

The dynamics of population of Indian origin in Romania and its current socio-economic implications

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In this article we present results of a micro-study based on a demo-economic perspective of a minority population of Indian origin, which had been migrated to Romania for over 700 years. We refer to the Romani population, almost 600,000 people, representing 3.25% of the total population. The migration to Europe, Wallachia and today's Romanian territories started from India in the 14th century. The spoken language has the same northeastern India origin, which is close to Sanskrit. From this viewpoint, we assume that the population has some specific features that define Indian people today. We mention here multiple talents, sensitivity, successful combination of various crafts and art, aspects that need a thorough study of the evolution of this population. Furthermore, such a study is important in the context of a dynamic economic and social expansion of the native country, India, perceived as the third major world power in the future, after USA and China. However, the bibliographical sources reveal some issues, such as the multiple economic and social problems related to the inclusion of the Romani population in the context of insufficient measures taken by the public authorities with respect to the Romani inclusion.

Keywords. Demo-economic indicators, Indian origin, Romanian population, socio-economic implications.

In our endeavour we were inspired by the charm of India. However, the basic theme was drawn from the approach of Joseph Samuel Nye Jr from his book, *The Future of Power*¹. Nye points out that India, with its population of 1.2 billion people, may become a core area in the context of a triple-pole world represented by USA, China and India by 2040. From an economic perspective, India might hold the third largest national income by 2045, after USA and China². Since 1990, India has recorded consistent growth rate of around 7% annually. Such performances were generated by the talent and technical skill of the Indian people, confirmed by the large number of engineers and computer specialists trained in this country in the last ten years, twice the number than that of USA. Furthermore, the stable democracy and popular cultural prototype which exert influence worldwide are aspects that explain the appreciation of Martin Wolf, according to whom, the economy of India 'will become greater than the British economy in ten years and the Japanese economy in two decades'¹. Obviously, human resources play the most important role, beyond shortcom-

ings such as poverty or illiteracy. Sociologists and economists consider this resource to be 'special' due to the 'uniqueness' of Indian people. In close connection with all these factors, we consider the analysis of some demo-economic aspects related to the Romani population, a national minority in Romania, that has an Indian genealogy for centuries. The Romani origins belong to Indian territories; therefore, we assume that the Romani population shares some common features with the Indian population. According to Mendizabal *et al.*³, across Europe, the Romani people have their genetic origins in North/northwestern India. The wide-genome data provided by 13 Romani groups revealed their affiliation to Indian population dating back to 1500 years. The migration of the Romani genome to Europe started 900 years ago via Balkans. Furthermore, the genetic blood studies focusing on Romani people indicated a closer connection with Indians than European populations⁴. Gresham *et al.*⁵ pointed out the common Asian origins of the Romani population after analysing the Y chromosome and the DNA markers of 14 Romani groups. Therefore we strongly believe that the evolution of Romani population deserves to be studied. The economic perspective that we would like to develop concerns the historical period marked by the beginning of the migration of these populations from India to the area recognized as belonging to Romania.

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Demo-economic indicators versus (un)employment

The issue of Romani population in Romania was of concern to many researchers, both from Romania^{6–12} and abroad^{13–22}. As argued by Radulescu²³, a significant number of studies has been conducted since 1990 (95.9%) because the interest in Romani communities has increased considerably. Obviously, the research on this topic has been carried out mostly by Romanian experts, but 15% of the studies has been conducted in USA, Great Britain and France.

