

Working with Socially Excluded Romani Communities in Central and Eastern Europe⁽¹⁾: Lessons from Bulgaria

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In this article the authors examine the main issues for organisations working with socially excluded communities in one country in central and eastern Europe, namely Bulgaria. The position of one disadvantaged social group, people from Romani Communities, is critically examined. Responses by social policy and social work agencies are considered; in particular, attention is paid to the role of non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Key issues and challenges for NGOs are explored and some practical initiatives in Bulgaria are outlined based on recent fieldwork conducted by one of the authors. Examples of specific projects in Plovdiv and Targovishte are considered, along with a review of their achievements and shortcomings. The article concludes with an overview of the principal lessons to be learned from these recent initiatives.

The Background and Context

“Wherever Gypsies are found, they are from elsewhere. Everywhere from nowhere. Present all over the world, no nation claims or protects them. On the contrary, the general tendency is to consider them as parasites and to reject them on first sight. Described as vagrants, vagabonds, pick-pockets, artful dodgers and even as cradle-snatchers, these nomads... are singular only in the negative. Their language is jargon, their offspring brats, their dress tawdry and their women loose. Not only are their leaders tyrants and their means of subsistence dubious, but their style of life generally seems pathological. Is this negativeness the only force unifying the six to twelve million Gypsies who have been dispersed over the land for centuries? Is the lot of thief, fortune teller, itinerant entertainer, attributed to them by common conviction (an amalgamation of prejudice and stereotype), the only heritage they share? Or can they, on the contrary, escape from persecution and the label attached to them in order to safeguard their cultural specificity?” (Liégeois, 1977:p.87).

In just a few sentences, Jean-Pierre Liégeois captures in his usual articulate manner the history

and weight of rejection and exclusion that those groups of people known as ‘Gypsies’ (Romanies) have faced by settled society. This is as true today as it was in the 15th and 16th Century and as true for those countries in Western Europe as it is for those in central and eastern Europe. The historical and contemporary situation of the Romanies in Bulgaria is, in many ways, no worse than it has been in other European nations. Although our focus in this article is to examine the situation of the Romanies in just this one country, we want to make it quite clear we are not ‘singling them out’ or unfairly suggesting that they are placed at the top of some kind of Romani / human rights ‘league table’ of shame (Clark, 1998: p.36). Although we begin by documenting some of the historical and contemporary problems that this community have faced, and are still facing, in Bulgaria, we quickly move on to examine some positive (though struggling) efforts to promote the social inclusion of a marginalised and disadvantaged ethnic minority group. These voluntary sector efforts, in the form of work undertaken by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), contain much potential for a brighter future, though we also cast a critical eye over such activities and illustrate how ‘good

1. For the purposes of this article we are using the term Roma / Romani in a broad sense but are also specifically using it in two ways; we use it to talk about those groups found in the Eastern parts of Europe who are known as Kalderash, Lovari and other such groups and speak Vlach, Xoraxanne or Rom variations of the Romani language, *Romanes*. We also use the term when speaking of those individuals / families who are identified by non-Romanies as being ‘Tsigane’ in central and eastern Europe. In this way, we are using the term Roma / Romani in a similar way to that of Liégeois and Gheorghe (1995:p.6).

practice' can best be achieved.

The position of the Roma in Bulgaria

With a total population of close on 9 million people, official figures from the interior ministry suggest that the Roma minority make up just over 6 per cent of the population of Bulgaria (576,927). However, estimates by both the Minority Rights Group, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Bulgarian Democratic Union of Roma range from between 700,000 to 1 million Romanies in the country (8-12%) (see Drucker, 1997: pp.22-23; Liégeois & Gheorghe, 1995: p.7; Clark, 1998: p.37). Moreover, a just published survey (January 2000) conducted by the Bulgarian Federation of United Roma Communities estimated the number of Romanies in Bulgaria at 2.6 million (Roma News Network (RNN) / Radio Bulgaria, 2000). The publication of these figures has been met with some scepticism by the government and have also been questioned by other NGOs as they seem inflated. In the same press release, the President of the Federation, Wasil Danew, also stated about 15,000 Romanies died during the winter of 1999/2000 due to cold, hunger and disease. He warned that these numbers will rise further this next winter unless something can be done to improve Romani access to state social services.

