

Roma Inclusion

Lessons Learned from OSI's Roma Programming



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Roma Inclusion:

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edited by

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A young Romani man carries a banner during a 2006 demonstration in Bucharest, Romania. The banner reads: “Different but Equal.”

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Roma Inclusion: Lessons from OSI's Roma Programming

Overview

The Roma comprise Europe's largest ethnic minority and endure discrimination so widespread that it sullies the democratic credentials of the European Union, some of its member states, and a number of countries aspiring to become member states. Eliminating the discrimination that keeps Roma from finding jobs, the squalor in which too many Roma raise their families, and the police brutality, lack of access to quality health care, poor education, and penury that the Roma suffer are daunting but achievable goals. Meeting these challenges will require long-term commitments from across Europe, from the EU's administrative bodies in Brussels to the governments in Europe's national capitals, from local councils to school boards, from police stations to courtrooms and classrooms, from hospital wards to theaters and concert halls, and from the headquarters of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to their offices in the field. Success will require multinational strategies and cooperation. It will require sharing lessons learned and best practices. And it will require pooling resources, reducing the waste of funds, and eliminating the duplication of effort that characterizes much governmental and nongovernmental intervention today. Too many projects targeted at Romani populations manage to consume vast amounts of available funding without creating lasting benefits. Some programs even exacerbate existing situations and produce cynicism and disenchantment with what many Roma see as an exploitative "Gypsy industry."

OSI's Experience

The Open Society Institute (OSI) has worked for 12 years to help build a better future for Europe's Roma, mostly by working with Roma to help them mobilize their communities to help themselves. The experience OSI and its staff and partners have garnered in dealing with the Roma and their problems is rich and deep. This report describes some of the lessons OSI has learned and makes broad and specific recommendations to help ensure that future efforts to promote the inclusion of Roma in society will be more effective than those of the present.

- ▶ **Funding Strategy.** OSI's funding strategy is characterized by the following: direct investment in Roma; fast and flexible grant-making; a clear focus on the younger generation of activists and students; direct participation of Roma in program design, implementation, and evaluation; and development of long-term partnerships based upon coherent and sustainable strategies.
- ▶ **Financing Technique.** OSI recognizes that there is a need for sustainable, long-term support for civic groups in order to allow Romani-led NGOs to undertake future planning. OSI also recognizes, however, that there is a need for a degree of "enlightened opportunism," a capacity for flexible, imaginative, and informed grant-making in order to respond to and take advantage of often dynamic political situations. OSI's Romani-related funding has combined strategic coherence with fast and flexible grant-making. For example, OSI's foundations and its Roma Participation Program combine annual renewable institutional support with additional grants for project initiatives, capacity-building workshops, seminars, and conferences to link NGOs to wider regional and national activities and campaigns and strengthen networking across borders.
- ▶ **Overcoming Bias.** OSI's core values promote civility, equity, and respect; and these core values inform its programming, grant-making, and all interactions with Roma. OSI's person-

nel have observed over the years that staff members of some international and national organizations working on Romani-related projects in the region are at times patronizing toward Roma, and in some instances even blatantly prejudiced against them.¹ Organizations working with Roma need to invest in staff training to ensure that their staff members are tolerant and unbiased. These organizations must adopt procedures to monitor and address issues of discrimination and be mindful of such issues when hiring staff.² Organizations dealing with Romani issues should also hire suitably qualified Roma whenever possible. OSI's experience is that this is not only possible, but a huge benefit to the organization in question.

- ▶ **Mainstreaming and Targeted Action.** Mainstreaming and targeted action are complementary approaches to crafting government policies aimed at fighting discrimination against the Roma and achieving their full integration into the greater society. The mainstreaming approach takes issues affecting the Roma into account in the formation of government policies applicable to all. In principle, mainstreaming is the preferred approach; at present, however, efforts to mainstream Romani issues are not working, and mainstreaming too often serves as an excuse for doing nothing. For this reason, to be effective, efforts to mainstream Romani issues must include targeted action, that is, corrective measures that are of limited duration and specific to the Roma at the local, national, and European Union levels to overcome discrimination and achieve integration.
- ▶ **Focus on the Young.** A well-educated and politically astute stratum of younger Romani activists is emerging. These younger men and women possess the requisite skills to engage in grassroots campaigning as well as in international advocacy; they are focused and professional in their activities; and they are more democratic and less beholden unto party political and business interests than many older community leaders. The younger activists should receive support.

- ▶ **Effective Strategies.** OSI has found success in Roma programs by providing direct funding, training, and capacity-building aimed at strengthening Romani civil society and stimulating wider Romani-led civic participation; helping assure that political leaders and state institutions heed the voices of Romani activists and communities; mounting effective challenges to state policies of segregation and exclusion; and strengthening the professional capabilities of Roma to engage effectively in policymaking processes to promote integration and fight discrimination. Success also requires transcending conventional donor-recipient relationships and fostering dynamic partnerships with Romani civic organizations based upon trust, transparency, and reciprocity. Funding for any initiative should be strategic and forward-looking, sensitive to the limitations and potential of the organization receiving the funding, flexible enough to respond to contingencies, and, ultimately, guided by one simple criterion: whether in its intended or unintended consequences the initiative empowers Roma.

