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PAL

FIGHTING DISCRIMINATION AND ANTI-GYPSYISM



## **“Fighting discrimination and anti-Gypsyism in education and employment in EU” (PAL)**

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# 1. Who are the Roma?

## Key words

**Roma**

**history**

**India**

**Gypsies**

**Europe**

## Starting questions:

1. Where the Roma came from?
2. How did the naming- Gypsies originate?
3. Who are the Roma?
4. When the Roma came to Europe?
5. When was chosen the term „Roma“?

## Definitions of terms:

**Gypsy** - The English term *Gypsy* originates from the Middle English *gypcian*, short for *Egipcien*. The Spanish term *Gitano* and French *Gitan* have similar etymologies. They are ultimately derived from the Greek *Aigyptioi*, meaning Egyptian. This designation owes its existence to the belief, common in the Middle Ages, that the Roma people, or some related group were itinerant Egyptians.

**Cikán, Cigán, Zigeuner** - Another common designation of the Roma people is *Cikán* (alt. Tsinganoi, Zigar, Zigeuner), which probably derives from *Athinganoi* the name of a Christian sect with whom the Roma (or some related group) became associated in the Middle Ages.

**Rom** - The demonyms of the Roma people and Dom share the same etymological origin, reflecting Sanskrit „*doma*“ a man of low caste, living by singing and music". When they started to migrate from India and wander from place to place the first letter of the name changed from D to R – Rom.

## Content of the chapter:

The country of origin of the Roma was a great mystery from the Middle Ages, when they arrived in Europe, to both the inhabitants of the countries they arrived in, as well as to historians. It isn't possible to determine the date of their arrival in Europe exactly, because they spread through Europe in individual bands independent of each other. The only available references are the records that have survived in the archives of various cities and towns. These records are evidence only of



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their "official" discovery and don't reveal the exact date of their arrival, merely a chain of events that made their way into the archives.

In the 14th century, companies of people started to wander from place to place, people which differed from the inhabitants by their darker skin, their clothes, their distinct way of life, their completely incomprehensible tongue, their temperament, and their unwillingness to conform to the pressure of the majority population.

The most well-known and most widely-held opinion about the origin of the Roma was that they originated in Egypt, from where they came to the Christian lands. This is evident in the naming of Roma in many countries - *Gitanos*, *Gypsies* - but in reality these names seem to be derived from the name of the Little Egypt region in Peloponnesia or Asia Minor. In the Balkans, the Roma were named by a term originally given to a Christian sect of the *Athiganoi* or *Atsiganos*, from which came another group of names - *Zingaro*, *Tsigane*, *Zigeuner*, *Cigani*, *Cikani*.

The first step in answering the question "Who are the Roma?" was made by chance in 1763 by a Hungarian theology student named Stefan Vali, who met several Indians in Leyden, Holland, where they were studying medicine. Vali was intrigued by their similarity to the Roma, who he knew well from his home in Hungary. He continued beyond these external similarities, writing down more than a thousand Malabar words, along with their meanings. When he returned to Hungary and discovered the meanings of the words among the Roma, he was surprised at the similarity of the two languages. From this beginning, a detailed study followed with the aid of a whole range of experts - linguists, historians, ethnologists - and the Indian origins of the Roma are today established beyond a shadow of a doubt.

In the opinion of linguists and historians, the Roma's migration from India was dependent on geography, through Mesopotamia to the Near East to the Asian parts of Turkey, where the greater part of the Roma settled and resided for three centuries - from the 12th to the 15th. By the 15th century, the Roma were dispersed all throughout Europe, including England and Scotland.

Roma people are now widely recognized as one of the EU's largest minority groups with an estimate of more than 10 million Roma living in Europe. The term 'Roma', first chosen at the inaugural World Romani Congress held in London in 1971, is now widely accepted across the European Union (EU) as a generic and pragmatic term to describe a diverse range of communities, tribes and clans.



### Questions for thinking:

1. Does the Roma affect their Indian origin?
2. Why do you think Roma don't have their own state?
3. What kind of positives brought their migration?
4. What kind of negatives brought their migration?

## **2. The Roma identity and the process of Roma emancipation**

### Key words

**identity**

**IRU**

**policy**

**non-profit organizations**

**20th century**

**Roma elites**

### Starting questions:

1. When did start the process of the Roma emancipation?
2. What kind of the Roma organizations existed?
3. Do Roma have their flag and national anthem?
4. Does exist some international Roma organization?
5. Do Roma people influence political processes on a communal, national and international level?

