing different parts of Catalonia.





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These groups were in charge of mobilizing the logistics of the women in each zone, as well as proposing ideas for graphic and communication contents.

The junior group, made up mainly of Roma girls and young women who participated by giving ideas in the creation of dissemination materials and other communicative pieces.

Participants Junior Group:

- Litani Gómez Cortes. Barcelona.
- Ana Fernández Contreras. Barcelona.
- Elizabeth Pubil Muñoz. Barcelona.
- Sulamita Fernández. Barcelona

And the group of women in each zone of Catalonia who promoted the participation of the Gathering, helping to organise women who had never participated, spreading the voice of the gathering among other actions.

Lead participants Group (by zone):

- Mercedes Cortés y Mari Carmen Cortés, Barcelona.
- Pepi Baptista de Figueres y Salud Muñoz, Girona.
- Maria Alegria Gabarri, Amposta
- Sacri Fernandez, Gavà, Barcelona.

In addition to the face-to-face meetings, virtual meetings were scheduled via social networks and phone calls with more women from Catalonia who wanted to participate with their opinions and ideas in the organization of the Gathering. **Sixty-nine (69)** women were contacted by phone. They in turn passed on the information to their families and communities.

In terms of dissemination, two social network platforms were used: Instagram and Facebook.



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The organizing committee created more than 30 publications, inviting women to take part in

this group. The experience from previous years, show that being part of this group becomes a unique opportunity to exchange knowledge and opinions amongst the women. Furthermore, the NCC also contacted 122 educational centers and 63 associations.



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In the NCC meetings, prior to the Gathering, the women who participated in the planning of the gathering, proposed some topics that should be discussed when visiting different cities and provinces. These were the topics:

- Dialogical feminism.
- Health and eating habits.
- The Romani language.
- Sexual orientation and transsexuality.
- Roma identity and diversity.
- Attention to special educational needs, entitlements, over-diagnosis or lack thereof.

The above themes emerged from a participatory space, where women felt in an atmosphere of trust that allowed them to discuss their interests.

The main focus is on their particular and general concerns about their environment and their expectations of themselves and their families.





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## 2- IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTIVITY: THE GATHERING

After all the women had evaluated the different topics, the theme that was chosen was:

### ★ ***Attention to special educational needs in the Roma Community*** ★

This topic was chosen because of its recurrence in all the meetings that were held with the Roma women in different parts of Catalonia. The women highlighted that in many educational centers, the content and the activities aimed at the students, were different for Roma students. The schools, through their teachers, make an erroneous assessment of the special educational needs of Roma children, assuming that their academic level is lower just because they belong to the Roma community. The women from Gavà and San Cosme communicated some special cases that they were interested in addressing in depth at the Gathering.

The Gathering will consist of the following parts:

- I. The Inaugural Conference.
- II. The Table of Role Models
- III. The Working Groups.
- IV. The Conclusions.



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## I. THE INAUGURAL CONFERENCE



**Inaugural conference of the XXIII Roma Student Gathering in Catalonia, Spain**

To address the chosen theme, the participants had the opportunity to listen to the conference given by Prof. Dr. Silvia Molina (Professor of the Department of Pedagogy at the University of Rovira i Virgili), titled "Special Educational Needs in the Roma Community: Barriers to Inclusion and Learning and Actions to Overcome them".

Among the various issues that were explored in depth, one of them was the dynamics of inequality and discrimination affecting students from cultural minorities. It was explained that international attention has been drawn to the fact that students from cultural minorities, and especially Roma students, have been sent to special education centers in many countries, especially in Eastern European countries.



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In 2007, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in favour of 18 Roma students, in Czech Republic. The students had been sent to special schools for children with learning difficulties based on their ethnic belonging. In this regard, the European Commission has stressed the need to eradicate school segregation and the misuse and misapplication of special education for Roma pupils.

The content of the conference was gathered by relevant information based on scientific articles and practical examples of successful educational actions, which have been used to tackle exclusion in education.

In the final part of the conference, the guide developed in the framework of the INTER-ACT research project was shared. The guide provides content on how to create interactive learning environments in contexts of functional diversity, and is useful for both schools and families.

