

# MIGRATION, SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND IDENTITY ISSUES OF MACEDONIAN ROMA

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## ABSTRACT

### **Migration, Social Exclusion and Identity Issues of Macedonian Roma**

The key aspects of issues related to Roma identity are inevitably linked to traditional migration on one hand and the long-term exposure of Roma to discrimination and social exclusion on the other. Therefore, the debate about identity issues, which are also disputable within the framework of the Roma community, would not be feasible without a brief review of the historical patterns of the movement of the Roma, processes of change during the migration waves and preservation of awareness of belonging to a group with specific ethnic and cultural features.

The contemporary analysis of the identity issues of Roma in Macedonia has an ambitious goal: through the application of three approaches used in the research of Roma, to give an overview of the causes and effects of the socio-economic status of Roma, migration and issues related to identity.

KEYWORDS: Roma, migration, identity, social exclusion

## IZVLEČEK

### **Migracija, socialna izključenost in vprašanja identitete makedonskih Romov**

Ključni vidiki vprašanj, povezanih z identiteto Romov, so neizogibno povezani s tradicionalno migracijo na eni strani in dolgotrajno izpostavljenostjo Romov diskriminaciji in družbeni izključenosti na drugi. Zato debata o vprašanih identitete, ki so diskutabilna tudi v okviru romske skupnosti, ne bi bila mogoča brez kratkega pregleda zgodovinskih vzorcev o gibanju romske skupnosti, procesih sprememb v času valov migracije, pa tudi ohranjanja zavesti o pripadanju eni skupini s specifičnimi etničnimi in kulturnimi potezami.

Sodobna analiza vprašanj identitete Romov v Makedoniji ima ambiciozen cilj: skozi aplikacijo treh pristopov uporabljenih v raziskovanju Romov želi dati pregled vzroka in učinkov socio-ekonomskega statusa Romov, migracije in vprašanj povezanih z identiteto.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: Romi, migracija, identiteta, socialna izključenost

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## INTRODUCTION

The intensive migration movements within Europe have emphasized the need for an analysis of issues related to identity. In response to the primary question of “who are we?”, peoples or nations often give the traditional answers that have the most meaning to them. They define themselves on the basis of ancestors, religion, language, history, values, customs and institutions. They identify with cultural groups: tribes, ethnic groups, religious communities, nations and civilizations at the broadest level (Huntington, 1996).

The postmodern perspective convoluted the theoretical analysis of identity by insisting on a plurality of identities that distinguish individuals from others. An individual identity depends on a defining source as well as the context in which it is constructed. The perception that individuals or groups have of themselves differs from the perception that other groups or individuals have of them. The discourse involves debates about multiple identities. “Adopting the internal plurality of identities and plural forms of individuality is a necessary prerequisite for life in a plural society, which does not entail the need to subordinate oneself or draw the lines of demarcation between oneself and others, or within oneself. We need internal plurality in order to be able to handle the controversial systems of sense” (Ule 2000: 307).

The issue of identity comes up whenever Roma are the focus of debate. According to Märginean et al. (2001), “there are three important approaches in the Roma research field: (1) the socio-economic perspective, which is based on the assumption that Roma people live in poverty and have low life quality. The indicators include income level, professional qualifications, participation on the labour market, educational level, health protection, and living conditions. (2) The institutional perspective. This approach raises aspects related to the institutionalized discrimination of the Roma in relation to public authorities and services. Discriminatory behaviours appear against a background of negative prejudice and stereotypes. (3) The identity perspective focuses on the identification of the characteristics of Roma ethnic identity; on one hand the analyses focus on a strictly cultural component and on the other hand the studies analyze the social component regarding the manner of living together.”

The issue of identity gains importance when Roma are considered as a socially excluded group. Actually, when Roma are subjects of migration, all three of the above-mentioned approaches should be taken into consideration. And the issue of identity cannot be understood in debates about migration without the aforementioned historical perspective and a discussion of the contemporary socioeconomic position of Roma within Macedonian society.

