



POVERTY OF THE ROMANIAN ROMA MINORITY – CURRENT DIMENSIONS

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***Abstract:** Roma people poverty is a topic analysed by the relevant national and European bodies, and attention is paid to the policies implemented with the purpose to reduce the risk of social exclusion. Within the context of a total European Roma population of 10-12 million people, the evaluations regarding the Roma people living in Romania focus on the aspects specific to the risk of poverty, and from this perspective, the aim is to develop and apply policies that are adapted, as much as possible, to the national situation. Thus, from the design and implementation of standardized directions of action, to the identification of the success results, and to the propagation and replication of the good practices, a more generous space should be created and used to capitalise on the positive experiences. This article is a new call to go on with the systematic approaches focalised on impact, with the purpose to improve the situation of the Roma people living in Romania.*

***Keywords:** Roma people, social inclusion, poverty, public policies, integration*

Introduction

The total Roma population living throughout Europe is considered to be the largest European minority, some 10 to 12 million people, who are frequent victims of racism, discrimination and social exclusion, living in extreme poverty, without access to decent healthcare and dwelling services (European Commission, 2012:2). However, many evidences show that the Roma population is actually larger than the official statistics, the discrepancy from the official records and research outputs being acknowledged both in Europe and in the national states.

Thus, regarding the statistics supplied by the Council of Europe, one can notice that 15 of the 27 EU member state didn't include the Roma people in the 2001 or 2002 censuses (Ionescu M., Stanescu S.M., 2014:81). The existence of differences is justified by the rather recent inclusion, within the methodologies of the national censuses, of questions regarding the national, ethnic, cultural or linguistic Roma identity, by the low level of self-

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identification of the Roma people during the censuses (and in polls, generally), as well as by the low level of self-identification as Roma minority due to the strong discrimination confronting these people (Ionescu M., Stanescu S.M., 2014:82-83).

At the regional level, according to UNICEF data (Gordon, A, 2012), an estimated 3.7 million Roma people live in South-Eastern Europe, about 1.7 million of them (46%) being children. While the majority populations display a decreasing trend in the surveyed countries, the Roma populations increase rapidly. Thus, in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia, the proportion of people up to 19 years old ranges between 22% and 29% of the general population, while this proportion reaches 41-47% for the Roma people.

Regarding the number of Roma people living in particular countries, there still is a methodological difficulty of accurately identifying their number, even though surveys and analyses have been performed, adding to the official data reported by the censuses of the past 25 years. It is thus obvious that additional investigations are necessary in order to determine the accurate number of Roma people, and to correlate the data collected by different analyses (below is a list of the main estimations and results, supplied by Ionescu M., 2013):

Table 1

Year	Source/ Organization	Estimated number	Proportion of majority population	Method
1998	ICCV study	1.5 million	6.7%	Hetero- identification
2002	INS census	535,140	2.46%	Self- identification
2003	2003 UNDP study (published in 2006)	Minimum 1.8 million, Maximum 2.8 million	10%	
2005	World Bank study	Minimal variant, 730.174 people; Medium variant, 851.048 people; Maximal variant, 970.000 people.		Self- identification
2011	European Commission, based on Council of Europe data (COM (2011) 173.	Medium variant: 1.850.000 people	8.32%	
2011	INS census	619,000	(3.2%)	Self- identification