- ▶ **Ineffective Strategies.** OSI has learned not to fund projects that in their design, budgeting, and implementation neglect the key issue of structured or substantive Romani involvement and partnership. Many projects seem designed for institutional convenience and are often strikingly at odds with, or disconnected from, the clear and pressing needs of the community in question. OSI has also learned not to fund projects that are devoid of strategic value, have no prospect of sustainability, and leave no worthwhile legacy or concrete lasting results as well as projects that fail to make any nexus between inputs and outcomes, that confuse means and ends, that offer no clear outcome justifying activities, training sessions, and seminars, and that neglect to include Roma in the processes of monitoring and evaluation.

Background

The discrimination, squalor, ill health, illiteracy, and poverty so many Roma are living with today are the result of a legacy that dates back centuries. Europeans have treated the Roma as pariahs since they began migrating into Europe a millennium ago. The officially sanctioned “Gypsy hunts” and edicts of banishment of the 17th century, as brutal as they may have been, were tame in comparison with the efforts to exterminate them during World War II. Many accounts of the Holocaust fail even to mention the Nazi campaign to exterminate the Roma. Estimates of the number of Roma killed from 1939 to 1945 vary. A broad consensus holds that at least 500,000 Roma perished. In some countries, this drive took place without much prompting from the Nazis. For example, between 1941 and 1943, the authorities in the Independent State of Croatia herded most of its 28,000 Roma into concentration camps and transported large numbers of them to death camps in the Third Reich; by October 1943, only 200–300 of these Roma were still alive.

During the postwar period in the Communist states of Central and Eastern Europe, traditional prejudices about “Gypsies” converged neatly with the notion of the *lumpen proletariat*, a class Karl Marx himself defined as “thieves and criminals of all kinds, living on the crumbs of society, people without a definite trade, vagabonds, people without a hearth or home.”³ Communist governments seized upon Marx’s idea of the *lumpen proletariat* to rationalize forced assimilation of the Roma. In Czechoslovakia, for example, the Communist government decided that there was no room in the socialist order for “the primitive old Gypsy way of life with all its bad habits.” Laws were passed on the “permanent settlement of nomads,” and local authorities were directed to provide education, employment, and housing to turn the Roma into orderly, productive comrades. The penalty for those persisting in “nomadism” was imprisonment for up to three years.⁴ Gynecologists from some Communist countries admitted routinely to cutting fallopian tubes of Romani women when they were undergoing Caesarean sections.⁵

While the policies of Communist governments toward the Roma were far from exemplary, the Communist countries offered at least a

social safety net that, in many instances, ceased to exist after 1989. The impact on Romani populations assumed crisis proportions. As Will Guy observed, in Czechoslovakia “the first tangible experience of this brave new world was not a sudden expansion of civic liberties but of harsh realities as many [Roma] were flung out of their predominantly manual jobs in the now virtually redundant heavy industries.”⁶ A World Bank report described the collapse of living conditions for the Roma as unprecedented: “Roma are poorer than other groups, more likely to fall into poverty, and more likely to remain poor. In some cases, Romani poverty rates are more than 10 times that of non-Roma. A recent survey found that nearly 80 percent of Roma in Bulgaria and Romania were living on less than \$4.30 per day. Even in Hungary, one of the most prosperous new EU member countries, 40 percent of Roma live below the poverty line.”⁷ In addition to impoverishment, studies show that in Hungary, for example, segregation has also intensified.⁸

Precise demographic data on the Roma of Europe are not available because many Roma are reluctant to identify themselves as Romani for official purposes and because many governments refuse to include Romani as a legitimate category for census purposes.⁹ Europe’s Romani population is estimated at between 7 and 10 million.¹⁰ The EU’s expansion in May 2004 added approximately 1.5 million Roma to the EU population; the accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU in 2007 will add another 3 million.

Romani Population Figures and Estimates by Country

Country	Official Figures ¹¹	OSCE Estimates ¹²	Minority Rights Group Estimates ¹³
<i>Bulgaria</i>	370,907	800,000–850,000	700,000–800,000
<i>Croatia</i>	9,463	20,000–30,000	30,000–40,000
<i>Czech Republic</i>	11,718	350,000–450,000	250,000–300,000
<i>Hungary</i>	190,046	500,000–600,000	550,000–600,000
<i>Macedonia</i>	53,879	150,000–200,000	220,000–260,000
<i>Republic of Slovakia</i>	91,450	500,000–550,000	480,000–520,000
<i>Romania</i>	535,350	2,300,000–3,000,000	1,800,000–2,500,000
<i>Serbia and Montenegro</i>	108,193	400,000–500,000	400,000–450,000

Open Society Institute and its Roma Programs

OSI is the largest nongovernmental supporter of initiatives designed to assist the Roma of Central and Eastern Europe to strengthen their communities and improve their lives. Over the last 12 years OSI's various Romani-related programs have aimed primarily to improve the social, political, and economic situation of Romani populations while fostering the development of Romani leaders. These efforts address a range of open society issues, including the right to equal protection under the law, legal and educational reform, media access and Romani media development, women's empowerment, civic and political participation, NGO capacity-building, promotion of tolerance, cultural diversity, and discrimination. OSI has spent some \$35 million dollars on Roma programs to date.

