

EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF



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

Final Policy Brief

26 May 2017

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.

EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

The migration of Roma from Romania is part of a more general process of migration of the Romanian population. Re-location of Roma with their families abroad is a rather late development that followed the migration of individuals, first from the majority population of ethnic Romanians, and then of Roma, after 2007. This recent migration of Romanian Roma is typically a circular mobility pattern that is characterised by migration and periodic returns and the maintenance of transnational networks. Investments and increased consumption in the home communities are important features of these mobility patterns. Financial and social remittances are shaping a process of gradual improvement of status, and this is often accompanied by residential desegregation of those who can afford to move into more central and prestigious areas within the localities. As a consequence, the visibility of the local Roma populations has increased in the origin communities. Even in cases where a large part of the Roma population is living abroad, their

presence is indicated by the construction of homes and their involvement in local trade. As a result, traditional interethnic relations and attitudes towards Roma are undergoing gradual change and the local majority's perception of the Roma is improving.

In migration, Roma networks appear to have particular features that distinguish them from other migrant groups (especially those from European countries): They have a clear family base; the married couple is generally the unit of migratory movement, although additional members of the household often migrate with the head couple, especially children and parents; a higher birth rate among Roma results in a higher number of household members; and the greater part of the household is often involved in international mobility. The household group does not migrate alone but tends to move with others who are related through kinship, and to generate networks of households in the host country.

The multi-site investigation resulted in a number of generalisations that can be made about the demographics of Romanian Roma migrant communities as well as about key elements of their inclusion and access to local services and institutions, and ways of establishing an economic base. The social organisation of Romanian Roma groups in the host countries is usually based on relatively large and dense locally situated family and household networks which, in turn, are connected by kin, marriage and regional networks-of-networks across Europe. These 'social fields' constitute moral and legal communities that share a sense of community (imagined but also operative) based on culture-language-origin. They are also largely intermarrying communities.

Romanian Roma migrants are a very young and fast growing population, with a stronger reproductive orientation and a lower life expectancy than their neighbours in any European country. They quite possibly constitute the youngest European population: often, 45% are children under 16 years of age and 80% are younger than 35. However, a decline of fertility rates has been observed which could be leading towards demographic transition.

The experience of living in different countries, attending desegregated schools, learning new languages, and new values and standards contributes to this transformation, especially with regard to the lives of young Roma women. Innovations in cultural practices are generating a new process of cultural hybridity. Young Roma mothers are increasingly using family planning facilities that are available in the new countries of settlement to space the birth of their children, and to stop their reproductive careers earlier. They are doing this within the arrangements of their own marriage systems, which often include early, pronatalist, endogamic, and in some cases even consensual arranged marriages.

The search for economic opportunities represents one of the main motivations for Romani international mobility. Saving to build a house back in Romania and returning to live there in the future is a common goal of the first generation in its different cohorts, but is increasingly complicated by the bonds created in the new countries. The first generation of migrants is hindered by very low human capital (literacy skills and professional skills) and is limited to low skilled self-employment, while the second generation is able to draw on acquired social capital (links outside the Roma community) to obtain jobs with low remuneration but which pave the way to integration into the mainstream labour market. The acquisition of human capital even by the second generation is often hindered by lack of adequate access to education, especially where the housing situation is precarious and lacks stability, as in France, Italy, and partly Spain; or else by low expectations of teaching staff and even segregation measures in schools, in countries where residence is stable, as in the UK.

The Romani language is maintained as first language, and the diversity of contexts in which transnational networks of speakers are immersed reinforces the use of Romani as an internal common language. It is interesting to note that Romanian is also maintained even among the young generation of migrants, a sign of continuing links with the origin country, though command of the language of the respective host country is usually stronger.

The project also assessed local policies and public attitudes to Romanian Roma migrants. 'Crisis' responses to the arrival and often to the continuing presence of Roma were noted in all of the research sites. In some cases, especially in France and Italy, local policies toward Roma migrants are continually influenced by visions of security and crisis management. Housing policies in particular confine Roma to informal makeshift settlements, temporary shelters, or designated 'nomad camps', where they are subjected to frequent evictions. The presence of Roma is often incorporated into political narratives in public discussions and was found to play a key role in

debates around the European elections, in France and in Italy, and in the early stages of the process that led to the EU Referendum, in the UK. Both public and private images of Roma migrants assign to them properties that are associated with indigenous Roma, 'Gypsy' or Travelling populations, rather than associate them with ethnic Romanian migrants, indicating a tendency toward homogenisation in perceptions of the Roma population. When such attitudes infiltrate policy interventions, they contribute to a particular 'subjectification' of Roma, assigning them a particular identity and role in the institutional context. We have found that such processes can have negative affects on the inclusion and achievement levels of Roma in particular in the education system, whereas a general inclusion policy that does not target Roma specifically and refrains from constructing a 'Roma narrative' usually allows a much smoother integration that is beneficial to individuals' well-being and chances to strengthen both social and human capital.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to protect the benefits of migration in the origin communities, it is necessary to encourage and protect investments in improving housing in the localities of origin and to ensure that the development of the local community is sustainable. Encouraging productive investments of remittances can help create new jobs. It is also important to make use of the existing provisions of school mediators and Second Chance programmes to reintegrate the children of returnees in local schools and to simplify the process of registering newly born babies who have been brought back by returnee families.

In the host communities that are the destination of migration, it is vital to prioritise normalising the legal status of those who live in informal, makeshift or temporary residences through administrative tools that will allow them full access to all public services and entitlements and prevent partial exclusion. It is especially important to increase the housing options that are available to Roma migrants, since these are the key to social inclusion, and to prevent segregation in enclosed 'camps', 'reception centres', or secluded residences.

