This increase is largely ascribable to immigration, principally from Romania, the country with the highest number of Gypsy inhabitants.

From the early twentieth century to 1945

By the time of the 1893 census, the great majority of Hungary's Gypsies were regarded as "permanently settled", with around 20,000 classed as "resident in one place for prolonged periods" (or "semi-nomadic" in the official parlance), and barely 9,000 regarded as nomadic or "vagrant".

It seems that this tripartite division of the Gypsy population had ended by the time régime under Horthy assumed power in 1919, for henceforth official documents make no distinction between nomadic and settled Gypsies but refer simply to Gypsies. In view of the seriousness of the social problems that Gypsies (still) posed in the then-new régime, innumerable proposals for resolving them were put forward by public bodies and private individuals. Parliament itself debated the issue on some half a dozen occasions, though never getting any further than referring the matter – ostensibly for preliminary examination – to one parliamentary committee or another. Since the legislative process always got bogged down at this point, the entire bundle of issues was downgraded to an administrative matter in which ministries – the Ministry of Internal Affairs especially – took the lead. By default, oversight of Gypsy settlement and integration fell to various government agencies, such as local offices of commerce, education and defence. Under this pretext, Gypsies in many places found, for example, that they were often denied permits to conduct trade, or those coming from outside a county might be banned from its markets, whilst a 1931 decree of the Ministry of Commerce debarred Gypsies in general from practising their trades outside their county of residence or from using horse-drawn carts in their occupation. In the educational field the aim of settlement led to new school premises being constructed (the villages of Ondód, Pankasz, Bicske and Pankota are mentioned in contemporary sources), though admittedly these ran into big problems of getting children registered (local notaries were not particularly zealous in pursuing this), with the result that no more than one Gypsy child in five ore six actually attended school.

Health provision for Gypsies in practice amounted to no more than a series of measures that were taken with the object of preventing the spread of infectious diseases. That did not stop them being blamed for spreading epidemics of cholera and smallpox during the last decade of the nineteenth century and two separate, protracted outbreaks of typhus during the 1920s and 1930s.

Social policies presented a characteristic duality in matters relating to Gypsies. On the one hand, begging was officially forbidden, but in practice it was not merely tolerated but directly institutionalised inasmuch as Gypsies were allowed to beg provided they visited a different street on each day of the week. Child protection, which falls under this heading, displayed similar curiosities. After 1901, children who had been legally abandoned, and thus had no carer who could be compelled to look after them, would be committed to a foundlings' home. A radically new situation arose with Ministry of Internal Affairs Decree 6000/1907, under which children whose circumstances were deemed to have exposed them to moral corruption, or who had already embarked on that path, were also classed as abandoned. The authorities used grounds of moral corruption to commit many Gypsy children who were living with their own families to foundlings' homes. As was subsequently revealed, they saw this as a way of solving their Gypsy problem as they fully expected the populations under threat to flee the country *en masse*.

History of the Gypsies from 1945 to the 1989 change in régime

Up until the German occupation of Hungary in 1944, virtually all the country's estimated Gypsy population of some 200,000 had adopted a settled mode of life, and such decrees as were issued to regulate them (policing and epidemiological surveillance) were directed mainly at the few who continued a nomadic lifestyle. A process of gradual marginalisation and decline of the traditional Gypsy occupations had already got under way by the time Austro-Hungary was recast constitutionally as a dual monarchy, in 1867, but thanks to the rapid economic growth and liberalism of the ensuing period Gypsies who lost those trades were able to find new means of subsistence. Between the two world wars, however, the disappearance of the older occupations became precipitate, and Gypsies were increasingly ill-equipped to keep up with the pace of technological and social change, interspersed as it was with jarring economic slumps. The situation was exacerbated by a large influx of Gypsies from surrounding states, since a much diminished pool of employment opportunities now had to be shared amongst a growing number of Roma. As a result, the widening disparities in material, social and cultural status between them and the dominant Hungarian community accelerated alarmingly: "On the brink of our liberation, Hungary's Gypsy population stood, relatively speaking, at a nadir in its history", István Kemény pointed out in his report on a series of research projects that were conducted in 1971.

The plight of the Roma was made all the worse by the ever more sharply hostile thrust of official action against them following the German occupation. Ideas of "re-educating", "civilising" or concentrating them in forced-labour camps of one kind or another had already been toyed with as ways of handling the "Gypsy question". A process of mustering so-called "labour service" battalions was by then already under way and after March 19th 1944 this was rapidly switched into a policy of genocide as the solution to the problem. The declared original aim of the new Nazi masters and the leaders of Hungary's home-grown Arrow-Cross movement was merely to deport the country's nomadic Gypsies, but since few, if any, such were to be found, entire communities of fully settled Gypsies were carted off to death camps. How many fell victim to the slaughter has not been convincingly documented to the present day; what are thought to the most reliable

researches put the total at 5,000, but a strongly disputed estimate made by the Committee for the Victims of Nazism Persecution suggests a figure of over 30,000.

