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# THE HUNGARIAN ROMA

*Amy Rikoon*



## Introduction

The Roma (Gypsy) population of Hungary has faced unjust social and political institutions that marginalize them in every aspect of society. They lack political power, their children receive substandard education, and they suffer from high unemployment, poor healthcare, and poor living conditions. The question is whether the problem of discrimination can actually be solved through political activism, changes in the government system, or improvements in education. While visiting Budapest in May 2005, I attended a gathering where people interested in fighting discrimination in Hungary exchanged ideas and hope for the future. This inspired my current research and provided me with a realistic perspective.

In this article I discuss the violation of rights that Roma currently face in Hungary, and I trace the historical foundation for discrimination against the Roma. I also describe the harmful social attitudes that currently reside in the minds of both Roma and non-Roma Hungarians and examine several ways Hungarians are beginning to address the problem of social justice. I focus especially on the educational and political realms, because of the

potential for positive change in these areas, and the far-reaching effect that education and politics have on other sectors of society. I also discuss both the successes and inadequacies of programs currently in place in Hungary.

## Current Situation

Of the thirteen recognized minority groups residing in Hungary, the Roma is the largest, making up about 5.3–5.8 percent of Hungary's total population.<sup>1</sup> (Danova/Russinova, p. 25) However, the Roma do not forcefully demand equal rights as Hungarian citizens because they lack economic resources, knowledge of how to use the established system, and confidence in their potential to effect change. After centuries of inequality, many Roma are convinced that they can do nothing to improve their lives.

Living in extreme poverty, the Roma generally face systematic exclusion from good schools, alarmingly high unemployment rates,

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<sup>1</sup>The actual Roma population of Hungary is probably higher than this estimate because it has been found that Roma often do not truthfully report their identity when census material is being collected. (Barany, p. 160)

low political influence, inadequate housing conditions, prejudice within the healthcare system, and unacceptable occurrences of police brutality. (“Notes to the Council...”) The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), an international organization based in Budapest that fights racism through public interest law, documents specific instances supporting all of these assertions. For example, 84.2 percent of the population of the remedial classes in 192 schools in Hungary in 2001 consisted of Roma children, but these classes were not equipped to help the students; rather they served to prevent Roma children from integrating and gaining the same opportunities as other children. (*Barriers to the Education...*, p. 15) In 2000 the Roma also endured poverty rates of 40 percent compared to the general population’s poverty rate of 7 percent, and in 2005 60 percent of Roma were unemployed. (“Notes to the Council...”) The World Bank reports that in Hungary 54.9 percent of Roma households do not have access to hot running water, 66.6 percent do not have access to adequate sewerage, 50.1 percent do not have indoor toilets, and 13.2 percent have at least one member sleeping on an earthen floor. (“Notes to the Council...”) In a 2003 study, the ERRC interviewed 131 Romani women from different locations in Hungary and found 33 cases of negligence by medical professionals and 22 cases of verbal abuse. (Izsák) In Central Europe the life expectancy for Roma is officially 15 years shorter than the mainstream population. (“European Education,” Part 3)

Discrimination against the Roma violates international law. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights set forth by the United Nations in 1948 proclaims that every human has certain inalienable rights, such as equal protection under the law, adequate standards of living, and compulsory elementary education. Yet racial discrimination against the Roma persists throughout Europe and is especially strong in Hungary. Because of continued human rights violations, Hungary has caught the attention of such international organizations as Amnesty International, which identified many cases of alleged ill-treatment of Roma by Hungarian police in its 2003 and 2004 reports. (“Europe and Central Asia...”) In addition, Hungary is

one of the countries in the European Union where housing segregation is most prevalent. (“Hungary Tells School...”)

