

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION WITHIN PHILANTHROPY, ROMA AND MISSION POSSIBLE

### THE ROMA PEOPLE

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, itinerant populations from northern India relocated in repeated migrations to Persia, in southeastern Europe by the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup>, and in western Europe by the 15<sup>th</sup> century. By the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they had spread to every inhabited continent with the largest settlements in Slavic-speaking countries. Today, the largest populations of Roma are located in Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, the Czech and Slovak republics, and Hungary.

Referred to as “Roma”, or “Rom” when singular, or Gypsies, although that name is often considered pejorative. Most Roma speak some form of Romany, a language closely related to the modern Indo-European languages of northern India, as well as the major language of the country in which they live.

Estimates of the total world Roma population range from two million to five million. They are known as a nomadic population yet fewer and fewer may have remained truly migratory, although this point is unclear due to the lack of census information available.<sup>1</sup>

Roma people are generally living in high levels of poverty with workforce operating in the informal sector more often than the formal economy such as gig employment. The culture is traditionally patriarchal although shifts in equality are developing for women in the areas of workforce development. Roma people are also highly invested in cultural practices such as story-telling, music and the arts.

### MISSION POSSIBLE

[Mission Possible](#) (MP) is in eastern Europe and Russia to serve the poor and share the Christian gospel. The organization consists of 74 staff and 313 volunteers. In its most recent 2021 impact report, MP has reported serving 2,250 families, providing Christian education to 3,900 people and helping more than 1,100 children in camps or clubs. Programs to serve Roma vary widely and across multiple locations. Seemingly, MP is operating in four eastern European countries and Russia. Programs consist of:

- Shelters
- Meals and food kitchens
- Business education
- Children’s education
- Land development and agriculture
- Water and sanitation
- Church planting and missionary training
- Medical care (ex: COVID support)
- Youth vocational education
- Legal care

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<sup>1</sup> [Roma | People, Meaning, History, Language, Lifestyle, & Facts | Britannica](#)

- Women's support groups
- "Baby boxes" consisting of infant care items
- Youth camps
- Holiday gift distribution

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR COLLABORATION

MP has significant influence and a powerful opportunity to serve the Roma people. One way to maximize its outreach is to identify its core strengths and to collaborate with other organizations that are either 1) currently thriving in overlapping program areas or 2) currently serving the Roma people. The following identifies select opportunities for collaboration within both of these two opportunities.

#### SELECT ORGANIZATIONS CURRENTLY EXCELLING IN PROGRAM AREAS OVERLAPPING WITH MP

While not all of these organizations are currently serving the Roma people, many of them have a model to scale and partner with local leaders to bring their programs to the areas where they are needed most.

Economic development such as livelihood education or business education

- [Street Business School](#) (SBS) is an award-winning entrepreneurial education organization helping people start and sustain micro-businesses to lift themselves and their families out of poverty. SBS proves to triple a women's income from below the poverty line to above the global poverty line at more than \$4 per day. SBS partners with other organizations to train them on this entrepreneurial education program so that it can be customized and implemented locally.

Children's education in high poverty areas and remote study environments

- [Educate!](#) is an award-winning organization that advances youth education and specializes in vocational training for youth ages 16-24. Educate! partners with youth, schools, and governments to design and deliver education solutions that equip young people with the skills to attain further education, overcome gender inequities, start businesses, get jobs, and drive development in their communities.
- UNICEF focuses on remote education for children across several remote education programs. [The following article](#) highlights some of these programs in Southeast Asia to keep children learning during the pandemic when gathering to learn was prohibited.

Water and sanitation

- [Water for People](#) (WFP) is an award-winning global organization working to bring people clean water and sanitation solutions to their communities for generations to come. Their model is to partner with local governments, businesses, and individuals, to bring clean water and sanitation systems to their own communities. WFP ensures they have the resources they need to maintain those systems now and in the future. The local government provides the structure. The local shop owner provides the materials. The local entrepreneur makes repairs. And the local family gets clean water for a lifetime.

