

**MIGRATION BETWEEN INTEGRATION AND DISCRIMINATION. THE
CASE OF ROMA COMMUNITIES OF ROMANIAN NATIONALITY IN THE
CITY OF RENNES, FRANCE**

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18509/GBP.2016.29>
UDC: 314.15-026.49(44:=135.1),,2105“

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ABSTRACT

Given the current policies of the Western European countries on the repatriation of Roma population and subsidies granting to those who return to the country of origin, increasingly more Romanian citizens of Roma ethnicity view migration as an economic opportunity. The present study has at its basis the research conducted on Roma immigrants of Romanian origin in the city of Rennes, France, between March and June 2015. The interview-based survey was conducted on a sample of 50 participants of Roma ethnicity, originating from different areas of Romania, and is aimed at analyzing the attitudes of Romanian Roma immigrants towards the local authorities: local administration, school, hospital, NGOs.

The research results suggest a positive perception of Roma population directed towards certain local stakeholders, such as the NGOs, hospital and school, as well as certain reluctance towards the local administration. The problems faced by the Roma community members in Rennes are linked to the attitude of local stakeholders towards immigrants, the difficulties of insertion in the work environment and social exclusion issues.

Despite the difficulties they face, the most interviewees expressed no desire of return to Romania, except for the situation in which they would be repatriated by the French State. Their migration project is based upon the intention of remaining in France for a number of years, or of migrating to another developed country in Western Europe.

The situation of Roma immigrants is highly sensitive, both for France and for the other Western European countries. Since 2000, many NGOs have focused their work on helping these communities illegally settled in France. This study represents a first contribution to a larger research project, focused on the analysis of the Roma community in the city of Rennes in particular and of Roma minorities of Romanian nationality in France, and generally follows the causes that have contributed to increased migration, migration experience and routes within the Roma population.

Keywords: migration, Roma communities, integration, insertion in the work environment

INTRODUCTION

The fall of the communist regime at the end of the year 1989 has had as a main consequence guaranteeing the right of free movement to Romanians, a situation which has led to a marked rise in emigration [12]. Open borders and progressive democratization

equally resulted in the increase of both freedom and unemployment rate, parallel with the decrease in living standards, and diminishment of social protection. In the context of the changes that have marked the Romanian post-Decembrist society, the Roma population remained one of the most vulnerable social groups, characterized by poverty, lack of education and training, which in turn have led to their social exclusion, long-term unemployment, discrimination and even violence (Ringold et al., 2005). Lured by the prospect of a better life, the number of Roma who have requested political asylum in the developed countries of the Central and Western Europe increased markedly in the early 90s. In the major cities of France such as Lyon, Nanterre, Toulouse, Roubaix, true "nuclei of Roma population" emerged [12]. Their presence on the streets, in subway stations and as inhabitants of abandoned buildings made the Roma community members highly visible in the public space. Consequently, certain acts of delinquency have resulted in an excessive mobilization that fueled and amplified the fears of the local population [2]. After 2002, the onset of the free movement of Romanian citizens in the Schengen Area, a new migration strategy was employed, i.e., the 'false tourists', which was aimed to circumventing the controls imposed by the European migration policy [12].

In the view of the EU accession, the successive Romanian governments improved the laws concerning the rights of minorities. Although Romania declared the period 2005-2015 as the Decade of Roma Inclusion, the laws enacted in this regard have rarely been followed by concrete actions, the effectiveness of Roma insertion programs depending most often on the involvement of stakeholders. Lacking education and training, and failing to integrate their illegal labor, Roma have resorted most often to beggary as a viable alternative. For this reason, their migration to developed countries was often interpreted as a "migration for failed work" [8]. Faced often with fear and unjustified hostility by the local population, attitudes likely explained as pertaining to certain beliefs and stigmatizing prejudices, the Roma were subject to forced evictions, violence and discrimination by local people and political stakeholders. As such they were regarded as the scapegoats and guinea pigs of the European security policy.