Source: Ionescu M., ANR, 2013

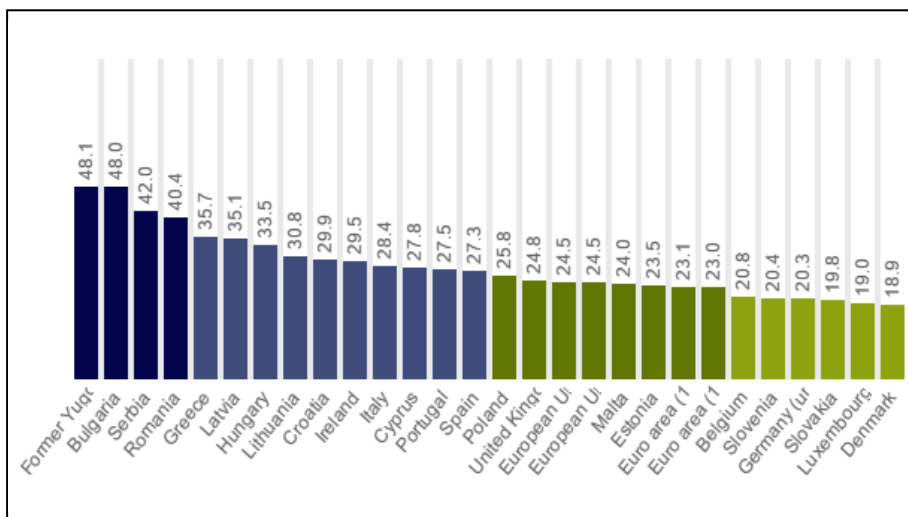
The different data on the size of the Roma populations across Europe and in the individual countries, reveal a specific characteristic regarding the territorial mobility,

particularly during the recent decades, within the “borderless” Europe under construction. The challenge of the migratory flows towards areas with a higher level of welfare can also be noticed within the Roma people, which calls for the establishment of more efficient mechanisms aiming to support the improvement of Roma people situation throughout Europe.

In Romania, a “gradual improvement of Roma people mobility after 1989 was noticed in Romania, as the costs and risks associated to travels abroad decreased” (Tarnovschi, D., 2011: 66), but the dimension of poverty and social exclusion of the Roma people persisted irrespective of the destination country of this process of migration.

Poverty and social exclusion of the Roma within European and national context

In the period of 2008-2013, the number of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion in the 27 EU member states, increased from 117 million to 121 million, after a decrease to 114 million during the previous period, 2005-2009. A peak of 123 million poor people was recorded in 2012, and a decrease by about 2 million people in the next year, 2013. Most certainly, this trend is due to the economic crisis of 2008 and to the recessions that subsequently swept throughout most European countries. Presently, 40.4% of the Romanian population is at risk of poverty or of social exclusion.



Source: Eurostat

From the perspective of poverty in Europe, in the list of the poorest 20 regions of Europe, Romania has 6 areas, which cover almost all the country (exception Bucharest-Ilfov area) (Stanciu, M., Mihăilescu, A., 2011: 9).

Depending on the age of the people affected by poverty, compared to the European means by age category, one may notice that, in Romania, the highest difference for 2010-2013 period is for the population younger than 18, which shows that the young generation needs priority interventions to curb poverty and social exclusion.

Table 2: Proportion of the population affected by the risk of poverty and social exclusion, depending on the age category

Year Age	2010		2011		2012		2013	
	RO	EU27	RO	EU27	RO	EU27	RO	EU27
<18	28.6	13.0	25.0	13.5	31.2	12.7	-	11.8
18-24	18.8	12.1	21.2	12.0	16.1	13.2	-	13.1
25-49	16.2	8.3	14.9	8.7	17.0	9.1	-	7.8
50-64	12.2	7.8	13.2	8.4	13.5	9.1	-	8.0
> 65	17.3	11.6	13.2	11.0	13.5	10.8	-	8.1

Source: Eurostat

A new trend is noticed in terms of the number of people in a household, which shows a higher level of poverty in the households with 2 adult people and 3 or more children in their care, which is a worrying aspect if we consider the size of the Roma families.

Table 3: People at risk of poverty and social exclusion, depending on household size

Year Household type	2007		2008		2009		2010		2011		2012		2013	
	RO	EU27	RO	EU27	RO	EU27	RO	EU27	RO	EU27	RO	EU27	RO	EU27
1 adult and 1 child in care	42.5	33.1	39.9	35.2	35.3	34.0	31.9	36.9	40.0	34.7	39.8	33.5	31.3	31.9
2 adults and 1 child in care	14.9	11.9	14.1	11.3	14.9	11.4	16.4	11.6	18.2	12.6	39.8	12.9	31.3	12.7
2 adult and 2 children in care	22.4	14.0	24.0	14.1	24.3	14.5	26.7	14.9	26.7	15.4	27.2	15.0	22.8	14.1
2 adult and 3 or more children in care	54.8	26.1	57.3	26.6	56.3	26.7	60.4	26.4	54.7	25.1	59.8	25.6	59.8	26.5

Source: Eurostat

Another aspect regarding poverty and social exclusion reveals, for Romania, a higher proportion of people living in households whose members don't have a place of.

