

# *The EU's Roma 'Paradox'*

*Why has EU policy aimed at improving  
the socioeconomic status  
of Roma communities in Europe largely failed?*



Bachelor Thesis Liberal Arts and Sciences

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## Epigraph

*“Auf wiedersehen miss Merkel, you are not my friend.  
When I tell you merhaba, you don't understand.*

*Cantare Berlusconi, prostitution story.  
His libido running country, taking all the glory.*

*If you wanna meet me mister Sarkozy,  
you will have to learn my language,  
Parle-vouz gipsy?*

*Don't want to be annoying,  
please don't get me wrong.  
I'm sick of being European just on Eurosong.*

*[..]*

*This is a winning song of Eurovision.  
Maximum points no split decision.  
Around continent telephone vote.  
Unite diaspora unite Europe.*

*[..]*

*All around the Europe, right wing taking power.  
They want to kick me out, so I live undercover.  
While royal family, live in quarantine.  
There's no really guarantee, that God will save the Queen.  
European parliament, sitting in the Brussels.  
No one takes them seriously, just another hustle.*

*Don't want to be annoying,  
please don't get me wrong.  
I'm sick of being European just on Euro-song!”*

- Transcript of the lyrics of the song ‘Eurosong’, written by  
Dubioza Kolektiv, a Bosnian music group]



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## **Abstract**

The Roma people are the largest, most marginalized, discriminated against and misunderstood minority within the EU. Compared to non-Romani populations, they often live in marginal conditions, have low levels of education, high levels of unemployment and lack basic access to health-care. Over the past decades many EU policy measures have been implemented to address these problems which are aimed at improving the socioeconomic status of Roma. To date these have had only limited effect and the situation of many Roma remains precarious. This paper adopts an interdisciplinary approach to investigate the reasons of this relative ineffectiveness of implemented EU policy. Human geography is deployed to look at policies of both national- and multinational governmental institutions as well as the main drivers of Roma migration. It investigates Roma migration and an overview is given of the main factors contributing to policy ineffectiveness. Cultural anthropology looks at Roma identity and analyzes their supposed cultural unity in order to understand what implications this has for the integration of Roma in the EU. We conclude that EU implemented policy is largely failing for a number of reasons. First of all, the integration of both human geographical and cultural anthropological insights show us that policy often targets Roma as a homogeneous unit, although the European Roma are mixed and diverse group. Furthermore, there seem to be discrepancies between EU initiatives and the actions taken by various individual member states and little attention is given to both institutional and non-institutional discrimination. Finally we argue there is too little communication and -understanding both between various levels of government, as well as between the people- and institutions that implement policy and the Roma communities and -individuals they are working for.

## **Introduction**

The Romani (or sometimes spelled as Romany) or Roma form a heterogeneous group of people with a South-Asian/Indian origin, who now live widely dispersed in communities across the whole of Europe. The Roma have lived in the European region for centuries, but the accession of 10 countries from Central and Eastern Europe to the EU between 2004 and 2007 has resulted in them having become the largest ethnic minority in the EU (Ram 2010: 197). Although there is a lack of official- and precise data, their total population in Europe is estimated to consist of approximately 9-12 million people (World Bank 2005; Ram 2010), of which approximately 6-8 million are concentrated in Eastern Europe. Besides being the largest ethnic minority in Europe, the Roma arguably also form one of the most discriminated against, marginalized and misunderstood minorities of Europe. Despite the fact that some Roma communities have been present in Europe for many generations their socioeconomic status is relatively low, both in comparison to dominant cultures as well as other minority groups. Some estimates suggest Roma are 8-10 times more prone to live in poverty than the average in certain countries (World Bank 2005). They often live in marginal conditions, have low levels of education, high levels of unemployment and lack basic access to health-care. Beside this there are several other factors, such as a lack of political representation and unclear property rights, that contribute to their problems (Ram 2014). According to a report written by the United Nations Development Programme on a survey done on the situation of the Roma in eleven EU member states,<sup>1</sup> Only 15% of young Roma adults have completed upper-secondary general education, vs. more than 70 % of the majority population living nearby, that less than 30 % of Roma (on average) are in paid employment, and furthermore that about 45% of the Roma surveyed live in households lacking at least one of the following: an indoor kitchen, toilet, shower or bath, or electricity.<sup>2</sup>

Being part of an marginalized, excluded and self-excluding group, Roma's face discrimination on many different levels, ranging from exclusion from the labour market to forced evictions, violent threats and protests against the presence of Roma communities (World Bank; Amnesty International; Ram). Some media even refer to the group as 'Europe's most hated minority' (Vice 2014).<sup>3</sup> In some parts of Europe there has been explicit fears over mass immigration of Roma from Romania and Bulgaria when these countries joined the European Union thus allowing their citizens, including many Roma, to move freely across its member states. As

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1 Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, France, Greece, Italy, Hungary, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain.

2 <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/poverty-reduction/the-situation-of-roma-in-11-eu-member-states---survey-results-at/>

3 <https://news.vice.com/video/europes-most-hated>

emphasized by Steward, cultural difference between Romany and citizens of their host counties disturbs and “inflames the repressive zeal of the civilizing state just as it did in the 1960s and in the 1930s (2013: 416).”

As possibly one of the largest societal problems the EU is facing today, various different programs and policies are being implemented that aim at improving the living conditions, legal status and educational level of the Roma. Examples are NGO’s, projects and EU initiatives like 'The Decade of Roma Inclusion' and 'We are Here Together - European Support for Roma Inclusion'. Arguably it can be said that these 'policies of inclusion' do not seem to have had the desired effect. In media images and public opinion Roma are portrayed as and considered to be an undesirable element in society and their level of education as well as living conditions do not seem to be improving. All over Europe anti-Roma tendencies dominate public and political imaginaries, regardless of implemented policies that are supposed to counteract this. Following this, the central question being discussed in this paper is: Why has EU policy aimed at improving the socioeconomic status of Roma communities in Europe largely failed?

While the effectiveness of EU policies is widely disputed, opinions on its failures are diffused. As ways to improve integration are difficult to find, one problem is that local governments often do not implement EU policy and just aim to eliminate Roma groups from society, which generally happens by deportations and evictions of their communities.<sup>4</sup> Others argue that reasons for the EU's failure to address the problem properly are due to Roma unwillingness to integrate in the community, while yet others claim that popular and institutional racism and exclusion the Roma face is the most fundamental reason for their problematic situation in society.

What is clear is that the issue is highly complex and related to both the attitudes of local governments and the EU, as well as those of the Roma communities themselves. In order to answer our research question and to understand which factors are contributing to the failure of these policies and the general integration of the Roma in larger society, we need to explore the interaction between the Roma culture on the one hand and the larger framework of development in the European Union on the other. Due to its complexity we see it necessary to approach the problem from multiple perspectives, and as this problem is foremost social, we analyze it with the help of the disciplines of cultural anthropology and human geography.

Cultural anthropological accounts on Roma communities tend to focus on specific Roma culture, history, ethnic identities, internal group-dynamics, the role they play in larger society and their personal views on this role, while human geographical accounts view Roma communities and

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4 France for example, took measures in order to make it more difficult for Roma people to settle in France and in some cases even evict them and expel them from the country (Ram 2014:207-208).



their migration flows more in a global context, providing critical perspectives on global/European distribution of wealth and integration policies. Questions we explore, explain and answer are: what does the term 'Roma' actually encompass? Although Roma groups are scattered all across Europe and all have their own historical development and culture, their unity is something often presupposed in public and political discourse. To what extent can one actually speak about the 'Gypsy', do they in fact form a relatively homogeneous group? What historical facts are known about the origins of the people we classify as belonging to the Gypsy group? What cultural characteristics do Gypsy groups have and what can we say about their ethnic identity? Furthermore, we explore various EU attempts to integration, the influence of the addition of Eastern European countries like Romania to the EU and the migration-flows resulting from it, and the origins of deep seated prejudices and discriminatory practices the Roma face.

