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Romania's Roma Population: From Marginality to Social Integration

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ABSTRACT *Among several groups vulnerable to discrimination in 21st century Europe, Roma loom large because the poorer, traditionally-minded elements continue to resist integration and remain on the margins of society. Most of the people involved have become EU citizens as a result of recent accession by East Central European countries where marginalisation has been tolerated, with varying degrees of discrimination, ever since the 19th century abolition of feudalism. In the interest of a more inclusive society, Roma are now being encouraged to strive for living standards comparable with those enjoyed by the mainstream population. This paper concentrates on Romania, which has one of the largest Roma communities in Europe. We profile the situation with some reference to regional geographies and previous policy history. We examine the key concepts relevant to marginality, arguing for an element of self-exclusion, because while many Roma elements have been successfully assimilated over the years, a large residual element insists on preserving elements of 'identity', implying separation from the mainstream in terms of the modernising ethos and the rule of law. The main thrust of the paper rests with a comprehensive programme to improve the condition of the Roma community as a major element among a number of other factors which are working towards the same objective. We give particular attention to the education programme that is now making significant progress.*

KEY WORDS: Exclusion, East Central Europe, EU accession, marginality, Roma, Romania, social integration

Introduction

Social integration has been a major issue in the recent enlargement of the EU, with the rebuilding of welfare services on a basis of state and private provision complicated by acute financial stringency during economic restructuring. Moreover, despite the assimilation policies of the communist era, there are inherited problems over Roma exclusion at a time when many Roma citizens are circulating around Europe thanks to the easing of bureaucratic barriers to migration. The problem originated in the distant past through the servile status of the Roma community in East Central Europe until the end of feudalism in the 19th century. But it has persisted due to a tendency for Roma to remain on the margins of society because of

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a desire to retain their traditional values, which has deepened prejudice against them from mainstream groups concerned (for example) about health hazards and rising crime. This led Zamfir & Zamfir (1993) to write about the public concern over a minority that could not simply be ignored. While there has been a shortage of funding to sustain policies of positive discrimination, it is also clear that, for many Roma elements, the danger of assimilation is always a concern in any strategy to overcome exclusion – most clearly evident in the ghetto phenomenon. This paper deals with the Roma question in Romania, where great efforts have been made over the past decade to create a more inclusive society. Our aim is to examine this programme while also reconciling sharply conflicting perceptions of the Roma minority that fluctuate between self-righteous exclusion of a recalcitrant and crime-ridden minority and inexcusable demonisation of a peaceful, talented but traditionally-minded community.

The study follows from previous work by the authors on Romanian society during both communism and transition, having in mind the problems of cohesion and inclusivity that surfaced during the EU accession process. In line with the Council of Europe's principle – 'all equal all different' – it is clearly important for governments to work for cooperative relations with other minority groups that are liable to be persecuted as misfits by reactionary elements in mainstream society. We attempt to profile the Roma community as a one of Romania's leading ethnic minorities and to provide a historical background with a focus on official policies through the ages. We go on to examine concepts of exclusion and discuss the key policy requirements for social inclusivity today before assessing progress with the current Roma Programme for the decade 2001–2010, with particular attention given to schools as agents of change. All numerical data come from official publications (government documents, statistical books, national census). Teams of researchers have carried out interviews on social and economic conditions extensively in the West Region and elsewhere among both Roma and mixed communities, while the implementation and impact of government policies has been considered with particular reference to some ten NGOs based in the region. Given the political will across the political spectrum (apart from the ambivalence of nationalist parties), substantial external funding and expertise and almost a decade of economic growth with open frontiers, there are now good prospects for at least a partial solution to a historic social problem.

The Profile

Romania is believed to have a Roma population share of some 10% (similar to Slovakia), which is the largest proportion for any European country except Macedonia (11%); Bulgaria's Roma constitute an estimated 8.5% followed by other transition states (mainly Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Montenegro and Serbia) with below 5%. Accurate figures are not available since many Roma do not declare themselves as Roma for census purposes and the official figures are clearly underestimates (Table 1), although it would appear that there has been a growth of 134,000 (33.4%) Roma during the period 1992–2002, while the total population of the country declined by 1.11 million (–4.9%). The Roma have therefore increased their official share of the national population from 1.76 to 2.47%, however this remains a massive understatement when set against the World Bank estimate of

Table 1. Census returns for Roma nationally

Group	1992 census		2002 census		Change
	Total th	Percent	Total th	Percent	
Total	22810.0	100.00	21698.8	100.00	-1111.2
Romanians	20408.5	89.47	9409.4	89.45	-999.1
Hungarians	1625.0	7.12	1434.4	6.61	-190.6
Roma	401.1	1.76	535.2	2.47	+134.1
Germans	119.5	0.52	60.1	0.28	-59.4
Ukrainians	65.8	0.29	61.1	0.28	-4.7
Others	190.1	0.83	198.6	0.91	+8.5

Source: Romanian National Population Censuses, 1992 and 2002, Institute of Statistics, Bucharest.

some 2.0 million while the Open Society Institute (OSI) uses 1.9 million (Hoelscher, 2007, p. 9) to substantiate the 10% estimate already quoted. There has certainly been a history of concealing Roma identity, as census data could be exploited by the authorities as a basis for further discrimination. In addition, opportunistic Roma may find it convenient to change their identity in order to gain advantage, e.g. in 2001 some Roma in Transylvania claimed they were Hungarian in order to benefit under a short-lived project by Hungary's Fidesz government to give Hungarian passports to Transylvanians on a double citizenship basis: in this way they could gain entry to EU states ahead of Romania's own accession in 2007. However, these much higher figures seem to embrace people with a Roma background who no longer wish to be part of an ethnic minority and perceive themselves as fully integrated. Indeed, OSI EUMAP (2007, p. 98) found that some 45% of Roma consider themselves Romanianised in the sense that they embrace Romanian culture. Changing allegiance may improve job prospects for the 'good Romanians' who thus avoid the social stigma arising from identification with traditionally-minded 'nomad gypsies' whose 'marginalisation by the society in which they live and their manner of obtaining the economic resources necessary for life are characteristics set them apart as an anti-social ethnic group' (Costachie 1997, p. 112). Our own estimates suggest that, in 2002, there could have been a total of 600,000, taking into account those working abroad (80,000 in Germany, Italy and Spain) or living in remote places within Romania. Allowing for further growth since 2002 the present figure could therefore be 650,000.

However, the Roma community is by no means homogeneous, as Voiculescu (2002) noted in Sângeorgiu de Mureș, on the northern edge of the town of Târgu Mureș (Figure 1), where there are four groups differentiated according to residence, dress, employment, religion and language (Romany, Romanian and Hungarian); while Ringold *et al.* (2003, pp. 68–91) show great diversity among nine sample communities across Romania: the main group at Babadag (40 km south of Tulcea) is Muslim, while the community at Iana (35 km southwest of Vaslui) is actively Orthodox and there are differences at Zăbrăuți (southern Bucharest), with the 'Sporitori' speaking the Roma language while more integrated Roma speak Romanian. In material terms, the group at Călan (20 km southeast of Deva), who used to work at the local metallurgical works, are relatively well-off. Indeed, at the top of the Roma class structure there are relatively rich clans dealing in gold and silver ('aurarii' and 'argintarii') who commonly flaunt their wealth in newly-built



Figure 1. Romania's counties, regions and main towns (other locations mentioned in text are described in relation to the towns shown in this map). The Carpathian mountain zone is shaded

three/four-storey 'palaces' (literally with 'golden gates' and towers covered with zinc-coated plate) for the extended families, in small towns such as Alexandria and Strehăia (the latter 55 km east of Drobeta-Turnu Severin), as well as some larger provincial towns (Sibiu and Timișoara) and the capital, Bucharest. There are also the coppersmiths ('căldărari') making stills for brandy distilling, although some are suspected of criminal links through the use of copper stolen from electrified railways, while musicians ('lăutarii') do well by playing for weddings and parties, having emerged in many cases from the ranks of 'vătrași' Roma and adapting a sedentary life following the abolition of slavery. Middle-class Roma groups include florists ('florarii') and circus artists, especially 'ursarii' who work with bears, along with ironworkers ('potcovarii'), blacksmiths ('fierarii'), and woodworkers ('rudarii'), some of whom specialise in making spoons ('lingurarii'), chests ('coșarii'), brushes ('ciurarii') and cart wheels ('rotarii'). The poorer elements undertake building work ('salahorii'), often in conjunction with decorators ('spălătorii'), or make sun-dried bricks from local clay ('cărămidarii'). Nomadic Roma ('nomazii') are now a tiny minority, although surprise appearances in unsuspecting neighbourhoods make a big impact, while semi-nomadic 'lăieții' have settled only within the last half-century and are commonly employed as night-time street cleaners. Other groups only partly settled are the 'cocalarii', who are reduced to begging and sorting garbage, and the 'cainarii' who often resort to stealing from other Roma groups.

