

A Study of the Rroma people of Romania and the key ministry approaches needed for the next decade.

Abstract

This paper explores the history, culture and lifestyle of the twenty-first century Roma people of Romania, during the past couple of decades. A literature review and discussions with those ministering among the Romanian-Roma today were then used to identify potential avenues for ministry over the next decade and beyond. The heterogeneity of the Roma across Romania revealed the limits of adequately capturing Roma diversity, rendering conclusions necessarily tentative. Stigmatisation, resistance to the gospel, and negative imprecations from their deplorable history, increase the need for awareness of the Romas' situation. The church is uniquely positioned to implement the ministry approaches raised; help the Roma sociologically; empower them to transform their communities; and to reflect their own contextualisation of the gospel and identity as Christian Roma. This research reflects the need for mission among the Roma, which starts with a vision for the next decade and influences Christians' ministry approaches for decades to come.

The Roma people of Romania, who are the focus of this paper, are a heterogeneous, ethnic minority group with a history formed over an estimated eight hundred year period (Revenga and Ringold et al. 2002, 4). After suffering a deplorable history and continuing stigmatisation, a more healthy and balanced understanding of this people group needs to be developed, in order to prevent fear and to encourage more Christians to accept the Roma as those in need of the gospel and a personal relationship with Christ who loves them. This research, therefore, aims to gain an overview of the biblical mandate of mission to the Romanian-Roma,¹ whilst portraying a realistic understanding of who they are according to their history, testimony and reception of the gospel. While recognising the diversity of definition for the term, this paper will understand 'mission' as the biblically informed and validated 'committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation... Our mission flows from and participates in the mission of God' (Wright 2006, 22-23).

A predominantly post-communist, European Union (EU) contextual exploration of Roma history will provide sufficient grounds for reflection and the identification of some implications and ministry approaches that should be considered when working with the Romanian-Roma in the future. In using the term 'ministry approaches,' this paper is referring to the potential and the actual approaches for ministry among the Roma people. There are various church groups in Romania, and this paper will refer particularly to the Evangelical Church, that is, 'Protestant Christians, churches, and organisations that hold to the full authority and reliability of the Bible, teach the necessity of personal conversion through faith in Christ, and emphasize personal piety and activism' (Ott and Straus 2010, xvi).

Alongside the observations of the writer of this paper,² contribution to this research has also been sourced by others who have personal experience and insight into how ministry approaches may be implemented and, therefore, how the gospel can be contextualised to the Roma situation.³ An

¹ Romanian-Roma refers to Roma who reside in Romania, yet still identify themselves as part of their distinct ethnicity.

² The writer is Australian, spent two-and-a-half years living in Timiș, and worked in part with Roma youth.

³ Contextualisation aims to present the gospel, whilst sustaining the worldview and practices of the Romanian-Roma providing they remain 'in harmony with the fundamentals of the Christian faith' (Musasiwa 2007, 66-71).

initial email was sent to seventy-nine contacts,⁴ in order to ascertain who has worked with the Roma in Romania or could establish further contacts. From the responses, thirteen qualitative questionnaires containing seven questions⁵ were emailed in English and/or Romanian. Of the eleven questionnaires returned, several required translation and all were followed up for either clarification and/or elaboration. The respondents⁶ covered eight *județ* (regions) of Romania, mainly from the west and south.⁷ Their answers were then assessed and applied.

Background of the Roma people and challenges facing them today

In spite of their historical origins from India (Achim 1998, 7-8; Revenga and Ringold et al. 2002, 1), Roma continue to be identified generically as nomadic peoples across Europe (Bancroft 1999, 7-8). The earliest documentation of Roma in Romania dates back to 1385 (Achim 1998, 13), and Hegburg and Ghosh (2007, 7) allude to the racist discourse that other Romanians have long associated with the Roma people. Through exonyms such as *Țigani*, Romanians impose on Roma an identity of 'otherness' and 'slave' (CEDIME-SE 2001, 6), thereby forging a derogative status and destiny (Achim 1998, 1). Roma have always been described by *Gadje*⁸ according to the pejorative term 'Gypsies'⁹ (Rombase nd.), and associated with witches and child-abductors. However, there also appears to have been an historic 'fairy tale' and nuanced portrayal of the 'Gypsies' as those who are beautiful, musically renowned and free (Laederich 2009, 4). These unrealistic associations have resulted in the stigmatisation of the people group as a whole, who prefer to be identified by the ethonym, 'Roma' (Bancroft 1999, 6; Fosztó 2007, 16).¹⁰

⁴ The initial contacts were those known in some way by the writer of this paper in some way, whether colleagues, organisations or other Christians who have some contact with Romania and the Roma people.