Combining the above mentioned micro and macro perspectives offer us a more comprehensive understanding of the problem, and by analyzing the discrepancies, existing holes and persistent failures in attempts to integrate gypsy-communities in European societies, we offer suggestions for future approaches and a more collaborative relationship between the Roma communities and the societies they find themselves in.

## **Methodological justification**

For this investigation we have adopted an interdisciplinary approach, derived largely from Repko (2012). The goal is to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the processes that shape the difficulties Roma in the EU have concerning migration and integration, and the policies aimed at improving these. Considering the time-frame and scope of the research it rests solely on a review of both scientific literature as well as reports from both governments and civil society organizations. The scientific literature used comes from a range of subjects, mainly in the fields of cultural anthropology and human geography. Our goal was to integrate the approach adopted by anthropology, in which Roma themselves are the main object of research, with the approach used in geography, which focuses more on the environment and the institutions that shape Roma migration and their problems. Whilst in human geography Roma culture is largely taken for granted when looking at their problems and political participation, in anthropology there is little attention for the larger framework of institutions that try to influence the well-being of Roma communities throughout the EU. The aim of this paper is to integrate information from both of these fields of research which, in our view, are equally important in understanding the current situation and challenges Roma are facing.

The focus of this paper lies primarily on Roma groups living in the EU and mainly covers the period from the end of the Cold War to the present. This is because countries there are bound to the same specific European laws, and the fact that with the the end of the Cold War opened up new possibilities in EU accession and transnational governance. Also with the accession of some Middle- and Eastern European countries in recent years most of Europe's Roma live in the EU. Beside that, the EU as an institution funds various projects and initiatives, making it an important actor in the plight for better circumstances and opportunities for Roma. Below follows a short justification of the used fields of research as well as an overview of the topics within each field.

### **Human geography**

Being interested in the social-, political and spatial dimensions of inequality and development processes, human geography is particularly useful for analyzing the situation of Roma in the EU. To understand the difficulties concerning the integration of Roma in the EU it is necessary to explain the forces driving Roma migration and the individual responses of various member-states, as well as the policies undertaken by various multilateral institutions such as the EU and the OSCE. The goal is to give an overview of the framework of Roma migration and the responses of individual

member states, as well as the rationale behind policies to improve their situation. Given its sub-disciplines human geography is an interdisciplinary field, encompassing aspects from sociology, political sciences and economics. Some papers focus on the problems Roma face throughout the EU (Castaneda 2014; Chorianopolous et al. 2014; Ram 2014), while others look at EU policy in general or shifts in policy (Fésüs 2012; Guglielmo & Waters 2005; Vermeersch 2012). This paper adds to that by looking at both the rationale behind EU policy as well as practices that are adopted by individual member states.

Literature used in this paper comes largely from studies concerned with migration and the national responses to migration (Cahn & Guild 2008; Castaneda 2014; Pantea 2013; Vermeersch 2012). These studies give a good overview of the extent of the problems Roma face when migrating within the EU and the policies and legal framework which guide these processes. Migration can also be the trigger for discrimination and nationalist responses, which in turn can cause socioeconomic- and spatial segregation. Also the fear of mass migration of Roma after the accession of some Middle- and Eastern European countries after the fall of the Soviet Union was one of the reasons of the increased EU attention towards Roma (Guglielmo & Waters 2005: 767).

Beside migration it is important to look at the larger framework of institutions that try to affect the situation of Roma within the EU and the way in which these have developed over time. This encompasses both non-governmental as well as governmental institutions. Policy measures for this purpose refer to all EU, OSCE, Council of Europe and governmental directives and initiatives which affect the socioeconomic status of Roma. Looking at the implementation of these at various levels gives a better understanding of the difficulties both Roma and policymakers face. This enables to draw some conclusions and make recommendations for policy improvement.

### **Anthropology and the Study of Roma/Gypsy Culture**

Cultural anthropology can be defined as a discipline dependent on long-term fieldwork and a bottom-up perspective on social life, and can therefore generate first-hand knowledge of the groups studied. Kottak describes the discipline of cultural anthropology as “the study of human society and culture, the subfield that describes, analyzes, interprets, and explains social and cultural similarities and differences (2012: 9).”

Although most scientific disciplines base their research and analysis on the premise or approach of objectivity, anthropologists accept their inability to do so. This is mostly due to the nature of the anthropological method, which foremost entails fieldwork and an ‘immersion’ of the anthropologists own being into the group studied. This means that data gathered is always dependent on context and the different personalities involved. Furthermore, people and cultures are

not static entities and - unlike for example natural laws - change and evolve over time.

Although anthropological history has produced a variety of models which could be applied to study certain cultural groups of people, it has failed to produce an overarching, always applicable 'law' of human group behavior. This can also be seen in the study of the Roma and Gypsy populations. As Steward emphasizes, "Roma and Gypsies may often 'not want in', but they also seem not to fit into existing academic models (2013: 415)." Roma societies have always lived dispersed among majority populations, yet have in some way, always managed to remain separate from them. This, he argues, makes research of the field a challenge for traditional anthropological models, and offers a potent opportunity for reflection and theorization (2013: 415). An important reason for this is that traditional anthropology revolved around the idea that anthropological research should focus on cultures unlike those of ourselves, preferably as far away in geographical distance from where we were. Since Judith Okely, now a well established anthropologist, pioneered the field in 1970 by conducting her doctoral research at a parking lot 60 km up the newly opened motorway from London, anthropology has widened its view. Today, anthropological accounts on Gypsy communities can be found in almost every European country (Steward 2013: 415-416), and forms the basis of the anthropological part of this literature review.

Today, anthropological accounts on Roma communities can be found in almost every European country (Steward 2013: 415-416). For the anthropological part of this literature review, this paper draws on these accounts as well as more abstract anthropological theory. In order to create a basic framework of knowledge from which analysis of the problem can be understood, important information on Roma communities is first discussed. This includes a discussion of the confusion between the social identities of Roma and Gypsies, Roma history, migration and theories on identity formation and ethnic boundaries. Furthermore, ethnographic accounts are discussed, which give insight in the implications of various policy measures and experiences of Roma themselves.

### **Other Relevant Disciplines and Methodological Limitations**

There are some other relevant disciplines which could add important insights into the dynamics of Roma communities in the EU. Law studies could, for instance, give an in-depth look at the legal framework in which migration in the EU takes place. This could add important insights in the responsibilities and duties of various actors. Economics could give insights in the economic aspects of labour and migration and (social) psychology could look at the mental effects the current situation has on individuals or groups in the current situation, etcetera. The goal of this research is, however, to combine the most important insights from our selected fields of research to provide a

framework which captures the most important aspects of the interaction between Roma, the EU and various policy measures. Also some of the before mentioned disciplines are indirectly incorporated into this research because of the scope of the relevant disciplines we have used.

## **Chapter 1: Who are the Roma?**

### **Roma or Gypsy?**

To start with, it is important to clear up the confusion between the terms 'Gypsy' and 'Roma'. Although we do not use the term Gypsy in this research, it must be noted that many others often do use this term as means of referring to the Roma.

