

**International Roma Movement Action**  
**(For the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 - 2015):**

**Between March 2007 & March 2008**

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**Dzeno Association**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this report is to analyze the international active Roma movement between March 2007 and March 2008, this project forms part of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005 – 2015). The Decade of Roma Inclusion is an unprecedented political commitment by governments in Central and Southeastern Europe to improve the socio-economic status and social inclusion of Roma within a regional framework. The Decade is an international initiative that brings together governments, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations, as well as Romani civil society, to accelerate progress toward improving the welfare of Roma and to review such progress in a transparent and quantifiable way. The Decade prioritizes the focus on the areas of education, employment, health, and housing, and commits governments to take into account the other core issues of poverty, discrimination, and gender mainstreaming.

The idea of the Decade emerged from "Roma in an Expanding Europe: Challenges for the Future," a high-level regional conference on Roma held in Budapest, Hungary in 2003. Prime Ministers of the participating governments signed the Declaration of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in Sofia, Bulgaria, on February 2, 2005.

The nine countries taking part in the Decade are Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia. All of these countries have significant Roma minorities that have been disadvantaged, both economically and socially. Each country participating in the Decade has developed a national Decade Action Plan that specifies the goals and indicators in the priority areas.

The founding international partner organizations of the Decade are the World Bank, the Open Society Institute, the United Nations Development Program, the Council of Europe, Council of Europe Development Bank, the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Roma Information Office, the European Roma and Traveller Forum, the European Roma Rights Centre, and the Roma Education Fund. In February 2008, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) also became a partner in the Decade.

Planning for the Decade is guided by the International Steering Committee (ISC), which is composed of representatives of the participating governments, international partner organizations and Roma organizations. Each year, one of the participating governments holds the Decade's Presidency. Serbia currently holds the Presidency, which it assumed on 1 July 2008.

Roma is an historic nation of people, which traces its origins to India. There they belonged to the lowest level of Doms (from here their name Roma came, from Doma). There are undoubted similarities between the Roma language and Sanskrit. Traditionally, and still for some Roma, the lifestyle consists of migration, and movement from one place to another through various states and continents. Around the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Roma people started to migrate directly to the west. It is thought that they came to Europe from

Egypt (and from this comes their name in certain countries i.e. in England they are referred to as Gypsies, and in France; the Gitanes).

Roma people face discrimination in the areas of housing, employment, education and health. Thus humanitarian agencies such as Dzeno Association are working to improve the situation. The practice of placing Roma students in segregated schools or classes remains widespread in countries across Central and Eastern Europe. In Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, many Roma children have been channeled into all-Roma schools that offer inferior quality education and are sometimes in poor physical condition, or into segregated all-Roma or predominantly Roma classes within mixed schools. Also, in Hungary and Bulgaria, many Roma children are sent to classes for pupils with learning disabilities, regardless of whether such classes are appropriate for the children in question or not. In Bulgaria, they are also sent to so-called 'delinquent schools', where a variety of human right abuse takes place.

Roma in Europe are often accused of crimes such as pick-pocketing; this is a regular justification for anti-Roma persecution. A UN study found that Roma in Eastern European countries such as Bulgaria are arrested for robbery at a much higher rate than other groups. Amnesty International and Roma groups such as the Union Romani, blame widespread police and government racism and persecution. A significant proportion of the world's Roma live in Central and Eastern Europe, often in squatter communities with very high unemployment, while only some are fully integrated in the society. Romania and Bulgaria have the biggest population of Roma people. There are approximately 100,000 Roma in the Czech Republic.

Dzeno Association was founded in 1994 by Ivan Vesely (acting Chairman) and Dr Klara Samkova-Vesela, and the objective of it is to gather not only the citizens of Roma nationality, who want to help their own nation, but also to support the development and regeneration of traditional Roma values and attributes. Amongst its further activities, it can name the support of regional Roma organisations in regional events, support of education of young Roma people including granting the intermediation of scholarships for talented Roma pupils and students and enhancement of professional knowledge of local Roma activists.

