Integration of the Roma Community within European Society

Case Study: Romania

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Abstract

This research project explores the human rights abuses that are faced by Europe's largest ethnic minority, the Roma, and offers recommendations for a more effective societal integration. The project will analyze historical and cultural backgrounds of the Roma ethnic minority, the policies and efforts Eastern-European governments have made regarding integration of the Romany people, and the violations this ethnic group systematically faces. This will offer a better understanding of the factors that lead to marginalization, discrimination, and the failed integration of the Roma community, and provides possible solutions to the integration of this ethnic group without forcibly assimilating their culture. By providing a better assessment of the Roma culture and acknowledging their desire to abide by their traditional values, this research project highlights the gaps that have delayed and toughened the integration of the Roma community within the European societies.

Every country in the world hosts people that belong to different national, ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities. Diversity can be a social asset but it can also cause inequalities. Minorities all over the world are still facing racism and discrimination from social and legal institutions. They continue to be excluded from full participation in economic, political and cultural life available to the majorities of the countries they live in. According to international human rights standards, the rights of minorities are

protected under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Article 27), the Convention on the Rights of Child (Article 30), and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which provides guiding principles for nation-states to adopt proper legislation and take necessary measures to ensure and protect the rights of minorities (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, n.d.).

Even though states are obliged to secure effective societal participation and inclusion of minorities under international law, the Roma ethnic group continues to face multiple forms of discrimination resulting in their exclusion and marginalization within the European territory. Due to their nomadic character, Roma people (commonly known as "gypsies") are an ethnic minority group spread throughout Europe with no territorial settlement and no country of their own. They are believed to have arrived in Europe from India in the fourteenth century. Initially, they were welcomed and perceived as exotic and mysterious due to their musical, craftsmanship and "fortune telling" talents; however, with no state protection and a distinct cultural identity, Romany people failed to acquire a territory. As a result, they keep living in the margins of the European cities, and continue to suffer from massive discrimination, which makes them the most disadvantaged ethnic group within Europe (Moraru, 2011).

The social inclusion of Roma people is one of the most important issues on the European Parliament's agenda, urging governments for more effective programs since no tangible results have been produced so far (Spasov, 2011). When developing integration programs, researchers have left out a very important fact about Roma community: Roma people have a strong desire to preserve their ethnic identity and to abide by their traditional values. This simple fact has increased prejudice against them. Ignoring this important feature is one of the reasons why the integration process has been delayed and made more difficult. Understanding these key obstacles means new insight will be gained, thereby helping create guidelines for more effective integration programs and policies.

This research project aims to provide the information necessary to realign Romania's domestic programs, as well as international standards, to integrate Roma populations into mainstream society and to improve their human rights situation. It is important to develop policies and programs that can result in effective societal integration, without altering the Roma culture. This can be accomplished by balancing the maintenance of their cultural identity with a more meaningful inclusion in a wider society. This requires a compromise between modern and traditional values.

Overview of Roma Situation within Europe

The Roma community suffers from massive discrimination throughout Europe. Roma people have been denied their rights to housing, employment, healthcare, and education and are facing forced evictions, racist attacks, and police ill-treatment. They mainly live in the margins of society in slums or illegal camps and are considered to be the most disadvantaged ethnic group within Europe (Amnesty International, 2009). Romania is an ideal case study because it is the European country with the largest Roma population share – ten percent, or around 2.2 million people. In Romania, 75 percent of Romani people live in poverty and face discrimination within society and by public officials (Amnesty International, 2010). Many critics ask a simple question related to Roma rights: How can we protect the human rights of a group whose desire to abide by their cultural values often means rejecting social integration? While living among various culturally distinct societies, it's clear that "the Gypsies have been remarkably successful in preserving their way of life, adapting to their changed conditions in order to remain the same" (Henriques, 2012, p. 318). This indicates that many Roma do not want to be included in the mainstream society, and do not see themselves as the settled people of Europe. They see themselves as people who share common language and cultural heritage, although not a common territory (Henriques, 2012). It is important to acknowledge that the Roma community is part of European history and society, and they should be listened to and respected – particularly when issues of

integration impact their right to cultural self-determination. Besides institutional policies and programs, there is a stringent need to change the mainstream mentality and to promote a European society that is more tolerant of its diversity.

Addressing the issues facing the Roma population is of great importance to Romania and other European countries, as well. Particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, where the Roma population is increasing, these social problems need special attention. In 2001, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) initiated an international study that would collect information on the situation of the Roma population in Central and Eastern Europe. The necessity of this study emerged as a result of the general tendency at the European level to pay close attention to minorities, especially people of different ethnicities. For instance, countries seeking European Union membership are obligated to initiate policies that support and ensure the rights of national minorities. One of the major factors that contributes to accepting a country as a member state of the European Union is the degree of integration of ethnic minorities, implicitly that of Roma ethnic minority (Preoteasa, 2003).

Studying and correctly assessing the ethnic Roma issue comes with several challenges. One of these challenges is estimating the size of the Roma population. The European Roma Rights Center estimates that there are about eight million Roma in Europe, of which 80 percent live in Central and Eastern Europe. However, the exact population number is not fully known in any of these countries. The official numbers that result from national census data are contradicted by data from other organizations, especially non-governmental organizations that advocate for the protection of the rights of the ethnic Roma. Due to governmental racial bias, there are significant differences in numbers, with governments tending to underestimate the size of Roma populations (Preoteasa, 2003).