For Hungary's Gypsies, then, the end of World War II signified, above all else, survival and escape from destruction. The ensuing brief period of democracy up to 1947 or 1948 considerably altered their relations to society as a whole. The pre-1945 authoritarian régime had refused to acknowledge Gypsies as anything but second-class citizens, whereas democratic Hungary proclaimed equality of rights. Although the country's newly constituted police force, which in rural areas took over the role of the earlier semi-military gendarmerie, was indeed deployed as an instrument in the gathering political struggle, it was forbidden to exercise racial or ethnic discrimination and it was anyway essentially aligned on the side of the poor simply by virtue of the social strata from which it drew its recruits. Against that, however, the Gypsies were hit hard economically by the break-up of Hungary's many big estates as this reduced their scope for employment. They also lost out on the redistribution of land under this reform, even though many of them depended for a significant part of their income on work in the agricultural sector. The principal reason for that exclusion was that the shortage of land to meet the needs of all claimants, so that overlooking the Gypsies meant more to share out amongst non-Gypsies. The impact of democratisation was also seen in education. Whereas before the war some half of all Gypsy children had not attended school, that ratio fell rapidly after 1945; by 1957 only around 10% of children in the age range for which schooling was compulsory were failing to attend.

On the political front no real progress occurred over a protracted period; indeed, no attempt was made even to entertain the notion that the Gypsies might pose specific issues. For a long time, an article by András Kálmán which appeared in the Communist party's journal of political theory in 1946 was the first and only analysis to tackle the subject at even a conceptual level. Though never adopted as an official standpoint, the article still exerted a perceptible impact, albeit short-lived, on the founding principles of a Cultural Association of Hungarian Gypsies set up in 1957. On the instigation of Mária László, its first Secretary-General and herself of Gypsy descent, this was set up on 26th October 1957 on the model of other ethnic associations reporting to the Nationalities Department of the Ministry of Culture. The organisation's declared aims included fostering original creative work by Gypsies in the fields of literature, music and other arts as well as the preservation of Romani for academic enquiry. The founding charter did, however, also have amongst its general goals the promotion of job creation and better schooling, health care and living conditions; one of its more significant activities, in fact, was to extend patronage to artisan's cooperatives of Gypsy nailsmiths which had been formed during the 1940s. Since these goals amounted to seeking recognition for Gypsies as a distinct ethnic group, those in power took a dim view of the Association from its outset. Furthermore its efforts were increasingly taken up in handling individual complaints, which in itself is a measure of the pressing need that was felt in Gypsy circles for some

form of organisation to defend their interests. The authorities were unwilling to tolerate such types of activity for long, however.

A resolution passed by the Politburo of Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party in 1961 brought a decisive turn by defining the position of the country's Gypsies as a social, rather than an ethnic, issue: "The starting-point for policies directed at the Gypsy population must be the principle that, despite certain ethnographic peculiarities, it does not constitute a nationality. In addressing their problems, their specific social situation must be taken into account and their full rights and obligations as citizens must be guaranteed, whilst the requisite political, economic and cultural conditions to exercise these must be created." And elsewhere: "Many people perceive this in terms of a nationality issue, and urge cultivation of the 'Gypsy language' and the establishment of schools and colleges teaching in that language, Gypsy farming cooperatives, etc. These views are not just misguided but harmful since they preserve a special status for Gypsies and retard their integration into society." Quite clearly, this was no more than a drive to assimilation masked as an approach to handling a social crisis. Despite that, the resolution makes a valuable point by noting in summary that living conditions in the 2,100 Gypsy settlements to be found in the country could only be described as inhumane.

A survey on a national sample of the Gypsy population that was carried in 1971 under István Kemény's direction, a quarter of century after the end of World War II, was the first reliable source of data for a long time – and indeed for a considerable time afterwards. That survey suggested that the number of Gypsies was then around 320,000, of which 71% had Magyar as their mother tongue, 21% were Romani speakers, and not quite 8% had Romanian as their native language. Two-thirds of that population resided within distinct Gypsy settlements, and more than two-thirds of them were living in small cottages of wattle-and-daub, tamped-earth or mudbrick construction. As many as 44% of abodes had no electricity supply. Piped water was available in a mere 8% of abodes and from a well on the property in only another 16%, whilst 37% had to fetch water from a well up to 100 metres away, and 39% from still further away. A flush toilet was present inside 3% of homes and outside another 4%, whereas 61% of homes had an outside earth privy, and fully 32% not even that.