[Link INTER-ACT Guide.](#)



## II. ROLE MODEL TABLE



Role Model Table of the XXIII Roma Students Gathering of Catalonia, Spain

The table of reference is a key aspect of the Gathering. This table was moderated by Raquel Heredia Gil, a Roma woman who is today a reference in the field of education. She was accompanied by four other Roma women, who all are role models for many other Roma women and girls.

| Members of the Bureau   |
|---|
| <b>Raquel Heredia Gil - 25 years old.</b> Campclar (Tarragona). Graduated in Social Education at Rovira i Virgili University.                           |
| <b>Alba Gómez Heredia- 21 years old.</b> Castelldefels (Barcelona). Third year of the Audiovisual Communication Degree at Pompeu Fabra University.      |
| <b>Maria Alegría Gabarri Moreno - 48 years old.</b> Amposta (Tarragona). Successfully passed the university entrance exam for people over 45 years old. |
| <b>Elisabeth Pubill Muñoz. 14 years old,</b> Salt (Girona) High school student at Institut Vallvera.  |
| <b>Lítani Gómez Cortéz. 17 years old</b> (Barcelona). Student of High school at Institut Joan d'Austria. Sant Adrià. Barcelona.                         |



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While composing the Role Model table, we made sure to include profiles of all age groups. The main reason for this was, to show that each stage in life brings its own experiences and characteristics, and this in turn, can inspire Roma girls and women in all ages. We want to highlight that education is for everyone.

In fact, Salud Hernández, a Roma woman participant, mentioned the importance of identifying older women that have finished their studies as referents. She means that this encourages anyone to set goals for their future, and see the possibility of starting or continuing their educational path at any time in life.

The presence of a large part of the young audience was also noted. They found it inspiring to hear about the experiences of others in their age group, and listen to their high educational expectations.

These were some of the phrases mentioned by the women at the reference table:

***"I have collected data on Roma women who have been scientists, teachers, doctors, many years ago! So just in case someone wants us to believe that this (studying) is not Roma, that they want to put limits on you, go ahead. Because if we don't do it, who will?"***

***"In the future I want to be a historian, because I would like to be able to teach our history in the same way that Roman or any other history is taught in schools".***

*Elizabeth Pubill Muñoz*



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***"My only support in life and in my studies has been my parents, they have always told me that if I want to achieve something in life... I have to study and work hard to achieve my dream. So I want to encourage all Roma girls and women to fulfill their dreams... with a lot of desire and dedication we can achieve even the tireless".***

*Lítani Gómez Cortés*

***"This year I passed the university entrance exam for the over 45s. This year I can do a higher degree in social integration, I want to train in anti-discrimination and equality policies and social education. I am 48 years old, I have 5 children and 2 grandchildren. So young people, don't let time pass you by. Study. The street market should be an option, not an obligation".***

*Maria Alegria Gabarri*



### III. WORKING GROUPS

After the panel discussion, the women were divided into small working groups to discuss and exchange ideas on the content of, both the panel discussion, and the inaugural conference.

The main idea of these discussion groups, which were all monitored by one Roma woman, is to find solutions to overcome obstacles encountered by Roma women in their educational trajectories and, above all, find solutions by sharing and exchanging experiences.

These spaces are characterized as safe and egalitarian spaces, where the active participation of all women is encouraged.





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**Working groups of the XXIII Roma Students in Catalonia, Spain**



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Here are some phrases mentioned in the dynamics of the working groups:

***"I would like my daughter to study as I have not been able to do so, I would like my child to do something that could help other people."***

***"We should not be discriminated against because of our educational or socio-economic level, even if we have not been able to study, we have a lot to contribute".***

***"I am very proud of my effort and the life I have now, if I have achieved it, they all can. It's effort, time and perseverance."***

***"If he had known everything he knows now, he would have told his daughter to go to university."***

***"We have not studied because we have not been able to, not because we are not good enough".***

***"Information and training are key. I used to say to my daughter that you won't be less Roma Women because you study the other way round, you'll be able to defend culture more".***





During the Gathering, we set up a Playroom for all the children. The women could take part of all the activities while their children were participating in activities and games designed for different age groups. Volunteers were in charge of taking care of the kids and conducting diverse games and participatory activities. To mention one example, they were constructing the universe through Lego, the latter being a physics workshop for the whole family developed by the Institute of High Energy Physics ([IFAE](#)).

Furthermore, reading and writing activities were carried out. Classic tales of Greek Mythology for children were read, following the model of the Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLG). DLG is a collective construction of meaning and knowledge on the basis of dialogue with the participants, regardless of age, gender, culture or ability. It allows access to universal classical literature. It is worth mentioning that, most of the volunteers were university teachers or working with education.



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## IMPACT OF THE TROBADA

For some of the women who participated in this Gathering, it was their first time they attended a meeting with other Roma women in Catalonia. In the evaluation forms that were distributed after the Gathering, they mentioned that they felt inspired by learning about the trajectories of other Roma women.

Most of the women were in the 30-60 age range, followed by the 13-18 age range. The municipalities with the highest participation were Barcelona, specifically Gavá and Girona, with 61 participants out of the total 77. This was mainly due to the active role played by the women who were in the Lead participants Group who continually encouraged participation.

