

MigRom

**The immigration of Romanian Roma to Western Europe:
Causes, effects, and future engagement strategies. 2013-2017**



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Project Briefing, June 2014

The project

MigRom is a European research consortium of academic partners in the UK, Spain, France, Italy and Romania, working with the non-academic partners Manchester City Council and the European Roma and Traveller Forum. It is funded by the European Commission's Seventh Framework Research Programme and led by the Romani Project at the University of Manchester. 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>

Key findings

Roma migration is usually a migration of families rather than of individuals. Motivated primarily 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 in overcrowded houses), irregular access to services, 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 migration 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 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 World War II.

While many Roma migrants report discrimination and abuse in Romania, and cite these as a factor that motivates migration, 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, and a low level of vocational skills. However, there are 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 there is a growing interest to engage with local institutions and with public audiences and media. There is also a noticeable trend toward smaller families. 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 be making use of health care opportunities offered in the destination communities.

Participation in education is directly linked to the removal of obstacles to school admission, as well as to stability in housing. It is also linked to the families' life history: Children who arrive directly from Romania where they attended school usually 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, and their visits and contact networks help raise aspirations among them. It therefore appears that migration and mobility are beneficial not just to the migrants themselves, but that they also make an important contribution toward improving the social and economic standing of Roma in the origin communities.

Policy needs

There is an urgent need to ensure access to **permanent housing** and local services including utilities and 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 constant threat of eviction.

Efforts are needed to **counteract negative images**. 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 separated from their own children. It is necessary to raise awareness among public sector officers of the needs and aspirations of Roma, and to monitor and maintain **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.

For more information contact: romani@manchester.ac.uk
<http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/migrom>