Despite this significant challenge, a 2001 international study initiated by the UNDP argued that the concept of integration is a preferable alternative to the goal of assimilation. Societal integration, compared to assimilation, presumes the conservation of the ethnic culture (such as language, customs,

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and tradition) while improving the economic situation through policies that address education and professional training. The study concluded that the Roma situation is similar in all European countries, despite the economic differences among them. Therefore, in order for countries to acquire full membership within the European Union, they are obliged to ensure that the Roma ethnic community will be productively integrated. This means that Roma ought to be given access to education, job opportunities, and political participation within the society they live in (Preoteasa, 2003).

Historical Background

In order to advance and create the appropriate social integration policies, it is important to understand the history and culture of the Roma people. Most of their history is not written, which makes it almost invisible and explains why most Roma, compared to majority Europeans, have little or no historical consciousness (Racz, 2011). However, origins of Romani people have been extensively researched. Studies on genetics and diseases common to the ethnic group have confirmed anthropological and linguistic theories that Roma people migrated from India to Eastern Europe. Luba Kalaydjieva of the University of Western Australia and her colleagues measured the prevalence of five different neurological-disease mutations in more than 1,800 Roma spread across Europe. Included in the study were 500 members of families affected by any of the diseases caused by these mutations, as well as several participants that were unrelated individuals who showed no symptoms of these diseases but might still be carrying one copy of a disease gene. It was found that one mutation, which has been present in the population for 1,000 years, is a common characteristic among the Roma individuals with and without the disease. These findings strengthen the theory that the Roma ethnic group has migrated from India to Eastern Europe, since the same mutation is present in people of Pakistani and Indian origin. Additionally, it was learned that within 400 years of entering Europe, the population divided into

three main groups: one in the Balkans, one in the north of the Danube River, and the third into Western

Europe (Brownlee, 2004).

After partly constructing Roma history by looking at its genetic structure, it is also important to

look at the data from a historical-linguistic perspective. The enslavement of Roma people in the

principalities of Wallachia and Moldova, part of today's Romania, played an important part in

determining the history of Roma population within Europe. From the sixteenth until the eighteenth

centuries, there were laws restricting contact between Romanians and Roma people. Initially, it started

with princes donating Roma slaves to monasteries; however, by the sixteenth century, the process

became more complex. According to Iovita and Schurr (2004), there were three categories of Roma that

had been formed: the "tigani boieresti" (Roma enslaved by nobility), "tigani manastiresti" (Roma

enslaved by the monasteries), and "laiesi" (free Roma or Crown gypsies that remained nomadic but used

to pay tribute and technically belonged to the state). The slaves who were the property of nobles and

monasteries were not entitled to any rights and were always at the disposal of their masters.

Additionally, they were forcibly relocated at the periphery of the villages and buried in different

cemeteries than those of Romanians, despite the fact that they were Christians. Moreover, the Roma

families and their children were often separated, sold, exchanged, or simply given away to other

owners.

Even though laws prohibited intermarriage, mixed relationships still occurred. Laws stipulated

that non-Roma who married Roma were bound to become a slave himself/herself. However, demand

for slaves decreased in the 1800s and nobles decided that free peasants (serfs) were more economically

beneficial; the laws changed, prohibiting free peasants from turning into slaves. Consequently, by the

eighteenth century, intermarriage was still banned but the children of mixed unions did not become

slaves. As a result, it was easier for them to be assimilated into the Romanian community. This involved

losing Roma customs and language by entirely adopting the Romanian ones. This was firmly and

rigorously put into place by the authorities until 1856, when the Roma acquired emancipation in the two principalities of Moldova and Wallachia (Iovita and Schurr, 2004).

Following this emancipation proclamation, a series of migrations began that are now known as the "great Kelderara invasion," which marks one of the largest events in ethnic Roma history. By the end of the nineteenth century, most of the Roma population of Romania migrated into neighboring countries and further into West Europe. The Roma groups that migrated speak the Vlach Romani dialect, which is heavily influenced by Romanian language; the name "Rom/Rrom" (Roma) stems from there. The migration process was a continuous practice, especially after the fall of the Iron Curtain and the opening of the Western European borders (Iovita and Schurr, 2004).

Cultural Background

It is essential to recognize the complexities of Roma culture in order to understand their social experiences, which could ultimately provide guidelines for generating effective policies for integration. Because the Roma are a nomadic people, their circumstances changed upon entering Europe and they were often forced to adopt new life strategies. They were stopped from traveling by European governments and forced to settle; thus, they had to find a permanent way to make a living. According to Roman tradition, however, Roma people have to find occupations that they can undertake while traveling. Men can engage in trade (selling and buying animals, or now cars), for instance, while women practice fortune-telling or palm-reading. However, these practices are forbidden in many European countries, so women are frequently seen in remote or hidden areas trying to convince people to have their fortune read (Godwin, 2001).

Weddings, marriage, and music are important factors in Roma lives. Parents arrange weddings for their children at very young ages. Even though child marriages are often considered abusive traditional practices and are not in accordance with international, European, or Romanian law, Roma

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traditions often view things differently; marriage is meant to assure psychological comfort for both the young couple and their families. During the wedding, the women prepare the meals while men slaughter a pig or a cow. In orthodox gypsy families, this gender gap is more obvious since men and women do not eat together at the same table, at weddings or during ordinary meals (Godwin, 2001).