The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015, an initiative supported by OSI and the World Bank, is an unprecedented international effort to combat discrimination and ensure that Roma have equal access to education, housing, employment, and health care. Launched in February 2005, and endorsed by the prime ministers of eight Central and Eastern European countries, the Decade of Roma Inclusion is also supported by the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Council of Europe Development Bank, and the United Nations Development Program. At the Sofia launch, George Soros pledged to contribute \$30 million to the newly established Roma Education Fund, which will support education reform in conjunction with the Decade of Roma Inclusion. Governments, multilateral institutions, private organizations, and individuals have also contributed to the fund, which now has more than \$43 million in pledges.

OSI provides grants to build capacity and leadership among Roma in order to challenge the direct and indirect racial discrimination that continues to hinder the integration of Roma into society. OSI supports a wide network of Romani NGOs, and Romani-rights NGOs such as the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), to counter such discrimination and build broad alliances to advocate for systemic policy reform, most notably in the international Romani-led movement to

desegregate schools. The Roma Participation Program (RPP) currently funds school desegregation projects in seven different towns in Bulgaria and involves more than 2,000 Romani children. In addition, the RPP provides institutional support to 40 Romani-led NGOs in eight countries, and provides training and capacity building to consolidate a new generation of Romani activists.

The RPP also helps to build Romani capacity at the European level by providing 10 three-month internships at the European Commission and 5 three-month internships at the Council of Europe. The RPP is committed to promoting and advancing the leadership role of Romani women. More than 15 of RPP's grantees are either women's organizations or NGOs directed by Romani women. The RPP works to widen the possibilities for more substantive participation by greater numbers of Romani women and to build local community-based initiatives led and managed by women activists. In addition, 7 out of the 10 successful candidates in the newly launched internship scheme with the European Commission are Romani women.

Women's issues

The Network Women's Program's initiative for Romani women has used leadership development and women's rights training to develop, link, and catalyze a core group of committed Romani women leaders. These women are poised to advance a strategic agenda for Romani women's issues in Central and Eastern Europe and to develop a well-integrated international Romani women's movement with links to the Romani-rights and global women's movements. In terms of profile and impact, the Roma Women's Forum at the June 2003 conference "Roma in an Expanding Europe" marked a turning point for Romani women. It signaled a capacity to influence the agendas of national governments, the EU, the World Bank, and United Nations agencies. This was further demonstrated by the remarkable success of the Romani women's delegation at the UN in March 2005. Sponsored by the Network Women's Program (NWP) and ERRC, the delegation garnered sufficient support to address the 49th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women held in New York, and call attention to the discrimination and

social exclusion Romani women face from both the majority population and their own communities. In collaboration with the Central European University’s Center for Policy Studies, NWP mentored a group of young Romani women as they prepared policy papers for a hearing in the European Parliament in the autumn of 2005. In addition to policy training, NWP supports the Romani Women’s Initiative’s website as well as innovative research and advocacy initiatives such as the regional Virginity Project—“Freedom to Choose.”

Education

The Roma Education Initiative (REI), a three-year pilot project launched in 2002, has worked to demonstrate that it is possible to eliminate discriminatory practices in the school systems of countries in Central and Eastern Europe. REI has worked to establish—without compromising educational standards—the conditions necessary to enable Romani children to succeed in school on equal terms with their peers, especially in the area of early childhood schooling and literacy. Since its inception, the REI has funded seven national-level projects, reaching more than 5,000 Romani children in Slovenia and the countries that have signed on to the Decade of Roma Inclusion. The REI has also supported national efforts to improve education for Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo.

Central to REI’s methodology is the innovative Step by Step education reform program that provides training and mentoring services to participating REI schools by introducing child-centered teaching methods, pedagogical techniques that support diversity and multiculturalism, and community and family involvement. Romani NGOs are integral partners, invaluable in terms of community outreach, out-of-school support, links with public schools, advocacy, and the providing of early childhood education. The REI also collaborates with parents, local communities, service providers, and other institutions, including local and national governments, in an effort to approach education comprehensively. Experience has demonstrated that such broad-based coalitions are necessary for success. In collaboration with other OSI programs, such as the RPP and the ERRC, the REI aims to mobilize

political will and resources and advocates for systemic policy changes that work against segregation and all forms of racial discrimination.

Under the auspices of OSI's Higher Education Support Program, support is provided to two Romaversitas programs in Hungary and Macedonia. Romaversitas is a comprehensive, supplementary scholarship and tutorial education system that supports select university students in the social sciences and humanities. Romaversitas aims to broaden these students' knowledge, strengthen their Romani identity and their ties with the Romani community, and assist them in continuing and completing their university studies.

