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## **The Pastoral for Roma in Hungary**

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### **The situation of Roma in Hungary (1)**

In looking at secular traditions, one could say that Hungarian society has been tolerant towards Roma, but in recent years one can see the presence of an important shift in political life marked by intolerance. The negative impact of democracy is shown by the game of party politics that play the “gypsy card” either by manifesting an excessive anti gypsy attitude or an excessive indulgence. A false interpretation of positive discrimination has caused many problems with public opinion towards the gypsies because of experiences where delinquents of gypsy origin were punished less severely than the others. In parliament there is a political party that defends extremist opinions towards gypsies. At the same time one can notice the presence of a completely opposite current. There exists a layer of society, more and more active, trying to calm conflicts between Gypsy and Non-gypsies. Conferences organised on this theme are more and more frequent, we can see that everywhere there are volunteers who want to work at this. All over the country in the frame of pastoral work by the Catholic Church we can count from 80 to 100 initiatives.

A major problem is that these collaborators, little by little, lose their enthusiasm and become **discouraged**.

An obstacle to integration can be found in “well-meaning” help which exaggerates the subordination and the dependence of the Gypsies instead of reinforcing self-confidence and the innate dignity of the person.

**The lack of self-confidence of the Gypsy people** and the conception of a major part of the society of subjection may be an obstacle to a symmetric and working social collaboration between Gypsies and Non-Gypsies ; some want to “solve the problem” but Gypsy society little by little is becoming more organised and aware of itself. Some people are not taking into account this evolution and maintain clichés while others try to find more humane solutions: formation, opening of the work market, respect of their culture to assure the place in society to which the Gypsy people have a right.

The Gypsy ethnic group represents 7 to 8 % of the total population of the country. Since their birth rate is higher than in the majority population the proportion of the number of gypsies is rapidly increasing, more so than the growth of total population. While 20% of non-Gypsy women have three or more children, 60% of Gypsy women have three or more children (2). In the last ten years Hungarian society has diminished by 300.000 people while the Gypsy ethnic group has increased by 100,000 people.

Several groups are present in the country. Hungarian Gypsies mostly belong to the Romungro group and for 80% of them Hungarian is their mother –tongue... They arrived in the country in the XV century. The proportion of Vlax is 7.8%; they arrived in Hungary in XVIII-XIX century. They speak “Lovári”. The Béas represent 4.5% of the Gypsy population and have lost their original language, they speak a dialect of ancient Rumanian.

**The sanitary conditions** of Hungarian Gypsies are rather unfavourable. Their life expectancy is ten times lesser than for the majority population. The presence of various illnesses is 2 or 3 times more. (asthma is 6 times more prevalent for them.)

**Their housing conditions** are also unfavourable. The destruction of housing is a very serious problem. There are already many projects concerning complete destructions; In 2002 a sum of several milliards of Forint had been included in the budget but finally the project has become victim to political interplay and has not been concretised. There is some progress in this domain but it is very slow. The number of those in employment is 25.1%. Those continuing their studies-5%; the proportion of those touching an invalid pension is 15.4%.those who stay at home to bring up their children and who receive a feeble subvention is 13%. Before the change of political regime 85% were in employment. At that time unemployment was inside work structures. This situation generates nostalgia for the period before the change of government.

**Unemployment** is closely related to the feeble level of schooling and formation; not having the necessary resources, the ROMA have no possibility of benefitting from adequate formation or higher study. This vicious circle means they cannot improve their lives which in turn results in sustained poverty, inadequate housing and poor health.

**In education, there are** positive and negative trends. Many (32%) do not finish elementary schooling. Those who leave school at the end of the first cycle represent 36.4%. The number passing A levels is rising especially in the younger generations.

Positive development :The number of youths not finishing the elementary cycle has diminished, it is now 15%; These last 30 years the number of youths doing “A” levels has increased tenfold- it is now 11.4% compared to 38.2% in the majority population. The number of qualified workers has quadrupled. According to recent statistics, although the number of “A” level students among the Gypsies has risen, their backwardness has also risen compared to the majority population. This has arrived at 27% over the last ten years... There is another regrettable tendency these last years: the number of segregated schools and classes composed only of Gypsies and classes composed of Gypsies only registered as mental deficient or handicapped children. These are ghettos where the situation is really serious. The number of diploma holders is superior to the European level but doesn’t reach 2% where in view of their proportion to majority population a score of 7/8% would be more acceptable.

## **The presence of the pastoral in a society, divided by tensions between Gypsies and non-Gypsies.**

In the pastoral there is a central element, a fundamental way of thinking. It is not sufficient to work at the “catching-up “of Gypsies, but more to make the majority population aware of the need to welcome the Gypsies. Therefore we must develop activities in a double direction, since in the accentuation of one side and neglecting the other, tensions rise instead of calming down.; The most effective solution is the presence together of Gypsies and non-Gypsies in a community who turn together to face the two poles of social tension.

**Government** is collaborating with the pastoral, giving modest help and assuring a healthy atmosphere for the work of evangelization among the Gypsies.

