

THE ROMA INTEGRATION PROGRAM: SUCCESS STORIES

Partners for Democratic Change

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Roma children in Velká Lomnica, Slovakia.

Milena Adamová, 29, realized she wanted to help her fellow Roma while still a student in school. “I began to understand that not all Roma share similar backgrounds, she said. “I feel very lucky to have been born in the environment that I was. I had a normal childhood. Later I realized that I was really fortunate, as a large percentage of the Roma from my community are not so lucky.”

After graduating with a specialization in Social Work with Ethnic Minorities from the Evangelical Academy in Prague, Ms. Adamová accepted a position with *Path of Hope*, an NGO that seeks to improve the lives of Roma in her hometown Chomutov, Czech Republic. But soon she would move on to bigger things.

In 2004, Ms. Adamová replaced a sick coworker at a training seminar. This training turned out to be the first Partners-Czech Roma Integration Program cooperative planning group meeting in Chomutov. “The Roma Integration Program really attracted me and I decided to join the subsequent meetings where I received information about various NGOs and their work with the Roma people.”

Inspired by these meetings, and with some encouragement from her father, Ms. Adamová decided to form a new NGO, *Romano Rat* in April 2004. The NGO received Roma Integration Program small grant funds, allowing Ms. Adamová and *Romano Rat* to work in Roma communities where “no one has ever worked.”

Since its inception, *Romano Rat* has benefited the approximately 300 Roma living in Pruněřov, a settlement near Chomutov. Roma inhabiting Pruněřov live in deplorable conditions; the NGO helps residents solve problems such as outstanding debts and administrative issues with the local government.

“I feel satisfied with my life. It is not always easy to find work that you love, so I feel very lucky,” Ms. Adamová said. “(Partners-Czech’s) support and their faith in me has been truly invaluable.”

Central and Eastern Europe’s Roma are one of the region’s poorest and most vulnerable groups. A 2002 United Nations Development Program survey titled “Avoiding the Dependency Trap: The Roma in Central and Eastern Europe” revealed the Roma’s desire to integrate, rather than assimilate, through increased employment opportunities, improved access to education, and higher levels of participation in government, especially at the local level.¹ Roma integration can be achieved through initiatives designed to address inter-ethnic tensions and the lack of skills and sustainable structures to ensure that Roma support projects succeed beyond the short-term.

¹ “Avoiding the Dependency Trap: The Roma in Central and Eastern Europe.” United Nations Development Program. Bratislava, Slovakia. 2002.

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For over a decade, Partners for Democratic Change (Partners), a U.S. nongovernmental organization, and its network of Centers for Change & Conflict Management (Centers) across Central and Eastern Europe have pioneered successful models of Roma integration at the local level. These programs trained Roma leaders, created sustainable community structures to foster ethnic conciliation, and expanded Roma access to social services, serving as the foundation for long-term integration efforts.

In 2003, Partners, in cooperation with the Partners-Czech, Partners-Hungary and Partners for Democratic Change Slovakia (PDCS) Centers, launched the \$2.8 million, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded Roma Integration Program in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia. This comprehensive program drew from Partners' past experience and, having produced important outcomes through a series of initiatives in nine target cities and towns, the three target countries and across the region, serves as a model of Roma integration efforts in Europe. Partners hopes that beyond sustainable program initiatives, the lasting impact of the Roma Integration Program will be this model.

To demonstrate Roma Integration Program outcomes, Partners has collected success stories from the project and presented them in this booklet. Each narrative is a study of a specific program component, which taken as a whole represent the best practices of this large and diverse project. This booklet is intended for NGOs, governments, donors, media outlets, and others working with Roma at the

local, national or international levels. Partners hopes that the booklet will encourage these organizations to support Roma integration initiatives and use the Roma Integration Program example when doing future work in the region.

Roma Integration Program Target Communities

Czech Republic

Bruntál, Chomutov, Pardubice

Hungary

Hatvan, Ózd, Pécs

Slovakia

Kežmarok, Prešov, Rimavská Sobota

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CONCILIATION COMMISSIONS

In each of the target communities the Centers established inter-ethnic Conciliation Commissions, which recognize local diversity and mediate community disputes. Trained in effective communication, mediation and conflict resolution methodologies, the commissions work to resolve disputes and promote inter-ethnic tolerance. These bodies are unique for their multi-ethnic makeup and focus. Unlike other community mediation organizations staffed and run by non-Roma, the commissions are designed to work effectively in multi-cultural environments. Since their inception, the Conciliation Commissions have mediated dozens of cases, from housing issues to family disputes, and become important institutions in the communities.

REMOVING BIASED QUESTIONS FROM SCHOOL FORMS IN HUNGARY

When six year-old Laszlo D.'s² parents in Lörinci, Hungary began preparing to send him to school, the local kindergarten, with assistance from the Pedagogical Counseling Agency, conducted a series of tests to assess his capacity to succeed in an academic environment.

Laszlo's parents were shocked to discover that the required personal information form included a question inquiring whether the child was Roma. Being Roma, they felt their family would be unfairly singled-out and were concerned the information would be used to discriminate against their child. They reported the case to the head of the Roma Minority Self-Government, Csaba Lakatos, who was also a member of the Hatvan Conciliation Commission.

Looking into the matter further, Mr. Lakatos discovered the same form was distributed in all 12 municipalities within the Pedagogical Counseling Agency's jurisdiction. But Laszlo's family was the first to complain about the "Roma question". Mr. Lakatos decided to present the case to the Conciliation Commission.

"For decades we've been asked questions like this on forms, but we never challenged the authorities," Mr. Lakatos said. "Because of our involvement in the Roma Integration Program, we decided to come forward."

Commission members approached the director of the Pedagogical Counseling Agency and requested that the question be removed from the form. But the director said it was intended to evaluate a student's prior education history and socio-economic background and suggested that Roma children typically have little prior education and thus wide gaps in knowledge compared with their non-Roma peers.

² Name changed to protect the identity of the child.

The commissioners countered that similar information could be obtained without making such negative generalizations about the Roma community. The Counseling Agency director admitted that the organization was unaware that such a question was insensitive, and agreed to cooperate with the Conciliation Commission. It was decided during the mediation session that the question would be removed from the evaluation form.

Having brought the case to a successful close, Mr. Lakatos reflected on what had changed as a result of the Roma Integration Program. “Earlier I would have used aggressive behavior to solve such issues,” Mr. Lakatos said. “During the (Partners mediation) training I learned that this does not lead anywhere.”