OSI's Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program offers scholarships for Romani university students in political science, journalism, economics, sociology, history, law, and public administration. The program currently operates in the eight countries that have signed on to the Decade of Roma Inclusion. In its four years of operation, the program has provided up to 800 scholarships per year.

The Open Society Institute has been supporting Romani cultural activity and research since 1999. The Roma Culture Initiative (RCI) focused on the promotion of greater cultural awareness among younger Roma and on supporting scholarly research covering new ground. Through the Young Culture Bearers Program, the RCI supported more than 130 organizations from 14 countries in assisting Romani youth to explore their cultural and linguistic traditions. The RCI has awarded 65 grants in 11 countries for innovative and original scholarly research. In 2005, OSI decided to include Romani culture in its Arts and Culture Network Program recognizing Romani culture on equal terms with majority culture. The Roma Cultural Participation Project supports the cultural inclusiveness and empowerment of Roma.

Media

OSI's Network Media Program (NMP) supports the development of Romani media outlets and programming in the Romany language on mainstream local media; current assistance covers close to 25 television and radio outlets and news agencies in 11 countries. NMP provides

direct support to cover operational and equipment costs, capacity building, and program exchange, and it supports a Romani media network. Romani news agencies in Hungary and Slovakia and media outlets supported by NMP have had considerable impact in countering negative stereotypes in both the mainstream media and society and continue to provide informed coverage of Romani-related issues to mainstream national and international media. A new coproduction fund devoted to coverage of the main priorities of the Roma Decade of Inclusion aims to increase cooperation between Romani media and mainstream media outlets and to assist in the creation of national and cross-border Romani media policy.

Public Health

OSI's Public Health Program supports efforts in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia to set the groundwork for pursuing a clear advocacy agenda to shape Romani health policies. The Public Health Program has funded many local NGOs to provide Romani communities with information on health and health insurance, to document discriminatory practices in the health sector, and to present findings to national human rights advocates. Grants were also made to strengthen the role of Romani health mediators in improving access to health services and to document the status of Romani health in each country. The Public Health Program also provides technical assistance to national efforts to develop actions plans for health under the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion.

Information

The Roma Translation Project supported the translation and publication of 28 titles on Romani history, culture, and society in the national languages of 10 different countries across Central and Eastern Europe. The Romani Publications Project, launched in 2002, provides grants for Romany-language publications as well as consultations and training for NGOs and publishing houses dealing

with publishing in the Romany language. These grants have helped build competencies in publishing house management, cross-border distribution, and reading promotion. The aim is to ensure professional results and the widest possible dissemination of publications. This training and consultation has involved some 23 participants from 12 countries. Grants were made for 20 publications in nine countries; of which nine were either written by women or produced by organizations focused on Romani women's issues. Full-text versions of all titles are accessible online.

ROMLEX is a unique lexical database consisting of over 25 Romany-language dialects and translations into 10 different target languages. Based at the universities of Graz (Austria), Manchester (United Kingdom), and Aarhus (Denmark), the ROMLEX project involves young native speakers of the Romany language in lexical and lexicographic compilation. So far, 16 trainees from 10 different countries have collaborated in the project.

The Roma Information Project (RIP) is a joint initiative of the Information Program, the RPP, and the NWP. The RIP's goal is to assist Romani groups to use information and communications technologies strategically in their work, enabling them to advocate more efficiently for their rights and better serve their communities. This training is carried out by young Roma specifically trained by OSI and assisted by technical consultants.

Policy research grants to Roma by OSI's International Policy Fellows program have served as a catalyst for change and succeeded in influencing national policies affecting Romani populations. One recipient, David Canek, collected and compiled the data proving de facto racial segregation of Roma in Czech schools; this research provided the basis for the first challenge to systematic racial segregation in education in Europe to reach the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. A second recipient, Romani fellow Mihai Surdu, carried out research and advocacy on school desegregation in Romania. The results of his work were directly incorporated into national legislation that acknowledged for the first time de facto school segregation of Roma and prohibited the practice.

Law and Human Rights

The EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program (EUMAP) is an effort to examine the development of human rights, the rule of law, and policy standards in Europe and to report on adherence to these standards to the European Commission. The EUMAP minority protection reports for 2002 focused on the situation of Roma in 10 countries. In 2004, five teams of young Romani activists worked on a joint project with EUMAP, the RPP, and the Resource Center for Roma Communities in Cluj to produce a report on local implementation of the Romanian government's strategy for the improvement of conditions for the Roma in Romania. In 2005, EUMAP began a joint monitoring project with OSI's Education Support Program and the RPP focusing on equal access to quality education for Roma. This initiative will culminate in the publication of a series of reports covering Romani education in each of the eight countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion. The reports will not only consolidate existing data on Romani education but, through the development of three case studies in each country monitored, will also provide an in-depth perspective on selected communities to demonstrate the impact of government policy.