## MACEDONIAN ROMA IN NUMBERS

In contemporary Macedonian society, each ethnic group has its own indigenous position, determined by the tradition, culture, establishment, and social acceptance of the group. The demographic structure of population indicates that the Republic of Macedonia is a multi-ethnic society with 64.18% Macedonians, 25.17% Albanians, 3.85% Turks, 2.66% Roma, 1.78% Serbs, 0.84% Bosnians, 0.48% Vlachs and 1.04% declared as other nationalities (53,879 persons) (State Statistical Office 2003). The percentage of Roma population in the Republic of Macedonia in 1994 was 2.20%, which indicates a significant growth in a short period of time of 0.46% compared to 2002. Nevertheless, these official figures (Open Society Institute 2008) have been disputed by the representatives of Roma communities. The formal representatives of Roma point out that the numbers are not realistic, especially bearing in mind the fact that there are still some unregistered (without country of residence) persons within these communities. According to the Commission of European Communities (2009), there are between 3000 to 5000 unregistered persons in Macedonia, most of them of Roma background. These people lack personal documents such as birth certificates and health insurance or employment cards which are necessary in order to collect benefits from social security, healthcare and other social services. There are also some 2,500 Kosovo Roma living in Macedonia as refugees.

The population of the Republic of Macedonia is unevenly distributed, with more than one third of its citizens living in the capital city Skopje. This also applies to distribution of ethnic Roma, where 23,475 (43.6% of all Roma) live in Skopje, and more precisely, 13,342 (24.8%) live in the municipality of Shuto Orizari. This municipality is the largest settlement of Roma in Europe. "Roma in Shuto Orizari have achieved certain minority rights owing to their compact (some say segregated) residence, most notably in a higher degree of political participation in local affairs" (Open Society Institute 2008). The uniqueness of this community lies in the fact that it is the only Roma-governed community in Europe. Despite the political integration, data from Shuto Orizari indicate a low level of social and economic integration. According to the OSI report from 2007, Shuto Orizari, the largest Roma settlement, "has no large businesses and unemployment is widespread." Unfortunately this trend is even higher in other Roma communities. One estimate shows that around 20 per cent of Roma have regular employment, while the rest are unemployed and are involved in unregulated trade. The main occupations are petty trading, handicrafts and self-employment. In general, Roma occupy the lowest positions on the labour market. Most of the employees in the communal hygiene sector in Skopje are Roma. Roma women often work as cleaning women in private apartments in middle-class households in the city of Skopje. Roma also engage in collecting recycling materials. There are no discernible patterns of seasonal work for the Skopje Roma (Open Society Institute 2008). This community, the largest organized Roma community, is often a testing ground for various community-based programs.

Other communities with a high concentration of Roma include: Bitola 2613, Gostivar 2237, Vinica 1230, Debar 1079, Kichevo 1630, Kochani 1951, Kumanovo 4256, Prilep 4433, Tetovo 2357, Shtip 2195, Centar 977, Cair 3240, Djorxe Petrov 1249, Gazi Baba 2082 and others (State Statistical Office 2003).

Based on other indicators, Roma communities have the highest concentration of young people and are the fastest growing ethnic communities in the country. Most Roma practice Islam and are bilingual. They attend schools in the Macedonian language.

## **PATHS OF ROMA MIGRATION IN MACEDONIA**

There is little historical written data on how Roma settled in Europe or more specifically in Macedonia. It is reasonable to believe that the process of migration of Roma from the Indian subcontinent was long and evolved in phases. On this migration path Roma travelled from Kabulistan, Iran, Armenia, Phrygia, and Laconia, from where they reached Byzantium. On another migration path Roma travelled through the Arab countries, from where a small portion of Roma reached the banks of the river Nile in Egypt and later began settling on the Peloponnesian peninsula (Djuric and Mefailleskoro-Demir 2005). The first record of Roma settling the Balkans was in the middle of the 11th century (Vukanovic 1983) but a larger wave of migration took place in the middle of the 13th century, during the rule of the Serbian King Stefan Dechanski. However, the most significant migration of Roma happened during the Ottoman Empire. The status of Roma within the Ottoman Empire did not differ from the other subjected groups, where the differences were mainly based on religious affiliation.