Roma love for their children and how it is manifested is another distinctive aspect within the culture. It is very common to see Roma families with at least five or more children. Being a very collectivist culture, having many children is a survival strategy to ensure that enough people that can work and provide for the family (Godwin, 2001). On the other hand, a large number among the Roma people are uneducated because they refuse to send their children to school, in order to not "be polluted" by the Western or foreign style of living and thinking. (Foreign people or individuals outside the ethnic group are called *Gadjo*.) On the other hand, there are also very educated and successful Roma men and women in professional backgrounds such as journalism, business, and music (Godwin, 2001).

The traditional education provided to Roma children is based on teaching the importance of fraternity, mutual help, and assumed responsibility for others while carefully delimitating gender roles. The girls (as young as five or six years old) take care of housework, while boys learn certain jobs/crafts and participate in male gatherings from the age of seven or eight. The moral principles that form the base of how Roma children are taught are related to the fact that these children are considered adults, with gifts such as strength, intelligence, wishes, and emotions that are given at birth. The only aspect that differentiates them is their lack of experience. Children are protected and their wishes are granted; they enjoy freedom, their progress is highly and overly encouraged and praised. However, they are given important responsibilities when they are very young. It is mandatory for the boys to help their fathers in their occupation, and for the girls to learn how to do housework from early ages so they can prepare to become good daughters-in-law (Rada, 2011).

Moreover, children are freely exposed to any kind of information, including conversations about sexuality. However, the girls are taught to be shy about sexuality; therefore, they avoid contact with strangers and behave in conformity with the recommendations and restrictions imposed by the Roma mentality on what is believed to be pure. The rules regarding shame and keeping themselves pure (virginal), start at five or six years old when girls have to start wearing long skirts that restrict people from seeing their legs or their body shape. Purity and family wealth are two important factors when a father chooses a husband for his daughter. Virginity is expected in a future husband, as well. If the girl is not a virgin when she gets married, then there will never be peace and love within the family. That represents a problem since the Roma rarely practice divorce. Usually, they resort to divorce only because of the infidelity of the woman; the infidelity of the men is often considered a sign of manhood (Rada, 2011). That helps explain the role that women hold within the Roma family, and the difficulties they experience within the society that make them more prone to discrimination and exclusion.

Other issues mark the Roma as distinct from majority European society. Even though the group has a traditional language – Romani – there are certain language and literacy issues that impede communication, for instance. Some Roma, especially women, only speak the Romani language. It is rich in many dialects, and people might have trouble understanding those from other regions or countries. Not a lot of women work outside their homes, and usually the male is the one who speaks for the wife or the entire family. Another aspect that distinguishes them (and facilitates racial profiling) is their use of traditional clothing. These clothes are rich in colors, with women wearing long skirts, scarves and golden coins that decorate their long, black hair. Most of them, especially the elderly, still adopt the traditional clothing, while many young women prefer wearing Western-style clothes (Health Service Executive, 2009).

Current Challenges within Europe

The Roma people have a strong desire to abide by their culture and traditional values, yet this has intensified prejudice against them from societies concerned with exposure to health risks and increasing crime rates (Cretan & Turnock, 2008). The Roma community, since its European arrival in the fourteenth century, has been regularly marginalized and discriminated against. According to Henry Kamm (1993), this situation grew worse after the fall of communism, when an increase in nationalistic feelings emerged and changed the way the ethnic group was perceived by both governments and the public. The ethnic and social transformations that started happening during the Cold War and after the collapse of communism contributed to the current economic situation of the Roma people. After the fall of communism, many of the economic and social protections that the Roma enjoyed in Romania, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia were restrained. This represented the re-emergence of open intolerance and maltreatment that has marked the history of the Roma community (Kamm, 1993). The Roma quality of life started deteriorating; most Roma lost their jobs, housing, and the social programs they were depending on. This led to an increase in discriminatory and racist attitudes and policies. As a result, the Roma started migrating to Western Europe, especially after the integration of many Central and Eastern European nations in the European Union. Unfortunately, Western Europe "welcomed" them with the same anti-Roma attitudes and the media speculated about the consequences of Roma immigration from East to West (Pool & Adamson, 2008).

These anti-Roma sentiments were nothing new, as open intolerance has been central to Roma history. After massive deportations to Transnistria during World War II, for instance, a lot of semi-nomadic communities disappeared and distrust toward the Roma community has increased. The trauma left in the collective memory of the ethnic Roma is one of the reasons why many do not officially acknowledge their ethnic background. This helps explain why the ethnic and cultural identities, as well as the cohesion of Roma communities, have been diminished. Other factors include: communist

assimilation policies (aimed at socio-cultural and economic uniformity), the cultural and economic effects of globalization, and policies regarding European Union accession (democratization), economic difficulties (recession), discrimination against the lower classes, and lack of access to education and social services (Rada, 2011).

