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Abstract

Over more than three decades since the fall of state socialism in Central and Eastern Europe, the position of the Roma in the region is rather ambivalent. Numerous European institutions, inter-governmental development agencies, national governments and European and national/local non-governmental organizations are involved in a pan-European effort to turn the tide for the Roma. The paper argues that although there are numerous efforts to implement development policies and programs to bridge the gap between Roma and non-Roma, there is still a gap between the discourses and inclusion policies developed at the European and national level and those at the sub-national level. There is a tendency to move away from the framing of Roma as an "at risk" group to seeing them as "dangerous people", who pose threats to the security of others. The paper uses two sets of data sources. First, it employs a secondary analysis of three recent databases: – SocioRoMap – Sociographic mapping of Roma communities in Romania for community-level monitoring of changes regarding Roma integration (2017) and two surveys conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2011 and 2016). The second data source is based on semi-structured interviews carried out in several research projects that the author has participated in over the last few years. In conclusion, I argue that the two political projects of institutional developmentalism and securitization of the lifestyle of the poorest Roma can coexist, but the abandonment of the former can lead to complex social problems in the future.

Keywords: public policies, Roma, securitization, institutional developmentalism.

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Introduction

In 2023, the European Union (EU) celebrated 30 years since its launch of the Copenhagen criteria, meaning the set of rules and conditions to which any country wishing to become a member of the EU must conform. The Copenhagen criteria adopted during the European Council meeting in June 1993 set out three pillars (European Council, 1993): a) "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, *human rights and respect for and protection of minorities"*; b) "a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU" and c) "the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including the capacity to effectively implement the rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law (the "*acquis*"), and adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union". The 1993 European Council's Copenhagen criteria (along with the European Council held in Madrid in 1995), have set the prerequisites of EU expansion to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) countries, former members of the socialist bloc. Because of the precarious social, economic and political position of the Roma in the region, plagued by historical discrimination and subordination, EU and national governments in CEE have paid special attention to the plight of the Roma in CEE over the last three decades, giving rise to a kind of **institutional developmentalism** (van Baar, 2019), through which numerous institutions, both at national and European level, have been established and/or made responsible to implement public and social policies to bridge the gaps between the Roma and the majority populations in the CEE countries.

However, after two decades of national (and a decade of European policies), the situation of the Roma minority in the region has not improved substantially. Roma are more likely to be unemployed, to not have access to (quality) public services – education, health, housing – compared to non-Roma. Poverty rates for Roma are higher than for any group in Europe, with most of Europe's 10–12 million Roma living below the poverty line, with a lower life expectancy than the majority populations (Zamfir, & Zamfir, 1993; Zamfir, & Preda, 2002; Ringold, 2000; Ringold, Orenstein, & Wilkens, 2005; UNDP, 2002, 2005, 2006; FRA, & UNDP, 2012; FRA, 2016).

Moreover, the social, economic, and political transformations of the last two decades (the financial crisis, the austerity policies that affected the capacities of public institutions with a role in social inclusion, the growth of far-right movements, the Covid-19 pandemic) had an impact on the social (and political) representations regarding (some parts of) the Roma minority. Among political and public/social policy decision-makers, there's a notable shift in how the (poorest of the) Roma are perceived. They're no longer seen solely as a vulnerable or at-risk group; rather, they're viewed as individuals posing risks themselves. These representations have spurred actions such as isolation, segregation, surveillance, and relocation away from gentrified and profitable urban areas. This tendency is especially noticeable, even in the handling of the recent SARS-CoV-2 virus crisis (Berescu,

Alexandrescu, & Anghel, 2021). Thus, two seemingly contradictory discourses and models of practice appear: on the one hand, a discourse of development – in which the Roma are primarily seen as being highly exposed to social exclusion, precariousness, vulnerability and (in work) poverty, and on the other hand, a discourse of securitization, in which Roma are considered "dangerous persons", public or health threats to the security of others.

Framing the most impoverished Roma as "dangerous individuals" who pose threats to the safety of neighboring citizens, whether in terms of public health or physical security, has increasingly justified practices of eviction and relocation over the last two decades. These practices involve relocating numerous Roma households to the outskirts of cities, often onto former industrial sites, near landfill sites, water treatment facilities, or simply to areas lacking access to essential public services and utilities. The present article addresses the question of how we can account for the two types of discourses and practices which appear, *prima facie*, to be contradictory?