The same survey indicated that some 39% of Gypsies over the age of 14 years were illiterate. Only 26% of young Gypsy adults in the age group 20-24 years had completed the eight years of general (primary) school education; the rest had all completed less, and more than 10% had never attended school. Amongst other findings recorded by the research, due to the country's massive industrialisation during the 1950s and 60s, some 85% of male Gypsies of working age were in employment by 1971, with 11% of heads of household being skilled workers, 10% semi-skilled, 44% unskilled, 13% agricultural manual labourers, 3% day labourers, and 6% self-employed or supporting themselves from seasonal work or by assisting another family member. The proportion of working-age women in paid employment was 30% in 1971, though that had increased to 50% by the early 1980s.

In 1965 the government initiated a programme of demolishing the Gypsy settlements. This offered Gypsies who were in permanent paid employment the chance to obtain loans at favourable interest rates in order to construct new "low-grade" homes or to purchase old peasant houses that fell vacant. For the most part, the "low-grade" properties were built within housing estates, whereas opportunities to buy older housing were predominantly confined to declining small villages, with the result that this simply created new forms of segregated settlements. For all that, the Gypsies experienced very substantial improvements in their housing and residential conditions.

Overall, it would be fair to say that by the end of the 1980s Gypsies were in a more favourable position than in preceding decades. Many had been offered a chance of advancement in life, and those who were able to take it found they were no longer regarded by the surrounding community as "real" Gypsies. Those achievements rested on singularly shaky foundations, however. Their generally poor educational standards and lack of job skills constituted a time-bomb that exploded with devastating force in the period after the unforeseen collapse of the socialist régime in 1989, to engulf a substantial proportion of the Gypsy population, along with all the efforts and illusions of the foregoing few decades.

Since the change in régime

As noted above, the spectacular rise in fortunes on which the Gypsy population had seemed to be set was obliterated almost overnight following Hungary's change in régime. Even under socialism those employed workers of Gypsy descent who were in unskilled jobs that required no or minimal skills (which applied to more than half of the Gypsies active in the workforce) were the first to be shed by firms as soon as they were privatised. Whereas 85% of working-age Roma men had been in employment in 1971 (barely below the 87% for non-Roma men), that figure had plummeted to 29% by the end of 1993 (compared with 64% for non-Roma men). The badly schooled, who, even in the preceding period, could only be used on jobs that demanded minimal training, often had not the slightest chance of successfully gaining work in a market that was now shaped purely on business lines. Many Gypsy families found that not only did this put their subsistence on a precarious footing but, being now unable to repay interest on the loans they had previously taken out to acquire their housing, large numbers lost those homes through repossession.

The shock effect of the years immediately following the change in régime have led to a continuing differentiation in the Gypsy population over the last few years. There is an emerging stratum – as yet rather narrow – which has demonstrated that it is able to respond successfully to the challenges. For the most part, these are the people who have taken on entrepreneurial roles, some with outstanding success, though this is less true of those who were compelled, rather than voluntarily chose, to assume that path; on the whole, the latter are able to achieve little more than provide an ordinary subsistence for their family, yet even so they are more fortunate than a substantial sector of the Gypsy population.

Some have found niches in professional jobs or in public life, but by far the greater number of Gypsy families have seen their standards of living rapidly slip back to levels last experienced decades ago and, due to their lacking of training, they have little prospect of employment. For many in this hopeless situation the sole means of keeping body and soul together is to resort to opportunistic crime. This, in turn, has led to a renewed outbreak of anti-Gypsy hatred amongst members of the dominant society, whose own material well-being was often threatened by the change in régime. During the 1990s, on top of increasing day-to-day discrimination that Gypsies face over education, employment, housing and their treatment by the authorities, schemes have been mooted for re-settling them to designated places and they have been subjected to an escalating number of attacks and abuse perpetrated by organised groups. Political groupings that overtly advocate racial discrimination, holding marches in which there is chanting of racist slogans and glorifying of Nazi "heroes", have frequently been allowed to cling to the coat-tails of nationally recognised political bodies, enjoying their public or covert support. Alarmingly, the Gypsies who, affronted at having to bear the brunt of abuse during a now-notorious parade at Tiszavasvár, decided to institute a civil action to uphold their individual rights have passed into the public consciousness as "lice-infested scum". Distorted notions of democracy and freedom of speech have been applied to stir up hostilities that have lain dormant for decades.

The change in régime can also be said to mark the beginnings of political awakening and self-organisation within the Gypsy population. After a long period when the only bodies speaking on their behalf were centrally directed organisations, such as National Gypsy Council, established in 1985, or the (from 1986) reconstituted Cultural Association of Hungarian Gypsies, the passage of laws proclaiming the freedoms of association, speech and press that are constitutional statehood opened the way to the formation of independent organisations. During the term of the freely elected 1990-94 parliament the representatives of several national parties included three who openly avowed their Gypsy descent (Antónia Hága, Aladár Horváth and Tamás Péli). In elections since then, though, only one of these has had a continued role in the legislative chamber; the country's parties have evidently not regarded Gypsy issues as forming an important element in their electoral platforms.

