

Reaching Roma on the world's fringe for Christ

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REACHING ROMA YOUTH – In a squatter village near Medgidia, Romania, a group of Roma children play near the railroad tracks. A Roma Bible study meets each week in this village, known as the Dallas community. (IMB PHOTO)

Forfeiting a starting position on a professional soccer team didn't make sense to the parents of Mihail Stoica, a talented young Roma believer from the mountains near Buzau, Romania.

For Stoica's Roma Gypsy people – an ostracized, poverty-stricken people group dispersed throughout the world – his chance to rise above his status was a rare opportunity too good to pass up. Yet for Stoica, being influenced by the professional sports lifestyle came at too great a cost to stay in the game.

"I was playing soccer, my personal idol," Stoica says. "I didn't think it was a sin to play soccer, but then I realized the price that came with that. So I left playing soccer and just followed Jesus Christ."

In the summer of 2006, Stoica obeyed God by joining eight other young believers from across Romania

to travel to a foreign city and country – his Samaria – to tell others about Jesus Christ. These growing disciples are the result of the International Mission Board's most developed work with the Roma.

Hope for the Roma

The end result of Roma reaching Roma is the hope of other Gypsy work that spans Europe, Northern Africa and the Middle East and just recently into South America.

The Roma people made their way to Europe in the 14th century after being evicted from their native India. As early as the 1500s, many were removed from parts of Europe and relocated to South America. Others traveled into parts of Northern Africa and the Middle East by force or by choice.

These staggered diasporas have caused the Roma to put down roots among people who despise them not



only for their dark skin, but also for their poverty, illiteracy and poor living conditions.

Wherever their travels take them, Gypsies tend to adopt the local language and beliefs while still maintaining their own. The Romani language, strong family relationships and lifestyle characteristics unite the more than 10 million Roma worldwide.

Tight family circles

Best known for their wagons, fortunetelling, colorful clothing and parties, the Roma are a proud, passionate people who fight against the loss of their culture and family circles.

To share with Roma, IMB workers and national partners reach out through literacy education, teaching job skills and using Bible storying to evangelize and disciple new believers.

Today, although this scattered people group may vary in dialect or location, IMB workers are able to minister along family and cultural lines to bring the Roma to Christ and train them to reach their own people.

“We hope to have our own leaders, our own missionaries,” says Jim Whitley, an IMB worker who recently transferred from Romania to work among the Gypsies in South America.

“When the Roma begin to do their own evangelism, they begin to cross barriers so quickly. A real indigenous church-planting movement. For me, that’s the ultimate goal.”



WINDOWS TO THE SOUL – In a Roma village near Krakow, Poland, the eyes of a young Roma mother reveal the hopelessness her people face without Christ as the Roma cling to a religion of superstitions and cultural traditions. (IMB PHOTO)