The article is divided into five sections. In the first section, I summarize the development of policies addressed to the Roma minority in the last three decades, efforts that were supported by a kind of institutional developmentalism. In the second section I present the methodology and data sources used in the article. In the third section, I discuss the disproportionate effects of the (neoliberal) transitions to the market economy on Roma and the evolution of some social, economic, educational, occupational, health and housing indicators. Although the evolution for some indicators has shown progress over the past decade, the gap between Roma and non-Roma has remained quite high. The way in which the discourse about Roma changes from persons at risk to "dangerous persons" who require measures of isolation, segregation, surveillance, relocation from the profitable spaces of the cities, is analyzed in the fourth section. In conclusion, I argue that the two political projects of institutional developmentalism and securitization of the lifestyle of the poorest Roma can coexist, but the abandonment of the former can lead to complex social problems in the future.

Three decades of Roma-related public policies

Over the three decades since the collapse of state socialism, the position of the Roma minority in Romania (as well as in the other CEE states) is rather ambivalent. On the one hand, European institutions, inter-governmental organizations (such as the World Bank and United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe), international human and minority rights organizations, national and local NGOs and government agencies are involved in projects that target the Roma, with the aim of improving their well-being in Europe. In the last three decades, the Roma have become the target of EU social inclusion programs (European Commission, 2004, 2003, 2010), The Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) –

a project of the Open Society Foundation and the World Bank (Haupert, 2007; Meyer, 2010; Reid, 2010; National Agency for Roma, 2011; Moisă *et al.,* 2013), national Roma social inclusion strategies devised by the CEE governments, human development initiatives initiated by UNDP and UNICEF (UNDP, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2011; UNICEF, 2011; UNICEF, 2012), empowerment initiatives of local and transnational NGOs such as the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) and European Roma Grassroots Organizations (ERGO), and of private philanthropic foundations such as the Open Society Foundations. More recently, the governments of Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, through Norwegian and EEA grants, as well as the government of Switzerland,[2] have opened separate funding lines on Roma inclusion, in several EU states.

On the other hand, academic and policy-oriented research indicates a decrease in the social and economic indicators for the Roma minority, at least in the first part of the transition to the market economy (Zamfir, & Zamfir, 1993; Ringold, 2000; UNDP, 2002; Zamfir, 2002; Revenga, Ringold, & Tracy, 2002; Ringold, Orenstein, & Wilkens , 2005; Tarnovschi *et al.*, 2012; World Bank, 2014; Rauh, 2018). In Romania, the values for the basic indicators of human development showed a gap, compared to the non-Roma population. Recent research has shown that the at-risk-of-poverty rate is almost three times higher (84%) for Roma than among their non-Roma neighbors, and almost four times higher than the nationally calculated at-risk-of-poverty rate (22%). The share of Roma households facing severe material deprivation in the early 2010s was 90%, almost three times higher than the national share (32%)(?) (World Bank, 2014). At the same time, the life expectancy among the Roma minority population is lower than that of non-Roma (UNDP, 2002, 2006), and they are more likely to be unemployed, and to not have access to (quality) public services – education, health, housing – compared to the non-Roma population (FRA, 2016, 2014b, 2014a; European Commission, 2014; Brüggemann, & Friedman, 2017).

The involvement of European institutions and intergovernmental development organizations, non-governmental organizations at the international and European level, as well as national governments in the pan-European effort to improve the situation of the Roma is due to the political, social, economic, and cultural transformations that have taken place in the former socialist states. The fall of state socialism, the neoliberal restructuring of states and economies, combined with the rise of nationalist movements in the CEE in the early 1990s (which also affected members of the Roma minority) attracted the attention of intergovernmental and non-governmental human rights organizations that took up the cause of the Roma declaring it a "humanitarian emergency" (European Commission, 2003). At the same time, the involvement of intergovernmental development organizations, European institutions and national governments have given rise to a kind of "institutional

[2] Based on cooperation programs between the governments of the mentioned states and the government of Romania.

developmentalism" (van Baar, 2019), through which the abovementioned political actors have launched development policies and initiatives in the fields of social inclusion, human and minority rights, empowerment, community participation, through which the Roma were supposed to "catch up" with the non-Roma.

