

PROGRAM

Hungarian Reformed Church
Roma Initiatives

LOCATION

Country/City

Hungarian Reformed Church
Roma Initiatives

Geography

Hungary's capital is Budapest. Hungary covers an area of 36,000 (half the size of Indiana), and has a population of 10 million. The racial ethnic make-up of this country is Hungarian, Roma, German, Slovak, Jewish and other Slavic. The economy works with machinery, buses, medical instruments, pharmaceuticals, textiles, and agricultural products. The spiritual content of the country consist of 68% Catholic, 20% Calvinist, and 5% Lutheran. The main language is Hungarian.

Description of Community

As many people 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 of their origin is that they migrated from Northern India about 1,000 years ago. After their long journey, the 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 were highly skilled smiths, cobblers, and weavers, as well as exceptional musicians, dancers, fortune-tellers and traditional healers.

European societies and churches have always strongly resisted anything that smacked of heresy and loose morals. They felt threatened by anything that flouted their norms. Roma were recognized as unsettled (even if they lived for a long time as settled citizens, like in some countries of the Balkans), were dark, spoke a different language and were accused of practicing witchcraft. They easily aroused prejudices, and the bad images became self-fulfilling prophecies. Roma faced many pogroms, and Hitler manipulated the situation 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 they also were provided jobs and social security. All of that apparent equality was lost after the fall of communism in 1990. Struggling with radical social change, the new regimes were seemingly unable to protect with weakest among them: the Roma. This led to a very high percentage of unemployment, terrible housing and health conditions, and poor education among them. Plus, the culture change produced a renaissance of traditional majority values, which didn't always include the rights of

minorities. As Churches in Central and Eastern Europe gain new acceptance and redefine their own identity, they can play an important role in discovering new ways to improve the relationships between Roma and Non-Roma. As part of an international and ecumenical group of young adults, volunteer will play a significant role in this new venture.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Description of Organization/Mission Statement

As part of this year of service, volunteers will meet regularly for retreats, prayer, study and support – as well as for times of historical, social, political and cultural education. Volunteers will benefit from a substantial time of in-country orientation. The need for language study and acquisition is assumed and will be provided (though volunteers will need to be comfortable embracing and living into a steep language learning curve!).

Placement (list job descriptions or service opportunities)

Young Adult Volunteers will serve in institutions, congregations and projects of the Reformed Churches in Central and Eastern Europe dealing with/ministering to Roma people (gypsies). Volunteer placements will be in the Ukraine, Hungary and/or Slovakia, and will involve one or more of the following aspects of Roma life:

- § social justice issues
- § human rights
- § education
- § teaching
- § youth clubs
- § hostels for teens/young people
- § work with children

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Housing

Housing will be provided in a variety of settings, from family homes to dormitories, apartments and shared living.

Community Life

Volunteers will serve in pairs, and will work to understand their local situation and ministry context: economy, politics, and relations between cultural groups – always seeking to build trust between Roma and the dominant cultural communities.

Spiritual Formation

As part of this year of service, volunteers will meet regularly for retreats, prayer, study and support – as well as for times of historical, social, political and cultural education.

REQUIREMENTS

A college degree or equivalent experience is required. The program is designed for young adults between the ages of 21 and 30; preference will be given to those who have previously served as an International Young Adult Volunteer. Volunteers must be flexible, in excellent health, demonstrate strong crosscultural skills and abilities, willing to serve in diverse communities (both racially and socioeconomically), have a gift for learning languages, and able to live for extended periods of time with very basic living conditions.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Site Supervisor

Emese Zavodi

organization website or email

<http://www.pcusa.org/msr/ya/hungary.htm>