The Second World War can be considered the most devastating period for Roma in Europe. The Fascists were promoting a campaign of sterilization and eradication of Roma, and according to some estimates around 400,000 European Roma were killed in concentration camps (Djuric and Mefailleskoro-Demir 2005). In Macedonia, Roma were victims of genocide and extermination alongside the Jews and Macedonian and Serbian Orthodox Christians (Savich 2010).

After the end of the Second World War in Macedonia, which was now part of the new Yugoslavia, Roma started developing permanent residences, mostly on the outskirts of larger cities. The demand for a workforce gave the opportunity for employment of Roma, mainly in low-skill jobs in the industrialization process. A natural disaster, Skopje's earthquake in 1963, contributed to establishment of the Shuto Orizari settlement. This settlement was primarily intended to be a compound for the victims of

the earthquake, but soon after the earthquake Skopje experienced an influx of internal migrants. During this period Roma began settling in the area of Shuto Orizari as well as in several other municipalities in Skopje.

The late 1960s are marked with labour migration of people from Southern Europe, including Yugoslavia, toward Western Europe. A significant number of Roma migrants participated in this labour force. The economic and political crisis in Yugoslavia in the mid 1980s caused a number of Roma to seek asylum in Germany and Scandinavia. Also, the phenomenon of trafficking in Roma children originating in Macedonia, was recorded during this period. Italy became a country of destination for children who were forced into begging and petty thievery.

The "Schengen wall" visa regime introduced by the European Union in the mid 1990s stimulated migration. Also, due to the economic and social changes in Macedonia a large number of Roma who were employed as unskilled workers lost their jobs and were forced into casual migration. Mostly in order to do small-scale trading, some Roma travelled back and forth to countries like Bulgaria and Turkey as well as to the organized markets in various cities throughout Macedonia. The end of the wars in ex-Yugoslavia (2001) enabled the free movement of people and brought about work-related seasonal migration.

Currently, since the (partial) fall of the Schengen wall in 2009, the practice of asylum-seeking migration to European Union countries has reappeared. Roma from Macedonia and Serbia represent a large segment within these waves of asylum seekers.

## **DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF ROMA IDENTITY**

The issue of Roma identity is inevitably linked with the long history of movement from one place to another. Ethnic groups undergo many transformations during the migration process and adopt multiple identities due to the interactions of individuals from different groups. A study of Roma in Eastern Europe points out that the "ethnic identity of the entire East European Romany population is multi-dimensionally diverse and difficult to define" (Barany 1998: 313). This analysis will mainly focus on the national, ethnic and cultural identity of Roma in Macedonia.

### **National identity**

The basic issue of Roma identity is connected to their (lack of) national identity. The lack of construct of Roma national identity is mainly due to the long discontinuation of contact with India as their country of origin. This led to difficulties of identification with their long-lost homeland. The initial activity for unification of Roma began in 1878, when Roma from Germany, Spain, Italy and Russia formed an organization for protection of their interests and freedom of trade and travel. Soon after, similar initiatives appeared in England, Bulgaria, Romania, USA, Serbia, etc. Almost one century after the initial activities, the First World Roma Congress was held in London with the main goal of spiritual identification of Roma (Kenrick 1971). The basic gains of the Congress were in acceptance of "Roma" as a common name, the adoption of a common flag and anthem. For the first time at this Congress a connection was made to their homeland, India. In 1977, the Human Rights Commission in Geneva adopted a resolution in which they verify Roma as an Indian historical, cultural, national, and linguistic minority that enjoys the protection and rights declared in the United Nations Documents (Djuric and Mefailleskoro-Demir 2005).

