

that I have contributed to the Department of Biophysics in their ongoing research. I trust that the projects I have participated in will be continued after I leave. I have contributed to the instillation of the FPLC, which greatly reduces the time needed for protein purification. Also, in the coming weeks I will purify human PGK for work on a new enzyme.

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Analyzing Social and Economic Mobility for the Roma in Hungary: A Look at Government Initiatives and International Responses

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While many groups in Hungary have benefited from economic modernization and development, others, such as the Roma, have not benefited as much from these advances. The Roma are the largest minority in Europe and in post-Communist countries, such as Hungary, are known as the biggest 'losers' of the change from Communism to capitalism because of the loss of governmental welfare programs. Currently, in Hungary the Roma face obstacles and challenges in access to healthcare, education, employment, and adequate housing. However, over the past decade the European Union and the Hungarian government have taken steps to promote anti-discrimination legislation and social programs focusing on equality and diversity. Additionally, international non-governmental organizations have also played an important role in minority rights in Central and Eastern Europe providing advocacy, resources, and policy development.

Introduction

Over the past ten years the European Union (EU) has significantly changed by the addition new member states, legislation, and increased funding for social welfare programs. The EU is no longer solely an economic institution but now has mechanisms in place to monitor human rights, security initiatives, and social policies. In 2004, ten new member states in Central and Eastern Europe (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Slovenia, Cyprus) joined the EU. Since then those countries have faced achievements and struggles in their economies with migration in the labor market, inflation, and poverty rates. In 2007, Romania and Bulgaria were welcomed to the EU with the hope of achieving long term economic growth by improving job opportunities and equality in society. However, for any country to achieve economic growth many circumstances need to be taken into consideration. As a result of enlargement, the EU has created new legislation and policies to ensure all citizens receive equality in all areas of life. With an expanding EU, minority rights have become a focus with anti-discrimination directives and social justice initiatives playing an important role. In order to support equality, the EU named 2007 “The Year of Equality for All” and is sponsoring programs to support diversity and abolish discrimination.

While many encounter discrimination on a daily basis, in Europe the Roma population feels its effects in every area of life. The Roma population is the largest minority in Europe. According to the World Bank, there are between 7 to 9 million Roma living in Europe with estimates of 70 percent of that population residing in Central and Eastern Europe mostly in Slovakia, Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria.¹ In addition, poverty rates for Roma range between four and five times that of non-Roma in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania.² The Roma are often discriminated against in the housing market, the health care and educational systems, and from employment opportunities. However, over the past couple of years there has been an increase of support for the protection and social inclusion for the Roma population from activists, international governmental and non-governmental organization, and not-for-profit organizations.

The EU and the Roma population are playing important roles in each other's lives. Protection of minority rights is now an important part of the EU's agenda. The EU has reconstructed its identity by creating anti-discrimination legislation for the protection and social inclusion of the Roma population. Additionally, the EU has developed social programming in order to provide assistance, opportunities, and services to the Roma. By creating these new laws and policies the EU is also

1 About the Roma. The World Bank. 2006. <www.worldbank.org>

2 About the Roma. The World Bank. 2006. <www.worldbank.org>

affecting the Romani identity by creating a new political frame that discourages discrimination and supports diversity. Moreover, how has EU changed in order to provide protection and services to the Roma minority?

Throughout this article I will examine the evolving identities of the EU and the Roma population by looking three factors:

- 1.) The current situation of the Roma in Hungary with regards to the condition of housing, health care, employment, and education
- 2.) EU anti-discrimination legislation, and other resources, programs, and initiatives that are being provided for the Roma
- 3.) Initiatives and support from the international community and non-governmental organizations and their effect thus far

Current Situation of the Roma in Hungary

Hungary has experienced many political, economic, and social changes over the past twenty years. With the 1989 end of Communism, and the transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-based economy, Hungary faced the challenge of achieving structural reform and economic stabilization. These changes brought much success and established Hungary's economic growth. Moreover, the changes made Hungary a leader in Central Europe, allowing the country to spearhead reforms in

enterprise and the public sector. As a result, in May 2004, Hungary joined the EU. Since then Hungary began to place an equal focus on social and economic policies, understanding that both play an intricate role in their success.