HOUSING DISPUTE IN CHOMUTOV, CZECH REPUBLIC

One of the first cases accepted by the Chomutov Conciliation Commission involved a long-running dispute between two Roma families and one non-Roma family living in the same building. The non-Roma residents complained that the Roma were noisy, held parties late into the night and left trash in common spaces. Roma children were accused of being too loud and destroying landscaping in front of the house.

Unfortunately, what started as a dispute between neighbors quickly escalated. Lacking an adequate forum to address their complaints, the non-Roma began verbally abusing the Roma residents. Without help, the situation would have probably ended only after intervention by local authorities, an outcome unacceptable to all parties.

The Conciliation Commission was contacted to help with the matter. They began by speaking with the head of the homeowner’s organization to learn more about the situation. During subsequent meetings with the disputants, each side was able to air its grievances. The Roma and non-Roma residents all agreed to a common meeting.

During the mediation, both sides consented to three conditions to end the dispute. The Roma families agreed to respect quiet hours at night and take greater care of common areas, including the landscaping. A group of Roma and non-Roma residents was formed to care for the grass and plant new flowers. The agreement was signed by all participants in May 2005, verbal arguments have ceased and the rules are being respected to this day.

COOPERATIVE PLANNING PROCESS

As one of the first program activities, Partners and the Centers connected with Roma and non-Roma municipal government, NGO, business, health, and education representatives and encouraged their participation in cooperative planning processes - facilitated processes to build consensus around concrete issues relating to Roma integration - in each of the nine target communities.

Over 400 people were trained in effective communication, negotiation and facilitation techniques and as a result, Roma and non-Roma were better able to collaborate on Roma integration initiatives and utilize effective conflict management skills.

Following their training, cooperative planning groups identified Roma needs in the community and collaboratively developed realizable action plans and projects to confront these issues. The nine groups developed projects, solicited grant proposals, organized working groups to confront specific Roma problems, monitored the implementation of the action plans, and arranged public and media events to publicize their efforts. Roma participants were empowered to effect positive change in their communities and benefited from greater involvement in civic decision-making as a result of the cooperative planning process. Looking forward, group members will continue to have an impact in their neighborhoods, towns and cities based on their Roma Integration Program training and leadership experience.

SOLVING ROMA HOUSING ISSUES IN PREŠOV, SLOVAKIA

Large numbers of Roma supported by social welfare programs in Slovakia face huge, sometimes insurmountable rent and utilities debts. In the city of Prešov alone, nearly 300 impoverished families as of late 2006 owed large sums of money to the municipality and utility companies, having failed to pay gas, electricity and water bills and rent for years. A Slovak court took action and ordered the forced eviction of 9 families from public housing. The others faced the prospect of utilities being cut off to their homes and apartments, or worse, being turned out as well.

Recognizing the consequences of allowing the situation to worsen, including further forced evictions, the Prešov cooperative planning group organized a roundtable discussion in partnership with PDCS and the Plenipotentiary Office for Roma Communities in Prešov. The cooperative planning group was established in early 2005 in Prešov as part of the Roma Integration Program and has served as a resource for both Roma and majority populations in the community. Group members became important actors in community planning processes, resulting in increased awareness by the local government of issues affecting Roma and the development of concrete solutions to Roma education, health and housing problems, implemented by the municipality.

Roundtable participants, including Roma, utility company and local government representatives, discussed possible solutions to the problem and decided to implement the *institute of special receiver*. The *institute of special receiver* allows the Prešov Municipality and the Department of Housing, responsible for municipal-owned housing in the city, and the Office of Labor, Social Affairs and Family, responsible for social welfare benefits, to deduct appropriate amounts from government support payments to impoverished families to cover essential items, such as rent and utilities. The solution protects children who often do not have control over household budgets but suffer when the family is evicted from their home.

By the end of 2006, the first 20 families had begun the process to be placed on this program and an additional 100 are planned to follow in the subsequent two years. The solution produced during the roundtable dialogue will ensure that these and future low-income Roma families in Prešov will not face homelessness.

SMALL GRANTS

Over \$760,000 in small grants money was distributed to community-based organizations as part of the Roma Integration Program small grants project. Following implementation of the cooperative planning processes, NGOs and other civic organizations from the nine target communities were encouraged to submit proposals to access grant funds, which ranged in size from around \$1,000 to nearly \$20,000. In total, 110 projects were funded, impacting thousands of Roma and non-Roma in the Roma Integration Program Target Communities. The supported projects improved education opportunities for Roma and non-Roma children, established youth centers and after-school programs, resulting in less petty crime, renovated run-down public spaces and parks in Roma settlements, trained unemployed Roma in marketable job skills and helped them find work, and provided health and social services to isolated communities. In addition, the small grants program led to an increase in the number of Roma and non-Roma who said they work cooperatively with one another to develop their communities. Through developing and implementing these projects, the non-profit and nongovernmental organizations supported by Roma Integration Program small grants improved their ability to write proposals and manage projects. As a result, over three quarters of these institutions accessed new local and national government, European Union and/or private funding sources.

STEP-BY-STEP SCHOOL IN PÉCS, HUNGARY

The Vásárosdombó Kindergarten and School serve the residents of a small village near Pécs, including 250 Roma living in isolated neighborhoods. Vásárosdombó teachers and administrators are committed to helping Roma students prepare for primary and secondary school, but Roma students in the area lag behind their non-Roma peers.

For this reason, the Kindergarten began searching for teaching methods better suited to its multicultural environment. With a Roma Integration Program small grant, Vásárosdombó organized trainings for its teachers in the “Step by Step” teaching methodology, in addition to purchasing the necessary classroom materials.

“Step by Step” was designed by the Open Society Institute for classrooms composed of young children from different social, ethnic and economic backgrounds. The methodology emphasizes teaching to every student’s individual ability and using positive encouragement to build self-esteem and personal independence.

Using grant funds, Vásárosdombó Kindergarten teachers visited the Ec-Pec Foundation to be trained in the basics of the “Step by Step” method. Ec-Pec emphasized three basic goals for every Kindergarten classroom: a sense of achievement, independence and integration. Following the training at Ec-Pec, Kindergarten teachers visited classrooms at a “Step by Step” school in Gödre. Seeing

their colleagues in Gödre use the method helped the Vásárosdombó teachers better understand how to put its theories into practice.

As a result of this project, the number of children requiring special education has dropped and the number of students entering primary school has increased from 75 percent in 2005 to 88 percent in 2007. “These (Kindergarten) kids will surely have no problems integrating into the school by the time they get there,” Kindergarten Director Erzsebet Lempert said.