The organization serves as an information centre on an international level, helping to promote Roma human rights and an end to discrimination and racism. Dzeno also has an office in Slovakia, and have plans to open an office in Canada in the near future. Regional expansion is also planned in countries where Dzeno currently works closely with other local Romani organizations, such as Hungary, Romania, Ukraine and Macedonia. Since 2003, Dzeno has been a partner of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and is working on a project for the return and reintegration of Roma (RCAI).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research approach used for this study is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative research uses smaller amount of samples, and looks for in-depth detailed meanings; thus information about the events including the conference/seminars, festivals, competitions, media/government activity etc forms part of this. Quantitative research focuses on a higher percentage of samples, and only looks at figures and numbers, not the meaning behind/potential reasons of the figures and numbers etc. Quantitative research is also often an iterative process whereby evidence is evaluated, theories and hypotheses are refined, technical advances are made, and so on.

The process for this study consisted of collating all emails received on an international basis (to Roma Network Email server) within the time period of March 2007 to March 2008. These were then studied to ascertain the type of events that were taking place, the date of the events and which country the events were planned and taking place: thus the data was categorised into country, date and type of activity.

## **DATA AND ANALYSIS**

Upon analysis of the data, the rapid movement of Roma activities on a national basis is clearly visible between the period of March 2007 and March 2008; details are listed below.

**Argentina** hosted the **Human Rights, Discrimination and Romani Associates Meeting** in Buenos Aires (25-28 September 2007) with sponsorship from the Working Group on Minorities of the United Nations.

**Belgium** held the **International Refugee Day** to campaign for support of refugees on 20 June 2007 (nb. campaigning against the fatal realities of fortress Europe etc). Also, the **European Commission**, focusing on non-discrimination, launched a competition open to all young people in the EU (30 July 2007). The European Commission has responsibility for justice, freedom and security; European children and teenagers between the ages of 12 and 18 were invited to design a poster on non-discrimination in the EU. The aim of the competition was to raise awareness among young Europeans of the work being done by the EU in this field. The final conference of the project, '**Social Inclusion of Roma in Europe: Towards Succeeding in Social Intervention**', was also held in Brussels on 7 November 2007. The aim of this event was to discuss the outcomes of the Romaine project, in which the framework of good practices concerning inclusion policies focusing on Roma communities was reviewed and analysed. Furthermore, EU policies aiming the social inclusion of Roma were also discussed.

There has been governmental based improvement in **Bulgaria** as the **European Commission (EC)** will grant \$3 million for house construction for Roma people by August 2007 for the construction of detached houses for Roma people in Sofia, Mayor Boiko Borissov said. Local authorities were seeking for a place in the Suhodol residential district, suitable for the construction of the houses, Borissov said as quoted by Focus news agency. In September 2007 the **Social Inclusion and Health – Crossing the Borders** conference in Sofia took place for Roma activists and civil society members by Open Society Institute's (OSI) Roma Health Project (RHP).

The second edition of the **International Romani Yag Gypsy festival - Montreal, Canada** took place between 11-14 October 2007. The event had over fifty artists and speakers, including international guests from five different countries exclusively for the festival, and offered many glances on the vast culture, through more than 25 activities over four themed days.

The **Czech Republic** was the country with the greatest movement action overall; the European Commission welcomed the decision by the Council and Parliament to designate 2007 as the '**European Year of Equal Opportunities for All**'. The year aimed to make Europeans aware of their right not to be discriminated against, to promote equal opportunities in areas such as work and healthcare, and to show how diversity makes the EU stronger. The year had four themes: rights, representation, recognition and respect, with a total budget of €15 million for the activities spanning 12 months. The

year's budget was spent on, inter alia (an EU-wide information campaign), new Eurobarometer surveys on discrimination and attitudes towards discrimination, as well as hundreds of national initiatives such as writing competitions for schools on the theme of respect and tolerance and prizes for companies with the most effective diversity training. There will also be the first ever Equality Summit, gathering together ministers, equality bodies, civil society and social partners. Most activities were co-ordinated nationally to ensure they took place as locally as possible. The €7.6 million dedicated to national, local and regional activities will be matched by co-financing from national public and private sources.

