

Roma people and the european union politics essay



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The term “ Roma” refers to a variety of groups of people who describe themselves as Roma, Gypsies, Travellers, Manouches, Ashkali, Sinti, as well as other titles. For the purpose of this paper, we will use of the term Roma to describe the group in question. This is in no way intended to downplay the great diversity within the many different Romani groups and related communities, and it is not intended to promote stereotypes. Our basic question is... what is the status of the Roma people today, within the context of the European Union?

For millennia, the Roma have been an integral part of European civilisation. Today, with an estimated population of 10-12 million people, Roma are the biggest ethnic minority in Europe; Roma communities are present in all 27 EU Member States. And in contemporary times, most Roma are EU citizens.

An issues is that their situation is characterised by persistent discrimination and social exclusion. Thus, Roma are very exposed to the risks of poverty, unemployment, stereotypes and social prejudice.

It's vital to understand that the Roma population is heterogeneous. Following the elimination of traditional labor activities and of nomadic lifestyles in some Member States, urban migration, but also migration from Eastern Europe to the western EU states, there have been a lot of changes affecting the Roma people.

However, there is a very big gap between the living conditions (in the fields of health, education, labor and housing) of the Roma and the majority population. And a concentrated effort toward EU's integrated policy towards the Roma is needed, preferably a multidisciplinary one, dealing with the

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problem from multiple angles, not just from an economic or sociological point of view, and also one whose results have to be quantifiable, state-wide but also centrally. This is our hypothesis.

Legal Framework in the EU

The European Union has established a strong legal anti-discrimination framework; the most important documents on the issue consist of Article 13 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, Council Directive 2000/43/EC on Racial Equality and the Council Directive 2000/78/EC, that establishes a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation. The European Union also has a strong legal framework dealing with Roma discrimination, that is based, among others, on article 13 of the Treaty of the European Community, the Directive 2000/43/EC on racial equality and the Directive 2000/78/EC concerning the prohibition of discrimination in employment and vocational training. It's important to note however that it is the duty of the Member States to translate these Directives into their own national legislations.

The European Commission's mandate also includes stimulating the use of EU Structural Funds by EU Member States for supporting Roma inclusion. This process is supported by the EURoma network, composed of representatives from 12 Member States, whose goal is to promote the use of Structural Funds in order to enhance the effectiveness of policies targeting the Roma and to promote their social inclusion.

Roma people in Romania

According to official data, Roma population in Romania included, according to the 2002 census, 535, 250 people, of which 325, 000 people (60%) lived in rural areas. Roma population is, numerically speaking, the second ethnic minority group in Romania, after the Hungarians. However, these census numbers might or might not reflect reality, for there are probably more Roma who haven't been accounted for because they refused to participate in the census or might have avoided stating their nationality.

According to a study by the National Agency for Roma, the socio-economic situation of Roma ethnicity remains still quite difficult: “ Roma score on a high level of poverty. Roma communities are affected by various problems: high levels of unemployment (28%), low income, low educational and vocational training (with visible effects in the labor market participation), improper living conditions and limited access to public services”. Many Roma are working as day laborers, thus without having a stable source of income.

According to OSI (Open Society Institute) research conducted in 2007, 4. 9 percent of Roma people in Romania lacked a birth certificate. Among non-Roma citizens, less than 1 percent lacked a birth certificate. Similarly, surveys in 2007 and 2008 indicated that between 1. 9 and 6 percent of Roma lacked identity cards, compared to 1. 5 percent of non-Roma. The lack of identity documents leads to exclusion from participating in elections, receiving social benefits, accessing health insurance, securing property documents, and participating in the labor market.

Another survey, conducted by the ICCV (Institutul de Cercetare a Calitatii Vietii), points out that the proportion of illiterates among Roma is disturbing: more than one third of the Roma (38.6%) are functionally illiterate, 19% of men and 27% of mature women only attended one school year. 18% of Roma children aged between 7 and 16 years have never been to school.

Among the conclusions of the study are the following: “ Roma population categorically refuse to be a part of the education system. The problem is that the Roma population lives, usually in secluded and / or notorious neighborhoods, and schools located in these areas, where Roma children might study, have inferior learning conditions.” NGOs and the media report that discrimination by teachers and other students against Romani students served as an additional disincentive for Romani children to complete their studies.