⁵ See Appendix C. The qualitative questionnaire was compiled with the assistance of several literary sources (Wadsworth, 1997; de Vaus, 2002) and through several known individuals who could help with the translation and cultural-sensitivity of the questions, based on their knowledge and experience of the stated cultures.

⁶ The 'respondents' referred to throughout this paper are the eleven people who responded to the qualitative questionnaire and discussions about the Roma. For the sake of identification, the eleven are identified according to their regions and/or ministry area.

⁷ See Appendix A

⁸ The term *Gadje* is used by Roma to refer to non-Roma.

⁹ From this unrealistic stereotype, the term *Gypsy* has been established as the more commonly asserted pejorative term for the Roma people in general.

¹⁰ 'Roma' is the preferred contemporary spelling by the Roma people, which distinguishes their identity from the Romanians, and has therefore been adopted for this paper. The more common English spelling Roma is still widely used.

According to the 2002 census, the Roma people represent about 2.5% of Romania's total population of 21,848,504;¹¹ that is, about 500,000 Roma are registered citizens of Romania (CIA 2012). However, estimates of numbers of Roma stretch as high as three million, which is the largest Roma population in the world (Laederich 2009, 4, 18). Efforts to identify and integrate them into Romanian society has proven almost impossible, due to a lack of legal identification resulting from their many home-births, illiteracy¹² and the choice of many Roma to claim dual-nationality (Laederich 2009, 18; CEDIME-SE 2001, 12, 14). This presents many obstacles to basic services, including enrolment in a mainstream school, employment, health care, and driver's licences.

Due to this people group's heterogeneity, many *Gadje* presume that all Roma live a nomadic lifestyle. On the contrary, after their initial migration, most Roma lived wherever they chose and were simply tolerated (Bancroft 1999, 8). This is especially true in Romania and the rest of the Balkans (Laederich 2009, 5). However, the results of the Second World War (WWII) and the communist era brought a great deal of both passive and active ethnogenesis upon the Romanian-Roma, as a leading Roma sociologist, Nicolae Gheorge, indicates (CEDIME-SE 2001, 17). Hence, their group identity was unintentionally moulded, and perhaps even deliberately manipulated, by its surrounding society and governing authorities, resulting in enforced habitation on the outskirts of towns and constructed ghettos (Bancroft 1999, 12; Achim 1998, 163, 166).¹³ This forced sedentarisation meant that the Roma never owned their own land or state, and so never developed 'their own administration or codified laws' (Laederich 2009, 12). Furthermore, 'Roma identity is thus not based on concepts such as homeland, nationality etc., but on their language, their culture and particularly on their traditions' (Laederich 2009, 12; cf. CEDIME-SE 2001, 16; Achim 1998, 191). Most integration attempts, such as the Roma Civic initiative, have resulted in further degradation, including unemployment, poverty and discrimination (Bancroft 1999, 12; CEDIME-SE 2001, 7).

Since Romania's induction into the EU in January 2007, a new type of sojourning Roma lifestyle has been identified. Drastic changes to the economy have particularly affected the Romanian-Roma, resulting in part from 'the lack of a qualified labour force' (CEDIME-SE 2001, 10). Without the freedom and acceptance of most Romanians, Roma seasonal-workers are now travelling

¹¹ July, 2012 est.

¹² Such illiteracy renders them unable to complete forms.

¹³ Another result was the introduction of a 'forced sterilisation' campaign.

around the Schengen countries¹⁴ to find work and provide for their families. Subsequent unemployment among the Roma has enhanced *Gadjes'* hostility toward the Roma. In related circumstances, Phillips (2010c) highlighted the socio-political controversy of France's actions toward the Roma, particularly emphasising the need to address the root cause of what drives them to 'abandon their homes and move across borders.' Countries such as France and Spain have acted in protest and attempted to take the law into their own hands by evicting the Roma, though not without backlash from the EU. Jaroka, (as cited in Pop 2010f) however, supported the Romas' right for movement within the Schengen area, as with all citizens who support the same values of 'family, hard work [and a willingness] to learn from other people'. However, Jaroka (as cited in Pop 2012c) also highlighted the need for 'a European solution,' as the means to integrate 'some 12 million Roma living on the continent.' Financial provision has been made available and pressure laid by the EU, for authorities and Non-Governmental organisations (NGOs) to take action ("Deporting Roma people" 2010, 4). Despite failed integration attempts thus far, statistical analyses, advocacy and activism provided by the authorities and NGOs, such as the World Bank, AIDRom and the European Romani Rights Centre, have helped to represent and raise awareness for the Roma (Hegburg and Ghosh 2007, 9).¹⁵