The better-off groups are well-integrated, even if they occupy specific neighbourhoods, with a 'ghetto' phenomenon reinforced by a clear preference among

non-Roma not to live among them. Even if traditional skills are handed down within each family, education is eminently acceptable, especially during the early years, and there are generally no financial constraints to accessing education. The problem of integration involves primarily the poorer elements who hold a traditional outlook and very limited resources since they lack qualifications and can take only the lowest-paid jobs. They have always lived on the edge of society and, broadly, continue to do so. Encouraged by the tolerance shown to them by the communist authorities, they are now reluctant to attend to such basic requirements as registering births, marriages and deaths – and also documentary proof of ownership for land and buildings (required under the 1993 property law). As a result, whole neighbourhoods may have no official existence in terms of both persons and property. Moreover, children may remain administratively invisible with access to healthcare, education and social services severely impeded. Education has traditionally been undervalued, although attendance is often ruled out by lack of suitable clothing, especially in winter, as well as domestic responsibilities (e.g. looking after younger siblings) which often distract the older children. Roma pupils may be taunted as ‘ghetto boys’ (as at Zăbrăuți) and also face physical abuse, while lack of immunisation records (reflecting a mistrust of formal medicine) may also be a stumbling block (Ringold *et al.*, 2003, p. 80).

Regional Variations

A detailed statistical survey would be inappropriate but it is worth indicating some broad contrasts, taking the west (Hungarian before 1918) comprising the central/western areas of Transylvania, Banat, Crișana and Maramureș (the Central, North East and West regions shown in Figure 1); the south which is known as Wallachia (comprising the regions of Bucharest-Ilfov, the South and South East) and the east, which is known as Moldavia (not to be confused with Moldova, which is a separate state, albeit connected historically) along with the coastal province of Dobrogea and the adjacent Bărăgan plain: the North East and South East regions. Census figures for the regions (Table 2) bring out major differences in the number of Roma,

Table 2. Regional distribution of Roma

Group	1992 census		2002 census		Change
	Total th	Percent	Total th	Percent	
Bucharest	22.1	1.8	39.3	2.72	+17.2
Central	73.3	3.80	93.1	3.96	+19.8
North East	27.2	1.72	46.9	1.22	+19.7
North West	82.0	3.42	97.0	3.50	+15.0
South	83.1	2.80	98.5	2.91	+13.4
South East	37.0	1.60	49.6	1.70	+12.6
South West	43.2	2.40	62.3	2.58	+19.1
West	33.2	1.41	48.5	2.47	+15.3
Total	401.1	1.76	535.2	2.47	+134.1

Source: Romanian National Population Census, Institute of Statistics, Bucharest, 2002.

between the 93,500 in the eastern group compared with 197,100 in the south and 234,500 in the west. But there are also broad contrasts in their condition. Roma in the central/western area are relatively well-off and include most of the Hungarian-speaking Roma who are being quite rapidly assimilated in the schools and churches (especially in the Hungarian majority areas of Covasna and Harghita), while the poorer groups are only weakly represented. There is also a well-developed NGO infrastructure, e.g. free food and clothing are provided by Pentecostal churches in Sibiu while the NGO 'Romani CRISS' is active in a similar way in Cluj-Napoca. On the other hand, tension between Roma and Romanians in this area was exacerbated by nationalist parties after 1989, especially the *Vatra Românească* organisation and the resulting Party of Romanian National Unity (now absorbed within the Greater Romania Party), which inflamed anti-Roma attitudes and helped provoke some of the worst ethnic violence (Mungiu-Pippidi, 1999).

In the south, the Roma are generally poorer but there are many large communities (e.g. in small towns near Bucharest – Budești and Fundulea – and in areas of the capital city – Giulești and Ferentari) with a readiness to vote for Roma candidates, which makes for relatively good representation in local government (Partida Romilor, 2008). There are also good wages paid for cleaners and refuse collectors by the 'salubritate' companies, which contributes to integration. The greatest poverty is found in the east with relatively large Roma families (7–8 persons compared with 4–5 for Romanians) and relatively little foreign investment to boost employment, especially outside the main towns of Bacău, Iași and Suceava, but even these limited investments attracted few Roma since large families generate sufficient income through child allowances (Bocancea & Neamtu, 1999, p. 43). Many 'lăieții' live in Bărăgan and Dobrogea, including some areas close to Bucharest where the Quality of Life Institute (ICV, 2003, p. 44) found this group had the poorest health record in the country, with a life expectancy of just 47 years, since in addition to suffering from HIV-AIDS, 40% of adults have tuberculosis through malnutrition, 28% suffer from hepatitis arising from poor hygiene and 25% were found with stress-related diabetes. There is also much Roma emigration to Italy and Spain (as in western of Wallachia, known as Oltenia) while orphaned children are found begging in Transylvanian cities, often to obtain drugs.

Figure 2 shows that distribution is highly uneven with areas of extreme concentration and many other cases of more moderate variation in each county. The emphasis on southeastern Transylvania – the borders of Brașov, Covasna, Mureș and Sibiu counties – recalls Medieval settlement by Roma under the Hungarian crown in an area that was marginal to both Hungarian (Szekler) settlement and the Saxon population associated with their seven castles or 'Siebenbürgen', which doubles as the German name for Transylvania. Roma in this area generally speak Hungarian today. The link with the monasteries to which many Roma were tied during feudalism is perpetuated, for example, by the bias to the frontier districts near Arad and Timișoara, where monasteries such as Hodos-Bodrog are situated. There were many new communities established across the country in the late 19th century, following the abolition of feudalism, while some other border communities – e.g. close to Chișineu-Criș (45 km north of Arad) and Iam (60 km southwest of Reșița) – are linked with the development of cross-border trade after this western frontier line was drawn following the First World War (with

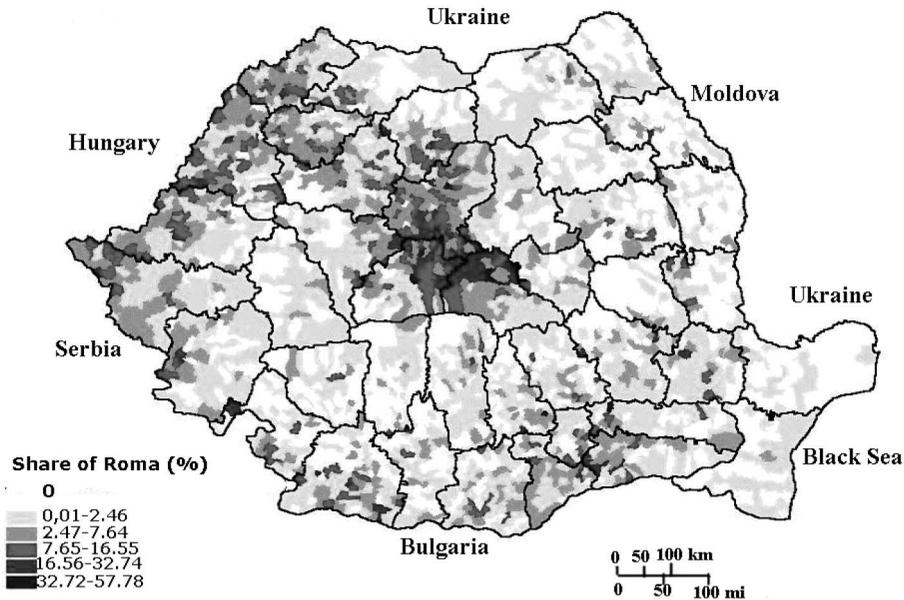


Figure 2. The distribution of Roma across Romania in 2002

business rekindled since 1989, especially in the case of petrol smuggling to break the UN embargo on trade with Serbia). Concentrations in the south have much to do with the resettlement under communism, when many Roma were dispersed to the outskirts of Romanian villages where they found work on the developing co-operative farm system while others were resettled in urban areas. Several interesting examples are listed by Ringold *et al.* (2003, p. 71).