Norbert Schumann, the school director, was so impressed with the changes that had taken place in the Vásárosdombó Kindergarten as a result of the trainings and new classroom materials that he asked the Kindergarten teachers to establish “Step by Step” first grade classrooms, with plans to implement this program in grades one through four.

NGO KLÚČ

The Civic Association Klúč (Key) participated in all three Roma Integration Program grant rounds in Slovakia, using the funds to provide educational and free-time activities for youth and expand the scope of its work in the Kežmarok community. Over the course of the three grant rounds, Klúč established an Integration Center for Children, serving approximately 150 children and 30 parents in the community, and managed an early childhood learning program for 60 children from low-income Roma and non-Roma families.

As a result of these projects, Roma children improved their school performance, learned to interact with members the non-Roma community, received tutoring help from parents and volunteers, learned to use the computer, and benefited from free-time activities, such as sports and arts and crafts programs. Klíč's efforts addressed the low level of education in the Roma community and the disinterest some Roma parents exhibit in their children's education.

The tremendous impact of the organization's Roma Integration Program-sponsored projects caught the attention of the mayor of Kežmarok and members of the local parliament. During a visit to the Klíč programs, the mayor praised Civic Association Klíč's accomplishments and good work implementing Roma integration projects.

The interest from local government officials resulted in a grant award of \$22,150 from the local parliament to Klíč for reconstruction of their premises. With this grant money and the experience gained from managing the Roma Integration Program small grant projects, the Civic Association is well positioned to continue its community youth programs and further expand its activities in Kežmarok.

ROUNDTABLES

Partners-Czech, Partners-Hungary and PDCS organized yearly national roundtable dialogues to discuss public policy issues related to Roma and support community-based Roma Integration Program activities. Composed of Roma and non-Roma regional and national government officials, civil society leaders, business, education, and healthcare representatives, the roundtables served as venues for regular examinations of lessons learned from Partners' Roma integration efforts and of Roma support efforts initiated by national and local government institutions. Connecting with such high-level officials to discuss community based models of Roma integration allowed Partners and Roma activists to advocate for national policies reflecting the real needs of Roma. Education and health were among the many topics discussed at these roundtables, producing important shifts in the governments' perspective and policy towards Roma community development.

GREEN PAPER ON THE PORTRAYAL OF ROMA IN THE MEDIA

In January 2007, the Hungarian Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor published an historic Green Paper titled *Representations of Roma in the Media*. The development of the Green Paper, a series of recommendations meant to

stimulate discussion on matters of media policy, resulted from national roundtable meetings organized by Partners-Hungary as part of the Roma Integration Program to encourage more accurate depictions of Roma life by journalists.

The Green Paper is the first such document published in Europe on the topic of Roma and the media. Its development is particularly groundbreaking because the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor, a wide range of experts, including representatives of Roma media and other journalists, and the Hungarian Ombudsman for Minority Affairs all reached consensus on its development.

“The media represents Roma as a community isolated in ghettos,” said Andor Ürmös, head of the department of Roma Integration at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor and a roundtable participant. “Many people draw very stereotypical conclusions from these pictures – like all (Roma) live in abject poverty. While this is not true, the media reinforces this image. Are these the only things the media has to say about Roma?”

During roundtable discussions, participants outlined a series of proposals to decrease conventional negative portrayals of Roma in the news and increase the number of Roma journalists working for mainstream media organizations. Following these conversations, a participant suggested the Ministry should publish the roundtable recommendations in a Green Paper and the government agreed.

“The media needs to change its approach and see things in a different way from the way they used to 20 years ago because the situation (of Roma) has changed as well,” Mr. Ürmös said. “We need a change in the structure of both public and commercial television so that more and more Roma media experts and journalists can work there.”

While not a policy paper, the Green Paper may lead to further discussions within Hungary's government about changing media regulations. Its publication is not only a significant step towards creating a more culturally sensitive media industry in Hungary, but also a strong indication that the government is cognizant of the media's role in Roma integration efforts.

ENCOURAGING THE CZECH GOVERNMENT TO GIVE GREATER SUPPORT TO ROMA REGIONAL COORDINATORS

A roundtable meeting on formalizing the role of Roma Regional Coordinators organized by Partners-Czech as part of the Roma Integration Program in 2005 led to the creation of a central resource center for the Regional Coordinators by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

Regional Coordinators serve as liaisons between Roma communities and the 14 Czech regional governments. They work directly with Roma advisors in cities and towns around

the country on issues of Roma integration. Before the roundtable was organized, the Regional Coordinators had very little support from within the government and lacked the capacity to operate effectively.

Representatives from the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, the Interior Ministry, the Ministry of Education, and the Regional Coordinators all attended the roundtable discussion. Based on this meeting, the Czech government approved a plan to create Centers for Regional Coordinators and to formalize their role within the government. Under the plan, the centers provide the coordinators with up-to-date information on legislative and procedural issues relating to Roma and allow them to share information and best practices with one another. The Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, which oversees the position, also meets with the Regional Coordinators at least four times a year to discuss problems that concern Roma in their regions.

As a result of the formalized Regional Coordinator role, the Czech government is better able to implement national Roma integration policies at the regional and local levels. Before the plan was approved, Roma Coordinators received little guidance from the government and thus lacked a common strategy. The new procedures have made them more effective at serving the Czech Republic's Roma population.

INSTITUTIONALIZING THE *FIELD SOCIAL WORKER* POSITION IN SLOVAKIA

Early in the second year of the Roma Integration Program, PDCS partnered with the Association of Field Social Workers and the Milan Šimečka Foundation to organize a national roundtable discussion on the institutionalization of the Field Social Worker position in the Slovak government.

Field Social Workers are an important resource for Roma community members, providing information about social benefits and services to geographically isolated. Until the roundtable meeting was held, only 30 Field Social Workers were assigned to the entire country, supported by a special Plenipotentiary Office for Roma Communities program and a few Slovak NGOs.

During conversations between key government and civil society representatives, it was agreed that the Field Social Worker position would receive official government support through the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family. PDCS worked directly with the State Secretary of the Ministry and other key roundtable participants to reach an agreement on funding and mobilizing the social workers.

