

Strengthening the Reformed Church to help the disadvantaged

Context

The Reformed Church in Hungary (RCH) covers some 16 per cent of the population with roughly 1,200 church parishes. It is the country's second largest religious community and a key social institution. It meets its social responsibility by advocating for Roma and refugees. HEKS/EPER has cultivated decades-long ties with the RCH and supports its project work as part of church cooperation.

Compared to the rest of the country, not only do the Roma have a much lower educational level, high poverty rates, poor job opportunities and a life expectancy 15 years shorter, but living alongside the majority population is also very tense in places. Unlike almost any other organization, RCH church parishes can potentially build bridges and ease tensions between population groups. HEKS/EPER assists Reformed parishes in developing projects for disadvantaged families, children and young people, in the fields of education and life skills and fosters the long-term development of church parishes into communities that promote inclusion.

Building bridges is a key aspect of dealing with refugees and migrants. Most Hungarians have very little contact with people with a migration background. They base their perception of them on the often heated public discourse. HEKS/EPER is keen to help the RCH raise awareness among its parishes of the situation of refugees, facilitate encounters and promote inclusion for refugees.

Objectives, priorities, activities

Roma children and adolescents receive remedial education at school and refugee children are assisted in becoming integrated into the Hungarian school system. Reformed schools help to counter the trend towards segregation in primary schools by including children from educationally disadvantaged families in their regular





classes. Recreational activities and youth groups open up new fields of experience for underprivileged children and young people and help them develop life prospects.

RCH parishes are also being sensitized to the situation of marginalized population groups. Reformed Church parishes build bridges between segments of the population through programmes geared to the Roma and refugees, face-to-face meetings and jointly organised events. Volunteers are trained in both fields for participation in local projects to facilitate the inclusion of Roma and/or refugees.

Target groups

Among the target groups are Roma children and adolescents, their families as well as refugees and migrants who have settled permanently in Hungary. Another target group comprises the Reformed parishes and their members and volunteers.

Partnerships, networks, alliances, memberships

In Hungary, HEKS/EPER cooperates with the RCH and its parishes. The RCH cultivates partnerships with other local stakeholders and networks. The transfer of knowledge or the maintenance of relations between Switzerland and Hungary are key programme components. These activities take place through partnerships between church parishes, group travel or the sharing of knowhow.

HEKS/EPER on the ground

Projects are managed by local project coordinators who maintain close contact with HEKS/EPER. The HEKS/EPER Desk Officer visits Hungary regularly.

Topics and working approach

HEKS/EPER has been working together with the RCH for decades now. The sharing of knowledge and experiences between Hungary and Switzerland always forms part of this work. In the future, this could also include working with refugees and migrants, in which both HEKS/EPER and churches in Switzerland are involved.

Country:

Hungary

HEKS/EPER No.: 394.900

Responsibility:

Angela Elmiger,
Desk Officer for Eastern Europe

Contact:

Swiss Church Aid (HEKS/EPER)
Communication
Seminarstrasse 28
8042 Zurich
Switzerland
Phone: +41 44 360 88 10
E-mail: projektdienst@heks.ch
www.heks.ch/english