

# Lost in Transition. An Exploration beyond the Narratives of Social Inclusion of Romanian Roma

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**Abstract:** *Many policy-oriented researches on the socio-economic status of Roma in present day Europe are anchored in a present-centred and ahistorical framework (Powell and Lever, 2015) which leaves understudied the complex mechanisms of inequality and socio-economic marginalization that have historically characterized the Roma minority. Based on a quantitative analysis of occupational trajectories and other socio-economic indicators in two development regions from Romania, South-East and South-Muntenia, I will show that the Roma were not only losers of transition, but their (current) socio-economic exclusion is the result of past programs to improve their situation. If before 1989, Roma experienced some occupational mobility, despite remaining on the lower rungs of the social structure, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, they were not only unevenly affected by the transition(s) in Central and Eastern Europe, but their precarious socio-economic status tends to reproduce between generations. While European and national policies are devised for combating their social exclusion, some programs have ambiguous and unsustainable effects on their wellbeing. The article concludes that despite the prevailing social inclusion narratives at the EU and national level, some social deficits are hardly addressed in the two regions.*

**Keywords:** occupational trajectories; life-course; labor market policies; Roma; transition.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** traiectorii profesionale; traiectorii de viață; politicile pieței forței de muncă; romi; tranziție.

## Introduction

Most of the academic or policy oriented research, but also non-governmental reports show a decline of the socio-economic indicators regarding the Roma in Romania (Cace et al., 2010; FRA and UNDP, 2012; UNDP, 2002; UNDP, 2005; World Bank, 2014; Zamfir and Preda, 2002; European Roma Rights Centre, 2007). The risk of poverty rate<sup>1</sup> is nearly three times higher (84%) for the Roma than among their non-Roma neighbors, and almost four

times higher than the poverty risk rate calculated at national level (22%). The share of Roma households who experience severe material deprivation<sup>2</sup> is 90%, nearly three times higher than the national percentage (World Bank, 2014, 4). Regarding employment, data show a worrying situation. The employment rate for Roma is only 35%, while 36% of them declared themselves jobseekers. In the past two years preceding their research, Tarnovschi et al. (2012) found that only 10% of the respondents had worked permanent, 32% had worked intermittently and 52% had

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never worked. The new revised National Strategy for Roma Inclusion (henceforth ‘the Strategy’) notes that among the formal employed Roma, only 10-15% are employees (the rest being self-employed), and among the former, the majority of them either have no qualifications or perform activities that do not require a qualification (National Agency for Roma, 2014, 12).

In order to address underemployment and exclusion from the labor market, the Strategy has proposed a set of targets and indicators to be achieved by 2020 through the joint effort of the European institutions, ministries and non-governmental organizations. By dispersing responsibilities to this multi-level ‘web of governance’ (Clarke, 2012), social and political delicate issues tend to be depoliticized, by removing them from the political domain and reformulate them in the objective and neutral language of expertise and policy making. This process of depoliticization is typical for most programs and policies devised for Roma in post-socialism. As Wendy Brown remarks, depoliticization involves putting in brackets historically constituted power relations (author emphasis, 2006, 15): “Depoliticization involves removing a political phenomenon from comprehension of its *historical* emergence and from a recognition of the *powers* that produce and contour it. No matter its particular form and mechanics, depoliticization always eschews power and history in the representation of its subject.”

In this article I will show that the underemployment and economic exclusion from the labor market of the middle-aged Roma from two development regions in Romania (South-Muntenia and South-East) cannot be dissociated from the ambivalent policies of the socialist regimes to solve the ‘Roma problem’. As we shall see, although some Roma experienced an upward mobility and stable jobs during socialism, they were often offered semi or unskilled jobs, which were restructured after 1989 by the new market oriented programs. Since then, the Roma from the two regions not only experienced downward mobility and loss of a stable income, but also

they lack access to quality public services and risk of perpetuating a cycle of poverty<sup>3</sup> at the household level. The data were gathered in 2014 during a POSDRU project ‘Incluziv pentru piața muncii’ (Inclusive for Labor Market – ILM) – ID POSDRU/165/6.2/S/143248.

This article is divided in six parts. The first part explores the socialist policies to resolve Roma related affairs and their legacies for present day situation. The second part reveals the effects of the neoliberal transition(s) in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) on Roma’s standard of living and their return to uncertain economic practices. The third and fourth part explores the occupational trajectories of the households during transition, emphasizing the past and current participation on the labor market for respondents, but also for their partner and elder child. The fifth part analyses the active social policies that were meant to support their reintegration on the labor market, and the programs lack of efficiency. In the final part, I will compare some socio-economic indicators between Roma and non-Roma and reveal that, despite the social inclusion/exclusion narrative, the socio-economic situation of the Roma from the two regions has failed to improve.