In March 2007 the **One world International Human Rights Film Festival** was held in Prague. The Film 'When the Road Bends: Tales of a Gypsy Caravan' was exclusively screened. The rich feature documentary is a dramatic journey with raw powerful music, reflecting the harsh but triumphant history of Romani people through the centuries. It is a wild celebration of the musical world of the Roma, juxtaposed to the real world they live in. Shot by documentary icon Albert Maysles, luscious performance film interweaves with the stirring real life tales of the artist's homes and families around the world. The **Celebration of the International Day of Roma 2007** in Prague (2-8 April 2007) was a week long celebration including workshops, bowling night, music/concert, and football matches etc. Immediately after this was the celebration of **Roma World Day; Roma Folklore Festival** on 8 April 2007 by Roma Association 'Cerenja', which contained exhibitions and performances etc. This was followed by a competition of **Romipen Photography** sponsored by Czech Radio in June 2007. Participants were welcomed to send in photographs documenting the Romani life, their traditions and customs. The contestants' assignments was to take a photograph of any 'scene' from the Romani life; such as the themes from the life of a Romani family, a Roma friend, Romani at work, relaxation or at fun, Roma artists or tradesmen. Romani at Christmas, Easter of other holiday celebrations, important lifetime events (baptism, weddings, funerals) and other situations. The **Gypsy celebration 2007** was held between 22-31 July and took form in a Voice and Dance workshop (Pension 'Galerie' Jedlova), and there was also a children's camp. There was an educational Roma movement in **Brno** held on 17 August 2007 to promote change to education law to aid Roma. Another governmental progression was the announcement that the Government plan to 'found an agency to fight problems of discrimination and social exclusion in ghettos in Czech towns' (19 September 2007). In March 2008 **EC internships for young Roma university graduates** were advertised. The 5 month internship was made available to all Roma university graduates from all new member states (excluding Cyprus and Malta), Croatia, F.Y.R.O.M, Serbia including Kosovo, and Montenegro.

Movement in Germany took place in the form of the Berlin TV festival in which a film about Roma was competing on 13-20 October 2007. The Czech documentary **Ghetto No.1** by **Ivan Pokorny**, about the Chanov Romani housing estate in Most, North Bohemia has been selected for the competition at the prestigious Prix Europa TV festival in Berlin. The film shot in Czech-German co-production, competed in two categories; among documentary films and multicultural projects.

There was also an **International Roma Film Festival** in Miskolc, Hungary in September 2007. This was the fourth international festival for young film-makers. Entries were welcomed in all types of films (feature, short, documentary, animated) to a special category. The ‘Training Course for Ethnic Roma Activists’ was launched by the **Foundation Centre for Resources for Ethnic Roma Communities** (24 September 2007). The Roma Participation Program and the Open Society Institute in Budapest funded this project, which aimed to set up a group of 15 ethnic Roma instructors, specialized in organizational management and the cycle of project management. Also in Hungary, the **Decade of Roma Inclusion Housing Workshop** (3-6 December 2007) was organized under the Hungarian Decade Presidency for government representative from countries participating in the Decade, which included presentations and discussions about Roma housing projects in Croatia and Hungary as well as site visits to projects in both Croatia and Hungary. Also in December (15<sup>th</sup>) 2007 was the **Roma Pavilion International Award for Young Curators and Art Critics. Theme; Paradise Lost – The First Roma Pavilion**. The Roma Cultural Participation Project of the Arts and Culture Network Program, Open Society Institute, Budapest awarded a prize of 1500 Euros for the best – most thorough, analytical and constructively critical – review written about ‘Paradise Lost: The first Roma Pavilion’ by a young curator and/or art critic of contemporary art. The authors were required to consider the wider theoretical context behind the idea of the trans-national representation of a strong cultural identity. In January 2008 the **Roma Education Fund** released the first issue of biannual magazine ‘**A School for All**’. The theme of the first issue of the Magazine was ‘The Case for Integrated Education’. The aim of the magazine is to provide a platform for discussion, exchange and learning to all involved and interested in the education of Roma children. The magazine hopes to bring academics, activists and community development experts, education specialists, and the people involved in day to day education of Roma and non Roma, together in an exchange of concrete experiences and ideas.