The Open Society Justice Initiative has assisted litigation before the European Court of Human Rights in landmark cases challenging discrimination against Roma in education and establishing standards of proof and investigative obligations in cases of racially motivated violence against Roma. The Justice Initiative is collaborating with local counsel and NGOs in several European countries in monitoring and addressing racially discriminatory stops and searches of Roma and other minorities by the police. The Justice Initiative is further engaged in litigation on behalf of Roma and other minorities who face discrimination and violence in Russia and Spain.

Conclusions and Recommendations

OSI's experience organizing Roma programs in specific areas underpins a number of conclusions and a battery of recommendations. These specific areas include education, health, housing, employment, women, civil society, acquisition of personal documents, and overcoming discrimination.

Education

So long as governments deny Romani children equal access to a quality education, any talk of integration is empty. Too many Romani children today are classified as “mentally handicapped” and relegated to “special schools”; too many other Romani children attend substandard “Gypsy schools” situated in Romani ghettos; and far too many others still are simply allowed by teachers and administrators to drift away from the classroom ill-prepared to manage lives fraught with problems. These are all segregation by different names; and so long as segregation is allowed to continue, it will have disastrous effects on Romani communities.

The countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion have endorsed its education goals. In order to raise the academic achievement of Romani children to the same levels as those attained by their peers outside the Romani community, these goals stress full and equal access to schools and the need to focus on keeping Romani pupils in school until they complete vocational training or receive high school diplomas.

Recommendations on Education

- ▶ Governments should publicly commit themselves to phased, but steady desegregation programs that over the next decade result in nondiscriminatory school assignments. All governments must scrutinize the workings of commissions responsible for testing and diagnosing children to bring an end to the systematic practice of placing Romani children in special

schools. At the same time, governments must enhance the quality of education afforded Romani children with the goal of ensuring that, by 2015, Romani children achieve secondary-school graduation levels on a par with their peers in the broader community. OSI's experience indicates that programs simply handed down from central governments will not be sufficiently effective; central governments must summon the political will to engineer and implement a system of incentives and sanctions that will persuade officials and governments at the local level to halt discriminatory practices and stop obstructing reform.

- ▶ Governments should produce action plans, with fixed timetables, for the complete desegregation of their educational systems.
- ▶ Romani children need social support, including clothing, light breakfasts and lunches, books, and, in cases where Roma are housed in ghettos far from mainstream schools, transportation.
- ▶ Governments should provide two years of free preschool education for all disadvantaged children, whether they are Roma or not.
- ▶ Initiatives are necessary to bolster the process of desegregation and overcome the legacy of discrimination, material disadvantage, and outdated approaches in pedagogy. Such initiatives may include programs to engage Romani parents and communities; the introduction of training for teachers and administrators designed to eliminate bias; the application of child-centered rather than teacher-centered pedagogy; the use of differentiated instruction to build on children's strengths rather than focus on deficits; the development and use of culturally sensitive curricula; and supplementary tutoring and scholarship support to prepare for exams and complete secondary schooling.

- ▶ Schools need to hire more qualified Roma as teachers, and to upgrade the professional status of Romani teaching assistants.
- ▶ Governments and school officials must ensure that Romani girls are able to take advantage of all educational opportunities; they must also reduce any existing disparities in enrollment and retention rates between Romani girls and their peers.

Health

Despite the paucity of data on the health status of Roma, one clear and very bleak picture emerges from the existing information: Roma have lower life expectancy and mortality than the general population, and they are more susceptible to communicable diseases and suffer higher rates of infant mortality.

Recommendations on Health

- ▶ Action is necessary to break down barriers between Romani communities and health providers to ensure equal and adequate access to health care.
- ▶ More initiatives, including scholarships and other programs, are necessary to expand opportunities for Roma to become health care providers, to increase the number of Romani nurses, doctors, and social workers, and to integrate Romani health mediators into local and national health care systems.
- ▶ Public health, medical, and nursing institutions need health training curricula that include strategies to ensure equitable treatment, access, and opportunities for members of vulnerable populations in general and the Roma in particular.
- ▶ More data on the health of Roma in Europe are necessary. Information is needed to identify and profile the most vulnerable and at-risk groups among Romani communities. It is necessary to disseminate information among Romani communities to improve basic health literacy, to raise awareness

of rights, principles of informed consent, and access to health institutions and preventive health care.

- ▶ Effective monitoring mechanisms are necessary to ensure that Roma are receiving quality health services and to address issues of direct and indirect discriminatory practices against Roma by health care professionals and institutions.
- ▶ Sanctions and means of redress against doctors, nurses, and other health professionals are necessary to counter discrimination and violations of patients' rights. Political leaders in national assemblies and in government should adopt new laws and regulations and develop new policies that remove bureaucratic and regulatory impediments barring the Roma access to quality health care and resort to the courts to ensure that laws and regulations are implemented.