Thus, if at the beginning of the 1990s, at both European and national levels, there were no public or social policies specifically addressed to the Roma minority, starting from this period, we see an intensification of working groups, organizations, public policy strategies aimed at implementing, monitoring, and assessing the programs and policies addressed to the Roma. In the early 1990s, both the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) began to support the publication of extensive reports on the situation of Roma in the region (Merlingen, 2003; Guglielmo, & Waters 2005). The two institutions have also developed their own internal bodies dedicated to Roma issues. In 1994, the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) inaugurated a focal point for Roma and Sinti affairs within the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Subsequently, in 1998, the OSCE established the role of advisor specifically dedicated to Roma and Sinti issues across the OSCE region (OSCE, 2008). The Council of Europe granted a coordinator position on Roma issues in 1994, and established a group of specialists on Roma, Gypsies and Nomads (travelers) in 1995, later renamed MS-S-Rom (Committee of Experts on Roma and Nomads), and also initiated the European Forum for Roma and Nomads in 2004. In the early 2010s, a working group dedicated to the Roma minority (*Roma Task Force*) was established, which has the status of a group consulted by the European Commission. Moreover, at the beginning of the millennium, the Roma came under the attention of the World Bank and the United Nations through a series of reports (Revenga, Ringold, & Tracy, 2002; Ringold, 2000; Ringold, Orenstein, & Wilkens, 2005; UNDP, 2002, 2005). When answering the question of "who are the Roma", the World Bank will respond in an extensive report of its own, with "the largest and **most vulnerable minority** in Europe" (Ringold, Orenstein, & Wilkens, 2005, 3), while the UNDP (2002; 2005; 2006; 2011) has reiterated the status of most of Roma as being "at risk" or as a "vulnerable group", for which specific policies aimed at their needs had to be developed.

The growing attention towards the social, economic, political, and cultural situation of Roma has not been limited only to European institutions, intergovernmental organizations, and transnational NGOs. From the early 1990s, national governments in CEE have developed legislative and policy initiatives aimed at safeguarding human and minority rights, while establishing (sub)national frameworks allowing for Roma participation in policy decisions that targeted them. Studies such as those by Dediu (2007) and Anghel (2019), synthetize the stages of public and social policies designed for the Roma in the last three decades. In the first stage (1990-1997), measures were taken to establish institutional mechanisms for the democratization and stabilization of CEE states, and to address the inter-ethnic conflicts that marked the beginning of the transition to

the market economy (Sterbling, 1995; Hajek, 1998; Merlingen, 2003). In this first stage, the governance of national minority issues was reduced to a set of tools and methods to facilitate the participation of minorities in society in order to prevent and/or reduce conflicts between minorities and the majority population, to institutionalize the protection of minorities, so that the minorities themselves will become agents and representatives in the decision-making processes that directly concern them (Decker, & McGarry 2005), while the social and economic plight of the Roma was subordinated to the former. The subsequent three phases have evolved within the broader context of CEE states' accession to the EU, as well as the ongoing implementation of inclusion policies for Roma, even following their attainment of EU membership. The second stage (1997-early 2000s) meant the development of new institutional structures to bolster national minority support, alongside the finalization of multi-year PHARE programs, providing support for the strengthening of Roma civil society, that would actively participate in the drafting and monitoring of public policies dedicated to Roma. The third phase (2001-present) is characterized by the adoption of public accountability at the national level for devising strategies aimed at enhancing the condition of the Roma minority across various domains, including health, education, employment, housing, small-scale infrastructure, civic and political engagement, as well as anti-discrimination measures. The National Roma Integration Strategy (Strategy) represented Romania's first political commitment after 1989 to improve the wellbeing of the Roma. This was adopted by Government Decision 430/2001 for a period of 10 years (2001-2010). The strategy established a public institutional framework, incorporating specialized positions on the socio-economic challenges of the Roma at all tiers of public administration, through inter-ministerial and ministerial commissions. At the institutional level, the Strategy not only offered a resource for a wider coverage of the social and economic problems of the Roma, but also the possibility of establishing a government institution with the role of coordination, monitoring, implementation, and evaluation of policies for the Roma minority (National Agency for Roma, County Offices for Roma, Joint Working Group at county level).

In different domains of the Strategy, public policies were devised for the social inclusion of Roma. These policies were the result of governmental efforts of the ministries responsible for the implementation of the Strategy, but also by non-governmental organizations that implemented projects mainly from external funds. During the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, policies dedicated to the Roma minority were being developed in different areas of intervention (the emergence of health and school mediator positions as a link between Roma communities and local institutions, the second chance program dedicated to early leavers, job fairs for Roma, social housing for Roma communities). I discussed elsewhere in detail the policies and measures developed over the last two decades to support increasing access to educational, health or housing services (Anghel, 2019). The strategies for the social inclusion of Roma have been renewed/revised

after 2011 on several occasions, the last such strategy covering the period 2022-2027 (Guvernul României, 2022).

Finally, the fourth stage is marked by the emergence, post-2010, of a European strategy for the social inclusion of Roma (EU strategy). The EU strategy does not replace those at the national level, but rather coordinates them. The implementation of the new strategies (mandatory for each member state) must respect the 10 basic principles of Roma inclusion, and the principles of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (Open Society Institute, 2011). Subsequently, the European Commission proposed the introduction at the EU level of a monitoring mechanism to measure the individual progress of each member state, the results being subsequently reported to the European Commission, the Council of Europe and finally, the European Parliament. The monitoring will be carried out by the Agency for Fundamental Rights of the EU, by the member states, and through the peer-review process carried out within the Strategy 2020. The European Commission has also established a new body, *the Roma Task Force*, to monitor and improve attracting EU funds intended for Roma inclusion.

