



*The immigration of Romanian Roma to Western Europe:
Causes, effects, and future engagement strategies
(MigRom)*

**DIGEST OF THE INITIAL RESEARCH
RESULTS & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**



*European Roma and Travellers Forum
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Digest of the initial research results & policy recommendations

Pilot Survey Report MigRom

The pilot studies were carried out in the following localities:

France	Wissous and Vigneux, Paris region Population interviewed: Department of Dolj
Italy	Milan and Bari Population interviewed: District of Olt and Dolj
Spain	Granada, Madrid, Malaga, Lucena Population interviewed: Dolj, Calarasi, Cluj, Bucharest, Ialomita
United Kingdom	Greater Manchester Metropolitan County Population interviewed: Tandarei, province of Ialomita

The Sending Communities

Cluj County – Huedin

There are 1200 Roma in Huedin. About 300 of them travel regularly, and some of them have palatial residences. The level of education is similar to the national average, except that the Roma tend to drop out at the age of 14. In the last few years there has been a huge decrease in the number of registered unemployed but most Roma still living there are unemployed and live on social benefits.

Salaj County - Nusfalau

Nusfalau has a stable Roma population and there is no conflict between the communities. There is temporary migration to Spain and Italy for the purpose of investing in houses in Nusfalau. In the last few years Roma houses have been connected to electricity and sewerage and the infrastructure of the Roma neighbourhood has been improved. The Roma have access to 5 family doctors and to a Roma health mediator.

All schools are mixed ethnically and a pre-school programme was started a few years ago. The majority of the Roma are day workers on the properties of local Hungarians and a few have jobs in surrounding factories. Unemployment has increased since a big construction site closed down. There is a Roma Councillor and a Roma school and health mediator.

Bihar County - Sacuieni

Seventy-four per cent of the population is Hungarian. The Roma population has no conflicts with the local population. They live in several areas, mixed with the rest of the population.

All the Roma have a family doctor and 85 per cent have no education. During the summer they work in agriculture in Hungary, Italy and Spain. Most of the Roma work as employees of the local Hungarians

but cannot rely on a regular work contract. In the last few years Roma neighbourhoods have been connected to electricity and running water. Professionalization and after-school programmes have also been introduced.

Ialomita County - Slobozia and Tandarei

Only ten per cent of the Roma population is employed. Most are self-employed as scrap dealers or traders in horses. Others have migrated. The Ursari live in big mansions scattered throughout Tandarei. The Tigani vatrasi, who are assimilated to the Roma, live in utter deprivation with no gas and no surfaced roads. Most of the Roma attend only primary school. The low attendance in high school is due to migration. Health mediators are employed.

Brasov County

The county has big areas inhabited by Roma living in extreme poverty. There is also considerable tension and conflict between the communities in Apata.

Results of the interviews

Reasons for migrating

It is interesting to note that none of the interviewees claimed that they migrated because of racism and aggression. The reasons given are mainly economic:

- lack of work, food and money
- seeking better education possibilities for their children
- possibility of black market jobs in Spain and Italy
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Beyond these immediate reasons given for migrating, all the interviewees in all four countries confirmed their intention to make money in the host country for investing in a house in Romania.

This is a long term process. The house is built in stages depending on funds available and the weather conditions prevailing in Romania. The process has its disadvantages: the family keeps moving back and forth to Romania, which disrupts the schooling of the children. Some interviewees claimed they preferred to live in slums in Italy than in flats in Spain to avoid paying rent and save money for building a house.

Quite often the dream does not materialise. After ten years in the host country it becomes difficult to move back. Moreover, children born and bred in the host country and who have never been to Romania are not interested in building a house in Romania.

Pattern of migration

Since 1989 there has been a generalised culture of emigration in Romania. Most Roma have tried several countries before finally settling in a particular country: Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, France, Belgium, Ireland and the United Kingdom. For example, the Koturari from Cluj arrived in Granada in 1997 and then moved to England and Germany in 2011.

The migration pattern is heavily determined by family relations and networks. Decisions to migrate are often based on relatives living abroad. Male siblings travel abroad together and are later followed by other relatives: spouses, sisters, cousins. Many couples are from the same village due to marriages between close cousins. In Spain 50.6% are males and 49.6% are females with an average age of 20.5 years. 35%

are children. This indicates that the sample population is made up of young families. There are very few elderly.

Housing conditions

Housing in shanty towns or in camps, authorised or otherwise, is common in France and Italy, and partly in Spain. In the United Kingdom and other European countries the Roma migrants live in houses or apartments.

In Italy some Roma live in apartments or in authorised camps. When their shanty town is destroyed they are moved to reception centres. In Milan there are 7 authorised camps and 1500 Roma live in unauthorised camps, from which they are regularly evicted. A new project 2012-2015 is intended to promote access to housing and employment. In Bari evictions are avoided and inclusion is promoted.

As the Roma in Italy are seen as nomads the three authorized camps are not intended to last. They are provided with all facilities and are heavily guarded. The Roma living in shanty towns have a sense of insecurity due to constant evictions which are traumatic for children and disrupt their schooling. The alternatives offered is for women and children to be put in foster homes and separated from the father.

In France the Roma migrants live in illegal shanty towns with neither water nor electricity and are regularly evicted and all their possessions destroyed. “Maisons d’insertion” has been established but these have been heavily criticized as being no less than detention centres.