However, some ethnic groups in Macedonia, such as Egyptians, who share a number of similar identity features with Roma ethnic groups, deny an affiliation with Roma identity and a connection to India. The impact of residing in Egypt probably had stronger influence on their identity. That is, in some parts of Macedonia, the connection of this group with Egyptian identity is generated from one of the varia-

tions used to represent Roma. Linguistic support for this identity is found in the English word "Gypsy", the French "gitan" as well as the word "guptzi" used as a synonym for Roma in the colloquial language of some Macedonian dialects. The adoption of this identity in Macedonia had strong political impact on a particular group that insists on being identified as Egyptians in the official census. (State Statistical Office 2003)

## Ethnic identity

Contemporary academic and political debates include discussions of issues related to group identity based on ethnic identity, especially in the case of social exclusion and discrimination. The concept of ethnicity entered into the sociological and political discourses partly as a reaction to observed racial disparities. It is often seen as justified, because in a way it avoids biological determination and application in relation to the self-defining of the members. According to Vermeulen and Slijper (2000), ethnic identity is understood as social identity that is characterized by belief in a common culture, shared history and common ancestors. Devic (2003) believes that ethnic identity is the main basis for political solidarity recognized at the institutionalizations of all levels of government, and that groupings based on ethnic and cultural lines can create territorial concentrated interest groups. Thus, an ethnic community is defined as a population whose members have a feeling of belonging, share common ancestors and a common cultural heritage or traditions, and is recognized by others as such.

Often, ethnicity is related to the particular situation. People can have different ethnic identities in various situations. It is possible simultaneously to be English, British and European, stressing one of these identities more in various aspects of everyday life or in various periods. One can declare differently depending on the situation or as a reaction to the conduct of others. This is evident in the case of the European Roma population. Moreover, a study of the Roma in Eastern Europe points out that the "ethnic identity of the entire East European Romany population is multi-dimensionally diverse and difficult to define" (Barany 1998: 313). The term ethnicity is almost always connected to minorities, not with majorities. Some connect this with the common experience shared by minorities regarding the racism or discrimination they have been subjected to. Nonetheless, this stand neglects discrimination that occurs within communities, such as discrimination based on gender differences (Yuval-Davis and Anthias 1992).

Basically, ethnic differences are not constituted on material inequalities. The data on people's occupation, income, wealth, or housing conditions do not reveal ethnic affiliation. Socio-economic analyses are not used in the constitution of ethnic identity, except in the case of extreme segregation, when this type of information offers certain conclusions. But even in such cases few will argue that these characteristics are in their essence 'ethnicity' in the way that is usual for socio-economic analysis (Geoff 2000). Nonetheless, in the case of the Roma, socio-economic analysis is commonly used in the construction of Roma identity. The traditional image of the Roma is associated with the nomadic lifestyle, engaging in harvesting activities, musicians, crafts such as blacksmithing, etc. Occupational activity influenced the construction of particular group identities and stratification within Roma subgroups, dividing them into "kovachi"<sup>1</sup>, "chergari"<sup>2</sup>, "jambasi"<sup>3</sup> etc.

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1 Blacksmiths

2 The poorest Roma with a nomadic lifestyle

3 Horse breeders

## Cultural identity

Lofgren defines culture as “a common world of experiences, values and meanings that constitutes certain social group”. The word “common”, according to Vermeulen and Slijper (2000), perhaps seems problematic, because culture is very often incompletely conceptualized by many political philosophers and replaced with cultural, which refers to a vision that denotes cultures as strictly defined, homogeneous, integrated and relatively distinct units. Culture is very often associated with what is called essentialism, and refers to the idea that culture has essence, character and even a soul. Culture has the capacity to absorb new ‘foreign’ elements which are accepted as own character features. However, culture is essentially unchanging.

Culture within the culturalist vision is treated mainly as autonomous field independent of political and economic structures. Within the conventional expression of the national government it is expected that a ‘people’ who are governed by state institution are largely culturally homogeneous and have a strong common linguistic, religious and symbolic identity (McCrone 2000). On the contrary, in the case of the Roma in Macedonia, the discontinued contact with the homeland, frequent migration waves and different cultural influences from the countries of residence have dissolved the homogeneity of Roma culture. The division into clans based on family ties, profession, dialects and way of life (sedentary or nomadic) introduces heterogeneous elements and, as some authors point out, has contributed to the diversity of Roma culture (Chiriac 2007). In the long migration process the Roma have absorbed a number of elements from cultures they have come in touch with such as Persian, Armenian, Arab, Greek and Old Slavic (Djuric and Mefailleskoro-Demir 2005). Although language, religion, myths and music represent a significant future of their culture, they have been subjected to constant change under the influence of the dominant culture in the countries that they have passed through or resided in for a longer period of time (Mefailleskoro-Demir 2002).

