EUROPEAN
POLICY BRIEF

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

15 September 2015

INTRODUCTION

MigRom is a European research consortium led by the University of Manchester (UK), in partnership with University of Granada (Spain), University of Verona (Italy), Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (Paris, France) Institute for Research on National Minorities (Cluj-Napoca, Romania), Manchester City Council, and the European Roma and Travellers Forum. The research teams include academics from a range of disciplines including socio-cultural anthropology, history, linguistics, demography, political sciences, media studies and social psychology. The researchers are specialists in the study of Romani society and culture and the relations between Roma and non-Roma. All research teams include staff of Romani background.

In the second project year, an Extended Survey was carried out among communities of Romani migrants in France (La Courneuve, Paris region), Italy (Milan and Bari), Spain (Granada, Malaga, Seville and Cordoba) and the United Kingdom (Greater Manchester), and in their origin communities in Romania (Slobozia, Ialomița and Sălaj). The Extended Survey expands on the findings of the MigRom Pilot Survey: http://migrom.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/firstyearreports/
Full reports on the Extended Survey can be found here:
http://migrom.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/secondyearreports/

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

The research teams relied on participant observation, life history interviews, quantitative data on demographic and economic indicators, archive material, and media analysis and online questionnaires about attitudes. These were used to obtain a picture of the history of the communities prior to migration, the motivations for migration, migrants' support networks, and the effect that migration has had on the origin (sending) communities. The teams investigated indicators of social inclusion in the target (receiving) communities including residence,

employment, access to education, leadership and representation, and changes to family structure, and analysed local policy interventions, media discourses and public attitudes toward Romani migrants. The consortium adopts a comparative perspective, investigating the circumstances and participation patterns of Romani migrants who originate from a number of locations in Romania, in a number of different target communities in Western Europe. The project pilots an innovative model of participatory research that involves Roma in the research design, analysis and dissemination of results, supports outreach work and capacity building in the community of Romani migrants, provides training to public services and policy input to local authorities, and engages actively with the media.

The profile of the communities under investigation is shaped by historical events that include the aftermath of Romani serfdom in Romania in the late nineteenth century, ethnic tensions triggered by the agrarian conflicts and the inter-war reforms in the early twentieth century, deportations to Transnistria during the Second World War, restrictions on itinerant economies and integration into the state agricultural and industrial sectors under communism, and negative images that include, in the case of one of the communities in particular (Ţăndărei in Ialomiţa), perpetual accusations of kidnapping and child trafficking.

The current mobility of Romanian Roma within Europe (and beyond) is an outcome of the transformations that Romania has undergone since 1989, such as the dissolution of collective farms and the decline of state industry, privatisation of land, and the opening of borders. Through a combination of traditional peripatetic activities and work on collective farms and in state-owned mines and factories, many Roma families had achieved a state of economic stability under communism. After the fall of communism, however, most Roma lost their state jobs, while only few received land from the redistribution committees. Growing financial hardship, coupled with an increase in overt expression of anti-Gypsyism and racially motivated violence, led to a cycle of downward social mobility and exclusion. Roma who emigrate generally have some resources to invest in the migratory process, while those who suffer even greater deprivation either stay in Romania or contract debts or other forms of dependencies in order to emigrate.

Several features characterise the migration of Roma; they derive from the key role of family structures in Romani society, coupled with the historical experience of marginalisation. These offer Roma greater flexibility, on the one hand, and a resilience to endure risks on the other. Migration networks revolve around family and social structures, and draw on pockets of information on work and accommodation opportunities in the receiving countries. Roma are often willing to move from one country to another to make use of such opportunities. As a consequence, migration is not a linear trajectory that connects Romania as a country of origin with Western European destination countries. Instead, each country is both a point of origin and a destination of migratory flows, resulting in the formation of a multi-sited diaspora. Romani migrations are characterised by young migrant communities that have a clear family base, often a higher than average birth rate generating larger households, and which consist of networks of related households rather than of nuclear families.

Stable residence is a key to social inclusion. Where Roma migrants have no other choice but to reside in makeshift camps in constant fear of evictions, as in Paris and Milan, employment is limited to the informal sector and school attendance is hindered, often obliging parents to leave children behind in Romania. By contrast, where Roma migrants have access to stable accommodation in the private sector, as in the UK and Spain, they are able to make use of employment opportunities (though usually at the bottom-end of the formal job market, or in poorly remunerated self-employment), and school attendance is regular. The removal of restrictions on employment in January 2014 has opened up new job opportunities and given a boost to the integration especially of young people, though it is noteworthy that it did not trigger a new wave of migration from Romania.

Migration contributes to improving the economic conditions in the origin communities, of both Roma and non-Roma. All families interviewed invest a sizeable portion of their income in the construction or improvement of houses in Romania, and as a result Romani families are moving out of segregated areas and into ethnically mixed neighbourhoods. Migrants employ local (usually non-Romani) labourers for construction work, and housekeepers and carers for elderly relatives. Some invest in small businesses owned and operated by relatives, usually by purchasing stock or developing infrastructure. The local service and retail industries benefit from the increased

spending power of Romani migrants who return to the origin communities during holidays. Young Roma who visit the communities of origin act as role models who help raise aspirations.