Thus, our findings suggest a broad east-west gradient in terms of Roma problems, but financial allocations to the highly influential NGO sector show no obvious correspondence. Although the eastern city of Iași does well enough, there is a clear focus on regional cities in general (Baia Mare, Cluj-Napoca, Craiova and Timișoara), as well as the capital, reflecting information flows linked with relatively high levels of development in general and NGO capacity in particular. Roma groups insist there are no regional problems, only basic issues like poverty and unemployment (Cace *et al.*, 2005, pp. 49–51). But the poorer regions seem to be losing out, especially where there are no Roma political leaders or NGOs to formulate projects and attract funds, e.g. the Roma Muslims in Dobrogea are relatively invisible (Cace *et al.*, 2005, p. 51). Evaluation of health projects dealing with hygiene and family planning (Cace *et al.*, 2005, p. 77) highlighted the problem in the more isolated rural areas since help is concentrated heavily on the Bucharest area along with the cores of the North East, South West and West regions (Iași-Bacău, Craiova and Arad-Timișoara respectively) and the Transylvanian axis Oradea-Cluj-Alba Iulia-Sibiu.

A further regional dimension concerns the migration of Roma abroad. Milder policing and the breakdown of informing networks linked with state security made it

easier for Romania's Roma to travel abroad without documents after 1989. Slovakia became a particularly congenial environment (Kalvoda 1991) since Roma could gain access by taking 'greenways' through the forests via Ukraine or by bribery at official border checkpoints: an issue frequently given media prominence (www.romnews.com). However, since passports may now be obtained as of right, there has been considerable migration to Western Europe, especially when EU (Schengen) states relaxed immigration controls prior to Romania's accession in 2007. Roma with an affluent background may prosper in Europe, e.g. the Novacovici family established a network of flower shops in Sweden and then set themselves up with a summer palace in the western spa town of Buziaş (40 km southeast of Timișoara). On the other hand, poorer elements have compromised Romania's image as an attractive investment option by aggressive begging and disproportionate criminality, as well as recourse to traditional 'contingency housing' in ad hoc encampments on the edge of cities.

Tension boiled over in Rome in 2007 when Romulus Mailat, from the Roma community of Avrig (20 km southeast of Sibiu), was arrested for the murder of an Italian admiral's wife. Local authorities were immediately given power to expel EU citizens posing a threat to public security while several Roma encampments were razed. Public concern over immigration contributed to Silvio Berlusconi's electoral success in 2008 and the realisation of his campaign promise to conduct a census of an estimated 160,000 Roma. Interior Minister Roberto Maroni from the anti-immigration Northern League, aligned with Berlusconi's Forza Italia party, commended the census as a means of finding of identifying those with no entitlement to remain in the country (Angelescu, 2008). Although this procedure was meant to pave the way to better housing for those deemed to have a right to stay – replacing camps like Rotunda in Naples – this discriminatory process recalled the registration procedures imposed on Jews and Roma used by Hitler and Mussolini as launchpads for persecution. Fortunately, a more constructive discourse has emanated from the Council of Europe, along with UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank, along with leading NGOs, to establish a European norm for the treatment of minorities, while the EU, which has historically not engaged directly in minority policies, enshrined this standard in the enlargement process, with the Copenhagen summit of 1993 declaring 'respect for minorities' a political criterion for accession.

Previous Policies

It is worth noting that Roma programmes have been attempted in the past, as is evident from historical narratives (Achim, 1998; Crowe, 1991) and others that research the servile status of the immigrants allegedly brought in by Medieval rulers to perform menial tasks (Beck, 1989). In the Habsburg Empire, coercive assimilation was intended by Maria Theresa's 'Gypsy Decrees' 1758–73 ordering them to settle (and not leave their assigned villages without permission) while paying taxes and performing mandatory military service as well as services to churches and landowners. There was zero tolerance for Roma dress, language or leadership while children over five were sent to state schools and foster homes. However, this draconian piece of enlightenment was not comprehensive enough to make any fundamental change, and the relatively objective contemporary writings of

Francesco Grisellini point to the perpetuation of a nomadic lifestyle (Grisellini, 1984, p. 33). The Roma culture persisted under feudal oppression until Romania's rural reform in 1864 established free communities with their own land, as at Iana where the community was later enlarged by First World War veterans. Shortly after, the ultimate extreme was reached by the Second World War holocaust – known to Roma as a devouring ('porajmos') policy since an estimated half million were killed in Axis-controlled Europe (Huttenbach, 1991). This figure includes some 10,000 deaths in Romania arising mainly from cold, starvation and disease in Transnistria (captured Soviet territory east of the Nistru river) after General Antonescu used a Roma census in 1942 as the basis for a transportation plan to avoid 'tainting the Romanian nation' (Achim, 2002). Despite poor organisation of a 'storage' problem and the privations of war, the stark realities of ethnic cleansing and genocide can hardly be denied. However, there is uncertainty over precise figures since the total number of deportees fluctuates between 25,000 (Crowe, 1991, p. 70) and 90,000 (Fraser, 1994, p. 268) while Ringold *et al.* (2003, p. 90) claim a total of 36,000 Roma deaths in Romania during the war.

Much has also been said about the communist integration of Roma, although the evidence is highly contradictory. The Soviets may have supported ethnic minorities as a weapon to oppose anti-communism in Romania but, apart from repatriation of survivors from Transnistria, tangible benefits are unclear, while assessment is inevitably clouded by the politically-inspired terror of the 1950s and Ceaușescu's excesses in the 1980s (Fonseca, 1995; Helsinki Watch, 1991). However, it is clear that Romania's communists favoured coercive assimilation from the late 1940s because their primitive lifestyle was considered irreconcilable with the unified socialist nation that Ceaușescu envisaged early in his rule in 1974 (Georgescu, 1988, p. 88; see also Verdery, 1991). Hence, not only did Roma fail to benefit from the land reform of 1946, but the Romanian Workers' Party (as the Communist Party was known at the time) did not recognise the Roma minority when it came to power in 1948 (although Roma could declare themselves as such in the 1977 census). There was no provision for education in the Roma language, and Roma suffered from the general confiscation of wealth (most notably their significant holdings in gold); in addition, nomadism was officially outlawed and some Roma even had their carts confiscated. However, while traditional communities were broken up and Roma dispersed to the margins of mainstream settlements, housing was provided along with employment in factories (albeit in hot, dirty conditions) and cooperative farms in the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, the Roma colony in Babadag dates from a housing project in the 1950s; likewise at Sf. Gheorghe and Timișoara (attracting Roma from neighbouring villages as well as more distant regions). Metallurgical skills encouraged some deployment in heavy industry, e.g. Călan, while some were drafted into engineering at Nădrag (55 km northeast of Reșița) when homes were flooded in Satu Mare in the 1970s, and coal mining in the Jiu valley brought Roma to Aninoasa near Petroșani (50 km north of Târgu Jiu). Integration efforts (with some coercion) were not always maintained and local authorities could also be relaxed over traditional practices and registration procedures: e.g. tinsmiths and brickmakers were tolerated at Ciopeia (Sântamaria Orlea near Hațeg; 40 km southeast of Deva) while production of bricks, buckets and soap continued within the Roma community at Călan (Ringold *et al.*, 2003, p. 71; see also Zang & Levy 1991).