## **The Culture of Discrimination against the Roma**

At this point it is helpful to provide some background on the history of the Roma population. The Roma were a nomadic group journeying from India that arrived in Europe during the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Many characteristics such as skin color, language, and customs distinguished them from the established European population. Donald Kendrick and Grattan Puxon, members of the Columbus Centre, a research center created after the Holocaust to investigate discrimination, have studied the history of the persecution of the Roma. From folk sayings, contemporary literature, laws, and legislation they have recognized four types of social attitudes that instilled and solidified discrimination against the Roma. First was the assumption that darker skinned people are more primitive, inferior, and unclean, a notion that was promulgated by the Europeans, especially during colonization. Second, the Roma’s apparent lack of a definable origin and heritage led to the belief that they do not represent a distinct, recognizable ethnic group, that they have “unnatural origins,” and that they are racially impure. Third, because the Roma came from the direction of the Turkish-occupied land of the infidels, Christians and Muslims of Europe saw them as essentially irreligious. Their fortune-telling and magical practices threatened the established European ways and aroused contempt. Fourth, the European trade guilds feared competition from the nomadic craftsmen and thus excluded the Roma from industry. Some Roma, not being permitted to utilize the skills they had cultivated, turned to petty crime, instilling the group’s reputation for begging and thievery. (Kendrick and Puxon, pp. 20–31)

Hungary became part of the Hapsburg Empire in 1723, an empire in which the level of tolerance for minority groups was considerably low. (Barany, p. 29) Beginning in 1761, Empress Maria Theresa enforced assimilation policies such as outlawing Roma ownership of

horses and wagons and forcing them to settle in one place, thus attempting to destroy their way of life. In 1773 her government seized 18,000 Roma children, placing them in Christian homes and state schools. (Barany, p. 93) Maria Theresa's son and successor, Joseph II, followed up by outlawing the Roma language, dress, and music, except on holidays. (Kendrick and Puxon, p. 51) Although Hungary continued to decree assimilation policies through the end of World War I, the goal of Roma assimilation failed because no communities actually welcomed Roma inhabitants and because the policies lacked the necessary enforcement.

During the interwar period, the state was able to ignore the Roma because they held little economic or political power and because no stronger groups supported them. Since their traditional trades could not be adapted to the industrialization of this time, the Roma were economically impoverished, leading to the emergence of ghettos where their standard of living was very low. In rural sections, hostility often arose when Roma offered to work for less pay than what the similarly starving peasants earned. While the Hungarian neglect of the Roma during the interwar period was not as detrimental and degrading as the assimilation policies of Imperial times, it still left the Roma marginalized in society. (Barany, pp. 96–99)

When the Nazis overran Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, they capitalized on preexisting anti-Roma feelings. The Roma were declared "asocial" by the Nazis, and "scientific" research performed by the Nazis concluded that they were lazy and uneducable, that they intermarried with the worst kinds of people, and that they carried venereal disease. In response, plans to sterilize the Roma surfaced (Kendrick and Puxon, pp. 60–65), and the government outlawed sexual contact and marriages between Roma and non-Roma. An estimated 31,000 Roma were deported from Hungary when the Germans invaded in 1944; however, the exact number of deaths remains undocumented. (Kendrick and Puxon, pp. 125–26)

Following the defeat of Germany, Hungary fell under communist rule, which favored policies that encouraged assimilation of minorities. (Barany, p. 114) Still communism benefited the

Roma only superficially. For example, the Roma employment rate increased from 30 percent in 1957 to 85 percent of men and 53 percent of women by the mid-1980s, but those who did work remained in unskilled positions with low wages. The percentage of Roma attending school through the eighth grade increased from about 2.5 percent in 1961 to almost 40 percent in 1986, but Roma attended mostly resource-deprived segregated schools or classrooms, thereby ensuring their low social status. (Kovats, pp. 338–39) In addition, Roma attendance beyond the eighth grade remained small and actually decreased by the early 1980s. (Barany, p. 133) Unfortunately, Hungary did not grant national minority status and all of the special rights resulting from that status to Roma.<sup>2</sup> Policy makers claimed that Roma lacked the characteristics of a nationality, which included a common language, uniform culture, or definable history. Their exclusion from nationality status was pure discrimination (Barany, pp. 115–16) and left the Roma in a situation worse than other minorities in Hungary under the communist regime.