Due to their distinctiveness and resulting discrimination, most Roma people in Europe are stateless. While nationality is a legal bond between a state and an individual, statelessness refers to the condition of an individual who is not considered as a national by any state (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, n.d.). Therefore, most Roma individuals have no legal nationality and live outside social protection. This causes them to face a double burden: Being stateless connects to other human rights issues (aside from being already stigmatized and discriminated against), and the situation is even worse for those who are migrants. Many ethnic Roma lack any formal identity documents – a fact that leads to infringements on their access to basic human rights such as healthcare and education. This in turn increases their predisposition to remain in a cycle of statelessness (Hammarberg, 2009). They often never obtain or even try to acquire birth certificates, which forces many ethnic Roma to live outside any social protection or inclusion. Even though states are obliged to monitor and prevent the exclusion of vulnerable groups like the Roma, according to the European Committee of Social Rights, no effort has been made by the authorities to determine the root cause of their statelessness. This is partly due to the systematic marginalization Roma face by both the authorities and societies they live in (Hammarberg, 2009). This situation particularly affects Roma children, diminishing their chances to acquire educational or healthcare benefits. State refusal to recognize them as nationals infringes on their rights provided by international legal frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which stipulates that children have the right to acquire nationality (Hammarberg, 2009).

Despite these ongoing human rights concerns, the Council of Europe has been a prominent leader in fighting against violations and protecting Roma rights. For instance, the adoption of the 1997 European Convention on Nationality and the 2006 European Convention on the Avoidance of Statelessness in Relation to State Succession are positive steps toward eliminating Roma statelessness. These treaties aim to put an end to *de facto* and *de jure* statelessness of Roma, providing them with legal nationality. The European treaties provide general rules and principles that aim to ensure the gratification of the basic human right to a nationality within Europe. Some of the most important provisions are: 1) respect for the primary principle of non-discrimination in law and practice, 2) obligation on states to avoid statelessness, including in the context of states succession, 3) obligation to grant nationality to children born on their territories and who do not acquire another nationality at birth, 4) restrictive conditions on loss of nationality by law, and 5) duty of states to reason and provide in writing their nationality-related decisions (Hammarberg, 2009).

Due to statelessness and widespread discrimination, the health conditions of the Roma community are deplorable. Poverty, precarious living conditions, and lack of access to adequate healthcare have led to the spread of diseases such as tuberculosis and hepatitis among large numbers of Roma individuals. As a result, the life expectancy of Roma populations is considerably lower than that of majority populations. Additionally, the medical community sometimes lacks recent data and statistics for fully addressing the health situations of the Roma community (Rada, 2011). Existing data shows serious problems with health education and access. For instance, statistics have increased for women getting married before the age of 18 – increasing from 44.6 percent to the current 52.1 percent. Relatedly, there has been an increase in the number of children per family when the wife/mother married young. This is usually explained by the disuse of contraceptives. Looking at a comparative study between the total female population and the female population of Roma ethnicity in Romania, the differences are dramatic: Only 13.7 percent of Roma women (the ones at fertile ages from 15-44) have

used contraception while, among the total population, almost 58 percent have used contraceptive methods. Part of the reason why Roma women score so low is because of their lack of knowledge/ information about contraception. Data also shows that there is the need for more education related to the prevention and treatment of diseases such as cervical cancer, breast cancer, the HPV virus, heart issues and diabetes; all diseases prevalent among the female population (Rada, 2011).

Economic rights and gender

Within the Roma ethnic group, women are the most vulnerable to human rights abuses and discrimination. Their role, often reinforced by patriarchal tradition and culture, has created obstacles to women's access to education and employment opportunities. Many times, the family or the male figure will oppose women's rights to education and employment, since the traditional female role is to do housework and take care of the children. Roma women have a hard time finding jobs because of their lack of education and professional experience, and often because of employers' discriminatory mentalities. However, the Roma population is shifting toward new occupations and qualifications are also increasing. Despite this increase, men represent 65 percent of the active working population, which means that the Roma people still abide by their traditional gender model in which men are the main source of income. The presence of the Roma female on the job market is dependent on the structure of the family she is part of, the degree of education she acquired, self-esteem, and her attitude about having a job (Rada, 2011).

Within the past several years, the professional integration of Roma people into the Romanian job market has been rendered more difficult because of a variety of factors, including lack of professional qualifications. The economic recession has put the Roma work force into a competition where they hold unequal chances and are exposed to discriminatory practices because of inter-ethnic experiences. The reluctance of employers to hire Roma workers is due, in part, to the distorted social

image of this ethnic group. Common belief stipulates that the Roma community is associated with high crime rates, difficult social dialogue, instability, inconsistency, etc. Moreover, the access to formal professional qualification is conditioned by mandatory graduation of the basic level of education (eight years of schooling), and within the Roma population school abandonment is frequent after five or six years of school. The girls' situation is even more difficult since they regularly abandon school within the first years of formal education. This is in part due to the pressure of gender roles imposed by the traditional values and culture (Rada, 2011).

A traditional Roma family is based on a culture that values collectivism, and each family member has a role that makes him/her more responsible towards the family as a whole. This tendency is far less common in more modern, individualistic families that represent mainstream Romania. Roma families often reject this emphasis on individuality because it can cause imbalance in their community. Some Roma believe that individuality (at the expense of community) leads to physical and mental traumas for people who abide by modern culture and the illusion of liberty (e.g. women getting education and seeking employment outside the household). According to the traditional roles within a Roma family, the male is the breadwinner and the head of the family, who responsible for taking care of dependents and ensuring financial comfort to his wife and children. The female is responsible for taking care of the children and ensuring their education. Additionally, she is in charge of housekeeping, cooking and supervising sick or elderly members of the family. Sometimes she might financially contribute to the well-being of the family by selling the products made by her husband (Rada, 2011).