The **FARE Action Week: Against Racism and Discrimination in European Football** was held in Vienna, Austria (17-30 October 2007). FARE aimed to encourage a variety of grass-roots and community initiatives to take place during the FARE action week against Racism and Discrimination in European football. The **Roma Access Program** was introduced by the **Central European University, Budapest** on 15 November 2007. The Roma Access Program is a 9-month preparatory course for promising young Roma from Central and Eastern Europe. The course is designed to help Roma enter international post-graduate studies on a competitive basis and focused on academic and English language development. Full scholarships were awarded, covering travel, tuition, housing and living costs.

In India the **Roma Nation Day celebration** took place in Chandigarh on 8 April 2007. The **3<sup>rd</sup> International Writers Festival** then took place in Agra (29-30 September 2007), which was arranged by the Writers Club International and India Inter-Continental Cultural Association. A special invitation was sent to Roma Poets, Writers and Intellectuals.

In Macedonia, the **Fifth Roma Film Festival – Golden Wheel** took place in Skopje between 6-8 April 2007.

Poland held the (15-21 April 2007) **Striving for diversity – Fighting Intolerance: Mediation training and conflict management seminar**. The idea of this training course was to strengthen a ‘peace network’ that crosses religious, ethnic, and geographic boundaries as human rights are not equal in every country. The target group for delegates was project managers, trainers, youth leaders and youth policy makers. Participants were able to take an active stand in defending human rights and contributing to a Europe that fulfils the slogan ‘united in diversity’.

Romania held the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of **Miss Roma International** on 31 July 2007. Money was available as a prize for the winner, as well as participation in other international beauty pageants, representing to the world the beauty of the young Roma women. In August 2007, the **International Romani Art Festival** with the theme of ‘**So Keres Europa?**’ took place. This is the only festival in the world that speaks not only to art appreciators, but Romani people and others who promote Roma culture.

The conference ‘**Sharing Best Practices and Tools in Addressing the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of Roma (SRHR)**’ (by IPPF-International Planned Parenthood Federation European Network) in Slovakia on the dates 28-29 March 2007. This conference aimed to exchange views and share and learn from examples of best practices and tools from various organizations and initiatives that have proven to be successful in the following fields: mediating, working with media, community and primary stakeholder involvement, youth and peer education, social and cultural issues in working with Roma minorities (traditions, taboo, discrimination, gender issues, etc), SRHR services, partnerships, social inclusion of Roma minorities and Roma rights.

Slovenia hosted ‘**Youth bridging the gap: Reaching out to the Roma**’ in Ljubijana (22-28 July 2007). The International Association for Political Science Students (IAPSS) dedicated a summer event to increase the level of acceptance and awareness of Roma as a minority group and the Romani culture among youth. The project targeted European students between the ages of 18 and 26.

The **Romani Women’s Rights International Conference** took place in Stockholm, Sweden on 28 November 2007. Its aim was to tackle the main challenges that Romani women and their communities face in today’s society. The conference entitled ‘Amare glasura ashunde – our voice heard’, discussed trafficking in human beings (including children), domestic violence and practices harming Romani women’s reproductive health, such as forced sterilisation and early marriages. The conference brought together women representing various Romani women’s networks in Europe as well as experts and policy makers from the Council of Europe member states who will try to find ways to improve the social condition of their communities.

Ukraine held the regular meeting of the **Council of Ethno-national Policy** (17 October 2007) under the President of Ukraine.

