

Churches contribute to European Roma strategies

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The annual meeting of the networks of two European church organizations was held in Budapest from February 14 to 15. It was hosted by the Synod of the Reformed Church in Hungary. Hungarian Reformed experts drafted the program of the first part of the two-day meeting to which the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), Eurodiaconia invited representatives of their partner organizations and cooperating churches.

[CCME](#) was represented by *Doris Peschke*, general secretary. *Catherine Storry*, policy officer, represented [Eurodiaconia](#). The membership and partners included representatives from the Transylvanian Reformed Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hungary (MEE), the Lutheran World Federation, Finnish, Norwegian, Italian representatives of the Lutheran Church, the United Methodist Church, as well as Danish, Dutch, Polish and Italian delegates from churches and charity organizations. *Elizabeta Kitanovic*, Executive Secretary of the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches ([CSC of CEC](#)), also took part in the consultation.

EU prepares for a Roma Framework



Photo by Richárd Kalocsai

The discussions focused on Roma integration which is a major priority of the [Hungarian EU Presidency](#). The participating organizations started to draft a joint statement offering proposals as a church contribution to the European Roma Framework, now being drafted by the European Council, and to the Hungarian Presidency Conclusions for a European Roma Strategy. This statement will be submitted to the relevant Hungarian and European Institutions.

Dr. Rita Izsák, chief of staff of the Secretary of State responsible for social inclusion in the Ministry of Justice and Public Administration ([KIM](#)) was also invited to the consultation. In her presentation, the ministry official outlined the goals of the Hungarian Presidency in relation to a European-level Roma integration strategy. She pointed out that, in the Hungarian government's view, such a strategy should focus not only on Roma communities, but also on the socially disadvantaged in general since the solutions would be effective for both groups. Recently, it has become clear that the EU is not preparing a strategy, but rather a set of guidelines to which the Member States can adapt their own strategies. This European Roma Framework is expected to be adopted during the Hungarian Presidency.

Recommendations of churches

In the two-day church conference, participants also voiced several observations and recommendations and additional findings will be presented to the Hungarian Presidency in their statement to be finalized in the next few days. Participants stressed that the EU should respect solidarity as its most important [core value](#). Inclusion should not be equated with assimilation, but efforts should be made to change the attitudes of majority and minority societies alike.

Several members agreed that the approach of the European system of competing for structural funds needs to be reconsidered in the long term as the current system is inadequate to support Roma inclusion programs. Inclusion or integration of a community takes decades, while the European programs usually offer support only for a few years. Another problem is that huge amounts of money are needed and therefore the grant amounts needed also reflect this. This issue of requiring a deductible is a problem in the communities in need. In addition to the overly complicated financial administration of grants, it is also disadvantageous that auditing focuses primarily on financial matters and less on the content aspects or long-term impacts of a given project.



Photo by Richárd Kalocsai



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The participants drew attention to the fact that, when adapting the various programs, one should take into account the local situation. It can be observed that even within Hungary the Gipsy minority is not uniform, therefore, out of the existing [cultural differences](#), it is possible that an inclusion project works may for one community while it may not work for another.

It is also important to know that, although Roma groups are in many ways segregated from the majority of the society, they do not live in complete isolation. In other words, those who deal with Roma inclusion also need take into account those majority groups which are closest to them. This approach should not be limited to the need to change the existing or suspected stereotypes or to raise awareness but one must be aware of the complex causes and respect the interests of the local communities and also treat mutual hurts.

Churches: the ability of situational awareness

As EU Affairs Officer of the Reformed Church in Hungary, *Adam Hamori* emphasized that unless reality is faced, no effective solutions can be developed. He stated that one of the [strengths of the churches](#) in dealing with the Roma is that no ideological or political commitment prevents them from understanding the present situation. Speakers emphasized that since the governments and European Institutions do not have resources to investigate problems case by case, churches and NGOs may help them because of their [active work](#) with disadvantaged communities.

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Gefällt mir

Registrieren, um sehen zu können, was deinen Freunden gefällt

Kategória: News, Roma Mission | A közvetlen link.