Whatever the 'real' figure is behind all these estimates, it is clear that Romanies have been present in Bulgaria since about the 14th century and as Marushiakova (1992: p. 96) has pointed out, there are a number of different Romani groups in the country who each display a variety of identities and cultural / economic practices; to be clear, they are 'not a homogeneous whole'. For example, at a basic level they were split by the Turks into (nomadic) Turks and (settled) Christians. Their 'place' in Bulgarian society at this time was near the foot of the Ottoman social and economic ladder and their 'difference' made them subject to specific taxes (Crowe, 1995: p.2). With Bulgarian reunification in the late 19th century came efforts to control Romani nomadism and immigration. During rule by the monarchy (1878-1946) Romani people were assigned low-status tasks and social duties. However, some positive developments occurred in the 1920s with literacy campaigns and Romani schools emerging in some parts of the country and various cultural societies even being formed. Fascist uprisings from about 1934 challenged this progress but the Second World War brought with it, somewhat surprisingly, a period of

relative calm for the Romani minority (Marushiakova and Popov, 1997: pp.30-32).

In the post-war period there was a Romani cultural renaissance, of sorts, although this quickly dissipated and by the 1950s the Stalinist government started to expel Muslim Romanies to Turkey and assimilating all other Romani groups, attempting to crush their cultural and ethnic distinctiveness. During the 1950s, those Romanies who were nomadic were being forcibly settled and 'Romani ghettos' started to appear in the larger cities. By the 1960s, this process of assimilation (or 'Bulgarianisation') had even reached those Romanies that had traditionally been settled. Once begun, the assimilation drive could not be stopped; it even went as far as the authorities forcing those Romani families with Turkish or Muslim names to change them to 'proper' Bulgarian ones. Romani music, whether played on television, radio or in the streets was banned and even speaking Romanes (the Romani language) in public was forbidden and actively discouraged via fines. Efforts were made to break-up compact Romani communities in large cities and cultural or social organisations were outlawed. In other words, in just a few years, the Romanies of Bulgaria were subject to a kind of cultural attack on their identity that was to have lasting consequences. For all that, in other areas of life, the conditions of the Romanies arguably improved under communist rule; such as housing conditions getting better and educational opportunities rising slightly. Suffice to say, this did little to compensate for the thorough and near-total destruction of Romani self-identity during that period.

Since the collapse of the communist system in 1989, there has been a re-birth of Romani political, economic and media organisations (Hall, 1994; Hancock, 1996). For example, the Democratic Union of Roma, which was founded in 1990, is the largest political group in the country representing a certain constituency amongst the Romani minority. However, they remain politically weak due to a number of reasons, not least the fact that ethnically the split between the Romani Muslims and the Christians remains intact. Likewise, a variety of Romani dialects are spoken in Bulgaria and there are various allegiances based around clan / 'tribe' associations (Popov, 1993). In 1992 a national lobby, the United Roma Federation, was created and together with the Democratic Union of Roma and other Romani leaders and intellectuals in Bulgaria, a challenge was mounted to the

institutional discrimination and human rights abuses that the Bulgarian Romanies were suffering from. Some of these main areas of discrimination are dealt with below and are a major challenge for NGO groups to come to terms with.