Housing

Discrimination by the general public and discriminatory housing policies of governments past and present have in large part segregated and isolated Romani settlements. The squalid living conditions in many of these ghettos are well documented and, in many instances, they fall far short of World Health Organization standards requiring, among other things, safe water supplies, waste and rubbish disposal, drainage of standing surface water, and safeguards against disease transmission. Forced evictions, disputes over property rights and the legal status of settlements, discrimination by the local authorities over access to social housing compound the problems confronting the residents of many of these settlements.

Recommendations on Housing

- ▶ National governments should press local authorities to meet their legal obligations and make use of all available funding resources in order to improve living conditions in Romani settlements and to identify the most expeditious and effective means to legalize informal settlements.

- ▶ Romani settlements should be incorporated into urban plans and receive the necessary public services to meet WHO standards for adequate housing.
- ▶ Housing policies should be tailored to specific local conditions. Local better-housing initiatives should include a variety of housing models, extensive community consultation, especially with the Roma, and mechanisms to ensure transparency, effective management, and monitoring of project implementation.
- ▶ Projects to improve the communal infrastructure of existing settlements should be carefully balanced and guided by the principles of social inclusion in order to avoid further isolation and segregation of the Roma.
- ▶ The right to adequate housing is intrinsically linked with a wide range of civil rights, women's rights, children's rights, and health rights. In examining housing issues and evaluating housing project proposals, governments, local authorities, lawyers, courts, and NGOs should fully consider the link between housing rights violations and the exercise of civil rights.

Employment

The Roma are one of the weakest groups in the labor market and suffer levels of unemployment that reach 90 percent in some isolated communities and villages. Over the past 15 years, most Roma have been either unemployed or underemployed. Unemployment is reinforced by a number of factors, including physical isolation of Romani settlements and communities and a lack of jobs in areas where many Roma live, factors inhibiting Roma from moving to more economically developed areas, low educational levels, a general lack of technical skills, widespread discrimination against Roma in hiring, widespread dependence upon state assistance, and ineffective efforts to improve employment.

Recommendations on Employment

- ▶ Affirmative action is necessary to improve job opportunities for Roma. These measures must be carefully designed, and their implementation must be carefully monitored, to avoid creating distortions and artificial labor markets.
- ▶ Romani settlements and communities must be connected to the rest of the community. Projects to improve infrastructure can be used to give the inhabitants of the Romani communities income opportunities. Priority should be given to Romani contractors from the community, who should be given assistance during the tender and contracting process. Romani workers should earn more than the state minimum wage.
- ▶ Government agencies, state-owned companies, private companies in which the public sector has an ownership stake, and private companies with sizeable state contracts should be mandated to follow equal-opportunity employment and subcontracting laws and policies by setting aside a certain percentage of jobs and contracts for Roma and members of other vulnerable groups. Members of these groups should also receive the necessary training and assistance to obtain and maintain jobs.
- ▶ EU funding should have strong and enforceable conditions requiring that financial benefits accrue to Romani communities and not to outside providers or intermediaries. Initiatives are necessary to intensify the development of Romani-owned businesses. Micro-finance programs and economic- and commercial-development agencies should change their mode of operation to be more responsive and relevant for Romani entrepreneurs.
- ▶ Preventative and punitive measures are necessary to defeat job discrimination against Roma. These measures should include training on labor discrimination for government officials, employers, trade union officials, and employees; and effective sanctions for abuses, whether they occur in the public or the private sectors. Comprehensive legislation outlawing job

discrimination is necessary, and must be a matter of public knowledge. The laws against job discrimination should comply with European Council directives and have provisions guaranteeing ease of access and swift redress for victims.

Women's Issues

Romani women face two layers of discrimination, but play a crucial role in the community. Their activities are linked with daily survival strategies and factors in the health, education, and overall success of the family and household. Romani women are generally the primary information seekers in their households when it comes to public services or programs.

Recommendations on Women's Issues

- ▶ Initiatives to end the double discrimination Romani women face need to be more effective and substantial. Gender mainstreaming must become an integral part of all Romani-related initiatives. More sustained efforts are required to empower women at the local-community level, to support Romani women's NGOs, and to provide training and internships that will provide Romani women with the skills and knowledge they need to become effective advocates. More initiatives are necessary to help Romani women to become involved in policy- and decision-making processes at both the national and local levels. Targeted action is also required in the spheres of education, employment, and professional development to ensure that Romani girls and women can have equal opportunities and life choices.

Civil Society

Over the past decade, the NGO sector, within the broader sphere of civil society, has proven to be *the* entry point for Romani participation in public life. It is largely due to Romani civic activism that there is any

public awareness or recognition of Romani issues. In addition to their role as advocates for Romani rights, NGOs with strong ties to local communities are key to the success of any initiative or intervention targeting Roma.

Recommendations on Civil Society

- ▶ The Romani NGO sector needs to be expanded and strengthened. Ad hoc, project-based funding is not enough. Institutional core support and a more strategic, long-term approach to funding are necessary to bolster capacity within this sector.
- ▶ Intensive training to build individual and organizational capacity is necessary. Training should extend beyond project and finance management to include content-based policy training in the issues that impact most upon Romani communities. Intensive training in advocacy skills and political leadership is necessary to prepare new Romani leaders capable of holding public office and moving from civic activism to political representation.