As a result of this dialogue, the Ministry currently supports 227 Community Social Workers, the new official title, and 380 of their assistants, 80-percent of whom are Roma, working in 183 municipalities across Slovakia. In addition,

the Ministry funds trainings and education programs facilitated by PDCS for the social workers and assistants. The Community Social Workers help Roma draft legal documents and appeals and complete official applications for social benefits. They help beneficiaries navigate the complex maze of state and local government regulations and serve as a bridge between isolated Roma populations and municipal authorities. In short, Community Social Workers increase Roma access to social services and have proved to be one of the most successful government-supported Roma integration initiatives in Slovakia.

MEDIA

Given a chance to shape news content, Roma journalists can address the underlying ethnic tensions and biases that lead to social, political and economic isolation. But Roma are underrepresented throughout the mainstream media industry in Central Europe. Roma Integration Program-sponsored internships and media campaigns encourage Roma voices to be heard and promote more tolerant views of minority groups. While working as interns, young Roma journalists were able to cultivate the skills necessary to thrive in the highly competitive media industry. And through media campaigns, activists advocated for greater inter-ethnic tolerance and challenged majority-held stereotypes. The Roma Integration Program media projects complemented Partners' other Roma integration work, ultimately promoting a more democratic culture of inter-ethnic dialogue.

'BE AWARE OF YOUR PREJUDICES'

In October 2006, Partners-Czech launched the "Be Aware of Your Prejudices" country-wide public awareness media campaign. The centerpiece of the campaign was a thirty-second Public Service Announcement (PSA), which aired on two major Czech Television stations over 60 times for a month, including eight primetime broadcasts. Partners-

Czech collaborated with advertising experts to develop the public awareness campaign, which confronted stereotypes of Roma and other ethnic and religious minorities in Czech society, such as Vietnamese immigrants and Muslims.

The TV spot depicted a non-Roma male on a Prague tram who, realizing his wallet is missing, blames an innocent Roma youth sitting nearby. In the end, the man realizes he had dropped the wallet upon boarding the tram car. In the final frame, a slogan in Czech reminds viewers to “Beware not just of your possessions, but also of your prejudices.”

In addition to airing the television spot, an extended version appeared in 27 cinemas in the Roma Integration Program target communities and Prague. The cinema spot was viewed by more than 75,000 audience members. Eight-thousand printed posters, downloadable from the 'Předsudky' (Prejudices) website at www.predsudky.cz, were posted in public transportation terminals, public buildings, and schools throughout the Czech Republic, including major cities such as Brno and Ostrava. Four versions of the posters feature headshots of a Roma man, Vietnamese girl, a Muslim man or a blond woman with prejudices associated with those groups “written” on the models' faces.

The website was launched to complement the other 'Be Aware' campaign activities. In addition to free downloadable posters and video (1,186 people downloaded the PSA from the website) and an explanation of the campaign, visitors were encouraged to participate in moderated online

discussions about tolerance and inter-ethnic relations in the Czech Republic. While some negative criticism was to be expected, the vast majority of the public, including the Roma community, welcomed the campaign. The following viewer responses demonstrate the broad impact of the month-long initiative and point to the effectiveness of the media campaign in changing the attitudes of Czechs towards Roma and other vulnerable social groups:

> The objective of this well-conceived anti-prejudice campaign is to reflect our usually deep-rooted prejudices in such a way that they become clearly visible to ourselves so that it is only up to us how we deal with them. The campaign seems to fulfill its purpose. – Czeslav Walek, head of the Government Council for Roma Affairs.

> I really like (the campaign). Unfortunately the campaign is needed. It is a pity that prejudices do exist. – Anonymous female website visitor from Hradec Králové.

> The campaign posters are my favorite part. They effectively attract attention. (The posters) speak for themselves. – Jiří Ondrasek, spokesman for the Bruntál municipality.

> I think that this website will open many people's eyes. I recommend that everyone visit it and discover that we all must work to challenge our (assumptions). It is extremely important. – Anonymous male website visitor from Uherské Hradiště.

> The public awareness campaign “Be Aware of Your Prejudices” is highly professional. It very effectively attracts one's attention using modern communication techniques and has a big impact on one's perception (of prejudices). It

is important that citizens are aware of the stereotypes present in everyday life and reconsider their position towards the current problems of our society. – Petra Hubková, Secretary of the Czech Government Office for Non-profit Organizations

> I am very conscious that prejudices are also written on my face. I don't like people who judge others so easily. – Anonymous female website visitor from Rymacov.

> The campaign expresses exactly the perception of the majority towards minorities living in the Czech Republic. It is necessary to warn of the dangers (of such perceptions) to minorities. Unfortunately, such campaigns are not common in the Czech Republic. – Vera Horvathová, Director of the Roma NGO Darjav.

> We need more of these campaigns. Otherwise, if nothing is done, everyone will get used to a really bad situation. I like the campaign. – Anonymous female website visitor from Duchov.

INTERVIEW WITH BEA LAKATOS, HUNGARIAN MEDIA INTERN

Bea Lakatos was one of five Hungarian Ministry of Equal Opportunities and Roma Integration Program-supported interns at Hungarian State Television (MTV). Ms. Lakatos comes from a Roma and Jewish family and said “I identify with both minorities, but Roma traditions and customs are closer to my heart.” She studied law and worked previously as an Abaliget city clerk and for the Hungarian Ministry of Education. The internship with MTV is her first job in the media. Ms. Lakatos sat down for an interview to describe her experience with the TV station.

How did you get involved with the RIP intern initiative? Why did you want to participate in this program?

I got a call from my girlfriend who had read about the internship opportunity and she told me to apply. She thought I could do a lot for Roma in the media. I had never worked in media before and I thought, 'Why not? This may be an opportunity to influence public opinion (about Roma).' However, I had no idea what it was like to work in media - I had no idea which was the front and which was the back of the camera, so to speak.

The internship entrance exam was rigorous. All the applicants had to sit in one room and take a test that had many unusual questions like, 'Who is India's prime minister?' and then write an essay. The people who

received the top 15 scores were then asked to sit for an interview with the (MTV) board.

After being accepted, (the new interns) attended a team building training and orientation meeting. We discussed the program: that we shall receive a monthly stipend and will work in editorial offices in rotation, that we shall have mentors to help us with professional questions and that we shall also receive theoretical, in-class instruction about TV production.

What do you think of the program?

Yes, I believe this is a good program - well thought out. You just have to count how many more Roma work at MTV now than before and you get the picture. Without programs such as this, nothing will ever change, because the situation of Roma in media has not improved in the last 16 years. We need change. I am not supportive of segregated media; I highly value people who produce Roma-only media, but it just reinforces our isolation in the media industry.

Describe the first few weeks working as an intern. Was it exciting? Difficult?