In the field of education, many Romani children are still being educated in segregated and poorly-funded technical schools which manufacture goods commissioned by local authorities or so-called 'special schools' which are for those with 'retarded mental development' (Tomova, 1995: p.58). Tomova (1995: pp.57-64) in her comprehensive survey of Romani life in Bulgaria, notes that whilst Romani children make up 9.7% of pupils in mainstream schools, they comprise some 32.1% of those in these 'auxiliary' or 'special' schools; often for no other reason than the fact they are Romanies and therefore 'must have' either behavioural problems or 'special needs'. Opportunities and attainments are very low and few Romani children complete secondary schooling, often due to a fusion of institutional discrimination and cultural factors such as early marriage and having Bulgarian as a second language. Related to educational disadvantage, Romani unemployment levels are high and poverty growing; for example soup kitchens in Sofia see Romanies amongst those queuing (Brearley, 1996: p.16). Traditional Romani craft skills are no longer in demand as they once were and lack of educational qualifications, rampant labour market discrimination and gross racial stereotypes perpetuate high unemployment.

In housing the situation is just as bad with most Romani families now living in run-down areas of the larger towns and cities such as Sliven which is home to some 50,000 Romanies (Silverman, 1995: pp.46-47). The infrastructure around such parts of town often does not even stretch as far as pavements or proper roads and refuse collection can be very irregular (Tomova, 1995: pp.65-70). Such basics as running water, adequate sanitation and mains electricity can be missing from the 'Roma districts' of such towns and overcrowding is also a serious problem with post-1989 land privatisation schemes merely compounding the problem (Barany, 1995: p.5).

Anti-Gypsyism and violence towards Romanies in

Bulgaria has taken some horrific forms during the 1990s. Violent attacks on Romani individuals, often with the tacit support of local officials, police officers and the press, are often justified by labelling the Roma as 'criminals', 'black-marketeers', 'thieves' and 'murderers' (Helsinki Watch, 1991). Incidents in parts of Bulgaria such as Cherganova, Pleven, Malorad and Dolno Belotintsi during the mid-1990s left many Romanies either burnt out of their homes, badly hurt or even dead in some cases. For example, in the village of Podem (near Pleven) in May 1991, fifteen Romani houses were burnt to the ground leaving 150 people homeless (Hancock, 1993: p.12). In the capital, Sofia, similar incidents occur often with anti-Romani arson attacks being particularly common. Allegations of police brutality, ill-treatment and torture of Romanies in areas like Glushnik, Dubova and Stara Zagora have left the minority with little faith left in the democratic parliamentary structures and the legal system.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs): the challenge ⁽²⁾

As Deacon (1997: p.154) has written, the term 'non-governmental organisation' is "now widely used... in the sphere of social welfare, but it is rarely defined". He goes on to suggest that the term has quite different meanings in different parts of the world and often it is simply equated with the notion of 'associations of citizens'. For the purposes of this article, when we speak of 'non-governmental organisations' we are specifically discussing independent, non-profit making agencies which are formally registered in the main country of activity. There were in fact many hundreds of independent bodies set up in the wake of the collapse of communism in Bulgaria, but little formal regulation or control of this burgeoning sector existed then or, indeed, exists now. For example, initially some organisations were - allegedly - fronts for mafia-type enterprises and helped to discredit the notion of the establishment of independent 'foundations'. Our interest is refined to focus on those non-profit making organisations with an ostensible social policy remit; the reader should be wary about imposing Western notions about the distinctions between the 'state', 'market' and 'voluntary' sector activities upon the transitional countries of eastern Europe.

2. This section and the following one of the paper is largely informed by fieldwork undertaken in both Bulgaria and Romania by one of the authors (Titterton) during 1998-99.

Non-governmental organisations in central and eastern Europe face a range of formidable problems. In most cases they involve individuals setting up something where there has been no or little prior history of voluntary effort in the society, where 70 years of 'actually existing socialism' has diminished individual initiative and fostered reliance on the state. Groups of individuals with an interest in reform in the 1970s and 1980s found it very difficult to establish independent organisations. Most often, activity would focus around a particular issue or perceived need: for example, in Bulgaria, families with autistic children had few specialist services or felt their particular educational and social needs were not being met by the state system. In the late 1980s families and sympathetic professionals formed an association, one of the first NGOs in Bulgaria, formally set up in 1988.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist system from 1989 to the early 1990s, the stresses and strains produced by the transition were significant. With the painful shift towards a market economy away from a command economy, there was massive insecurity about economic futures and the labour market, with rocketing prices and hyper-inflation. Many professionals and workers saw their pay packets fall to a quarter of what they were previously. This had an enormous impact in Bulgaria where there was a higher standard of living than some neighbouring countries such as Romania. There were increased demands for mental health services, for counselling, stress reduction and for community based forms of assistance. In addition, the hospitals had run out of money, with rapidly deteriorating conditions, with little food or blankets for inpatients. The professional associations, such as the Bulgarian Association of Psychiatrists, began to change with younger and more radical professionals pressing for change. The reform of psychiatry has been pressing ahead, if slowly, throughout eastern Europe. However in the sphere of voluntary associations, that is those organisations outwith the state and outwith professional associations, groups had been trying to form to bring about change from 'below'.