Personal Documents

According to the European Roma Rights Center, an international public interest law organization that monitors the situation of Roma in Europe, vast numbers of Roma suffer a lack of personal documents, including birth certificates, identity cards, residence permits, passports, and documents proving eligibility for state-provided social welfare and health insurance. This confines Roma to a Kafkaesque nightmare in which the lack of one document, for example an identity card, makes it impossible to acquire another one such as a document for health-insurance benefits, for voter registration, for residency registration, for school enrollment or legal employment, or for receiving social benefits. Roma affected by military conflict and forced migration are particularly vulnerable to this problem.

Recommendations on the Lack of Personal Documents

- ▶ Political leaders, both at the national and local levels, should launch targeted initiatives to expedite the issuance of basic documents to the Roma who lack them.

Eliminating Discrimination through Raising Awareness

Verbal attacks on the Roma, ranging from overtly racist statements by public officials and politicians to skewed and inflammatory media commentary, are often indistinguishable from hate speech.¹⁴ Such discourse is not confined to the extreme right wing of the political spectrum, and those persons who propagate it do so in an uninhibited fashion with seeming impunity, ever confident that they are merely echoing their audience's common-sense perceptions.

Recommendations on Eliminating Discrimination through Raising Awareness

- ▶ Political, business, and religious leaders; celebrities from the arts and sports; government institutions, churches, NGOs, bar associations, and other interested groups should undertake and join high-profile, public-education, and antiracism campaigns to show the damage that prejudice, segregation, discrimination, and violence are inflicting upon the Roma—as well as upon the broader community. Presidents and prime ministers, party leaders, and other ranking political officials need to publicly and repeatedly speak out against racism, to make clear that verbal attacks on the Roma are unacceptable, and that the Roma are full and equal members of the political community.

Specific Recommendations to the European Commission

1. The eight Central and Eastern European countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion have offered the best proof to date that closing the gap in living conditions and ending social exclusion of the Roma is a European issue which requires a multilateral and long-term approach. The Decade of Roma Inclusion is compatible with EU policies and structures in the areas of social integration, employment, equal opportunity, and eliminating discrimination. The instruments of both the Decade of Roma Inclusion and the EU are based upon common targets, indicators, national action plans, and a peer review process. The European Commission should take advantage of this initiative. In order to ensure the maximum impact of this multinational effort, and to avoid unnecessary duplication, the European Commission should play a key role in the International Steering Committee of the Decade of Roma Inclusion and facilitate the closest possible alignment between the policies and funding instruments of the EU and the Decade of Roma Inclusion. This practice should be extended beyond the countries that have signed on to the Decade of Roma Inclusion, and especially to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo where Roma suffer severe discrimination and live in appalling conditions.
2. The European Union and local stakeholders with support from the EU should monitor implementation by member states of the EU's new comprehensive, antidiscrimination laws. OSI welcomes the EU's Green Paper on Anti-Discrimination, which addresses the gap between legislation and implementation.
3. The EU should make sure that documenting and challenging discrimination against racial and ethnic minorities and noncitizens remain major areas of focus for the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). As the EUMC becomes a

human rights agency, it may not concentrate sufficient attention on the issue of discrimination. EUMC must receive the resources, mandate, and technical capacity to eliminate discrimination across Europe.

4. The European Commission's approach to mainstreaming Roma into relevant EU policies and funding instruments is correct. However, for mainstreaming to work it should be coordinated and monitored by a strong interdepartmental task force that has influence with high-level leaders and policymakers. OSI supports the establishment of an interdepartmental task force led by Director General Odile Quintin. This task force should have direct access to one or more commissioners and be able to initiate community policy and funding. The task force needs to put in place specific, targeted measures to ensure that Roma will benefit from the mainstreamed policies and funding.
5. Romani participation is essential when defining EU policies and instruments. The EU should ensure that it has an appropriate consultation process in place with Roma and that this process involves Romani women and men in discussions in Brussels.
6. EU mechanisms which require Romani participation in monitoring and selection boards, e.g., structural funds and PHARE programs related to EU accession, should include broadly representative Roma selected by NGOs or vetted through NGOs. The European Commission should make this a requirement for national authorities working with EU cofunding and should provide capacity building for Romani NGOs in participating in steering committees and in accessing EU funds.
7. Romani leaders need exposure to the EU and the governments of the EU member states; they need to learn how issues and policies are developed, implemented, and adjusted in mature democracies; they need to understand better how democracies

function; they need to build networks with the Roma in Western Europe and with people outside the Romani community in Western Europe. Roma also need exposure to the EU and its institutions through internships. Since only a small number of Roma speak English or French, language courses are necessary. EU institutions should recruit Roma to work, initially as temporary agents and national experts. Any investment that helps Romani leaders to acquire such knowledge and understanding, language skills, and work experience and to build such networks will pay the EU dividends in the years ahead.

