Roma in Europe – socio-economic situation and well-being

Roma[1] are the largest minority in Europe and mostly known through headlines mentioning poverty, discrimination and expulsions. In 2011 the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) conducted a survey in 11 EU Member States (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain) on the most visible and margenalised part of the Roma population, those living in segregated areas or in high concentration in specific parts of towns or villages. Information was collected on the socio-economic situation, on discrimination experiences, rights awareness and integration. For benchmarking purposes, non-Roma living close by were also covered by the survey.

The first results presented in a short report on the situation of Roma in these EU member states[2], draw a worrisome picture of the socio-economic situation of the Roma, in particular when compared to the situation of their closest non-Roma neighbours. The survey results confirm the concerns expressed by the European Commission in its April 2011 Communication that many Roma face discrimination and social exclusion living in marginalised and very poor socio-economic conditions. The results show that in the 11 EU Member States covered by the surveys the socio-economic situation of the Roma in the four key areas of employment, education, housing and health is not satisfactory and is worse, on average, than the situation of the non-Roma living in close proximity. They also show that Roma continue to experience discrimination and are not sufficiently aware of their rights guaranteed by EU law.

For instance, less than one out of three Roma are reported to be in paid employment and one out of three Roma respondents said that they are unemployed.

Only 15 % of young Roma adults surveyed complete upper-secondary general or vocational education, and dropout rates before the end of compulsory school are high in some countries.

One out of three Roma respondents aged 35 to 54 report health problems limiting their daily activities. In addition, about 20 % of Roma respondents declared not to be covered by medical insurance or not to know if they are covered.

Roma often live in crowded households as on average more than two Roma persons live in one room. The quality of housing is also not satisfactory as about 45 % of the Roma surveyed live in households that lack at least one of the following basic housing amenities, namely indoor kitchen, indoor toilet, indoor shower or bath and electricity.

Roma suffer from very precarious economic situations as about 90 % live in households with an equivalised income below national poverty lines and around 40 % live in households where somebody had to go to bed hungry at least once in the last month since they could not afford to buy food.

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[1] The paper follows in the use of the term Roma the approach of the Council of Europe which uses the term to refer to "Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as "Gypsies". Council of Europe, Descriptive Glossary of terms relating to Roma issues, available at http://hub.coe.int/web/coe-portal/roma

[2] FRA and UNDP (2012), *The situation of Roma in11 EU Member States: Survey results at a glance*, available at: http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2012/situation-roma-11-eu-member-states-survey-results-glance.

In addition, Roma are exposed to discrimination, as about 50% said that they have experienced discrimination in the past 12 months because of their ethnic background.

The picture painted by the survey of the situation of Roma makes it difficult to talk about "well being", nevertheless it is important to know which factors are most important for life satisfaction in order to prioritise policy interventions accordingly. Therefore the Cantril Self-Anchoring Striving Scale[3] has been included in the questionnaire of the survey to measure respondents' well-being; this scale consists of two questions and was asked in the beginning of the interview:

Please imagine a ladder with steps numbered from zero at the bottom to 10 at the top. The top of the ladder represents the best possible life for you and the bottom of the ladder represents the worst possible life for you.
(1) On which step of the ladder would you say you personally feel you stand at this time?
(2) On which step do you think you will stand about five years from now?

The paper will explore the results obtained through this scale with particular attention to a cross national perspective. Responses obtained from the non-Roma living closest to the Roma surveyed and therefore sharing the economic and social infrastructure will be considered with the aim to identify cultural biases in the answers.

Using regression models important factors for the life satisfaction of Roma living in marginalised settings will identified, taking into account age, gender, education, health status, employment status and poverty levels.

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[3] For more information, see: http://www.gallup.com/poll/122453/understanding-gallup-uses-cantril-scale.aspx