Trends across seven centuries

The Romani population is present on Romanian territories starting with the end of the fourteenth century²⁴. Being of Asian (Indian) origin, the migration of Romani people reached Southeast Europe in the 1300s and Western Europe in the 1400s. The first acknowledged text²⁵ from Moldavia and Wallachia (historical province of today's Romania) illustrates the situation of slave families of Romani origin. Dan I. Waywode of Wallachia reports that in 1385 there was a group of Romani people, also known as 'Gypsy'. Other similar references subsequently revealed the existence of a Romani group in Transylvania. According to a document, in 1416, the Transylvanian city of Kronstadt (Brasov) donated food and money to a Romani group in need. In Moldavia, the presence of Romani people is first mentioned in 1428, during the reign of Alexander cel Bun, in an act of donation to a monastery. Since their arrival to Romanian medieval countries, Gypsies were slaves to landowners. An important episode in the history of Romani people during the nineteenth century was the abolition of slavery in Romania, an event which generated massive migrations from this part of Europe to the rest of the world. Nevertheless, after the Great Union and the foundation of Romania as a state, the Romani population increased due to a large number of people living in Transylvania and Bessarabia, regions where they were not perceived as slaves. In the 1930 general census²⁴, 262,501 people declared themselves to be Romani, representing 1.5% of the country's population. Out of these, 221,726 Romani people (84.5% out of total) lived in villages and 40,775 (15.5%) in cities. During the communist period in Romania, at various times²⁶, the number of Romani people alternated as follows – in 1956: 104,216 (0.60% out of country's population), in 1966: 64,197 (0.37% out of country's population) and in 1977: 227,398 (1.05% out of country's population). It can be said that the twentieth century was marked by two key moments: the Holocaust and the collapse of communism in Europe. Moreover, major events of this century were meant to reveal something extremely important, that is the need for political organization of the

Romani people. This process has undergone tremendous progress after the First World War, especially in Eastern Europe²⁷.

Demo-economic description

In Romania, the Romani people or Gypsies are one of the largest ethnic minorities, the second minority after the Hungarians. It is important to mention here that the provisional results of the 2011 census revealed that 16.87 million people (88.6% of the total resident population) declared themselves as being Romanians. In the same year²⁸, 619,007 persons (3.25%) declared themselves to be Romani, 535,140 persons (2.5%) in 2002 and only 401,087 persons (1.8%) in 1992. The variation in their number in all 41 Romanian counties (1.06% of country's, population – light colour, 8.78% – dark colour) is graphically shown in Figure 1.

In the period between 1992 and 2011, the Romani population from Vrancea (74.9%), Tulcea (65.8%), Arges (65.8%), Valcea (61.4%) and Dambovița (58.9%) increased²⁹, whereas the number of Romani people from Teleorman decreased by approximately 24%. As indicated by the most recent data³⁰, the employment rate for the 15–64 years age group among the Romani population was only 30% in 2011, compared with 44% for the majority population, with significant disparities in employment rates between Romani men and women: only 19% of women and 42% of men out of Romani population were employed. Furthermore, the employment status of young people (15–24 years) remains problematic for both Romani and non-Romani population, only 22% and 24% of them are employed³¹.

Employment in the informal sector increased between 2008 and 2011: it was slightly more pronounced among Romani population (15–64 years old), where 7 out of 10 people worked in the informal economy, as opposed to 2 out of 10 in the non-Romani population³¹. In 2011, out of the total number of Romani people employed (15–64 years old), approximately 43% were unskilled workers, 9% semi-skilled, 18% skilled workers, 16% day labourers and only 2% employed in jobs that require higher education.

The loss of traditional professions and the level of poverty

From an economic perspective, the Romani is the most disadvantaged community in Romania. There are at least two factors that could explain the discrepancy between the rate of employment and unemployment³²:

- Education of Romani people; only a relatively small number of Romani people are educated, requiring a job and documents in order to be officially registered.