When draconian measures were taken to stimulate a higher birth rate from 1967, the Roma tradition of large families was already in place, although the lack of material benefits (through poor access to the comprehensive but low-provisioned communist welfare system) gave rise to the massive social problem of unwanted children. The result was an expanded network of 170 orphanages, of which 20 were earmarked for Roma children with serious health problems (HIV-AIDS and lung complaints). Substandard care – revealed after 1989 in remotely-situated mountain institutions such as Baia de Criş (40 km north of Deva) and Râu Sadului (20 km south of Sibiu) – gave rise to emotive propaganda over ‘death camp orphanages’ for the victims of Ceauşescu’s campaign for a pure Dacian nation. ‘Romani CRISS’ estimated there were some 80,000 Roma children in orphanages in 1989, which reduced to 55,000 in 2006 allowing for deaths and adoptions. Meanwhile, determined efforts were made after 1977 to accelerate social and cultural integration through education and settlement policies, but resources were inadequate for radical rural reorganisation (‘sistemizare’) to be achieved by 1989. Had the programme been fully implemented, the Roma might eventually have gained by replacement of ‘contingency housing’ demolished in the late 1980s to make way for new village centres (Turnock, 1991). Also on the positive side, the communist leadership had earlier been appreciated for allowing an estimated 40,000 Roma families access (on very low rents) to state-owned houses acquired when other minorities (mainly Jews and Germans) – and some Romanians as well – were allowed to emigrate.

The Post-Communism Situation

This was initially difficult because of the collapse of cooperative farms combined with a failure to qualify for land restitution because Roma had not normally owned land before communism. Moreover, the government’s intention to provide symbolic subsistence holdings for all rural dwellers was often prevented by the lack of sufficient land outside the state farm sector after restitution claims had been met. Exclusion from villages (reinforced by poor access to social security) made for some resumption of an itinerant lifestyle or removal to the towns where the Roma population has increased considerably. Some are to be found in squalid apartment blocks in downtown areas of Bucharest (where the Zăbrăuți community colonised abandoned apartment blocks) but a World Bank (2005) social mapping exercise revealed that most Roma now live in the more developed rural communes and small towns with a high level of concentration in large communities of over 500 and average communities of 200–250. The growth rate in some cases is considerable with a local authority census in the small town of Avrig revealing a growth from 150 at the 2002 census (albeit an understatement due to many absences abroad) to 1500 in 2007, with absentees now taken into account. Roma dwellings were 20% smaller on average (while household size was larger) and access to services (water and sewage; gas and electricity) was generally poor – and made even worse by disconnection for unpaid fuel bills. However, the law on social housing (1993) not only allowed the Roma who had been allocated state houses under communism to remain in them but also assisted a further 15,000 Roma with households through an additional stock of property acquired mainly through a major post-1989 emigration of Germans (Creţan, 2006). This boosted President Iliescu’s popularity among Roma, although

further legislation in 2007 enabled the descendants of the former owners to claim restitution.

Ringold *et al.* (2003, p. 90) refer to a study in 1993 indicating that 35% of Roma men had acquired ‘modern’ skills while less than a tenth practiced traditional occupations. Nevertheless, unemployment in urban areas increased through downsizing in the factories that saw the relatively unskilled Roma among the first to lose their jobs (in 1992 45% of the Roma population over 16 was unemployed): hence, limited formal sector employment was balanced by more casual and self employment involving itinerant trade, day labouring, waste recycling or informal manufacturing. In any case, Roma who do not carry an identity card (‘buletin’) or work card (‘carte de muncă’) are barred from legal employment and social benefits: thus, early in the transition period, 60% of employed Roma worked for low wages on the black market (Zamfir & Zamfir, 1993). This contributed to a serious poverty problem. The government’s Commission on Poverty Alleviation & Promotion of Social Inclusion (established in 2001) declared a poverty rate for Roma overall of 75.1% (compared with 24.4% for Romanians and 19.9% for Hungarians) and a severe poverty rate of 52.2% compared with 9.3% for Romanians and 6.4% for Hungarians (www.caspis.ro). Moreover, poverty rates increase according to the number of children in the family (also for older heads of household, poorly education and isolated from the majority population). The national human development report of 1999 (Ionete & Dinculescu, 2000) showed that only a fifth of Roma families with five or more children were doing ‘relatively well’: the rest were poor or were living in misery. By contrast, 43% of households with no children were living comfortably. Large families also distort the age structure: 43.6% were aged under 18 in 2002, compared with 24.0% for the country as a whole, with corresponding figures of 29.1 and 26.6% for the 18–34 group; but 19.7 and 25.3% for the 35–54 group and 7.6 and 23.5% for people aged 55 and over (Table 3).

Education was also a major problem because only a fifth of Roma children attended kindergartens in 1998 and 44% of the Roma population had not completed the basic eight-year schooling programme. The consequences can be seen in an extraordinarily high Roma illiteracy rate of 65% (while another 15% could only read with some difficulty and only 20% could read well). Poor awareness of the importance of education was highlighted by dropping-out in the later primary years (classes 5–8) arising to some extent through the tradition of child labour in rural

Table 3. Age structure for the Roma population and for Romania as a whole

Age group in years	Romania 2000		Roma 2004	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Below	5,391,401	24.0	3,487	43.6
18–24	2,323,894	10.4	968	12.1
25–34	3,644,244	16.2	1,357	17.0
35–44	2,880,033	12.3	851	10.7
45–54	2,914,862	13.0	721	9.0
55–64	2,295,258	10.2	344	4.3
Over 65	2,985,513	13.3	262	3.3
Total	22,435,205	100.0	7,990	100.0

Source: OSI EUMAP (2007, p. 30).

areas (Dobraca, 1994, p. 66). Taking the under 40s, 20.9% of Roma had not been to school compared with 2.0% for the country as a whole (OSI EUMAP, 2007, p. 41). There was also discrimination against girls who 'tend to be socialised with a focus on preparation for marriage and childbearing' (Hoelscher, 2007, p. 21). Welfare inevitably remained poor since restructuring of the economy was needed to fund improvements (Deacon & Szalai, 1990, p. 21) but rural Roma had particularly poor access to social safety nets (which are more easily accessed by urban dwellers). Relations between health care personnel and patients were often characterised by misunderstanding, mistrust and, in some cases, discrimination, while traditional leadership manifested through the Cioabă and Rădulescu families in Sibiu was not considered effective because authority is 'rarely recognised beyond their extended families and the people who are keen to do business with them' (Barany, 2004, p. 263). Living on the edge of settlements and finding comfort in a daily routine of begging and petty theft, conflicts often developed with mainstream rural communities, with the more shocking cases of violence often aggravated by earlier provocations (Năstasă & Salat, 2003). Alienation was deepened by violent incidents and calls for separation: hence the concrete 'Berlin Wall' in Sf. Gheorghe isolating two dilapidated Roma blocks. Embarrassment over the confusion between Roma and Romania (suggesting a Roma nation state) even led to government proposal in 1995 to change the group's official name to 'Țigani', although this was quickly withdrawn after a wave of demonstrations.

