

# Why are roma poor economics essay

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Increasingly severe poverty among Roma, or " gypsies," in Central and Eastern Europe has been one of the most striking developments since transition from socialism began in 1989. Although Roma have historically been among the poorest people in Europe, the extent of the collapse of their living conditions is unprecedented. Whereas most Roma had jobs during the socialist era, there is now widespread formal unemployment and poverty among Roma communities. The problem is a critical one. Because of higher birth rates, the Roma population's relative size is increasing across the region. A minister of education in one of the new European Union (EU) member states recently noted that in his country, every third child entering school is Roma. Policies to address Roma poverty therefore need to be an integral component of each country's economic and social development strategies.

## **WHO ARE THE ROMA?**

The Roma are Europe's largest and most vulnerable minority. Unlike other groups, they have no historical homeland and live in nearly all the countries in Europe and Central Asia. The origins of Roma in Europe are widely debated. Historical records indicate that they migrated in waves from northern India into Europe between the ninth and fourteenth centuries. Roma are extremely diverse, with multiple subgroups based on language, history, religion, and occupations. While Roma in some countries are nomadic, most in Central and Eastern Europe have settled over time, some under Ottoman rule and others more recently under socialism. Size estimates of the Roma population differ widely. Census data are intensely disputed, as many Roma do not identify themselves as such on

questionnaires. By most estimates, the share of Roma has grown to between 6 and 9 percent of the population in Bulgaria, FYR Macedonia, Romania, and the Slovak Republic (Slovakia). These shares are likely to increase in the near future because of high population growth among Roma and decreasing fertility among the majority populations. Romania has the highest absolute number of Roma in Europe, with between 1 million and 2 million. Large populations of between 400,000 and 1 million also live in Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia and Montenegro, the Slovak Republic, and Turkey. Western Europe's largest Roma populations are found in Spain (estimated at 630,000), France (310,000), Italy (130,000), and Germany (70,000). In total, about 7 million to 9 million Roma live in Europe for a population equal to that of Sweden or Austria. Why has attention to Roma issues increased so sharply over the past decade? Following the collapse of the iron curtain in 1989, political liberalization allowed for increased international and domestic awareness of the situation of Roma, including emerging human rights violations and humanitarian concerns related to deteriorating socio-economic conditions. National governments have a large stake in the welfare of Roma, for human rights and social justice concerns, but also for reasons of growth and competitiveness. In countries where Roma constitute a large and growing share of the working-age population, increasing marginalization of Roma in poverty and long-term unemployment threaten economic stability and social cohesion. Important priorities are understanding the nature and determinants of Roma poverty and taking policy action.

## ROMA POVERTY

Roma are the most prominent poverty risk group in many of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. They are poorer than other groups, more likely to fall into poverty, and more likely to remain poor. In some cases, Roma poverty rates are more than 10 times that of non-Roma. A recent survey found that nearly 80 percent of Roma in Bulgaria and Romania were living on less than \$4.30 per day (see figure 1). Even in Hungary, one of the most prosperous accession countries, 40 percent of Roma live below the poverty line.

## WHY ARE ROMA POOR?

For several interwoven reasons, Roma poverty is rooted in their unfavorable starting point at the outset of the transition from planned to market economies. Low education levels and overrepresentation among low-skilled jobs led to labor market disadvantages, which were compounded by discrimination and the low expectations of

Overviewxv  
 FIGURE 1 POVERTY RATES, 2000  
 (Percentage of population living below \$4.30/day)  
 100Percent  
 806040200  
 Roma Non-Roma Non-Roma Non-Roma  
 RomaRomaRoma