Today most Hungarians still harbor an extremely negative attitude toward the Roma. This attitude surfaces in commonly heard phrases like "the Roma problem" or "dirty Roma," and in schools where Roma children consistently complain of physical and verbal abuse. It is not unusual to hear reports such as a teacher calling Roma female students "stinking little Gypsy whores." (*Barriers to the Education...*, p. 24) Non-Roma believe that Roma children are inherently uneducable and unruly, as seen by another teacher who was reported to have hit a six-year-old Roma boy's head against a wall while claiming, "These children come in with real behavior problems because their parents don't care about them. They need to be taught to behave." (*Barriers to the Education...*, p. 24)

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<sup>2</sup>National minority status is granted to minority groups in many European countries as a declaration of their right to special social and cultural institutions (such as education in their mother language). Hungary denied this status to the Roma until 1988, claiming that the Roma did not constitute a nationality because they lacked criteria such as a common language, a territorial base, and a well known history. (Barany, pp. 114–15)

Since the fall of communism in 1989, Hungary has increased its acknowledgement of the inequality facing the Roma, but has continued to provide insufficient support to help. (Barany, p. 291) The National Minority Law of 1993, one of the most noted legislative actions in Eastern Europe, promotes rights for minorities as individuals and as a community. Some areas targeted by the National Minority Law include political representation, housing, education, and cultural institutions. The Office of Parliamentary Commissioner for National and Ethnic Minority Rights was also created in 1993 mainly to investigate complaints of grievances against minorities. (Barany, pp. 306–307) Furthermore, the process of applying for admission into the EU motivated the adoption of protective measures for minority groups in Hungary. Hungary was admitted in 2004.

Despite these new policies, the status of minorities has not substantially improved. For instance, the Minority Law of 1993 has lacked the financial support and necessary enforcement to function effectively. (Barany, pp. 295–96) In addition, the Constitutional Court's Decision 18/2004 declared unconstitutional Parliament's 2003 amendment to the Constitution that would outlaw publicly expressed hate speech. ("Notes to the Council...") This decision ignored the fact that hate speech often encourages violent crimes, particularly towards racial, national, or religious groups, and thus has been outlawed by many international institutions. (Errera, pp. 62–64)

As I have tried to show, throughout the centuries and despite multiple changes in Hungarian politics, the Roma have remained disadvantaged in virtually all sectors of Hungarian life.

## **How the Educational System Has Failed the Roma**

The Hungarian Constitution (1949) maintains that every minority group has the right to education in their mother tongue (Article 68) and that education is obligatory for minor children (Article 70/J). Article 5 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) and Directive

2000/43/EC of the European Council of the European Union also prohibit both direct and indirect discrimination and require member states, of which Hungary is one, to guarantee equality in education. Yet Roma children continue to face significant hardships ranging from verbal and physical abuse to exclusion and segregation. (Danova/Russinova, pp. 17–18)

One method used by school officials and teachers to exclude Roma children is to pressure their parents to accept "private student" arrangements whereby they waive mandatory school attendance in favor of home schooling. Ironically, this "private student" status was established by Article 69 Paragraph (3) of the Public Education Act to accommodate exceptionally talented students, but it has become a widespread tool for discriminatory exclusion. (*Barriers to the Education...*, p. 23; Danova/Russinova, p. 81)

Another segregation tool is the labeling of Roma students as "special needs" students, thereby rationalizing their placement in either segregated "catch-up" classrooms in the mainstream public schools or in entirely separate remedial schools. (Danova/Russinova, pp. 38 and 55) The number of Roma in schools for special needs children in Hungary is estimated to have increased from 15,000 in 1989 to 70,000 in 2003. ("European Education," Part 2) A February 2003 news report from Transitions On-Line gives as an example the village of Patka, where 23 out of 24 students in the remedial classes of the elementary school were Roma. ("Romani Education...") Supporters of segregation want outsiders to view such placements as helping Roma who may not have received the necessary preliminary education to understand the lessons in a normal classroom. However, the fact that students almost never return to the mainstream school after being placed in remedial education (Jensen, 2004, p. 11) suggests that the motivation is not to reintegrate, but rather to effectively eliminate any chance of Roma students receiving equal education. Often the required diagnostic testing for "special needs" is simply not performed, or the examiner neglects to account for language differences of Roma children, or placement depends on the judgment of a racist psychologist who concludes, as one Czech doc-

tor did, that Roma families often show genetic defects resulting in mental retardation. (Danova/Russinova, pp. 50 and 53)