The activities of civic bodies set up by Gypsies had much more auspicious beginnings, with 96 such organisations being officially registered by the end of 1991. However these ran into growing problems with discharging their functions due the vagaries of financing, with successful applications for grants often being tied to loyalty to whichever parties happened to hold power. The state set up a number of public foundations from which support can be given for various types of programmes. The *Hungarian Public Foundation for National and Ethnic Minorities*, for example, was established in 1995 pri-

marily to support efforts that promote the self-identity and preserve the cultures of minority communities, whilst in 1996 the *Public Foundation for Hungarian Gypsies* commenced its work, 80-90% of whose budget (HUF 70 million in 1997) has been disbursed in grants for approved schemes aimed at encouraging agricultural production. The *Office for National and Ethnic Minorities*, set up following the change in régime, is also intended to fulfil a major role.

The National and Ethnic Minorities Act (Law LXXVII/1993) was a landmark for the assertion of political rights in Hungary, and for the country's Gypsies in particular. For the first time they were recognised as constituting an ethnic minority and thus, over and above the individual rights, were entitled to set up their own bodies to pursue their collective rights. Coupled with existing legislation on associations and parties, this opened up the way to forming their own minority self-governments at both local and national levels. During 1994-95 a total of 477 local Gypsy self-governments were established, whilst in the capital the district minority self-governments set up an indirectly elected Metropolitan Gypsy Minority Self-Government, and a 53-strong National Gypsy Minority Self-Government (NGMSG). Elections for these bodies were held for a second time in 1998, with a sizeable increase in the number of municipalities – to 764 – where local self-governments were voted in, though it proved impossible to form such a body for the capital. The new elections for the NGMSG were won for the second time by a coalition grouping led by the Lungo Drom party, with Flórián Farkas again assuming the presidency. As second terms of office have got under way, however, it has become increasingly evident that problems are occurring which can only be overcome through modifications to the Minorities Act. In particular, the Act makes no provisions for financing the functions of minority self-governments, as a result of which they are becoming pawns of the local majority self-governments. This is particularly evident in the case of the Gypsies given that they have no homeland to which they can turn for moral or financial support in the way that Hungary's other minorities can. It has also become clear in recent years that, in consequence of the disturbingly low educational level of much of the Gypsy population, many of their elected representatives, and even some of their nationally known politicians, are ill-equipped to discharge their functions and elaborate long-term plans. Successive governments attempt to put together packages of measures and set up diverse bodies, but these experiments have not, as yet, proved strikingly successful.

Several newer initiatives, however, have given reason to be more hopeful. The Gandhi Grammar School in Pécs, with its European-wide reputation, and the Romaversitas Invisible College in Budapest, which provides training for the more highly talented specialists are two such beacons. Slowly but surely a stratum of highly professional Gypsy intellectuals is emerging that it will be increasingly difficult to exclude from decision-making that relates to the Gypsy population.

In summing up, the years since the change in régime have witnessed a tragic setback in the fortunes of Hungary's Gypsy population, which represents no mere halt but a significant reversal of the advancement and solid progress that were achieved in preceding decades. The gravity of that setback has repercussions which are now beginning to be felt at politically. Once it is accepted – and the fact is hard to dispute – that the greater mass of Gypsies in Hungary are now living at the barest levels of subsistence, forming the stratum that society at large is most prone to despise and regard as superfluous, then if what now amounts to several centuries of co-existence between Gypsies and the Hungarian majority population is to remain on a peaceful course, there is an urgent need for well considered change. With member states of the European Union taking an ever more sharply critical view of the present circumstances of the country's Roma population, and with those conditions becoming intolerable and seemingly with little prospect of redress to the bulk of that population, particularly in light of the now notorious case of a group of Roma families in Zámoly,[1] other groups may be prompted to take similarly desperate actions. That would do nothing to further the cause of Hungary's accession to the Union.

[1] The high-handed and indeed, as was later ruled, illegal demolition in late 1997 of a group of houses that a Roma woman and her family from the village of Csór, just west of Székesfehérvár, had purchased during the early 1990s in the village of Zámoly, 15 km to the north of the city, sparked a further long train of flagrant mishandling by local authorities and abuse from the local population, culminating in an unprovoked attack by a small gang of Zámoly youths in August 1999 during which one of the latter died. This incident was fanned by national media mis-reporting to the point where the Roma families concerned feel their life is under threat anywhere in the country. Due to the consistent unwillingness shown by national and local authorities to back or protect them, the families have now appealed for help to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.