Well it was strange joining a team of people (at MTV) who had been working together for a number of years already. I never had any problems fitting in however. I had a wonderful mentor who helped with everything, not only with professional issues. It was all very exciting.

What is the most important thing you have learned since working as an intern?

They taught me to see the world from a broader perspective. This was the most important lesson I learned. And of course the professional skills I learned were also important, such as using the editing software, editing "raw" video, how to provide background to a story, how to add background music and narration to the story, and how to use a microphone. I did not know the first thing about producing media before joining the program.

What has been your most challenging assignment?

By the third week I became a copy editor without any prior experience, while my colleagues whose work I was editing had 10 to 20 years experience as journalists. I had to review all the material and if I noticed shots that were stereotypical of Roma, I had to cut them out. The best thing about this was that even though we may have had arguments about my work, it was always strictly professional, and they accepted my editing for the most part.

What has changed at MTV as a result of the Roma internship initiative? Has the perception of Roma working in the Hungarian media changed since you and your colleagues started working as interns? Why or why not?

The people I am working with have learned that I am a capable journalist – and this without any prior experience. My colleagues respect me both from a professional and

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from a personal point of view. In the beginning I was afraid that it wouldn't be this way, but I was wrong. I am happy because I am no longer an outsider.

How will this experience help you in the future? What impact will this have on your career?

I don't know what will happen to me. I may get lucky and have the opportunity to work for a daily magazine that covers civic issues. But I realized three months ago that I was concentrating too much on landing my next job, rather than focusing on my work as an intern. Now I realize my world won't end if they do not hire me here. I know I am good at what I do.

How do you think Hungarian media can continue to improve its coverage of Roma issues?

Since the changes to democracy, no positive changes have occurred in Hungarian media regarding the coverage of Roma issues. There are always promises about how many Roma they were going to employ, but these remain only promises.

This is a bitter, uphill battle. While we are trying to change attitudes, just one story can reinforce stereotypes, negating our efforts.

Looking towards the future, do you think Roma will have greater opportunities to participate in the production of media? Why?

There are more and more well-trained Roma journalists. But I don't know when the glass ceiling will break, allowing more Roma journalists to work outside Roma-only media. Greater numbers of Roma need to work in the media in order to change the current attitudes (towards the Roma community). I came to MTV because I thought I could give valuable input and gain valuable experience. I did not come to put it on my CV after a year. I came here because I am interested in media and television. If I can't find work with MTV, I won't give up. I will work for another TV station.

ROMA TV PROGRAM SO VAKERES?

During year three of the program, PDCS and the Roma Integration Program Regional Coordinator Orhan Galjus worked to promote the idea of a twice-monthly Roma TV magazine on Slovak TV. After talks with PDCS, the Roma Press Agency agreed to transform the *Romale* program, produced by non-Roma journalists for Roma, into *So Vakeres?* (“*What do you say?*”), a twice-monthly Roma TV newsmagazine produced by Roma for a wider Roma and non-Roma audience.

Ten Roma Integration Program-supported episodes of *So Vakeres?* aired between June and December 2006, attracting millions of viewers. While complete statistics are unavailable, it was estimated by Slovak TV that on average 200,000 to 300,000 Roma and non-Roma viewers tuned in to each episode. A new Roma Integration Program-sponsored show aired every other week and featured segments on Roma news, in-depth reports and Roma culture. One episode featured a story about the Decade of Roma Inclusion in Romany, making *So Vakeres?* one of the only newsmagazines to do so. Other episodes focused on education, housing, employment, and health.

Each *So Vakeres?* episode was broadcast in both Romany and Slovak (other languages were sometimes spoken). When one language was being used, the other was

subtitled making *So Vakeres?* more accessible to a wider audience than Slovak-only *Romale*.

Viewer reactions were highly positive according to a Slovak TV survey:

> Roma appreciated the use of the Romany language, which promotes the idea that Roma should not be ashamed of using the language. Respondents said they have increased their vocabulary and ability to communicate in Romany.

> Non-Roma said they have a new sense of Roma life. They learned that not all Roma live in settlements, and they were impacted by images of Roma who are hard working and resourceful. The reaction of non-Roma viewers debunks the notion that majority populations will reject non-standard portrayals of Roma in the media.

> Roma respondents said they enjoyed the educated and “enlightened” reports about Roma social problems.

Overall, *So Vakeres?* increased coverage of Roma news and culture, facilitated dialogue between Roma and non-Roma and created new opportunities for Roma journalists. “Finally, a program that is for Roma and speaks about Roma through the eyes of Roma,” one viewer said. As programs such as *So Vakeres?* continue to develop, more objective portrayals of Roma by the press will become the norm rather than the exception.

SCHOOL TOLERANCE PROGRAMS

School tolerance programs across the three countries increased tolerance and an appreciation of diversity among students and teachers. Nearly 200 teachers and over 900 students were trained in multiculturalism and conflict management, affecting classroom and personal relationships and fostering open-mindedness about ethnic and religious minorities, and other isolated social groups. After completing all rounds of training, Partners-Hungary and PDCS developed training manuals to be widely disseminated in schools and teacher training programs in those countries, while Partners-Czech advocated for government support of similar school tolerance programs in the Czech Republic.

BATTHYANYI STRATTMANN SCHOOL TOLERANCE TRAINING

High schools in Hungary follow a tradition of lecturing, rigid timetables and well-delineated subjects that lack a unifying theme or cohesiveness. Topics such as democracy and entrepreneurship have slowly made their way into curricula, depending entirely on the openness of the instructor. As a result, little time is actually spent investigating issues

important to a healthy multicultural society, such as tolerance, diversity and human rights.

The Partners-Hungary school tolerance training program was launched to counter the discriminatory attitudes of students, especially those preparing to work in a multi-ethnic workplace. The directors of the Batthyanyi Strattmann Health Vocational School in Budapest welcomed such a program, hoping to address problems of inter-ethnic conflict among the students.

Partners-Hungary's training program was radically different than what students and teachers at Batthyanyi Strattmann were used to: small-group activities, no lecturing, active learning through experience, and role play. Trainers challenged students to become fully involved in the learning process, to become active listeners and participants in discussions and debates.

After initial resistance, the students warmed to this approach and opened up about their feelings towards Roma. They revealed unexamined stereotypes about ethnic minority groups, reflecting the prejudices of the broader Hungarian society. But some students also displayed very tolerant attitudes and began to confront their prejudiced peers. One explained the obstacles Roma students face: some have no desk, computer or study aids at home and their parents cannot afford private tutors. This information shocked some, particularly because it came from a fellow student rather than a teacher.

