

FACTORS DETERMINING SOCIAL VULNERABILITY OF ROMANI PEOPLE

Adriana Florentina Călăuz

**Lecturer, PhD, Technical University of Cluj-Napoca – Baia Mare Northern
University Centre**

The study of Roma's history, origins and lifestyle represented the concern of Romanian and foreign researchers. At the beginning the Roma in Romania were mostly under the attention of foreign personalities, thereafter Romanian researchers came up with interesting studies on the lifestyle of Roma. Presently, a great part of the members of this ethnicity are exposed to marginalization and social exclusion.

The present study intends to analyze the lifestyle of the Roma population living in the Maramureș contry. The subjects were handed a questionnaire containing questions on discrimination, financial situation, bringing up and educating children, health, migration, employment, citizen rights, etc. The total population on which the research was carried out is of 1486 persons from the Craica and Ponorâta community. A number of 150 questionnaires were handed over within this communitis. The questioned subjects are men and women over the age of 18. The method employed was face-to-face inquiry at home. The results obtained highlight the causes with most frequently lead to social marginalization and exclusion of the Roma ethnicity.

Keywords: roma, marginalization, integration, vulnerability.

A brief history of Roma origin

Studying history, origin and the way of living of the Roma people has been the concern of researchers from abroad and from our country. The most popular works are those of Paul Bataillard which have a wide European coverage "Bohemiens ou Tsiganes" and F. Miklosich's who was, in the opinion of Paul Bataillard, the most competent Indologist, philologist and gypsy specialist "țiganologul".¹

At the beginning, the issue of Roma people was taken into consideration especially by foreginers who have visited Romania. At the beginning of our century, Dr. Eugene Pittard leads a band of researchers in Dobrogea, who conducted anthropological research on Roma and other populations. In Romania there have been and there are Roma persons, but not more than in other

¹ Potra G., *Contribuțiuni la istoricul țiganilor din România*, Fundația Regele Carol, București 1939, p. 5.

European countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Italy, Yugoslavia).² Over the years, researchers have conducted interesting studies regarding the way of living of the Roma people in Romania. Șerboianu Popp made an ethnographic study with greater scope about Roma nomads³, Mihail Kogălniceanu described, especially the life of Roma in Moldavia⁴ - their liberation-, and Professor Barbu Constantinescu studied the Romany language. Michael Barner, born in 1881 in the city Agnita, bank clerk, in his desire to know the habits and life of nomadic Roma people, accepted their nomadic life, learning their language and customs and assembling them into a collection of gypsy folklore.

Dan Demetrius, a priest from Bucovina, conducted a small but interesting study including ethnographical data about the "Tigani din Bucovina".

Ion Chelcea, an outstanding researcher and an expert in the Roma language, published in 1944 a study entitled "Țigani din România", ethnographic monography that includes very interesting information on the history of Roma people, their origins, their occupations, port, customs and beliefs. The paper also includes a large number of maps, charts, photographs, authentic documents for today's ethnographers who are studying the lifestyle of the Roma people.

Popp Șerboianu admits Paul Bataillard hypothesis that Roma are Thracians⁵. This means that P. Bataillard is looking for Roma's origin not in India, but in Turkey, Asia Minor and the Caucasus. Recently, journalist Vasile Ionescu, based on historical data: Greek sources of information, the findings of archaeological research in Romania (tablets from Tărtăraia, Hunedoara county), Romanian mythology, legends and data- concludes that Pontus territories were under the pressure of nomadic people coming through north and south of the Black Sea, the place of birth of a strange, terrible and damaging nation. This people considered property as a sin, the essence of man is evil, preaching nonviolence, a world without borders. These messengers of archaic times, excessive in vitality were called by Europeans Roma (Gypsies).⁶

German teacher H. M. Grellmann, taking into consideration the historical data, states that no people migration was done over large areas of water or on a smoothly land and tried to prove the Hindu origin of Roma people. The comparison drawn between Hindu and Roma words leads him to the conclusion that there is a perfect likeness⁷.

² Potra G., *Contribuțiuni la istoricul țiganilor din România*, Fundația Regele Carol, București 1939, p.12

³ Șerbănoiu P., *Les Tsiganes. Historie-Etnographie Linguistique-Grammaire-Dictionnaire*, Pazot, Paris 1930, p. 312.

⁴ Kogălniceanu M., *Scriseri literare, sociale și istorice; Dezrobirea țiganilor*, cap.18, Editura Litera, București, 1975, p. 68

⁵ Șerbănoiu P., *op. cit.*, p.315.

⁶ Ionescu V., *Prolegomene la o istorie a țiganilor*, Aven Amentya, anul I, nr. 1, 24 mai 1990, p. 5.

⁷ *Idem*, p. 6.

