

EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF



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

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INTRODUCTION

Roma are one of Europe's largest minority populations. They live in dispersed communities but share many aspects of language, social organisation and culture. Roma are often confused with 'Travellers' and with the fictional image of 'Gypsies'. European institutions have noted high rates of poverty, unemployment, and difficulties accessing health care and education among Europe's Roma population, as well as widespread discrimination against Roma. In 2011, EU member states were asked to submit National Strategies on Roma Inclusion that address these issues.

Like other citizens, Roma benefit from freedom of movement within the EU. There is no evidence that the proportion of Roma among migrants from central and eastern Europe in the West is higher than their proportion in the overall population of the respective countries of origin. Yet measures to exclude Roma from access to employment (including self-employment), housing, health care, and education and even to curtail their right to take up residence have been taken in several western EU states; large-scale expulsions of Roma from France and Italy have been condemned by the European Commission. Exclusion policies have often been justified by an assumption that social inclusion of Roma migrants is always doomed to fail. It is often claimed that Roma culture and behaviour are obstacles to integration. The project aims to examine the motivations behind the immigration of Roma, the steps that Roma take to participate in the social and economic life of the destination communities, the real obstacles that they face in the process of inclusion, and examples of good practice in overcoming such obstacles. The project brings together a range of expertise on Roma culture and Roma society, with leading researchers on Roma history, sociology, anthropology and language. It also incorporates as partners a leading Roma NGO and a local authority with an established practice of engagement with Roma migrants, and a cooperation scheme with a wider network of local authorities, in order to help assess existing policies and pilot the implementation of new policy measures.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

Roma migration is usually a migration of families rather than of individuals. Motivated in most cases by the wish to escape extreme poverty in Romania, Roma are often prepared to take risks in order to make use of short-term earning opportunities while preserving family structures. These risks include frequent re-location, poor housing conditions (in unauthorised shanty towns, or squatting, or overcrowded houses), irregular school attendance of children, and hostility, including evictions. Risks also include low-prestige and insecure earning opportunities such as begging and recycling.

Many families have a history of periodical migrations and re-locations going back to the early 1990s. There is a direct link between the poverty of Roma in Romania, and their economic deprivation immediately after the collapse of the state sector in 1990. The historical dependency on the state sector is in turn an outcome of historical marginalisation that goes back to the period of slavery and serfdom in the nineteenth century, followed by exclusion from land reforms and large scale deportations to Transnistria during the Second World War.

While many Roma migrants report of discrimination and abuse in Romania, there is also fear of exclusion and in particular of eviction and confiscation of children in the destination communities.

The overall profile of Roma migrant communities is that of a young population, with large families, tight family networks, with a low level of vocational skills. We see many indications of an emerging shift in the community profile: opportunities in the destination communities raise aspirations in the areas of employment, housing, and education, and willingness to engage with local institutions and even with public audiences and media. There is also a noticeable trend toward smaller families and toward prolonging intervals in bearing children. The lifting of employment restrictions in January 2014 was immediately followed by a noticeable surge of interest and success in finding regular employment opportunities. High awareness of health care stands out, and Roma migrants appear to make use of health care opportunities offered in the destination communities.

Participation in school education is directly linked to the removal of obstacles within the admissions procedure, as well as to stability in housing. It is also linked to the families' life history: children who arrive directly from Romania and who attended Romanian schools tend to adjust quite easily to a new school setting. Children whose school attendance was interrupted repeatedly due to re-locations and evictions tend to experience greater difficulties.

Many migrants maintain close contacts in the origin communities. Through remittances and investments in housing and small businesses they often create new opportunities for relatives in Romania. Through visits and networking they often help raise aspirations of Roma in the origin communities. It therefore appears that migration of some families to the west has the potential to make an important contribution toward transforming the long-term social and economic standing of Roma communities who have stayed behind in the origin communities.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an urgent need to facilitate access to **permanent housing** and local services including utilities and school education; this is a priority especially where Roma have no other choice at the moment but to reside in temporary or makeshift camps where they are under threat of eviction.