### Definitions of terms:

**Emancipation** - the fact or process of being set free from legal, social, or political restrictions.

**World Romani Congress**- The World Romani Congress is a series of forums for discussion of issues relating to Roma people around the world. There have been eight World Romani Congresses to date. Among the chief goals of these congresses have been the standardization of the Romany language, improvements in civil rights and education, preservation of the Roma culture, reparations from World War II, and international recognition of the Roma as a national minority of Indian origin.

**Sinti** - refers to members of the Roma minority living usually in German-speaking areas.

### Content of the chapter:

For the most part of the 20th century, the Roma's emancipatory activities remained largely isolated



experiments. In the 1950s and 60s, a growing number of organisations originated, preparing the ground for the “Romani-Movement” of the 1970s. This decade saw the emergence of local and national Roma organisations in large numbers and of a variety of goals, and significant efforts were made towards a political representation of the Roma at an international level.

After 1945, when most governments did not accept responsibility for the crimes committed during the Nazi time and felt no need to deal with the consequences, the Roma did not have a strong enough lobby. Only individual non-Roma organisations stood up for the once again marginalised minority. Their work for justice and equality, however, did not bring forth significant achievements. The denial of basic rights, such as in the case of Germany, where the Roma ( mainly Sinti) were ignored in the reparation process, as well as ongoing discrimination brought about the founding of new organisations. A milestone in the history of Roma emancipation was the foundation of the “Verband rassisch verfolgter nichtJuden” (Association of racially persecuted non-Jews) by Oskar and Vinzenz Rose in Germany, 1956. Although not unchallenged in its claim to represent all Sinti and Roma living in Germany, this organisation effectively tackled the issues of reparation and official recognition of Sinti and Roma and became one of the most influential representative bodies of Roma in Europe.

In 1960, Ionel Rotaru founded the “Communauté Mondiale Gitane” (World Gypsy Community, CMG) in Paris. From the CMG, which was dissolved by the French government in 1965, the “Comité International Tzigane” (CIT) evolved. The CIT’s declared aim was to stop forced assimilation and improve the Roma’s legal and social conditions worldwide. The CIT, renamed “Komiteto Lumniako Romano” (in French “Comité International Rom”, CIR) in 1971. By 1972, twenty-three international organisations in twenty-one countries, including Canada and Australia, had been linked through the CIR.

Towards the early 1970s a small but proper Roma elite had formed in Eastern and Western Europe, which for the first time voiced Roma issues in public and showed opposition against the Roma’s prescribed social and economic status. The striving for equality and social recognition to a great degree resulted from a change in the way the Roma dealt with their own identity. Assimilation to the majority population and self denial were replaced by clear public support and acceptance of Roma culture. Integration no longer was to depend on the loss of cultural identity. The Roma demanded to be recognised and respected by society as Roma. Along with political demands, there was the attempt to describe the history and culture of the Roma from the inside and make this accessible to Non-Roma. The formation of the World Romani Congress in 1971 constitutes the



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breakthrough of the new political movement. Its first conference in London with participants from 14 states was an expression of the need for “international unity”, the fight against social marginalisation and a common striving for a positive future. Based on the existence of a so-called “Romani Nation”, the song “Gelem, Gelem” was proposed as the official Romani anthem and a common flag was created. The motto “Opre Roma!” became the political credo of the Romani Movement and its fight for social justice and equality. The choice of the terms “Rom” and “Romani” as official designations was to do away with old prejudices and help create new self confidence. Slobodan Beberski was elected Honorary president, Dr. Jan Cibula from Czechoslovakia Vice-President, and Grattan Puxon, Head of the British Gypsy Council, General Secretary, and commissions were established which dealt with war crimes, social and educational conditions, as well as the language and culture of the Roma. The London Congress triggered and strengthened emancipatory activities worldwide, which resulted in the formation of other politically active Roma organisations within and outside Europe. Consequently, the Second Romani World Congress, which took place in Geneva in April 1978, already had the participation of no less than 50 Roma organisations from all over Europe, the United States, India and Pakistan. An important step for the future was the formation of the International Romani Union (IRU) in 1977, joining regional and national representatives. In the following years and decades, the IRU managed to make governments pay closer attention to Roma issues. In 1979 the IRU was accepted into the economic and social councils of the United Nations as a private organisation. The Third World Romani Congress was held in Göttingen, Germany in 1981. At meetings with representatives of different institutions of the UN, UNESCO, the European Council, and the EC, Roma issues were discussed by international committees. In this way, the kind of conditions needed for the successful work of Roma organisations could be established. In 1986, the International Romani Union became a member of UNICEF. The International Day of the Roma was also officially declared as April 8, in honour of the first World Romani Congress meeting in 1971, in Warsaw, Poland as part of The Fourth Romani Conference in 1994.