### **The ambivalent effects of the socialist policies to improve the socio-economic status of Roma**

Although the Roma was a constant presence on the Romanian territories for more than six centuries, they failed to achieve the status of national minority (*naționalitate conlocuitoare*) after 1948<sup>4</sup>, being perceived more as a socio-economic group than as an ethnic minority (Achim, 2010). However, we can distinguish two processes that affected the Roma during socialism: forced settlement and proletarianization. These policies were meant to ‘turn this poor and marginalized minority into good socialist citizens’ (Stewart, 1997, 6).

Romania was one of the first states in Central and Eastern Europe that had endorsed a policy of forced settlement towards its nomad

and semi-nomad Roma category at the end of the 1940s. Despite the fact that the latter category represented only 1/3 of the total Roma population (Marushiakova and Popov, 2008, 3), it was a constant concern for Romania's administrative authorities<sup>5</sup> because of security and public order threats (Achim, 2010). Also, from a Marxist point of view, nomadism was associated with marginality and poverty. The industrial revolution had turned Roma artisans, basket makers, metallurgists into beggars forced to steal or to take advantage of others by developing commercial or trading skills, deemed as immoral by the socialist authorities. Not being integrated into the formal economy, Roma were perceived by the socialist authorities as part of the lumpenproletariat (Lucassen, 1998; Stewart, 1997). The policy of forced settlement, although not entirely enforced by local authorities, has dispersed traditional communities to the margins of mainstream settlements.

The second main objective for the authorities was that of proletarianizing their labor. Their 'commercial' activities were signs of independence from the socialist production system. By confiscating their trade and livelihood means, be it gold, horses or other means of production and engaging them into the socialist production system, they were proletarianized. Strict labor discipline, organization and collective work was needed to combat 'social parasitism' and to change their lifestyle (Barany, 2002; Stewart, 1997).

Since the Roma had no land to contribute<sup>6</sup>, they were in a greater extent excluded from cooperatives (Barany, 2002, 137) and encouraged rather to accept jobs in the heavy or mining industries, or in the state farms. These two economic processes – industrialization and cooperativization – have unravelled most of Roma's traditional crafts and changed their lifestyle, making them dependent on the state economy. Even so, most of the Roma who had accepted a job in industry or state farms practiced low-skilled and labor intensive jobs, which were quickly restructured after 1989 under the rationalization programs of new property

owners. The data for the two regions from the above mentioned research shows that 63% of the Roma had manual occupations, while only 5% had a non-manual occupation (which required medium qualification). Although Decree No.153/1970 condemned 'social parasitism' and deviancy from the socialist way of life with imprisonment and forced labor, the policy was not implemented rigorously by local authorities (Barany, 2000a) and 25% of the respondents from the two regions declared not being employed before 1989.

Even if the socialist policies to improve the socio-economic status of Roma were coordinated by the central public administration, the responsibilities for their implementation were transferred to local authorities, which had to ensure a space for housing and access to employment. The local enforcement of these regulations explains the different degrees of integration/exclusion of Roma in post-socialist period. If most of the Roma have accepted the socialist pact and abandoned their traditional crafts to take jobs in the industry or state farms, some Roma groups such as *căldărari* (*coppersmiths*) or *gabori* took advantage of their practical knowledge of traditional crafts and managed to negotiate their position with local authorities to enable them to continue practicing these crafts outside the harvesting season (Haşdeu, 2005; Radu, 2007).

In conclusion, although the socialist policies to improve the socio-economic status of Roma had some results, inasmuch as Roma had access to housing,<sup>7</sup> a steady job – which allowed them to increase their living standards –, access to education for their children<sup>8</sup>, these policies have had some ambivalent results. According to the research conducted by the Research Institute for the Quality of Life in the early 1990s, nearly 80% of the working Roma performed unskilled jobs and only 4% of Roma were still carrying traditional crafts (Zamfir and Zamfir, 1993, 98). Simultaneously, the educational policy targeted at the Roma was a 'silent disaster'. About 95% of Roma had not graduated high school (Zamfir and Zamfir, 1993, 88) which inevitably led them

towards embracing jobs requiring low, or no skills, which were the first to be restructured after 1989. By encouraging Roma to take low or unskilled jobs in the labor intensive industry or state farms, providing them substandard housing on the outskirts of villages or towns, coupled with a weak control by the central authorities on the local ones regarding Roma integration shows the status of second-class citizens that the Roma experienced during socialism.

Considering the vulnerabilities accumulated before 1989, we expect their socio-economic status to have been worsen not only compared to the non-Roma, but also we expect that these vulnerabilities have been transmitted at intergenerational level.