The term gypsy stems from the Greek 'γύφτοι' [gifti], which is a corruption of the Greek word 'Αἰγύπτιοι', meaning 'Egyptians'. As the Gypsies were originally thought to have migrated from Egypt, this word refers to their supposed origin. The Oxford Dictionary defines the term as “A member of a travelling people traditionally living by itinerant trade and fortune telling. Gypsies speak a language (Romany) that is related to Hindi and are believed to have originated in South Asia.”<sup>5</sup> In practice this definition seems inappropriate, since either through self-identification or by external identification as well as in popular discourse, the term 'gypsy' is applied to refer to many communities. The global diaspora of Roma is just one that this term encompasses, other examples are the Sinti, Tinkers or Travellers. Although used regularly by NGO's and academics to identify a specific people it can be considered an exonym<sup>6</sup> for, in our case, the Roma, and is often (but not always) considered offensive by Roma themselves (Bhopal and Myers 2008: 8). Furthermore, not all gypsy's – like the Scottish and Irish Travellers – have Indian origins and not all Roma are travelling people. Conclusively it can be argued that the term gypsy encompasses much more than the term Roma, and therefore, when encountering the word 'gypsy', it is important to explore what exactly is meant by this term. When in this research we refer to the word 'gypsy', it will be always be because in those cases the word is used to indicate Roma peoples.<sup>7</sup>

Knowing this, we can return to the topic of this thesis, the Roma of Europe. If one would attempt to address Roma 'problems' on a European scale it is necessary to explore and define what it actually entails to be a 'Roma'. Could the European Roma be defined as one ethnic group, or as a cultural one? In order to approach an answer to these questions, this chapter elaborates on the concepts of (Roma) history, identity, ethnicity and culture.

### **Roma History**

Although it is widely accepted that the gypsies have migrated from somewhere in Northern India between the 9th and the 14th century, there is much debate on this topic and the complexity of their

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5 [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/gypsy#gypsy\\_\\_3](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/gypsy#gypsy__3)

6 Name of an ethnic group that has been applied to them by outsiders

7 For example when an author quoted speaks about gypsies.

migration-routes and flows is not yet fully understood. According to Radu P. Iovita - paleoanthropologist - and Theodore G. Schurr - professor of Anthropology -, existing genetic knowledge combined with historic and linguistic evidence “suggest that the Roma or Gypsies do, indeed, seem to be descendent communities of an ancient population that arrived in Europe from Asia some 1,000 years ago (2004: 278).” Additionally, Thomas Acton has noted that there is virtually no (more specifically: only one) scholar of any reputation<sup>8</sup> that still maintains the idea that gypsies left India as a single united tribe distinct from any of the other nomadic tribes that are home to India (1974: 55).

As noted by Kaminski, gypsies followed migration routes that led through former Persia (present day Iran), Greece and subsequently, the Balkans. A small percentage of gypsies branched off towards Armenia and Northern Africa (1980: 117). Migration from the Byzantine empire to the Balkans took place by the 11th century. By the 14th century, the expansion of the Ottoman empire towards the Balkans led Gypsies to disperse themselves across Western Europe (Haywood 2008: 142). After having entered Europe, some gypsy groups moved further while others limited their migration to the Balkans, which also contributes to the explanation of why gypsy populations are largest in Eastern-Europe.

Iovita and Schurr have shown that the molecular genetic studies of the Roma “unambiguously support the linguistic theory of an Indian, or at least a largely (South) Asian, origin for the Gypsies (2004: 278).” Furthermore, they claim that these studies also support data on three following major migrations: The early migrations around the 14th century into Western Europe; second, the expansions from Moldo-Wallachia and Hungary in the 17th and 18th century; and third, the exodus that followed from the abolition of slavery in the 19th and 20th century in Romania (2004: 279). After these episodes, another migration-flow can be added. The Cold War or fall of the Soviet-union, as well as the disintegration of states such as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia resulted in the late 20th century in a flow of Roma from the East to the West. We speak more about this last (and still lasting) major migration-flow in the end of this chapter.

## **Roma and Identity**

*“Why of course I am a Rom, but those others are just Gypsies.”*

[Kaminski 1980: 116]

As the above quote is meant to emphasize, Gypsies' own interpretation of their supposed collectivity and belonging is less matter of course than many non-Gypsies like to believe. As has been noted by Kaminski, the distinction between Gypsies and non-Gypsies seems at a cursory

<sup>8</sup> The scholar referred to here is Dr J. Kochanowski (1963)

glance to appear 'straightforward and unproblematic' (1980: 116). He means that, from history to date, the Gypsy has been distinguished by both external and internal qualities, of which most obvious are racial features, a presumed common origin, commonalities in language, economic statuses, or by common internal identification. Kaminski stresses though, that a closer scrutiny reveals that "neither external nor internal criteria are sufficiently precise tools of identification (1980: 116)." There are, for example, gypsies that comply little with the above mentioned criteria, as the Roma have undergone biological (and cultural) assimilation due to their large expansion across Europe. Furthermore, when one interviews or questions a gypsy about his supposed belonging to the larger 'gypsy' community, many will offer conflicting answers (Kaminski 1980: 116). Mostly, the supposed identity of Roma seems to rest on their history and collective heritage, while it has been shown that (ethnic) identities are not static and cannot solely be derived from a presumed shared history. As Lee has emphasized with reference to Smith: "ethnic identity and difference are socially produced in the here and now, not archaeologically salvaged from the disappearing past (Acton and Mundy 1997: 67)."

In practice, there seem to be various ways Roma identities get constructed. For example, identities resulting from ascriptions from the majority society or constructed by self-determination. These are related to each other and in the following I elaborate on both. As Csepeli and Simon have noted, Roma communities have, in spite of their heterogeneity and individual discrepancies, been perceived by majority population "as a highly homogeneous, depersonalized mass, whose members collectively can be characterized by illiteracy, lack of work discipline, and lack of respect for legal and social norms (2004: 133)." This idea has been emphasized by numerous researchers (Kopf 2012; Steward 2013; Sigona 2005), and is the identity ascribed by majority society. Being confronted with these structural negative stereo-typifications and various forms of discrimination, it seems the target-group, in this case the Roma, internalizes the negative images and tries to 'get rid' of the identification with the group. This means, as Csepeli and Simon have very clearly exposed, that Roma "unable to resist and protest against outgroup hostility associated with the name of the group, [...] attempt to get rid of the identification with the ingroup and try to cross the boundary (2004: 135)." Which leads to an self-determined identity of not-belonging.

This idea on the boundaries of identity has very elaborately been explained by Fredrik Barth (1969). In his influential essay on ethnic groups and boundaries, he shows that in order to understand the concept of ethnicity, it is necessary not to look at the core it should contain, but to look at the places where boundaries are being constructed, deconstructed and reshaped. In the case of Roma it is relevant to realize that their self-determined identity is based on terms of 'us' and 'them', not necessarily on a shared history or ancestry. Formoso goes as far as to say Roma or Gypsy



identity is based on the “strict differentiation between Gypsies and non-Gypsies (Csepeli and Simon 2004: 135).” This in turn creates links between various Roma or Gypsy communities, even-though they might differ greatly in their own cultures. As we will see later, these processes of identity formation are important in order to understand the way majority societies and its policies influence Roma communities.

### **Recent Migration**

Whilst Roma are often portrayed as being a nomadic group, this only applies to a relatively small number of them. Most of the migration is undertaken by similar reasons non-Roma have, including a search for better economic chances, or are the result of discrimination or prosecution. There are several important historical events that shaped migration patterns for Roma in the past decades. Both the end of the Cold War, as well as the disintegration of states such as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia had several consequences for the situation of Roma and their subsequent migration. The accession of countries with a large Roma population in recent years also had a big impact. This next section gives an outline on some important historic events over the past decades that shaped Roma migration and that had large consequences for both Roma as well as policymakers.