This situation is present in different cities in Macedonia where Roma have established communities. For instance, a large number of young Roma from Prilep do not speak the Romany language, and as a result of this, the elders of the community have set requirements for the local authorities to introduce Roma language and culture as an elective subject in primary education (Donevska et al. 2010). In addition to shared language, religion is another cultural element that often plays an important part in defining identity and maintaining group cohesion. Similar to Romany language, Roma religion is not consistent with in Roma communities. Generally, the Roma have adopted the religion of the mainstream society (Chiriac 2007). The vast number of Roma in Macedonia traditionally practiced Islam or Orthodox Christianity, but recently there is a noticeable growth of Roma attendance at some of the Protestant Churches.

## SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND MIGRATION OF ROMA

The frequent migrations of Roma are a strong indicator of their unfavourable social and economic position in Macedonian society. These trends of migration of Roma are generally connected to the inability to secure the basic means of existence in their place of residence. Also, migration is closely connected with the treatment and acceptance of the Roma in the permanent and/or temporary place of residence. Frequently, due to discrimination experienced in the society, Roma have been exposed to ghettoization and harassment from dominant groups and local authorities. Unfortunately, social perceptions of the problems associated with Roma impose a distorted viewpoint, locating the reasons for the unfavourable situation within the Roma community and their subculture rather than the society (Donevska et al. 2010). On the contrary, Roma should be recognized as long-standing ethnic minorities with a history of discrimination (Boswell 2005).

Poverty and social exclusion are crucial factors for migration of Roma in contemporary Macedonian

society. This corresponds to the claims of the German refugee rights organization Pro Asyl, according to which the main reason for the increase number in asylum applications from Serbia and Macedonia is “the extreme poverty and continued exclusion suffered in particular by Roma in these states... Roma communities in the Balkans and much of Europe face inadequate housing conditions, with widespread discrimination leading to forced evictions, lack of access to social housing and underemployment” (quoted in Angelos 2011).

## Indicators for Roma exclusion in Macedonia

Roma migration is closely connected to experiencing different aspects of social exclusion<sup>4</sup> in Macedonian society. This can be verified through numerous indicators.

The position of Roma in Macedonia has varied throughout history. It probably improved most in the former Yugoslavia, when many Roma were integrated into society as unskilled labourers. Unfortunately, few took advantage of the era of free education in order to improve their position in society. The transitional period cast many to the outskirts of society as superfluous remnants of the unskilled labour force. The activity rate among Roma is 50.4%, whereas the unemployment rate among Roma is 78.5 % and they are represented at only 0.42% within the structure of the public sector. The fact is that poverty among Roma is higher than it is among other groups and is based on a number of accumulated factors that are incorporated in the history, tradition and their permanent social exclusion. However, the participation of Roma ethnic communities in the informal economy is quite high, indicating limited employment opportunities in public administration (Gerovska-Mitev et al. 2007). Roma have the lowest incomes and the highest mortality rate. An estimated two thirds or 63% of Roma households live below the poverty line. (Ibid.: 23)

The statistical figures on the level of education among Roma have been traditionally low. According to the census data from 2002, 23% of Roma are without education, 28.6% with incomplete primary education, 37.4% primary, 9.7% secondary, 0.2% post-secondary and 0.2% higher secondary, faculty or university (State Statistical Office 2003). In 2002, over half or 51.8% of the adult Roma population had either no education at all or had not completed even elementary education, as compared to only 18.0 % for the total population. Roma children have a lower literacy rate and have a low rate of inclusion, attendance, and enrolment in primary (61%), and secondary education (17%) (Commission of the European Communities 2009).