A. Poissonnier⁸ (*Les tziganes en Moldovie et Valachie*), and P. Bataillard, Ascoli, Miklosch, Mihail Kogălniceanu și Barbu Constantinescu also agree with this theory. Dr. George Potra writes that in India exists even today a nation far below others, called “Cengar”⁹.

Poissonnier notes that Roma claim to be native of Egypt. Probably that is why Englishmen call them Gypsy. Poissonnier met in England a group of Roma and tried to talk to them in the Romani language spoken on the European land. They did not understand each other because they were speaking other language than that spoken by gypsy from Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, France and other EU countries. He encountered another similar situation in Spain. The Spanish call Roma "Gitano" but Roma from over there call themselves “Mauri”, rejecting the idea that they have the same origin as Roma from Barcelona and Andalusia.

In Romania, by the way that organize their lives, they act or by their occupations, Roma have several names: “carturari”, “laiesi”, “netot”(homeless, nomad, uncut, uncombed, disheveled, eats what he can stole). There is another category of Roma who deal with crafts and live on what they do: “rudari”, “baiesi”, “aurari”, “ursari”.

Moral duality of Roma people

The private life of Gypsies is conducted very differently than their public life. Firstly, the Gypsy’s solidarity is to be taken into account. Although sometimes they quarrel and fight, they do not steal or cheat one each other. A gypsy, regardless of the group to which it belongs, is a Roma or “kalo”, and an individual belonging to any other nation is a "Gajo" or "Parno”¹⁰.

One of the great oddities of Gypsy behavior is his way of behaving differently to those who are called Roma and those who are called Gajo. No matter how loud are Gypsies and any cause would be among them, are much more correct than in relationships with other nations. A Gajo is always an individual from whom a gypsy has not got moral obligations. In this manner, a misunderstanding between Gypsies is seen as something serious, something in which all members of the community take part in solving that, where as a misunderstanding with a Gajo is seen as something very natural and does not draw their particular attention. This moral duality of Gypsy persons is perhaps responding to the indignities and prejudices that those who call themselves Gajo treated them for a long time.¹¹

⁸ Poissonnier A., *Les tziganes en Moldovie et Valachie*, Paris, PUF, 1855, p. 126.

⁹ Potra G., *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38

¹⁰ *Idem*, p. 45.

¹¹ Merfea M., *op. cit.*, p. 46.

Marginalisation and Integration

Aberrant equalization policy - or better standardization - of individuals promoted by the communist regimes in Eastern Europe had the effect of avoiding social exclusion. Prior to 1989, due to mitigation policies and social differentiation there were no obvious processes of marginalization of Roma people by public institutions, although the existence of prejudices, stereotypes or discriminatory attitudes among non-Roma population can not be denied. One of the reasons that hindered these discriminatory events was the feeling of solidarity existing among the population because beyond ethnic differences, all individuals had a common identity - that of oppressed citizens. This sense of solidarity is manifested sometimes by developing survival common strategies. However, after 1989, "rapid and intensive social change, which raised serious and unexpected problems in the process of institutionalization and democratic consolidation in society"¹² but, above all, "the collapse of the planned economy and social patterns of communism"¹³ and the transition to a market economy have generated a process of social polarization and marginalization. In this way appeared two "classes": the "very few, but rich" and "very much, but poor"¹⁴. Starting with 1989, the actors of a social development scene, were ethnic minorities, in particular Romani minority whose members were experiencing - the vast majority - an acute marginalization process. With the democratic changes that occurred after 1989, there was a phenomenon of liberalization and social relationships. As a result of this, liberalization equalizers coercive forces disappeared, the social field is thus open for expressions of group identity and prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination dormant until then.

The vast majority of Roma was one of the most vulnerable social costs of transition as already stood high risk positions: being poorly qualified, Roma were severely affected by unemployment, those who earn a living from complementary economy remained without the work object.

On the other hand, the erosion of wages and the state allowance for children (the main source of income for many Roma families before 1989) led to a dramatic drop in living standards for a significant proportion of the Roma population.

Before 1989 Roma were not a discriminated ethnic minority, one of the reasons being so is the fact that they were not given "the right to represent an ethnic minority, free to promote their own

¹²Neculau A și Ferreol G., "Democratizarea și marginalizarea în societățile est-europene (cazul Bulgariei)" – în vol. "*Minoritari, Marginali, Excluși*", Editura Polirom, Iași, 1996, p. 217.

¹³*Idem.*

¹⁴*Ibidem.*

cultural traditions"¹⁵ because "tacit principle of socialist policy towards the Roma was assimilation."¹⁶

After 1989, with globalization and democratization of society, there was a process of emancipation of various minorities - ethnic, religious, sexual, etc. - and shaping their identity but at the same time occurred a process of marginalization by the majority in its desire to maintain and perpetuate the regulatory balance. It is important to mention that the reaction of society is universally, not specific to Romania.