Several general aspects of the economic conditions faced by Roma women offer a better understanding of traditional gender roles, the societal challenges faced by females, and how the government can address these issues. According to Marian D. Ilie (2011), the parameters that illlustrate the economic situation of ethnic Roma females in comparison to females in mainstream Romanian society include: employment, the job location in rapport to place of residence, and the situation and

duration of unemployment benefits and living conditions. In terms of employment opportunities

compared to the total female population, Roma females have a lower percentage of job market

penetration. Out of the total female population, Roma females represent 2.37 percent of women

workers. According to job market statistics, only 76.4 percent of Roma women who are able to work are

actually active, while at a national level 90.6 percent of women enjoy employment (Ilie, 2011).

Further analysis indicates that Roma females represent one of the population categories that

enjoy significant unemployment benefits and face prolonged periods of unemployment. Data shows

that 25.8 percent of Roma women are sustained by government resources. This indicates an atypical

situation, considering that the same percentage calculated in relationship to the total national female

population is only 1.6 percent. As a result, programs that stimulate the integration of Roma females into

the job market could actually financially benefit the Romanian government. However, in terms of job

location in relationship to the place of residence, there is not a major difference between the Roma

females and the rest of the female population. The percentage of women who reside in the same area

or city as their place of work, and do not need to commute, is about 89.7 percent for Roma women,

which is close to the level for the total population at 87.5 percent. Compared to the total national

population, Roma females are less likely to be consistently employed. The unemployment rate for the

total Romanian female adult population is 9.37 percent, while within the Roma community it is 2.5 times

higher, reaching 23.5 percent. If the duration of unemployment is considered, the situation seems even

more discouraging; the percentage of female Roma who receive unemployment compensation for more

than 27 months is significantly higher than that of the total female population (45.2 percent compared

to 27.6 percent) (Ilie, 2011).

The last indicator of the economic situation of female Roma is represented by their living

conditions. While 55 percent of households in Romania have sewage facilities, within the Roma

community only 17.88 percent access those facilities. There are even higher discrepancies when it

comes to heating (there is a 5 times higher difference), but there are also better situations where the differences are almost insignificant (when it comes to electricity or simply having a kitchen facility). Overall, this suggests the grave differences and precarious conditions that Roma females are facing. Their basic living and health conditions are directly related to low employment opportunities and the inability to generate a stable income. Additionally, the precarious living conditions are not only due to poverty caused by lack of jobs, but also because of residential segregation (Ilie, 2011).

Challenges within Romania

Romania is an excellent case study because it holds the highest number of ethnic Roma, followed by Hungary and Albania. Despite government inclusion policies and programs, the discriminatory mentality of Romanian society toughens and delays the integration process. Due to racial bias, the government estimates the number of Roma people at 500,000, while European Union researchers estimate that figure to be closer to 1.5 million. Human rights activists extend that number to as high as 2 to 2.5 million (Grigore, 2007). It is estimated that about 200,000 Roma live in metropolitan areas where there are higher employment and housing opportunities. However, due to social stigma, they have a harder time finding proper housing and jobs. Additionally, their children face racist attitudes and are held back in schools. Unfortunately, less than eight percent of Roma children are enrolled in elementary school, while only two percent of those pursue a high school or college degree. Thus, this only leaves the Roma people with tedious, low level jobs like garbage pickup, street cleaning, and dish washing.

One of the most widespread social problems in Romanian metropolitan areas is the issue of street children. More than 80 percent of homeless children are of Roma ethnicity. After the fall of communism, Roma people have been economically impacted. This led to an increase in orphans and child abandonment; many of these children today are currently living in the sewers of big cities. Even

though the Council of Europe estimates that about 1,000 children wander the streets of Romania's

capital city in Bucharest, local NGOs contend that more realistic estimates put that figure at 10,000 or

even more (Grigore, 2007).

Data on Roma populations isn't always easy to attain; the social stigma faced by Roma people

often prompts them to lie about their ethnicity on national census forms. This way they can benefit from

social programs or job prospects, while strongly trying to preserve their ethnic identity through

unofficial channels. On the other hand, a low percentage of Roma individuals perceive themselves as

fully integrated (and no longer part of the ethnic group), seeing themselves instead as Romanians

abiding by Roma culture and traditions. This way, they attempt to avoid the social stigma arising from

identification with traditionally-minded "nomad gypsies," whose marginalization and customs are

characteristics that set them apart as an anti-social ethnic group (Cretan & Turnock, 2008).

Even though there has been an ongoing problem of social exclusion, governments have had

limited success with integration policies and sometimes resort to radical and inhumane approaches. One

example comes from the Roma community in the Romanian city of Baia Mare. In 2012, Mayor Catalin

Chereches finalized the construction of a concrete wall around a Roma settlement, shutting the

community off from the rest of the town. His reasoning for building the tall, thick wall was that it would

keep children safe from the main road, and it would ultimately improve their lives. However, human

rights advocates accused Chereches of racism, claiming that his scheme to improve lives had only

entrapped the Roma community in a ghetto and made their plight even worse. The concrete wall, which

is 1.8 meters (six feet) tall, was built on a dam and is constructed on one side of collapsing apartment

blocks. Because it links with other buildings and walls, it surrounds the area with few access points. Even

though Chereches claimed that it has improved the living conditions of children, the wall keeps Roma

away from the society and it lacks space and basic facilities such as bathrooms. However, according to

Chereches: "It's clear…conditions there are not similar to the Hilton or Marriott. But this doesn't mean

this is not a step forward towards their civilization and emancipation." By imprisoning the Roma families in the Romanian town of Baia Mare, Chereches became the country's most popular local politician. He won 86 percent of the votes in a June 2012 local election, days after the relocation started. Several members of the Baia Mare community support his strategy: "He's done a great job by putting up the wall," said Michael Szinn, a 74-year-old retiree. "Gypsy kids were on the streets before and threw stones at cars. Moving others [to a Roma slum] is an even better thing for our city" (Gladdis, 2013).