By the end of the training sessions, Partners-Hungary trainers observed that Batthyanyi Strattmann students were more conscious of their prejudices. They had opened up to new ideas and interacted with their peers in a way that is not typical of the traditional Hungarian classroom. School teachers learned how to facilitate tolerance training seminars for their classes. Most importantly, the teachers learned to emphasize critical thinking and active participation in exercises. They are now able to hold these sessions on their own and build the tolerance training curricula at Batthyanyi Strattmann.

KANKA: 'ENHANCING THE MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF ROMA AND NON-ROMA'

After attending the Roma Integration Program multicultural tolerance training in Bruntál, teacher Jana Manaková decided to expand the Rymarov Primary School paper *Kanka*, which she edits, to include more articles about Roma issues and culture. Her initiative demonstrates the positive impact of Partners-Czech's tolerance training program in Czech schools.

“Thanks to the Partners-Czech training, I could develop these new skills and methodologies,” Ms. Manaková said. “(The trainings) inspired me to deal with multicultural issues in education in a more sensitive way. For me it was a very positive experience.”

The Rymarov School's 165 students include a large number of Roma children. Ms. Manaková, like other teachers, interacts daily with Roma children and their parents and thus found the trainings to be very relevant to her work. Inspired by what she learned at the Partners-Czech training, Ms. Manaková was motivated to make improvements to *Kanka*.

In the past, the paper's only coverage of Roma news or culture consisted of a Czech-Romany dictionary. Ms. Manaková increased the number of stories about Roma life and encouraged students and their parents to contribute articles on Roma literature, culture, history, and traditions. A special section on Roma food proved to be especially popular among readers. Responses to the changes were very positive and the school noticed an increased interest in school activities among Roma families since the improvements were made.

“Readers of the school paper, mainly parents, have found more information about Roma culture,” Ms. Manaková said. “I really think that this is a positive development, and the paper will continue to enhance the mutual understanding of Roma and non-Roma at the school.”

She said the Roma Integration Program-sponsored tolerance trainings are part of the process of creating a more tolerant and collaborative learning environment. The impact of the training and initiatives such as the Roma section in *Kanka* will continue to “improve everyday coexistence” between Roma and non-Roma, Ms. Manaková said.

STRATEGIC PLANNING IN SLOVAK REGIONS

As a result of its successful cooperative planning work in the target communities, PDCS and the Plenipotentiary Office for Roma Communities facilitated a regional planning process in Banská Bystrica involving government and civil society stakeholders to create new strategies for Roma integration. While many independent plans existed, no collaborative document on integration strategies had yet been produced. Ultimately, the Roma integration strategy for Banská Bystrica will be included as part of a national strategy on Roma integration.

Based on the success of the strategic planning process in Banská Bystrica, a similar process was launched in the Prešov region, implemented by the Plenipotentiary Office for Roma Communities in Prešov and PDCS.

More than 80 people, including NGO, government, health, education, district, religious, regional development, employment office, and Roma representatives participated, over half of whom were members of the Roma Integration Program cooperative planning groups. Twenty of the most active participants formed a steering committee to analyze and define the main problems and obstacles to Roma integration and prepare a set of concrete steps towards solving the problem. Following the work of the steering

committee, groups were formed based on the most important strategic areas, such as housing, education, health, employment, and inter-ethnic relations.

The final document will form the basis of further national policy documents, for example, plans for conducting Roma integration work on the national level. This national Roma integration plan includes useful information about who will implement various parts of the strategy and who will finance the various initiatives, whether it is the European Union or the Slovak government.

The documents are groundbreaking because this facilitated process represented the first time that different Roma, NGO and government representatives were able to collaborate and prepare a common strategy for Roma integration, including how various initiatives are meant to be funded.

At the conclusion of their work, the steering committee called a meeting with members of the district parliament to officially inform them about the Roma integration strategy and asked that they approve the document. The Parliamentarians promised to discuss the material during their meetings and incorporate the document into a wider plan for economic and social development in the Prešov region. Once approved by the local parliament it will be implemented from 2008 through 2011.

INTERVIEW WITH REGIONAL PROGRAM COORDINATOR ORHAN GALJUS

Orhan Galjus joined the Roma Integration Program in 2005 to lead regional program activities. In his position Mr. Galjus developed regional Roma integration strategies with Partners, the Centers, NGOs, governments, and donors, fostered increased communication between Partners, the Centers and program beneficiaries, and advocated for greater Roma participation in the production of media. His work to influence media policy and give a greater voice to talented Roma journalists led to the realization of initiatives such as the *So Vakeres?* TV program in Slovakia. In addition, Mr. Galjus linked Roma Integration Program local-level beneficiaries, such as small grants recipients and Conciliation Commissions, and promoted the sharing of best practices and program ideas.

What is your background?

I was born in Prizren, Kosovo to a very large Romany family. More than 80-percent of the members of my family were educated. I learned from my uncles, from my family that education is the way to liberty; liberty in the sense that you have the ability to achieve your dreams. When I was young, I admired people who worked for radio and TV stations. I wondered, 'how did they get there, how did they become a journalist?' That was my dream and my goal was to make this a reality.

Please describe your role as the Roma Integration Program Regional Coordinator.

When I first talked to my colleagues in San Francisco, I began to get a sense of how I could help the Centers in the three countries with the Roma Integration Program. I have learned that it is not easy to make a positive impact, to achieve results that positively affect the lives of Roma. So I was very happy to work with the Roma Integration Program target communities. (As Regional Coordinator) I have worked to link the communities so that they share ideas, because the issues affecting Roma in the localities are similar. The challenge was for the program beneficiaries and the Centers to see this as a regional issue and see what daily challenges there are for Roma and to demonstrate to Europe that the challenges that exist in (the Roma Integration Program target) communities exist in all Roma communities.

THE ROMA INTEGRATION PROGRAM: SUCCESS STORIES

The results we have achieved can serve as a model for working with Roma at the community level and regionally. Having worked in three countries, I have had the opportunity to bring people together, to share information with local, national and international stakeholders. I can see a real difference. When I first began talking to some of the Roma Integration Program beneficiaries in the communities, I saw that even these people, who lived in the same town, did not know each other very well. But when they started to meet each other, to meet their neighbors, their fellow countrymen, and other Roma across the region, they began to see the benefits of working together on issues of common interest. We reached a level of dialogue that produced important results.

Why did you want to become involved with the Roma Integration Program and with Roma integration efforts in general?