### **Neoliberal transition(s)<sup>9</sup> and their effects on the socio-economic exclusion of Roma**

The fall of socialism and the realigning of CEE states to Western (European) capitalism have had significant consequences for the Roma population in the region. Deindustrialization, the dismantling of collective and state farms has led to increased unemployment among Roma, being among the first to be laid off. Without a stable source of income and with the raising of (informal) costs for basic public services – such as education and health services –, their standard of living declined and some socio-economic indicators receded throughout the transition. But this is not the whole story. The declining standard of living was doubled by the emergence of nationalist and xenophobic movements in which Roma were attacked, houses were burned and some of the attacks have even resulted with casualties. During the first years of transition, Roma were constantly imagined as the ‘Other’, a foreign minority and made scapegoats for the failure towards a smooth transition to market economy (Verdery, 1993; Crowe, 1999). The effects of this transition for Roma was synthesized by Spyros Themelis (2015, 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, due to state and private sectors inability to pay wages and the decrease in industrial production, which was supported by cross-subsidies and used to keep the Communist industrial system operating.”

The Roma started accumulating the effects of a vicious cycle, combining low educational levels, low employment rates, poor housing, lack of access to (quality) public services and institutional discrimination (Barany, 1994; Barany, 1998; Barany, 2000b; Barany, 2002; Barany, 2004; Zamfir and Preda, 2002). After 10 years of transition to market economy, all countries in CEE reported high levels of poverty among Roma (see Ringold et al., 2005; Ringold, 2000). In Romania, the share of Roma living below the poverty line (less than 4.30\$ a day at PPP) was 69%, more than twice higher than non-Roma (Ringold et al., 2005, 29). The last regional survey conducted by the World Bank/ UNDP/European Commission, although showed a decline in the poverty rate (less than 4.30\$ a day at PPP) to 54%, it was still four times higher than non-Roma (FRA and UNDP, 2012). It is not surprising that some scholars suggested that the new neoliberal policies and welfare reforms have transformed the poorest of the Roma into an underclass, trapped into a sort of ‘culture of poverty’, in which poverty is reproduced alongside an ethicized culture (Emigh and Szelenyi, 2001; Ladanyi and Szelenyi, 2006)<sup>10</sup>.

The current decline in the standard of living is not only the result of low employment rates, ranging from 22% (Fleck and Rughiniș, 2008) to 35,5% (Tarnovschi et al., 2012)<sup>11</sup> depending on the methodologies used to select the respondents/communities, but also to the low capacity of state transfers to substantially reduce poverty rates. The World Bank’s report on Roma inclusion in Romania showed that

the social protection programs reduce with almost 9% the share of Roma households in the bottom quintile (from 82 to 73.2%) (World Bank, 2014, 135), reiterating Cristina Raț's remarks that 'state transfers in Romania [...] did not change the relative income position of economically deprived Roma households in comparison with other segments of the population' (Raț, 2005, 96).

In absence of formal employment, the Roma adopted survival strategies in the informal economy, although the lack of land forced them to be overrepresented in dehumanizing activities, such as gathering herbs, mushrooms, wood or participate in different recycling industries (Ladanyi and Szelenyi, 2006). These coping strategies were reported by 45% of the Roma in Romania who declared being engaged in economic 'traditional' activities (Cace et al., 2010, 37). Although these activities are rather post-socialist coping strategies that substitute the lack of employment opportunities, they are interpreted as originating from a 'Romani culture'.

In the next section I will show – based on data collected in two development regions from Romania – that although during socialism the Roma experienced some occupational mobility, after 1989, they were not only main losers of transition, but also that their chances of reintegration in mainstream society are impeded by structural and individual factors, not to mention by the policies designed for their (re)inclusion.

## Methodology

The data for the empirical analysis were collected during 2014 in two development regions: South-Muntenia and South-East, based on a probabilistic triserial stratified sample (1.300 respondents) from the two regions. The sample consists of respondents aged between 45 and 65 years. Let's call them, middle-aged respondents. This age cohort was chosen because of its particularities; the respondents

spent half of their lives in socialism (where they have attained most of their education) and the other half in transition and post-socialism (where they should have spent the most time on the labor market), yet still being technically at their working age. Their children are either finishing their education, or entering the labor market and, as a recent study shows, the parent's social status (especially education) is the main factor determining inequality of opportunities in terms of achieving a tertiary education in transition countries (Berglof et al., 2013, 81).