Recensamantul populatiei si locuintelor din 2011

3. Etnicii romi

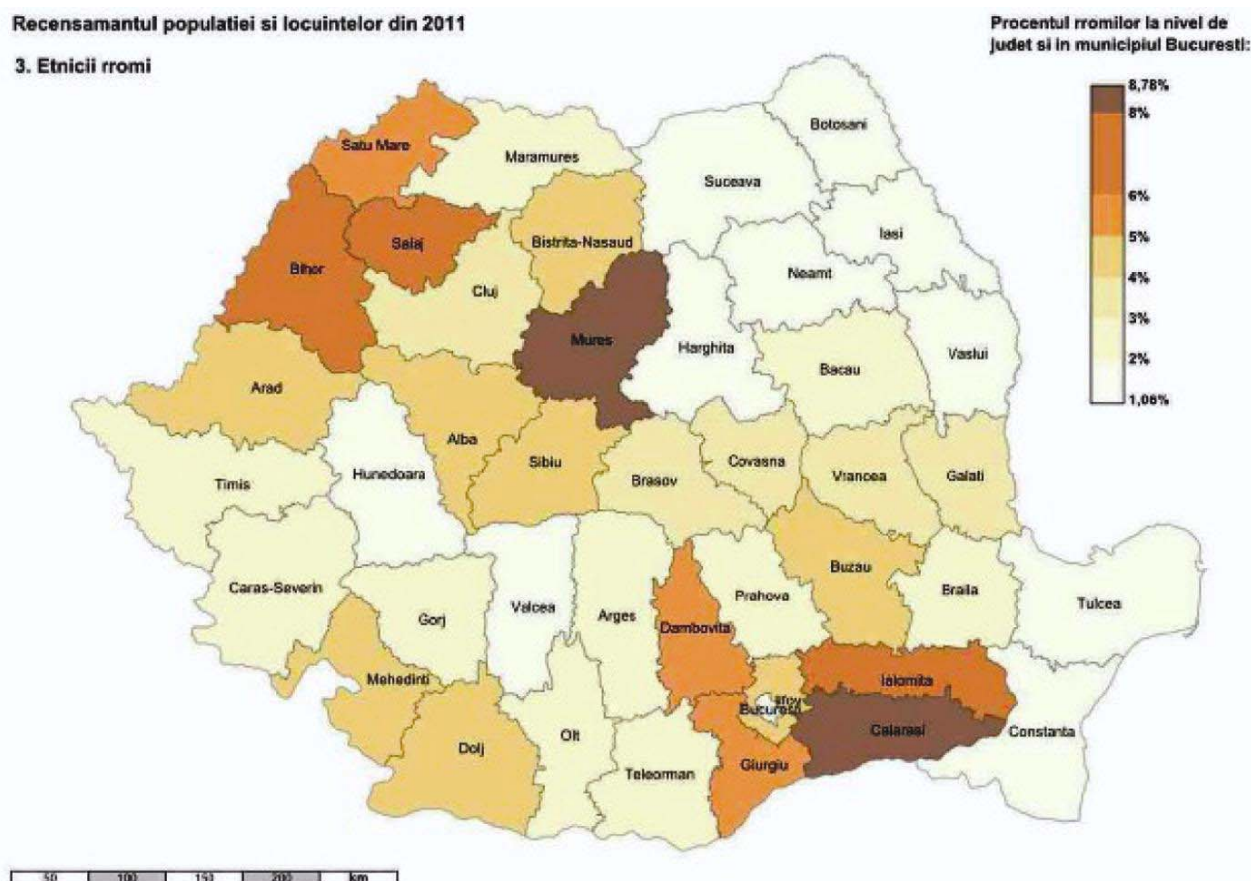


Figure 1. The percentage of Romani people per county and in the Municipality of Bucharest (2011). (Source: National Institute of Statistics, National Census of Population and Housing – 2011, Bucharest, 2012.)

- Small number of adult Romani people who lost their jobs followed the official steps in order to be registered as unemployed.

In 2011, only 13% of Romani people, almost exclusively men, had traditional occupations³³. On an average, 50% of the Romani people are working on their own, often without legal employment contract, which may lead to the association of this group with that of the temporary workers. To this type of workers we might add those who have seasonal contracts. Among non-working people, there are housekeepers, retired people, people with disabilities, people living on social aid and the unemployed. Table 1 gives a comparison between Romani and non-Romani sources of income, presented as a percentage of total monthly income.

Taking into consideration the poverty threshold of US\$ 4.3/day, reported to income and expenditure, the data³¹ emphasize that about half of the Romani population from Romania lives in absolute poverty, a number which is four times higher than that of the majority population. Taking into account a lower poverty threshold (PPP US\$ 2.15), the absolute poverty rate drops significantly in both the populations, but still remains much higher for

Romani people in comparison with the majority population. The precarious employment situation is directly reflected in the quality of housing³⁴; approximately 29% of Romani people have a housing density of more than three people/room and 12.6 square meters/person, compared to other ethnicities, where the percentage is only 3.7% and the average space per person is about 22.3 square meters.

In 2006, a study reported that 83% of Romani people lived mostly in peripheral areas of towns and 77% of them in compact communities³⁵. Only 40% own a house and a quarter of them live in their parents' houses, particularly in rural areas. A significant percentage of people (2.7) live in improvised homes. In this category we might include the following:

- Approximately 15% of Romani people do not have electricity, compared to only 2% of the Romanian population.
- In urban areas, only 27% of Romani people have access to tap water, compared to 90% of other ethnicities.
- Only 53% of Romani households were using refrigerators in 2007, compared to 92% non-Romani households.