### Bulgaria

### Hungary

### Romania

a Adjusted to purchasing power parity (PPP) to allow for price comparisons across countries. Sources: Yale dataset; Revenga et al. 2002. employers. As a result, Roma have had more difficulty re-entering the job market than

other groups and have become caught in a vicious circle of impoverishment. Additional barriers include a lack of access to credit and unclear property ownership. Combined with an over-dependence on welfare, these factors create a poverty trap that precludes many Roma from improving their living conditions or starting their own businesses. Persistent disadvantages in education, including low school attendance and overrepresentation in "special schools" intended for physically and mentally disabled children, make it highly probable that without policy interventions, the next generation of Roma will remain in poverty. Moreover, very few Roma are active in local or national politics, which mutes their political voice. Growing needs and tight fiscal constraints are further limiting access to social services in Eastern Europe's transition period. These conditions have brought formal and informal charges for previously free services and eroded service quality. The increasing barriers to access have hurt Roma in particular because they are at a higher poverty risk and are often geographically isolated. Similarly, because Roma frequently live in settlements where property ownership is unclear, or in remote areas, they may lack the documentation necessary to enroll in school and claim social assistance or health benefits. The high prevalence of Roma in informal sector employment—such as petty trade and construction—also limits their access to benefits based on social insurance contributions, including health care and unemployment benefits. In addition, social and cultural factors affect access and interactions with service providers. Because of language barriers, Roma may have difficulty communicating with teachers, understanding doctors, and maneuvering through local welfare offices. Poor communication and stubborn stereotypes of Roma and non-Roma

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breed mistrust and reinforce preconceptions on both sides. Moreover, the overall absence of Roma personnel involved in policy design and delivery of public services means that few individuals can bridge the cultures.

## **REGIONAL CONTEXT**

Roma issues have gained increasing international attention over the past decade because of emerging evidence of human rights violations and seriously deteriorating socio-economic conditions within many Roma communities. These developments have caught the attention of international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Council of Europe, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including the Open Society Institute (OSI), Save the Children, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Perhaps most significant Roma issues have been an integral part of the EU enlargement process; in 1993, the EU adopted attention to Roma issues as part of the Copenhagen criteria for accession. At the international level, Roma NGOs such as the International Romani Union and the Roma National Congress have become increasingly active.

## **CONTEXT AND CONTENTS**

### **The Role of the World Bank**

In 2000, the World Bank published the first cross-country report on the poverty and human development challenges that Roma face in Central and Eastern Europe (Ringold 2000). Unlike prior analyses that had largely focused on human rights questions, the Bank report addressed Roma issues from an economic and social development perspective. This study updates

and expands that work, incorporating new survey findings and, for the first time, publishing some background studies that were included in the 2000 report. Policy-makers, the Roma and NGO community, and a wider audience concerned about Roma issues showed a strong interest in more detailed information on the conditions in Roma communities and policy responses. This study responds to that demand, but does not quench it. The surveys and case studies included are still incomplete. Further work is needed to examine the particular circumstances of Roma living in Albania, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine, and the former Yugoslavia, among other countries. Health, housing, and the situation of Roma women are issues that need further attention. These gaps stem from a lack of information and measurement challenges. Despite the severity of Roma poverty, the limited information on their living conditions and challenges is often unreliable and frequently anecdotal. The analyses presented here are intended to fill these gaps—and to stimulate further action.

## **Contents**

The chapters draw on both quantitative analyses of household surveys and qualitative, sociological case studies that document the experiences of Roma communities in different countries, focusing on Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia and drawing on examples from other countries. Chapter 1 provides background on the Roma, their characteristics, and their origins. It also discusses contrasting policy approaches that have shaped the position of Roma in Europe over time. Chapter 2 looks at Roma poverty—its nature and characteristics—using quantitative data from household surveys, including a cross-country Roma household dataset. It examines the

correlates of Roma poverty, including poor housing conditions, education, and health. Chapters 3 and 4 report the results of detailed field studies by Central and East European sociologists on diverse Roma communities in Romania and Slovakia. The studies draw directly from interviews with Roma and non-Roma to provide a better understanding of the interrelated challenges that Roma face in accessing markets and services. One of the strongest findings was that access to public services and labor markets is compounded by the geographic isolation of some Roma settlements. Often, these isolated settlements originated from past exclusionary policies. Today, the geographic isolation of Roma settlements limits their access to education, health care, and waste collection, and thus increases poverty over the long run. Other causes of Roma poverty are interrelated as well. For instance, the choice of Roma parents to enroll their children in "special schools" that are intended for the mentally and physically disabled is sometimes driven by discrimination that Roma experience in regular schools. Roma parents sometimes feel they are protecting their children by sending them to special needs schools with other Roma children, but the education that they receive ill prepares them for life, again exacerbating the long-term risks of poverty and exclusion. Chapters 5 and 6 look at the experience of projects in Hungary and compare the Central and East European experience with that of Spain, a West European country with a large Roma population. Chapter 7 reports the survey results of Roma projects in Hungary and shows that despite the proliferation of such projects since 1989, it remains difficult to evaluate their impact. Case studies of several projects identify several important factors, including the quality of project leadership, local economic conditions, and monitoring and