Migration accelerates the process of demographic change. Earlier patterns of teenage marriage and uncontrolled fertility are being replaced by a pattern of early adult marriage followed by the birth of one or two children and the purposeful postponement of further pregnancies. Religious affiliation to Pentecostalism in some communities is counteracting this trend, as it discourages contraception. The need to care for the elderly, who generally stay behind in Romania, is a key factor motivating migrants to maintain contact with the origin communities. On the other hand, the absence of the elderly in the destination communities gives young people greater control over their lives and facilitates changes in social attitudes; there is a growing tendency among young couples to find separate accommodation, and for households to revolve around the nuclear rather than extended family. Access to school and availability in principle of a variety of jobs open up new opportunities and raise aspirations among young women.

Local authorities react in different ways to Romani migrants. Some (e.g. Manchester, some cities in Spain) aim to normalise the situation of Roma in regard to housing, employment, education and health care by offering training and advice while also tackling issues of negative public perception. Others (e.g. Paris, Milan) engage in systematic attempts to remove migrant Roma from their jurisdictions. In between these two extremes we find measures that risk having a segregating effect: turning camps into permanent settlements (e.g. Bari), or proposals to set up separate education pathways and school admission protocols and special tracking and information sharing procedures (e.g. those put forward by voluntary sector partners, but not implemented, in Manchester). In most cases, interventions are part of a crisis management strategy in response to expressions of hostility against Romani migrants, often in the form of protests and petitions and in some cases anti-Roma violence. Local authority responses that aim to alleviate tensions and maintain community cohesion are often accompanied by measures to control and contain Romani migrants in order to appease the 'host' population (Manchester, Milan, Paris). In some cases, crisis management involves the drafting of strategy papers and the setting up of monitoring bodies (Manchester, Milan). Implementation usually relies on multi-agency cooperation and involvement of third sector agencies, church organisations, schools, as well as individuals from within the Romani communities.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Migrant Romani communities are perceived as tight-knit networks of young, large families who are prepared to take risks such as temporary residence in overcrowded conditions or low-income and informal work including, in extreme cases, stigmatised activities such as begging. This profile is usually interpreted by public opinion against the background of pre-existing ideological dispositions and stereotypes. This results in pressure on policy bodies to introduce measures to control and contain Roma, or even to remove them. The challenge facing policy makers is to disentangle approaches to Romani migrants from such dispositions. It is of crucial importance to abandon the notion that Romani culture is a hindrance to participation. Instead it is essential to accept that social inclusion requires the dismantling of exclusionary practices and narratives. Residential stability and protection from evictions is the most important key to social participation. Capacity building can help ensure that Roma become active participants in planning strategies that affect their own communities. Interventions that are outsourced to third sector agencies must be subjected to close scrutiny, accountability, and quality assurance, in order to ensure that they too adhere to these principles. Policy at European level should acknowledge the contribution that migrants are making to support the upward social mobility of Roma in the origin communities and the fact that this contribution has, potentially, far greater positive impact than structured EU development funds.

Rather than view Romania strictly as the country of origin and Western European countries as destinations, a model of migration must recognise the double role that each location has as both the origin and destination of migratory flows. Romani migrants are members of family networks that are scattered across Europe. Their frequent visits to other network members are often prolonged. Their mobility can therefore be understood as a pattern of long-term multi-sited residence. In this perspective, push and pull factors are not linear trajectories but dynamic and often circular processes.

Local policy toward Romani migrants typically shows two strands. The first seeks to enable social inclusion by applying equality protocols. To that end, it confronts negative public attitudes to Roma. The second strand singles out Roma on the basis of assumed 'cultural' or 'lifestyle' differences and launches interventions to change the 'behaviour' of Roma. Central to this strand are images and allegations of early and forced marriage, the sale of child brides, neglect of children, begging, trafficking and organised crime. In some cases both strands co-exist in the same local context. Measures that serve the inclusion strand tend to follow a strict template that identifies targets and achievement indicators; those that serve the containment strand, on the other hand, tend to be seen by their initiators as open-ended. The availability of funding grants (especially EU grants) and local service contracts is a key factor that motivates third sector agencies to engage in work with Romani migrants.

The involvement of community members in the research offers new and contextualised insights into issues that community members consider to be important. It also offers community members opportunities to acquire research skills. The consortium's partnership with a Romani NGO allows Romani representatives to become active participants in the research design and the dissemination of results in particular to policy bodies. It also allows the NGO to draw on the input of the academic partners to formulate policy proposals. The project's community outreach component (Manchester) pilots a scheme to provide advice and support which is Roma-led and which at the same time benefits from the input of researchers and the local authority. In two of the research sites (Manchester, Paris) the project fosters Romani leadership capacity and facilitates access to mass media and local policy bodies.

PROJECT IDENTITY

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

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Universidad De Granada – UGR - Granada, Spain
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FUNDING SCHEME
FP7-SSH-2012.5.1-2. Dealing with diversity and cohesion: the case of the Roma in the European Union

DURATION	April 2013 – March 2017 (48 months).
BUDGET	EU contribution: 2 487 903 €.
WEBSITE	http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/migrom/index.html
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FURTHER READING

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