Conceptualising Exclusion and Marginality

Philo (2000, p. 751) explains how excluded individuals tend to 'become unwelcome visitors within those spaces which come to be regarded as the loci of "mainstream" social life' such as middle class suburbs and prime public space. Sibley (1995) used psycho-analytical arguments about 'self' to create distance from all those perceived as alien 'others' transformed into socio-spatial configurations grounded in exclusion. 'Others' 'enter the psyche as objects which create unease and discomfort' (Sibley, 1998, p. 119). As the idea began to assume policy interest, Sibley (1981) anticipated a new tradition of research into excluded minorities through the study of Roma and travelling people in general – as reflected in the EU projects referred to below. Recalling Lawless *et al.* (1997) on labour markets, he argued that 'unemployment and associated deprivations, particularly poor housing and inadequate education can, in combination, amount to a denial of citizenship' (Sibley, 1998, p. 119). While national economies may 'serve adequately to integrate most of the population, there are some on the margins who are weakly connected to the economic system and need help' (Sibley, 1998, p. 119). Regarding problems of Roma marginalisation in Romania (Burtea, 1996; Neculau & Ferreol, 1996), the community as a whole suffers systemic marginality arising from traditional inter-ethnic relations (grounded in Roma exclusion) and fundamentally divergent value systems.

On an individual basis, contingent marginality arises among those who find themselves at a disadvantage on the labour market since they lack the qualifications and skills for effective competition, and also information about work opportunities in neighbouring areas (Crețan, 2006, p. 97; Mehretu *et al.*, 2000, p. 90). Given the Roma poverty rates already quoted, there is clearly a major problem, although in the

light of modest social security benefits, disadvantage is arguably greatest when a large number of children are looked after by a Roma mother who is widowed (or in some cases divorced). In addition, Roma frequently suffer from a poor environment, e.g. in the Cunți quarter of Timișoara where poor Roma families live beside the Bega river, which is prone to flooding, while Hungarians and Romanians live higher up on the river terraces. And Roma are also socially and politically disadvantaged, through prejudice often shown by officials. For example, our fieldwork reveals that the local authorities in such communes at Comloșu Mare, Periam and Ticvaniu Mare are reluctant to sell building land to Roma families, especially when the Roma have no council representatives and it is suspected that the land is sought only for speculation. Gender inequality arises through differences in access to employment and the wage levels available. Institutul National de Statistica (2006, p. 22) shows that while women earn 1200lei (€250) monthly on average compared with 1500lei (€300) for men, Roma women averaged below 500lei (€120) compared with 800lei (€140) for men. Women may encounter further disadvantage if poor services in Roma quarters mean that households have to travel relatively long distances for shopping since Roma rarely run retailing businesses in their communities (although training in business skills may lead to better local provision).

Meanwhile, collateral marginality is derivative, arising from social or geographical proximity to people suffering systemic or contingent marginality (Crețan, 2006, p. 98). In this way, it is a study of unequal development in society and space. Most people living in such areas are threatened by alternative/cheap labour pools. Collateral marginality may also arise as an intermediary form (Mehretu *et al.* 2000, p. 91) when, for example, investors steer clear of Roma areas because of their perceived social or environmental contamination. Thus, despite low taxes there is no interest in investing in the Bocșa's Godinova quarter because the local labour is unskilled and the area is environmentally degraded by tipping. Tension may easily arise if Roma are believed to harbour infectious diseases: a clear case of 'others' creating a sense of unease and discomfort. In the Dâmbovița suburb of Timișoara, where the Roma make bricks on the edge at the lakeside, the children of mainstream families are forbidden by their parents to play with Roma children since the latter have no health insurance and are seen as a danger, through habits such as washing fruit and vegetables in the polluted water of the lake (Crețan, 2007, p. 97). Again, international aid for Roma communities may be viewed with hostility by other ethnic groups in the same neighbourhoods who might consider that the Roma should do more to help themselves. Such feelings were evident in the towns of Arad, Caransebeș (35 km northeast of Reșița) and Lugoj (60 km east of Timișoara) in 1990–92 when aid intended for poor people in general was given overwhelmingly to Roma. And our research noted representations in 2005 in Bocșa (15 km northwest of Reșița) and Lugoj when food and clothing were distributed by the Red Cross and the churches exclusively to Roma.

Because of their strong sense of autonomy, nomadic Roma 'have often sought peripheral locations on the edge of cities because in such locations they may be able to minimise the interference of social control agencies and to maintain their cultural separation from the defining [non-Roma] *gaje*' (Sibley, 1998, p. 120). Indeed, self-exclusion is an important element in the whole syndrome of Roma deprivation based on rejection and non-compliance with certain forms of social participation (Stewart,

1996). There are disturbing attitudes to education, given the focus on traditional skills, while the lack of social assistance for children not attending school is balanced by the preference of many parents to have their children beg in the cities or work from an early age in traditional occupations (Zamfir & Zamfir, 1996). The practice continues from the communist period and also involves women begging with small children in attendance: although it is illegal token fines imposed by the local police that tend to encourage serial offending (although police action has intensified since 2007). Documentation deficiencies tend to be self-perpetuating, e.g. a mother wishing to register a birth cannot use the name of an absent father if she has no marriage certificate herself, while the procedure becomes more complex after one year, especially because the certificate is only obtainable at the place of birth; fortunately only a minority of Roma – and often the older people – are in this predicament, with 2006 police data for Banat and Crişana revealing that 15.0% of Roma did not have an identity card, 10.8% had no birth certificate and 7.2% had no marriage certificate.

Bournis & Leyens (1997, p. 46) regard self-exclusion as 'the great stumbling block for integration' involving historical roots in the era of slavery. However, any suggestion that Roma are a dysfunctional – indeed criminally-minded – subgroup attracts strenuous denials and counter allegations of racism for the assumption (usually unintended) that a marginal existence amidst crime and violence reflects a conscious preference in a tolerant world of equal opportunity, where the majority adopt a posture of legitimate self-defence. Hence, the Roma suburbs are thought to have high crime rates, although this has been shown to be unjustified (Dumitrache & Dumbrăveanu, 1998), while Roma children feel they are always blamed for any trouble at school arising from broken windows or damage to furniture (Jigău & Surdu, 2002). Clearly, there is a point to be made about a 'rhetoric of extreme inequality' based on a major difference and moral exclusion to the point where Roma can have no moral and social equality with others (Tileagă, 2006, pp. 490–491). Yet, for many Roma to accept the values and rules of the '*gaje*' is to cease to be a gypsy. And Edwards (1998, p. 122) argues that 'if it is possible for different ethnic groups to have different values and beliefs and to arrange what they value in different priorities then it must be possible that different groups have different conceptions of inequality, use different elements to measure it and to place a different significance on it'. Inequality may boil down quite reasonably to difference, although this would obviously not apply in the case of major disparities in employment and wellbeing.

Hence, while Rughinis (2007) is relaxed about the lack of integration over living and work, reflecting difference in colour, appearance and behaviour, ethnic segregation poses a social dilemma and resolute action is needed, for example in education, to overcome the deficiencies in overcrowded and poorly-staffed Roma schools (OSI EUMAP, 2007, pp. 61–66). A large part of the problem for the most traditionally-minded Roma is the threat of assimilation, but a minority rights-based approach should avoid coercion and seek integration balanced by ample scope for cultural self-expression. Following Ringold *et al.* (2003, pp. 21–23), a compromise is needed through integration that allows an ethnic group to maintain some or all of its cultural characteristics while minimising barriers over adaptation to the dominant society. Such partial assimilation should be acceptable to Roma elites given some redefinition of Roma identity compatible with economic development. However, any such redefinition needs to come from the Roma community and should not be

prescribed by others. Given the divisions in Roma society, this is only happening very slowly without a clear consensus. Thus, Crețan's (2007, p. 102) research in Bocșa and Reșița reveals that some Roma parents have very mixed feelings about the teaching of Romanian or Hungarian – even though it is crucial for steady employment – because of their determination to preserve their own Romany language.