“Ghetto schools” have emerged because of residential segregation based on prejudice, demographic changes that caused Roma to steadily move to certain areas, and “white flight,” or non-Roma relocating when they see more Roma entering their community. Although there is no “legal” difference between the ghetto schools and mainstream schools, it is well known that ghetto schools have lower educational standards. The facilities are usually run-down, textbooks are outdated, and teachers lack necessary instructional aids. (Danova/Russinova, pp. 67–78) A 2002 study showed that schools with a majority Roma population were less likely to have a library, more likely to have overcrowded classrooms, and nearly two times more likely to have a shortage of qualified teachers as compared to all other rural schools. The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) reported in 1998 that the percentage of Roma in the fourth grade who were functionally illiterate was 17.6 percent, and for Roma who dropped out in the fourth grade the percentage who were functionally illiterate was 35.7 percent. (Surdu, pp. 13–15)

Even the 1993 Minority Law that outlaws discrimination has worked against the Roma in a surprising way. Articles 44 and 50 state that schools will be compensated for the extra costs of educating minorities. However, this provision encourages the placement of Roma students in segregated classrooms so that the school can receive extra supplies, including material resources and teacher education; but the extra expenses are not necessarily used to educate minority students. (*Barriers to the Education...*, p. 16)

Poor education leaves the Roma in what some call a “self-perpetuating cycle of poverty.” They rarely enter secondary or vocational schools (Jensen, 2004, pp. 12–13), and only one half of 1 percent of Roma children attend school at the university level. (Jensen, 2005) Since their education does not prepare them for the challenges of adulthood or teach them the skills necessary for most lawful employment, they cannot rise above the poverty of their parents’ generation. This educational

neglect negatively affects the non-Roma of Hungary as well because it ensures a permanent underclass that will eventually rely on the state for support. (Jensen, 2004, pp. 11–12) Furthermore, as with any group stuck in a cycle of poverty, the Roma may resort to stealing and other activities outside the law.

## **Efforts to Eliminate Discrimination: Recent Progress in Education, Politics, and Activism**

### **Desegregating the Schools**

In 2004, based on its extensive work on this subject, the ERRC suggested ways to facilitate desegregation in the schools. Its general recommendations were to raise community awareness, provide social support, initiate curricula reform, and closely monitor the process. It also suggested closing schools where the population was predominately Roma because of the inability to convince non-Roma to attend such schools. Additional recommendations included busing Roma students to mainstream schools, providing academic support to Roma students and financial and other appropriate support to the schools who would receive them, and introducing a quota system to force schools to accept a balanced number of Roma and non-Roma students. Since this last suggestion violates the Minority Act of 1993 (which allows parents to freely choose the school their child attends), the ERRC suggested that this right should be revoked until the educational system became more balanced. (Danova/Russinova, pp. 95–98) It is important to note that in 2004 the Budapest Metropolitan City Court of Appeals upheld a decision that declared unlawful the segregation of Roma children into remedial classrooms without documentation of mental deficiencies that require remedial education. However, the ERRC still found many examples of Hungarian school segregation in 2005. (“Notes to the Council...”)