One of the main problems when discussing Roma migration is that there is almost no official- or precise data on the number of Roma living in Europe and the size of Romani migration. Most of the numbers in research are based on estimates. There are several reasons for this lack of data. After the Second World War many countries stopped reporting the ethnicity of their citizens or people entering their borders. This was in large to prevent this data to be used for purposes of prosecution, as the Nazi’s did during the Holocaust (Sollie and Wijkhuis 2014: 74). Beside historical explanations the lack of data can also be explained by the absence of standardized measuring methods which can differ greatly between countries. Whilst some countries would determine Roma ethnicity based on language, others could rely solely on the people who identify themselves as Roma (World Bank 2005: 25).

### **Important Events for Roma Migration**

The end of the Cold War and the dismantling of the Soviet Union had the biggest impact on Roma migration in the past decades for several reasons. After the Cold War ended it became possible for persons and goods to travel around the continent more freely. This enabled Roma to migrate to countries in Western- and Southern Europe more easily. Also countries who had previously been under the control of the Soviet Union were now eligible to join the European Union, which in turn could make demands concerning their application. In the sphere of transnational human rights

policies new opportunities emerged as well. Countries that had previously been closed of the NGO's and international monitoring agencies were now accessible. Beside this in many countries a new constitution was drafted which, such as in Slovakia, stated the right to the 'freedom of ethnicity', which enabled Roma organized themselves in political parties (World Bank 2005: 10).

One of the reasons for many Roma to move from former socialist countries was a drastic change in their labor situation during this period. Under socialism many Roma were forced to participate in the labour organization just like any other citizen. On the one hand this policy somewhat improved the economic situation of some Roma groups, whilst on the other hand it left them with little choice and means for expressing cultural or religious believes (World Bank 2005: 17). During this time there was discrimination already, but nationalism was largely suppressed. Because of this Roma were fairly well integrated in society, even though this was reached through forceful assimilation policies aimed at decreasing their notable presence. After the fall of the Soviet Union in many former USSR states nationalism arose. In many countries Roma were treated as outsiders or immigrants, despite being present for many generations. After the breakup of Czechoslovakia for instance, the Czech government adopted laws which made it difficult for people who originally came from Slovakia to apply for a passport, which left some Roma without citizenship (World Bank 2005: 16). Also the conflicts that arose after the breakup of Yugoslavia and the war in Kosovo led to many Roma fleeing to Western Europe or Canada.

The enlargement of the EU with several Central- and Eastern European countries in 2004 and 2007 was also important for Roma migration. Although some countries placed some temporary restrictions on the free movement of people from these countries, Roma now enjoyed freedom of movement within the EU. Many Roma from Bulgaria and Romania went to France, Spain or Italy because language barriers there were lower than for other countries (Ram 2014: 206). These countries have also had Roma populations for centuries, making them relatively well represented by various institutions. As noted before, since many countries do not record the ethnicity of migrants it is difficult to determine the exact number of Roma who migrated, but it is estimated that many of the people who migrated, especially from Romania, have been Roma (Ram 2014: 206).

In recent years the global economic crisis, which started in 2008, had an impact on Roma migration. First of all the crisis affected Eastern- and Southern European countries, which in general have the largest Roma communities, the most. In some Eastern European countries, such as Bulgaria, the crisis brought about a decrease in employment in sectors which traditionally employed many Roma. Construction is an example of this. Since 2009 this sector shrank by 30%. In the same period the unemployment rate among Roma rose from 40% in 2008 to 61% in 2009. Beside this, already existing tensions between the general population and Roma increased because of the

financial downturn leading to increasing social and economic exclusion among Roma, stimulating their migration (Mesic and Woolfson 2015: 39).

## **Chapter 2: Overview of EU Roma Policy**

Over the past decades several policy measures have been implemented to address the situation of minorities in the European Union. Roma, being the largest and most disadvantaged minority in the EU, have been of special interest for policymakers. This chapter gives an overview of the most important efforts concerning the migration and integration of Roma over the past decades, and their implications. In order to gain a good understanding of these policies it is important to look at various institutional levels, ranging from supranational institutions, such as the EU, to local governments of the various member-states and the role of NGO's. It is also important to identify the various goals policy can have and how this impacts actions on both the national as the supra-national level as this allows for a comparison between policies over time and the leading paradigm in policy circles.

Three important multilateral institutions concerned with the policies towards Roma inclusion are: the European Union (EU), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe (Guglielmo and Waters 2010: 11). Each of these operates within its own framework and has its own legal obligations, values and norms. The OSCE, one of the leading institutions for the improvement of minority rights within Europe, was one of the first governmental agencies to raise concern about the status of Roma in Europe. In 1995 it created the Contact Point of Roma issues. Their agenda was mainly aimed at human rights and other issues concerning the protection of Roma in Europe (World Bank 2005: 20). Another important institution, the council of Europe, has been traditionally responsible for coordinating the issue of Roma and other minorities between the EU, the OSCE and several post-communist countries, of which some would later join the EU (World Bank 2005: 20). Whilst the EU institutions were in the beginning mainly focused on Roma immigration, this later shifted towards minority rights, countering discrimination and security within the borders of Europe (Vermeersch 2012: 1196).

Beside these institutions there is a wide range of NGO's and other civil society organizations that over the years took an interest in raising the issue of the problematic situation many Roma live in. Some of them focus solely on Roma issues, while others, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, dedicated part of their portfolio to raising attention for their situation. Added together these and some other organizations formed the basis of what grew out to a cross-border transnational advocacy network (TAN). The activities undertaken by this network varies from maintaining links between governments and Roma communities, as well as documenting malpractices of individual member states and providing this information to the EU and the other

multilateral institutions. These functions make this network important in both monitoring progress as well as pressuring countries from below to adapt better practices and take serious efforts to improve rights issues domestically (Vermeersch 2012: 1197). Some of these NGO's also developed special capacity to monitor and evaluate policy measures.

According to a report by the World Bank (2005: 14) four different policy approaches towards dealing with Roma can be defined within Europe. These are broadly defined as: exclusionary-, (forced) assimilation-, integration- and minority rights policies. The first two measures are mainly aimed at reducing the visibility of Roma and their cultural identity, whilst the latter two try to achieve an improvement of their situation without necessarily affecting their identity. Despite being coercive, assimilation policies can be implemented with good intentions in mind as the rationale goes the more Roma assimilate with 'mainstream' society the less discrimination they will face. This distinction gives a framework for placing various events in a framework, which could help understand basic problems and recognize incompatibilities within the policy agenda (World Bank 2005: 15).

Since the early 1990s the European Union has increased its attention towards minority problems in Europe, especially concerning the Roma. Several reasons are mentioned for this in the literature. Most often it is mentioned that the fear of domestic destabilization because of Roma migration from new member states in Middle- and Eastern Europe to Western nations was the most important driver for giving attention to the situation of Roma (Guglielmo and Waters 2005: 763; Ram 2014: 204). The idea was that improving the situation of Roma in candidate member states would give them less incentives to migrate to more wealthy countries after accession. Years later when accession of new member states became certain the narrative changed from a focus on migration towards one of human rights and tackling discrimination.

According to Vermeersch (2012: 1196) these international NGO's were among the first multilateral organizations to demand attention for the precarious situation of Roma across Europe at the start of the 1990's. As noted before, after the fall of the Soviet Union new opportunities arose for transnational governance in Europe. He notes, however, this wasn't the only factor in explaining the sudden attention for Roma. In the same period many individual member states became concerned about the migration of poor people, especially Roma, from the former Soviet countries. They came to the conclusion that in order to prevent this migration it was necessary to raise the issue of human rights on a transnational level. Ram (2014: 209) states that the emergence of the TAN in combination with the new focus on both migration and human rights were three crucial elements that created momentum to put Roma issues on the agenda.

