

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



In partnership with Manchester City Council



Understanding Marriage and Partnership in the Roma Community

Why the issue is important

- ✓ Romani customs and values surrounding marriage and partnership are often misunderstood, and sometimes misrepresented.
- ✓ Lack of understanding can give rise to unnecessary suspicion.
- ✓ It is important to ensure that interventions serve to protect the wellbeing of individuals while supporting community cohesion.

Roma 'marriage' is a process, not a status

- ✓ When Roma talk about 'marriage' they refer to the steps taken to forge a partnership, not necessarily to the formal wedding act.
- ✓ Romani parents generally prefer that a teen couple should seek the approval of parents, on both sides, for their partnership; when such approval is granted, the couple is often referred to as 'married' even if the partnership is not permanent.
- ✓ A teen couple in a stable partnership will often, as in other communities, seek parental permission to spend time together in one of the parental households. In most cases, the families live in close proximity to one another, which facilitates parental supervision.
- ✓ Girls in a lasting partnership may move to live with their partner's family. It is very rare for this practice to involve teens under 16; when it does, the move from one parental household to another might be regarded as an informal fostering, which is always carried out with the consent of all those involved.
- ✓ Wedding ceremonies often symbolise the initiation of a long-lasting partnership with the intention of raising children; some Roma, however, tend not to celebrate weddings.
- ✓ Adult Romani couples in a long-lasting partnership rarely register their marriage officially, even if they have children, and husband and wife usually retain their maiden surnames.
- ✓ For most Roma, the term 'marriage' therefore does not necessarily suggest a formal legal status but recognition of an existing partnership, whether lasting or temporary, whether teen or adult, regardless of whether the couple reside separately or with family relations, and regardless of whether or not they have children.

Child bearing among Roma in Manchester

see also:

- 'Pilot survey of birth rates and age at first birth among Romanian Roma in Manchester, August 2014:

http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/migrom/docs/MigRom_BirthRatesAug2014.pdf

- MigRom project report on the Extended Survey, June 2015:

http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/migrom/docs/Yr2report_Mcr.pdf

- ✓ Roma usually have children at an earlier age than the UK average, and the number of children is higher than average. But practices are changing rapidly.
- ✓ A survey of Romanian Roma women aged 17-49 in 2014 showed that the average age at the birth of the first child was 17 among those who arrived in Manchester before 2008, but among those who arrived after 2008 it was 20.
- ✓ The average number of children for each woman in the survey was 2.7, but among the Pentecostal Romani women it was 4.0. This compares with 1.9 UK average, 3.0 for Muslim British women, and 6.9 for Orthodox Jewish women in the UK.
- ✓ Of 365 recorded teenage (age 15-17) pregnancies in Manchester in 2013, according to our data no more than 3 were Roma. Considering the age and socio-economic profile of the community, that proportion is not unexpected. The overall scale shows that these are individual cases, not a general cultural pattern.

School attendance and gender among Roma in Manchester

- ✓ Data for the period 2008-2015 from the secondary school with the highest number of Romanian Roma in Manchester suggest that lack of progression to higher years that is specific to Roma girls is marginal, affecting at the most 6-7 girls during the entire period, and triggered by personal circumstances rather than culture. Some of the girls are likely to have moved to a different school.
- ✓ During the same period, Roma boys on roll in the school usually outnumbered Roma girls 2:1, but this is common for ethnic minorities at that school, with Middle Eastern and Asian boys usually outnumbering girls of the same background 10:1, as parents prefer to send girls to a nearby all-girls school.

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Further references on Roma marriage in a European context:

European Roma and Travellers Forum, Making early marriage in Roma communities a global concern, September 2014:

http://www.ertf.org/images/Reports/Making_Early_Marriage_in_Roma_Community_a_global_concern_Final_Version_.pdf

Romani Criss, UNICEF, The case of early marriages within Roma communities in Romania, by Nicoleta Bitu and Crina Morteau, 2010:

http://www.unicef.org/romania/Early_marriages_Romani_CRISS.pdf

Council of Europe/ CAHROM, Early and forced marriages in Roma communities, country report Romania, prepared by Eugen Crai, May 2015: (available online via Google search).