I spent over thirty years of my life trying to somehow create a bridge between Roma communities and between Roma and mainstream society. The three Roma Integration Program target countries lie in the heart of Europe and have many challenges, but also many possibilities. I thought very much that there was a good possibility to make progress here and make a positive impact on the lives of Roma. I wanted very much to help Roma enjoy the benefits of an integrated society.

What is the goal of Roma Integration Program regional initiatives?

The goal is to help the nine communities and ultimately for our work in these communities to serve as a model of Roma integration projects. I hope and I believe our best practices, from Conciliation Commissions to our media initiatives, will be very visible to NGOs, governments and all of Europe. One cannot expect that in only four years time everything be perfect. Roma need long-term support. The Roma Integration Program and other programs show that Roma need structural support, long-term support.

How has the Roma Integration Program made a positive impact on Roma integration efforts in Europe?

Simply put, the Roma Integration Program helped small, unknown Roma communities. Typically, similar projects were implemented in major cities that already received adequate funding for Roma support initiatives. (But) Partners and the Centers carefully selected the communities (through a needs assessment). This is why the Roma Integration Program has produced such good results.

How can Roma activists, civic groups and nongovernmental organizations create broader and more effective networks?

Looking at the network we have developed of Roma Integration Program beneficiaries, this type of network can have a greater impact than a large network. I believe that Roma and our beneficiaries have learned that working and collaborating locally can create impact beyond their cities and towns, across the whole region even. I believe that in the future, building the capacity of small Roma NGOs should be a very high priority. A grassroots network, a community network of Roma organizations – this is how you help Roma.

How might similar Roma integration programs be successful in other parts of Europe?

I would ask them to consider the Roma Integration Program. Our experience during the past four years is unique. Unfortunately, I would have loved to have seen a longer program.

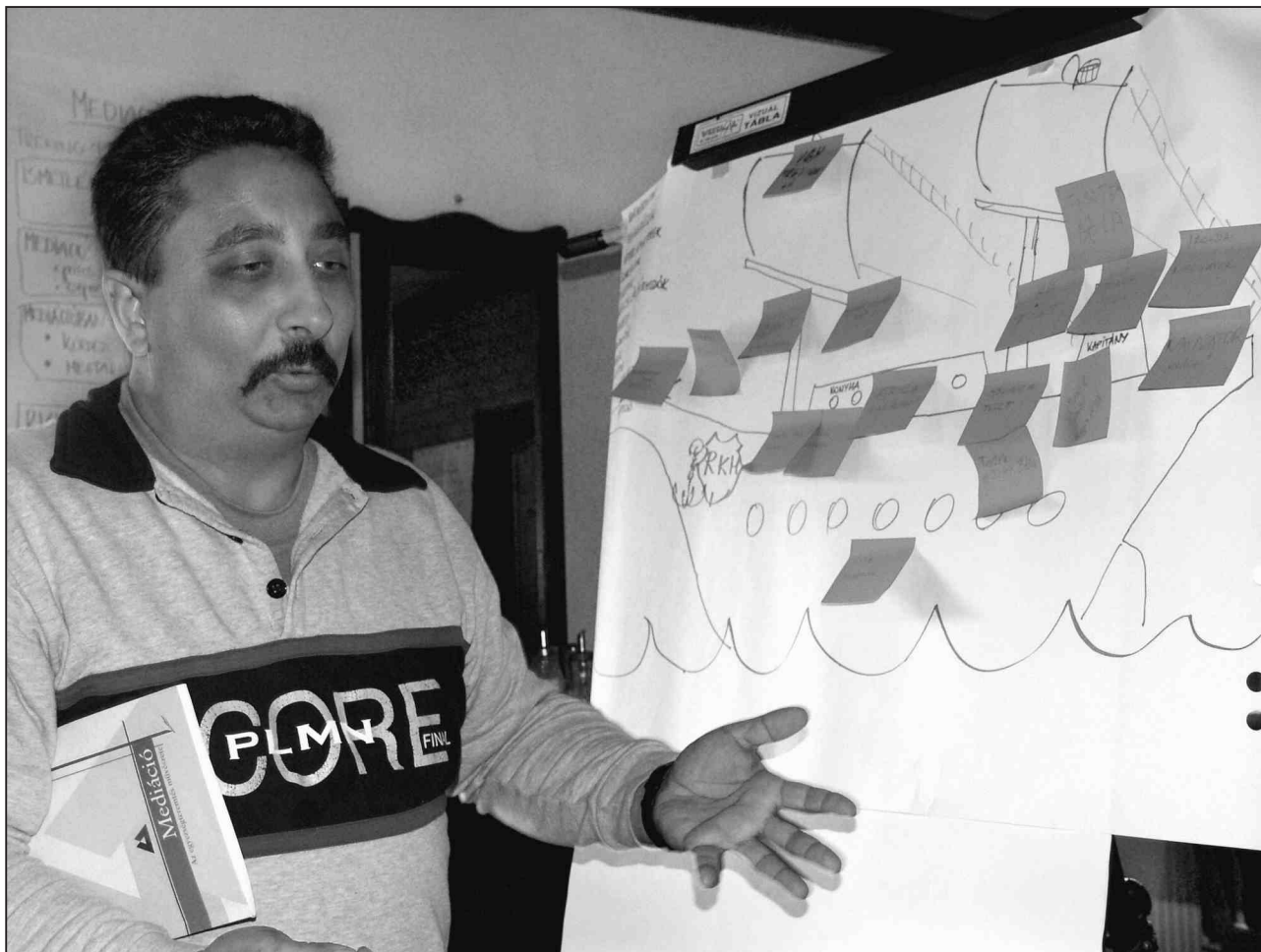
Are you confident future Roma integration efforts will be successful in Europe?

It depends very much on governments, donors and other institutions. Unfortunately, Roma are dependent on some of these institutions. But if programs similar to the Roma Integration Program were implemented, I would say I am very confident that the future of Central and Eastern European Roma is very bright.

THE ROMA INTEGRATION PROGRAM: SUCCESS STORIES



Filming the “Be Aware of Your Prejudices” TV Public Service Announcement in the Czech Republic. The spot was aired more than 60 times on two national Czech TV stations. A modified version was viewed by over 75,000 cinemagoers.