To summarize, during the last three decades, several inter-governmental organizations, European institutions, non-governmental organizations, national governments were/are involved in projects, programs to improve the well-being of Roma, to ensure access to basic services, and to offer tools for community participation and empowerment at local levels. Even though systematic evaluations of these programs and policies are not carried out, in the next section I will address how some indicators in the fields of education, health, employment and housing have evolved, bringing into question the comparability of sample-based data.

Methodology

The data sources used in this paper are twofold. First of all, a secondary analysis of three recent databases – SocioRoMap – Sociographic mapping of Roma communities in Romania for community-level monitoring of changes regarding Roma integration (2017) and two surveys conducted by the European Union's Agency for Fundamental Rights (2011 and 2016). A second data source comes from semi-structured interviews carried out in several research projects I have taken part in recent years. The semi-structured interviews addressed topics such as the social and economic situation of the Roma minority at the local level, the consequences of evictions or relocations of (some) Roma families on the land of former industrial sites or near areas with environmental risks. Last but not least, discussions addressed the programs implemented by the local authorities to approach the precarious social, economic, and housing situation of Roma. The interviews and observations were carried out between 2018 and 2020 in two Romanian cities (Târgu Mureș, & Miercurea Ciuc) by the author and other research team members. We collected 22 interviews with 37 participants in

Târgu Mureș and 18 interviews with 39 participants in Miercurea Ciuc, mainly with representatives from the local authorities, e.g., city hall, social work and social housing departments, but also local activists, NGOs and Roma living in ghettoized places, slums, segregated social housing or improvised barracks. The two towns were selected based on the previous research conducted in the SPAREX project, "The Spatialization and Racialization of Social Exclusion" (Vincze, & Rațț, 2013), and the SocioRoMap project (Horváth 2017), as the two towns both presented communities of Roma which were exposed to environmental deleterious conditions because of the relocations and evictions that took place during the last two decades. The qualitative data was conducted using the software NVIVO12.

The (neoliberal) transitions to the market economy and its effects on the socio-economic exclusion of the Roma

During state socialism, the political interest towards the social and economic situation of Roma was marginal. In the almost five decades of the socialist regime, there were several episodes in which the socialist authorities directed their attention to the social, economic and political situation of the Roma (Anghel, 2024) but the general policy was to forcibly settle the Roma groups that were still nomadic and semi-nomadic, and to incorporate the Roma into the socialist industrial or agricultural production system. Although the socialist authorities developed a program to improve the social and economic situation of the Roma at the end of the 1970s (Partidul Comunist Român, 1977), the turnover to austerity at the beginning of the 1980s and the economic regression affected the Roma disproportionately, pushing them towards adopting a survival strategy focused almost exclusively on the extended family (Zamfir, & Zamfir, 1993). The fall of the socialist regime and the realignment of CEE states to Western (European) capitalism had significant consequences for the Roma population in the region. Deindustrialization, and the restructuring of collective and state farms led to an increase in unemployment rates among the Roma, being among the first to be laid off. Without a stable source of income and with the increase in (informal) costs for basic public services such as education and health services, their standard of living declined, being reflected by the decrease of some social and economic indicators during the transition to market economy (Zamfir, & Preda, 2002). The impact of the transition to the market economy on the Roma was summarized by Spyros Themelis (2016, 7).

This capitalist reintegration of Eastern Europe has had devastating effects for the Roma, who, even before the transition, used to belong to the most vulnerable section of the working class in economic, cultural, and political terms. When the transition was completed, the Roma became more fixed to this marginal and vulnerable position than ever before, due to the widening income differentials within these regions, the very sharp rise in unemployment because of state and

private sectors' inability to pay wages and the decrease in industrial production, which was supported by cross-subsidies and used (only) to keep the Communist industrial system operating.