While many groups in Hungary have benefited from economic modernization and development, others, such as the Roma, have not benefited as much from these advances. Today, there are between 400,000-600,000 Roma living in Hungary.³ It is often said that the Roma are the biggest ‘losers’ of the change from Communism to capitalism because of the loss of governmental welfare programs. For example, during Communism a majority of the Roma was employed becoming socially and economically secure and creating a working class.⁴ However many scholars debate about the actual standard of living for the Roma during Communism. While a working class was instantly created, cultural traditions and ethnic diversity were suppressed during this time. Moreover, the economic situation that seemed to be an instant fix was unsustainable for economic growth in the region.⁵

3 U.S. Department of State. Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. Hungary. June 2005.

4 *The Roma in the 21st Century: A Policy Paper*. The Project on Ethnic Relations. May 1997. Pg. 10.

5 *Avoiding the Dependency Trap: A Regional Report*. United Nations Development Program. Pg. 21.

Transitioning out of Communism left many Roma unemployed and homeless in Hungary. The previous command economy needed unskilled labor that the Roma could provide, however with the privatization of land ownership and the dismantling of large agricultural farms, industrial plants, and construction companies, unskilled labor was no longer needed.⁶ As a result unemployment rates for the Roma skyrocketed as they were seen as unwanted, uneducated, and unneeded. Because many employers during Communism also provided housing, many who lost jobs also became homeless.⁷ Anti-Roma sentiment grew with the unemployed and homeless begging on the street and increased further with asylum seekers and migrants heading toward the west.

Stereotypes and prejudice against the Roma still exist in society today. Many people have cynical views and opinions of the Roma, which leads to discrimination on a regular basis. Peter Vermeersch author of The Romani Movement: Minority Politics & Ethnic Mobilization in Contemporary Central Europe states that defining the Roma in such a negative way “perpetuates misleading stereotypical images of them as eternal nomads, criminals, outsiders by choice or a people with a preference for living in poverty on the margins of society.”⁸ Because of

6 The Roma in the 21st Century: A Policy Paper. The Project on Ethnic Relations. May 1997. Pg. 11.

7 *Ibid.*

8 Vermeersch, Peter. The Romani Movement: Minority Politics &

this, many Roma do not want to identify themselves as Roma. Their identity becomes not only what they see themselves as, but what society constructs for them. Additionally, statistical representation of the population becomes skewed. For example, the 2001 Hungarian census stated that only 190,046 Roma were living in Hungary.⁹ However, different organizations in Hungary indicate the number lies between 400,000-500,000, but could be as high as 800,000.¹⁰ With such contradicting demographics of the population governmental services becomes problematic when the group is underrepresented. Vermeersch also notes, “Stereotyping and discrimination is seen by many organizations and independent scholars as the underlying cause of two other problems: the concentration of poverty and unemployment among the Roma.”¹¹

Currently in Hungary the rate of unemployment for the Roma is 3-5 times higher than that of the non-Roma.¹² There are three contributing factors that cause this unemployment rate: lack of educational opportunities,

Ethnic Mobilization in Contemporary Central Europe. New York 2006. Pg. 3.

9 Avoiding the Dependency Trap: A Regional Report. United Nations Development Programme. Pg. 25.

10 *Ibid.*

11 Vermeersch, Peter. The Romani Movement: Minority Politics & Ethnic Mobilization in Contemporary Central Europe. New York 2006. Pg. 23.

12 Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion of Hungary. Brussels, 18 December 2003. Pg. 34

racial discrimination, and lack of job opportunities. In regards to education, many Roma face classroom or even school segregation in their communities. In addition, according to the Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, “Some 84-85% of Roma children completing their primary education go on studying at secondary level, but only one fifth of them choose schools providing a secondary school leaving certificate that would allow studies in higher education. The majority of Roma secondary school pupils get qualified in subjects that provide them with only limited chances for employment. Less than 1% of Roma hold higher educational certificates.”¹³ Therefore, even trying to enter the workforce is difficult when educational barriers and obstacles are in the way. Discrimination also plays a substantial role in the unemployment rate. Even though anti-discrimination legislation exists by the Hungarian government and the EU many employers do not follow these laws. Furthermore, different regions of Hungary are challenged with lack of job opportunities, specifically Northern Hungary where a large majority of the Roma live.