The Roma Programme

European policy has been evolving along these lines to advocate integration with cultural self-expression. The term 'social exclusion' originated in France in the 1970s with reference to people administratively excluded from social insurance and thereby unable to work legally. But from the presumption of an 'agency' excluding certain people, a relative approach (basically involving measures of income inequality combined with such linked problems as unemployment, lack of skills, poor housing, high crime environment and poor health) was adopted by the EU and 'social exclusion' became the focus of the social agenda for the 1990s (Lelkes, 2006, p. 7). Moreover, following the Amsterdam Treaty of 1999, the European Council's 'Race Directive' of 2000 enacted the principle of equal treatment irrespective of racial and ethnic origin. Mainstream politicians in accession states have therefore given social exclusion greater priority while European funding to alleviate social problems has been greatly enhanced. Following Levitas (1998, p. 7), a redistributionist discourse (for poverty problems generally) needs to be complemented by a focused social integrationist discourse linked with paid work and better access to education – which should provide a better basis for tackling moral and behavioural delinquency – and Romanian authors (e.g. Bocancea & Neamtu, 1999) argue that it is important to bring both Roma and non-Roma into social work to moderate top-down solutions.

Global institutions, such as the World Bank (Ringold, 2000) and UNDP (Ivanov, 2002) have been very influential and have adopted a transnational dimension that has been very useful in evaluating different combinations of policy responses (Hoelscher, 2004). The EU became involved through PHARE money for Roma in Romania, which amounted to €10.66 million during 1993–2003: 16.0% of the 66.56 million for East Central Europe as a whole (although less than was received by Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia). In 1997, the European Commission 'Agenda 2000' noted that integration of minorities in candidate countries was generally satisfactory except for Roma. Further pressure was placed on candidate countries and continuing EU activity can be seen through a Monitoring and Advocacy Programme (EUMAP), which reported in 2001 and 2002 on the position of Roma in Central and East European Countries (as well as Roma and Muslims in Western Europe in 2002 and 2005). There has also been considerable philanthropy. For instance, in 2003 George Soros not only helped Roma through his open society initiatives (Frontul pentru o Societate Deschisă), financing many grants to NGOs, but he also gave \$30 million to launch a Roma Education Fund. In addition, he financed a World Bank Conference in Sofia in 2005 to agree a 'Decade for Social Inclusion of Roma' (2005–2015) across the region with EU and World Bank participation. Various nations have also helped, e.g. MATRA is a Dutch programme for social transformation, which helps Roma join an open, pluralistic and democratic society through grants to Roma NGOs to help specific communities.

In Romania, sporadic initiatives gave way in 1997 to the establishment by the new Democratic Convention government of a National Office for Roma within the Department for Protection of National Minorities. It began work on a strategy to improve the situation of Roma and, in 2000, Romania became the first EU candidate country in the region to enact general anti-discrimination legislation creating the National Council for Combating Discrimination. With input from the Roma Party (see below) a wide-ranging ten-year Strategy for Improving the Condition of Roma ('Strategiei de Îmbunătățire a Situației Romilor') was formulated and then launched by the succeeding Party of Social Democracy administration in 2001. An action plan for the first four years was to operate in ten different domains: administration and community development, housing, social security, health, economy, justice, child welfare, education, culture and civic involvement. A national agency for Roma ('Agenția Națională pentru Romi': ANR), established in 2004, is responsible for monitoring, evaluation, planning and coordination, in the context of the national development plan for 2007–2013, which means that a number of ministries (such as employment and social protection) need to consult Roma representatives, while the ANR has the main responsibility for links with Roma NGOs and civil society. ANR also supports a consultative committee representing the relevant ministries, maintains eight 'birouri regionale' and prescribes actions to be taken by each of the 'Birouri Județene pentru Romi' (BJR) working at county level. From 2002, there have been Roma councillors working within each county council and prefecture. They collaborate with the police and labour organisations with the aim of enhancing the integration of Roma people through improved school attendance and labour market access. Local authorities must appoint Roma experts where the Roma population in their area exceeds 5%. This requirement has now been satisfied although (according to evidence provided by the Roma Party's representative on the Town Council at Lugoj) there was initially a problem finding Roma with the necessary qualifications: a university degree, experience in Roma projects and the ability to help Roma in such domains as computer literacy, language skills and clerical work. Nevertheless, there is now a significant Roma presence in local government as more young Roma students complete their high school and faculty education.

Integrating with the international programme already mentioned, a ten-year action plan ('Proiectul Planului de Acțiune al Deceniului') for 2004–2013 has now been launched to combat poverty and social exclusion; recognising priority areas of housing (including infrastructure), employment, health and education; and with the aim of bringing the poverty level down to no more than 10%. The Institute for Life Quality Research has evaluated Roma programmes for the period 1996–2004 (Cace *et al.*, 2005) and will now extend its activity to ensure that Roma projects are included in virtually all its 20 projects concerned with these four interrelated priorities. The project gives a clear answer to the question raised by Deacon (1992, p. 13): of whether transition governments would capitulate to racism by ignoring the claims of minorities or seek to improve their condition. However, it is also necessary to educate the majority – paying for welfare to support large Roma families – to appreciate that a ghetto culture can lead to irreversible marginalisation and more vicious circles of exclusion, whereas promoting access to employment reduces dependence on social welfare over the longer term if it is linked with an increase in

human capital and productivity and Roma respond to the incentive to invest in themselves. Space does not permit a detailed assessment but we attempt a review of the four interlocking issues of employment, health, housing and, above all, education.

Employment, Health and Housing

Aiming at a reduction of the unemployment rate to 15% in all Roma communities, ANR has introduced a Roma labour market ('Bursa locurilor de munca pentru Romi') geared to helping all Roma (but especially the most vulnerable categories: women and young people) to find work by listing all the employers with jobs on offer. Currently, not all the places can be taken because the job seekers lack the required qualifications (not to mention the necessary motivation and commitment for regular work). Hence there is also a need for training so that job-seekers can acquire the necessary skills, while business training should improve Roma access to micro-finance (see for example www.parudimos.ro/org/training/html). We believe that the ANR strategy should also have an agricultural component to increase Roma access to land as part of a sustainable strategy over nutritional problems. But land is now very expensive and it is unclear how committed Roma might be towards smallholding projects of the kind funded by the French government to help people they have repatriated. However, on the whole, Roma seem to be catching up on the rest of the population, with the employment rate rising from 39 to 48% during 1996–2001, and they earn the same as the mainstream population after allowing for their generally poorer qualifications. Indeed, 'if the health and schooling of Roma were to improve to the extent that employment prospects increase with human capital, they might move out of poverty without having to deal with discrimination in earnings' (Metz *et al.*, 2003 p. 43). In other words, low incomes arise from low employment rates and poor qualifications rather than discrimination against Roma workers as such. Furthermore, it may be generally desirable to target poor communities where Roma are over-represented in order to avoid further marginalisation by singling out the group explicitly.

On health matters, Roma communities have higher infant mortality and average lower life expectancy than majority communities – resulting from poverty in general but especially poor housing, sanitation and nutrition as well as poor access to health care (Cace & Vladescu, 2004). Roma children are especially at risk, as well as women through early marriage and early births (Ringold *et al.*, 2003, pp. 80–85). To improve Roma access to health care (e.g. vaccination and other preventive measures including screening and monitoring of health status) the aim of the programme is to provide one Roma doctor for each 1000 Roma citizens, which is twice the national average. Meanwhile, health authority campaigns are trying to prevent the spread of infectious diseases among Roma communities. The plan aims to eliminate tuberculosis and make further progress with regard to HIV-AIDS cases (which declined 30% to 859 during 1993–2006), heart disease and hepatitis. A key aspect of the plan involves 'mediators' in health (and education) matters: 200 in health by 2004 subsequently increased to 600. First introduced in 1996–1997 by the NGO Romani CRISS, their wider use was encouraged by Roma language inspector Gheorghe Sarău in 2000 (OSI EUMAP, 2007, pp. 67–68). Mediators provide a link between

families and professionals in health and education, thereby improving access to these essential services by identifying problems and overcoming misunderstanding and mistrust (Ringold *et al.*, 2003, pp. 82–83).