Table 4: Proportion of the population living in households whose members don't have a place of work

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
EU27	9.4	9.3	10.2	10.7	10.9	11.2	11.3	10.9
RO	10.0	9.9	9.9	9.9	12.2	11.7	11.6	11.4

Source: Eurostat

Given the importance of employment in curbing poverty and social exclusion, the statistics show that, in Romania, irrespective of their statistical state – employed, inactive, unemployed, retired – the people are confronted with much more serious poverty problems than the average values registered in the other EU member states.

Table 5: Poverty and employment

Year	2007		2008		2009		2010		2011		2012		2013	
RO/EU	RO	EU27	RO	EU27	RO	EU27	RO	EU27	RO	EU27	RO	EU27	RO	EU27
Employed people	18.3	8.4	17.5	8.6	17.6	8.4	17.2	8.3	18.9	8.8	19.1	9.0	18.0	8.9
Inactive people	33.1	27.3	31.8	27.2	30.7	26.7	29.8	26.7	32.9	26.9	34.9	27.4	36.0	26.8
Jobless people	27.9	23.9	24.7	23.5	22.3	23.1	20.5	22.7	20.8	23.1	22.0	23.0	22.7	22.7
Unemployed people	46.4	43.6	42.7	44.8	46.4	45.2	45.4	45.3	47.7	45.9	51.8	46.3	51.1	46.5
Retired people	22.9	16.6	19.0	16.3	15.7	15.6	12.8	13.8	11.1	14.0	11.2	13.2	12.0	12.6
Population	22.8	15.8	20.9	15.5	19.8	15.3	18.7	15.2	19.8	15.7	20.5	15.7	20.2	15.6

Source: Eurostat

The 2011 European Commission report (Bartlett, W., Benini, R. & Gordon, C., 2011:40), makes a dynamic analysis of the absolute poverty, taking the years 2000 and 2005 as references: in absolute terms, in 2000 more than two thirds from the Roma people living in Romania (about 68%) were living in poverty (at a PPC of 4.3\$/day), while in 2005, the poverty rate had decreased significantly (to 22%).

According to UNDP/World Bank/European commission data of 2011, 3 of 4 Roma people are in **relative poverty**, unlike 1 of 4 people belonging to the majority population. In Romania, in 2005 just 2 of 5 Roma people lived under conditions of relative poverty.

The reference document for the programming of the financial exercise 2014-2020 identified several aspects regarding the poverty and social exclusion of the Roma people living in Romania (Partnership agreement, 2014).

- Two thirds of the Roma people live in poverty, and half of them are exposed to extreme poverty, while just 619,000 of the general population (3.2%) live under similar conditions (Partnership agreement, 2014:51).

- The Roma children are the most affected by poverty: 27.3% poverty rate of the Roma children in the urban environment, compared to 2% of the general population, and 41.1% in the rural environment, compared to 10.6% of the general population (Partnership agreement, 2014:49)
- The poor schooling rate is regarded as the underlying cause of poverty among the Roma people (82.4% of the Roma children of school age attend school, 6.9% dropped out of school and 8.9% have never been enrolled within the educational system; the Roma girls run a higher risk of early school dropout and early motherhood (Partnership agreement, 2014:51-52).
- About 38% of the Roma population works as unskilled workers, 32 are skilled workers (workers, sellers, trade agents), 9% are agricultural workers and 13% perform traditional Roma activities (Partnership agreement, 2014:52)

Roma people are victims of the vicious poverty circle: the lack of jobs, or the low level of incomes prevent them investing in the education of their children, in health or to improve their living conditions, while the lack of these elements generates, in turn, poverty.

