

## **THE ROMA IN THE EU: CONTINUING INEQUALITIES AND EXCLUSION**

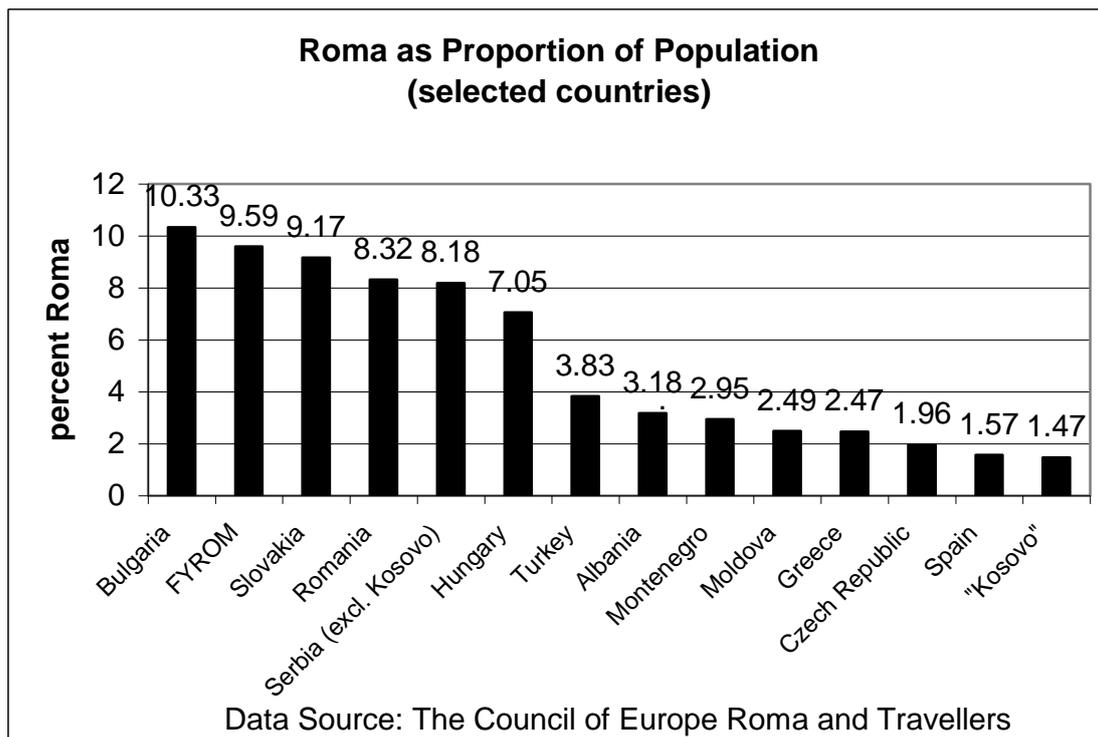
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In the summer of 2010, hundreds of people in France and Italy were rounded up and expelled, with most of them returned to Romania. It seems that the Italian and French governments did not want a certain population in their countries, as the people who were rounded up were Roma. Despite being EU citizens, those people were rounded up and sent back to other EU countries, something that is a bit confusing, as it seems to clash with the general policy of the free movement of populations in the bloc. There are continuing cases of expulsion of Roma (Phillips and Chrisafis 2011), with the case of a 15 year-old Roma girl in France in 2013 probably being the most publicly discussed in recent years.

The Roma have a long history in Europe and most agree that they have been in Europe for about a thousand years. Although they have had a long history in Europe, they have suffered from all sorts of exclusion and genocide. Some use the word "Porajmos" (meaning "devouring" or "destruction") to describe the genocide that they suffered from during World War Two in which between 220,000 to 1,500,000 were killed (Hancock 2005). The genocide ended although persecution and all sorts of exclusion have continued to this day (Council of Europe 2012).

Despite the genocide during World War Two, the Roma population is alive and kicking, with many of them living in many EU countries, especially those countries that were admitted to the EU in 2004 or afterwards. The figure below illustrates that the highest proportions of Roma in EU countries are found in Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Romania. The highest concentrations of Roma populations in the EU tend to be in the poorer parts of the EU, with the Council of Europe estimates that there are about two million Roma in Romania and 750,000 in Bulgaria. This makes the Roma populations of Bulgaria and Romania the largest Roma populations in the EU, although numerically Turkey has more (about three million).



There are some interesting things to note in the data. The highest proportions of Roma seem to be concentrated in the poorer countries of the EU. It is understandable that those from the poorer countries in the EU (Bulgaria and Romania) would seek their fortunes in wealthier countries in the EU, as all EU passport holders theoretically have mobility within the EU. So it comes as no surprise that many from socially excluded groups such as the Roma in the poorest countries in the EU would move to wealthier countries in the EU, presumably to seek their fortunes where there are opportunities for economic and social advancement.

The problem is manifold for the Roma. When Roma flee poverty and poor living conditions in countries in which they are from in the EU, they are not only entering into another country where there are opportunities for economic and social advancement, but they are also entering into communities with deeply-engrained suspicions of Roma. As a result, the Roma seem to be learning that they are treated as second-class citizens in much of the EU. While the EU touts "rule of law" and "equal treatment," the Roma are learning that within many member states of the EU, deeply-engrained beliefs and attitudes towards the Roma follow the Roma.

The way ahead is difficult and there seems to be no quick fix to deal with the situation of the Roma in the EU. First, the Roma have not fully integrated nor assimilated into their host countries, despite centuries of being in Europe. What this suggests is that there is something about this group that either resists integration/assimilation or that host populations hold such anti-Roma attitudes that this is not a practical option. Second,

social, economic, and political exclusion mean that many Roma, when given an opportunity, will leave the countries where they are from and find opportunities elsewhere. This means that the EU's Roma have the right to be mobile within the EU, although it seems that legal loopholes and deeply-entrenched anti-Roma attitudes work in combination to limit their geographical and social mobility.

In 2004, the Roma issue in the EU was introduced as a major social, economic, and political issue for the EU, as in 2003, the number of Roma was generally limited in the EU. The introduction of Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia, and Hungary into the EU introduced a population of millions of marginalized people who have the rights of mobility within the EU. Solving the puzzle of integrating a large population of people into the EU without continued racism and marginalization will be a tricky business for decades or perhaps centuries to come. What would likely help the Roma and related groups to move away from being an excluded group would be organization, lobbying, and building strong institutions for advocacy. While such an approach would in many ways assist the Roma and related groups and such organization is underway, in some limited ways, it faces substantial external as well as internal resistance. But this is also why the Roma and related groups remain so interesting, as they largely defy the way that we identify nations and ethnicities and seem to work on a very different logic from the industrial/post-industrial societies of Europe. Because they are culturally different and perceived of as being different, overcoming exclusion and marginalization will be a continuing issue for the Roma and Travellers and a major challenge for the EU for many years to come.

## **References:**

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