The Roma culture and lifestyle varies quite broadly across the country from region to region, this writer observed, because they have been influenced by the surrounding Romanian culture and other diverse cultures within Romania. Such influence has resulted in significant divisions, with at least forty different Roma groups identified and only two-thirds of Roma estimated to currently speak Romanes¹⁶ (Laederich 2009, 8; CEDIME-SE 2001, 16). In the Mureş region in particular, where one respondent resides and works in Bible translation with the Roma, there is a dominant Hungarian influence.¹⁷ Most Roma are at least bilingual and normally speak Romanian as a second mother tongue (Laederich 2009, 8-9).¹⁸ The diversity of languages and cultures in Romania alone is also due to the country's own transient history and border changes, as well as the current freedom of migration between Romania and the rest of the EU.

¹⁴ The Schengen Area is the 'free travel' zone, in which the border controls between 25 nations have been eliminated according to the EU policy developed in 1985 (See Appendix B).

¹⁵ One such initiative introduced by the European Roma Grassroots Organisation Network (Kuiper 2010, 14-15) is that of 'The Most Roma-Friendly Mayor'; however, its long-term benefits remain to be seen.

¹⁶ This is the Romas' mother tongue.

¹⁷ Approximately 75% of the population are Hungarian. There the Roma population occupies approximately 22% of the total region, with the 'non-Roma-Romanians' representing the remaining 3%.

¹⁸ All Romani dialects are very much influenced by their residing country. Romani is the collective term for the Roma people.

In addition to their history and current circumstances, some Roma cyclical patterns actually impede improvement of their situation by affecting their lifestyle and how *Gadje* respond to and marginalise them. Examples include non-conformist attitudes to the surrounding cultures and refusing to admit their ethnicity when applying for work, so as to protect their identity. Being a strongly collectivist society, social control is entrusted to the family nucleus and extended relatives, especially through the paternal lineage. Additionally, Roma pride themselves on their resourcefulness, folk traditions and music (CEDIME-SE 2001, 16). Yet, their shrewdness in being able to administer 'impression management' is also often misunderstood and viewed negatively by *Gadje*.

While many admit there has not been any great change of attitude either among the Roma communities themselves or among *Gadje* toward them following communism, some progress has been apparent since Romania's amalgamation with the EU. Whether it is a trajectory toward greater tolerance or greater acceptance is debateable. The power relations of the media and authorities who speak out against the Roma have certainly raised many relevant issues, thereby increasing the social distance between the rest of the world and the Roma (Elmer 2002, 93-95). Eight centuries of slavery, and the maltreatment they suffered as 'historical subjects' during the *Porrajmos* (the Holocaust), has caused the Romas' distrust and unreceptiveness of *Gadje* on the one hand, and the failure of *Gadje* to accept the Roma as fellow citizens on the other (Hegburg and Ghosh 2007, 8; CEDIME-SE 2001, 5-6). Many Romanians and those working with Roma are unaware that their attitude toward the Roma may be only prolonging this longstanding division and hurt (Elmer 2002, 96). Change needs to be made at every level of society, both by the Roma and *Gadje*, if healing is going to occur and trust- 'the glue of all good relationships'- is going to be rebuilt (Elmer 2002, 98; Hiebert 2009, 73).¹⁹

An exploration of potential and actual ministry approaches, according to the respondents

The qualitative questionnaires and follow-up discussions with respondents provided many helpful insights. The respondents originate from a variety of backgrounds and nationalities including American, Canadian, Hungarian, Romanian and Romanian-Roma. Their responses varied greatly, despite every respondent having lived and worked alongside Roma communities.²⁰ The questionnaires provided a diversity of Roma contexts and range of perspectives from which a

¹⁹ See also Eph 2:11-22; 4:4.

²⁰ However, the eight *județ* represented in Appendix A are not indicative of the Roma population and simply show where the respondents reside.

greater understanding of mission amongst the Romanian-Rroma can be obtained. With this in mind, respondents raised both long-standing issues and current developments in ministry with the Rroma, which, together with missiological, sociological and anthropological literature, provide consideration for future ministry with the Romanian-Rroma.