The Gypsy Lore Society of the University of Manchester, *England*, held the **International Conference on Romani Diasporas, Romani Migrations** (an annual meeting). The event was hosted by the Romani Project in cooperation with the Migration and Diaspora Cultural Studies Network at the School of Languages, Linguistics and Cultures within the University. This event took place alongside an international conference on 'Creolising Europe', participants had unlimited access to both events.

**International Roma Day** was celebrated in San Francisco, *United States* on 6 April 2007, at the Croatian American Cultural Centre. The day included live music and Romani dance with Sani Rifati and the screening of the documentary film '**Not a Refugee**'.

Also in the U.S., the University of Montana School of Journalism promoted the '**New Roma Media: Taking Steps to Educate the Public on Roma Issues**' (August 2007).

The findings of the data show that seventeen countries held Roma movement activities within the twelve month time frame between March 2007 and March 2008. The Czech Republic had the most events followed by Hungary and then Belgium. The countries which held the least activities were Slovenia, Macedonia, Poland, United Kingdom, Argentina, Canada, Sweden, Germany and Slovakia. All of these countries held only one event each.

The most prevalent Roma movement activities took place in the form of festivals and celebrations, then conferences, governmental, education, and competition activities while training and media activities occurred least frequently within this study's time period (there were thirty six activities in total). The more high culture events took place in the form of creative competitions (i.e. the film competition in Berlin, the photography contest in the Czech Republic and the Roma World Day of exhibitions and performances also in the Czech Republic). Low culture events occurred in the form of festivals and media coverage, taking place mainly in Romania, Macedonia, India, Hungary, Czech Republic and Canada.