The first research carried out in Romania after 1989 regarding the social and economic well-being of the Roma was carried out in 1992 by a group of researchers led by Cătălin and Elena Zamfir (1993). The research showed a worrisome situation in which most Roma households found themselves. Nearly 80% of employed Roma lacked modern qualifications, with only 4% engaged in traditional crafts (Zamfir, & Zamfir, 1993). At the same time, the educational levels of the Roma did not undergo substantial improvements during the socialist period, compared to the majority population. More than a fifth of Roma had no schooling and about 5% had completed high school or post-high school. Moreover, a quarter of the Roma respondents in the research could read with difficulty or not at all (Zamfir, & Zamfir, 1993). Throughout the transition to the market economy, the Roma began to accumulate the effects of a vicious circle of poverty, combining low levels of education, low employment rates, inadequate or poor quality housing, lack of access to public services (of quality), combined with a certain level of institutional discrimination (Barany, 1994, 2004; Zamfir, & Preda, 2002). After the first decade of the transition to a market economy, all CEE countries reported high levels of poverty among Roma (Ringold, 2000; Revenga, Ringold, & Tracy, 2002). In Romania, the share of Roma living below the poverty line (less than USD 4.30 per day at PPC) was 69%, more than twice the share for non-Roma (Ringold, Orenstein, & Wilkens, 2005). The 2011 World Bank /UNDP/European Commission regional survey (FRA, & UNDP 2012) showed a drop in the poverty rate (less than $4.30 per day at PPP) to 54%, but it was still four times higher than for the non-Roma population.

Due to the widening disparity in specific social and economic indicators between Roma and non-Roma, in the initial phase of the transition, public institutions and non-governmental organizations-initiated programs and projects in strategic intervention areas such as education, health, housing, community development, and employment, in order to bridge this gap. A report published in the early 2000s on the projects implemented for Roma showed that in the 1990-2000 period, 1,013 projects were implemented by 519 organizations. Non-governmental organizations (associations and foundations) implemented 79% of these projects, while the rest were implemented by public institutions (Anăstăsoaie, & Tarnovschi 2001; Bădescu 2001). Many of these initiatives would be taken later by public institutions and transformed into public policies, (e.g., school and health mediators, the "Second Chance" school program, the job fairs for Roma, and more recently, the social vouchers for preschool children.

I will discuss below some of the reports and research that have measured the evolution of certain educational, health, housing, or employment indicators during postsocialism, even if they use different methodologies and data sources. To begin with, it should be noted that academic debates regarding the use of the

best data source when discussing progression or regression of some indicators for Roma still remain a pressing point on the researchers' agenda. Each data source (censuses, representative samples, over-sampling of the Roma in national samples) has its own advantages and disadvantages, as has been shown multiple times and will not be discussed in this paper for reasons of space (Rughiniș, 2010; Surdu, 2016; Anghel, 2022). Using data from the 1992, 2002 and 2011 censuses, Anghel (2022) showed that during the three decades, there were some improvements for the Roma living in rural areas regarding their access to the educational system, a decrease in illiteracy and an increase of the secondary education graduation rates, but structural, social and economic barriers still persist, which prevent Roma children and youth going forward to high school and tertiary education. Also, their housing conditions (reported as the number of square meters per person) have improved, according to data from the three censuses, although the gaps between Roma and non-Roma remain quite large, with most Roma living in overcrowded conditions (Table 1).

The research carried out by FRA, which aims to monitor the evolution of social and economic indicators stipulated through the Framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020 (European Commission, 2011), used a different sampling methodology. In FRA's research, the localities with a higher percentage of Roma are selected, and from these localities a sample of Roma is selected, which leads to the over-sampling of those areas with a high concentration of Roma.

Table 1. Evolution of social, educational, and economic indicators for Roma in Romania during the 2010s

Indicator(s)	Value for the indicator 2011 (%)	Value for the indicator 2016 (%)
Percentage of Roma children enrolled in preschool education (4-6 years)	45	38
Percentage of Roma children aged 7-15 years who are not enrolled in any form of education	22	23
Percetange of Roma who have not completed any level of formal education (ISCED 0), by age group (16-24)	15	6
Percentage of Roma who have not completed any level of formal education (ISCED 0), by age group (25-44)	28	12
Percentage of Roma who have not completed any level of formal education (ISCED 0), by age group (45+)	26	20
School segregation - All/Most children in the school are Roma	26	29
Share of waged earners among economic active Roma	29	28

Indicator(s)	Value for the indicator 2011 (%)	Value for the indicator 2016 (%)
Share of paid work for Roma aged 20-64, including self-employment, casual work and work done in the previous four weeks	29	43
Share of Roma who are not employed and do not follow any educational or training program.	58	51
Share of Roma living in households where at least one family member went to bed hungry one or more times in the last month	63	32
Share of Roma covered by medical insurance	51	54
Number of persons per room	2.5	1
Share of Roma people living in households without running water, sewerage, indoor bathroom, indoor toilet	86	79
Share of Roma who are at risk of poverty	81	70
Share of Roma who reported feeling discriminated against in the last year because of their ethnicity	27	21