On average, the Roma in the Republic of Macedonia have a younger population compared to the average age of population. Owing to different fertility and mortality rates compared to the national average, there is a higher proportion of Roma children in their groups, and a lower proportion of older persons. The reproduction rate among Roma is twice as high as the national average, but the mortality rate among children is twice as high as other ethnic groups. Life expectancy is shorter and Roma are more prone to chronic illness (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy 2005).

The living conditions are below the standard level. The vast number of Roma (95%) are mostly

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4 The concept of social exclusion, especially in a European context, has been used since 1970, primarily for the purpose of systematic analysis that will help in planning social policy (Atkinson 2000). Being socially “excluded” means to be socially ‘separate’ from other groups and lifestyles. In order to understand social exclusion it is necessary to have the understanding of social division that produces social exclusion (Geoff 2000). A deep penetration into social exclusion reveals that exclusion is a political acronym associated with scarcity and is often used as a synonym for poverty and deprivation. Poverty and unemployment are usually pointed to as sources of exclusion. But exclusion cannot be reduced only to these two sources; rather it incorporates factors such as health, education, income, access to services, housing, debt, quality of life, dignity and autonomy, which interacts with various forms and degrees of social exclusion. Economic, social, socio-political background and origin are associated sources of exclusion.

concentrated in poorer and suburban areas. In the area of housing, Roma are mostly facing problems of unclear ownership status of property located outside of urbanized planning zones, lack of basic infrastructure, and lack of access to services (Lakinska 2000).

Roma in Macedonia are faced with conditions of direct or indirect discrimination. This situation is reflected in numerous areas due to which Roma are not in position to fully integrate into the society.<sup>5</sup>

## Social inclusion measures for Roma in Macedonia

The problem of poverty and social exclusion is causing the emigration of Macedonian Roma to EU countries. Since the fall of the Schengen wall in 2009 this trend has increased at an alarming rate. In response to this trend the European Commission warned Serbia and Macedonia that the asylum increase puts the Balkan visa-free scheme in jeopardy (Jovanovska et al. 2010) and required that the respective countries take appropriate preventive measures. The second aspect that needs urgent action is the immigration process: Macedonia hosts nearly 1,600 refugees, mostly of Roma ethnicity, who left their homes as a result of the 1999 conflict in Kosovo (UNHCR 2011).

The need to implement measures for the social inclusion of Roma in Macedonia has been recognized in the past. A series of strategic activities, programs and projects has been carried out in the last two decades aiming at the development of the capacities of Roma communities, utilization of human capital and reduction of social exclusion. The focus was generally placed on the process of strengthening Roma communities through the implementation of programs for the provision of support to Roma in the educational process.

The Decade for Roma Inclusion (2005–2015) and the National Strategy for Roma are the main strategic documents that focus on Roma inclusion in Macedonia. Their main goals are focused on empowerment and integration of the Roma population into the social and economic life, decrease of poverty and marginalization of the Roma population as well as the continuous development of Roma communities.<sup>6</sup>

In this regard FOSIM played a key role in developing and strengthening the human and social capital of the Roma population, primarily by developing offspring organizations. Their work with the Roma is based on a strategic approach focused on developing programs, establishing the structure, staffing for independent work and ensuring sustainability.

## CONCLUSION

Recognition of the cause and effect connections between the phenomena of migration, identity and social exclusion of Roma in general, and more specifically in the Republic of Macedonia, poses the need for attention in approaching and resolving these issues. The state should be responsive to the requests for programs directed toward the fight against discrimination and protection of the rights of smaller, socially excluded ethnic groups such as Roma. Regardless of the number of activities undertaken, ad-

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5 E.g. the police do not respond to fights against Roma, some local policemen are constantly harassing them but there is no effect from reporting the policemen, cases have been reported of prohibited access to night clubs, swimming pools and restaurants, Roma are restrained from court procedures (Ministry of Labour and Social Policy 2005).