However, other Roma are largely or fully integrated into society. Scholarships in schools and universities were created for Roma by the state creating “ positive discrimination” whose impact on improving integration in Romania remains to be seen.

On the downside again, in schools where students are predominantly Roma, repeater rates reach 11.3%, almost three times higher than the national average. “ Because of the low quality level of the school, almost 20% of Roma students enrolled in the fourth grade are functionally illiterate,” according to the ICCV. The EU, Romania included, has launched a program entitled “ Decade of Roma Inclusion” to combat this and other problems.

Roma situation differs from country to country, but integration problems remain in developed countries. A report by the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) emphasizes that, in 2005, the Roma in France for example, counting around 500, 000 individuals – are the target of dramatic levels of discrimination. The report notes that civil, political, social and economic community are frequently violated and concluded that the authorities fail integration of minorities in the Hexagon (France).

The most important communities of Roma live in Central and Eastern Europe, but, similarly to Romania's case (where the official 2002 census claims numbers of 535, 000, while a EU report dating from 2004 says there are 1. 8 million Roma) their number varies between official censuses and unofficial estimates: Czech Republic has between 11, 000- 200, 000 Roma, Slovakia, between 95, 000- 550, 000, Hungary, between 200, 000- 600, 000, and European reports on this minority are often negative. In each of the three of the EU countries mentioned above, unemployment among Roma reaches 75% -80%; when they have access to education, most often the children study in special schools and the wider community is a victim of racial prejudice coming from the majority population, according to Amnesty International.

EU Strategy for Roma integration

The European Commission has set up a programme to tackle the main difficulties involved in the integration of Roma people. There are EU funds available to help, and countries are encouraged to make greater use of them on a national level.

To this effect, one important tool is the European Social Fund, which currently stands at around 12 billion Euros and amounts to 10% of the EU's budget. The purpose of the fund is to provide support for projects that seek to improve social cohesion in the Union.

The second European Roma summit, was being held at the beginning of April 2010- on the International Roma Day, and was set-up as a forum to discuss the Commission's new strategy and to renew commitments.

Representatives of EU institutions, EU countries and civil society organisations, including Roma groups, have participated in the conference and also present were World Bank Director Theodore Ahlers and the investment banker and philanthropist George Soros. The direct involvement of Roma organisations and representatives was a key feature of the event. The agenda included the implementation of rules against discrimination and racism by member countries of EU. Concerning this, the Commission had taken legal action against 24 EU countries which have not fulfilled their obligations in this respect and for 12 of these cases, the proceedings are ongoing.

The focus shifted in the EU in 2009 from an analysis of the problems to an exploration of how existing instruments could be made more effective and how the situation of the Roma could be addressed more explicitly across a broad range of policies, including employment, social inclusion, health, education, housing, youth and culture. But the enforcement and development of specific EU legislation in the areas of non-discrimination, freedom of movement and anti-racism has continued.

The European Platform for Roma inclusion- composed of key players in Roma inclusion from EU institutions, international organisations, Member States governments and civil society, was launched in April 2009 to exchange good practice and experience and to stimulate cooperation among its participants, with a clearly stated objective: to increase the coherence and effectiveness of the parallel policy processes at national, European and international level with a view to creating synergies.

Most Member States report a stronger focus on internal coordination and on involving the Roma communities. Some Member States have begun to use the opportunities of complex programming and combined cohesion policy instruments.

Among the findings of the forum, it seems that Member States want to mainstream Roma issues and to use mutual learning in order to explore how to improve their current initiatives on desegregation and on access in the areas of education, employment and basic social services.

Another new effort of The European Commission deals with the implementation of a pilot project on Roma inclusion (5 million Euros for 2010-2012), initiated by the European Parliament, addressing early childhood education, self-employment through micro-credit, and public awareness particularly in countries with high Roma populations. The pilot project will also explore methods for data collection and counterfactual evaluation to assess the impact of the interventions in these three fields.

Specific problems concerning the workforce

As a fact, working age Roma lack sufficient human capital. Apart from barriers such as labor market discrimination still affecting them, the vast majority of working age Roma lacks the necessary qualifications to participate effectively in the labor market.

The next figures will portray the cases of 3 member states, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Romania, and also a non EU state, Serbia, in order to get a grasp of how serious the educational problems are among various European Roma communities.

Note: Data included in figures 1, 2 , 3 and 4 comes from the World Bank.