Source: European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights Surveys on minorities and discrimination in the European Union (2011/2016)

According to the two surveys carried out by FRA, some progress has been made in the field of education by increasing the access of Roma children to preschool education, and the overall literacy levels for adult Roma (through `second chance` programs). The share of Roma working in the daily or informal system has decreased, while the share of Roma who acknowledged that they live in households where at least one family member went to bed hungry once or more in the last month was halved. One can even see a (slight) decrease in the at risk of poverty rate among Roma during the two surveys. On the other hand, the share of Roma wage earners among those who were economically active remained constant, while more than a quarter of Roma children study in school units where all or most of the children are Roma, which indicates the persistence of school segregation. A general conclusion that can be drawn from the data presented above is that although the values for certain indicators show an improvement in the last decade, this is less the result of the national strategies dedicated to the Roma and more the result of individual strategies and local public policies. Overall, their social and economic and housing situation remains critical.

Corollary to the social inclusion policies and programs developed and implemented through European and national public institutions, local and national NGOs one can observe in the last two decades an increase in the hostile

measures of local authorities against the Roma. The resettlement of Roma from the profitable and gentrified areas of the cities to former industrial sites, garbage dumps, or in substandard housing, abandoned buildings or belonging to old industrial enterprises, later transformed into social housing units without access to adequate public services, has already been analyzed in academic research, or by NGOs (Mionel, 2013; Vincze, 2014a; Anghel, & Alexandrescu, 2023). It is likely that these practices of local authorities will continue, especially in the context of decentralization and the weakening of political control of the government (through the prefect) over local public authorities.

Table 2. Number of Roma in compact communities who are exposed to general and legal risks of eviction

The risk of evacuation	Share of cases out of the total Roma compact communities	Share of cases out of the total Roma compact communities (Urban areas)	Number of persons subjected to a risk of evacuation	Number of persons subjected to a risk of evacuation (Urban areas)
Subjected to any risk of evacuation[1]	23	11.7	143,524	87,375
Subjected to any juridical risk of evacuation[2]/ eviction	18	8.5	127,962	78,513

Source: SocioRoMap database, author's calculations.

The research "Sociographic mapping of Roma communities in Romania" (SocioRoMap) undertaken by Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities from Cluj-Napoca showed that almost a fifth of the compact Roma communities, where more than 127 thousand Roma live (almost 10% of the total population of hetero identified Roma by local authority representatives), are subject at any time to the legal risk of eviction (table 2).

[1] The percentages are calculated on the basis of the general eviction risk index calculated as an aggregation of the indicators included in the question "Is there a risk that part of the inhabitants will be evicted due to the following processes/investments?" 1. Private or public constructions (houses, industrial constructions) 2. Constructions of roads, dikes, etc. **3. Restitution of land or buildings to former owners 4. Because of their legal situation (living without a contract)** 5. Because of their economic situation (not paying rent or other utilities) **6. As a result of house/land ownership lawsuits**.

[2] The percentages are calculated based on the legal eviction risk index calculated as an aggregation of the indicators marked in bold in the above footnote.

If we take into consideration only the compact Roma settlements in the urban areas, where one can see a tendency of local authorities to relocate Roma to the peripheral areas of the cities, there is a legal risk of eviction for more than 78 thousand Roma. I argue in the next section that the practice of relocating the poorest of the Roma is legitimized by a discourse of securitization, in which Roma are represented as "problematic" or "risky" people, or as posing a high risk to public health or safety to the people (non-Roma) surrounding them.

From people "at risk" to "dangerous people"

Despite the pan-European effort to improve the plight of the Roma, there is a gap between the discourse and inclusion policies developed at the European and national level and those at the sub-national level. Recent research has shown that more often than not, Roma are missing from local development programs, and in cases where they are still present, the discourse about the causes of their poverty is strongly racialized (Vincze, & Raț, 2013; Vincze, 2014a; Vincze, & Hossu, 2014; Picker, 2017; Vincze *et al.*, 2019; Anghel, & Alexandrescu, 2023). By racialization of poverty, Vincze (2014b, 445-46) understands the "practice of coupling 'the Roma perceived as the ‹racial other› with ‹the poor› and explaining ‹Roma poverty› as a ‹natural result› of the cultural traits of an ‹inferior race› trapped in pre-modern (‹non-civilized›) and subhuman forms of existence". Thus, in these contexts, the poverty of the Roma is culturalized, perceived by local power factors as a way of life or a "civilization gap" (Picker, 2017). Since the causes of poverty are perceived to be at the individual level and not structural, the development policies discussed in the previous sections are, in these cases, abandoned and the structural causes of poverty and underdevelopment are no longer addressed, and local authorities prefer instead to govern their poverty and maintain the *status quo* (Anghel, & Alexandrescu, 2023). As summarized by a community facilitator involved in a European project that aimed to improve the living conditions of the poorest Roma in a municipality in Romania:

There is a thick stratum of Roma [.] They call themselves idle Roma, so they have no job and here we can refer to Valea Rece (Roma ghetto), Băneasa (informal settlement) [.] [T]hey are a problem because they are exactly idle. They only pursue the social benefits passed on from generation to generation, that's what they live for, unfortunately (community facilitator, Târgu Mureș, 2019).