## Agriculture education and resources

- [One-Acre Fund](#), [Heifer International](#) and [International Development Enterprises](#) (iDE) all have won awards and accolades for the inventive approaches to helping rural farmers living in low-income areas increase their self-sufficiency and agricultural practices.
  - One-Acre Fund supplies smallholder farmers with an alternative to handouts by offering the financing and training they need to grow more food and earn more money.
  - Heifer International crosses multiple programmatic areas and countries. They support farmers and their communities as they mobilize and envision their futures, provide livestock and training so they can improve the quantity and quality of the goods they produce, and create connections to market to increase sales and incomes. This model spans hunger relief, livelihoods, women's economic development and environmental sustainability.
  - International Development Enterprises (iDE) promotes manufacturing, marketing, and distribution of affordable, scalable micro-irrigation and low-cost water recovery systems throughout the developing world. This work enables smallholder farmers to afford advanced tools to sustainably produce crops and livable wages from their land.

## ORGANIZATIONS CURRENTLY SERVING THE ROMA PEOPLE

If MP sought to partner with organizations that might not be award-winning yet, but that are already serving the same community, the following organizations offer opportunities for collaboration.

- [Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance](#) works towards the integration of Roma peoples into Bulgarian society. Amalipe claims to be the largest nonprofit organization serving Roma people across Bulgaria. It has community development centers and local community clubs in 15 municipalities and works with a network of more than 260 schools, combating the high drop-out rate among Roma. It focuses on both modernizing Roma society and helping the Roma people retain their unique identity and traditions. Their focus is on education, health and social services. The following is an extensive [report](#) on scope and impact. However, it was funded by Open Society Foundation which means Amalipe might not collaborate with a faith-based organization. This should be explored further.
- [Indi-Roma Social Foundation](#) is a grass-roots organization founded by a group of Roma themselves. They aim to bring about social change by fighting stereotypes about Roma people in Bulgaria, moving away from cultural practices of oppressing women and girls such as campaigns against early pregnancy, early marriage and domestic abuse. Additionally, this organization works to increase educational and employment opportunities such as facilitating vocational training and programs for gifted children.
- [Drom](#) is primarily an advocacy group that fights against the segregation of Roma in Bulgaria to create more democracy for the Roma people. Also, Drom is heavily involved in capacity building through education and equality. It offers free, quality education to Roma children who are concentrated in Roma-heavy districts.

- [Integro Association](#) seeks to integrate the Roma people into Bulgarian society. They have spearheaded a number of projects aimed towards desegregating schools and reintegrating dropouts in order to make primary and secondary schools more accessible to Roma families.
- [Bulgarian Fund for Women](#) (BFW) is the only indigenous donor in Bulgaria that raises funds and gives grants to local NGOs working to advance women's and girls' rights, eliminate gender stereotypes, gender-based violence and discrimination, achieve gender equality in all spheres of life including livelihoods and make a social change. They are funded by reputable U.S. based donors and partner with local NGOs working on gender issues and opportunities. This organization would be a great resource for ongoing learning.
- [Romani Early Years Network](#) advocates for early childhood development (ECD) and education for Roma children by building Roma networks across 11 eastern European countries, training Roma people to become educators, creating access to health and education for children locally and remotely, and advocating for equality for Roma people. By providing adequate nutrition and supportive environments as well, this group hopes to put Roma on an equal footing. This organization seems highly credible. Their manifesto can be viewed [here](#).
- [Arete Youth](#) supports Roma young people with mentorship, camps, and professional development. The organization envisions a community of engaged Roma citizens who support and inspire each other as role models. This will lead to educational success, personal achievement, and career prospects.
- [Roma Entrepreneurship Development Initiative](#) (REDI) is focused on economic development. It helps to identify jobs for Roma placement, offers startup capital and business education for entrepreneurs, and built the Roma Financial Institute to build capacity among grassroots groups in central and eastern Europe as well as the Balkans. It is particularly focused on fostering entrepreneurship and job creation among the Roma population.

## SUMMARY

Currently, there is a developing movement within civil society to achieve a few key goals for Roma people. These trends seem to be:

- Access to fair and quality education,
- Protection and equality for women and girls in a patriarchal culture of oppression,
- Self-sufficiency through economic development and entrepreneurship,
- Reducing discrimination of Roma people and integrating cultures to increase equality.

There are many opportunities for collaboration. The quest for more efficiency and increasing impact could begin with a series of conversations among organizations already germane to the areas in which MP is operating. Second, MP might explore opportunities to streamline its services and collaborate with others who are excelling in key program areas. Lastly, once the landscape for collaboration is thoroughly explored, the task of identifying the program areas to focus and “go deep” versus the areas to shift away from and collaborate should begin. This effort could further impact and heighten efficiency. Overall, there are many opportunities to explore.