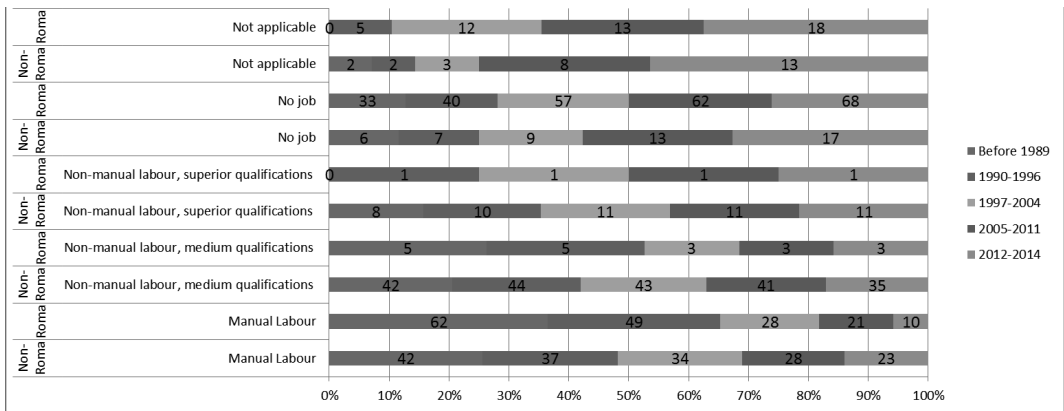
Since, according to other scholars, individuals who define themselves as Roma in a representative sample are of very low proportion of the sample, the Roma sample was over-represented, in order to conduct comparisons with the general sample, resulting 200 Roma to whom the questionnaire was applied. The information was collected not only about the respondent, but also about his family (parents, partner, and first child). The items on which I conducted the statistical analysis are in reference to occupational trajectories, upward/ downward occupational mobility, access to employment opportunities, participation in activation policies, and access to social services, grouped by periods: before 1989, and since 1990, based on election cycles. In the end, I computed calculations based on at risk of poverty or social exclusion indicators and compared them with the same indicators for the non-Roma. However, the indicators I used do not reproduce accurately the methodology Eurostat uses to measure at risk of poverty or social exclusion (ARPE). For this research, it was used the median household expenditures, and not the income household expenditures, and instead of using the indicator that measures the number of active persons in the household with low work intensity (worked less than 20% of their working time), it was used an indicator that measures the number of able-bodied in the household that declared of not working. Still, the value of the indicator for non-Roma and Roma is close to the ones estimated by Eurostat or the World Bank.

### The revolving door of Romani labour market participation

Beyond the vulnerabilities accumulated at the individual level (lack of modern qualifications, low education levels), one has to take into consideration the structural conditions that (re)produced the socio-economic exclusion and underemployment, namely the region’s economic underdevelopment, including the lack of jobs caused by economic restructuring, access to public or private employment, quality services, coupled with the demand of the labor market, access to

social benefits and safety nets to support a decent standard of living.

As it was previously mentioned, the Roma were overrepresented in jobs that required manual labor and underrepresented in jobs with medium or higher qualifications (see Figure 1). If the percentage of those who worked/ are working in manual jobs has fallen dramatically for both categories analyzed (Roma and Non-Roma), the share of those working in jobs with medium or higher qualifications was to a lesser extent affected by economic restructuring. The share of Roma who work in informal economy or became inactive has doubled after 1989.



Source: ILM database.

**Figure 1:** Occupational trajectories by type of labor (%)

The occupational trajectory of Roma seems to have deteriorated since 1989. Due to the collapse of socialist industries and state farms, they had to turn to the informal sector, with low and volatile incomes. If for the non-Roma, the socialist full-scale employment policy was translated into some sort of occupational mobility that transcended their parents’ occupational status, for Roma, this occupational mobility was less observed. If a third of the respondents’ parents worked in agriculture, only half of this share was observed in the respondents’ case. Nevertheless, economic activities that required mobility – crafts that were to be commercialized – were less frequent for the respondents than

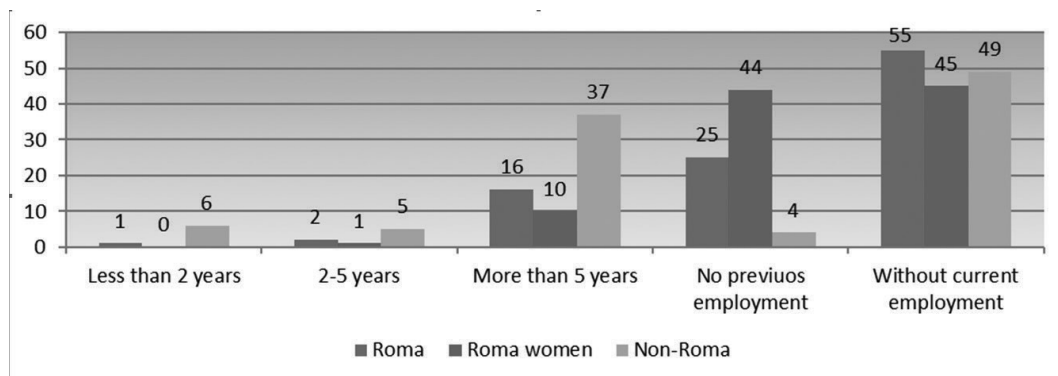
for their parents. Many Roma had to give up their traditional crafts to accept jobs in industry and state farms. The share of qualified persons increased from 7% in the case of parents, to 16% for the respondents.