The initial questions asked the respondents to indicate the extent of their involvement with, and knowledge of, the Romanian-Rroma. One Timiș respondent attended integrative schools and other community groups alongside Rroma, and supervised Rroma workers within their vocations. Another respondent in the same *județ* hired Rroma as workers within their organisation in order to provide education facilities for the Rroma children and youth. Six respondents, all ministering in different *județ*, predominantly focused their ministry on teaching the Rroma children and youth about Jesus through camps, Vacation Bible Schools (VBS), weekly programs involving sports, crafts and food provision, Bible studies, and by simply establishing relationships. Aside from regular programs with the children, two respondents ran regular Bible studies for Rroma women. Although only the respondent in Mureș was involved in Bible translation,²¹ she noted that they had a network of people working in various parts of Romania and other nearby countries.

Whilst knowledge about the Rroma lifestyle was sought in the questionnaire, the respondents yielded little additional insight to that previously found in the literature, and several expressed difficulty in expanding their knowledge of the Rroma in their area. However, the Salaj respondent shared that ‘they have different customs, traditions and sometimes languages in villages that are only separated by a few miles.’ Three respondents also alluded to the fact that Rroma tend to be raised and remain in the same village for most if not all of their life, and that decisions and conflict are dealt with collectively (Elmer 2002, 136-138). In fact, the Vâlcea respondent went so far as to say that the 500-600 Rroma in his area originate from little more than two families, and that those who leave the communities usually do so only on the basis of finding work to support their family.²² Significantly, every respondent raised both the issues of the two-way discrimination between the *Gadje* and Rroma, and the diversity between the Rroma themselves, who may enjoy equivalent living standards with the rest of society or endure squatter conditions (Revinga and Ringold et al. 2002, 8).

²¹ This team was working on several of the Romanian-influenced dialects of Rromanes, including the *Vlax* dialects and a *Caprathian* dialect.

²² Achim (1998, 206) similarly records the Rromas’ distinctive family organisation.

The questionnaire proceeded to explore the potential and actual ministry approaches according to the respondents' awareness. All the approaches mentioned resulted from their own ministry contexts or knowledge of their colleagues' participation. Three respondents involved in Bible training, itinerant teaching and church planting respectively, raised the need for church planting among Roma. The Salaj respondent's organisation has seen ten churches planted among Roma villages by evangelical missionaries, with a further three currently in the process. According to this respondent, these church plants are established once a relationship with the community has been initiated, often through the Roma children, enabling the 'planting of seeds and investment in the future leaders of the church.' The lack of ministry workers was seen as the main obstacle to this approach, whilst the young median age of the Roma, and their receptivity to the gospel, were two reasons given for its value. Although it may have been assumed, it seemed significant that not one respondent raised prayer as a key ministry approach. Köstenberger and O'Brien (2001, 92) highlight Jesus' exhortation to his people to intercede in prayer for the lost, as well as for more workers, as a crucial part of mission (Luke 10:2; Matt 9:38).

A Cluj respondent commended some known Romanian churches in his area for persisting with the integration of Roma into their local congregation. However, he also acknowledged that this is rarely seen in Romania, and that most still 'encourage the Roma to have their own churches.' He admits that it is 'a hard balance to distinguish what is more beneficial for both Romanians and Roma. On the one hand, being part of the same family who worship the same Lord is ideal, but sadly practicality and history often gets in the way.' The Roma not only need to be trained to work with their own people, but, more importantly, to learn how to distinguish between cultural values, traditional church values and biblical values (Hiebert 2009, 32).

A core value for any ministry approach, which ten of the respondents referred to, was that of trust (Mayers 1974, 31-42; Hiebert 1985, 83-85). Elmer (2002, 87) also acknowledges the need for acceptance and openness when approaching another culture for '[t]hey get us started in the right direction and help us stay on the upper track toward building positive connections with people who are different.' Whilst within 'the 'Gypsy Way,' [there] is an ethos of sharing with and thereby helping each other' (Acton and Mundy 1997, 89), the Roma need to be more willing to let 'outsiders' into their communities. However, as the Salaj respondent observed, 'for the most part they are curious about what you have to share.' Building trust through time-investment, regular routines, keeping one's word, and faithfulness in accepting the Roma as people of value to God were considered important evidence that Christian workers are serving not only the Lord but also

the Roma people (Rom 15:7). Through an establishment of trust, 'the heart-problem [can begin to] be treated,' said one Timiș respondent, who further identified the biblical principles of grace (Eph 2:8-9), whilst balancing the place works have in faith (Jas 2:17).

