

# Fostering inclusion for the Roma

## Context

Estimated at 12 to 15 million, the Roma are Europe's largest minority. They suffer from extreme poverty and social exclusion as a result of very high unemployment and daily discrimination. The Roma often have limited access to public institutions and basic services, for example to education and medical care, as well as to public infrastructure such as electricity, water or sanitation. HEKS/EPER fosters the social inclusion of the Roma in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans through a holistic programme approach in the areas of schooling, housing improvement, healthcare and social legislation as well as vocational training and income support.

## Objectives, priorities, activities

The main planks of the HEKS/EPER programme of inclusion for the Roma are improving their quality of life and fostering their social, economic and social inclusion. To this end, the following sub-targets are being pursued:

- **Advocacy and outreach.** As a result the Roma are obtaining the same rights as the mainstream population as well as equal access to public infrastructure and basic services.
- **Education initiative.** This is leading to the integration of Roma children into the existing school system and their education at the appropriate level. Alongside the school curriculum, special courses are organised to teach them life skills that equip them to meet different challenges in their lives.
- **Better housing.** To promote individual housing improvements, the Roma themselves are being facilitated in carrying out improvements to their own often dilapidated dwellings. Efforts are also under way to get municipalities to better connect Roma settlements to public infrastructure.
- **Employment and income.** Employment and income opportunities are being improved through targeted vocational training, cooperation with job centres and enterprises as well as the encouragement of self-employment.

## Target groups

Roma communities in Kosovo, Serbia, Romania and Hungary.

## Partnerships, networks, alliances, memberships

**Kosovo:** Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (VoRAE), Roma Education Fund (REF), Terre des hommes Lausanne, Skat St. Gallen, PH Zürich.

**Serbia:** Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization (EHO), Bread for the World.

**Romania:** FAER Foundation, Diakonia Christian Foundation, Filantropia Alba Julia, Skat St. Gallen, PH Zürich.

**Hungary:** Reformed Church in Hungary





## HEKS/EPER on the ground

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HEKS works directly with local partners.

### Topics and working approach

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Priority fields of action are advocacy and outreach, education, housing improvement, employment and income support. The aim is to foster social and economic inclusion for the Roma.

### Progress

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- Advocacy and outreach. Thanks to extensive lobbying, municipalities are playing a larger role in the rehabilitation of settlements and the improvement of basic infrastructure in Roma settlements. Municipalities and school authorities are also doing more to include Roma children in the school system. With the support of HEKS/EPER, Roma children are better able to exercise their basic rights, and are getting registered, for example.
- Education initiative. In Kosovo, Romania, Hungary and Serbia, support programmes such as «After-school classes» have been mounted. These programmes were considerably expanded in Romania for the 2016/17 school year and now cover seven districts and about 70 classes. Fortunately, local funding has been increased from 35 to 50 per cent. This programme is offered in 22 schools in Kosovo. Talks are now in progress with the Ministry of Education for the programme to be incorporated into the education system. Moreover, a scholarship programme has been built up and expanded from 150 to 500 Roma students over recent years.
- Better housing. In Serbia, HEKS/EPER and its partner EHO developed the so called «Self-build approach» whereby Roma communities themselves are upgrading their housing while receiving the support they need. The housing situation has consequently improved in some 20 Roma settlements over recent years. The same approach was successfully introduced in Kosovo in 2013 and in Romania in 2015. Municipalities in Serbia and Kosovo are now also helping with funding.

**Region:**

Kosovo, Romania, Serbia, Hungary

**Programme costs 2018:**

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**Responsibility:**

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