In the wake of The Fifth World Romani Congress held in Prague in the year 2000, reforms had to be carried out within the IRU and new structures were established. What followed was the foundation of a Roma Parliament, which from then on was to define the direction of internal and international IRU politics. The Sixth World Romani Congress was held in Lanciano, Italy in 2004. A new committee was set up to examine issues surrounding women, families and children. The seventh Congress was held in Zagreb, Croatia in October 2008. Almost 300 delegates from 28



different countries attended the meeting, which released The Roma Nation Building Action Plan, a document which outlined plans for the development of Romani nationalism and representation. The eighth and last Congress was held in Sibiu, Romania in April 2013. Approximately 250 delegates from 34 different countries attended the meeting. Florin Cioabă was elected as the new president of the International Romani Union.

Thanks to the founding of Roma organisations, worldwide lobbying, cooperation with international organisations and the institutionalisation of their issues, the Roma today are in a position to influence political processes on a communal, national and international level.

### Questions for thinking:

1. What kind of changes happened after The Second World War for Roma people?
2. Do you think the majority changed the attitude toward the Roma?
3. Do you think the Roma language will exist after 50 years?

## **3. Prejudice, discrimination and social exclusion**

### Key words

**exclusion**

**social issue**

**Roma traditions**

**discrimination**

**segregation**

**education**

**labour market**

### Starting questions:

1. What is the biggest social issue relating to the Roma?
2. What are the factors of the social exclusion?
3. Where usually starts discrimination and segregation?
4. What caused so high unemployment among the Roma?

### Definition of terms:

**Social exclusion** - is the process in which individuals or entire communities of people are systematically blocked from or denied full access to various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of a different group, and which are fundamental to social



integration within that particular group (housing, employment, healthcare, civic engagement, democratic participation, etc.).

**Prejudice** - is prejudgment or forming an opinion before becoming aware of the relevant facts of a case. The word is often used to refer to preconceived, usually unfavorable, judgments toward people or a person because of gender, political opinion, social class, age, disability, religion, sexuality, race/ethnicity, language, nationality or other personal characteristics.

**Discrimination** - is an act of prejudice in which members of one group are treated differently from those in another group based of their gender, political opinion, social class, age, disability, religion, sexuality, race/ethnicity, language, nationality or other personal characteristics.

**Segregation** – is the institutional separation of an ethnic, racial, religious, or other minority group from the dominant majority.

**Ethnic identity** - refers to the ethnic group with which an individual most closely associates. It is a complex and multifaceted part of the development of an individual.

**Social status** - is the position or rank of a person or group, within the society.

### Content of the chapter :

The exclusion of the Roma from the rest of society is considered to be one of the most serious social issues. Members of Roma communities form, as a result of the flawed relationship between the majority of society and the Roma communities, but also due to certain Roma traditions, an isolated social group. In connection with this a topic of debate is whether this social exclusion is caused by the Roma 's ethnic identity or by their social status. Social exclusion as one of the results of discrimination There are a number of factors affecting social exclusion, and this condition can lead to a cycle in which the situation of the affected person deteriorates until they reach the very bottom of society. The term social exclusion is usually associated with regions where the Roma form the majority. The issue of social exclusion, however, should not be regarded as solely a Roma issue, as it affects other social groups as well. Nevertheless, it is a part of life for many Roma families. Mostly the results of the researches by many NGOs reveal that the key factor causing the exclusion of Roma people from the social life of the majority is their excessively high unemployment rate. Roughly speaking, the high percentage of unemployed people in the Roma community is the result of limited access to elementary education. Apart from very obvious discrimination and the segregation of Roma children in schools, their parents' unawareness and underestimation of the importance of education is an important factor in the low enrolment rate of



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Roma children. Low education and qualification levels are symptomatic of socially excluded people and, unfortunately, pre-determine their future life to their disadvantage. It is very hard for a person with a low level of education to find a good job, and the situation is even more complicated if this person is a member of a discriminated social group (the disabled, Roma). Low levels of education, together with commonly experienced unequal treatment, greatly disadvantage Roma people in the labour market. To be unemployed is to be dependent on the social security system (government benefits). Over time, such a person loses work habits, ceases to plan for the future and lives from one day to the next. After losing the income from employment, housing conditions usually deteriorate or housing is lost altogether. A consistently bad financial situation can lead to high indebtedness and, sometimes, to addictions (alcohol, gambling) or even criminal activities. The longer the person remains socially disadvantaged, the harder it is for them to re-integrate into society. The vicious cycle is complete - dependence on social security payments can lead to low economic standards, usury, indebtedness, unpaid rent, execution and often eviction.

### Questions for thinking:

1. How the integration changed the Roma culture and traditions?
2. Why do you think the integration is needed?
3. Is the social exclusion caused by the ethnic identity or by the social status?



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