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evaluation. While this study aims to pull together as comprehensive a picture as possible of poverty and human development among Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, it does not attempt to be comprehensive in its coverage of Roma issues more broadly. Critical topics, such as the human rights situation of Roma and their political participation, are central to the agenda of improving the welfare of Roma in Europe, but are outside the scope of the study. There is also a full agenda for future research and analysis on Roma issues, which is discussed further in chapter 8, including more in-depth analysis of the determinants of poverty and exclusion and greater understanding of the internal organization of diverse Roma communities, including their origins, language, and social structure.

## **Methods and Approaches**

This volume draws from both quantitative and qualitative methods to paint a fuller picture of Roma living conditions. Both approaches have distinctive benefits and drawbacks. Quantitative methods are useful for illustrating where Roma stand relative to non-Roma populations in individual countries and for comparing Roma populations across different countries. On the other hand, data on Roma are notoriously unreliable and difficult to attain. Even basic population figures are subject to dispute. Since Roma often do not self-identify as Roma, survey-based research has serious limitations. Still, quantitative data offers useful comparisons of welfare measures that can improve policy analysis and responses. Although quantitative research shows that Roma poverty is distinctive, it does not provide an adequate basis for understanding the particular dynamics that underlie Roma poverty. Here, qualitative research has the greatest impact. Qualitative research can

identify social processes, mechanisms, and relations between variables that are difficult to discern by looking at numbers alone. For example, the empirical analysis presented in chapter 3 shows that much of the gap between Roma and non-Roma welfare is likely due to factors such as discrimination and exclusion, which cannot be assessed empirically. Therefore, qualitative research provides a sharper picture of Roma living conditions in different communities and emphasizes the diversity of Roma populations, allowing for a better understanding of interconnections between causes of poverty. Carefully constructed qualitative surveys conducted by researchers in Central and Eastern Europe are the primary source for this analysis. This qualitative research highlights how Roma perceive their poverty situation in their own words. Yet qualitative research has drawbacks as well. It tends to provide a snapshot of a single area, emphasizing certain factors over others with biases that may reflect the researchers' specific concerns. This is particularly important for this study, as different research teams in each country conducted the qualitative studies with different foci and depth. While these caveats should be kept in mind, the combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis provides a complementary set of perspectives and a better starting point for analysis and policymaking.

## **The Policy Development Environment**

Policies to ease Roma poverty need to be designed with three key factors in mind: (i) the multidimensional nature of Roma poverty and its interconnected roots, (ii) the diversity of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe, and (iii) the European integration process.

## **The Multidimensional and Interconnected Roots of Roma Poverty**

This study's central insight is that Roma poverty has multiple and inter-related causes. The causes tend to reinforce one another in a vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion and require a multifaceted approach. Roma often have poor labor market access because of low education levels, geographic isolation, and discrimination. Low education levels result from constraints on both the supply and demand side. Roma often face discrimination in school and feel that schools ignore their culture and language. In addition, Roma sometimes lack sufficient food or clothing to support school attendance. Thus, attitudes, experiences, and social conditions conspire to reduce Roma education levels and labor market performance. Because of these interconnected roots, one cannot adequately address Roma poverty by focusing on a single aspect. Rather, a comprehensive approach is needed. For example, researchers found that poor housing conditions, in part, contributed to Roma poverty in several countries. In many cases this is because Roma were left out of the property and land privatization processes that occurred during the early 1990s. Information was scarce about how to navigate the bureaucratic procedures for property ownership, and Roma were less likely than others to do it successfully. Hence today Roma disproportionately live in unregistered dwellings, contributing to poverty in complex ways. According to one man interviewed in Kyjov, a segregated Roma settlement in the town of Stará Lúbovna, Slovakia, " We built our house with a building permit, but there are still problems with the site, although it wasxxRoma in an Expanding Europeofficially given to us during

socialism. But today the land is not ours, therefore we can not install any water, gas, or sewage pipes." This example shows that Roma poverty is rooted in incompatibilities between Roma social practices, dominant state behaviors and norms, limited political representation, and geographic exclusion. It also shows how economic reforms may have missed Roma.