### **A Successful School Desegregation Program in Bulgaria**

During the 2000–2001 school year, the Nov Pat settlement in Bulgaria carried out the

first desegregation process in Central and Eastern Europe led by a Roma non-governmental organization, and its success might serve as a model for a similar program in Hungary. The project included busing Roma students to mainstream public schools, providing free school materials such as notebooks and bags, ensuring that Roma students were not segregated into all-Roma classrooms, providing training for those teachers who suddenly had mixed classrooms, and monitoring the children's progress. A great deal of preparation was necessary on multiple levels for this dramatic shift to work. For example, a publicity campaign involving television programs and newspaper articles built public support by advertising the benefits of integration, while leaders of the initiative met with officials of all-Roma schools, mixed schools, and Roma parents to discuss the initiative and the expected advantages to it. Most of the Roma parents needed some convincing because they feared adverse psychological effects on their children perceiving their disadvantaged economic background so glaringly on a daily basis. They were also unsure of their children's likelihood of success in mixed schools. Through explanations of the proposed integration system, their worries subsided. Furthermore, the strong fears of the municipal authorities, that integration would cause unrest between the Roma and non-Roma, were calmed after the first successful year of integration. The success was obvious in that desegregation led to increases in attendance rates and higher grades for Roma and non-Roma alike. Roma students received extra assistance when necessary, and all Roma students completed their coursework well enough to advance to the next academic level. (Panayotova and Evgeniev, pp. 44–50)

Bulgaria's successful Roma desegregation program is a good example for Hungary to emulate. The community was adequately prepared, and during the transition frequent monitoring and open conversation about the progress were immensely important to ensure the public's support. Success was also due to the alliance between local and international Roma non-governmental organizations, demonstrating the effectiveness of cooperative efforts.

## **Politics: Minority Self-Governments**

Two government bodies can coexist in Hungary at the local level — the municipal government and, in areas where a significant portion of people vote for it, a local “minority self-government (MSG).” This unique system of MSGs was established as a result of the Minority Act of 1993 to give representation to minorities in matters affecting them, such as public education, the media, and the practice of traditions and culture. (Kaltenbach, p. 182) The MSG is meant to act as an advisory board to the municipal government. Any of Hungary's 13 minority groups can elect a 3–5 member local minority self-government. Between 1993 and 1997, about 400 Roma MSGs were established. (Göncz and Geskó, p. 33) In 2002, after the third MSG election, 998 settlements elected Roma MSGs, and 545 representatives were Roma. (Hungarian Government Executive Branch) Peter Vermeersch, a political science researcher, found that about 3,000 Roma have “a certain role in public affairs at the local level.” (Vermeersch, p. 163)

This MSG system of representation and advocacy has been viewed optimistically by some as demonstrating Hungarians' acknowledgement of the Roma; however, the establishment of separate MSGs can also be seen as an attempt to exclude the Roma from the mainstream, fostering the Hungarian view that Roma are incompatible with Hungarian society. (Vermeersch, pp. 170–71) Furthermore, the implementation of MSGs does not always advance the intended purpose of promoting autonomy for the minority for several reasons. First, because ethnicity is not officially registered in Hungary, people outside of the minority can be elected to an MSG, making questionable how representative it is. (“Respect for Political Rights...”) Second, elected minority officials may attend the municipal local council meetings. Although they cannot vote, they can voice their opinion at the council meetings and veto decisions. (Schafft) Third, the MSGs were designed to work closely with the municipal governments, but many have become overly dependent on them. The MSGs rely on the municipal government for all of their funding; thus the municipal government can deny fund-

ing and effectively block any decision of the MSG. Fourth, municipal governments have taken advantage of the Act on Local Governments that permits them to transfer some of their responsibilities to local MSGs. (Kaltenbach, pp. 183 and 186) Often, especially with the Roma population, the municipal governments transfer social services concerns to the MSG without considering whether the MSG has the money to handle those extra responsibilities. (Eiler and Kovács, pp. 16–17)

In spite of these flaws, the minority self-governments can help the Roma if they learn to use the institution as a stepping-stone to more influence in the country. The European Roma Rights Center suggests that, whereas many obstacles inhibit Roma from entering the mainstream Hungarian government, especially on the national level, winning an elected position of any kind is worthwhile. At the local level, elected officials may have the power to influence the situation (if their resources allow it) and to gain the trust of the community so they can move forward in the political sphere. Furthermore, the professionalism that Roma would exhibit in their roles in MSGs can help to eliminate the derogatory stereotypes that non-Roma have, so that their participation in national politics is welcomed.