It is important to point out the difficulties faced by this developing independent sector. First, there are very few paid staff; most are run by volunteers, or unpaid staff which may be a better term. No funds are available from the government, either for core funding or specific project funding. All funds have to be raised from independent grant making bodies

from international foundations which sometimes have a base in the country, such the Soros Open Foundation or based abroad or from a supranational body such the European Union. Thus they are in competition with every other organisation pressing for funds. It is always difficult to raise funds for groups who are deemed 'less worthy' or undeserving, for example people with mental health problems or the Romani communities, compared to say children's welfare or care of the elderly.

Second, most are on a short term project basis, from six months to two years. The proliferation of projects is something shared by the British voluntary sector (Titterton et al., 1999), but it is far more pronounced in eastern Europe. This makes it very difficult to plan long term services or strategic approaches to reform and change. While again this is a problem of the West too, in the East because there are few stable NGOs and projects, with little in the way of government support, the problems are multiplied and more pronounced.

Third, the sheer lack of infrastructure is a crucial barrier to NGO activity. Many organisations have no offices, no computers, no meeting rooms, no transport, and no paid staff. They operate out of apartments. Occasionally a building will be used to house a number of NGOs who will share facilities, as in the Centre at Dimitri Nesterov Street in Sofia, where the National Network of NGOs operates from.

Fourth, the lack of trained staff and lack of trainers and educational and learning structures to support staff and users forms a major problem. The training needs are extensive for new NGOs; these includes topics such as financial management, organisational development, equal opportunities, volunteer development and others. There are also needs at many levels however; training unskilled workers, awareness raising, working with the media, campaigning and the like. There is a kind of cycle to be noted where the demands are intensive to start with, then tail off, then pick up as the NGOs projects increase. Eventually they reach a point where they have the competence and ability to pass on what they have learnt to other, newly emerging NGOs. However this is affected by funding and assistance from abroad. Some funders are now preferring to fund projects which promote East-East links, as opposed to West-East links. In truth though, both types of links are needed; it is unlikely that the reliance on the West can be broken, at least in the immediate future.

The fifth challenge facing these NGOs concerns their relationship with Western-based international NGOs and the formation of appropriate East-West partnerships. The growth of Western NGO involvement in East European countries has been notable in recent years and merits careful scrutiny. The modalities of intervention vary widely and few have been subject to rigorous evaluation. Some organisations such as Help Age International and the Hamlet Trust tend to focus on the development of regional networks. Others, such as InterMinds (formerly Penumbra International), seek to work in directly empowering ways with national and local NGOs, through the provision of organisational development and the transfer of essential skills, involving both service users and professionals. However, some Western NGOs have adopted methods of working which must be open to question about whose interests are being served. One example is Save The Children which has recently established offices in Sofia in order to set up its own operation, ignoring local groups who had requested assistance to help them develop in their own right. This sort of approach leaves Western NGOs open to accusations of empire building, at the expense of Bulgarian community groups wishing to work with children, including those of Romani communities.

More empowering types of links between West and East are needed and the type of situation that Green (quoted in Deacon, 1997: p.155) discusses should be avoided at all costs:

“in extreme cases (large NGO presence combined with weak government and civil society) they engender fragmentation, incapacitation, and client creation to a degree that generates major resentment, not least among the by-passed domestic social sector actors.”

