

## The Vicious Circle of Roma Minority Social Exclusion in the Czech Republic

Andrea PREISSOVÁ KREJČÍ\*

\* Silesian University, Faculty of Public Policies in Opava, Czech Republic

\*Corresponding Author

E-mail: andrea.krejci@email.cz

Received: November 09, 2019

Accepted: December 20, 2019

### Abstract

The Czech Republic was, until recently, more or less ethnically homogeneous, although for a relatively short period of time, namely in the second half of the 20th century, because a considerable number of non-Czech inhabitants (the Germans and Hungarians) had to leave Czechoslovakia for political reasons after the World War Two. Contemporary ethnical variety of the Czech Republic is enhanced especially by migrants from East Europe and Southeast Asia. A very specific problem is the coexistence of Czech majority and Roma minority (together with migration, minorities and so on). Roma often live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and are discriminated against in various areas of social life. They are more often unemployed and less educated; they do not get enough health care, etc., compared to the Czech majority. The main goal of problems of socially excluded locations in the Czech Republic reflection is to introduce limits of contemporary discourse about social exclusion of part of Czech citizens in connection with Roma minority as the most typical image of social exclusion.

**Keywords:** Social exclusion, Roma minority, persistent unemployment, qualification, life aspirations, Roma schools

### INTRODUCTION

The main aim of this article about socially excluded localities in the Czech Republic is to present the limits of the current discourse about the social exclusion of some Czech citizens in connection with the Roma minority as the most typical picture of social exclusion.

My study discusses a topic about Roma people, or in other words Gypsies, who in the Czech Republic are a large minority. Ethnographers point out that the term Gypsy is not a mere neutral denomination of a group member, but it is understandable only through a cultural model that is connected to it and that has been built because of a long culture of conflict and therefore is in accordance with the stereotypical reflexion of a gypsy in the context that is not surprising to the member of majority. I will try to explain that conflict.

There are 10 516 125 citizens in the Czech Republic, according to the last census (2011). Ethnically it is quite a homogenous part of the central Europe. Czech society cannot be described as multicultural as such, as there are just roughly 500 000 citizens of a different nationality and just about 500 000 foreigners living in the country long term. Czechs who make over 90% of the population totally outnumber the other nationalities language-wise and culturally. 100 years back it used to be different, but after the second world war and after Czechoslovakia fell apart there were various historic – demographic processes and the population got homogenized. The Germans were displaced and Slovaks and Hungarians became the citizens of a different country.

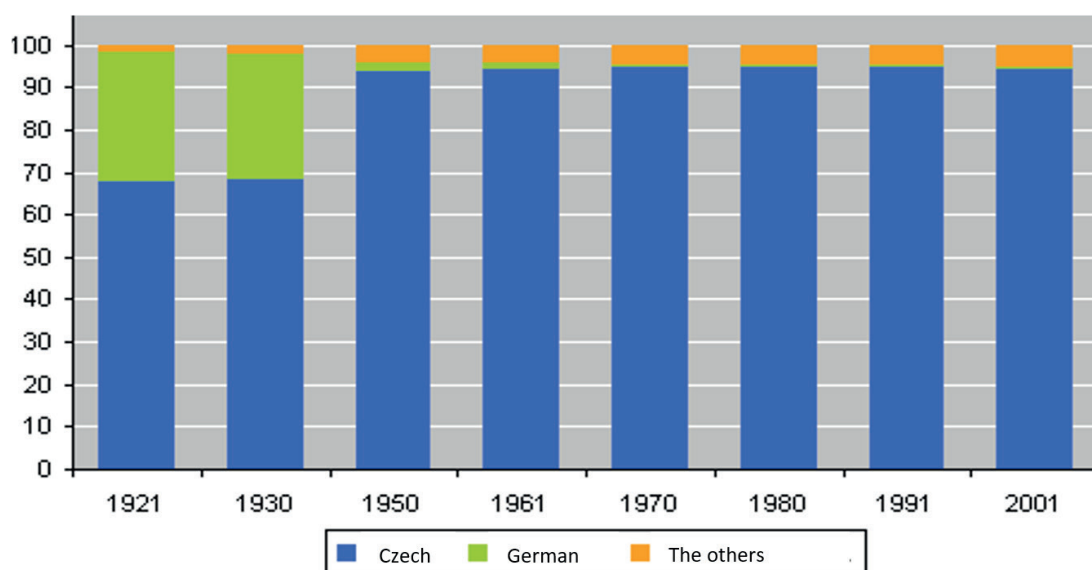


Figure 1. Population structure development based on nationalities between 1921–2001