After 1989, the conclusion that emerges is that, Roma population has undergone a process of marginalization. But it is extremely difficult to distinguish the ethnic dimension of economic marginalization or the age or sex related. In fact, we are dealing with a plurality of marginalization (accumulation of "dirt" by Pierre Bourdieu), however, the main role is represented by the economic component of marginalization.

The consequences of marginalization

Like the causes of marginalization, the consequences are multiple and interrelated. Since it is difficult to establish a hierarchy depending on the importance and gravity, we will try to make a ranking according to the causal relationships between them.

One of the worst consequences of marginalization is the situation of marginalized people on a lower position as second-class citizens, deprived of rights and responsibilities deriving from citizenship.¹⁷ Unfortunately, after 20 years of democratic experience, in Romania there is still a lack of culture of civil rights or public services specializing in monitoring compliance with these rights and providing advice and support for people whose civil rights were violated (advocacy). A large number of Roma communities are not only socially marginalized, but also spatially, being located on the outskirts of towns or in isolated areas. This marginalization is not ethnic but economic and territorial. One of the consequences of this spatial isolation is the reduced access to community services. In addition to their citizenship rights violations, often marginalized people are placed outside the scope of human rights.

Research methodology

¹⁵Zamfir C. și Zamfir E., coord. – *“Țigani între ignorare și îngrijorare”*, Editura Alternative, București, 1993., p. 157.

¹⁶*Idem.*

¹⁷Neculau A. și Ferreol G. (coord.), *“O reconsiderare a sărăciei: autonomizarea și drepturile cetățenilor”* în vol. *“Minoritari, Marginali, Excluși”*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 1996, p. 256.

In this study we considered necessary to achieve a sociological investigation among the Romani population of Craica and Ponorata (Maramureş country). The investigation was accomplished by implementing a questionnaire to subjects in the aforementioned communities.

The total population on which investigations were made is 1486 people, out of which 1080 people are from Craica community and 406 people are from Ponorata community, namely the urban and rural area.

Questionnaires were administered to 150 people out of which 93 people from Craica and 57 from Ponorata. The applied method was the social home inquiry, using „the face to face technique". The subjects interviewed were men and women who have reached the age of 18 at the moment when the questionnaire was administered. The questionnaire consisted of a total of 62 questions which captures aspects of age, gender, educational level, financial situation, issues that capture discrimination, raising children, health, migration, finding a job. Questionnaires were administered by a team of 10 field operators.

Hypotheses:

The existence of discrimination, unreported by authorities, communities and individuals.

The lack of assurance their own autonomy and financial independence of the Roma.

The training and qualification are reduced to elementary level.

The existence of social benefits (social provisions) whose financial dimensions are insufficient in ensuring a decent living.

Continental migration phenomenon (in Europe) is present in these communities

The migration is driven by economic reasons, health and cultural ones;

The migration is a seasonal pendulum type (resident-foreign country-residence).

The results of the study

The replies of the subjects confirm the perception of ethnic discrimination, manifested not in the rules and legislation but in the behavior of authorities and community towards them. The process of discrimination is the result of a historical mindset, an idea found in the separate development of Roma communities from the Romanian ones. Do not forget that Roma are located in distinct areas delineated on the outskirts of towns in the communities studied.

The studied Roma communities have not owned means of production, with only able to engage in various organizations and companies. During the communist period, Roma community from Ponorâta used to practice agriculture in the agricultural cooperatives. After the fall of

communism the ex landers were reassigned with land, leaving the Romes with no land to work. The Craica community from the urban area has not got either any means of production, more than that, even their homes are not legally owned by them. Consequently the degree of maneuver, the autonomy and independence of the members of these communities is limited to solutions that includes migration.

Income members of these communities is between 200-500 lei (50-120 euros) and is mostly made up of social benefits provided by the state or mayors (minimum income support, child benefit, compensation disadvantage in etc.). The statistical data presented in the study, show that these revenues are insufficient to provide a decent standard of living. It is worth specifying that Romania will, in a short time, adopt a law that will reduce the number of social benefits and their magnitude. As specific information, Ponorâta community is the poorest Roma community in Romania, which can be observed in the graphs presented. The birth rate in these communities is much higher than the national average, the average number of children / family being 4 children. There are families with 10 children and one of them has 20 children. This financial difficulties multiply for maintenance the children, they do not attend educational institutions, the massive dropout and school level at which this children stop is 4 classes. Many of them remain in the household help "taking care" of little brothers perpetuating the existing condition. Consequently their training and access to higher statuses is seriously diminished.