### **Activism**

During my trip to Hungary, I was fortunate enough to speak with two experts in political and social change: political strategist Robert Braun and Ferenc Miszlevitz, the director of the Institute of Social and European Studies in Szombathely. Both expressed the belief that the Roma themselves must be at the forefront in their fight for equality. However, the defeatist attitude of many Roma has inhibited their activism. Although the number of Roma personally involved in activism efforts has increased (“Political Participation...”), participation is not as high as it could be. The cause is not apathy, but rather a feeling of hopelessness because the Roma have known nothing but discrimination for centuries. In fact, many Roma even deny their ethnicity to avoid the ill-treatment brought about by their ethnic label, revealing their lack of self-respect.

(Barany, p. 160) They often fail to use the democratic tools available to them such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, the right to vote, and the right to assembly. As policy analyst Bill Hangle Jr. points out, “The challenge facing Roma activists is ... to get their own people acting like citizens of a democracy.” (Hangle, p. 183) And Miszlevitz maintains that the Roma still live under the spell of communism, that silenced any criticism of authority. The Roma are not accustomed to monitoring their government and to voicing their opinions. This practice must be taught and encouraged in the new democratic society before the Roma can begin to demand equal rights from their government. (Miszlevitz)

One way to change a defeatist social attitude is to show historical examples of activism working, thus proving its effectiveness. According to Ferenc Orsós, a leading educator, another important goal is to build Roma pride in their distinct culture and ethnic identity. Orsós teaches Roma students about their heritage, music, dance, and mythology to foster confidence and pride in their culture and traditions. (As explained in Jensen, 2004, p. 21)

### **Suggestions for Activism**

Michael Simmons, a human rights activist working on Roma issues, and Bill Hangle Jr. suggest that since the Roma are dispersed around the entire country (Central Statistics Office...) their activist agendas will likely be unmet unless they organize their efforts. Unfortunately, such organization is difficult because the Roma lack the economic resources and technological knowledge to utilize certain communication tools. Furthermore, variations within the spoken Roma language can hinder effective communication. (Simmons) However, if a successful network is formed, deciding on collective goals and making demands with a united voice will garner more attention from the Hungarian government than if each community had separate goals that the government might dismiss as merely local concerns. (Hangle, p. 180) Simmons and Hangle also suggest organizing support around specifically stated demands, such as the availability of better resources in the schools or more finan-



cial support for the minority self-governments, rather than amorphous requests to “help the Roma situation.”

Diane Post, the legal director of the European Roma Rights Center, suggests that litigation is another tool of democracy that the Roma underutilize because they do not trust the Hungarian judicial system that has rarely supported them in the past. (Post) They do not make use of the potential to initiate court cases that could result in antidiscrimination decisions. These tools are available to the Roma, but they have not been exposed to the effectiveness of democratic tools and need to be taught how to use them.

Both the ERRC (“Political Participation...”) and Hanglely suggest that non-governmental, grassroots organizations should assume responsibility for initiating the process of change. However, they also contend that the chances of these initiatives succeeding greatly increase with help from powerful allies in local and national legislative and executive offices, the media, and international non-governmental organizations. For example, the school desegregation program in Bulgaria used alliances between local and international organizations. Hanglely clearly explains that the mid-level government officials who directly create and implement policies are most likely to respond when pressure comes from both above and below. (Hanglely, pp. 181–82) Essentially, the non-governmental organizations can passionately voice their demands but have little power over policy makers. Higher political connections have the power to influence policy makers by publicly supporting certain laws but must be inspired by the grassroots organizations.