### **Some aspects and events of pastoral work which have an important symbolic aspect and influence public opinion.**

There are not many people who use the complete Bible in Lovári tongue and yet its effect on the self-confidence among the Roma is unquestionable. We use it for the liturgy as texts and non official translations. Throughout the country, respect for and knowledge of Blessed Ceferino is rising. His image and name are increasingly widespread among the Roma and at our meetings we spread his renown. From the personality of Ceferino we try to form the conscience and influence public opinion about the Roma. These last years we have seen an aggressive anti-Gypsy voice pushed by political impulse, but at the same time the number of qualified Roma who participate in public life is rising. In addition we also notice a silent interest and a new solidarity towards the Roma. In the past, intellectual Roma were more left-leaning in their views, but now we can find them in a position compatible with Christian values.

In 2010, a book written by Bishop Székely János was published, under the title “Getting to Know the Gypsy People” with the aim of spreading knowledge about the situation, history and culture of the Roma. The book has had an impact on the public and we have seen positive benefits in public opinion. In 2015, a catechism for the Roma was made available and in 2016 a booklet on the funeral ceremony in Lovári tongue appeared.

A number of meetings and pilgrimages take place each year in our calendar. For example, there is a parish fete and pilgrimage at Csatka (parts of the Mass are in Lovári and also witnesses) at Mátraverebély-Szentkút, a Gypsy pilgrimage organised by local minority authorities with a procession and preaching, at Máriapócs, Gypsy pilgrimage with encounters over two days and spiritual exercises, the Csobánka feast of Szent (saint) Anna. Meetings concerning Gypsy youths at Kaposszentbenedek a national encounter between Gypsy and non-Gypsies at Vác, the feast of Szent Márton at Alsószentmárton.

The Greek Catholic church makes great efforts in pastoral work in areas where there are significant numbers of Gypsies. Schools, spiritual exercises, a Gypsy pilgrimage at Máriapócs and in the Gypsy parish of Hodász.

In 2013, the Hungarian Episcopal Conference organised for the first time, Catholic public days during which the pastoral is presented and commented on at a round table. The Blessed Cerferino Institute as part of the Episcopal conference, actively associates with public work organised throughout the country, and in this way, promotes the subsistence of over a thousand out-of-work Gypsies and their families. It is an important contribution to pre-evangelization.

At the moment, there are 9 priests of Gypsy origin. They have responsibilities in ordinary pastoral work which makes their direct participation in the Gypsy pastoral problematic. These different activities reinforce the self-confidence of Gypsies and contribute to mutual knowledge, understanding, and welcoming between Gypsies and non-Gypsies.

### **Parishes**

The ordinary pastoral work often goes unnoticed, yet it is the most important: baptisms, catechisms, Masses with a large Gypsy participation. To understand this observation- in the Eger diocese 25% of the children who are baptised are Gypsies.

### **Seminaries**

Following the suggestions of the pontifical council of 2013, the culture and the pastoral of Gypsies have been integrated into the themes taught in all Hungarian seminaries. Other moves are still necessary. The Pastoral Committee wrote a program of lessons that theology schools use depending on their specific conditions.

### **Other regular activities.**

Many Roma benefit from aid from Caritas: food, clothing, medication...in some cases it is also Caritas that makes available seeds that will be used in projects concerning a return to work. Prison visits permit us to enter into contact with many Roma (at Vác, and Balassagyarmat). We are also present in educational homes (bible courses, Masses at Aszód and Esztergom).

The Roma participate in a number of movements in the church. For example the cursillo, an intense spiritual formation and deepening which generally occurs at week-ends. In 2013 their participation in the cursillo was remarkable.

### **.III. Other activities concerning evangelization.**

The Catholic Church finances many schools where pupils are recruited among the Roma (for example Kazincbarcika, Karcag, Szolnok, Nyíregyháza, Rakaca, Hodász) and secondary schools for Roma at Miskolc, Szeged, Budapest etc).

In the County of Komáran-Esztergom, we award every year the Vályi medal to reward the work done in favour of handicapped children. With the help of the Episcopal Conference we organize an annual conference on the Roma pastoral which is a place for sharing experiences and for formation for the participants from all over the country. In the big university towns (Budapest, Miskolc, Debrecen, Nyíregyháza, Szeged), there are large Roma colleges helped by different Catholic churches, the Jesuits in the Szeged-Csanád and Hajdúdorog dioceses, the latter belonging to the Greek Catholic church but also the Reformed church and the Evangelical church. The college pupils are mostly of Gypsy origin; they continue their university studies

while receiving a formation on the culture and history of the Gypsy people and as well as social interaction between Gypsies and non-Gypsies. We hope that they will become leaders among the Roma, capable of accomplishing this mission of successful integration. Currently, some students are involved in medical studies, music or singing, art, teaching and social work.