Following this increased attention in a 1993 meeting of the European Council in

Copenhagen it was decided that aspiring member countries need to have “stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the respect for and protection of minorities” (World Bank 2005: 20). These later came to be known as the Copenhagen criteria for accession. Although the European Union was traditionally not directly influential in minority policies, which were the responsibility of individual member states, the Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 made it possible to gain more influence in subjects like cultural recognition and persistence within its borders. This opened the way for a larger influence concerning Roma and affiliated minorities (World Bank 2005: 21). Along with the Amsterdam treaty, which entered in 1999, for the first time human rights and anti-discrimination were listed as fundamental principles in the EU (Ram 2014: 208). This was not only important because of the extra attention, but it also increased the capacity for tackling the problems because of the large capacity in both tools and financial terms of the EU.

In 1995 the Council introduced the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which was the first ‘legally binding multilateral instrument’ aimed at ensuring EU members would protect their national minorities (World Bank 2005: 21). There are however still some countries, such as France which have neither signed nor ratified the convention, and countries, such as Belgium, which have signed but not yet ratified the convention (Council of Europe 2008: 10). In 1997 the European Commission started publishing annual reports on the situation of Roma. Over time these reports became more elaborative and gave advice to aspiring member countries what steps needed to be taken in order to meet the accession criteria (Ram 2014: 199). Not specifically targeting Roma, in 2000, the EU adopted the ‘Race Equality Directive’.

In 2004 the European Commission released a report that it might be legally impossible to establish measures specifically targeting Roma as a group since this would favor them over other disadvantaged minorities. This meant attention for their cause would have to be implemented within the existing minority rights framework (Vermeersch 2012: 1200). Despite this, in 2007 the EU Fundamental Rights Agency was established and a framework aimed to enhance ‘Roma inclusion’ was developed and adopted. This program was aimed at stimulating Roma inclusion in decision making and adopting human rights policies to improve their situation.

After the accession of Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland and some other countries with large Roma populations between 2004-2007 the situation of Roma became a truly ‘European’ problem, since large groups of Roma could now move freely across borders within the EU (Castaneda 2014: 3). Before that time the EU seemed to look at it more as a problem that lay outside of its borders. It were not just Roma migration, integration and identity that mattered now, but also European identity and common values became important since the EU wanted to uphold its

image of high moral values (Guglielmo and Waters 2005: 764). Member states now faced a moral imperative to deal with the situation of Roma within their borders. After making minority protection a condition for accession, countries had to act themselves to remain credible.

The increased attention among policy makers, NGO's and multilateral institutions eventually led to the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion' which spans 2005-2015. This is a joint effort between the EU, the OSCE and the Council of Europe and the governments of twelve Central- and Eastern European countries, aimed at eliminating discrimination and improving the socioeconomic status of Roma in Europe. Participating countries would prepare plans for several years and establish the capacity to monitor progress. Ending this year, some successes have been ascribed to the program so far. It has raised awareness amongst policy makers and individual governments and has led to more engagement with Roma about policies concerning them (Decade of Roma Inclusion 2015). Also in the field of education for Roma children some improvements have been made. According to Vermeersch (2012: 1202) the four main goals of these current policies are: enhancement of Romani representation, the promotion of better domestic policies, stimulate the use of existing EU instruments for implementing Roma inclusion policies and to bring social change by raising awareness. The aim of these goals is to introduce an overarching framework which would support member states to develop national strategies aimed at improving the socioeconomic status of minorities such as the Roma. Whilst some of the goals have been partially reached, still some obstacles remain, as we will explain in later sections.

## **Chapter 3: Where Policy Fails**

### **Introduction Policy Failure**

Despite the appearance of an extensive transnational advocacy network (TAN) and increased attention from the EU and some other multilateral institutions the situation of Roma across the EU is still precarious (World Bank 2005; Amnesty International 2014). Some successes have been achieved, especially in education, but poverty and discrimination are still widespread. Several reasons have come forward from the literature that either limit the effects of policies in place or run contrary to their objectives. On the one hand Roma themselves seem to be little involved in politics concerning their situation, whilst on the other hand there also seems to be a disparity between efforts at the international scale and local implementation. This chapter gives an overview of difficulties of implementing policy on such a large scale, and the most important reasons little has been achieved in improving the situation of Roma across Europe.

### **Difficulties of Policy in a Culturally Complex Society**

According to Eriksen there are two dilemmas inherent to a culturally complex society. “Faced with a de facto situation of ethnic and cultural pluralism,” he argues, “the state may be accused of injustice both if it promotes equality and if it supports the retention of difference (2010: 175).”

He means that, while some minorities are granted the right to be different, others are expected to become like the majority population. The power to define when one group should assimilate or when to segregate, is generally held by the majority and very often the group expected to assimilate is made out of potential elites, while the lower classes generally are the ones who are denied the right to equality. This kind of contradiction can, according to Eriksen, be described as 'the paradox of multiculturalism' (2010: 176).

Susan Moller Okin, Professor of Ethics in Society and Professor of Political Science, adds a slight nuance to this, as she argues that while until the past few decades minority groups were typically expected to assimilate, now this expectation is generally considered oppressive, resulting in many Western countries seeking to devise and implement policies that are 'more responsive to persistent cultural differences' (1999: 9). In Eriksens words this could be seen as 'being denied the right to equality'. For Okin this means the implementation of policies that comply with the politically popular idea of multiculturalism, a concept she describes as “the claim that minority cultures or ways of life are not sufficiently protected by the practice of ensuring the individual rights of their members, and as a consequence these should also be protected through special group rights or privileges (1999: 11).” This means that ethnic minorities are granted certain rights based



on their 'cultural relevance', rights that other parts of the population are not granted. In the UK for example, followers of the sikh religion are exempt from wearing a helmet while driving a motorcycle, as they typically wear a turban which cannot be combined with wearing a helmet.<sup>9</sup>

With reference to the Roma, both claims can be substantiated. As Csepeli and Simon have emphasized, devaluation of the term 'gypsy' has been actively encouraged and strived for in Central and Eastern Europe during state socialism. The idea behind this was to make it attractive to members of the Roma community to enroll their children in schools, which in turn would lead to more educated Roma people who could function in normal wage-labor. This in turn would equalize differences between Roma and non-Roma, which would reduce hostility expressed by the majority population. In reality, the outcomes of these policies were – according to Csepeli and Simon – largely negative. In this period, Roma did start to identify themselves more and more as non-Roma. Problematically though, majority population was not ready to accept them as non-Roma. Furthermore, they argue: “under the pressure of forced assimilation part of the Roma subjects of state-socialist societies developed dysfunctional strategies of coping such as ‘learned helplessness’ and striving for instant gratification (2004: 133).”

The other side of the paradox, the retention of difference under the veil of multiculturalism can for example be seen in Italy. As has been shown by Sigona, Italian regional governments have during the 1980s and 1990s adopted several laws that were aimed mainly at ‘protection of Gypsies’ and ‘their nomadic culture’ (2006: 746), of which the providing and building of camps was a key aspect. Although this seems like a positive and good development for respecting cultural needs and diversity, Sigona exposes the underlying stigma associated with these policies, as it frames the Roma as having a typical ‘nomadic’ identity. This perception, that all Roma adhere to nomadic lifestyles and should therefore live in camps, is founded on bias and is not supplying Roma with a right to have a culture, but is in fact forcing them to have a culture. Some Roma communities have been sedentarised for centuries and do not identify with nomadism or nomadic Roma groups. Furthermore, a deep problem associated with this ascription is that reinforces “the popular idea that Roma are not Italians and do not ‘belong’ to Italy (2006: 747).” So fundamentally, as Sigona furthers, the typification of Roma communities as nomadic communities enforces the segregation between Roma and the rest of society, and provides “a form of cultural legitimation for marginalizing the Roma (2006: 747).”