Where targeted interventions are to be beneficial, they should address vocational training, housing and work. Roma should play a key role in shaping these interventions, and general advice and support services can and should be led by members of the Roma migrant communities, who should, to that end, receive necessary training and resources. Such an approach can lead to middle-term self-reliance, reduced dependency, and increased self-confidence, as well as allowing the emergence of role models for younger members of the community, of spokespersons who can lead targeted resistance against anti-gypsyism in public debates, and of community representatives who can serve as an important channel for local authorities and public services to engage with the community.

Care should be given to the portrayal of Roma migrants and their cultural practices in official reports, in order to avoid the risk of generalisations that may lower expectations of the community among service providers and a wider public. Such reports must be evidence-based and the information contained in them must be substantiated, where possible through the involvement of competent experts and members of the Roma community.

RESEARCH PARAMETERS

The project connected to a paradigm shift in migration studies which placed a focus on the investigation of mobility networks and reciprocal relations between them, and the value of human and social capital in inclusion processes, thus reaching beyond the previous focus on push and pull factors. This paradigm shift instigates new approaches to the study of east-west migrations of Roma. Attention is given to the individual capital that facilitates migration; to processes of identity re-configuration in migrant Roma communities, including reliance on non-Roma networks and on local NGOs; and to the particular changes to gender roles brought about by migration.

We use the term ‘Roma’ specifically to refer to those populations that employ that label as their community-based self-ascription, irrespective of lifestyle, social status or occupational patterns, or who otherwise self-identify explicitly as belonging to communities whose members self-ascribe as Roma. In practice, this definition is strongly aligned with the use of the Romani language either synchronically or historically, that is, either as the active language of the home or the wider kinship group and affiliated families, or else as a language that is the subject of collective memory having been the vehicle of communication of recent generations (parents or grandparents). The MigRom research targeted families who were Romani speakers as well as families who interacted with Romani speakers and were referred by them, and referred to themselves, as ‘Romanianised Gypsies’ (țigani românizați), entertaining a collective memory of having lost the Romani language and having shifted to the majority language, Romanian, yet having retained an awareness of a distinct ethnic identity and a sense of affiliation with Romani speakers.

The absence of territorial concentration, varying cultural practices, lack of a political entity or legal categorisation, and indeed different degrees to which the Romani language is actively maintained, create potential ambiguity in identifying the boundaries of Roma ‘communities’. We followed a practical definition of a Roma ‘community’. This may follow family networks, patterns of intermarriage and shared institutional practices such as conflict resolution, shared faith and religious practices and alignment with contiguous non-Romani populations; shared place of settlement in migration and the development of networks of mutual dependency; and the punctual coming together within shared households and support networks of family groups that speak Romani and others who do not speak the language but descend from Romani speakers.

The research sites in the UK, Spain, France and Italy were selected to represent those countries that had become the principal target for Romanian Roma migration, and which in turn displayed a variety of public discourses and policies toward Roma migrants. The research also extended to the migrants’ origin communities in Romania, where both the motivations to migrate and the effects of migration on the sending communities were investigated.

With a grant of €2.5 million and a team comprising altogether thirty-five full- and part-time researchers and research assistants, MigRom was in all likelihood the largest international research project in Romani/Gypsy studies thus far and the first to adopt a multi-sited, cross-disciplinary and co-production agenda on such a scale. The co-ordination of a diverse team that included sociologists, social anthropologists, historians, social psychologists and linguists, based in institutions in five different countries, was achieved through a regimented schedule of research cycles. Three consecutive stages of research -- a Pilot Survey, an Extended Survey and a Follow-up Survey -- were designed to capture developments and changes of attitudes and activities in the communities. Annual project meetings were used to coordinate methodologies and to share and evaluate data and analyses as they emerged from the fieldwork.

All academic partners engaged Romanian Roma as research assistants. In most cases these were members of the communities in which the research took place. They participated in project meetings and contributed to the research design, received training in fieldwork methodology and data protection protocols. They facilitated and supported interviews and the archiving of interview materials in the Romani language, and provided their insights and interpretation into the data evaluation process, acting as co-authors of some of the reports and in some cases also of academic outputs. They also took an active part in the consortium’s public engagement activities. In Manchester, the project delivered a three-year community outreach programme, providing Roma-led advice and support in partnership with the City Council. The project thereby facilitated both a new model for research co-production with Roma and a lasting contribution to capacity building and empowerment. Project staff were regular contributors to local policy events and some engaged regularly with social media to disseminate project findings as well as contributions to policy related debates. The consortium thus adopted a literal reading of the project’s sub-title “Causes, effects, and future engagement strategies”, placing an emphasis on developing a policy vision for future engagement together with relevant stakeholder, in addition to its academic objectives.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	The immigration of Romanian Roma to Western Europe: Causes, effects, and future engagement strategies (MigRom)
COORDINATOR	Professor Yaron Matras, University of Manchester, Manchester, United Kingdom yaron.matras@manchester.ac.uk
CONSORTIUM	Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'homme – FMSH - Paris, France Forum Européen pour les Roms et les Gens du Voyage – ERTF - Strasbourg, France Institutul Pentru Studierea Problemelor Minorităților Naționale – ISPMN - Cluj, Romania Manchester City Council – MCC - Manchester, United Kingdom Universidad De Granada – UGR - Granada, Spain Università degli Studi di Verona – UNIVR - Verona, Italy University of Manchester - UNIMAN – Manchester, United Kingdom
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 – September 2017 (54 months).
BUDGET	EU contribution: 2 487 903 €.
WEBSITE	http://romani.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/migrom/
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FURTHER READING	MATRAS, Y. & LEGGIO, D. V. eds. 2017. <i>Open borders, unlocked culture. Romanian Roma migrants in Western Europe</i> . London: Routledge.