

MIGROM FINAL POLICY BRIEF

DELIVERED AT COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSULTATION ON 'DIALOGUE WITH ROMA
AND TRAVELLER ORGANISATIONS,
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Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities

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Project title: **The immigration of Romanian Roma to Western Europe: Causes, effects, and future engagement strategies.**



This 'final policy brief' was presented at a meeting of Council of Europe officials, representatives of the member states and the European Forum for Dialogue with Roma NGOs (which is led by the Council of Europe) in June 2016 by Dr László Fosztó (Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities, Cluj-Napoca) and Prof Yaron Matras (University of Manchester).

0. Introduction

We wish to thank the organisers for the invitation to join this meeting and to present findings and policy recommendations arising from our research. Before we turn to the main content of our presentation, a note on terminology and concepts is in order:

The session is devoted to 'Internal and cross-border migration of Roma and Travellers: current challenges and possible solutions'. We realise that the term 'Roma and Travellers' has been adopted by the Council of Europe to replace the popular notion of 'Gypsies'. But we wish to warn against using this term as a mere placeholder for the term 'Gypsies'. Most Roma are not Travellers, and most Travellers are not Roma. Moreover, migration has little or nothing to do with nomadism or with itinerant traditions. Roma migrate from eastern to western Europe, just like other populations such as Poles, Lithuanians, and Bulgarians. Travellers are very seldom among the cross-border migrants. In our view as researchers, there is no common theme around the migration of Roma and that of Travellers.

1. The project

MigRom is a four-year research project. The participants are social scientists with specialisation of many years in the study of Romani history, society, culture, and language. The aim of our research is to understand the process of migration of Roma from Romania to western Europe, and the challenges they face.

MigRom is

- A Multi-site project, with academic partners in the UK, Spain, France, Italy, Romania. This allows us to compare the circumstances of Roma migrants in these countries, and to compare the effects of different policies on them
- The project's focus is on a community-based ethnography, that means, we do our research within the Roma communities, in the Romani language, to explore their experience directly
- The project is longitudinal. It runs from 2013 to 2017. This allows us to observe changes in the situation of Roma migrants over time, especially around the change in legislation in 2014, which allowed Roma migrants full employment rights
- The project is Policy-oriented: we have partnerships with local authorities; we assess their policies, and we give recommendations

- The project also has a commitment to public engagement. We make contributions to local and national media. We are involved in campaigns against evictions. And we help set up local Roma community organisations.

More information can be found on our webpage.

We also have a project Twitter account.

2. Roma participation

MigRom has a commitment to including Roma in research in a way that is unique and innovative :

- Members of the Roma communities participate as fieldwork assistants who carry out interviews and help us understand the context of the events that we analyse.
- The project draws on the support of Roma research assistants: Some are non-academics, who are part of the community, and help us interpret the data, ask the right questions, and draw the right conclusions. We also have Roma academic researchers at MA and post-doctoral levels.
- The project employs Roma community outreach workers, who provide advice and support to community members in various areas such as registration, employment seeking, access to health care and more. The service is client based and responsive, not intrusive, and is entirely Roma-led and sponsored by the project in partnership with local authorities.
- The ERTF is full partner in the MigRom consortium and has supported the research design and the dissemination of results and recommendations.

3. Key findings

Our research has investigated the history of migrations and the history of Roma in the origin communities in Romania, the circumstances and living conditions of the Roma migrants, their participation in various areas, and the effect that local policies and public attitudes have on them. Some key findings:

- Migration of Roma from Romania is the outcome of historical circumstances: the legacy of slavery until the end of the 19th century, exclusion from land reform in the early 20th century, deportation to Transnistria in World War II, dependency on the state sector under communism leading to social insecurity after 1990, and forced re-patriation from destination countries like Germany in the early 1990s; all of these have contributed in a cumulative way to the motivation to migrate within the EU
- It is clear from our analysis that it is Policy, not Roma behaviour, that facilitates or hinders inclusion
- Roma participation is enabled when structural barriers are removed; the best example is the removal of restrictions on employment in 2014, which allowed Roma access to work and reduced dependency

- Access to housing and employment is the key to stability and inclusion; where Roma are forced to live in makeshift camps, they have no access to public services, and their lives are reduced to mere survival
- Roma migrants live under constant Fear of eviction in France and Italy.
- In all countries we found that Roma live in Fear that social services will remove their children. For this reason, some families keep their children in Romania while the parents are in the west. This of course destroys the social fabric of the community.
- There are repeated attempts to Criminalise the migration of Roma, by depicting it as an organized form of trafficking and benefit fraud. We found no evidence to support this view. We found instead that it is a central theme that promotes wholesale suspicion of Roma and anti-Gypsyism
- Another central theme of anti-Gypsyism are Pre-conceptions about Roma family structure: Roma culture is depicted as supporting early marriage and child neglect, as under-valuing education, and as promoting overcrowding in residence. Many local authorities believe that they need to take action to protect Roma from themselves. Again, we found no evidence for this, but these depictions influence general perception and lead authorities and public services to distrust Roma. This shows how important it is to counteract the argument that Roma culture is prone to support trafficking, domestic violence, and child neglect. The Council of Europe and other organisations have a responsibility to warn against such generalisations.
- Roma stand out through demographics: they are a younger population, have larger families, and lower life expectancy; but a rapid demographic change is underway ('demographic transition' as opportunities increase, especially in migration. Where there is access to housing and employment, Roma women are having fewer children, later in life; more people live in nuclear families; and health conditions are improving.
- We have examined local policy and found that including Roma in mainstream measures is more effective than setting up targeted, Roma-specific interventions. This applies especially for housing, education and social care: when Roma have access to general services, their situation improves. Specific measures for Roma tend to increase segregation and stigmatization.
- Capacity building is a key to improvement: We have seen that Roma-led community support enables self-reliance. It is more effective than 'mediation' that regards Roma as the problem and seeks to change their behavior.
- A key finding of our research is that Migration makes a very significant contribution to the social mobility of Roma in the origin communities in Romania. Roma migrants send back money to dependents, they build houses outside of the traditional 'Gypsy neighbourhoods', they invest in businesses, they employ non-Roma, their children have skills and are role models to young Roma in Romania, and they spend money when visiting and support the local service economy. We can clearly say that migrants make a greater contribution to the Roma communities that we investigated than European social funds.

- Successful Roma migrants bring back to their home communities in Romania new skills, competences (so called ‘social remittances’) and extend their social networks which enable them to improve their status and perception by the majority population. This is contribution to changing the negative attitudes towards the Roma and their migration to western Europe.

4. Key policy recommendations

Our research gives rise to some policy recommendations:

- A key Priority must be removing structural barriers, not changing ‘Roma behaviour’. It is essential that Roma migrants are not forced to live in so-called ‘nomad camps’ but have access to housing. It is important that they have full access to mainstream, not segregated education. And that they have full employment rights.
- It is important to Support capacity building so that Roma can lead their own community outreach work: we must promote self-reliance, not ‘mediation’
- It is important that Roma are included in mainstream policies, not separated in targeted measures that are designed just for Roma
- It is important to actively Counteract prejudice especially on Roma family structure and values, because this is where the perception of institutions, policy makers and practitioners often leads them to distrust Roma, and consequently to treat them unequally.
- It is essential to recognise the key contribution of migration to promoting equality across EU states: the contribution of migrants helps Roma gain social and economic status and opportunities in the origin countries, and in that way it reduced inequalities across European regions, which give rise to migration in the first place.
- It is important that local authorities in the home communities make provisions enable that the invested remittances can contribute effectively to local development (for example by extending the infrastructure and facilitating legalisation on new construction).