The adult population of the two communities, is in terms of qualifying a largely unskilled population, which narrow their chances to get a job in various companies and organizations.

Most adults in the Roma community are not engaged. From the data presented in the study, they do not receive unemployment benefits, because they are long out of the period of unemployment aid. Many of them are long-term unemployed. Recall that in Romania the maximum period of granting unemployment is 12 months.

There is an opening for people from these communities to training courses but jams occur due to regulations in force in Romania according to which you must have completed 8th grade to attend such courses. In the areas studied in Baia Mare, there is enough potential for development, that allows absorption of the labor force in the coming years. There are companies that employ a significant proportion of Roma, citizens of Baia Mare. In contrast, the Coroieni common and its surrounding areas (Roma community of Ponorâta), the economic situation and prospects for economic development are reduced, without the possibility of hiring Roma. Note that this area is mainly agricultural, practicing subsistence farming by smallholders, who are not interested in hiring even as a day laborer person of Roma origin.

We encounter with a mentality that is not necessarily specific to Roma, but to a large part of Romania's population that manifests in relationships with national and local state. The state is seen as a kind of "parent" who has to provide its citizens good conditions without making any effort to this. From the data presented, subjects expect the state or municipalities to provide them housing and jobs, especially in SOEs. Consequently, the communities studied, do not have a culture of initiative so their efforts to ensure a desired standard of living fails.

The migration phenomenon is confirmed in these communities. Migration is perceived by community members as an alternative solution to the difficulties encountered in Romania. The direction of migration is towards the European Union and developed Western European countries like Italy, Spain, France. Migration is seasonal. In our investigations we met Romans who were in Western Europe and now have returned home after a period, following that, them and others in the community, to join the migration paths.

Because of their cultural specific, migration or migration intention is conceived by respondents as being made with the entire family (husband / wife, children and even other relatives) which cause specific problems in the countries where they migrate.

The main cause of migration of the respondents is economic- finding a job that will provide enough income for themselves and their family- plus family reunification and related causes. We note that this case is correlated with the difficulty of finding a job in Romania, in their residence area.

Migration is perceived by people from studied Roma communities, as a right that they have as members of the European Union. They know their rights resulting from this quality but are less aware of the obligations resulting from this status. In fact there is a cultural and historical ground regarding the freedom of movement (including migration) resulting from the history of Roma ethnicity characterized by a permanent tendency to travel and by the refusal to stay in one place. The idea of freedom is understood as a lack of constraint and the freedom is understood as a lack of coercion and as a refusal of rules imposed from outside communities.

Conclusions and proposals

It's a common given that the European Union is not heterogeneous in terms of economic development, financial opportunities, cultural standard of living and so on; there are economically developed countries with high standard of living and countries in which the living standard is at a lower level. EU policies are aware of the situation and aims at achieving a level of development, similar to all those EU member countries, with all its consequences. But currently,

it is the existence of these differences in reasons, which cause the migration from less developed countries to more developed countries, particularly for Roma communities. As long as these differences exist, and considering the principle of free movement, migration will be presented as an inexorable phenomenon. In order to reduce migration, we propose to establish an EU committee with responsibilities in managing the Roma issues from all over the Europe. This structure should develop uniform policies for social integration of the Roma, the resources allocated to offer social support, social service types should be identical in all countries including the financial benefits. In our opinion, these measures would substantially reduce the migration phenomenon. Specifically, if we compare the welfare in France and Romania, we notice that they are similar, but different by their size (amount of money). It can be also developed an employment workforce policy with features identical throughout the European Union for Roma people- the companies that hire Roma people to enjoy a range of facilities-. We suggest adopting a similar policy to the EU Common Agricultural Policy.

Locally, in Romania, we suggest that the government and parliament should pass a law according to which local or national authorities can buy land from the owners and give it to Roma population, especially from rural areas. In this way, a good deal of social benefits would reduce, if not eliminate; resulting from our calculations that in a period of 10-15 years, the costs of land acquisition would equal social benefits costs granted in this period.

At local level, we propose the establishment of a structure in which to be part local economic organizations, on the one hand and local authorities on the other hand, in order to develop an action system in hiring Roma persons. We believe that the reduction of local taxes and the elimination of enterprises duties to authorities, would be the perfect trade for labor absorption of Roma.

Regardless of the Roma issue, regardless of the particular way in which it appears in various European countries, regardless of search states' efforts to find solutions to national or local level, we believe that if we want a united Europe, a kindred level of development and living in all countries, if we want to integrate the Roma, this can be achieved only in a unified view, the European Union's global organizational structure to be competent across the current European Union. As a final conclusion we can say that any solutions we adopt will not solve the problems, always existing the danger that the Roma issue to burst again.

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