6 Programs implemented by the Ministry of Education and Science targeting Roma are focusing on: scholarships for continuing education of the Roma children, organizing courses for the teachers, training sessions aimed at preventing a large portion of the children leaving the school at early age, organizing after-school classes. Programs implemented by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy focus on: opening of day-care centres for children on the street, supporting activities of some NGOs working with Roma children, helping in securing free educational materials, provision of free meals at schools, and provision of social benefits.

addressing the issue of the exclusion of Roma requires continuous and systematic efforts of governmental and nongovernmental institutions. The success of the policies, programs and services depends on the active participation of Roma in the process of their identification (Trbojevik 2007). Also, it is important for the services to be localized and adapted to the population living in a certain area as well as to be participative.

The social inclusion of Roma should incorporate “the principle of ‘explicit but not exclusive targeting’, which is based on the belief that without a specific Roma target, the policies, programs and projects may not reach the Roma population. On the other hand, policies and programs exclusively aimed at the Roma may be segregating and, as a result, disapproved of by society as a whole. It is important to ensure that the general services are not exclusive. Explicit targeting means that policies must be sensitive to the culture and characteristics of the Roma population, and must always empower the beneficiaries to gain access to general programs. A good balance between Roma access to broader programs and to programs adapted to those who cannot gain access to general resources is the most adequate approach” (Report on the 2nd European Roma Summit 2010).

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## POVZETEK

### MIGRACIJA, SOCIALNA IZKLJUČENOST IN VPRAŠANJA IDENTITETE MAKEDONSKIH ROMOV

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Članek predstavlja pregled procesov migracij Romov v Republiki Makedoniji. Besedilo želi predstaviti fenomene povezane z migrantskim gibanjem Romov s pomočjo treh pomembnih perspektiv, ki so karakteristično uporabljene pri raziskovanju Romov: socio-ekonomski pogled, institucionalni pogled in identitetni pogled. Celostni pristop prinaša možnost za raziskavo in identifikacijo vzročne povezave med pojavom revščine in socialno izključenostjo Romov in migracijo, pa tudi njihov vpliv na vprašanja identitete.

Članek podaja demografske podatke o Romih v Makedoniji, pa tudi kratek zgodovinski pregled o poteh gibanja Romov v Makedonijo in iz nje. Analiza kaže, da so v procesu migracije skupine Romov podvržene različnim transformacijam in zaradi interakcij s posamezniki in kulturami različnih skupin sprejemajo multiple identitete. Študija o Romih v vzhodni Evropi pokaže, da je »etnična identiteta celotne vzhodnoevropske romske populacije multidimenzionalno raznolika in jo je težko definirati« (Barany 1998: 313).

Posebna pozornost je namenjena vprašanju nacionalne, etnične in kulturne identitete Romov v Makedoniji. Ta vprašanja postanejo pomembna, ker so rezultat pomanjkanja konsenza tako v znanstvenih krogih, kakor tudi v romski skupnosti. Temeljno vprašanje romske identitete je povezano z njihovo nacionalno identiteto. Pravzaprav je pomanjkanje oblikovanja nacionalne identitete Romov v veliki meri posledica dolge prekinitve stikov z Indijo kot njihovo državo izvora. To je privedlo do težav pri identifikaciji Romov s svojo dolgo izgubljeno domovino, pa tudi do razlik temelječih na njihovem kraju bivanja in na delitvi na klane, utemeljeni na dominantni poselitvi.

Članek želi postaviti migracijska gibanja makedonskih Romov v sodobno perspektivo in jih povezati s fenomenom revščine in socialnega izključevanja. Pogoste migracije Romov so močan kazalnik njihovega težkega družbenega in ekonomskega položaja v makedonski družbi. Ti trendi migracije Romov so na splošno povezani z nezmožnostjo zagotavljanja osnovnih sredstev za življenje v kraju bivanja in prepoznanimi primeri diskriminacije in stigmatizacije. Vprašanje socialne izključenosti in migracije Romov je v zadnjih dveh desetletjih v središču interesa oblasti, kajti Romi predstavljajo hitro rastočo etnično skupino v Republiki Makedoniji (2.66% vsega prebivalstva). Kljub uradnemu priznanju in prepoznavanju problemov pa ukrepi, ki jih je v tem času sprejela država, ne dosejajo pričakovanih rezultatov.