Figure 1. Number of Events Each Month

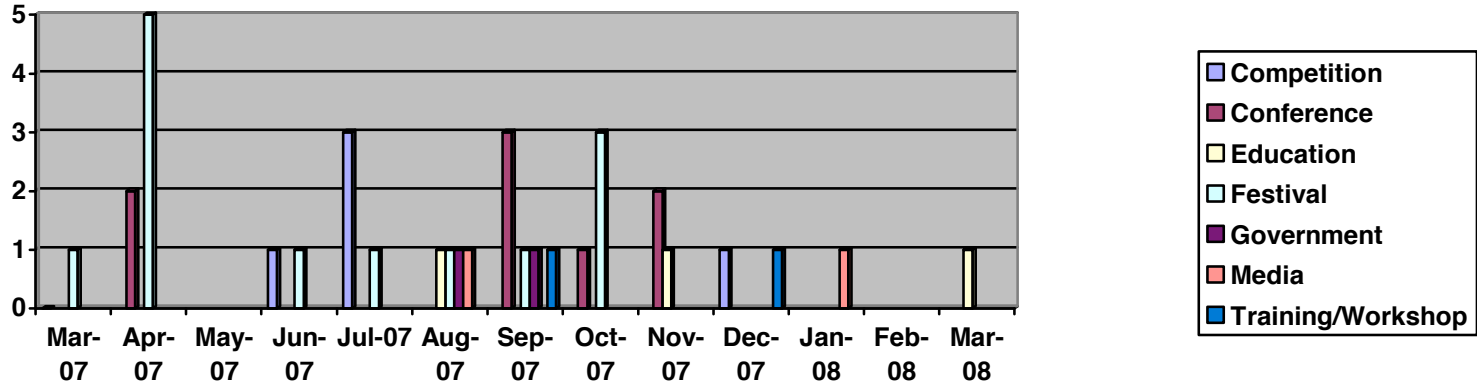
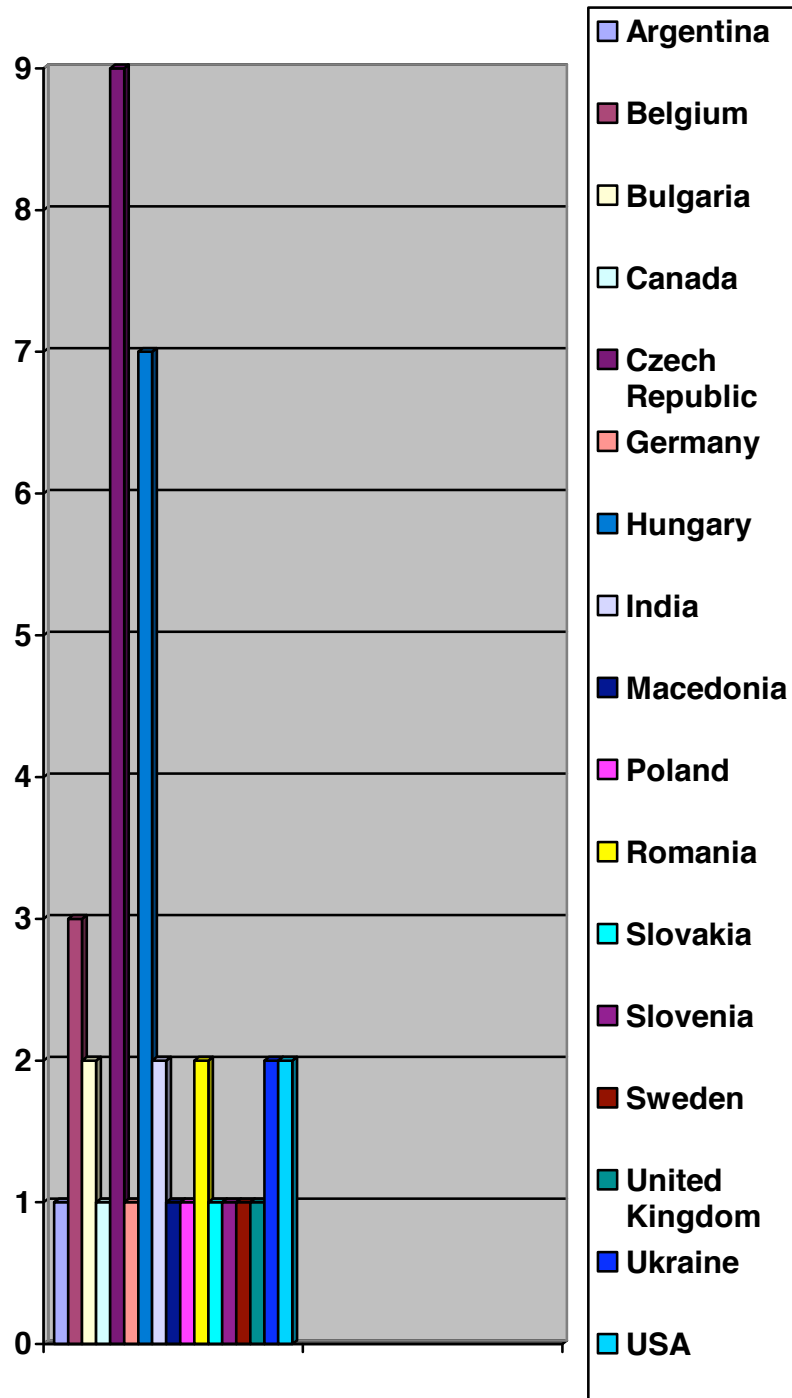


Figure 2. Number of events in each country between March 2007 and March 2008



## **CONCLUSION & SUMMARY**

It is clear that there has been rapid movement in Roma activities internationally between March 2007 and March 2008. However, some countries held more events than others. Reasons for this could include: a lack of resources within a country, the number of Roma focused humanitarian charities/organizations located within the territorial boundaries of a country or the number of Roma living in the country.

Typical activities throughout the year focused mainly on content of low culture i.e. celebrations and festivals. Logically, this phenomenon occurred due to the fact that these events are easier to organise. For example, on World Roma Day all countries could arrange low culture activities and celebrate in a similar manner, assuming the cheaper cost logic of choosing this type of event. Events such as education opportunities, and media/governmental progression were less likely to occur due to the nature of the lengthy process and increased costs.

There is an up-side however. On the whole this movement shows a positive indication that could be the start of rapid progression of the Roma Decade of Inclusion, which still has 7 years remaining within the 2005 – 2015 time frame.