

## **Decade Matching Fund**

### ***Highlights from 2006-2008: Challenging Anti-Roma Prejudice and Promoting Intercultural Dialogue***

In 2006, Roma Initiatives set up the Decade Matching Fund to support innovative projects that promote intercultural dialogue and challenge negative attitudes towards Roma. Through the Fund, Roma Initiatives has matched funds with public authorities, private foundations, television, publishers and corporations.

Recent highlights include the film "Looking for My Gypsy Roots" about award-winning Hungarian Roma film-maker Arpad Bogdan. Bogdan was placed in an orphanage at the age of four and the film narrates his personal odyssey and quest to resolve issues of Roma identity. "Looking for My Gypsy Roots" was broadcast on BBC World News in September 2008.

The Matching Fund also supported the award-winning "Mundi Romani" ([www.mundiromani.com](http://www.mundiromani.com)) television documentary series produced by the Romedia Foundation with Hungary's Duna Television. One episode, "Trapped – The Forgotten Story of the Mitrovica Roma," was nominated for Best News Documentary at the prestigious Monte Carlo Television Festival in June 2008. Director Katalin Barsony was the first Roma to be nominated in the 47 years of the festival. In September this episode won the Uzhgorod International Television Festival 2008 award for Best Television Production of the Year. Another episode in the series "Granada, the Maya Family," was selected as winner of the 5th Hungarian Ethnicity Film Festival Selected in March. The most recent episode, "Lashi Vita – Beautiful Life," which was filmed in Rome and Naples in August and September 2008, explores the plight of diverse Roma communities in the face of an unprecedented wave of anti-Gypsyism across Italy.

The Decade Matching Fund also provided funding support for the making of a documentary film entitled "A Wheel of the Wagon." Directed by a highly talented Roma woman, the film tells the story of one Roma family in Torino, Italy, over the last two decades and sets this narrative of integration against the wider context of rising intolerance. Currently under production, the documentary will be broadcast by RAI.

The Fund also supported a number of highly successful cultural events, including a four-week series of programs in Brussels, organized with the Hungarian Cultural Institute and the Romanian Information Center, to promote International Roma Day on April. Events ranged from world music and jazz concerts, to a fashion show and film festival, to the opening of "Chachipe" and "Paradise Lost" exhibitions with public panel discussions on Roma integration. Other cultural events and festivals which received match funding included the widely publicized "Athe Sam - We Are Here!" festival in June 2008. The "Chachipe" exhibition provided the backdrop to a week-long series of concerts, exhibitions, theater and dance performances, debates and discussions staged in the heart of Budapest attracted thousands of visitors including tourists and received much media coverage.

Funding was also provided to the Turn Cultural Association in Romania for the Second International Romani Art Festival in Timisoara, which combined a program of information and entertainment, exhibitions, concerts and performances to project a

positive image and at the same time draw public attention to the problems faced by Roma communities.

As part of OSI's wider commitment to build Roma capacity in mainstream media, the Fund supported a training program which provided 10-month internships for five Roma journalists at Hungarian Public Television and Radio. In addition to providing them with opportunities for direct input on Roma-related issues, the scheme provided the interns with opportunities to contribute to all mainstream productions. The direct outcome of the first round in 2007 was that all five trainees were hired in 2008 by major Hungarian television stations as reporters, anchors and news writers.

Another innovative capacity-building project supported by the Fund is the Fraternal Association of European Roma Law Enforcement Officers. This organization aims to promote equal opportunities, foster positive action to encourage recruitment of Roma as police officers, improve relations, challenge prejudices and mediate in conflicts between Roma communities and the police. The Association was founded in Budapest in 2006 with support from OSI and the Ministry of Justice and Law Enforcement of Hungary and with strategic advice from the UK and US National Black Police Associations. In a recent interview with the BBC, Captain Gyorgy Makula, who runs the program, estimated that in Hungary there are as few as 200 police officers of Roma origin in a force of 38,000. A new recruitment drive aims to increase the presence of Roma within the law enforcement agencies. Makula's ambition is "to change the mind of the people," to challenge populist prejudices about so-called Roma criminality and to "show to the Hungarian people, to the majority, among them police staff, that there are really excellent people in this community, committed to working with the police." (For updates on the national campaign, billboards, publicity etc. please see <http://www.romadecade.org/index.php?content=344>.)

The Fund also provided support for the "Mesed - Turning the Page Together" project, in which small groups of young Roma mothers meet together weekly with trained facilitators to learn the skills of storytelling. The sessions help mothers overcome their insecurities about reading aloud, improve their literacy skills, strengthen and enrich the bond with their children through a shared love of books. Mother of four Agi Racz described her experience: "At first I had doubts. Fears. But I felt good with my friends, and it helped me to get over my feelings of shame. If someone couldn't read she got encouragement from the others ... I realized that I can do it, that they won't laugh at me, that I can learn and I did learn." This warm sense of support was echoed by Marika Farkas, another mother of four: "the most important thing was that we had found a new family because the atmosphere was very warm, At home, it brings the whole family together. Mother, father and the children sit together and read and in this way the home becomes a warmer place because of these stories."

One of the stories of Hungary's past that has been elided from national history is the fate of the Roma at the hand of the Nazis and their Hungarian collaborators during the Holocaust. To counter the indifference and lack of awareness about the *Porrajmos*, the Fund has provided support to the Remembrance 1944-2004 Foundation for a two-year project to develop a teaching kit of visual and written materials, including interviews with survivors targeting 7-8th Grade, high schools and universities. In the second phase, the project will be extended to cover the Roma Holocaust in the Carpathian Basin. Also in 2008, the Fund supported the first Roma group to participate in the "March of the Living" in Hungary, part of an international educational program that brings young Jewish people from all over the

world on *Yom Hashoah*, Holocaust Memorial Day to march from Auschwitz to Birkenau.

Other initiatives in the sphere of education and awareness include support for the Forum Film Foundation to prepare the English edition of the "Roma Culture" multimedia DVD, a virtual treasure trove which contains fine art and photo archives, 400 paintings by Roma, over 1000 Roma related photos, four hours of documentary films, Roma music and poetry. The Hungarian version was created some years ago and is used in schools and universities across the country. Funding was also provided for the creation of an exhibition entitled "The Other" at the Museum of Ethnography in Budapest (October 2008 to April 2009). The exhibition, designed as a response to the increasing intolerance and surge in racism in Hungary, aims to foreground the sources and consequences of ethnocentrism, and challenge the negation of "the Other."