Much Roma housing remains unsatisfactory (Berescu & Celac, 2006). In Măguri (part of the town of Lugoj), where research has been carried out over a number of years (Crețan, 2007, p. 101; Pandele, 2002) there is a gradient from the large brick-built, tile-faced houses in the centre, with 7–10 rooms (well-serviced, with high levels of car ownership), to the poor one-room cabins on the periphery that lack even an electricity supply (although good housing is not always the top priority since some families with relatively poor accommodation are dealing in gold and run second-hand Mercedes cars). Roma make only a limited call on public housing at present – no more than a fifth of urban Roma, and only 1% in rural areas – although it is a legal requirement for the authorities to provide low-rent social housing for poor Roma families (and others) with an income of less than €100/month. Social housing is very limited at present (as is capacity for sheltering the homeless) but 5000 new apartments were announced as a social housing programme in 2007. Concerning documentation, special measures may be needed, along with clearer mechanisms for local authority accountability to ensure that Roma settlements become integral parts of municipal development plans with better resourcing of the local authorities involved. Services are now improving thanks to better local authority resourcing boosted by PHARE assistance. Măguri now has piped water and sewerage, as well as a surfaced road to the town centre and a TV cable, while the school and the cultural centre ('Cămin Cultural') have been refurbished and heating has been provided for the Orthodox church. There is also space available for 100 new houses on the edge of the suburb to rehouse existing families and accommodate newcomers.

Education

Roma have persistently minimised the importance of schooling so that adults who have never been to school comprise 26.3% of Roma, compared with 2.3% for non-Roma (for the over 40s) with a larger relative difference of 20.9% and 0.8% for the under 40s (OSI EUMAP, 2007, p. 41). The estimate of 160,000 Roma in education in 2000–2003 (at all levels) is only 35.5% of the 450,000 persons in the relevant age groups and, although the number increased to 250,000 in 2006–2007, the position is still very unsatisfactory with the ratio in participation between Roma (17%) and non-Roma (69%) standing at 1:4 for 16–19 year olds (OSI EUMAP, 2007, p. 34). Literacy for Roma over 15 years of age was 69% in 2005 in the Roma communities surveyed compared with 96% for Romanians in the vicinity and predictably lower still for the over 45s (63% against 95%) compared with the younger age groups (71% against 96%) (OSI EUMAP, 2007, p. 108). More than half Roma pupils fail their final ('capacitate') examination. So although young Roma are better educated than their parents there is still a wide gulf separating Roma from the rest of the population. This is partly the result of segregated schools that became more prominent immediately after the revolution when many non-Roma parents withdrew their children from village schools with a large Roma element. A good example is Bobești in Glina commune on the eastern edge of Bucharest, where most Romanian parents transferred their children to better-endowed schools in the city (OSI

EUMAP, 2007, pp. 130–139). Segregated schools tend to work to a lower standard and are prone to high drop-out rates linked with overcrowding, poor buildings and facilities as well as a shortage of qualified teachers (OSI EUMAP, 2007, pp. 41–46).

Links with the community are relatively poor (calling for reintegration of parents) while stigmatising the Romany language is hardly productive given pupils' poor knowledge of Romanian – a major educational barrier that indicates the need for a bilingual approach. Another key deficiency is pre-school education which involved 55% of all children nationally but only 20% of Roma. Thus, most Roma children start school without prior experience of an educational environment. The government's aim now is to make schools real agents of change with an attendance level of at least 75%, based on a comprehensive programme launched in 2001 and improved in 2005 and 2008 (coordinated in each county by a Roma school inspector) after earlier piecemeal initiatives (Guvernul României, 2001, 2008). It is now forbidden to organise pre-school or lower grade (one to five) classes for exclusive or majority Roma pupils, while the school curriculum is being enriched through Roma language and culture. There is also a 'second chance' programme for those who have missed out: 'A Doua Șansă' was launched in 2000 on a pilot basis to help integrate Roma pupils with the backing of EU funds and effective liaison between the BJR, local experts and Roma teachers to ensure funding for students working at the school or at home (Ringold *et al.*, 2003, p. 78). Beyond the primary level there is provision of free places without entrance examinations from 2000–2001: 10,000 in high schools and three for each university faculty (following a more limited scheme dating to 1993–1994). These schemes are financially very attractive in covering clothing, subsistence and books as well as fees.

It is too early to make a full assessment of the programme but there are positive indications deriving from our research on all the key elements in the education ministry's Roma programme, which has been assisted by NGOs in Timișoara and, in particular, by Valentin Pepenei from the Roma NGO Parudimos (www.paradimos.ro). Segregation has been eliminated since 2005 and attendance is improving nationally, with 129,000 Roma pupils in 1989–1990 rising to 250,000 in 2006–2007 (as already noted), although in 2005 the 76% level registration by Roma 7–15 year olds (just meeting the basic target) was still well below 94% scored by the majority population living in Roma areas. Parudimos considers that schools are generally showing signs of improvement with many new buildings as well as better equipment and materials and more Romany-speaking teachers. Inspectors are checking carefully for deficiencies so that the PHARE funding (to improve access to education for disadvantaged groups) can reach all needs. The idea of 'Education Priority Areas' for reintegration and drop-out prevention is showing some promising results, although there is a problem finding suitably qualified staff at the higher levels. Meanwhile pre-school education has increased with 43 new kindergartens in the 14 counties involved (while the population as a whole has been decreasing). In all primary schools, Roma pupils now have two hours per week of Romanian language teaching (one hour in secondary schools) – similarly for Hungarian in Covasna and Harghita counties. Priority is being given to the employment of young Roma graduates to teach these two languages, which are crucial for job prospects. Roma teachers are also covering Roma culture and history, since these topics became compulsory in 2005. Collaboration by schools with the National Authority for Child

Protection ensures that children are healthy and can cope with their education. The procedure, which has resulted in a better life for some 50,000 Roma children since 2005, involves not only hospitalisation where necessary but help with winter clothing and intervention over cases of ill-treatment at home.

With help from UNICEF and Save the Children, intercultural education is now provided at county inspectorates. For non-Roma teachers working with Roma children, teachers are trained not to discriminate against Roma pupils and they have time allocated to aid with the Roma children's integration and to liaise with parents (which can involve some special classes for Roma parents). According to Parudimos, the ministry and NGOs have also launched training courses dealing with multicultural and tolerance matters at all levels of education with a very positive impact, and it is hoped that tolerant teachers will encourage tolerance among pupils. A World Bank programme to 'reintegrate' parents in school activities has produced some positive results with parents once apathetic over their children's education now prepared to encourage cultural projects and install home computers. Examples feature in media presentations that normally pander to traditional stereotypes. There is much improved school-community integration, which is particularly evident in rural areas and small towns where Roma culture is appreciated; thus making for a more inclusive educational climate. Roma school mediators increased rapidly from the 70 that were deployed in the 10 counties covered by the PHARE programme in 2001 and extended nationwide from 2003. The total reached 500 in 2007 by recruiting Roma graduates as well as Romanians willing to help Roma pupils: the latter have proved influential at county inspectorates and have been effective in some eastern counties (e.g. Brăila, Iași and Vaslui) where the Roma community is relatively poor.

About half the free high school places are now taken, and particular interest in Spanish is reported since many students wish to work there. However, partly because young people from the age of 16 or less are keen to join their parents working abroad, only a tenth of the free faculty places are being taken – and none at all in Timișoara in 2007–2008 where a total of 25 places were offered. It is also evident that some of the funding for Roma students is appropriated for general family use. Meanwhile, the 'second chance' scheme has now been extended nationwide and offered to all sections of the population, with particular emphasis on literacy courses backed by a competition among textbook authors, as is the case over primary and secondary school books in the Roma language, which are distributed free of charge. Finally, new skills are enabling adult Roma to take jobs in computing, and call centres as well as traditional trades such as tailoring. Thus, the evidence we have collected, with the help of Parudimos, shows that the education programme is operating effectively and producing encouraging results, although more detailed results are awaited.