Reflecting their paternalistic culture, Bible teaching and discipleship for the Roma men in particular has shown positive results, teaching them how to be leaders both within the church and their community.²³ Although nine respondents were hesitant about the means by which material hand-outs are given to the Roma, since dependency, manipulation and stealing were common reactions by the Roma, half the respondents identified the potential approach for ongoing support and training for the Roma working with their own people. The Salaj respondent acknowledged this initiation as a necessary component of an exit-strategy in church planting, to prevent any collapse in church structure when the missionaries leave, as well as any sense of dependency. They, therefore, need to be taught how to minister and model to their people in grace and truth (John 1:14-17; 4:23-24; Rom 1:5; Phil 2:5; 1 John 3:18), which contrasts starkly with their cultural values (Steffen 2005, 2-4). Four of these nine respondents also emphasised the frequent cultural-ignorance of secular *Gadje*, but also some Christians, who approach the Roma whilst holding their own agendas and superior attitudes, rather than contextualising their vision or strategies.

Eight respondents further addressed the illiteracy and poor-education amongst the Roma, highlighting education as a potential ministry approach. Achim (1998, 206) links the Romas' poor understanding of the purpose of education to the Communist era, when 'no significant connection' was established between education, occupation and income. Therefore, contra to history, Roma need to understand the importance of education for their living standards (Achim 1998, 206). Consequently, two respondents advocated the temporary removal of children from their villages to enable adequate concentration and provision. Alternatively, five suggested that, despite potential opposition from both the older Roma generation and even Romanians, education should be enacted within the Roma communities. The Mureș respondent also raised concern about the lack of use of their mother tongue in education conducted outside the community, which results in many Romanian-Roma only hearing the gospel in Romanian. Given these caveats, the eight respondents agreed that, by improving accessibility to education (Revenga and Ringold et al. 2002, 33-34) and by introducing biblical principles, Roma can be

²³ In contrast, Acton and Mundy (1997, 86) deny that Roma 'construct their society in the image of a lineage preserving its patrimony.'

encouraged to send their children to school and 'work heartily, as for the Lord' (Col 3:23). As one Timiș respondent acknowledged, this will also, in turn, encourage the Roma to respect what they invest in (Matt 6:21).

Nine respondents identified a need for the church and community to utilise the Romas' orality, which is a key aspect of most Romanian-Roma.²⁴ Potential approaches to ministry were therefore suggested, including contextualised discipleship, worship, storytelling and folk stories, discussion-based Bible studies and classes, and mentoring strategies, which may hopefully encourage inclusive participation, whether literate or not. Fosztó (2007, 32-33) elaborates that media technologies can also 'perhaps close the gap between literate and non-literate audiences,' and Steffen (2005, 3) similarly addresses the value and potential pitfalls of storytelling to create 'numerous new pedagogical and theological dynamics which, when gone undetected, can easily skew the Story.' The respondent in Salaj also saw the necessity of personally inviting the Roma, particularly the women, to be involved in the church and other activities, since many are fearful of failure and the opinions and expectations of others. Elmer (2002, 23) furthermore encourages a contextualised approach, allowing for cultural differences, that is, 'all those things, which the Scripture does not directly or in principle identify as sinful, wrong or destructive' (Rom 14, 1 Cor 8).

Further responding to their orality, the Bible translator indicated the need to address the many English songs and hymns which have been 'badly translated and badly sung' amongst the Roma. This is because the Roma, she said, 'have musicians, they love music, they sing and dance... we need to utilise their talents and skills in church and as a way to teach biblical principles, such as stewardship and acts of service.' Since, to a degree, every 'true' Roma should be able to sing, dance or perform folk tales (Acton and Mundy 1997, 99), the 'greatest resource we have is the Roma themselves,' suggests the Alba respondent. Yet additional resources were also suggested by respondents as useful for encouraging the illiterate, and even the literate Roma, to accept and understand the gospel, such as 'The Jesus Film,' a Romani Christian radio program and Romani music. Although two respondents already utilize existing government resources, such as literacy programs and financial-aid, three respondents said they would love to see more Romani resources developed. Tools and methods can be established through joint initiatives, including

²⁴ Acton and Mundy (1997, 18) also raise the need to prevent the Romas' orality from becoming static in written form, for 'in spoken form words are repeated and transformed everywhere they are used' (Edwards and Sienkewicz 1990, 1-3).

data collection by authorities and NGOs, which may provide stronger and more efficient resources for ministering to the Roma (Open Society Institute 2010, 33-34).