Roma women are often faced with additional challenges in employment. Not only are they faced with gender-based discrimination, but they also encounter

13 Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. United Nations Economic and Social Council. 17 February 2006. Pg. 108.

racial discrimination. According to the Open Society Institute Network Women’s Program, “Many Roma women remain entirely excluded from the formal economy, constrained by limited educational opportunities, inadequate housing, poor healthcare, traditional gender roles, and general marginalization from the majority community.”¹⁴ Moreover, while men face long-term unemployment more often, women experience low participation rates in the formal labor markets. As a result women participate in the informal or ‘grey’ market, which does not provide economic security, social benefits, or dependability. Women are often susceptible and vulnerable to the market’s inconsistencies and fluctuations.

Long term unemployment coupled with low participation rates in the formal economy only drives the Roma community further into poverty and away from social inclusion. In addition to the employment challenges, the Roma also encounter challenges for the right to adequate housing. According to the World Bank report, *Roma in an Expanding Europe*, in Hungary 54.9 percent of Romani households do not have access to hot running water, 64.7 percent do not have central or gas heating, 66.6 percent do not have adequate sewerage, 49.8 percent do not have bathrooms or showers in their homes, 50.1 percent do not have indoor toilets and 13.2 percent have one or more member sleeping on earthen floors in

14 Romani Women: Your Sex and Race Matter. Open Society Institute Network Women’s Program. 1999.

their homes.¹⁵ Additionally in Hungary, poor housing conditions are coupled with forced evictions and lack of governmental housing programs. According to a survey conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in 2000, 60% of the Roma population lives in disadvantaged areas with little educational or work opportunities and 20% (100,000) of the Roma population live in segregated settlements.¹⁶

In Budapest, the 8th district has a large Roma population. Dilapidated housing conditions coupled with overcrowding and poor health conditions leave sections in the 8th district in need of development. However, since 2004 the Hungarian government has created community programs trying to improve living and health conditions in settlements that need improvement. One way the government is doing this is by increasing the number of government housing and upgrading the housing in existence. According to the Implementation of the International Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, improving the 8th district of Budapest is a focus of the development programs. “The main goals of the programmes are to improve the quality

15 Table 2.4: Housing Characteristics by Ethnicity, 2000. Revenga, A., Ringold, D., and Tracy W.M., “Poverty and Ethnicity: A Cross-Country Study of Roma Poverty in Central Europe”. In Ringold, D., Orenstein, Mitchell A., and Wilkens, Erika. *Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the Poverty Cycle*. The World Bank: Washington, D.C. 2003, Pg. 37.

16 Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion of Hungary. Brussels, 18 December 2003. Pg. 14

of life, to solve the housing problems while strengthening public security, social cohesion and improving the labour market potentials in the district.”¹⁷

While these actions seem like meaningful and progressive initiatives, the fate of these programs fall within the local authorities. Some local authorities recognize the need for the governmental assistance and apply for the grants, however many do not. Additionally in the past many local authorities have sold off public housing in order to compensate for declining revenues. This creates a problem with meeting the housing needs for the low income and poor, rendering many homeless. By losing the security of a legal residence, other rights and services are lost as well. Logistically without an address registering for services becomes impossible including engaging in income-generated activities.¹⁸

Inadequate housing or lack of housing leads to many problems. Poor and hazardous housing conditions contribute to threats in public health and the increased spread of communicable diseases. Furthermore, housing inequalities and discrimination leads to the lack of accessibility and decreased standards of healthcare for the Roma. The right to healthcare is

17 Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. United Nations Economic and Social Council. 17 February 2006. Pg. 74.

18 Security of Residence. Main Issues. Roma and Sinti. Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. <<http://www.osce.org>>

guaranteed by several international laws however Romani people often find themselves excluded from healthcare for several reasons. One of the most common reasons for lack of healthcare for the Roma population in Hungary is lack of access to healthcare facilities in small villages outside the city centers.¹⁹ Moreover, where there are healthcare facilities in small villages the building structures and resources are usually in poor conditions.²⁰ In addition, racial discrimination in healthcare leads to inferior quality of treatment and services from healthcare providers. For example, the European Roma Rights Center notes in their report *Ambulance Not on the Way* that some healthcare emergency workers will not respond or respond inadequately to emergency calls.²¹

Moreover, reproductive health for Roma women is often compromised because of lack of access to resources, lack of information, and illegal sterilizations. According to the European Roma Rights Center, “On 14 August 2006, the UN Committee to End Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) condemned Hungary for violating the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women for forced sterilisation of a Romani women in 2001.”²² While the Hungarian government has not directly

19 *Ambulance Not on the Way: The Disgrace of Health Care for Roma in Europe*. European Roma Rights Center. September 2006. Pg. 34.