The Romani projects in Bulgaria: two examples of a changing environment

Demands for reform of the difficult conditions of many Romani communities emerged swiftly with the fall of communist regimes in Bulgaria. A number of the Romani projects started in 1990 out of an initiative called ‘conflict mediation’ for ethnic conflicts, organised with the help of the Foundation for Inter Ethnic Initiative for Human Rights and the New University of Bulgaria, which are both based in Sofia. A number of groups came together in a training conference based on experiential learning,

including visits to several schools in Sofia based in Romani ‘ghettoes’. They sought to work with representatives of the Romani population, such as the head of school in the Rhodope mountains. The intention was to try to set up a network of NGOs, along with a clinical social work programme. Visits were made to social work services in Romani areas. The ‘Learning from Experience’ conference saw a number of groups from Sofia and Sliven come together wanting to contribute in various areas, for example, working with single mothers; children on the streets; people with physical disabilities; isolated older people; young women prostitutes; and poor families. They developed programmes and sought funding from sources such as the Open Society in Bulgaria and the EU Phare programme. Most of the projects have a basic structure, with a chairperson, administrator and eight to ten people working in different areas; most of the cases involve helping individuals and families with contacting required services, preparing documents and going with them to hospital and other agencies; as well as also distributing donations. The use of volunteers is crucial to these projects. One project which is emerging involves attempts to create foster families in Plovdiv, bringing together school, police, abandoned children and social workers working in field to help families sustaining a foster role. Literacy is seen as important though this is a vexed issue; there is pressure on children to leave school early to become earners and staying on at school is perceived as increasing dependence on the community. Education is regarded as being critical for achieving independence and, in turn, independence is seen as important for helpers too. The thrust of the work is towards developing a ‘self-help’ ethos.

Two examples of Romani NGOs are now considered, illustrating the kind of organisations which are trying to bring about change in Romani and mixed ethnic group communities.

Union Spravedlivost 96 (Justice)

This NGO was set up in 1996 in the Roma suburb of Plovdiv, with funding from the Foundation for Inter Ethnic Initiative for Human Rights. It started from a workshop on training skills for creating projects for people from this foundation and following discussions with the main Romani NGO, the Foundation for Local Development Roma. It was intended to be used by other NGOs and to promote client advocacy. The project got under way with the involvement of five volunteers in

1998. A training agenda was drawn up by local experts from social work agencies and the employment office and includes topics such as project creation, the municipality, social issues, and the health and welfare system. Feedback from the community on the work of the NGO is actively encouraged, being given vocally at meetings of the NGO and local people. A two-year programme, funded by PHARE, was used to develop fifteen social workers, who each trained for five months, and fifteen people act as volunteers. Over thirty people are now working for the organisation, with advice from the New Bulgarian University in Sofia. The group is very interested in learning skills and developing exchange visits; they also are in urgent need of office equipment such as photocopiers and computers. The project has recently set up in a house which was formerly a kindergarten, with funding from the United Dutch Foundation.

The key problems which users of the NGO bring to the social workers and volunteers have to do with unemployment, poverty, lack of clothes and food, ill-health, lack of medicines and a general shortage of money. The conditions of the suburb are extreme; there are burst mains, rubbish everywhere, gaping holes on buildings which somehow still stand up, a community (within a community) that has been largely forgotten about by the municipal authorities. Housing conditions in the Romani suburb are very bad; there is little in the way of basic amenities such as electricity and running water and there is no hot water. While some welfare services do exist, project workers contend that they face discrimination and prejudice from these services; doctors and teachers do not really want to work with the Romani community. Most children leave school very early; some girls become prostitutes from the age of 12, because they need clothes and food. Some children are neglected and uncontrolled, and there are drugs problems, like sniffing glue. Some families are overcrowded, with 3 or 4 families living in one apartment. Family problems such as divorce are prevalent, leading to mental health problems, and causing stress for children. There are also long standing health needs such as diabetes. There are ten people with diabetic needs at the clinic but there is no service. The NGO would like to help the community create such a clinic and to create an organisation to help them. The aim would be to help people with diabetes to help each other.