Although the modernization and professionalization of occupations does not seem to be reflected in the respondents’ occupations, their incorporation in the socialist production system, even in marginal economic activities, gave Roma a stable income. Post-socialism instead appears to be marked by a downward mobility for the households’ first child if we compare it with the employment status of their parents. In almost one fifth (18%), the elder son

is unemployed, and in 10% of the households, he/she participates in recycling activities. So, the working-age Roma, in best scenario, have kept their previous economic domains, but in many cases they had to adopt even dehumanizing, survival strategies.

In present, 80% of the Roma aged 45-65 years old in the two regions declared to have no job, and only 14% had a job for more than five years. As a consequence, only 12% stated

receiving any type of pension. At a closer look, one can observe that the inactivity rate is higher for Roma women, a third of them having no job and only one in ten women had a job for more than five years. The picture is more alarming when considering the situation of the elder child, where more than half of them either had/have unstable jobs on the informal market or have never had a job (see next section).



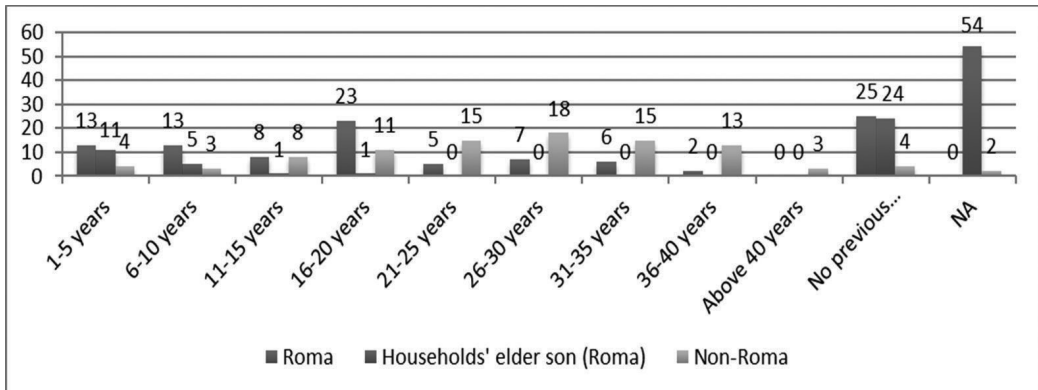
(%) Source: ILM database, NA excluded.

**Figure 2:** Duration of the current job for Roma, Roma women and non-Roma

### Precarious work for their children

Some studies show a decline in the employment rate for Roma younger generations, compared to their forerunner. According to a study conducted by the World Bank, 32% of Roma men and 10% of Roma women from the age group 15-24 were employees, whereas in our sample 42% of men and 19% of women from group age 15-64 were employed. Also, 62.5% of Roma from the age group 15-24 years were not employed, while the share in the sample was 54.5% (World Bank, 2014, 72). Thus, we can expect the employment experiences of our respondents' first child either to be missing or to be less stable and for shorter periods of time. Although two thirds of our respondents were employed during their life-course in industry and agriculture, that is not the case for the

households' first child. We could not detect a clear picture for the latter's employment trajectory, because of the high rate of non-answers, but this may also reflect to some extent the activities carried out in the informal sector. Alongside those that work in the informal sector, a quarter of them were not employed. These two categories (those working in the informal sector and the 'inactive') are in a high risk of poverty or social exclusion. Increased vulnerability on the labor market is reflected not only by the lack of a steady income, but also by the inability to have access to social benefits in the future, especially pensions and health insurance. The figure below shows the total working years for Roma, their first child and non-Roma. As one can see, not many Roma respondents have 20 years formal employment experience, while for the non-Roma, this share is 64%.



Source: ILM database.

**Figure 3:** Seniority (in years) for Roma, the household's first child (Roma) and non-Roma

The lack of a stable job is reflected in the household resources. A fifth of them have no source of income, while 30% indicated the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) as the main monetary resource. Salaries and pensions are a source of income for only one third of

Roma households (see Table 1). Thus, as a coping strategy, a quarter of households resort to informal activities, more specific for those who live in South-East (38%, where the employment rate is lower *per se*) than for those in the South-Muntenia region (23%).

