

Who are the Roma?

As most of us are aware, Gypsy People—more accurately referred to as Roma people—have been roaming many parts of the earth without any particular home for centuries. The most likely view at their origin is that they migrated from Northern India about 1000 years ago. After their long journey first Roma families arrived in Europe during the 15th century, still on an endless nomadic journey, earning their daily bread with special skills as day laborers and small traders. Among them highly skilled, smiths, cobblers, and weavers, as well as exceptional musicians, dancers, fortunetellers, and traditional healers.

European societies and churches have always been struggling deeply with everything that smacked of heresy and loose morale. They felt threatened by anything that flouted their norms: Roma were unsettled, dark, and spoke a different language; they were accused to have witchcraft. It was easy to produce prejudices and for the bad images to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Roma faced many programs and Hitler increased the will to erase them along with the Jews: Thousands were sent to concentration camps and to death.

In Communist times the remaining Roma were forced to settle and to integrate into the majority societies, but also were provided with jobs and social security. All that apparent equality got lost after the fall of communism in 1990. Struggling with radical social change the new regimes were seemingly unable to protect the weakest among them; the Roma. This led to a very high percentage of unemployment, terrible housing and health conditions and poor education among them. The cultural change produced a renaissance of traditional majority values

which didn't always include the rights of minorities but sometimes even led to discrimination or scapegoat images against minorities like Roma.

The Churches gaining new acceptance and redefining their own identity play an important role to find out how to improve the relationship between Roma and Non-Roma. There are sensitive political signs (like the EU



assessment process, a high unemployment rate, as well as a rapid population growth among Roma) that show, that the time for a paradigm shift is right now.

We have set up an egroup for communication about Roma mission. Please refer to:
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Network_Roma_Projects/

For Roma Mission pledges please use our Extra Commitment Opportunity (ECO)
#E-040061

**PC (USA)
PFF**

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We need your support for:

Roma Initiatives in Central- and Eastern Europe



**PC (USA)
PFF**

How does PC(USA) Support the Partner Churches in their work with Roma?

- By making regular small grants to the Reformed churches in Central Europe to fund cross-cultural training for Reformed pastors and lay leadership and to develop intercultural ministry mentoring skills,
- By developing a programme that would include young people from CEE (including Roma), Western Europe, and the USA to serve as volunteers in institutions, congregations and projects of the Reformed Churches dealing with Roma,



Harold Kurtz (PFF) visiting Roma in a Hungarian village

- By funding the development of leadership training programmes and other resources for Roma leaders in all the Reformed churches in the region,
- By engaging in specific developmental projects that: involve Roma groups in planning, implementing and evaluating, are low cost, involve a relationship with the church, have promise of success, have an educational component,
- By supporting financially the Tutoring Programme of the Hungarian Reformed Church.
- By looking for seed money to leverage further resources for micro-credit.
- By cooperation with national Churches, Church alliances, Human rights and community development NGOs

What Problems Ought to be Addressed?

Participation of Roma in congregational and church life

Roma like other cultural groups, must have the opportunity to worship in their own way, have their own leadership, have their own music, and create their own patterns of church life. Those Roma who wish to worship in predominantly or exclusively Roma congregations, should be welcomed into the majority churches of Central Europe. On the other hand non-Roma congregations who have a strong desire to include Roma as full members in their congregational life should be supported in their efforts to do so. All congregations and churches, would surely be enriched by the inclusion of Roma members, Roma music, and other indigenous forms of worship.

Roma leadership development

There is an obvious need for education for Roma church leadership that must not remove them either culturally, geographically or relationally from the communities they serve. Mission history has shown that at the start up level training in Bible schools or by theological extension to be the most effective way of developing pastoral leadership in a newly emerging Christian community. It is essential that leadership development be centred in the ultimate aim to have all Roma congregations attain the same level of self-support, self government, and self propagation as other Reformed congregations.

Social economic development, education

Simply to transfer money or goods or formal education to marginalized communities as practised in the past is not a way to solve the various problems facing the Roma people in CEE countries. Roma and non-Roma together have to find an integrated approach to address diversity. A prerequisite to any programmes is the acceptance of marginalized people as a people worthy of respect. Pastors, congregational and local community leaders can succeed to build trust between Roma and the dominant cultural communities if engaged in dialogue on a personal basis with Roma. Adult education programmes that allow Roma to develop their own understandings of their culture, situation in society, etc., should be encouraged and developed in co-operation with Roma teachers and community leaders. They are needed in order for them to lead organisations, manage programmes, represent themselves in dealings with government, etc. as well as to support their children in their own education. Micro-credit programmes should be explored as a way of helping Roma to develop economic self-sufficiency

How to assist Roma Mission in CEE?

Working as a young adult volunteer

- I need more information
 I would like to apply
 I would like to promote this

Twinning with a Roma church in CEE

- I need more information
 Tell me about options
 We are ready to ...

Financial sponsorship for one of our projects

- Young adult volunteer
 Roma leadership training
 Tutoring Program of HRC

Visiting & encouraging national Partners & local churches

- I need more information
 Put me on your mailing list
 I'm ready to ..

Comments:

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

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