Furthermore, Dr. Javier Lafuente Sancho, Rector at the Universitat de Autònoma de Barcelona, welcomed the holding of this meeting at the University, and highlighted the importance of education in the lives of all individuals. He acknowledged the effort that the academy must make to reduce the barriers that many people have in accessing education.

The post-gathering evaluations include the following feedbacks from the participants:

- "The most remarkable thing for me was to see that every day we are more and more women pursuing our dreams". Woman Barcelona. 40 years old.
- "It has motivated me to continue my training". Woman Tortosa, Tarragona. 26 years old.
- "I'm going to do a degree in Social Work". Woman Barcelona, 45 years old

3rd Report Meeting of Roma students in Catalonia. "Roma women transform education systems in Europe through their political and social mobilisation".

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS OF THE TROBADA



Once the working groups had finished, all the participants met again in the main hall, to present to the audience the conclusions that each group had reached through a dialogical method.

The moment of presenting the conclusions is a valuable stage. Ideas, proposals and experiences, that are considered important by the women for the education and their personal lives, are being shared with everyone.

Additionally, in order to transfer the message of the participants to representatives of public administration and other relevant actors, Drom Kotar Mestipen Association, creates a document with all the demands that the women made, organised by theme.

The following is the document of conclusions, of the XXIII Roma student Gathering in Catalonia, in which, the participating women lifted the following points:



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## EDUCATIONAL CENTERS

- **Equality** in schools. The Roma children should not have their content or timetables adapted, or sent to other classrooms if they have difficulties. Instead, they should obtain the necessary help they need, within their normal classroom hours, to be able to reach the necessary level.
- Ensure that children leave each year with the content and academic level they are expected to have. If a child does not have the necessary competence to pass the school year, they should not be sent to the next year. They must arrive to school with the **corresponding level**.
- In real cases of **Specific Educational Needs**, it is essential to have the figure of a "**vetllador/a**", which is similar to teacher aid in English, in the educational centers. Their presence **within the classroom** is essential, favoring the academic success of the students and making them participants in the class, creating an inclusive and egalitarian space, where they can learn together.
- Social services and the education system need to **provide the necessary resources** so that children can be in the classrooms and learn. Sometimes the resources are not offered because they think Roma children are ignorant.
- Sometimes they are treated as if they need special attention because they are Roma, but it is often a wrong diagnosis.
- **Teachers trained to** work with diversity, if necessary; they should be given the **relevant training** to be able to teach **all students equally**.
-

- There are many stereotypes about our people; we want them to stop treating us as thieves, disruptive, etc. These **stereotypes** are not close to our reality and the reproduction of these stereotypes means that we are still in **situations of inequality**.



Schools and society are increasingly demanding higher standards, and to achieve this, it is necessary for teachers to **motivate students in a positive way**.

- Making primary schools into a **school institute** is a good alternative so that children do not have to go far away to study, making it easier for them to continue their academic journey in a centre where they already know and feel safe.
- It is not enough for them to go to school, we want them to succeed.
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### **ROMA REPRESENTATION:**

- **Roma women in schools and institutes.** "Sometimes girls don't go because they lack self-confidence; they are afraid and/or feel inferior. The fact that there are Roma women in high schools can help them feel more confident and represented".
- It is important that there are **talks about our people** and about racism in schools. We want to feel more represented and give visibility and knowledge of our history and our people to the rest of the society. We want to give **value** to **our culture** and our contributions.
- **Talks and spaces like these Meetings** are important to raise expectations and not to feel alone.
- Us women have to organize ourselves and go to **schools in Catalonia to hold speeches**. In this way, they can get to know us, and see our reality. This will break the stereotypes they have of us.



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## SCHOOL AND FAMILY

- **The involvement of families** in their children's educational journey is important.
- For there to be **more Roma presence in schools**, it is important:
  - Participate **more** in meetings with teachers.
  - **To improve the relationship between families and teachers**, for teachers to be more involved, for there to be **equal dialogue**, in order to break down stereotypes and get to know the reality of families.
- Include **family training** in schools, while creating a link with the school and families, we have the opportunity to learn.
- School and families have to **work together in the same direction** for the benefit of their children's educational future.
- **The voice and perspective of Roma families** should **be taken into account** when making decisions. That there is a Roma representative in **decision-making spaces** at school or in other areas of society is important.
- **Equal dialogue** between teachers and/or other professionals and families are essential.
- To be more **present in the AMPA** (Parents' Associations of schools in Catalonia), this is important to get to know the school better, and for there to be more trust.