Table 1. The structure of income sources

	The percentage of income sources in the total monthly income	
	Romani	Non-Romani
Earnings	31	36
Unemployment benefit	1	1
Pensions	19	51
Social assistance	14	4
Allowances for children	23	5
Income from sources other than employment (extra-wages)	8	2
Remittances (money sent from abroad)	3	1

Source: Ref. 31.



Figure 2. Estimated Romani population in Europe (Source: People’s World Peace Project, 2010).

- 8% of Romani households had computers compared to 24% of the same settlements not belonging to the Romani minority.

the vanished jobs of the Romani people, we mention the processing of animal bones and horns, hair processing (for brush manufacturing) and horse trade.

Traditional crafts of Romani people have a lower market share in the context of the development of new technologies that generate better quality products at lower costs. Consequently, traditional practices such as tinning of metal boilers, manufacturing of gold or silver jewellery, clothing (buttons), household items and religious articles made of wood are in less demand in the market. Among

European Union concerns on Romani issues

Currently, with a population of approximately 10 million people in Europe, Romani people can be found throughout ‘the old continent’ (Figure 2). In this context, we argue that this population does not have a country of its own. The largest number of Romani people live in

Central and Eastern Europe, in countries such as Romania, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary and the former Yugoslavia.

According to the Council of Europe in 2007, the total number of Romani people and other migratory populations²⁵ was 9,855,382. The size, social and economic situation of the Romani people vary from one member state to another, and therefore, the national approaches of Romani inclusion should be tailored to the specific needs. Although the number of Romani people is not that large compared to the total European population, there are several concerns. The low level of education is part of the vicious cycle of poverty and dependence, including the lack of free healthcare facilities, life in poor conditions, and discrimination. A quarter of them are illiterate, which significantly reduces the chances of inclusion in the European labour market that is increasingly more competitive. The situation is even more difficult taking into consideration that the existent laws clearly specify that only those who have completed secondary school qualify for the European Labour market. According to the European Union (EU) framework for National Integration Strategies of Romani people up to 2020, 'improving the situation of the Romani people is not only an urgent social priority, but it can also enhance long-term economic growth; successful inclusion policies will contribute to the efforts of the Member States to achieve the objectives for Europe 2020, mainly specific aims in areas of employment, education, and social inclusion'³⁶. Integrating them into the economic system through adequate training, both in terms of education and health, is a solution able to determine the active participation of the Romani people in the socio-cultural system. For this purpose, it is necessary that the Member States of EU and the European Commission (EC) better exploit the experience of international organizations such as the Council of Europe³⁷, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and international initiatives such as the Decade of Romani people inclusion 2005–2015.

Conclusion

The Romani population from Romania whose multiseccular origins might be located, according to geneticists, historians, demographers, etc., in the Indian territories, is confronting for a long time with a series of socio-economic difficulties, despite its undeniable virtues. Currently, the insufficient measures taken by the public authorities are responsible for the extreme poverty, profound social exclusion, barriers to exercise fundamental rights and discrimination that these people are faced with. As we have shown in this article, this leads to limited access to education, jobs and quality services, low income levels, poor living conditions and extremely poor healthcare. In a broad context, this is reflected in the eco-

nomic cost for society as a whole, including the wastage of human capital and productivity loss. In the new European context of improvement, Romania aims at achieving a set of new objectives³⁸, which reflect socio-economic inclusion of the Romani minority by implementing integrated policies in education, employment, health system, habitation, culture and social infrastructure.

Strategic landmarks are related to the following:

- Ensuring equal, free and universal access to quality education at all levels for the Romani people in the public education system in order to support the growth and development of the knowledge society.
- Promoting the education of Romani children within the existent educational system and reducing discrimination based on ethnicity, social status, disability or any other criteria that affect children and young people from disadvantaged groups, including Romani people.
- Increasing the level of employment of Romani minority along with attractive investment options.
- Local and central institutions have to take measures to promote healthcare and provide decent living conditions for the poor communities, as well as free access to public services and basic infrastructure. What makes all these measures particularly significant is that the above-mentioned objectives are proposed while trying to ensure the preservation and development of cultural identity (language, customs, and heritage) of the Romani population in Romania.

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