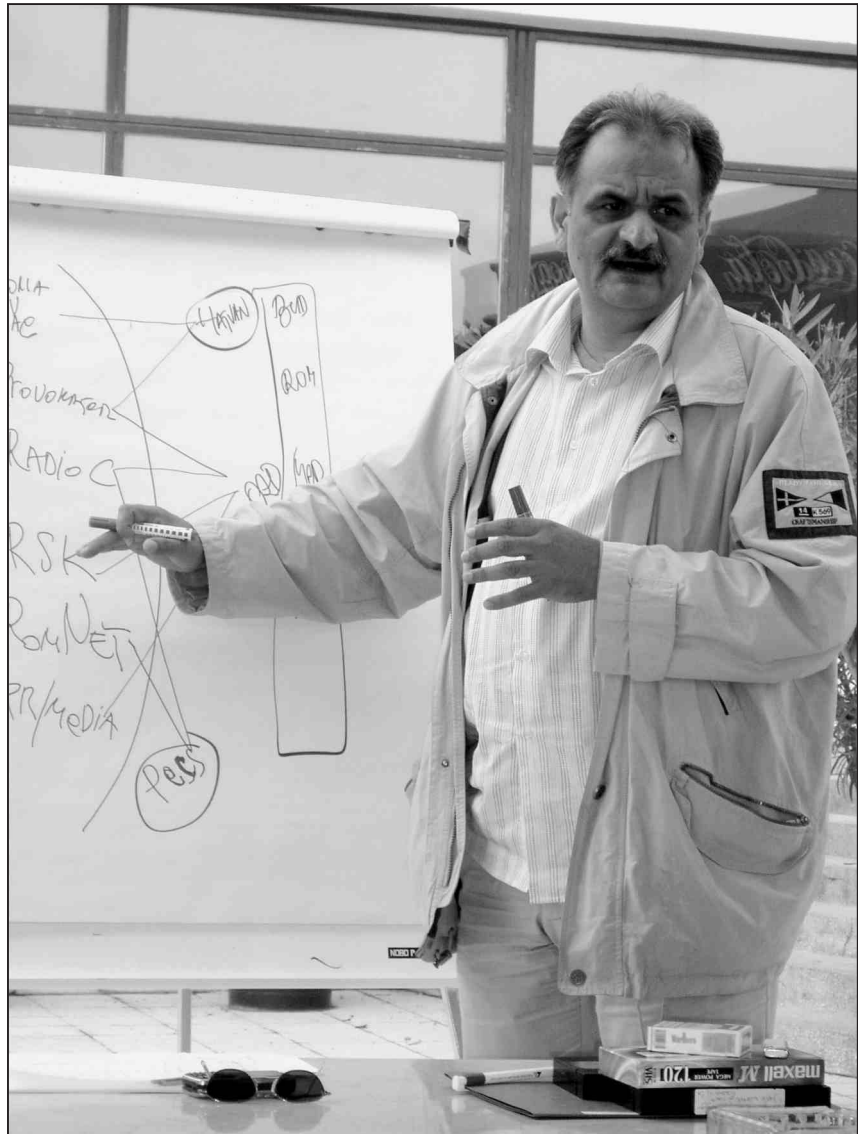
At the Partners-Hungary training for Ózd Conciliation Commission members. The Conciliation Commissions, composed of both Roma and non-Roma community members, served as local mediating bodies focused on resolving inter-ethnic disputes and improving minority-majority relations in the nine Roma Integration Program target communities.

THE ROMA INTEGRATION PROGRAM: SUCCESS STORIES



U.S. Ambassador to Slovakia Rodolphe M. Vallee visited Roma Integration Program small grant beneficiaries in Kežmarok. Fifty-nine Roma Integration Program small grant projects worth nearly \$270,000 have impacted over 3,100 Roma and non-Roma in Kežmarok, Prešov, Rimavska Sobota and surrounding communities

Janos Daroczi, editor of the Roma Magazine on Hungarian Television, spoke at the 2006 Regional Beneficiaries Meeting in Pécs, Hungary. During annual meetings, Roma Integration Program beneficiaries from the target communities in all three countries gathered to discuss program achievements and challenges and to strategize about expanding the program's impact across the region.



THE ROMA INTEGRATION PROGRAM: SUCCESS STORIES



Intern Aladar Olach edits tape for the Czech TV morning news program. Roma media interns at leading Czech media organizations, such as Czech Radio, Mladá Fronta Dnes and Czech TV, learned essential journalism skills, such as editing and reporting. Because of his good work as an intern, Mr. Olach was hired by Czech TV.

ABOUT PARTNERS FOR DEMOCRATIC CHANGE

Partners for Democratic Change is a U.S.-based international nonprofit organization headquartered in San Francisco. Partners is committed to building sustainable local capacity to advance civil society and a culture of change and conflict management worldwide. Since 1989, Partners has built the capacity of local institutions to promote democratic, participatory change and developed a network of independent locally staffed and managed Centers in 14 countries throughout Central and Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, Latin America, and the Middle East. Partners' initiatives encourage citizen participation in democratic processes, good governance, the rule of law, and the empowerment of disadvantaged groups, such as Roma, through trainings, facilitating inter-group dialogue, strengthening citizen representation in local government, and improving education, housing and employment opportunities.

Partners for Democratic Change International (PDCI) based in Brussels is a partnership of Partners and Centers linked by a common mission and values of democratic change, working to build capacity, cooperation, and sustainability among its members. Through PDCI, Partners develops and strengthens Centers through transferring expertise and resources among them, and mobilizing experienced trainers from existing Centers to build new Centers' training, application and organizational development capacities.

www.partnersglobal.org

PARTNERS-CZECH

Partners-Czech was founded in 1991 to support Czech democratic developments. The organization focuses on education, ethnic and national minority issues, civil society development, and local government reform to further support the advancement of a democratic culture in the Czech Republic. Partners-Czech specializes in working with Roma and non-Roma populations to resolve differences and increases the involvement of marginalized groups in decision-making processes.

www.partnersczech.cz

PARTNERS-HUNGARY

Partners-Hungary, established in Budapest in 1994, provides cooperative planning, problem solving and dispute resolution skills and services essential for a healthy democratic society. The Center specializes in conflict management and consensus building, especially between Roma and majority groups, promoting gender equality, and building a more robust civil society in Hungary and abroad.

www.partnershungary.hu

PARTNERS FOR DEMOCRATIC CHANGE SLOVAKIA

Partners for Democratic Change Slovakia has provided conflict management training and consultation services to Slovakia's NGO, local government, business, academic, and ethnic minority communities since 1991. The Center specializes in citizen participation initiatives, consensus building among diverse sectors, and facilitating dialogue among local governments, NGOs, businesses and other community stakeholders for cooperative local development.

www.pdcs.sk

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