## **Diversity**

While demonstrating the distinctive nature of Roma poverty, this study also emphasizes the diversity of Roma populations in Central and Eastern Europe—ethnic, occupational, religious, and economic. The proportion speaking Roma language dialects differs greatly from country to country, as does the proportion living in cities, integrated neighborhoods, or segregated rural settlements. These differences have a major impact on welfare status.

Efforts to create, define, or represent a single Roma community will similarly founder on the rocks of internal cultural diversity. Roma tend to have distinctive problems of integration and access, but the situation of different communities and individuals varies immensely and cannot be reduced to a single, simple set of answers or policy responses. Illustrating this diversity is a study of nine Roma communities in Romania that is included in chapter 5. Each of the nine communities consists of different combinations of Roma subgroups, with different languages, religions, and occupations. The Bucharest Zabrauti neighborhood contains a mosaic of Roma ethnic groups, varying from the quite traditional Sporitori, who speak the Roma language, to more integrated Roma, who speak primarily or only Romanian. The Babadag urban community has three main Roma groups, the largest of which is Muslim. However, in the Iana rural community, most Roma are

active Orthodox Christians. Other communities are relatively homogenous. Primarily Hungarian-speaking Roma lived in an urban and a rural community in Romania. Populating another rural community were relatively well-off Caldarari Roma, who speak the traditional Roma language; they work primarily in trade, after being laid off from a large state-owned enterprise. Such diversity complicates any approach to reduce Roma poverty, since the root causes may also differ dramatically.

## **The European Dimension**

Policies to address Roma poverty must also be framed in the context of the Central and East European countries' drive for EU membership. The timing of the publication of this study and other reports on Roma is not coincidental. The EU's expansion on May 1, 2004, to include eight countries of Central and Eastern Europe and to acknowledge the candidacy of Bulgaria and Romania, focused attention on the Roma issue through the adoption and monitoring of the Copenhagen criteria for EU accession. Based on these criteria, those countries have built institutions and legislative mechanisms to address Roma issues. However, this is only the beginning. Addressing Roma poverty will require a long-term approach that is part of each country's overall economic and social development program. Interactions between Roma policy and the EU accession process can be seen most vividly in Hungary—the first Central and East European country to apply for EU membership and also the first to make a substantial policy effort to address Roma issues. Hungary passed the Minorities Act in 1993, which granted considerable cultural, educational, and linguistic rights to Hungary's 13 recognized minorities, including Roma. The act created a system of national

and local minority self-governments that let minorities initiate social, educational, and development projects. Approximately half of these are Roma self-governments. Hungary has also established the national Office for National and Ethnic Minorities, an independent minorities ombudsman to oversee minority rights and protections, and the Roma Office under the Office of the Prime Minister to coordinate Roma policy across the government. Together, these offices enable Hungary to comply with EU norms, in part through the implementation of a "medium-term package" of measures aimed at the Roma's social inclusion. Hungary's extensive experience with Roma institutions and projects provides an important example for other new EU member states and aspirants.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND APPROACHES**

While the plight of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe has not gone unnoticed, many lessons need to be drawn and new policy approaches pursued. In the past decade, governments, NGOs, and international organizations have launched numerous initiatives to address various aspects of the Roma issue, from combating human rights violations, to addressing racial stereotyping in the media and promoting education and employment. The activity level varies significantly across countries. With EU enlargement, a more systemic policy-oriented approach is needed to address gaps in Roma economic and social development. Project lessons from the 1990s can be used to inform policy interventions in key areas, such as education, health, social assistance, and the labor market. Together, the multidimensional and interrelated roots of Roma poverty, the diversity of Roma communities, and the differences in European background constitute a

unique context for policy. This report outlines a number of policy implications. First, a comprehensive Roma in an Expanding Europe approach is needed to address the multiple, interrelated causes of Roma poverty simultaneously. Second, primary emphasis needs to be placed on furthering the social inclusion of Roma in European societies. In identifying policy approaches, useful lessons can be drawn from other countries with similar experience. Finally, greater attention needs to be paid to policy implementation and evaluation and the central role of Roma in these processes.