What is important is that today the ethnical composition is enriched mainly by the migrants from the eastern part of Europe and south-east of Asia. This fact is reflected in the need of preparation of the Czech majority population to multicultural society of the future and to suppress the

prejudicial behaviour, xenophobia and extremist attitude towards foreigners.

There are a few ethnical minorities in the Czech Republic at the moment (12/2018).

Ukraine	131 302	Bulgaria	15 593
Slovakia	116 817	Romania	14 684
Viet Nam	61 097	United States of America	9 510
Russian Federation	38 033	Mongolia	9 075
Poland	21 279	EU 28	232 493
Germany	21 267	non-EU	331 852
Total			564 345

**Table 1.** Foreigners - 10 most frequent citizenships: EU-citizens and third-country nationals by region of the CR as at 31 December 2018 (source: Directorate of the Alien Police Service)

The biggest group are Ukrainians (131 000), then Slovaks (116 000), who lived in one state unit with Czechs for nearly 500 years (Czechoslovakia and Austria-Hungary). The next minorities as for their size are: Vietnamese (61 000), Russian (38 000), Polish (21 000), German (21 000) and others (50 000).

## METHODS

The presented study is theoretical and therefore deals with the analysis and synthesis of findings from authors who have dealt with the issue in the Czech Republic so far. We also build on a heuristic method that allows us to describe the collective historical consciousness and stereotyping of the Roma issue in modern history. Heuristic analysis and interpretation of the literature on the topic will lead us to the aims of the thesis: The main goal of problems of socially excluded locations in the Czech Republic reflection is to introduce limits of contemporary discourse about social exclusion of part of Czech citizens in connection with Roma minority as the most typical image of social exclusion.

### Position Of Minorities In The Czech Republic Focused On Roma People

Firstly, I would like to clarify that according to international agreements minorities have ensured rights, including the right to be educated in the language of the minority, but no one uses this right but Polish. Roma people too are educated in the language of majority. Roma language, which is used by only a part of Roma population, even though it is brought to life by Roma folklore and national movement, is not used for education of Roma people. Roma people are considered the most visible minority in the Czech Republic.

In Bohemia and Moravia, it can look ridiculous how vigorously and in a complicated way we are trying to define who is a Roma person and who isn't, because everybody has met a member of that ethnical group and associates certain beliefs or attitudes with them. Every Czech has heard of the Roma problem and either got involved personally in a problem with them or just indirectly through their acquaintances' experience or information from media.

Štěpán Moravec [1] gives us 3 possible definitions of Roma people. 1) Roma people as the carriers of Roma culture: a Roma person is someone who applies a certain complex, integrated system of values, norms and principles of social organization, way of problem solving, etc., that we call the Roma culture, even though this term can be quite problematic. 2) Roma people as the self-identifying notion: a Roma person is someone who considers himself to be a Roma person. 3) Roma person as a set of appearance characteristics: a Roma person is someone who is described as one by other people, usually because of his appearance.

The declared number of Roma people is not as big in

comparison with other minorities in the Czech Republic. according to the results of census in 2011, 5135 people claimed allegiance to the Roma nationality and 7717 people claimed allegiance to two nationalities, where one of them was Roma. it is not off-topic to have a look at the statistics concerning mother tongue. less than 5 000 people declared to have the Roma language as their only mother tongue. Roma language along with Czech language is considered to be their mother tongue by more than 33 000 people and another 2 000 people consider Roma language along with Slovak language to be their mother tongue.

It is obvious that these numbers are in accordance with the definitions of who is a Roma person mentioned above, because they identify themselves as Roma people. the largest nationality group next to Czechs are Moravians with 521 801 people, then Slovaks with 147 152 people, Ukrainian with 53 253 people, Polish with 39 096 people and Vietnamese with 29 660 people [2].