Outbreaks of anti-Roma sentiment are common across Central and Eastern Europe, while considerably high numbers of people have fled to Western European countries since European Union membership. According to the police, many Roma individuals beg and are often involved in crime and trafficking rings. A European Commission study showed that one in four EU citizens (25 percent) would be uncomfortable with a Roma neighbor against six percent if the neighbor was from a different ethnic group (Gladdis, 2013). The anti-Roma sentiments are also fueled by the ethnic group's extensive migration. The migration process constitutes ones of the biggest challenges, and impedes effective societal integration and acceptance. Lacking adequate policies and resources, European countries experience huge waves of migration of the Roma people. Considering the challenges they face, Roma consider migration as the only chance for their socio-economic survival. This makes it difficult on the local authorities' budgets and fuels the resentments and discomfort of the larger community, while making it almost impossible for the Roma people to enjoy their rights. Additionally, because of the precarious living conditions, illiteracy and poverty, Roma children and women are more likely to be victims of human trafficking. In 2010, the European Roma Rights Center conducted a research study on the issue of Roma vulnerability to human trafficking within Romania. The results show that Roma population is highly vulnerable to trafficking for the purposes of begging, forced labor, and sexual exploitation. Unfortunately, even though the Romanian government has passed laws for the protection of the Roma victims that are being trafficked, nothing has been implemented yet. This is partially

because the government refuses to collect trafficking data disaggregated by ethnicity of the victims. When reporting human trafficking, the Romanian government focuses on the high number of Roma responsible for trafficking, rather than considering them as a group that is otherwise highly vulnerable to this practice (European Roma Rights Center, 2012).

Romanian Government Policies towards Social Inclusion

Despite unfortunate radical and inhumane treatment by state authorities, public policies focused on the Roma ethnic group have experienced some progress since 2002. This is first because Roma activists have undertaken advocacy related to their life conditions and their rights, and secondly because public and international institutions have pushed Roma issues onto the political agenda. Only after 1996 has the Romanian government paid attention to the Roma situation in the context of rights entitled to minorities, otherwise emphasized by the Romanian constitution and international treaties Romania has ratified. Romania has assumed obligations imposed by the 1975 Helsinki Treaty and has entered into bilateral treaties with Hungary and Ukraine that protect national minorities. Since then, several governmental bodies have attempted to advocate for and ensure that minority rights are respected. However, the financial resources for projects aimed at ensuring minority rights and promoting integration within the society have been scarce, despite the growing interest by Western countries in minority rights issues. In 2000, the international community paid close attention to Romania's programs of inclusion and respect for minority rights because of two reasons: increased ethnic violence (including police abuse of Roma community members that was reported to international institutions) and Romania's bid for European Union membership, which included taking measures to improve the well-being of Roma ethnic group (Ionescu & Cace, 2006).

As a result of these pressures, some affirmative measures have been taken. Minority citizen organizations are allowed to be represented in the Parliament, they can participate in elections, and

through electoral law they can gain seats in the government. The Ministry of Education assures the reservation of places for Roma individuals in public educational institutions. It also adopted a law that facilitates the admission of Roma children in high schools and special skills schools. Moreover, more funding has been allotted to nongovernmental organizations that fight against discrimination and for the protection of the rights of minorities (Ionescu & Cace, 2006).

The Roma situation has become a matter of interest to a variety of actors, both internal and external, and actions are intricately linked to Romania's socio-economic situation. The inclusion of Romania in the Euro-Atlantic structures and membership within the European Union has allowed for the re-orientation of policies towards certain populations impacted by economic recession. The Department for the Protection of National Minorities was established in 1997, for instance, which included the National Roma Office. This office is tasked with representing the interests of the Roma population. One year later, in 1998, the Department for the Protection of National Minorities established a sub-commission for the Roma people, formed from representatives of Roma-related institutions and associations united under the name "The Work Group of Roma Association" (GLAR). The goal for this sub-commission was to substantially work on and develop programs aimed at improving of the situation of the Roma community. However, the results of the 2000 election had a negative impact on this program. The Department for the Protection of National Minorities was dissolved, and its tasks were transferred to the Ministry of Public Relations. By the end of 2005, the tasks of the National Office for Roma were also transferred to the newly established institution, The National Agency for Roma (Ionescu & Cace, 2006).