Project workers say that what is required are educated social workers who can work with local

communities, other professionals and already existing social services. The kinds of skills which social workers need are communication skills to enable workers to link with different levels and other agencies. In addition, good facilitation skills are necessary for making things happen on the ground and for encouraging people to help find their own solutions to their problems. The skills of people living within the community themselves, perhaps without formal education, are also essential to illustrate to various groups, such as isolated mothers, prostitutes, orphans, that life can be better and they do have a choice. The NGO has talked with the principal of the school about the need for a safe building, books and equipment, just for Roma children. Equal treatment is one of the primary goals, as is helping people out of helplessness, anxiety and depression. Deaths from overdoses of alcohol need to be prevented and the increasing numbers of street children need attention, clothing and care. If the building project is successful this will help the children by creating a 'safe shelter' for them to live until foster parents can be arranged.

Spravedlivost 96 provides community leadership whilst being based firmly within a Romani community and as such provides an encouraging example. It has a large and enthusiastic group of people under the guidance of a co-ordinator who himself is a Romani man living within the community.

NGO Roma

This NGO works with Bulgarian Romani and Turkish minorities in Targovishte, a town situated near the Black Sea. It provides a range of services, including language and cultural activities. It collaborates with other NGOs such as the Mental Health Society and the Library Club for Turkish speakers, founded in 1964. They operate a twenty four hour telephone system and there are groups for people without work who are organised into groups by currently unemployed teachers. There is a centre organised by two agencies, set up in April 1997, whose main task is to solve unemployment problems which are very serious in Targovishte. The NGO works with unemployed people to help them solve their own problems and there is a club for unemployed persons where they can exchange information and ideas. Some of those who attend have their own ideas to solve problems, for example, starting up a business on a small scale. The centre also helps people to unite smaller clubs into larger single organisations such as the

Association for Young Roma or the Ecology Association, with the dual intention of helping people to assist themselves and to help the town of Targovishte as a whole. Other clubs have explicitly social aims, such as assisting women at risk, lone mothers, pensioners and homeless children.

The philosophy is about teaching people to find their own solutions, taking appropriate steps to move on. However the project workers need some help with know how, with providing information and assistance and with technical expertise. They would like to develop further the idea of self-help groups and they are interested in training the trainers and other suitable training programmes. They see a pressing need to work with the system, while seeking to improve it and tackle wider structural injustices and discrimination. They are resolved to keep on campaigning for change, despite official indifference and inactivity.

Opportunities and constraints for the two NGOs: a critical commentary

The emphasis on self-help in both these NGOs is very interesting to note. This is an attempt to help people break from old forms of dependency on the state, but also to help people avoid building new types of dependency. It also helps to counter the commonly made assertion among the majority communities in Bulgaria that the Romanies are not prepared to help themselves in any way. The use of volunteers is also noteworthy; it is part of a developing voluntary ethic in central and eastern Europe, but also a reflection of the lack of resources and funding to pay people for their time. In addition, these NGOs and their projects involve tackling a broad range of social issues such as literacy, poverty, abandoned children, unemployment and health care. These projects also involve Romani communities in working with many different types of agencies and professions, such as schools, hospitals, the municipal authorities and so on. They can provide, moreover, new opportunities for Romani communities to engage with civil authorities, and the majority population, in fresh and constructive ways.

The limitations of these projects, however, should be acknowledged. First, the people involved in such projects are seeking to bring about lasting reforms, attempting to redress structural inequalities with few of the right kind of tools at their disposal. The social exclusion of Romani communities is buttressed by profound inequalities of employment,

education, health and wealth as discussed earlier in this paper; tackling these historical and deeply ingrained inequalities will require sustained national and international programmes of action. Second, they are trying to bring about cultural and attitudinal change in the face of massive government indifference. Without a determined and widespread campaign backed by respective governments, the European Union and the wider international community, the positive work of these sometimes fragile and local initiatives will be lost. Third, the need to form progressive alliances, both within Romani communities and between these communities and the majority population, is essential in order to bring about change. Such alliances are hard to foster and sustain in an atmosphere of overt discrimination and prejudice. Fourth, these NGO inspired projects are typically run on very limited funds and are mostly staffed by volunteers; without properly resourced staff, and without support from local social workers, there is little chance of continuity and development with a trained and experienced group of people.