Below we will explain why the Roma people in the Czech Republic attract most of the majority attention even if they are not the largest minority or culturally and linguistically most distant. Roma people don't claim their allegiance to their nationality on purpose. Roma people don't understand them being Roma as a nationality different from the Czech nationality. Roma people don't identify to be a part of the Roma community. According to expert estimation the number of Roma people in the Czech Republic is much higher. usually the estimation is around 150- 200 000 people [3], but sometimes it is close to 300 000 people. But it looks like not even the experts are able to make an expert estimation of how many Roma people live in the Czech Republic. Beside this, it is estimated that only in the excluded locations (economical discomfort) there are 80 000 Roma people.

### Historic Context Of Czech And Roma Relationship

Secondly, I would like to describe the milestones of the long-term co-existence of Czech and Roma people. where did the culture of conflict that characterize it come from? Roma people are an ethnical group that have their members not only in most countries in Europe but also North America, for example. according to expert estimation there are 12 000 000 Roma people in Europe and "they are the most discriminated and segregated ethnical group" [4].

It is in south-eastern Europe where the Roma people have the biggest percentage of people in the number of citizens – 10%. It is similar in Slovakia and Hungary [5]. Some sources mention Roma people being in Europe as early as in the 14th century, they got to Bohemia and Moravia in the 15th century and then continued to Germany, France and Spain.

Even in the middle ages, Roma people were widely distrusted by others, because of their different appearance, character and customs. to this we can add thefts and

poaching, which were their source of living, because Roma people were landless and wandered from a place to place. The initial distrust grew and gradually turned into an open aversion. The following centuries meant the times of repressions and persecution for Roma people. From the 18th century permanent settling of Roma people was appearing, but in the 19th century they were still not settled in Bohemia. A different situation was in Moravia, where so called "Roma camps/villages" existed. These were more or less isolated units on the outskirts of villages and towns whose citizens allowed Roma people to settle there [6]. At the beginning of the 20th century legal actions were made to ensure the gradual integration of Roma people into society.

In between the wars there were a few groups of Roma people in Czechoslovakia – the largest group were so called Slovak Roma who lived permanently in Slovakia, another large group were Hungarian Roma who lived in Hungarian speaking part of Slovakia. Roma people in Bohemia and Moravia were the Czech Roma. Beside these, there were German Roma (Sints) and wandering Vlachika Roma.

After the Roma holocaust in the second world war there were only a few families of Czech Roma left in Bohemia and Moravia. Roma from the settlement in eastern Slovakia were coming to the displaced regions and to the industrial cities to find jobs. Therefore, Slovak Roma people are superior in numbers. Unlike in Slovakia most of the Roma people live in cities in Bohemia and Moravia. In the 60s there was another wave of relocation of Roma people from Slovakia to the municipal areas in Bohemia and Moravia, but unlike the after-war migration, this was a planned spread of families and it didn't take family bonds into consideration. during this relocation almost 2 000 Roma people came to the area of the Czech Republic [7].

### Roma Social Status

Thirdly I would like to mention, that in connection to the economic transformation of the Czech society from the state driven economy to market economy a new phenomenon of unemployment emerged, hand in hand with creating menial low-waged jobs [8]. This development impacted mainly unskilled or almost unskilled classes – which mostly means Roma people. It is estimated that nearly 90% of Roma people from segregated locations who are able to work are unemployed on the long-term bases.

Poverty grows in 300 existing Roma settlements, new housings emerge – shacks without basic facilities like running water and electricity. This is connected to failing health and more negative phenomena on rise (alcoholism and criminality) on one side and growing intolerance and xenophobia from the majority on the other side [9].

Socially segregated locations are usually spatially segregated too, because they are located on the outskirts of municipal areas. in these enclaves "pathological phenomena are cumulated and this reinforces the feeling that it is right to segregate them" [10]. Because of the absence of functional social control, the socially pathological, deviant phenomena (such as crime rate, prostitution, drug or alcohol addiction) are more or less tolerated. It is obvious that a life in segregated location influences or even determines person's behaviour.

In connection to the existence of socially segregated locations, some experts started using the terms ghetto and ghettoization of Roma people. At the same time, some of them blame the majority population, which not only allowed this to happen, but also gradually created this situation.