Experts and government officials have initiated long-term plans aimed at developing and enacting Roma social inclusion policies. In the legislative spectrum that covers Roma societal integration, the following documents have been issued: The National Strategy for the Improvement of the Roma Situation (H.G. 430/2001), The National Plan on Combating Poverty and Promoting Social Inclusion

2002-2012 (HG 829/2002), The Joint Inclusion Memorandum 2005-2010, The National Development

Plan 2007-2013, The National Action Plans developed within the spectrum of the international initiative

"The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-1015," The National Strategic Reference Plan 2007-2013, The

Operational Program "Human Resources Development 2007-2013," and the Romanian government

strategy towards inclusion of Romanian citizens of Roma ethnicity between 2012-2020. Additionally,

there is another relevant document with respect to social inclusion: Law 116 of 15 March 2012

regarding the prevention and elimination of social marginalization. Article 1 of the 116 Law,

encompasses the social attribute of the state to implement measures that combat degradation of living

conditions and preserve citizens' dignity. Article 2 outlines the effective and immediate guarantee,

especially to young people, of fundamental rights such as the right to employment, housing, healthcare,

and education (Rusu et al., 2012).

Challenges to integration policies

Despite laws to ensure the protection of minority rights, a 2011 analysis by the European

Commission showed that poverty in Romania remains a pressing concern. The poverty rate stands at a

mere 1.71 euro per day, per person. Data shows that there is a need to continue economic programs,

and it further indicates that Roma people are the main population category directly affected by the

extreme poverty level (both in Romania and at the European Union level). As a result, there is a

continuous need to develop European programs directed at these vulnerable population groups (Rusu et

al., 2012). There are fundamental public policies aimed at social inclusion and the improvement of Roma

living conditions of Roma, yet human rights challenges persist despite government policies. In particular,

these challenges relate to access to education, healthcare, and housing.

Education is the primary goal of Romanian politicians when it comes to the improvement of

living conditions among the Roma ethnic minority. Education is considered the main tool for addressing

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the vicious cycle of poverty that impacts the Roma community. The educational programs of the last 20 years have aimed to resolve problems of limited school attendance and lower literacy levels of the Roma. This has been done in conjunction with the development of the intellectual Roma elite. Additionally, there has been a continuous effort to reconstruct the Roma identity through publication of textbooks and scholarly materials in the Romani language, as well as literature on Roma culture, civilization, and history for use in primary and secondary schools. Books, textbooks, and bilingual dictionaries in both Romanian and Romani language are also available. Moreover, since 1992 Romania has adopted affirmative public policies for ethnic Roma citizens in order to stimulate their enrollment in high school and higher education. This involves the allocation of additional spots for Roma students who can pass the minimum standardized test requirements. The supplementary spots (about 1,000 seats) are allocated in several other higher education disciplines such as sociology, political science, psychology, law, and medicine. In addition, the Romani language has been introduced as an optional language choice within Romanian primary and secondary schools. The government has also invested in the training of Roma academic professors and there are more than 1,900 graduates of university courses of Romani language and literature (Rusu et al., 2012).

Positive practices in the educational system also include a series of measures the Romanian government has adopted to offer social support to Roma children coming from disadvantaged, poor families. Some of these measures include providing school meals, subsidized textbooks, and school transportation. Several bilingual kindergartens have been founded that teach Romanian to Romani-speaking children. This is meant to encourage and support an easier adaptation to the national educational system, whose main teaching language is Romanian. The main objective of this project is for children to gain the necessary abilities to communicate in Romanian language, develop relationships between parents and school institutions, and to encourage the participation of Roma parents in their children's school life. A special program has been developed, called "the Second Chance," that targets

adults who have abandoned school, or young individuals that passed the age in which they can enroll to

finish their primary and secondary education. This program is the most beneficial for Roma females and

young girls who tend to abandon school in larger numbers at earlier ages than men do (Rusu et al.,

2012).

Concerning the public health care system, Romania has been going through a lot of major

changes since 1989. Demographically, there has been a decline in the population because of low birth

rates and increased mortality and migration rates. Also, the general health condition of Romanian

people is quite low compared to other European states; life expectancy in Romania is six times shorter

than the average within the European Union member states. Infant mortality and mortality among

mothers represent some of the highest rates in Europe. Among the Roma population, the situation is

even worse. The lack of decent living conditions, vulnerability to forced evictions, and limited access to

clean water and adequate sewerage treatment are issues that predominantly affect the Roma

population, making them vulnerable to diseases such as Hepatitis A and tuberculosis. Other factors that

contribute to the precarious health condition of Roma people are low levels of education, lack of

nutritious food, lack of communication between Roma people and medical staff, lack of access to

information related to healthcare, and lack of proper identification documents (Rusu et al., 2012).

As a result, the government has adopted national healthcare programs that target the Roma

ethnic community. In 2008, the National Healthcare Program was established with the goal to improve

the health conditions of Roma by facilitating their access to health services. However, despite increased

government spending on the public healthcare system, there is a constant need to teach medical staff

about the problems of discrimination and cultural differences. Discriminatory attitudes and mentalities

are reflected in the quality of services given to ethnic Roma individuals. According to sociological

research conducted by the 2011 EU-Inclusive project, only 70 percent of Roma within the first six

months of 2011 used medical services, out of which more than 54 percent responded that they felt

discriminated against by the medical staff when trying to access public health services (Rusu et al., 2012).