Conclusion

“The only weapon with which I can defeat them
is a flame-
thrower;
I will exterminate all Gypsies, adults and
children;
Although they can only be destroyed if we
co-
operate;
If we exterminate them successfully
We shall have a land free of Gypsies.”
(Lyrics to a song by the Hungarian group
Mosoly, quoted in Hancock, 1985: p.15)

Despite the wishes of many non-Romanies in various parts of central and eastern Europe, this part of the world will never be ‘free of Gypsies’ as the song puts it. The history of the eastern part of Europe is inextricably bound up with the history of the Romanies who have been present in those lands since the 14th and 15th century. Having survived hundreds of years of slavery, persecution, assimilation and genocide, they are simply not going to ‘go away’. In this paper we have attempted to review the historical and contemporary situation of the Romani minority populations in Bulgaria and show how this complex and disturbing history has impacted on present day attempts of NGOs to work with socially excluded Romani communities in each country. We have explored some of the most

pressing issues in working with socially, economically and politically excluded Romani communities in eastern Europe and a number of lessons appear to be emerging. First and foremost, there are messages here for Western funders. The availability of independent sources of funds is crucial for helping NGOs develop new forms of civil society in eastern Europe. It is evident that a little (western) money goes a long way in these kinds of settings. Second, these initiatives are often delicate and require nourishing in a sometimes inhospitable climate. Realistic expectations are needed of projects which are sometimes only funded and in operation for six months or so. Third, successes so far are small but are encouraging. However, there are counter examples of mismanaged resources which need to be attended to. Appropriate training, with support from Western agencies, is essential, including working on key topics such as equal opportunities and financial management. Fourth, the availability of a body of volunteers, prepared to give some degree of commitment to a project, is critical. Ideally, the expansion of a trained and salaried cadre of professionals within the emerging voluntary sector must be the end goal to ensure some support to marginalised communities such as the Romani one discussed in this paper. However, without positive and enlightened engagement by the West, this aspiration will remain only an unfulfilled dream.

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victims of human trafficking in Central and Eastern Europe? 2. What is currently being done to address these factors? 3. What can be done to improve human trafficking prevention in Romani communities in order to reduce vulnerability and prevent future exploitation? It provides a critical analysis of the current prevention work being implemented in Bulgaria and examines the gap between the stated goals of anti-trafficking actors and the actual programs being implemented. CHAPTER THREE: THE ROMA OF EUROPE The democratization of many Central and Southeastern European countries in 1989 signified a marked decline in the wellbeing of the Roma, more so than any other social group in the region. European Union support for Roma communities. in Central and Eastern Europe. Contents. 1. Roma communities in Central and Eastern Europe. Country Bulgaria Czech Republic Hungary Latvia Poland Romania Slovakia Slovenia. Estimated number of Roma 3 700,000 – 800,000 4 250,000 – 300,000 5 550,000 – 600,000 8,2005 50,000 – 60,000. Roma communities suffer from social and cultural exclusion in most European countries. The problems of marginalisation are particularly severe in the central and eastern parts of Europe, where Roma have suffered in the transition of the countries towards market economies. The Romani people, also referred to depending on the sub-group as Roma, Sinti or Sindhi, or Kale are an Eurasian ethnic group, who live primarily in Europe. They originated in Indian subcontinent and left sometime between the 1st century AD - 2nd century AD, as merchants, and settled in Roman Egypt, eventually settling in Europe, the Byzantine Empire. In the Romani language "Roma" means "a person or people" Many also believe that Gypsies are descendants of Traders from the Vaishya caste, who left the