20 Ibid. Pg. 21.

21 Ibid. Pg. 51.

22 *Ambulance Not on the Way: The Disgrace of Health Care for Roma in Europe*. European Roma Rights Center. September 2006. Pg. 45.

responded to the CEDAW remarks, according to Anita Danka, Staff Attorney for the European Roma Rights Center, a response has been prepared. Ms. Danka also notes that policy changes on this subject are imperative and hopefully the government will continue to consult the European Roma Rights Center on this matter.²³

Recognizing that public health is an important issue, there have been several measures taken in recent years to improve the quality of healthcare for the Roma population in Hungary. For example, a program entitled *Tolerance for Health* was launched in five areas hospitals in hopes of improving access to healthcare services.²⁴ Additionally, health development programs have been set up in six settlements with over 2500 participants in hopes of providing information and improving the conditions of health of the Roma population.²⁵ While proactive measures are being taken in some communities, the disparities to access healthcare information, services, and facilities still persist.

Discrimination and segregation play active roles in the lives of the Roma population, especially for Roma children. In Hungary, school segregation is one of

23 Notes from Ms. Anita Danka, Staff Attorney for the European Roma Rights Center on March 26, 2007.

24 Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. United Nations Economic and Social Council. 17 February 2006. Pg. 99.

25 Ibid. Pg. 100.

the main problems for Roma children in the education system.²⁶ Many Roma children are often labeled as “mentally handicapped” and forced into different classrooms or even different schools where educational resources, textbooks, and staff is at a minimum. According to the European Roma Rights Center and the European Network Against Discrimination, “In the case of Hungary, desegregation policy has been made operative primarily through financial incentive mechanisms, with few or no sanctions applied to schools refusing to implement or otherwise opting out of the integration policy.”²⁷ Therefore, while as an educational policy segregation is not used, it still exists.

Understanding that education is a vital foundation for the future of a student’s life, the Hungarian government along with many non-governmental organizations has developed programs and scholarships for students in the Roma community. Currently, in addition to many undergraduate university scholarships that exist in Hungary, Central European University has the *Roma Access Program*. This program is for students who have already completed their undergraduate degree and would like to see if they want to pursue a graduate degree. Within this program the students audit classes at

26 Ibid. Pg. 107.

27 “Challenges to Roma Integration Policies in the European Union and Among Candidate Countries.” European Roma Rights Center and the European Network against Racism. Peer Review Meeting. 23-34 October 2006. Pg. 3.

CEU and increase their English skills. After completion of the program, they are equipped with the tools to apply for a graduate program at CEU. Moreover, the educational program *From the Last Row* aims at decreasing classroom and school segregation by re-evaluating students that were labeled handicapped by independent experts.²⁸ Also in 2005, an *Anti-Discrimination Warning System* was created in order to train 600 participants who can then provide legal advice for people affected by discrimination.²⁹ Additionally, the Ministry of Education has recognized that integrating Romany studies (Romology) into school curriculums are an important way of increasing understanding and awareness for the Romany culture.³⁰ Therefore, the National Core Curriculum mandates that elements of the Roma culture and history be built into the curriculum.³¹ Governmental funding for education is important for many reasons. Specifically, if money is not spent on educational opportunities for the Roma the poverty cycle will continue when those children develop no skills and become an uneducated and unemployable workforce.³²

28 Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. United Nations Economic and Social Council. 17 February 2006. Pg. 111.

29 Implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. United Nations Economic and Social Council. 17 February 2006. Pg. 111.

30 Ibid. Pg. 108.

31 Ibid.

32 Avoiding the Dependency Trap: A Regional Report. United Nations Development Program. Pg.34.

Furthermore, by examining the current situation of the Roma in Hungary, one can see that the Roma face challenges and obstacles in everyday life. Discrimination in employment, housing, education, and healthcare also exists with other institutional and personal discrimination and prejudice in society. While the current situation looks dismal, many governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations recognize the urgency of their attention to the Roma population. Thus committing resources, funding, and attention to the matter has become an important issue for the political and economic situation in Europe for the past decade.