8. The EU's antidiscrimination laws set a minimum standard for national antidiscrimination laws across Europe. The EU laws are relevant to all countries that have signed on to the Decade of Roma Inclusion; these laws are binding for the EU's new member states; and adoption of these laws is recommended for all future and potential member states. General antidiscrimination laws are essential, but it is equally essential that these laws be applied in the same way to Roma as they are to other minorities. For this purpose the EU should strengthen its bodies dealing with equality and equal opportunity as well as its ombudsman service. It should also invest in training judges and government officials responsible for applying and enforcing antidiscrimination laws.
9. Sustaining public and government support for Romani policies over a long period requires changing public attitudes toward Roma. And changing attitudes requires awareness-raising initiatives that highlight critical issues and policies, the contribution the Roma make to society, and the benefit a tolerant society brings to all. The EU has a wealth of experience with awareness-raising campaigns targeted at eliminating racism and discrimination. The EU should make use of its experience to design and implement a European communication strategy on Roma.

Endnotes

1 One of this paper's authors heard the following comments uttered by persons working in civil society organizations dealing with Roma: "One thing you don't realize, the main problem with your desegregation is that Romani children are smelly." "It's a well-known fact in our country that, since the system change, Roma communities have become more isolated not just from the majority but isolated from each other. This means that Roma are 'marrying-in', first cousins and the like, with the result that there are many more children born with handicaps. So you see the psychological testing in our country is not just a matter of bias against Roma, many of the children really need special schooling." "Why would we consult with Romani NGOs, there is no point, they are all corrupt."

2 See the best practices presented in "The Business Case for Diversity: Good practices in the Workplace," European Community Action Program, European Commission's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities at http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/pdf/events/busicase_en.pdf.

3 M. Stewart, *The Time of the Gypsies (Studies in the Ethnographic Imagination)* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 113.

4 David Crowe and John Kolsti, eds., *The Gypsies of Eastern Europe* (ME Sharpe Inc., 1991), 97.

5 Marek Kohn, *The Race Gallery: The Return of Racial Science* (Jonathan Cape, London 1995), 202.

6 Will Guy, "Ways of Looking at Roma: The Case of Czechoslovakia," in *Gypsies: An Interdisciplinary Reader*, Diane Tong, ed. (Garland Publishing New York, 1998), 60.

7 Dena Ringold, et al., *Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the Poverty Cycle* (The World Bank, 2005), xiii, xvi.

8 István Kemény, Béla Janky, and Gabriella Lengyel, *The Roma In Hungary 1971–2003*, quoted in Balázs Wizner, "The Figures of Deprivation," *The Hungarian Quarterly* 179, Volume 46 (Autumn 2005), 159.

9 European Commission, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union* (2004), 9. http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/fundamental_rights/pdf/pubst/roma04_en.pdf

10 Ibid.

11 Bulgaria: official census 2001; Croatia: official census 2001; Czech Republic: official census 2001 (the figure of 11,718 marked a sharp decline from the 1991 census figure of 32,903); Hungary: official census 2001; Macedonia: official census 2002; Serbia and Montenegro: official census 2002 (this figure excludes Roma living in Kosovo and 46,238 officially registered IDPs); Slovakia 2001 census; Romania: official census 2002.

12 *Report of the High Commission for National Minorities of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe* (1997), see <http://www.osce.org/odhir/18149.html>

13 Jean-Pierre Liegeois and Nicolae Gheorghe, *Roma/Gypsies: A European Minority* (London: Minority Rights Group, 1995), 7.

14 In the early 1990s, Vladimír Mečiar, the former premier of Slovakia, clearly articulated his attitudes toward his country's Romani population. His remarks on the issue provoked an international outcry; domestically, however, his words about "dealing" with the extended reproduction of "the socially unadaptable population" found a wide and appreciative audience. For example, Mečiar spoke on the higher birthrate of the Roma in comparison to that of Slovakia's "whites" in an address to members of his party, the Movement for Democratic Slovakia, in September 1993. He asserted that "... children are giving birth to children, or grandmothers are giving birth to children – poorly adaptable mentally, badly adaptable socially, with serious health problems, who are simply a great burden on this society." See Marek Kohn, *The Race Gallery: The Return of Racial Science*, 179. In Bulgaria, the nationalist "Attack" coalition polled in excess of 8 percent of the national vote in the 2005 elections following a campaign of vicious xenophobic propaganda and blatant incitement to ethnic hatred focused on the Roma minority. The "Attack" coalition's penetration of the parliamentary system has been accompanied by anti-Turkish and anti-Semitic ranting. Propagating the myth of a "Gypsy terror," calling for "de-Gypsification," and "Bulgaria for the Bulgarians," Volen Siderov enjoyed electoral successes that pose a grave threat not just to the physical safety of Roma but to the very fabric of democracy. See Krassimir Kanev, "How Should We Think of 'Attack'," *Objektive* 123, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee at <http://www.bghelsinki.org/objektiv/frames-objective.html>.