**Table 1:** The respondents' and the household's main source of income

The respondents' main source of income	(%)	The households' main source of income	(%)
Wage	12	Wage	21
Informal economic activities	9	Informal economic activities	13
Self-employed	1	Self-employed	2
Pension	7	Pension	4
Disability benefit	1	Disability benefit	1
Early retirement pension (illness/disability)	5	Early retirement pension (illness/disability)	6
Unemployment benefits	1	Unemployment benefits	0
Pension for alimony, child benefits, maternity benefits	1	Pension for alimony, child benefits, maternity benefits	0
Other social benefits (heating aid, social grants)	6	Other social benefits (heating aid, social grants)	12
Income from traditional activities	4	Income from traditional activities	1
Loans from relatives	1	Loans from relatives	5
Guaranteed minimum income (Law 416)	30	Guaranteed minimum income (Law 416)	33
Other sources	1	Other sources	1
No source of income	20	No source of income	0

Source: ILM database (highlighted top three and bottom three sources of income)

Incomes from traditional activities are no longer a source of sustainable livelihood for Roma, because most of the respondents lost their traditional crafts skills. However, in their opinion, only a few traditional crafts can now be a source of income: fiddler or *lăutar* (32%) and commercial trade (15%). Even so, more than half of them no longer consider traditional crafts profitable.

### The failed promise of active labour market policies

The active labor market policies gained popularity in CEE during the 2000s. With the activation policies, the individual (who, according to the new rationality, becomes a jobseeker) itself becomes a resource for change, by acting on his motivation, skills and education. This reconceptualization towards an ‘active society’ or ‘active citizenship’, – which partially replaced the ‘welfare society’ – was in line with the agenda of inter-governmental organizations (such as OECD, EU) to describe domestic social policy reform processes towards active welfare states (Walters, 2000), which eventually took shape during the Lisbon strategy (European

Commission, 2000). The activation measures/ programs act upon both supply side (individuals), to increase their ‘employability’ – counselling, training – which aim at motivating individuals to accept a paid job, and on demand side, to create additional employment opportunities: public schemes to create jobs, financial incentives for employers (exemption from social security contributions, wage subsidies) (Moreira, 2008). These reforms in social policy are important for Roma because of Romania’s harsh transition, when they experienced mass unemployment. It is useful to see to what extent the inactive Roma participated in activation measures, and what were their impacts.

The data present a grim picture regarding Roma’s participation in the activation policies. The month previous to the data collection, 56% of the respondents did not look for a job. However, 46% of the ‘inactive’ Roma would agree to start a paid job in the near future. Participation in training courses was also weak. In more than 90% of the households, the adult generation (I excluded the respondent’s parents) has not attended a training course, and only 14% of these households’ elder child has attended such courses.

**Table 2:** Participation in activation measures (%)

	Respondent		His/Her partner		Elder child of the family	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
He actively looked for employment in the last month*	20	56				
Attended training courses**	5	95	7	93	86	14
Community work for MIG***	40	18				
Retraining courses**	1	99				
Itinerant job fairs (Caravana locurilor de muncă)**	3	97				
Job fair organized by CLFEA (Bursa locurilor de muncă)**	1	99				
Job fair organized by private firms (Târg de joburi)**	0	100				

\* 24% were still employed or were retired, Source: ILM database.

\*\* Respondents who declared as their main source of income wages or pensions were excluded.

\*\*\* Since we had only 58 answers to this question, I used the number of answers and not percentages.

The most popular active measures for Roma are the community work performed under law 416/2001 in exchange for the MIG and the job fairs for Roma introduced by the County Labor Force Employment Agencies in collaboration with the National Agency for Roma, in the first half of 2000s. In the two regions, the only activation measure attended by the Roma – especially for those living in rural areas – is community work under the MIG law. The effectiveness of the MIG in maintaining the working habits of the inactive and in facilitating ones path to a paid job has been critically interrogated by some recent critical studies (Raț, 2009a; Zidărescu, 2007). Roma are being used in semi or non-qualified occupations, such as public infrastructure, cleaning green spaces, constructions, which do not increase their employability opportunities. The main reasons for not participating in the active labor market policies are the lack of accessibility and information to these measures, and not their low interest in the activation programs. These training courses, even if they are adapted to the local labor market needs, may have little impact, unless they are followed by other measures to support the unemployed/inactive (for example, a person may follow training/retraining courses, but lives in rural areas while employers are mainly located in urban areas).

An activation measure – even if it is more expansive – that has shown effectiveness is the inclusion of the unemployed/inactive in public employment schemes. These public schemes imply offering subsidized jobs to those inactive/unemployed jobseekers that provide community services. Public employment schemes are considered temporary solutions for reducing unemployment, providing opportunities for retraining and increasing skills (Fundamental Rights Agency, 2014, 12). While other countries from CEE (Hungary, Slovakia) have implemented such public employment schemes (Messing et al., 2013), in which Roma participated, in Romania a similar program was implemented between 2008 and 2010, but we lack information to assess its effectiveness, because of the restrictions of

collecting data on ethnic criteria. At the time of our research, only 5% of Roma have participated in such public schemes (employment in infrastructure, including transport infrastructure or cleaning public spaces).