Lastly, policies regarding housing still represent challenges despite housing being a central issue for advocates of social inclusion. The lack of housing for Roma families – which includes lack of decent living conditions and residential segregation – impacts the vicious cycle of exclusion. Despite its importance, housing remains the most neglected issue among the Roma minority. While Romania is experiencing a "chronic shortage" of social housing, an increase in prices during the last decade has made it almost impossible for disadvantaged, poor families (especially Roma) to rent or purchase a decent housing facility. Some of the factors that contribute to the exclusion of Roma with respect to proper housing are the lack of proper identification documents, lack of property documents to attest that they own the land or facility where they reside, overpopulation, lack of basic utilities (such as hot water, heating, electricity, sewerage, paved streets), great distances between their residences and important centers (such as government authorities, schools, hospitals), and their proximity to dangerous sites (such as sewage plants, waste dumps, radioactive plants). According to a 2005 study, more than 60 percent of Roma communities are poor, and more than 50 percent live in these kinds of locations (Rusu et al., 2012).

The responsibility for public housing policies centers on Romania's Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration and the National Housing Agency. With the help of PHARE programs between 2002 and 2004, there have been attempts to provide social housing to Roma without documentation. The PHARE Program is the main mechanism through which the EU helps its candidate and member countries, by granting them financial and technical support. The PHARE Program has been providing support to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe since 1989, helping them through a period of massive economic restructuring and political change. Following the 1993 Copenhagen Council's invitation for central European countries to apply for membership, PHARE support was

reoriented and included a marked expansion in support to infrastructure investment (European

Commission-Enlargement Information Unit, n.d.). In 2005, 14.16 million euros were allocated from the

EU budget, plus 3.33 million euros from the Romanian national budget, for a number of projects meant

to build and rehabilitate social housing of Roma communities. These investments were not successful in

fixing the living and housing conditions of the Roma, but they did stimulate local authorities into paying

closer attention to this issue (Rusu et al., 2012).

Recommendations for Better Social Inclusion Strategies

While the legal framework for respecting minority rights is a necessity, it is insufficient for

ensuring the Roma community's social and economic integration. Therefore, there is a need to develop

opportunities for respecting the rights of the Roma. There are several recommendations that could aid

in drafting inclusion strategies at the national and international level. The most important is to continue

facilitating access to educational opportunities, which is an essential element for future development of

the Roma ethnicity. Since the phenomenon of school abandonment is still prevalent, a suggestion would

be to offer children (starting with preschool ages) educational allowances, free meals, and textbooks.

These constitute stimulants for school participation, especially since integration of children at the

earliest school phases determines continuance in higher educational stages, and also contributes to long

term societal development (Preoteasa, 2003).

Additionally, there is a need for conducting national and European awareness campaigns about

Roma children. Issues include strengthening the role and responsibility of Roma mothers within the

family and community, educating parents/adults, combating identity-related stigma, and diminishing

racism children face in schools. Non-governmental organizations could be further developed, as well, to

assist poor families, children in orphanages, and single-parental families (Roma Parliamentary Sub-

Commission, 2010). The general public needs to be better informed about the Roma situation and

challenges faced by this community in order to avoid misinterpretations and stereotypes. That is why it is essential to implement and finance programs aimed at social and economic integration by involving and asking for the support of the local community (Preoteasa, 2003). Moreover, there is also a need for public campaigns and diversity management courses for civil servants and government officials in order to eliminate discriminatory mentalities, familiarize individuals with Roma issues, and to spread awareness of Roma culture, history, and traditional values.

Other issues that need to be thoroughly addressed are those of migration and the risk of human trafficking. The government ought to launch awareness campaigns that educate the Roma with respect to migration and the risk of being victims of human trafficking. Extensive research and transparency is required when dismantling human trafficking rings, and careful attention to the use of racial profilers is necessary for existing operations that separate the traffickers from the trafficked (Roma Parliamentary Sub-Commission, 2010). The Romanian government ought to implement training programs for police dealing with human trafficking and sexual abuse victims, and eradicate criminalization of sex trafficking victims by offering protection and assistance instead (European Roma Rights Center, 2012). Furthermore, strategic projects must be developed aimed at ameliorating the socio-economic situation of vulnerable Roma communities, making them understand the risks associated with migration and ultimately dismantling the concept that this is the only survival strategy (Roma Parliamentary Sub-Commission, 2010).

Additional recommendations are in regard to the improvement of the economic stability within the Roma community. In order to fight discrimination within the workforce, the Romanian government could offer certain benefits or subsidies to employers that hire Roma individuals. In order to expand professional qualifications of the Roma, the government could develop and implement programs of professional training while stimulating agricultural activities within the Roma communities. Moreover, there ought to be awareness programs that target employers, teaching them about workplace

discrimination, equal employment opportunities, and social dialogue. The government could also

encourage entrepreneurial activities among Roma disadvantaged groups, especially among females, and

could implement programs to help the Roma identify financial resources for starting small businesses,

designing resumes, preparing for job interviews, job seeking, and facilitating access to housing (Rada,

2011).

Even though it seems that there have been efforts on the part of the Romanian government and

the international community to effectively integrate the Roma community and respect their human

rights, in reality this minority group still faces pervasive challenges. Despite the fact that they are on

every European nation's agenda, the Roma people still continue to face discrimination and live on the

margins of society. Societies (including the media and politicians) have often resorted to stereotypes – a

fact mainly due to people's ignorance of the complexities of Roma culture and tradition. It is imperative

that the Romanian government cooperates with non-governmental organizations to raise awareness,

change discriminatory mentalities, and offer solutions and complementary programs to effectively

integrate the Roma community within Europe.

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