### **Links with Systemic Reform**

Improving Roma conditions is inherently linked to the overall success of each relevant country's economic and social development strategies. Each country must implement policies that promote and sustain growth, while improving social welfare outcomes and the inclusiveness of policies for all populations. However, macro-level policies will not be sufficient to reach all Roma, so targeted interventions are needed to address unique exclusion problems and ensure that Roma are able to work and participate fully in public services. Related to this, better access to quality social services for Roma is linked to the overall effectiveness of each country's education, health, and social protection systems. In many ways, the inherited systems were ill suited to the reality of a market economy, and one way that they have proven ineffective is in their inability to reach all vulnerable groups, including Roma. Throughout Central and Eastern Europe, countries have embarked on systemic reforms to improve the efficiency, equity, and relevance of public services. These measures are making a difference.

Addressing systemic issues and improving access and quality of social services will improve conditions for the entire population. Again, interventions designed to reach Roma need to accompany these system-wide measures.

## **Toward an Inclusive Approach**

As Roma poverty is rooted in broad-based social exclusion—economic, social, and geographic—addressing it calls for an inclusive approach that aims to expand and promote Roma involvement and participation in mainstream society while maintaining cultural and social autonomy. Only policies that allow Roma to take advantage of opportunities in national and European labor and housing markets, education and health systems, and social and political networks have a chance of reducing poverty over the long term. Policy mechanisms include those that make existing policies more accessible to Roma and identify areas where targeted initiatives will specifically reach Roma. An emphasis on inclusion policies would complement rights-based approaches by tackling the economic and social barriers that Roma face. OverviewxxiiiA central policy goal should be the multifaceted inclusion of Roma into institutions and mechanisms that create economic and social opportunities. Emphasis should be placed on providing incentives, rather than forcing compliance. Interventions that reduce the isolation and exclusion of Roma can help improve living conditions over the longer-term. An inclusive approach also needs to rely on the greater participation of Roma, particularly of Roma women, in the projects and programs that affect them. A number of successful projects use Roma mentors as liaisons between Roma and non-Roma communities. For



example, Roma teachers' assistants who work with parents or peer advisors who assist with job placement can facilitate integration, while strengthening the Roma community. Addressing exclusion and the wounds of segregation also involves overcoming divisions between Roma and non-Roma communities. This helps build trust and social capital within communities. Such measures need to involve both Roma and their non-Roma neighbors. In most cases, policies should target communities at large, rather than Roma in particular. However, there may be exceptions where explicit attention to ethnicity would be appropriate, such as overcoming language barriers. Critical vehicles for overcoming cultural barriers are multicultural education and a curriculum that includes the history and culture of Roma and other minorities. Training teachers, local government officials, and other personnel working in social services can address discrimination in public services. Finally, public information campaigns can promote multiculturalism and raise awareness about discrimination. Policies need to balance three related sets of objectives: first, increasing economic opportunities by expanding employment participation; second, building human capital through better education and health; and third, strengthening social capital and community development by increasing Roma empowerment and participation. In this vein, options include the following: Reducing housing segregation, particularly by alleviating the problems associated with, or providing alternatives to, isolated rural settlements; Integrating Roma students into mainstream education systems through preschool programs and provision of food and clothing to enable attendance; Increasing outreach to Roma communities through social service providers, including health and social workers; Involving Roma as liaisons between communities and public

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services; and, Providing relevant job training and programs that increase Roma participation in formal labor markets. xxivRoma in an Expanding Europe