In Manchester all Roma families live in rented terraced houses, furnished with basic appliances. Good housing is also available in Spain, particularly from Gitano landlords who do not require guarantees and allow sub-lettings. Most of the Roma live with the general population. There are nonetheless Roma migrants who live in slum conditions.

Security in proximity

All interviewees have expressed their need to stay together. In both France and Italy they express their preference to live in a shanty town together rather than be separated in different apartments. In Manchester the Roma, particularly if family related, seek to live in the same street. This proximity provides them with a sense of security and shields them from solitude and isolation. The same sentiment of security has been expressed by the interviewees in Spain. In Manchester not more than two generations live in the same house. In Spain, however, expensive housing forces the extended family to live together.

Health care

In both Spain and Italy only emergency care is available if the individual is unemployed and has no residence permit. In Manchester all the Roma are registered with the National Health Service. Access to health care is available in France. The interviewees expressed their satisfaction with the treatment and showed surprise that the health staff did not ask for bribes! In Bari the Roma population in the authorized camp has regular medical examinations and vaccinations. Nevertheless, the health condition of the Roma in all four countries is precarious, particularly in the shanty towns, where the hygienic conditions are appalling.

Education

In all four countries there is a strong willingness on the part of the Roma to have their children properly educated. School attendance, however, varies according to country and circumstances.

In Italy, all Roma children go to school and are provided with school equipment and bus transport. Their schooling is, however, often disturbed by successive evictions. Similarly, in Spain, attendance is satisfactory except when the family changes residence. Social workers are particularly vigilant on school attendance.

In Manchester school attendance by Roma is higher than that of other ethnic communities. The rate of girls in secondary school is however low. Parents want their girls to attend schools for girls only. The Roma parents have a good relationship with the school staff and participate in school activities. Roma youths have also been appointed as school mediators.

School attendance is low in France, in spite of the obligation to attend classes. This is due to constant evictions and to repeated travels to and from Romania.

Employment

The pattern of employment is identical in all four countries. The Roma migrants have little or no professional competencies and up to end 2013 did not have the right to work.

Their work is restricted to informal employment, undeclared and occasional. Women work as carers and housemaids; the men do seasonal work in harvesting. Most are self-employed: metal scrap collection, peddling, cleaning windshields, begging, and (in Manchester) selling the big Issue. In Spain no mafia-type behaviour has been noticed in begging.

Since 1 January 2014, all migrant Roma have the right to work in EU countries. Expectations are high among the young Roma and in Manchester many are applying for jobs.

Public debate

Public debate veers on the hysterical in Italy and in France. In Italy the government passed emergency laws, giving the impression the country was under siege. In France the systematic deportation of Roma led to a crisis with the European Commission. Deportations continue unabated.

In Spain and the United Kingdom debate has been limited but the opening of the labour market has caused alarm in both countries for fear of being flooded by thousands of Roma from Romania. So far this fear has proved unjustified.

Perception of the Roma

The Roma migrants complain of racism in France and Italy. Nonetheless, in spite of the harsh living conditions the Roma in France claim to have good relations with the French population. They find the police less brutal than in Romania and are surprised there is no bribery in the administration. Their only conflicts are with the Travellers.

Similarly, in Manchester, their relations with their neighbours and with the school authorities are good and find that the clerks in the administration are not racist. Most complain that relations with the authorities pass through associations. In Romania relations are direct. Moreover, politicians tend to follow the views of the associations rather than listening to the Roma themselves. The Roma are particularly concerned about their children's welfare and are terrified that their children be taken away and given for adoption. This fear is very much alive in Italy but has also existed in Spain in the past.

Recommendations:

Mainstreaming

- Avoid targeting Roma or adopting a “gypsy policy” which puts the Roma in a separate category as a “privileged” group. The presence of Roma is over-mediatised and determined by ideological considerations. Tighten the belt on public declarations to avoid ideological discourses.

Housing

- Search, together with Roma, alternatives to nomadic camps and forced evictions; develop programmes for affordable housing using foreclosed or unfinished housing developments; avoid segregation; the Roma could finish houses they will finally own;
- In any case, even in shanty towns, ensure access to water and garbage collection.

Education

- Enforce school attendance; teach Roma parents how to be involved in their children’s education.
- Train young Roma (language, literacy, IT, accounting, and administration structure) to support the community and serve as role model for younger Roma;
- Develop adult education programmes and link them to objectives (e.g getting a driving licence).
- Organise language courses and provide professional training.

Health

- Develop family planning and reproductive health services; improve communication between professionals and Roma patients;
- Change attitudes and improve health practices among Roma; develop awareness raising campaigns on preventive care, smoking, nutrition, exercise.

Employment

- Search, together with the Roma, employment possibilities (e.g. Roma cooperatives). Develop training for employment and self-employment programmes (recycling, car-repair, etc.);
- Provide access to a legal address.

Empowerment and participation

- Promote political participation. Increase the self-reliance of the community and train community members on procedures with institutions and agencies (application forms, etc.) and reduce dependency.

Role of administration

- Local authorities and agencies should be informed by experts and specialists. Staff running interventions should receive training on Roma culture and social structure. The Roma family structure should be respected (relatives caring for children) and taken into account in institutional procedures;
- The rights of Roma parents over their children should be safeguarded and respected. Children should not be taken away from them except in very serious cases where the safety and the well-being of the children is at risk, and subject to a judicial decision.

Decisions on interventions by local authorities must be transparent and records of deliberations kept. Support measures must be described clearly and clear divisions of responsibility maintained. Reports should be accessible to the Roma community and feedback recorded.