The aim of this paper is to identify the problems faced by the Roma community members in the city of Rennes, France, in relation to local stakeholders represented by the local administration, school, hospital and NGOs, as well as their attitude towards Roma immigrants. The study addresses the difficulties related to the Roma insertion in the French labor market and their social marginalization in the destination society, in correlation with the possibility of a return migration to Romania.

International scientific literature focused on migration in general, and the migration of Roma, in particular, is extremely abundant. However, there are very few contributions that address issues related to the attitude of Roma immigrants to authorities and stakeholders. Starting from the lifestyle and activities typical of the Roma population, several studies analyzed Roma migration as compared to the movement of people who are not members of the Roma community [3]. Although perceived as different, the Roma migration phenomenon actually resembles the migration of non-Roma population from the Eastern Europe [8] and Romania [9].

The movement of Roma population is analyzed firstly from a historical perspective, by addressing this phenomenon in the context of the European 14th century, when the presence of Roma communities was first noted [6], and during the following centuries (15th-20th) [7]. Secondly, we assess Roma migration from the viewpoint of political, social and economic changes of the recent decades in Europe [5]. Special attention was paid to strategies and migration profiles of Roma communities from Bulgaria and

Romania, to their migratory paths and policies concerning Roma population [6, 7], to the role of ethnic minorities' mass-media, including Roma, as a means of production and representation of identity in the public space [10].

There are numerous studies focusing on the marginalization of Roma originating from the Eastern Europe, on the economic status and precarious housing [1], the discrimination to which they are subjected [6], the issues of health of Roma immigrants (Duprat, 2011), or the aspects related to the education of Roma children whose parents have emigrated [4].

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present research, which is part of a wider research project focusing on the Roma minority of Romanian nationality, developed in Rennes France, March - June 2015, examines the complexity of social identity in terms of national identification of Roma immigrants and their attitudes towards local French stakeholders.

The Roma community of Romanian nationality in Rennes is very small compared to other Roma communities in France. It consists approximately of 80 people, of which 30 are children aged up to 14 years, with only 13 of them enrolled in French schools. Although the community is supported by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which are aimed to help minority ethnic groups throughout their inclusion in French society, the Roma originating from Romania appear not to exhibit consistency in providing important data for organizations. A good example is that of a Roma family of 14 members who, having been supported by the MRAP organization with finding a home, refused to further communicate with the organization and were subsequently expelled from the house and later on from Rennes.

Within the present study, around 50 Roma representatives of Romanian nationality, over 15 years old, were interviewed. Although the interview involved a variety of questions, we found that one of the major problems faced by the Roma community members, but also by other Romanian immigrants, is related to discrimination by the host society.

The information obtained was included in a database for statistical analysis, using both the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and Microsoft Office / Excel / Data Analyses.

MAIN RESULTS

Unlike other regions in France, the Roma community of Rennes began to settle with 2009.

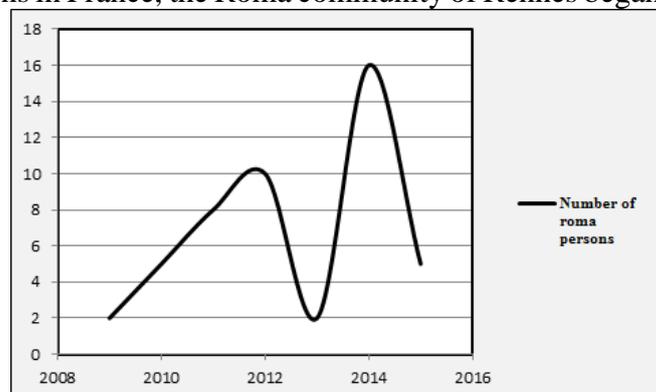


Figure 1. Evolution of the number of Romanian Roma in Rennes , France

An increase in their number was observed in 2012 and 2014. Their migration route is complex, starting from Romania towards countries like Italy, Great Britain, Luxembourg and even the United States, and implicitly France.