Through discourses that racialize poverty and frame it as an individual/family deficiency, local authorities end up legitimizing the segregation, relocation, or eviction of Roma in order to mitigate the danger to the security of others (non-Roma). One of the known cases of relocation occurred in 2010 in the municipality of Cluj-Napoca, where several Roma families were relocated from Coastei street (central area) to the municipality's landfill, Pata Rât. According to a representative of the mayor's office and a law enforcement officer who participated

in the relocation of the Roma families, interviewed by Picker (2017, 54-55), the relocation was decided based on the unsanitary living conditions in the houses inhabited by the Roma families (an argument often used by local authorities), which could have degenerated into an outbreak of infection that could become a danger to public health.

"The housing in Coastei street was unhealthy, and not appropriate for a decent life in the Cluj municipality, but (the irony was that) we are talking about general rules of hygiene and public health that should be assured in each housing property. There was a potential for a breeding ground of infections, a threat to people's health (law enforcement officer in Picker 2017, 54) […] There, in Coastei Street [in the city center] there was a breeding ground of infections. Now they have much better housing. Every year we go to Cantonului [one of the three Pata Rât Roma settlements] to hygienize [...]. This is called "civilizing" [civilizare]. The hygienization process is coordinated by our office [the Municipal Technical Office] in partnership with the Branter company. In Coastei Street, we have done hygienization with disinfection, along with deratization, only after the relocation, because it would have made no sense to do it before. We try to carry out a civilizing action, but we cannot succeed!" (town hall employee in Picker 2017, 55).

From my own research carried out in recent years within the project "Adaptation to climate change from the perspective of ecological justice: the case of Roma communities in Romania", where I conducted a series of interviews with local institutional actors, but also Roma who live in spatial segregated settlements or in informal housing, in two cities in central Romania, I noticed that the relocation of Roma people is justified by the potential risks to the physical security of non-Roma (neighbors). A former deputy mayor of one of the two cities justified the relocation of several Roma families from a former social housing unit located in a mixed neighborhood to the outskirts of the city, next to the wastewater treatment plant, as follows:

R: Honestly, I don't know which solution is better, so if we are talking about situations in the city center, where people with social problems have 6-7 children, whatever, they go out to the area where there are terraces, they are like that and beg, steal, more like that... It's not very fair, do you understand? I don't know which is better, honestly, I don't know, I'm trying to integrate them on the seventh floor [of un apartment building], and you're ruining it, and that's how you ruined the community in the apartment buildings, or is it better in another area, another ANL [public apartment buildings], and I honestly do not know. But what we see today in the behavior of some people, and especially those with social problems, they are in conflict with their neighbors, so they create other conflicts, and I don't know if we are also talking about integration, however they integrate (former vice-mayor of the municipality).

I: The one on [name of the street where they were relocated from].

R: Exactly, we are talking about those people. So they got a second chance [n.a. the shacks near the water treatment plant], until they get their lives in order, buy land, move in with neighbors, relatives, whoever...But no, they thought that: well I'm still here, I'm still making a mess, I'm still building, I think there are seven, 10 houses there, I'm building six more houses (former deputy mayor of the municipality).

An exacerbation of the discourse about Roma as "dangerous" people who endanger the security of others occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic. As we have shown elsewhere (Berescu, Alexandrescu, & Anghel, 2021), during the first four months of the pandemic, Roma were repeatedly constructed as vectors for the spread of the disease among the majority population. In Romania and Bulgaria, special measures were taken to contain larger Roma neighborhoods, where entire streets were patrolled by police cars and special checkpoints, or makeshift walls were installed to prevent people from leaving. In the case of segregated Roma communities or ghettos where predominantly Roma live, quarantine was used, alongside its medical purpose, as a disciplinary device, where alongside ensuring quarantine and physical distancing, state institutions disproportionately used policing devices and disciplinary discourses for the unequal surveillance of Roma-inhabited ghettos, compared to the wider mechanisms used for the general population (Berescu, Alexandrescu, & Anghel 2021). Such a discourse in which the Roma were represented as a danger to the security of others was propagated through a social network platform by a former mayor of a municipality located in the center of Romania, as follows:

I observe how certain social categories simply refuse to comply with the measures to combat the spread of the coronavirus, and the law enforcement officers are simply spectators, for the simple reason that they have no laws to give them force. I said 15 years ago, and I repeated it a few months ago, that one of Romania's big problems will be this social category coming from disadvantaged areas, which are simply totally out of control. There are those people who do not like to work or the social order, many of them returning to the country during the pandemic, and we will most likely be stuck with them. After the events with assaulted policemen, with citizens whose lives are put in danger by robberies, by thefts from their properties, I believe that a radical reform in public order institutions is urgently required. Reform should start with how to select, train and operate in such situations; but of course, also a responsible and firm conduct regarding the social reinsertion of this category that creates so many problems (former mayor of a town in the Centre development region).

The securitization practices that have emerged in many of Romania's poor, often informal and segregated settlements have tended to render invisible the complex mechanisms of socio-economic and political exclusion and marginalization that have historically plagued Roma communities. In several cities or parts of them,

special isolation measures have been applied, arguing that Roma are the ones who do not respect hygiene standards and physical distance, without considering the lack of access to basic utilities and living conditions in overcrowded housing and substandard, which made isolation and proper hygiene almost impossible for the poorest of the Roma living in these informal settlements/ghettos. Moreover, in the case of Roma living in such informal settlements/ghettos, development policies do not seem to include them, since although the efforts to develop the rural villages, large cities and peri-urban areas through investments in infrastructure or capital attraction have been intensified, the areas inhabited by Roma seem to be excluded from such investments (Anghel, 2022).

Conclusions

After more than three decades since the fall of state socialism in CEE, the socio-economic, cultural, and political situation of Roma remains rather ambivalent. As a result of the social, economic, and political transformations that took place during this period, the neoliberal restructuring of economies and welfare states, the shrinking of social spending, the Roma were disproportionately affected, having higher shares poverty and unemployment rates, with less access to (quality) health and education services. Their social, economic, and political plight has attracted the attention of both European institutions and national governments, national and international non-governmental organizations, as well as intergovernmental development organizations (World Bank, UNDP). Most academic research and policy reports framed the Roma as a group "at risk", for which targeted social/public policy intervention was required. The involvement of the political actors mentioned above has given rise, since the early 1990s, to a kind of "institutional developmentalism" (van Baar, 2019), through which the abovementioned institutions launched development policies and initiatives in the fields of social inclusion, human rights and minorities, empowerment, community participation, through which the "gap" between Roma and the majority population should be bridged. In this context, several policies and projects were launched in the fields of education, health, employment, and small infrastructure that targeted the Roma minority. While assessments of the efficacy of these projects and policies are infrequent and direct correlation between their existence and the enhancement of social and economic well-being among the Roma is difficult to establish, certain educational indicators (such as school participation and literacy rates), health (such as life expectancy at birth and infant mortality), and housing conditions have shown improvement in recent decades.

However, there is a gap between the discourse and inclusion policies developed at the European and national level and those at the sub-national level, where at the level of political or public/social policy decision-makers, the Roma were framed from persons "at risk" to "dangerous persons", who require measures of isolation,

segregation, surveillance, relocation from the profitable spaces of the cities. The representation of some parts of the Roma (especially the poorest among them) as "risky persons", who threatened the security of the non-Roma (either in terms of public health or even physically) has legitimized, in recent decades, the policies of relocating Roma households to peripheral areas of the cities, on the land of former industrial sites, near garbage dumps or water treatment plants, where access to public services and utilities is almost non-existent. In these cases, policies to narrow the gaps between Roma and non-Roma generated by the narrative of institutional developmentalism are quasi-abandoned, with local powerholders contenting themselves to governing their poverty and preserving the *status-quo*.

An exacerbation of the discourses about Roma as dangerous individuals who endanger the security of others manifested itself during the Covid-19 pandemic, when Roma were repeatedly constructed as vectors for the spread of the disease among the majority population. The quarantine of some compact Roma neighborhoods/areas was rather used as a disciplinary mechanism, where alongside ensuring quarantine and physical distancing, the state institutions disproportionately used police devices and disciplinary discourses for unequal surveillance of the ghettos inhabited by Roma, compared with the broader mechanisms used for the general population. In the absence of sustained public policies that continue to reduce the social and economic gaps between Roma and non-Roma, the well-being of Roma (or the poorest among them) will deteriorate, which will lead to a proliferation of several social problems: overcrowding, generated by the lack of affordable housing, as well as feeding the new urban ghettos created in the cities defined as development poles.

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