These points mentioned above are valuable for this analysis, and should be considered when thinking about the implementation of EU policy with regards to minorities in general. However,

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<sup>9</sup><https://www.gov.uk/rules-motorcyclists-83-to-88>

while acknowledging the implementation of policy on a large scale is complex, there are some clear and visible implications of policy today that strongly contribute to its failure.

### **Low Political Participation**

One problem that often comes forward in the literature is the low political participation of Roma. This takes place both at government levels as well as in NGO's lobbying on behalf of the Roma. Several reasons are mentioned for this. First of all poverty and a lack of means remains an obstacle for successful political participation. Many Roma communities do not have the capacity to enact in a transnational lobby at the EU for instance. Also many Roma do not speak the language of the country they live in and illiteracy rates remain high. This is largely because of low school enrollment rates among Roma children, especially among girls. Also drop out rates remain very high (Chorianopolous et al. 2014: 105).

Guglielmo and Waters (2005: 765-766) note many Roma also seem to be skeptical towards 'Roma policies'. This seems to originate in post-war socialist states where policies aimed at either improving their situation or eliminating their presence targeted them as being an 'ethnic' rather than 'national' minority. This gave rise to discrimination and treatment as second class citizens. But also in the present Roma often do not identify themselves as 'Roma' out of fear of facing discrimination and being subjected to less preferential treatment. This does not only occur in Middle- or Eastern European countries, but also in Western EU member such as France, the UK and Germany. Partially because of this many Roma feel government do not have a genuine interest in improving their situation (Ram 2014: 201).

Another problem is the large diversity of groups that are labeled 'Roma'. In countries such as Germany and France there have been substantial Roma populations for some centuries. These groups usually face different obstacles than more recent immigrants and also have different rights under the law. Where recent immigrants may be more concerned with obtaining a place to live without getting evicted or getting a work permit, individuals and groups that have lived for longer periods are more concerned with the right to travel within the country and park their caravans or discrimination related issues (Ram 2014: 212). Thus far there has been limited cooperation between these various groups. Beside these differences, disagreement among Roma in the same situation about the best policies to deal with their issues has also been reported (Ram 2014: 201). Ram (2014) notes attention for the problems Roma face was triggered because of successful efforts by a transnational network of NGO's and other organization lobbying on behalf of them rather than with them. These organizations include Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International for instance.

But even when there is political participation this is often ineffective for various reasons.

Chorianopolous et al. (2014: 101) describe how an anti exclusion program in Komotini in Greece included Roma in their decision making process concerning spatial segregation. The Roma community was to be resettled to a newly developed piece of land. Due to power asymmetries the role of the participating Roma became more consultative than actually directly making policy. Another problem was that representatives from the Roma community were not consulted until a very late stage in the decision making process when there were no other options left but to agree or disagree with plans that were already made. The local government's definition of 'participation' in this case became a means to justify an already made decision. This led the Roma community to withdraw its support for the initiative. When the Roma community finally agreed to their resettlement the local non-Roma population organized against the decision and the plans were frozen (Chorianopolous et al. 2014: 105). Also in many cases where Roma were included in the democratic process they were simply outvoted by the majority. This proves participation does not lead to more decision making power. Because of these issues some authors claim Roma never really capitalized on these new possibilities for transnational governance. One of the reasons for this might be that they did not have a kin-state backing up their plight with political capital (Ram 2014: 200).

### **Inconsistent Policy**

The literature clearly shows a dichotomy between the norms and rules set forward at the international level and the practices that are conducted by the individual states, but policies also seem contradictory on their own sometimes. This pattern is visible between various scales of government both multilateral as within individual member states. Despite the emergence of a TAN and increased attention of multilateral government agencies individual member states have consistently denied Roma some basic rights. Over the years various schemes and laws have been adopted to prevent migration or repatriate Roma. This runs contrary to the fundamental rights approach adopted by the EU.

After Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007 several countries, including Germany and France, took measures to limit immigration from these countries. France for instance introduced extra taxations for employers hiring people from these countries, but also excluded them from entering certain jobs and placing restrictions on obtaining work permits and visas (Ram 2014: 207). Also both France and Germany introduced pay-off schemes to pay Roma to leave and return to their country of origin. There have also been various schemes to prevent Roma migration all together. A deal aimed at preventing migration between the UK and Czech allowed Britain to check passports at Prague airport (Vermeersch 2010: 206). Germany made similar deals with Poland, Hungary and

the Czech Republic. In the run-up to their accession to the EU agreements were signed through which Germany eased the visa restrictions for citizens if these countries in exchange for a commitment of their governments to prevent Roma migration (Castaneda 2014: 9). There are also reports that Roma applying for refugee status because of political prosecution or severe (institutional) discrimination got rejected by the German government because they were 'EU citizens' and who could not prove their prosecution and discrimination. Canada on the other hand, has accepted these requests in some cases. Castaneda (2014: 8) describes how many Roma who have left former socialist countries such as Serbia and Kosovo in fear of persecution were unable to apply for refugee status in Germany, but were granted a 'duldung' status instead. This placed severe restrictions on their mobility as well as their legal status and placed them under constant threat of expulsion or repatriation. In some cases people had this status for over ten years, placing severe restrictions on their integration in society.

Whilst in some cases national governments have spoken out against abuses and discrimination on a local scale and multilateral institutions such as the EU have expressed criticisms on a national scale, little has been done to enforce the rules and guidelines set out in various programs. The EU and the European Commission, as well as NGO's such as Amnesty International, have often criticized individual member states on their treatment of Roma. However aside from some incentive schemes aimed at stimulating Roma inclusion little has been written about the enforcement of human rights policies by multilateral organizations. Guglielmo and Waters (2005) argue the shift from a 'migration prevention-', which could be seen as an exclusionary practice, to a 'human rights and common values' approach is largely a rhetorical one. In recent years France for instance has used less harsh rhetoric towards Roma, but according to a report by Amnesty International (2014: 15) forced evictions and exclusion are still common practice.

### **Little Policy Evaluation**

Making statements about the effect of various policy measures is very difficult. As noted earlier, also in this area the lack of available data is a bottleneck for recognizing the scope and size of the problems and the effects of measures trying to address them. Beside the methodological challenges many implemented policies are often not properly evaluated. This can either be because of a lack of resources and commitment, methodological difficulties, or more political reasons (For full details on policy evaluation see: Korsten 2012). Also because of the difficulty determining the exact number of Roma in a country, improvement for accession was largely monitored in terms of effort, not outcomes (Ram 2014: 199). Most of the evaluation and monitoring is done by NGO's, but these often focus at social- and economic circumstances on a local scale. This makes it hard to look at the

combined effects of policy decisions at the multilateral level. Not many NGO's are trying to directly influence government policies (Ram 2014: 205).

### **Contradictory Policy and Public Discrimination**

*“Although a number of Romani groups emphasize their cultural autonomy, linguistic, historic, and regional differences, there are some distinctive similarities, of which their persistent discrimination, structural inequality, and their collective exclusion from the majority societies in Europe, are the most evident ones.”*

[Kopf in eds U. Kockel, M. Nic Craith and J. Frykman 2012: 310]

Perhaps one of the biggest obstacles for the successful integration and socioeconomic development of Roma is discrimination (Amnesty International 2014). Despite the efforts undertaken by the EU, various other multilateral institutions and NGO's advocating on behalf of Roma in Europe, discrimination and practices aimed against Roma citizens are still widespread. This is partially fueled by the increased Roma migration over the past years as a result of EU enlargement. It is important to make a distinction between state- and non-state actors. Chorianopolous et al. (2014), Castaneda (2014) and Ram (2014) for instance report how popular protest forced governments to adopt measures to displace Roma or take decisions which affected them in a negative way. And whilst policy is mainly aimed at the solving the first, the latter is a very big problem as well. Discrimination against Roma is something that is reported throughout the EU and touches on nearly all aspects of their life. In some sectors, such as education, some improvement has been made, whilst their overall situation remains precarious.