Potential and actual approaches to ministry

Missionaries have too often mistakenly approached the Roma, and other people groups, as if they are a *tabula rasa* (blank slate) (Tennent 2007, 115). However, Acton and Mundy (1997, 87) indicate that it would take a rupture of their past to create such a blank slate. Naively presenting changes to the Romas' 'issues,' without understanding what they have endured and their current worldview, only hinders their further acceptance of the message of Christ (Webster 1990, 561; Hiebert 1985, 50). Contextualisation involves presenting the gospel,²⁵ such that it connects with a people group's language, penetrates their worldview, meets their deepest needs, and allows them to remain within their own culture, while following Christ. Observation and research revealed a number of cultural values and worldview themes important to the Romanian-Roma, which affect their reception to the gospel, and thereby affect the way mission should be enacted and contextualised among them. With their heterogeneity in mind, Roma communities should be approached on an individual community basis. The Roma are spread all over the world, but their concentration in Romania presents a helpful basis for understanding those elsewhere. Their heterogeneity and evolution in Romania presents a unique challenge for missionaries to attempt to understand their identity and minister to them.

Roma identity expresses itself through cultural-norms, and uniquely in their language and creative mediums (CEDIME-SE 2001, 18). From the time Roma musicians performed for the Ottoman army, music has been acknowledged as integral to the life of the Roma (Laederich 2009, 11; CEDIME-SE 2001, 16). Furthermore, folklore identifies the 'quintessence of events experienced by a community,' carrying the need to convey 'the deep affective resonance of what they have lived through at important moments' (Slobin 1996, 156). It is through such cultural expressions that the Roma may do well to express their worship and identity, which, when found in Christ, is all the more edifying. The Holy Spirit is able to work in the hearts of non-Christians so they may be personally convicted by the truth of God's Word. Therefore, Romas' creative mediums such as story-telling, folk tales, songs and poetry could be used to open the way to an understanding of salvation, beginning with the foundation of the Old Testament (Persaud 2010). This would provide a scriptural foundation for an understanding of Jesus' gracious offer to cleanse

²⁵ Whiteman (2007, 2) defines contextualisation as the manner in which 'the Gospel and culture relate to one another across geographic space and down through time.'

all people's defilements by His blood's sufficient sacrifice, rendering all who believe as saved and righteous in God's sight (1 Pet 2:6; Heb 9:13-14; 12:2).

The more Christians are involved in ministering to the Roma, 'the more we realize the reality of social, cultural, and historical contexts, the depth of the differences between them, and the difficulties in dealing with these differences' (Hiebert 2009, 23). The complex nature of any post-WWII and post-communist context challenges the faith of those involved and reveals a variety of concerns that the church needs to address, including the atheistic nature of communism, socialism, materialism and secularism, as Sauca (1997, 539-542) recognised.

A key ministry consideration that needs to be approached well is making the gospel applicable to the Roma community (Elmer 2002, 133). Therefore, an awareness is needed on behalf of *Gadje* to prevent ethnocentrism from imposing outside frameworks and strategies upon the Roma (Elmer 2002, 30; Hiebert 1985; 97). Whilst changes to infrastructure, education and healthcare, for example, can be more rapidly improved, integration 'implies participation and a two-way process in societies, which requires a change in attitudes' (CCME 2011, 2). A more accurate approach and methodology may be enabled through the building of relationships with Roma. An ingrained anti-Roma attitude continues to be expressed, especially in light of their history as slaves, and many Roma are still used as scapegoats for crime and ethnic animosities and anxieties in society (CEDIME-SE 2001, 7; Fosztó 2007, 20). While both history and present circumstances show that Roma are often defined by their previous slave-masters, or by various appellations of either their trade-skills or locations (Rombase nd.), the Roma need to hear that their identity can be found in Christ and the gospel can be incarnated in their culture, 'without losing its distinct divine nature' (Hiebert 2009, 25, 31).

With the high birth rate, low median age and short life-expectancy of the Roma in Romania,²⁶ questions are being raised as to where the priorities of ministry approaches lie. Cultural traditions, such as wedding early,²⁷ impurity and ritual purity concepts, superstitions, 'initiation' ceremonies, and, what some have labelled, a 'fertility cult,' all contribute to the challenge of

²⁶ Whilst current statistics are inconclusive and vary, CEDIME-SE (2001, 11-13) estimates the fertility rate to be 'double that of the majority population,' with a median age of 25.1 and 33.9% aged between 0-14 years old. Life expectancy for Romanian-Roma averages between 50-55 years old, which is 15 to 20 years less than other Romanians.