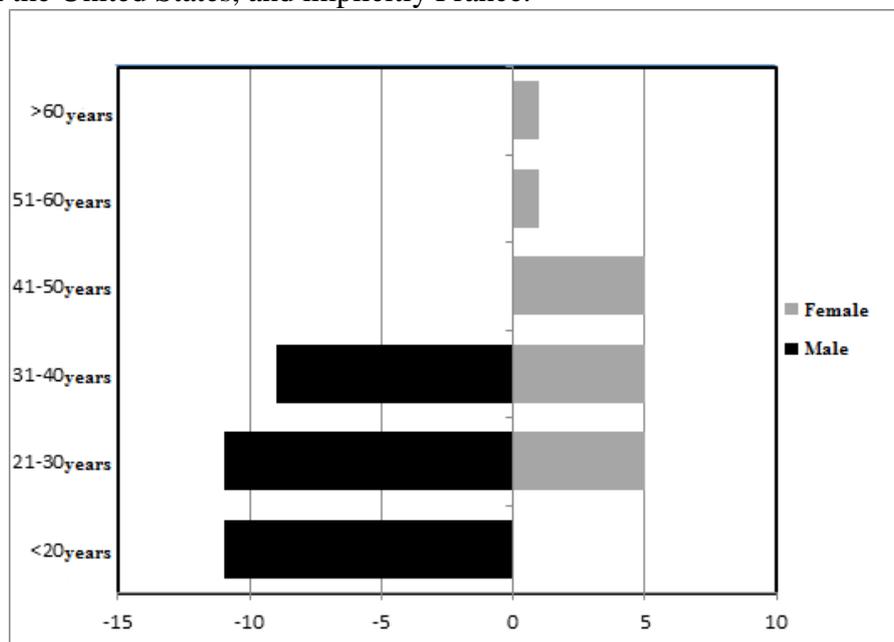


Fig.2. Roma population pyramid of Romanian nationality in Rennes, France, registered in the period March-June 2015

Of the 50 Roma people interviewed between March and June 2015 in Rennes, 27 are aged up to 30 years and are mainly men; the migration phenomenon among the Roma communitie from Rennes generally characterizes the male population.

To determine whether there is a similarity between variables representing difficulties faced by the Roma in Rennes and their desire to leave France in order to return to Romania, we employed the ANOVA analysis.

Table 1. Results of the ANOVA tests – Descriptive part

		Descriptives							
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Have you faced difficulties with documents, procedures?	1 year	1	1.00	.	.	.	.	1	1
	2-3 years	14	.93	.267	.071	.77	1.08	0	1
	5 years	22	.86	.351	.075	.71	1.02	0	1
	No	11	1.00	.000	.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Total	48	.92	.279	.040	.84	1.00	0	1
Have you faced difficulties in finding a job?	1 year	1	1.00	.	.	.	.	1	1
	2-3 years	14	.93	.267	.071	.77	1.08	0	1
	5 years	22	.95	.213	.045	.86	1.05	0	1
	No	11	.64	.505	.152	.30	.98	0	1
	Total	48	.88	.334	.048	.78	.97	0	1
Have you faced difficulties in finding housing?	1 year	1	.00	.	.	.	.	0	0
	2-3 years	14	.64	.497	.133	.36	.93	0	1
	5 years	22	.86	.351	.075	.71	1.02	0	1
	No	11	.55	.522	.157	.19	.90	0	1
	Total	48	.71	.459	.066	.57	.84	0	1
Have you faced difficulties on the French unfavorable perception on Roma?	1 year	1	1.00	.	.	.	.	1	1
	2-3 years	14	.21	.426	.114	-.03	.46	0	1
	5 years	22	.14	.351	.075	-.02	.29	0	1
	No	11	.00	.000	.000	.00	.00	0	0
	Total	48	.15	.357	.051	.04	.25	0	1