Efforts are needed to **counteract negative images** in media. This includes the misrepresentation of Roma as nomads or travellers, and the portrayal of Roma as victims of their own culture who put their own families, especially women and children, at risk. It is therefore necessary to carefully reconsider so-called 'safeguarding' interventions and to help alleviate Roma's fear of being estranged from their own children. This can be done by raising awareness of the needs and aspirations of Roma among public sector staff, and by monitoring and maintaining **quality assurance** of public service and voluntary sector interventions. Local institutions should contribute to **capacity building and self-reliance** within the Roma community by offering training and support to young leadership.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

The project is carrying out a longitudinal survey among recent Romanian Roma migrants in urban communities in Spain, Italy, France and the UK, and in their origin communities in Romania. The survey is based on recorded oral interviews in the Romani language, carried out by a team of researchers who have close familiarity with Roma culture, customs, language, and social organisation forms, and assisted by a number of Roma research assistants and interpreters. The survey firstly elicits a standardised set of measures designed to obtain an overall picture of the communities. It also elicits testimonies of participants in order to obtain a picture of the reasons and motivations for migration, the role of family and social networks and the socio-economic organisation of life in the migrant community, the social and economic effects of migration on the home communities including the role of women in productive and reproductive activities, the aspirations of various generations in the community, attitudes to neighbours and institutions, values and cultural activities, the reaction to local authority interventions, and reciprocal relations with Roma migrant communities of the same origin in other locations ('diasporic networks'). The three consecutive stages of the survey – a pilot survey, an extended survey, and a follow-up survey – are designed to capture developments and changes of attitudes and activities in the community during the investigation period. The outcome will be an Ethnography of Roma Migration, which will contribute to an understanding of the triggers and the internal structure of the process of migration among Roma from Romania.

In the first project year, a Pilot Survey was carried out among communities of Roma migrants in France (Wissous and Vigneux, Paris region), Italy (Milan and Bari), Spain (Madrid, Malaga, Lucena) and the United Kingdom (Greater Manchester), and in their origin communities in Romania (Dolj, Călărași, Cluj, Bucharest and Ialomița). The full reports on the pilot survey can be accessed here:

<http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/migrom/firstyearreports.html>

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	The immigration of Romanian Roma to Western Europe: Causes, effects, and future engagement strategies (MigRom)
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CONSORTIUM	Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'homme – FMSH - Paris, France Forum Européen pour les Roms et les Gens du Voyage – ERTF - Strasbourg, France Institutul Pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale – ISPMN - Cluj, Romania Manchester City Council – MCC - Manchester, United Kingdom Universidad De Granada – UGR - Granada, Spain Università degli Studi di Verona – UNIVR - Verona, Italy University of Manchester - UNIMAN – Manchester, United Kingdom
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WEBSITE	http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/migrom/index.html
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FURTHER READING	Cousin, Grégoire, Olivier Legros. in press. L'évacuation des « campements illicites » en région parisienne : actualisation du droit, jeux d'acteurs et asymétries territoriales. <i>Les annales de Géographie</i> Agoni, Marianna. in press. Etnografia della migrazione di alcune famiglie di rom rumeni a Milano, in : Lofranco Z.T., Pusceddu A.M., (eds.) <i>Nè vicino né lontano. Etnografie italiane del Sud-Est Europa</i> . Firenze: SEID, Tesar, Catalina. in press. Begging-between Charity and Profession. Reflections on Romanian Roma's Begging Activities in Italy. in : Tauber, Elisabeth, Zinn , Dorothy (eds), <i>Anthropology of the Public Space</i> , Bolzano: University Press Matras, Yaron, Leggio, D. Viktor, Sutac, Mirela. in press. Roma Education as a lucrative niche: ideologies and representations. <i>Zeitschrift für internationale Bildung und Entwicklungspädagogik</i> .