²⁷ According to statistics reported in 2000 by the Research Institute for Quality Life (cited by CEDIME-SE 2001, 12), Roma women's first marriage age is estimated at 19 years old.

effective ministry with Roma, because they trump religious importance (Laederich 2009, 12-13). Reaching the younger generations before they are handed traditional roles can, therefore, influence whole families, providing that the authority and respect of the adults is not undermined. However, interpreted Christianity must not suppress and replace the 'good' in the Roma culture, such as their collectiveness, and the imposition of 'universal idioms of humanity and individuality should be taught with caution' (Hegburg and Ghosh 2007, 10).²⁸ It is important to reassure Roma that it is good for them to simultaneously be Roma and Christian and be taught that all who believe are of one family, Christ's family (Gen 1:26; Acts 10:34) (Fosztó 2007, 38; Hiebert 2009, 72).

Educating *Gadje* about the Roma and their history, being reluctant to impose ideas, and displaying patience with regard to any changes, will help establish a platform of trust and relationship through which Roma can be introduced to the gospel (Kuiper 2010, 10, 98). CCME (2011, 3) further supports the need for mutual trust and respect to be established, as opposed to merely reducing chauvinism. Their atrocious history helps explain Romas' fear of change, difficulty in trusting and accepting those who try to control them, and their development of survival and adaption strategies in response (CEDIME-SE 2001, 15-16). It is for this reason that one cannot assume 'instant credibility' when approaching Roma (Elmer 2002, 101). Furthermore, many of their family nuclei and traditional socio-cultures have been destroyed, resulting in a greater resistance, mistrust and deliberate separation from mainstream society (Rombase nd.). For Roma, the weight of one's words and oaths is important, affecting their level of trust toward others (Fosztó 2007, 109-110, 119). Biblical evidence supports this ministry approach to help change the mindset of both *Gadje* and Roma about how they relate to one another (Deut 15:10-11; Mark 12:30-31; Rom 12:9-18; 2 Cor 9:12-13; 1 John 3:16-20), but also helps prevent the Christian witness from being like a "clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13:1).

As yet, many Roma remain on the outskirts of society and are unable to make changes without outside help (Wolfe-Murray 2007). The CCME (2011, 3) warns of the victimisation that results from giving the Roma hand-outs, and recognises the need for them to be empowered to actively initiate both socio-economic change and integration into society. Therefore, 'Impression management' could be useful in the areas of public relations and employment as they adapt and develop self-control in learning to relate to the wider society. Whilst learning to resist the

²⁸ Even within their own tribunals exclusion from their community is often used as the strongest form of punishment (Laederich 2009, 12-13).

temptation of falling back into their traditional mindset, if nurtured well, Roma can themselves contribute quality attributes to their places of employment, schools, and homes. The high illiteracy rate and need for education amongst the majority of Roma is well recognised, and working to educate the Roma will enable them to contribute to society with generational change, opening doors into the workforce and other basic lifestyle changes such as hygiene and health improvements (Wolfe-Murray 2007).

The Evangelical Church needs to acknowledge the actions being taken by secular and religious authorities and organisations, in order to help establish a more justifiable approach to their ministry. Going back to the core biblical doctrines and stripping back the traditions would help to reveal the priorities, foundations and trajectory of their church. Accepting the need not only to reach the lost but also to model love, compassion and the ways of the Kingdom to others, should be taught as an ethos and doctrine within the church, since this reveals our inclusive relation with God and reflects the church's responsibility to act (Matt 7:21; 1 Cor 9:22-23; 15:58) (Justinian 1967, 157-160; Hiebert 2009, 32; Lingenfelter and Mayers 2003, 15). Allowing for the Holy Spirit to guide the Roma, under the authority of Scripture, rather than by *Gadje* imposing "correct" theology upon them, will enable a lasting inner conviction (Elmer 2002, 30).

The ministry mandate for Christian Romanians includes the Roma in their own backyard. Acton (Persaud 2010) depicts the success of attempts to contextualise the gospel so that it is 'not a foreign ideology [but] a gospel that has taken on Romani colors.' Church congregations should combine their gifts and abilities to work out how they can practically implement this biblical mandate. Accommodating ministry toward the Romas' oral lifestyle, in particular, is a clearly crucial method, for, according to Goody (2000, 11), 'literacy cannot be seen as a substitute for orality, [as] orality plays a major role in most spheres of life even in fully literate societies.' Involving Roma music and instruments, encouraging them to write their own music and teaching them to apply the gospel to their lives through discipleship and various dialogues will empower Roma to implement change as the stakeholders of their communities (Kuiper 2010, 13, 69).