### **What about poverty and social exclusion? (Instead of conclusions)**

In this article, I have tried to argue that the socio-economic exclusion of Roma from the formal labor market is far from being a new phenomenon since 1989, although it has intensified during this period. Their exclusion and lack of economic activity in post-socialism can partly be explained by the ambivalent policies of the former socialist regime to solve the ‘Roma problem’. To integrate the Roma in the new socialist production system, the Romanian authorities sought to force settle (Roma nomadic groups that still carried on traditional activities) and proletarianize Roma, to turn them into good socialist citizens. However, the socialist policies had rather ambiguous effects. The Roma did not own land before 1944, so they were in a lesser extent accepted in cooperatives, being rather employed in heavy industries and state farms. Thus, they were less eligible for the (re)allotment after 1989, although the law stipulated that those who worked in the cooperatives are entitled to 0.5 ha of land). Even so, most Roma were employed in low-skilled jobs, which were first to be restructured after 1989. Moreover, 93% of our respondents did not graduate high-school, which forced them to accept no or low-skilled employment. The lack of central political control over the degree of integration at the local level caused different levels of integration to emerge, an aspect visible after 1989, when many socio-economic researches revealed the heterogeneity of Roma communities (see Vincze, 2014). A side effect for the lack of political control is that, although the socialist policy targeted full employment of the labor force, 25% of our Roma respondents from South-East and South-Muntenia included in the present study declared they were not employed before 1989.

In post-socialism, their standard of living has worsened, if we take into account the fact that seven out of ten Roma respondents were not engaged in a formal economic activity at the time of our research. Only 12% are employees, and one out of ten receives a pension. Moreover, the occupational mobility for the elder child seems to be downwards, since one fifth were declared to be inactive, while one tenth are engaged in dehumanized economic activities (recycling industries).

Therefore, comparing Roma with non-Roma, the former score lower on all indicators measuring at risk of poverty or social exclusion. The poverty rates for Roma households based on expenditures per equivalent adult are much higher than for non-Roma. More than two-thirds of the Roma households were below a threshold set at 320 RON, almost twice as much (households) than non-Roma. Moreover, 85% of the Roma households are at or below the relative poverty line, nearly two times higher than the percentage of the non-Roma in the same situation. The differences between the

two categories seem to increase if we take into consideration material deprivation<sup>12</sup>; 75% of the Roma households experience severe material deprivation caused by the lack of material goods or an inability to satisfy basic social needs, a share which is three times higher than for non-Roma. Monetary and material deprivation in the case of Roma households is doubled by a weak integration of the latter in economic activities that generate a stable income. From the total number of Roma households in which we encountered working-aged persons, a quarter is not (formally) economically active, where for the non-Roma households, the share was only 10%.

As a consequence, the marginal position of the respondents on the labor market has an influence on the individual and households' welfare. The lack of a formal job makes them more dependent on social benefits that have a low monetary value and fail to reduce the risk of poverty<sup>13</sup>. Consequently, the risk of poverty or social exclusion for Roma households is 92%.

**Table 3:** *At risk of poverty or social exclusion indicators for Roma and non-Roma*

	<b>Non-Roma</b>	<b>Roma</b>
Expenditure per equivalent adult below the median household expenditures (320 RON)	24%	67%
Expenditure per equivalent adult below the median household expenditures (533 RON)	46%	85%
Material deprivation	25%	75%
Low intensity of work	10%	25%
Share of households in risk of poverty or social exclusion	43%	92%
Share of respondents declaring to be poor <sup>14</sup>	24%	62%

Source: ILM database, own calculations.

The data presented in this chapter and the ones summarized in Table 3 makes the debate on Roma inclusion rather rhetorical. Can we discuss about social inclusion when only 11% of the respondents' first child has graduated from high school, and only 8% of the respondents (the share is increasing to 14% for the eldest child)

followed a training course, compared with 31% of the non-Roma? It is rather difficult to discuss about social inclusion programs when healthcare in rural areas are lacking, and when almost a third of the households do not go to a doctor because of the lack of financial resources. Finally, how can we increase the share of Roma employed in

the formal economy when at least half of Roma households live at the periphery of the villages/towns, and only 5% have participated in public employment programs in the last year?<sup>15</sup>

Instead of addressing these social deficits, the political elites – and not only –, are indulged in moralizing narratives regarding Roma's demographic deviant behavior and dependency

on social benefits, which are not even innovative<sup>16</sup>. The problematization of Roma's weak inclusion in behavioral terms tends to depoliticize the complex histories of inequality, segregation, socio-economic and political marginalization that historically characterized Roma communities.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The at-risk-of-poverty rate is the share of people with an equalized disposable income (after social transfer) below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold, which is set at 60% of the national median equalized disposable income after social transfers.

<sup>2</sup> Share of population living in households lacking at least four items out of the following nine items: i) to pay rent or utility bills, ii) keep home adequately warm, iii) face unexpected expenses, iv) eat meat, fish or a protein equivalent every second day, v) a week holiday away from home, or could not afford (even if wanted to) vi) a car, vii) a washing machine, viii) a color TV, or ix) a telephone.