In order to solve these disparities, the deficiencies have to be mapped properly, while the priorities have to be set adequately.

The reference framework regarding the situation specific to the social exclusion of the Roma people living in Romania, is presented in an updated and synthetic form in the 2015-2020 Strategy of the Government of Romania for the inclusion of the Romanian people belonging to the Roma minority (Government decision 18/January 14, 2015).

Curbing the poverty and social exclusion of the Roma minority – European and national priorities

Discrimination, poverty, social exclusion, the lack of education, the lack of access to basic healthcare, the lack of dwelling, etc., are just a few of the problems confronting, day by day, the Roma people throughout the entire European Union (CE, 2005)¹.

Although antidiscrimination policies have been developed during the past decade, as well as various initiatives to improve the living conditions and promote the social integration of the Roma people, throughout Europe, this minority still is the most discriminated group compared to other minorities, also being the most exposed to social exclusion. According to EU the 2009 EU study on minorities and discrimination, in average, 50% of the Roma respondents have been victims of a situation of discrimination during the previous year, while 20% have been the victims of a racial attack (EU-MIDIS, 2009). Furthermore, the Roma people are also confronted with a social-economic exclusion: they are the largest, yet the poorest ethnic minority in

¹ EC, 2005, DG Employment and Social Affairs, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged European Union*, Luxembourg.

Europe. The high unemployment rate, the low educational level and the precarious sanitary conditions are correlated to poverty, even severe poverty.

The Decade for Roma inclusion initiative (“**Decade of Roma inclusion 2005-2015**”, launched in 2005) is the positive reference example for improved cooperation between the supranational institutions, national governmental representatives and the civil society for the inclusion of the Roma people. The initiators of this multilateral project have been eight governments from Central and South-Eastern Europe, subsequently joined by other countries, which have drawn support from the World Bank, the Open Society Institute, the Council of Europe, the Council of the European Development Bank, United Nations Development Program, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the European Commission. The countries that presently support the project are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Yugoslav Republic of a Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Spain. The Decade is the first multinational project in Europe focusing on the present improvement of the socioeconomic status of the Roma community. The priority axes of the Decade focus on four major areas of intervention: *education, labour force employment, health and dwelling*. These areas are, of course, interconnected, so that the policies with satisfactory results in an area will necessarily have a positive influence on the others too.

The 10 common basic principles on Roma inclusion, which were set and presented in 2009, within the First Integrated European Roma Platform¹ (convened at Prague, on April 24th, under the Czech Presidency of the EU) are significant guiding lines for the design and implementation of cultural-sensitive and efficient policies supporting the successful integration of the disadvantaged group of European Roma.

The principles state explicitly that the Roma policies must:

- Be constructive, pragmatic and non-discriminatory policies
- Be explicit but not exclusive targeting
- Provide inter-cultural approach
- Aim for the mainstream
- Have awareness of the gender dimension
- Provide transfer of evidence-based policies

¹ The Integrated European Roma Platform (established following the conclusions of the Council for General Affairs, on December 8, 2008) is constituted from the stakeholders representing EU institutions, international bodies, governments of the member states and actors of the civil society. The activities of the Platform focus on three basic functions: exchange of good practices and experience in the field of Roma inclusion between the member states; provision of analytical support; encouraging the cooperation between all stakeholders on all Roma matters.

- Make use of European Union instruments
- Involve the regional and local authorities
- Involve the civil society
- Provide for the active participation of the Roma

The above-mentioned principles have been annexed to the conclusions of the Council meeting from June 8, 2009. By adopting these principles, the European Council restated EU commitment to promote further cohesion and social inclusion.

The Integrated European Platform for Roma Inclusion (or the Integrated European Roma Platform) is explicitly mentioned by the „**European Commission announcement on the EU framework for national strategies for Roma integration by 2020**” as having „*a significant contribution to the accomplishment of European and national policies more sensitive to Roma needs.*” (Paragraph 7 „Empowering Civil Society: A Stronger Role for the European Platform for Roma Inclusion”). Thus, its role within the new framework is reinforced regarding the following general objectives:

- Providing assistance and support to the member states by facilitating the exchange of knowledge and good practices *within and outside the EU*;
- Providing feedback for the European Commission on the results of the national initiatives, through the voice of the Roma actors of the civil society.