Governmental Initiatives

The Roma populations across Europe face similar situations in regards to social exclusion and discrimination as they face in Hungary. The European Commission’s Equality and Non-Discrimination Annual Report states, “EU enlargement has helped to focus attention on the discrimination and exclusion faced by the Roma communities in both ‘new’ and ‘old’ member states.”³³ Therefore, in addition to national governments taking proactive measures, the EU has invested a lot of funding and resources in projects and initiatives for the Roma population. According to the European Roma Information Office, “The Roma

33 Equality and non-discrimination Annual report 2005. Employment and Social Affairs. European Commission. April 2005. Pg. 25.

issue has been on the agenda of European institutions for the last decade, and according to the European Commission, over €270 million have been invested between 2001 and 2006 (within the framework of European Funds) in projects exclusively targeting Roma communities.”³⁴

Funding from the EU exists on many levels. One source of funding is the EU Structural Funds, which aims to narrow development disparities among regions and member states. The Structural Funds are then divided into different groups of funding. The European Social Fund (ESF) is one of the EU Structural Funds. The money is used for developed long-term projects across EU member states. Specifically, the funding supports projects in both old and new member states improving access for the Roma to employment opportunities especially through education and training.³⁵ Some objectives of these programs are women’s participation in the formal market, developing social inclusion, and improvement in the labor market. The *EQUAL* initiative, which is financed through the ESF, develops new approaches to fighting discrimination and inequalities in the employment

34 “Promoting the Social Inclusion of Roma: A Challenge for the German Presidency of the European Union.” Recommendation of the European Roma Information Office. European Roma Information Office. <WWW.erionet.org/advocacy.html>

35 European Social Fund. Employment, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities. <http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/esf2000/introduction_en.html>

market.³⁶ Another initiative is the *Community Action Programme*, which aims to combat discrimination by improving the understanding of social exclusion and poverty. This program funds transnational projects for Roma integration by developing innovative approaches and helping to organize changes in policy.

In addition to funding, anti-discrimination legislation has been implemented hoping to ensure social inclusion and equal treatment for all people in the EU. In 1997, EU member states approved the Treaty of Amsterdam. Article 13 in the Treaty of Amsterdam approved the community to take proactive steps in order to combat discrimination on the basis of sex, religion, racial or ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation, or age.³⁷ Two directives or laws were created that enforced the principle of equal treatment and they were put into action in 2000. The Directorate General of Employment, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities states The Racial Equality Directive 2000/43/EC, “implements the principle of equal treatment between people irrespective of racial or ethnic origin and gives protection against discrimination in employment and training, education, social protection (including social security and healthcare), social advantages, membership and

36 EQUAL. Employment, Social Affairs, and Equal Opportunities. European Commission. <http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/equal/index_en.cfm>

37 Anti-discrimination directives. Action against discrimination, Civil Society. Employment and Social Affairs. European Commission. EUROPA.

involvement in organisations of workers and employers and access to goods and services, including housing.”³⁸ Therefore, this law prohibits discrimination in most areas of everyday life on the basis of race or ethnic origin. Additionally, the Employment Equality Directive 2000/78/EC “implements the principle of equal treatment in employment and training irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation in employment, training and membership and involvement in organizations of workers and employers.”³⁹ While the EU is able to develop these directives, implementation and reinforcement needs to come from local, regional, and national levels.

In order to assist with implementation of the EU Anti-Discrimination Directives, the non-governmental community provided resources and assistance. A project organized by the European Roma Rights Center, Interights, and the Migration Policy Group began in January 2001 entitled *Implementing European Anti-Discrimination Laws*. The project targeted the 15 EU member states and 11 candidate countries (Turkey and 10 in Central and Eastern Europe) and aimed to host informational workshops for judges, activists, governmental officials and lawyers, to advocate the legislation to policy-makers, and to test the legislation in European courts.⁴⁰

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 “Implementing European Anti-Discrimination Law.” A Joint Project of the European Roma Rights Center, Interights, and the Migration Policy