Whilst economically Roma were more included in the labour force before the collapse of the Soviet Union and several socialist states than afterwards, discrimination was already widespread. After the Second World War in many socialist countries Roma were seen as 'ethnically' different rather than just being a minority. This often led to discriminatory practices and a treatment as second rang citizens (Guglielmo and Waters 2005: 765). In Slovakia for instance, since the Second World War Roma have been concentrated in settlements with a minimum distance of two kilometers from public infrastructure. This spatial segregation still influences their social- and economic circumstances to this day, with poverty rates at much higher levels than in better connected living areas (World Bank 2005: 62). The Copenhagen criteria did little to tackle this social exclusion, but were more focused on providing for opportunities.

To a large degree discrimination is reinforced by negative stereotyping and a negative depiction of Roma in the media. In some media and even governmental bodies Roma are often depicted as 'poverty migrants'. According to Castaneda (2014: 6) this rhetoric implies Roma do not

migrate to look for work, as labour migrants do, but rather that they migrate to make use of the welfare system. Also politicians add to this. Manuel Valls, France's former Interior minister (and current prime minister), stated policies aimed against Roma, such as dismantling settlements, were 'necessary and meant to ensure that Roma go back to Romania or stay there' (Ram 2014: 208). This sort of rhetoric runs contrary to the rights many Roma enjoy as being EU citizens and might give nationalists and racists 'legitimacy' for their actions. According to Amnesty International (2014:28) many countries do little to investigate discriminatory or hateful practices against Roma, creating an environment which stimulates these practices.

### **Implications of Public Discrimination for Policy**

Sabrina Kopf, anthropologist, has experienced the implications of general discrimination against Roma while conducting ethnographic fieldwork on the implementation of two European funded Roma projects in Eastern Slovakia. Her aim was to shed light on the question of what implications these programs have had on a local level, and why, although the member countries have definitely utilized these programs to promote the social inclusion of Roma and Sinti, their situation is perceived as having changed little in the past number of years (2012: 313). As many problems that the Roma face stem from poverty, both projects she explored were aimed at combating high unemployment rates among the Roma by increasing their education levels.

She found that these projects were unsuccessful for both staff and Roma involved, and shows these two examples are just a reflection of policy failure in general, as there seems to be a fundamental problem in the language spoken by non-Roma founded projects to improve Roma wellbeing. As she concludes "what is evident from these short episodes from my fieldwork is that the Maxim and Ružena projects were a disappointment to the project staff and Roma alike, although diverging perceptions and experience prevailed within both groups (2012: 313)." Most fundamentally, the diverging perceptions and experience were related to the reinforcement of negative Roma-stereotyping by the project staff, who classified the Roma as a "social-problem group", and blamed them for being lazy, work-shy and "hindering all attempts of integration by holding on to their 'backward' way of living (2012: 320)." What the Roma argued, on the other hand, is that in their view the most relevant explanation for participants high dropout-rates and low motivation was that they were not learning the necessary tools needed for obtaining employment afterwards. Fundamentally her research showed that the projects failed to live up to expectations of both parties involved, which she argues was mostly due to the paternalistic attitude of staff towards the Roma, as well as the "continuing reproduction of culturalizing and discriminating ascriptions (2012: 319)."

Although reasons for the above mentioned practices are diverse and complicated, the way policy is applied and has been applied to influence societies is an important factor. Nando Sigona, a sociologist with over ten years research and teaching experience in migration, refugee and ethnic studies,<sup>10</sup> elaborates on this issue by exploring the 'anthropology of policy', the central argument of which is that "policy shapes the way individuals construct themselves as subjects (2005: 743)." By referring to his (Italian based) research into the way NGO's, bureaucrats, officials and society at large interact with Roma, he exposes the implications and diverging perceptions around top-down imposed policies and how bureaucracy and implemented policy 'form, transform and manipulate' the identity of the Roma involved (2006: 741)." In his article, he shows the ambiguity and ambivalence of the expression 'problema zingari' ('Gypsy problem'), and shows that it proposes us with the following important question: "do [politicians] aim to address the problems that Roma face or, conversely, the problem that the Roma pose to 'us' (2006: 742)?" This exposes the underlying discriminatory practices that often coincide with top-down imposed policy and laws.

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10 <http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/staff/profiles/social-policy/sigona-nando.aspx>

## **Integration of Disciplinary Insights**

By exploring different policy-approaches the EU has deployed in order to promote the integration of Roma communities in the EU, we have in this research analyzed the vast and complex conflict of the EU's Roma 'paradox'. As the Roma are the largest and most discriminated minority in the EU, a lot of projects have been initiated with the purpose of improving their socio-economic status. Unfortunately, most attempts have not had their desired effect, and while the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion'<sup>11</sup> is about to end, the World Bank reports that Roma minorities are still estimated to have poverty rates “range between 4 and 10 times that of non-Roma in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Romania (2005: 3).” Furthermore, they have noted that “because of higher birth rates, the relative size of the Roma population is increasing across the region (2005: 3).” Here we can see the paradox becoming visible, as the Roma in the EU (and possibly outside the EU as well) are living within what Kamiski defines as a 'State of ambiguity' (1980: 11). The Roma, are living inside - on the EU's geographical territory - while at the same time they are being considered as outsiders. And even though officially most of them are as much European as the majorities claiming nation-states, they seem to be stuck in a vicious circle of discrimination, poverty and (self)exclusion. Building on this, our main research question formed around the topic of Roma integration in the EU, and reads as follows: “Why has EU policy that is aimed at improving the socioeconomic status of Roma communities in Europe largely failed? Combining and integrating the insights of both the disciplines of human geography and cultural anthropology, this chapter answers the above question and leads us to a more comprehensive understanding of the problem.

The used disciplines do not necessarily bring forward competing theories or insights, but rather adopt a different approach. We can speak of ‘narrow disciplinarity’ (Repko, 2012: 286), as both disciplines are considered social sciences, make use of qualitative research methods, and overlap on many levels. Most insights are based on reports, factual knowledge and the perceptions of people involved with policy making, or Roma themselves. Furthermore, both disciplines used for this research are interdisciplinary by nature and are comprised of many subfields from which knowledge can be drawn. Human geography for instance incorporates insights from sociological-, economic-, and political sciences. Anthropology in its turn uses historical-, geographical-, and psychological insights. The core of human geography is that the discipline looks at the world, its peoples, their communities and cultures, by emphasizing their relations of- and across space and place (200: 353-360) while the core of cultural anthropology is the study, description, analysis,

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11 <http://www.romadecade.org/>



interpretation and explanation of social and cultural variation in terms of similarities and differences. The geographical perspective investigates top-down driven processes and in the used literature for this paper, poses little questions about what Roma culture comprises of and how that influences their integration. The problems Roma face, and measures used to counter these, are taken as the departure point of much of the literature. Anthropology, being more bottom-up oriented, tries to establish a point of departure for determining who falls within the category of Roma and this means for their relationship to and integration in majority populations.

The most important insights from a human geographical perspective,<sup>12</sup> with an emphasis on migration and policy, are that there are often discrepancies between various levels of governments, and that there is often a poor coordination between the needs and preferences of both Roma communities as well as the non-Roma population. Furthermore, there seems to be little participation and trust for governments amongst Roma, and Roma are badly represented in policy making institutions. Although the EU has turned its attention towards Roma integration problems, it seems to do little to hold individual member states accountable for their poor treatment of Roma and there are no real consequences for member-states that do not comply with EU policy on Roma. Also little attention is given to the role discrimination and social exclusion play in perpetuating the problematic socioeconomic situation in which many Roma find themselves.