This is seen dramatically in Figure 1, which shows the proportion of working-age Roma that have completed at least some secondary education or more. Only 1 in 5 Roma of working age in the Czech Republic and as few as 1 in 8 in Bulgaria, Romania and Serbia are equipped with these necessary education skill levels. Working age members of the majority populations in these countries are 4 to 6 times more likely to have these educational qualifications.

Figure 3 shows the average monthly net income that employed Roma earn compared to that of the majority population. Employed Roma earn 31% less in Bulgaria, 48% less in Serbia, 55% less in Romania, and 58% less in the Czech Republic.

Specific problems concerning demographics and education

The health situation of the Roma conditions their life expectancy and their demographics are different from the european average. The European Roma population is significantly younger than the overall population (an average of 25. 1 years old in seven Member States, compared to 40. 24 years in the whole EU; 62. 38 percent of the Roma population is under 29 years old, compared to 34. 98 percent in the EU-27). There is no official information on the average life expectancy of Roma, but this is expected to be significantly lower than the overall EU population (which is around 63 years old in Romania)

The child dependency index is 57. 77 compared to 23. 33 in the EU, while the elderly dependency index reaches 4. 11, much lower than the EU of 24. 93. There is also a gradual decline in birth rates among Roma, however, the replacement index (reflecting the number of people with ages between 15 and 39 for every 100 people aged 40 to 64) remains significantly higher among Roma (231) than for the overall population (101).

As we have seen from the figures above, Roma citizens in some Member States influence the demographic pyramid in a specific manner.

Educational systems are selective and, despite efforts by Member States to overcome segregation, a great deal of the systems that have been ostensibly designed to combat segregation are often used in practice to increase disparities between social groups and disadvantage the poor profoundly, especially in the case of Roma. There is a constant need of specific educational policies to address Roma families and also policies that encourage active participation.

Although the proportion of young Roma enrolled in education and higher education systems has largely increased in some Member States, their level of qualification is still below the EU average. However, in the absence of formal qualifications, the position of Roma in the labor market can be improved by creating a system of recognition of practical skills.

Indeed, Figure 6 shows that among Roma who completed secondary education the average earnings are much higher than the average earnings among Roma who completed primary education: 83% higher in Bulgaria, 110% higher in the Czech Republic, 144% higher in Romania, and 52% higher in Serbia.

Romania's efforts aimed towards the Roma through structural funds

Surprisingly, there is a great deal of implication concerning this matter with the local, Romanian authorities, and a lot o projects concerning Roma and their social integration are on their way. Most projects are co-funded by the European Structural Funds, are managed centrally and focus primarily on education (including early childcare), vocational and professional training, labour market insertion and social inclusion.

According to the information provided by the Romanian Managing Authority, a total of 11 projects are being or will be implemented multiregionally or statewide with an aggregate budget of 37, 819, 853 Euros and are planned to benefit 61, 634 Roma men and women.

Most projects are short-to-medium-term (2-3 years). We can note that 6 major projects (employment and early education) are directly managed by

the National Roma Agency. Our hope is that perhaps these efforts will actually yield some quantifiable results.

Figure 5

source: EURoma report- Roma and the Structural Funds

There are currently several integrated projects that rank as highly important. First, a transnational pilot project, Together on the labour market, is managed by the National Roma Agency is being implemented in 8 cities, in partnership with the Fundación Secretariado Gitano from Spain as transnational partner during the period 2008-2010. In the following period, 2010-2013, the project aims to be expanded nationwide. At a cost of 4, 908, 749 Euros for a period of two years, the project has ambitious aims: to benefit 6, 670 Roma women and men through personalised support for labour insertion, vocational training adapted to the demand of the Romanian labour market.

With a budget of 4, 770, 000 Euros, another employment activation project, Strategic steps for improving access to education for Roma children, presents ambitious outcomes and outputs: to increase the qualification on the labour market of 2, 000 persons, including 1, 000 Roma, the development of social economy structures, the increase of job opportunities addressed to vulnerable groups, the establishment of 8 Regional Centres to supporting social economy structures, the creation of 8 Regional Partnerships, and the development of 80 social economy projects.