Table 2. Results of the ANOVA tests

		ANOVA				
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Have you faced difficulties with documents , procedures?	Between Groups	.147	3	.049	.613	.610
	Within Groups	3.519	44	.080		
	Total	3.667	47			
Have you faced difficulties in finding a job?	Between Groups	.821	3	.274	2.720	.056
	Within Groups	4.429	44	.101		
	Total	5.250	47			
Have you faced difficulties in finding housing?	Between Groups	1.384	3	.461	2.379	.083
	Within Groups	8.532	44	.194		
	Total	9.917	47			
Have you faced difficulties on the French unfavorable perception on Roma?	Between Groups	1.031	3	.344	3.056	.038
	Within Groups	4.948	44	.112		
	Total	5.979	47			

Based on the value of the F statistics (0.613 to 3.056) we suggest that the Roma of Romanian nationality, especially the younger ones aged up to 40 years, do not want to return to the home country, despite the less favorable living conditions in Rennes. However, the 0.038 Sig. value for the variable denominating the unfavorable perception of the French population against Roma, further confirms that the interviewees consider such attitudes as one of the methods used to coerce them to leave the area.

Equally relevant is the 0.056 Sig. value for the variable representing the difficulty of finding a job in correlation with the desire to return home.

DISCUSSION

We note that the Roma members included in our study, have integrated themselves socially very well, but the most important problem remains the lack of jobs for immigrants. Although enrolled in the Employment services of Rennes, no more than two Roma people have managed to find a stable job, while others perform seasonal or temporary works, some even engaging in beggary or scrap metal gathering.

The support received from NGOs such as MRAP or from local authorities was a real help for the Roma community in Rennes. One of the immigrant families, consisting of a total of 18 members aged between 6 months and 48 years, was offered a house; currently all the 8 minors are attending school in Rennes, while adults have been included in the databases of the employment services in order to facilitate finding a job.

Unlike other large Roma communities in France, the one from Rennes is a quiet community, with no particular situations in terms of violence and crime. Not a single Roma person of Romanian nationality is in the criminal records of the regional police; there are however hindrances resulting from activities such as beggary, especially in women. An important point to remember is that French administrative institutions punish severely the act of forcing underage children to beg, and likely because of this, in Rennes, all Roma minors are attending French schools.

At the same time, the analysis also highlights the satisfaction of Roma community members towards health services; although with no medical insurance, some Roma

members have received healthcare in very good conditions. Among these, those interviewed stated that they did not feel discriminated at all by the medical staff.

Equally, a satisfactory attitude could be observed from the teaching staff in the schools where Roma children are enrolled; given that these children did not study French intensively in Romania, they reported that they did not feel marginalized during school hours, but on the contrary they were offered more attention.

The situation is becoming more critical, especially as the employment service in Rennes does not generally have jobs for immigrants who do not speak French well or who do not have specialized training in different fields. The majority of members of the Roma community in Rennes have completed secondary school in Romania, whereas in France they were not enrolled in any kind of specialty course.

Although living conditions of the Roma community in Rennes do not reach the normal standards, not even a single member wishes to return to Romania sooner than 5 years.

CONCLUSIONS

The Roma population needs support for integration into the society, both in Romania and in any other country; because of their struggle to survive, they become marginalized and rarely included in society, thus becoming dependent on social and administrative system of the host country. To help manage the situation in which these and many other Roma families are encountered, we need to highlight particular problems they are current facing, thus making the wider public more aware and sympathetic.

Social exclusion is found among various social categories, such as the unemployed, single parent families, institutionalized children, minorities. Roma belong to this category because they do not share an optimum level of social integration (some of them not having even identity papers).

These social problems cause in turn other forms of social exclusion, as undocumented Roma cannot benefit from certain rights granted by the Romanian state or the host state. Furthermore not attending school also leads to social exclusion, because of the differences in educational between Roma and non-Roma children. The hiring of undocumented Roma leads as well to social exclusion and inability to get health insurance.

It is also likely that part of the Roma population, experiencing different forms of discrimination, cultural traditions and undergoing problems related to daily existence, chooses to self-marginalize, of which case we may speak of self-exclusion. These issues are often encountered among Roma communities of Romanian nationality, both in Romania and abroad.

Consequently, it is important that Romania enforces a series of measures in order to prevent such cases of migration of Roma community members, which appear to have been basically triggered by the financial situation in the home country.

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