## **Learning from Examples**

When considering future policy directions, a key source of ideas and experiences may be found in the minority policy experiences of other countries and regions, particularly in the West. North America and South America provide interesting counterpoints to Europe's experience, in part because the histories of African and indigenous peoples in the Americas offer more parallels to that of Roma than other national minorities in Europe. While all ethnic groups have distinct features, minority-majority relations share important similarities everywhere, and much can be learned from the policy experience of other countries that have confronted these issues over centuries. What is distinctive about the Roma in Europe is that they have endured centuries of exclusionary and assimilationist policies without being absorbed into majority societies. They remain stateless and have founded no statehood movement because they lack a historic home-land. These general characteristics underline the challenges facing an integration-oriented approach to Roma poverty. However, they also focus attention on the stakes involved in getting policy right. Policy-makers need to approach Roma poverty issues from a long-term perspective, with a clear idea of objectives and tradeoffs.

## **Learning from Evaluation and Implementation**

Developing a comprehensive national policy response to Roma poverty entails attention to monitoring and evaluation. The wealth of Roma projects <https://assignbuster.com/why-are-roma-poor-economics-essay/>

in Central and Eastern Europe provides a great deal of implementation experience, but very few initiatives were evaluated or monitored, making it extremely difficult to identify lessons learned for future interventions. It is still important, however, to examine this body of experience to distill lessons for future work. Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation should be built into new and ongoing initiatives, as should opportunities for exchanging information within and across countries. A first step is to increase the availability and quality of information about Roma. To address this, countries need to examine their statistical instruments—for example, censuses and household surveys—and administrative data to assess how they can better capture policy-relevant information on Roma and other minorities.

Multilateral coordination, advice, and guidance can be important for ensuring data comparability. More information on international practices is needed, particularly in addressing the privacy issues involving ethnic identification. The outcomes of targeted public policies and NGO initiatives also require close monitoring. Program evaluations should be used for ongoing policy development. Mechanisms should be in place for disseminating lessons across regions and countries. Privacy concerns about data collection must be respected, but up-to-date information is critical for policymakers to make decisions about program design and to monitor outcomes. Such data collection should benefit Roma in the long run through better-designed and targeted interventions. By making ethnicity declarations voluntary and by using periodic sample surveys rather than national administrative data to collect information on specific topics, privacy concerns can be respected. It is extremely important to involve Roma groups in survey development, implementation, and analysis. This was an emphasis

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of recent censuses in Bulgaria and Slovakia. Qualitative assessments can also provide valuable information for project design. It is vital to build monitoring and evaluation mechanisms into projects and policies. Monitoring should be an integral part of all projects to ensure accountability. Equally important are evaluations to assess project impacts and outcomes. These require collecting baseline data at the outset of projects for comparison with data once the projects have been completed and experiments with controls that compare the project to outcomes in the absence of the project. For example, an intervention designed to improve school enrollments should measure enrollments prior to the project and assess whether participants stay in school during the project and afterwards. The time horizon for outcome evaluation should also be long enough to assess longer-term impacts. Again, in the case of education, the evaluation should assess not just whether children are in school at the project's end, but what they have learned, whether they graduate and continue their education, and how the project affects their chances in higher education and the labor market.

## **Ensuring Participation**

Regardless of whether programs and policies are explicitly designated for Roma, Roma participation is essential. The success of the inclusive approach outlined earlier rests on the ability of the Roma to contribute to the development processes that affect them. The experience of policies and programs directed at Roma during both the socialist and transition periods showed that it is essential to involve the Roma in program design, implementation, and evaluation. The recent past is littered with projects and

programs that, however well intentioned, failed because they were designed and implemented without the involvement of the future beneficiaries.