With the EU’s ever growing diversity, many projects and initiatives have been created to promote diversity and discourage discrimination. Some examples of those initiatives are the *Breaking Stereotypes Photo Competition*, which encourages students in the EU to submit photos about breaking stereotypes, the *EU Journalist Award*, which honors journalists who use their journalism to create a public understanding of the benefits of diversity, and the *EU Diversity Truck Tour* which visits cities to provide information and activities about diversity and anti-discrimination laws in the EU. Finally, 2007 has been named the *European Year of Equal Opportunities for All*. This initiative has three aims. First, the year hopes to raise awareness about anti-discrimination laws and make sure those laws are put into action. Second, the year hopes to promote equal opportunities for all. Third, the year wants to encourage dialogue between European societies and individuals about the benefits of diversity.⁴¹ Overall, the year desires to promote equal treatment and celebrate diversity.

The EU has invested a great deal of funding and resources into programs, legislation, and initiatives for the Roma population. However, according to the European Roma Information Office, “Unfortunately, the outcome has not been proportional

Group. Special Projects. <<http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk+1681>>

41 Why this 2007 Year? 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. European Commission.

to the significant investment.”⁴² Many organizations and scholars feel that even though the government is supporting programs to promote diversity and equal opportunities, they are not having a positive effect in society. Furthermore, the report *Current Attitudes Toward the Roma in Central Europe: A Report of Research with non-Roma and Roma Respondents*, which was constructed by Ipsos Szonda a Media, Opinion and Market Research Institute states, “Programs promoted and supported by the EU may be received with a fair amount of cynicism.”⁴³ Moreover, some governmental programs are met with an attitude that the situation for the Roma will not necessarily improve.

Finally, a significant barrier in evaluating and tracking the successes and failures in governmental programming is the lack of statistical representation for the Roma population. As previously mentioned the number of the Roma population is significantly skewed in Hungary. This becomes an important subject when deciding how to allocate resources for the population through social programming. Additionally, many local and regional governmental authorities do not keep statistical records on the ethnicity of their citizens. According to the European

42 “Promoting the Social Inclusion of Roma: A Challenge for the German Presidency of the European Union.” Recommendation of the European Roma Information Office. European Roma Information Office. <www.erionet.org/advocacy.html>

43 *Decade of the Roma: 3 Roma Groups Focus Groups Discussion*. Hungary. Ipsos Szonda. June 2005. Pg. 2.

Roma Rights Center and the European Network against Racism,

A major obstacle to measuring the magnitude of discriminatory treatment and social exclusion affecting Roma is the failure of governments in many EU Member States to generate and make available in a form readily comprehensible to the general public aggregate data on the situation of Roma and other minority groups in fields such as education, healthcare, housing, social services and in other areas relevant for social inclusion. Moreover, the lack of statistical data on the situation of Roma in various sectoral fields makes the design, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes difficult and unreliable. According to interpretation of data protection laws frequently promoted by governments, gathering data according to ethnicity is “illegal”. In its data protection rules however, the EU has consistently affirmed that data protection rules apply to personal data, not to aggregate data about groups, nor data disaggregated by ethnicity or other criteria.⁴⁴

Therefore without this quantitative data evaluating social programs is difficult to accomplish especially on a national or regional scale. With governmental programs being met with skepticism, logistical obstacles, and lack of implementation, many supporters in the

44 “Challenges to Roma Integration Policies in the European Union and Among Candidate Countries.” European Roma Rights Center and the European Network against Racism. Peer Review Meeting. 23-34 October 2006. Pg. 6

international community have stepped up to support and work with the Roma population.

International Support

Over the past ten years, international support for the Roma has increased exponentially. Many non-governmental organizations and not-for-profits have been launched in Central and Eastern Europe focusing on providing resources and advocacy for the Roma population. Some examples of organizations are the European Roma Rights Center, the European Roma Information Office, the Roma Educational Fund, and the Legal Defense Bureau for National and Ethnic Minorities. Each organization focuses on a different agenda ranging from international advocacy, litigation, research, education, policy development, and training for Roma activists. The presence of these organizations and organizations like them has definitely had an impact on the accessibility of resources and support in the region. Furthermore, programs and trainings sponsored by these organizations have such a positive effect on the community because of their highly regarded reputations. One major non-governmental financial contributor and policy advocate to Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe has been the Open Society Institute. Their *Roma Initiative* has developed many projects supporting issues as access to health care, education, and legal rights and equality. For example, *The Roma Participation Program* offers fifteen internships to Roma

students at the European Commission and the Council of Europe.⁴⁵ Additionally, *The Network Women’s Program: Roma Women’s Initiative* supports several programs and techniques for empowering women throughout Central and Eastern Europe.⁴⁶