<sup>3</sup> Breaking the poverty cycle is the subtitle of an influential report released by the World Bank at the beginning of the new millennium, see Ringold, D., Orenstein, M. and Wilkens, E. (2005) *Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the Poverty Cycle*. Washington, International Bank for Reconstruction.

<sup>4</sup> Although they could declare themselves as such in the 1977 census.

<sup>5</sup> Viorel Achim's article illustrates how the Central Committee of the then Romanian Workers Party constantly framed the nomad and semi-nomad Roma as the main problem in Romania, for which regulative measures were taken to reduce their free movement and also forbade begging, fortune telling or commercial activities Achim, V. (2010) *Încercarea romilor din România de a obține statutul de naționalitate conlocuitoare (1948-1949)*. *Revista istorică*, XXI, 5-6, 449-465.

<sup>6</sup> However, some Roma did benefit from the land redistribution during the agrarian reform in 1945, when 19.559 out of 500.000 people who received land, were Roma *ibid*.

<sup>7</sup> Some scholars estimate that during socialism, 40.000 Roma families had received state-owned houses, with very low rents, due to migration of some ethnic minorities, mainly Germans and Jews Crețan, R. and Turnock, D. (2008) *Romania's Roma*

*Population: From Marginality to Social Integration*. *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 124, 4, 274-299.

<sup>8</sup> Although statistics regarding school participation of Roma during socialism are scarce, the research conducted by the RIQL in 1998 showed that the highest level of education was attained by the generation enrolled during 1960-1980, ICCV (2002) *Indicatori privind comunitățile de romi din România*. București, Expert.

<sup>9</sup> I used the concept at its plural form acknowledging that we have witnessed to various forms of transitions in CEE, from neoliberal transition in Central Europe to a more neo-patrimonial system in Eastern Europe; for differences see Szelenyi, I. (2008) *A Theory of Transitions*. *Modern China*, 34, 1, 165-175 and for a more extensive analysis on the effects of these systems on the formation of an underclass and under-caste of Roma in CEE see Ladanyi, J. (2001) *The Hungarian Neoliberal State, Ethnic Classification and the Creation of an Roma Underclass*. In Emigh, R. J. and Szelenyi, I. (Eds.) *Poverty, Ethnicity and Gender in Eastern Europe during the Market Transition*. Westport, Connecticut, London, Praeger, Ladanyi, J. and Szelenyi, I. (2006) *Patterns of Exclusion: Constructing Gypsy Ethnicity and the Making of an Underclass in Transitional Societies of Europe*, New York, Columbia University Press, Szelenyi, I. (2001) *Poverty, Ethnicity and Gender in Transitional Societies - Introduction*. *Review of Sociology*, 7, 2, 5-10.

<sup>10</sup> For a critical perspective on the hypothesis regarding the formation of a Roma underclass in CEE, see Stewart, M. (2002) *Deprivation, the Roma and 'the underclass'*. In Hann, C. (Ed.) *Postsocialism. Ideals, ideologies and practices in Eurasia*. London and New York, Routledge.

<sup>11</sup> Other studies show a rate of 27% Căce, S., Preoteasa, A. M., Tomescu, C. & Stănescu, S. M. (Eds.) (2010) *Legal și egal pe piața muncii pentru comunitățile de romi*. *Diagnoza factorilor care*

influențează nivelul de ocupare la populația de romi din România, București, Expert, or 30% World Bank (2014) *Diagnostics and policy advice for supporting Roma inclusion in Romania*. Washinton: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

<sup>12</sup> See note 2.

<sup>13</sup> For a more in-depth analysis on the effects of social transfers in reducing the risk of poverty in the case of Roma see Raț, C. (2005) *Romanian Roma, State Transfers, and Poverty: A Study of Relative Disadvantage*. *International Journal of Sociology* 35, 3, 85-116, Raț, C. (2009b) *Incluziune adversă. Prestații sociale și persistența sărăciei în rândul romilor din România*. IN Toma, Ș. & Fosztó, L. (Eds.) *Spectrum. Cercetări sociale despre romi*. Cluj-Napoca. Cluj-Napoca, ISPMN și Kriterion.

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<sup>14</sup> Score 1, 2 or 3 on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means poor and 10 rich.

<sup>15</sup> These data refer only to the two regions included for analysis in this article.

<sup>16</sup> The problematization of Roma's weak integration in terms of demographic deviant behavior and dependency on social benefits appeared in the assessment made by the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party in the late 1970s, see Fosztó, L. and Anăstăsoaie, V. (2001) *Romania: representations, public policies and political projects*. IN Guy, W. (Ed.). *Between past and future. The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*. Great Britain, University of Hertfordshire Press, Stoenescu, A. M. (2014) *Țigani din Europa și din România. Studiu imagologic*, București, Rao.

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