Ensuring Roma involvement in policy and project development rests on the existence of effective participatory mechanisms thatxxviRoma in an Expanding Europe recognize the diversity of Roma communities. While Roma have been increasingly involved in civil society and various aspects of policy-making, significant challenges remain to ensure effective communication and involvement. Some have been discussed in this chapter, including low education levels and illiteracy, which diminish the potential pool of Roma leaders and voters, and lead to mistrust and prejudices between Roma and non-Roma. It is essential to continue expanding opportunities for Roma to participate in civil society at the local and national levels and to increase contacts with non-Roma. The example of Slovakia presented in chapter 4, in particular, highlights the perils of separation and segregation. Lacking opportunities for interaction with wider society, including other Roma communities and non-Roma, Roma are cut off from society. Increasing partnerships between non-Roma and Roma will facilitate inclusion and address the mistrust and miscommunication that limit the progress of local and community development.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Poverty among Roma remains one of the most pressing issues for the Central and East European states as they move toward EU integration and sustained economic development. Using a variety of sources and approaches, this report examines the nature of Roma poverty—a multifaceted challenge that can only be addressed by a policy approach that

attends to all dimensions of Roma social exclusion and focuses on the potential contributions Roma can make to social and economic development. Since the dominant policy approach in the years after socialism has tended to rely on a fragmented set of projects, often delivered by local NGOs with limited assistance from the state, the opportunity to make a difference through comprehensive change is significant and bright. The current level of activity and interest in Roma issues in Central and Eastern Europe provides a promising start. The next step is to integrate the lessons learned into policy. The mechanisms to facilitate this are in place. Most countries have formulated strategies to improve the conditions of Roma and of established institutions to develop, coordinate, and administer policies and projects. However, the agenda is complex, and improvements will not come overnight. Indeed, poverty among Roma communities in some West European countries highlights the scope of the challenge. Effective policy responses will require a multilayered approach involving cross-country partnerships among Roma and international organizations, national and local governments, NGOs, and communities. OverviewxxviiBOX 1 IN THEIR OWN WORDSInterviews with Roma throughout the region highlight the range of their experiences and living conditions across and within countries. These snapshots illustrate this diversity. The challenges they face are explored further throughout this volume.

## **Education**

Many Roma children do not attend school. Some parents are unable to send their children to school because they lack basic supplies or even clothes. Other children are excluded because of social and cultural factors, such as

language." We can't afford to send them to school in the winter. We have no sneakers, no proper shoes for snow. They can't go to school in slippers. They don't have jackets or warm clothes either. We can't afford anything—copybooks, pens. . . . Children have no money for meals. That's why they don't go to school," said a parent in Bulgaria." Children from segregated Roma settlements do not master the Slo-vak language and do not understand their teachers. The teachers do not speak the Roma language, so they communicate by using gestures," a school director in Slovakia stated. While demand for education is low in some Roma communities, other parents express a strong interest in their children's education and recognize its importance for their future success. A grandparent in Slovakia noted, " My grandson is a first grade student. We sent him to kindergarten and hope in the future that he will put more importance on education than we did." " I waited for my daughter to return from school every day and asked her what happened at school. I sat beside her when she was writing up her homework. I would not let her go out until I saw that she had finished. I would not allow anyone at home to touch her and make her do some other housework. . . . [I] do not know what will happen to her after she completes her education, but whatever that is, it will be better. She can become a doctor, a teacher. She will go higher than us," explained a parent in Bulgaria.

## **Employment**

Formal unemployment in some Roma settlements can reach 100 per-cent. Many Roma face severe obstacles in finding a job because of their limited education and low skill levels and discrimination on the labor market." Who is going to give me a job? I have no education, no skills, and am Roma. Even

in my neighboring village nobody wants to give us any work," said a 35-year-old father of five in Slovakia. A Roma in Bulgaria stated, " If his Bulgarian name is Angel or Ivan or Stoyan or Dragan, he'll get all the application forms and be asked to (continued)xxviiiRoma in an Expanding EuropeBOX 1 (continued)come in. As soon as they realize he's Gypsy, Roma, he's turned down, they lower their voices and tell him to come some other time. When your name is Bulgarian and they see you are a Gypsy, they throw you out!"

## **Roma Identity**

In Hungary, experiments with alternative education for Roma high school students that include Roma language, culture, and history in the curriculum have sparked interest in Roma identity among young people. A student in Hungary noted, " My grandmothers spoke the Roma language, and my parents can understand it. I do not speak the language, but I would very much like to learn it." Another student in Hungary added, " I would like to know more about the origin of my people