Cultural anthropological insights relate to what the idea of the 'Roma' entails and what the Roma in reality seem to be. It has shown that the Roma are a culturally heterogeneous group, and although being part of a community at certain levels, cultural and biological exchange have changed dynamics of different groups extensively. It can therefore be that some groups supposedly belonging to the Roma community have maintained relatively isolated lifestyles, while others have been sedentary and/or assimilated for centuries. Furthermore, not all Roma identify themselves as Roma, or identify with other Roma. Following this, it is in fact rather complicated to speak about the 'Roma' as a single cultural unit without adding any side-notes. Although academic literature acknowledges this variety amongst Roma, in policy they are often depicted as one group who face the same problems. The anthropological insights show us it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine who are the Roma, and what their needs and desires are because of their diverse nature and background. Behavior towards Roma is often based on very persistent negative stereotyping and ascribed cultural values that do not necessarily belonging to Roma culture. Beside this, culture in itself is a process of ever changing and adapting preferences and should be viewed in its context.

Although there are no terminological conflicts, we can identify a conflict of viewpoint. As

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12 As human geography, like cultural anthropology, is already an multidisciplinary subject by itself, we would like to stress that these topics have been emphasized in this thesis, but do not encompass the entire field of human geography.

we have noted before, while both cultural anthropology and human geography look at the Roma and their integration into majority societies, geography starts from the top on a macro level, while anthropology looks at the bottom, micro and local level. In policy there seems to be a gap between the two approaches. Therefore, our common ground can be found in the insight that knowledge of both top-down and bottom-up processes is needed to understand the factors impeding the improvement of Roma and socioeconomic situations the failure of policy. Furthermore, it is important that the two approaches meet at one point, and that shared concepts are identified.

Concepts and terminology that are important in this research are identity, culture and integration, since it has been shown that Roma identity and culture are not fully understood by policymakers, which in turn impedes integration. Given the discrimination Roma face as well as their status as outsiders indicate many people view them as being different from being 'European', despite Roma being a truly European minority. This presupposes there is something like a European 'identity', that does not incorporate the Roma. There seems to be a misconception on what a European culture and identity entails, as Roma are often perceived and treated as if they do not belong. Paradoxically, as Lee noted, the endurance of the different cultural aspects and identities between Roma and non-Roma, are also reinforced by opposition to their cultural expressions (Acton and Mundy 1997: 67-81).

The term 'integration' plays a vital role both between the two disciplines used, as well as in societal processes and policy circles there is a need for better integration. The current policies of the EU are mainly defined in terms of human rights and integration (World Bank, 2005: 18). They are both aimed at recognizing the Roma as equal members within society, but the human rights approach places greater emphasis on the possibility to maintain a lifestyle that is at odds with the rest of society. Regardless of this, many nation-states express objections towards Roma maintaining a traditional lifestyle, and adhere to policies that legally impede this. From this it follows that there is the need for EU policy objectives to be integrated in national policies, which in turn need to be implemented at the local level. In order to be successful these top-down policy measures need to be based on more bottom-up knowledge about preferences and experiences of Roma. If high dropout rates in school can be partially explained by discrimination in the labour market, for instance, a focus on improving education will not have the desired effect for welfare without an increase in opportunities.

So why has EU policy that is aimed at improving the socioeconomic status of Roma communities in Europe largely failed? We have shown that EU policies have proven ineffective for a number of reasons. First of all, there are discrepancies between EU initiatives and the actions taken by various individual member states. Also too little attention is given to the diversity of Roma

groups, as they are often perceived to be something or belong to a certain group – with specific, often discriminatory ascriptions – to which they in reality do not feel they belong. Often wrong assumptions are made concerning their preferences and culture and these seem to have a significant influence on the way both institutions and non-governmental organizations communicate with them. Often little is done to counteract discrimination, which reinforces the practice as well as the division between Roma and non-Roma. Partially because of this there is little participation by Roma in efforts by various institutions to improve their situation, and even when they do participate, they are often unable to influence policy due to power asymmetries or being outnumbered in democratic processes. Although all these reasons are major factors in why EU policy on improving Roma situations is failing, most fundamentally, our findings suggest that there is a basic lack of communication and understanding both between various levels of government, as well as between the people- and institutions that implement policy and the Roma communities and -individuals they are working for.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

This paper revolved around the question as to why EU policy is failing with regards to improvement of the socioeconomic status of the Roma, which we have answered aided by disciplinary insights from both cultural anthropology and human geography. In this conclusion, we take the opportunity to reflect on the process that led to the findings, the findings themselves, and to suggest some points of improvement that could be considered by policymakers and researchers.

Although the integration of disciplinary insights from human geography and cultural anthropology was sufficient to answer the research question, there are some limitations to this research. First of all, the scope of this literature analysis is limited as we did not have the resources and time to investigate all topics as deeply as we would have like to. For example, personal field-work experience with reference to the topic would have been preferred. Also, if this research would have or will be carried out on a larger scale, involving other disciplinary insights would be interesting. For example, an historian could present more data about Roma origin, which could be used to analyze their situation today. Also, researchers with more legal knowledge or more knowledge on policy in specific, could be of use to better analyze how certain policies and laws contradict each other, and how discrepancies between the EU and its member-states could be mended. However, we think the disciplines employed have offered enough insights to answer the issue presented in this paper, and in the following we discuss some valuable suggestions policymakers could consider.

First of all, an important issue for the failure of integration policy is that often there are other laws or policies that directly counteract Roma existence, integration and autonomy. Although our research focuses on those policies that are meant to benefit the Roma, there are many others that create difficulties for some Roma communities, for example laws that make it difficult for Roma to park their trailers in non-designated places (Okely and Houtman 2011). Also, as we have shown, certain laws or policies meant to improve Roma wellbeing, can in reality have the opposite effect (Sigona 2006). It is therefore important that policy is not used or applied to force the Roma into a certain role as - for example - nomadic people, but at the same time it is important that communities that do aspire nomadic lifestyles have a certain freedom to exploit this option.

Furthermore, on a policy level, the EU could develop a strategy to penalize individual nation-states that do not comply with EU policy on Roma minorities, as often nation-states apply their own laws and ignore EU policy. Another suggestion is that more resources could be made available at both the local- and the international level to report- and counter discrimination. Discrimination cannot be stopped with policies aimed at integration. Human rights need to be

upheld and there need to be efforts aimed at restoring trust between government institutions, policymakers and Roma communities. In order to achieve this they will need to learn about the culture and preferences of the groups they are working with, and empower and actively involve Roma in decision making-processes.

Finally, due to the complexity of this issue, we strongly suggest that more research has to be done on a local level. Policy is very organized from a top-down perspective, which after many attempts of implementation has shown not to be successful. There might be an overarching idea of who the Roma are, reality shows that many Roma communities have evolved and adjusted differently to their environment than others. As Pantea has emphasized “because of the large diversity among Roma the individual rather than the group should be ‘the unit of analysis’ (2013: 1729).”

As a last note, we would like to emphasize that it is important to realize that anthropologists (as well as human geographers) believe, based on what is known about the human capacity to function within any culture, that “present day inequalities between so-called ‘racial’ groups are not consequences of their biological inheritance but products of historical and contemporary social, economic, educational and political circumstances (Kottak 2012: 135).” Therefore, although both sedentary- and traveling societies will have to make efforts to overcome cultural clashes and disagreements, we argue that a Europe that includes Roma people could be possible.

*[“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail.”]*

- ‘The Union’s Values’, Article I-2 (ex Article 6(1)) of the Treaty on European Union<sup>13</sup>

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13 <http://www.eurotreaties.com/lisbontext.pdf>

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