Programs such as diversity and sensitivity training could dispel rumors about the Roma lifestyle and moral system (Sántha). One such program would be to bring Roma and non-Roma together in an open environment to have directed discussions about their beliefs and lifestyles. Discussions should also demonstrate the often overlooked similarities between the goals and motivations of Roma and non-Roma. Sensitivity training has been used in other similar conflicts, such as the Seeds of Peace organization that works to develop Israeli and Palestinian leaders and the School for

International Training that works toward building understanding between the competing viewpoints in Ireland. Such programs would be most effective if they happened in schools because schools provide contact with a large portion of the population including students, teachers, administrators, and parents, thus targeting the younger and older generations simultaneously.

## Some Hope for the Future

The number of Romani Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) is on the rise. (“Political Participation...”) According to the elected president of the national Roma minority self-government, Mr. Flórián Farkas, approximately 200 NGOs for Roma interests existed in Hungary in 1998. One such organization is the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005–2015 (the Decade), an international organization whose purpose is to elevate the status of the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. It was created when prime ministers and senior government officials from Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, FYR Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, and Slovakia met at a regional conference on the Roma in 2003. The Decade emphasizes the importance of Roma participation in their efforts, the importance of closely monitoring progress, and the overarching goal of “equal treatment” in four priority areas: education, employment, housing, and health.

In 2003 the Decade created the Roma Education Fund to financially support the goals of improving the quality of education, the access to preschool, secondary, post-secondary, and adult education, and encouraging desegregation in the schools. By 2004 over 42 million dollars was donated by bilateral and multilateral organizations, private foundations, and individuals. (*Decade of Roma...*) The Decade hopes to encourage Roma advancement by teaching the necessary skills for employment qualifications, as well as providing incentives for employers to hire Roma. They also are establishing public works programs, and expanding Roma employment agencies. In addition, they want to increase Roma access to health care, promote health education, increase the number of Roma health providers, and

maintain reliable data on the health status of the Roma population. The initiative sees legislation as the answer to improving Roma living conditions, including access to housing and utilities. The Decade exemplifies the use of specifically stated aspirations and international alliances in confronting Roma discrimination; however, its influence has yet to be seen (more information can be found at [www.romadecade.com](http://www.romadecade.com)).

The European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), which has been referred to previously in this article, is another international organization aimed at stopping discrimination against the Roma. This center uses legal measures to benefit the Roma such as litigation, legal defense, and legal research. It promotes international advocacy and provides training and suggestions for activists. Also, it performs research and development, and communicates its findings through the internet and written publications to increase awareness and to foster support for their goals. The organization has accomplished many objectives in various sectors of society (more information can be found at [www.errc.org](http://www.errc.org)).

The Soros Foundation-Hungary, founded by George Soros, is an institution that promotes the public policy goals of the Open Society Institute (OSI), a private grant-making foundation based in New York. OSI-Budapest conducts initiatives in education, health care, human rights, local government and public services, and advocacy, and seeks to empower the Roma to participate in programs such as the Decade of Roma Inclusion. An annual report describes their international programs, which can be viewed at their website ([www.soros.org](http://www.soros.org)).

Still another program that assists Hungary and the Roma minority is Partners for Democratic Change. This organization, based in the United States, helps to promote democratic practices in Central and Eastern Europe, where there has not been a long history of democracy. It facilitates training programs in negotiation, mediation, cooperative problem solving, and conflict resolution to teach the skills necessary for cooperation between majority and minority communities and respective governments. Also, these programs often involve discussing real and hypothetical situations with the help of a third-party facilitator. The training encourages a sense of understanding between the groups and promotes cooperation that hopefully carries over into other policies and everyday life. (Göncz and Geskó)

## **Conclusion**

Discrimination against minority groups is a worldwide and longstanding phenomenon. Everywhere that it emerges, discriminatory ideology has devastating effects for its victims that can impact all aspects of their lives, and the discrimination against the Roma of Hungary is no different. It will take a long and effortful commitment on the part of many parties to end discrimination against the Roma, and exploring what has been done in other situations could help provide suggestions here. Certainly acknowledgment has been made of the problem and some progress is now being made. However, unless still greater steps are taken, specifically in the areas of education, political reform, and activism, the Roma will remain marginalized in Hungarian society.

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