Roma Organisations

Since the Roma Programme aims at greater involvement by Roma in their own community development, it is appropriate to look at recent organisational trends. These present a mixed picture. As regards politics, Roma were included in the interim government (Brown *et al.*, 2003) when a movement for Roma emancipation

was started under the leadership of the Democratic Union of Roma (Uniuna Democrată a Rromilor). This spawned a Roma Society ('Societatea Romilor'), which collapsed through internal dissent in 1992, but also the Roma Party ('Partida Romilor'), which has continued to flourish with the benefit of a reserved seat at each parliamentary election (held at four-yearly intervals from 1992). The party negotiated with government over the Roma Programme during the formative years 1997–2001 and reached an electoral agreement with Party of Social Democracy for the election in 2000. The party has also secured representation in local government, including a number of town councils, especially in Transylvania, e.g. Sibiu along with the smaller towns of Gherla (45 km north of Cluj), Ineu (55 km northeast of Arad) and Sebeș (15 km south of Alba Iulia). However, the party does not do as well as it should because most Roma either fail to vote or prefer to support mainstream parties, partly through mistrust of Roma candidates – who often seem unprepared for office and are rarely re-elected – but also because of a preference for strong national leaders with a record of assisting the Roma community in various ways, e.g. former President Iliescu over the allocation of state housing in the early 1990s. The votes of illiterate Roma may also be bought by non-Roma parties, e.g. the New Generation Party, which is controlled by media and property magnate Gheorghe Becali (the country's richest man in 2008 with assets valued at \$5.0 billion), who has the ambition to become state president. Although his party's discourse is not generally supportive of the Roma minority, there are communes in the Bucharest area where Becali's property interests (important for financing his party) could benefit from the presence of council members. Irregularities were widely reported (e.g. 'Gardinul' on 5 June 2008; 'Cotidianul' on 9 June 2008) and Romania's High Court ordered repeat elections in the communes involved (although the earlier results were confirmed). Becali has also supported Roma communities through his foundation, including a payment of 2.0 million lei (€0.53 million) to the electricity company in 2005 to settle outstanding bills and secure reconnections for the Roma communities in the Bucharest area: the southern suburb of Ferentari and the small town of Budești (45 km southeast of the capital).

Reference should be made to cultural organisations such as 'Aven Amentza' (The Cultural Foundation of Roma Emancipation) and the General Union of Roma ('Uniunea Generală a Romilor'). As regards the media, a Centre for Roma Social Studies produces 'Roma News' with PHARE finance to improve media presentation of Roma affairs and challenge the conventional stereotypes that help to perpetuate discrimination. Other initiatives include the newscast 'Rromano Lil' as well as a radio station and press agency, as reported in 2000; these services continue to operate although more Roma journalists are clearly needed. Meanwhile, some young, internationally-connected Roma professionals do good work for the NGO sector (e.g. Romani CRISS) in attracting resources to implement a wide range of programmes. Parudimos (already referred to) is a student NGO, staffed by many Roma volunteers, with a focus on cultural and economic activities for young Roma (e.g. radio programmes, employment opportunities and training/integration programmes); while the PHARE-supported Roma Women's Organisation ('Organizația Femeilor Tiganci) has worked with local governments to secure vegetable allotments. And 'Than Rromano' is a successful economic organisation founded in

1997 to collect scrap metal (500–700 t/monthly) for recycling from a base near Bucharest (Sintești in Vidra commune) with the proceeds used to finance education and health programmes: the scheme could now extend to other centres in Romania and neighbouring countries. However our surveys reveal a weakness of the Roma NGO sector through a tendency to campaign primarily in terms of straightforward handouts (e.g. higher wages and benefits or better social housing provision) rather than development projects requiring a measure of participation (Crețan, 2007, p. 56). The official Roma programme is of course supported (despite a traditional reserve in some quarters over collaboration with the ‘gaje’) but seminars and discussion groups, which have been part of the government programme, rarely produce results that are significant for policy formulation. Therefore, it remains a challenge for the Roma community to overcome its organisational weaknesses and engage more meaningfully with government at national and local levels and to express its priorities with greater precision.

Overall Assessment

There are clearly many positive signs. For the period 2002–2006 the proportion of families living in poverty fell from 60 to 45% compared with national rates of 33 and 29% percent respectively. This represents a drop from 182% to 136% of the national rate. Figures from OSI EUMAP (2007) show that whereas 15% of Roma were not carrying an identity card in 1995, it was just 9% in 2000; while the proportion of married Roma without a marriage certificate fell from over 10% to just 7%. Roma infractions have fallen sharply: there were 12,880 cases in 1995 but only 4,921 cases in 2005; nevertheless, the prevalence of crime is still twice as high among Roma than Romanians (three times in the case of Hungarians), and barometers of Roma inclusion researched by two organisations – Consiliul Național pentru Combaterea Discriminării (2004) and Fundația pentru o Societate Deschisă (2007) – show that prejudice, expressed through traditional stereotypes, is still widespread. For their part, Roma communities seem to retain a conservative outlook. In Măguri, a questionnaire survey among 300 children and 170 parents revealed the depth of traditional family life and reliance on the judgement of the older people. As a result, the state appears as an alien institution that may provide benefits (especially when needed on an emergency basis) but without requiring any obligation to cooperate, even for basic bureaucratic requirements – an outlook retained from the past when communist local authorities frequently adopted a relaxed attitude to non-compliance by deprived minorities. However, neglect of basic education, at a time when the labour market demands higher qualifications, is placing Roma families at a serious disadvantage. Only about half the children attend school (Crețan, 2007, p. 99), although high school graduates especially appreciate the benefits of education and the need for integration into mainstream society. Our questionnaire also shows that while about half the Roma families now live comfortably, especially with money sent from Germany, Italy and Spain, 30% have no regular income and depend on social security through ‘community social assistance’: a special programme for Roma launched by Lugoj Town Hall in 2005–2006.

Conclusion

The integration of Roma is a social problem with deep historical roots and one that shows an ongoing problem of exclusion. Even if the Roma have tacitly encouraged or acquiesced in their marginalisation as a means of preserving elements in their traditional culture, it is also evident that governments have been unable to resource integration policies consistently and have – at times – sought radical and inhumane solutions. The stereotyped perception of the Roma as a disruptive minority responsible for disproportionate levels of criminality may not be wholly unjustified – given the high crime figures for example – and forms part of the wider problem of self-exclusion. But it also has to be recognised that substantial numbers of Roma are continually joining mainstream society and tacitly relinquishing their old affiliations which means that the visible Roma community tends, by definition, to be deprived and underprivileged. The heterogeneity of the Roma community – evident fundamentally over attitudes towards the ‘gaje’ but also expressed through economic and social diversity – is frequently overlooked and we believe that the under-recording of Roma in each national census reflects a continuing process of integration. The present programme is naturally trying to accelerate this trend away from marginalisation and the results are quite encouraging, especially given the European dimension, which secures much of the funding and also provides a guarantee of continuity. However, there is little evidence so far to indicate how far the poorest sections of the Roma community are profiting, as opposed to more affluent and integrated elements, who may well benefit disproportionately from the free high school and university places. It is also important to recognise the benefits for employment arising from eight years of sustained economic – and relatively rapid – economic growth which, along with the unprecedented opportunities for work abroad, has transformed the labour market. Recession in Europe and a ‘hard landing’ for Romania’s recent economic miracle cannot be discounted. However, there now seems a good chance that the younger generation especially will try to balance the maintenance of their cultural identity with more meaningful inclusion in a wider society, and thereby extend the delicate compromise between modern and traditional values. It is this decision that will be crucial for the outcome of the present initiative.

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