Within the education field, the All in kindergarten, all in the first grade. Integrated programmes for increasing the access to education and the educational level of the children within under-privileged communities, mainly Roma, during 2008-2009 project, is managed by the central government with a budget of 5, 000, 000 Euros. Although no data is yet available on its results, it had some ambitious and specific targets. The general objective of the project is to prevent and correct early school leaving for children aged 5 to 8 within 420 disadvantaged communities (a high proportion of them being Roma children). It seeks to increase access to pre-school and school education for 8, 000 children within disadvantaged communities, mainly Roma, through participation in Summer kindergarten and School after school educational programmes. Its potential outputs are ambitious: A 75% decrease in school dropout rate for pupils in the first grade belonging to the 420 disadvantaged communities; 6, 000 Roma children benefiting from the school-after-school programme and 10, 000 Roma parents receiving counseling regarding child education.

Three other projects target pre-school education. Two are managed respectively by the Amare Rromentza Roma Centre and the National Agency for the Roma, with more than 4, 000 combined beneficiaries. The third, titled Strategic steps for improving access to education for Roma children is managed by Romani CRISS and will have as a general objective the reduction of early school leaving risk among Roma pupils. With a budget of 4, 872, 060 Euros, it will develop desegregation plans within 90 schools from 4 regions of the country -North-West, Centre, South-East and Bucharest-Ilfov over three years, including intercultural training for 150 teaching staff and

awareness-raising initiatives regarding the benefits of education to 20, 000 planned Roma beneficiaries.

Finally, an integrated project, Education of Roma children- the way to a guaranteed employment, is being managed by the National Roma Agency and implemented for three years (no exact dates provided). It aims to increase of the educational level of the Roma children from rural and urban areas nationwide and the development of human resources. With a budget of 4, 943, 831 Euros and targeting 4, 800 beneficiaries (50% women), it could help to find ways to articulate education and employment policies through effective local implementation of equal opportunity and desegregation measures, and if it demonstrates long-term sustainability.

Economic costs of Roma Exclusion:

As expected, the fact that Roma people sit on the margins of society leads to some macroeconomic consequences. These consequences have been thoroughly analyzed and documented in a recent, 2010 report by The World Bank. Note that some of the issues presented in the report have surfaced in the previous chapters of this paper. A summary of the findings is presented in the following table:

Figure x: The economic costs of Roma Exclusion

The vast majority of working-age Roma lack sufficient education to participate successfully in the labor market.

As a result, European countries are losing hundreds of millions of Euros annually in productivity and in fiscal contributions to the governments.

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Lower bound estimates of annual productivity losses range from 367 million Euro in the Czech Republic, 526 million Euro in Bulgaria, to 887 million Euro in Romania.

Lower bound annual fiscal losses range from 202 million Euro in Romania, 233 million Euro in the Czech Republic, and 370 million Euros in Bulgaria.

Toward inclusive growth: bridging the education gap is also the economically smart choice to make

Better educated Roma can expect much higher earnings. Compared to Roma with primary education, Roma who complete secondary education can expect to earn 83% more in Bulgaria, 110% more in the Czech Republic, 144% more in Romania.

The annual fiscal gains from bridging the employment gap are much higher than the total cost of investing in public education for all Roma children; by a factor of 7.7 for Bulgaria, 7.4 times for the Czech Republic, 2.4 times in Romania.

The share of Roma among the working-age populations will rise as majority populations in Eastern and Central Europe are aging rapidly. Equal labor participation among the Roma is essential to shoulder the nationally rising costs of pensions, health and other costs of aging.

source: The economic costs of Roma exclusion, World Bank Report, April 2010.

Conclusions

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We consider that Roma are mostly discriminated because of a certain lack of education, but also because they are sometimes perceived as social outcasts. And this is sometimes a matter of choice, even tradition, which makes this a very tough area to cover and improve. Education is a milestone to consider, and perhaps the key to solving a lot of Roma related problems.

We have seen that there are tremendous efforts on a local but also European level, which we believe is a positive sign. The use of structural funds could be a very powerful tool when used properly. While targeting Roma education might lead us to certain cultural barriers, we have to do our best to understand these limitations and figure out a way to please both parties. There are a lot of opportunities and advantages what will come with a better integration of the Roma people, and some steps have been taken into this direction, both socially and economically.

However, there is one problem that should be noted. The issue of results, and more specifically, how do we make the efforts quantifiable? We see a lot of projects through structural funds in Romania, but we should also bear in mind their specific results and goals. The centralisation of these results should be a priority, otherwise they risk getting by unnoticed. Have the goals been achieved? They the programmes successful, but just how much? How can they be improved so they reach the broader audience rather than smaller groups?

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