This support from the international community prompted many larger international bodies and governments to take action in the matter. Governments from Southeastern and Central Europe along with the World Bank, the Open Society Institute, the United Nations Development Program, the Council of Europe, Council of Europe Development Bank, the European Roma Rights Center, the Roma Education Fund, the European Roma Information Office, the European Roma and Travellers Forum, the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation of Europe founded *The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015*. This initiative is a “political commitment by governments in Central and Southeastern Europe to combat Roma poverty, exclusion, and discrimination within a regional framework. The Decade is an international initiative that brings together governments, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, as

45 Roma Initiatives. Open Society Institute: A Soros Foundations Network. 2007 Open Society Institute. <www.soros.org>

46 Romani Women. Focus Areas. Roma Initiatives. Open Society Institute: A Soros Foundations Network. 2007 Open Society Institute. <www.soros.org>

well as Romani civil society to accelerate progress toward improving the welfare of Roma and to review such progress in a transparent and quantifiable way.”⁴⁷ Countries that are taking part in this initiative are Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Slovakia.

While still in its early phases, the initiative has received international notability and recognition by hosting events that bring together activists, governmental officials, and Romani leaders for conferences and workshops. Yet, local communities have mixed reviews of *The Decade of Roma Inclusion*. For example, Ipsos Szonda’s report *Current Attitudes Toward the Roma in Central Europe: A Report of Research with non-Roma and Roma Respondents* states, “Both Roma and non-Roma respondents insisted that the program should also address the needs and concerns of other citizens in the region suffering from similar social and economic disadvantage. Programs and services that are perceived as “preferential” are seen by both Roma and non-Roma respondents to be counterproductive- with the potential to increase discrimination and hostility toward the Roma over time.”⁴⁸ While this review of *The Decade of Roma Inclusion* maybe an isolated opinion, it does bring light to an overarching theme to the access of rights for the Roma population.

47 The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015. The Official Website of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. <<http://www.romadecade.org>>

48 Decade of the Roma. 3 Roma Groups Focus Groups Discussion. Hungary. Ipsos Szonda. June 2005. Pg. 4.

If non-Roma and Roma community members are not behind different social programs and initiatives such as *The Decade of Roma Inclusion*, it could be interpreted that the Roma are being favored. This 'positive discrimination' could be as harmful as negative discrimination if community members are not committed to these projects. Moreover, the response from regional and local communities to international initiatives and programs will be a contributing factor for the future of the Roma.

Conclusion

The Roma population in Hungary faces poverty and obstacles when trying to access resources everyday. Access to education, healthcare, safe and adequate housing and employment opportunities become difficult when they are faced with discrimination and prejudice. However, the EU as well the Hungarian government over the past 10 years has invested resources and funding for the Roma population. Anti-discrimination legislation along with diversity initiatives have been developed and implemented in the EU member states. Moreover, the international non-governmental community has provided advocacy, support, and policy development.

While the identity of the institution of the EU has changed over the last decade, what about the rest of Europe? Implementation of anti-discrimination laws and equal treatment need to not only exist on a national level, but also on a local

and community level. Unfortunately, the changing of an institution does not always change the discriminatory actions of people. Progressive initiatives and rhetoric are not enough. Governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and activists believing in social justice and equal rights for the Roma are not sufficient. Social inclusion and equality for the Roma will only come when anti-discrimination laws and programs are embraced, supported and practiced throughout the region.

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Acting as a Role Model and Resource: Student Development through Education and Advising

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As a teaching assistant in Budapest, I was able to observe multiple dimensions of student need and student development. My position made it possible for me to serve as both an advisor and a teacher to Hungarian and other international students. Through these dual roles I was able to explore education from a new perspective, and work with a unique and important student population: international students.

Introduction

During my appointment as a Fulbright Teaching Assistant I split my duties between advising at the Fulbright Educational Advising Center, and teaching, at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church, both in Budapest. As an advisor with the Fulbright Educational Advising Center (FEAC) my main responsibilities included advising