In 2015, under the direction of the Blessed Ceferino Institute and with the support of the Episcopal Conference we have launched a formation for helpers in pastoral work. The aim being to prepare involved Gypsy or non-Gypsy who will be able to help the parishes in their work and in particular to maintain contacts between Gypsies and non-Gypsies in the spirit of a parish community. The participants are recruited among Gypsy or non-Gypsy population. They must acquire the qualifications and knowledge of the Gypsy people and of parish work.

The socio-pedagogical system is composed of community homes which are places for living together, places where problems can be discussed with a counselor and which offer a whole range of services for the needy such as laundry and shower etc. (Arló, Esztergom, Karcag, Gilvánfa, Alsószentmárton, Kaposfő, Zsámbék.)

The Ceferino House which is in the Vác diocese works an office for pastoral work. According to its fundamental principle it is open to Gypsies but also to non-Gypsies, with the aim of establishing relations between the two ethnical groups. These mixed communities of 30 to 40 people work in several small villages. They meet up monthly or yearly for spiritual exercises. Their main role is to introduce Roma to public life. Different initiatives have been launched to help needy Roma. Some schools organise “special classes” for youths of 10 to 18 to sensitize them to the differences of life ideals between Gypsies and non-Gypsies.

A system of day nurseries has been created to help the ‘catching-up of Roma children in the Nyírség region in the Nógrád County. Another system of community homes has been created in the Vác diocese, with subventions coming from the state and the management by Ceferino House. (Dejtár, Vanyarc, Kálló, Mátraverebély, Valkó.) Their functioning is complicated since subventions are only periodical.

In Budapest one of the largest Gypsy communities has afternoon classes that are organised for remedial teaching for the children. Our collaborators participate several times a year in spiritual exercises and formation courses that last two or three days. (Esztergom, Máriabesnyő.)

Masses organized by the pastoral are regularly celebrated (Esztergom, Szent Anna church; Budapest, church IX, Gát utca, chapel VIII. Tömő utca.)

29th September we organised a youth meeting about the relations between the church and Gypsy culture. The youths interpreted poesy, plays, dancing and songs inspired by religious sentiments and Gypsy culture.

**The order of the Knights of Blessed Ceferino** is composed of Roma who live exemplary lives and who work to encourage “getting together” with Gypsies and non-Gypsies. They meet once a year and help with different projects, for example the “chicken” program at Mátraverebély.

The order of the Knights of Malta is also present in pastoral work by its activities among the young and by material help. (Monor, Tarnabod.)

Every year “**summer camps**” are organized for young Roma (Esztergom, Csobánka, Vanyarc, Kemence). There are festive meetings including the May festival in Esztergom with a football match and.....a culinary competition, and Mass are always part of the program.

In Budapest, a pastoral workshop initiated by the Jesuits, meets twice a month: it is a place where people already engaged in pastoral work can meet but also others who are interested by this work.

#### **IV. Programs aimed at non-Gypsies: Put into focus the relation between Gypsy and non-Gypsy.**

Now and then we receive invitations from universities and prestigious schools who wish to know more about the work of the pastoral. These are occasions for discussions in a friendly atmosphere between students and Roma committed to church work. We have the opportunity to present culture and Gypsy cooking. Often the come-backs are very positive.

Sometimes we also get the opportunity of providing news of our events and the pastoral ideas in profane media. We try to help the listeners or spectators to discover the work of our committed collaborators, maybe taking a step forward to a better mutual comprehension.

On Radio Mária where we primarily address believers or churchgoers, there is also a program that has the same aim.

To open the approach and the understanding of students concerning the Gypsy question our committed collaborators regularly visit primary and secondary schools. In most cases these meetings give rise to profound and sincere exchanges.

Finally we have adopted the South American program “El Sistema” which is a teaching method for slow learners or handicapped children.

We have also proposed to students of Romology and sociology to join activities in day nurseries as voluntary workers for 50 hours. The relations born from this collaboration help to overcome prejudices concerning the Roma and to change the stereotypical picture of Gypsies. Experiences acquired in this way become messages for the majority society.

Here are a few websites that furnish news of pastoral work, events or who publish studies on this topic.

[www.ceferino.hu](http://www.ceferino.hu); <http://www.boldogceferinoalapitvany.hu>

#### **Particular programs**

Lutherans and Calvinists. Both have works of interest and invitations to conferences or meetings are sent mutually.

We have occasional communications with Slovakia (Bártfa) with a Gypsy community close to the Salésiens or at Csicsava with another Gypsy community belonging to the local Greek Catholic church. In 2013 the gypsy community Ceferino of Gyömrő invited the Gypsy

community of Bártfa. This was not only destined to create mutual relations, but also to help the Slovakia-Hungary reconciliation.

1. from research and estimations Kertesi-Kézdi (2003)
2. Kopp Mária, Magyar Lelkiállapot - Hungarian state of mind-2008 pp.419-420 research of Szabóné Dr. Kármán Judit.
3. Kopp Mária, Magyar Lelkiállapot2008 p.434, from an article by Miklós Endre
4. Kopp Mária, Magyar Lelkiállapot2008pp.419-420, research of Szabóné Dr. Kármán Judit