From the above research, many categories have been raised as potential and actual approaches to ministry amongst Romanian-Roma. The heterogeneity of the Roma across Romania alone limits the ability to adequately capture Roma diversity, rendering conclusions as necessarily tentative (Lingenfelter and Mayers 2003, 21). The survey methodology allows for this diversity in

definition and reveals a more nuanced understanding of the variety among the Roma groups in Romania. Resistance to the gospel results from the Romas' deplorable history and the many superior and inappropriate approaches toward them.

Whilst every person is a product of their heritage, (Lingenfelter and Mayers 2003, 19), affirming and building upon the positive contributions of the Roma worldview, and helping to raise awareness of the negative imprecations, will prevent them from the victimisation of their history (Elmer 2002, 23). Since the world is rapidly changing, the longer action is delayed in helping the Roma to acculturate, the harder it will be to enable them to be accepted, have a voice and hold a more positive contribution within the wider society. Integration and change of disadvantaged communities, such as the Romanian-Roma, can take decades, so there is a need for long-term investment to achieve sustainable solutions. Guidance from experts and those who have experience in working with the Roma is a helpful step in preventing the reoccurrence of the Romas' deplorable history. The Evangelical church is in a unique position to be able to implement potential and actual ministry approaches to help the Roma at a sociological level, and, more importantly, transform their communities into those who live and reflect their own contextualised knowledge of the gospel.

Awareness, openness and trust, as addressed by Elmer (2002, 87) and Mayers (1974, 31-42), help Christians 'to reconsider the pedagogical "story" [that is often] unconsciously accepted and biased' (Steffen 2005, 2). Ministry approaches need to be redefined in order to prevent any such repetition of events and in order to reconcile the relationship between Roma and *Gadje*, and, more importantly, between Roma and God (Mayers 1974, 33). Therefore, when Roma become Christians, they should not surrender being Roma, but rather become 'better' Roma, who help their own people, just as the Romanian-Roma respondent is now doing. In fact, there is both significant reaffirmation of the Roma culture in conjunction with transformed hearts and communities, which should become an avenue for expression of their identity as Roma. This research reflects the need for mission among the Roma, starting with a vision for the next decade, but may influence Christians' ministry approaches for decades to come.

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Appendix A: This map is not representative of the location of the Roma population in Romania, but solely indicative of the eight *județ* or regions where the eleven questionnaire respondents reside. Thus, three respondents reside in Timiș, two in Cluj and the remaining *județ* have one each. (NB: Bucharest is Romania's capital, though it is not one of the regions referred to.)



Appendix B: The Schengen Area is the 'free travel' zone, in which the border controls between 25 nations have been eliminated according to the EU policy developed in 1985 (AXA Schengen 2012).



Appendix C: (Blank Questionnaire)

Qualitative Questionnaire

Project Title:

“The Roma people in Romania with key ministry approaches needed for the next decade.”

Personal Details *(for researcher’s eyes only):*

- Name: _____
- Gender: Male / Female *(please circle)*
- Age: [18-24] [25-34] [35-45] [46-60] [60+] *(please circle)*
- Current permanent-location/address: _____
- Nationality: _____
- Occupation: _____
- Email: _____

Questions:

I have provided the questions below, but please write your answers on separate paper with as much information as you feel able:

1. To what extent have you been involved, both in the past and the present, with the Roma people of Romania?
2. What do you already know about the Roma as a people group of Romania?
3. What *ministry approaches*²⁹ are you aware of, that are already being undertaken in working with the Roma people of Romania?
4. What do you feel are the key ministry approaches needed over the next decade for the Roma people of Romania?
5. How do you think these key ministry approaches over the next decade could be achieved? And what would be needed to make this start to happen?
6. What *resources*³⁰ are available that you are aware of in regards to both the Roma as a people group and in working in Christian ministry and mission with the Roma of Romania?
7. Is there any additional information you wish to contribute?

²⁹ *Ministry approaches* refers both to the potential and the actual approaches for ministry.

³⁰ *Resources* could be anything from books to websites, articles and curriculums etc, that refers to the Roma people or are being used with the Roma.