EU-level objectives, formulated in the European Commission announcement on the framework for the national strategies for Roma integration, promote the *need for an integrated approach*, in order to keep under control the problem of Roma exclusion. These objectives are grouped around four main areas of socioeconomic inclusion¹. First of all, they are domains of the national policies:

- Education: enhancing the efforts to include all Roma children with the elementary education and support them to graduate the primary education level;
- Workforce employment: enhancing the efforts to cancel the difference between the Roma and the other people in matters of employment;
- Healthcare: enhancing the efforts to reduce the difference in the health state between the Roma and the other people;
- Dwelling: enhancing the efforts to cancel the difference between the Roma and the other people in matters of access to dwelling and public utilities such as water and electricity.

¹ It is noteworthy that the implementation of policies in a field should also have a visible positive impact in other fields, which means that the interventions should be harmonized and designed carefully, having permanently in mind the close connection between the four areas of national policy presented hereafter.

On April 5th, 2011, the European Commission responded, by the announcement on the “EU framework for national strategies for Roma integration by 2020”, complete document on policies addressing the social inclusion of the marginalized Roma communities from Europe. According to the EU policy for the Roma community, the national strategies for Roma integration should be developed a) in agreement with the common basic principles on Roma inclusion; b) in agreement with the broader framework of the 2020 European Strategy (for economic development); c) in agreement with the NPRs¹.

In a report for the World Bank, D. Sandu (2005:11) highlights the fact that there are three large categories of problems confronting the Roma communities: of accessibility, of income and of infrastructure. It is obvious that the Roma minority, being second after the Magyar minority as proportion of the general population, is confronted with multiple problems such as poverty, lack of education, healthcare, lack of identification papers, lack of dwelling, unemployment and discrimination (Micu, J., 2009:11).

With a large proportion of people affected by poverty, Romania undertook to develop, by 2020, several policies and programs which to:

- (a) Take out at least 580,000 people from the poverty caused by low incomes, by 2020 compared to 2008 (about 6.51% of the 2012 level);
- (b) Disrupt the poverty cycle that is inherited from generation to generation;
- (c) Provide the equal access to social work, money and services transfers, such as consolidation of the social cohesion.

Even though there has been significant progress in improving national policies targeting the Roma would be wise to capitalize recorded positive experiences on social inclusion and social economy (Cace S. et al, 2010; Cace S. et. al, 2011; Nicolaescu et. al., 2012).

Conclusions

Performing researches and studies which allow knowing the factors that produce and support poverty is very important for the development and implementation of efficient prevention and controlling measures for this spreading phenomenon (Macarie, S., 2009:64). However, a certain duality exists in the theory and practice, the programmatic frameworks for the control of poverty and social exclusion and the reality of the initiatives implemented in the European and national area becoming gradually harmonized. From this point of view, it is recommended to concentrate the resources from structural funds (Cace C. et. al, 2009; Cace C. et. al, 2010; Cace C. et. al, 2011a) and to pass over the global crisis effects (Cace C. et. al, 2011b; Cace C. et. al, 2012).

For instanced, the vicious circle of poverty-precarious education of the Roma people, by which poverty is described as an important factor for the low school attendance, together with the acknowledgement of cultural patterns specific to the different types

¹ National Programs of Reform.

of Roma communities, which has a high explanative power (Dobrică, P., Jderu, G., 2005) is very well designed by a concentric series of directions of action to enhance the educational level of the Roma. From the design and implementation of standardized directions of action, to the identification of the success outcomes, and to the propagation and replication of the good practices, a more generous space should be established for the use of the positive experiences. A certain lag has been identified in the survey of a particular social phenomenon and in the design of directions of action and of operational mechanisms, while the monitoring and evaluation of the initiatives should provide reorientations and adjustments determined by the actions that work and produce real outcomes in curbing the poverty and social exclusion of the Roma.

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