Markéta Levínská says that the foundations of ghettos were laid by the situation in the 80's, when the countryside population of Czechoslovakia got smaller. Young people were moving to cities and free flats, produced by mass housing construction in the socialist era in 60's and 70's,

were given to Roma families [11]. Gradual moving of the socially disadvantaged Roma people into the same houses and not early enough start of the programmes to integrate these people into common life, amongst "normal" population and lately market economy and uncontrollable entrepreneurship with estates, gradually caused the development of the ghettos. That is how Roma people were segregated socially, ethnically and in many places also spatially from the majority.

In the socially segregated locations, a higher crime rate is recorded and it comes directly from the lack of resources (mainly financial) and on that account also lack of job opportunities, and because Roma people usually live in these segregated locations, a phenomenon called "ethnization of criminality" emerges in the Czech society.

Pavel Řičan says that 20 – 30% of Roma economically productive Roma people earn their living illegally. The ratio of them in prisons is 60% and their relapse into crime ratio is estimated up to 50%. The most common crimes committed by the Roma people are: burglaries (22%) and theft (19%). Also, their involvement in raping (20%) cannot be overlooked. Considering the number of Roma population, the all in all crime rate of Roma people is 5 times bigger than the crime rate of the other population [12].

Roma people are often linked not only with insufficient qualifications but also with illiteracy

it is not common to finish education on an ordinary lower secondary school for Roma parents and their children [11]. Education is the condition for a successful work life. Knowledge, abilities and skills gained at school are so abstract for Roma children, that they find them unnecessary and can live without them. Roma children are brought up with the use of examples, experience and school knowledge is not personally transferable into that. Why do Roma children fail in schools? If the schools are still ethnically divided, social exclusion only gets worse and reinforced. Children from socially segregated locations, or in other words Roma ghettos, often don't meet the members of majority population for a long period in their life, because they don't attend ordinary schools, but they attend practical schools and so called Roma schools, where the curriculum is adapted to the needs of the Roma minority.

Even Roma people themselves prefer attending practical, or so-called Roma schools with adapted curricula, but this prevents them from attending high schools or colleges. Several schools in the Czech Republic are ethnically homogenous – Roma. Roma often don't see a reason to invest in the higher education of their children. A school where the majority of children are not Roma is perceived as alienating for Roma children. Roma children are often stigmatized (Roma are visibly different). The school results of Roma children depend on how well they cope with their stigma.

## CONCLUSION

Therefore, Roma people are trapped in the social exclusion from childhood and the socialization of Roma children into majority population is a vicious circle. To accept the humiliating role of a pupil at an ordinary school is possible only for the kids who think the education will be worth it one day – socially and financially. However, the gain is in so far away future that most of the Roma youth lost motivation [11].

The estimation of Roma people living in the Czech Republic is around 200.000, and from that amount 80.000 people live in excluded locations. Living in these conditions means especially the combination of 3 factors: persistent unemployment, low qualification and low standard of living.

For the children of people living in this environment the lack of higher education, along with the lack of life aspirations and attending special schools with less requirements for the pupils is typical. The existence of so called "Roma schools" is linked to these locations. Currently there are 12 schools with exclusively Roma pupils, and 83 schools with majority of Roma pupils. Despite the state administration and self-government attempts to include Roma pupils into standard school and major society, the majority of Roma doesn't have higher education and the social exclusion gets deeper and deeper with new generations.

Roma people are usually trapped in the vicious circle which ends by living in the socially segregated locations, or ghettos, in poverty without any prospect of a better life. Low or insufficient education prevents them from finding employment and therefore they get dependant on the state and help from the majority and make living illegally which makes them fit into the stereotypes that were created about them.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Moravec, Š. (2006). Nástin problematiky sociálního vyloučení romských populací. In: Hirt, T., & Jakoubek, M. (eds.) „Romové“ v osidlech sociálního vyloučení. Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk.
- [2] Český statistický úřad. Obyvatelstvo podle věku, podle národnosti, mateřského jazyka, náboženské víry, nejvyššího ukončeného vzdělání, státního občanství a podle pohlaví [on-line]. 31. 10. 2012 [cit. 2019-11-06]. Retrieved from: <https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/20534540/obcr614.pdf/7d27edbd-4b32-45ee-89d5-a1ceaf618033?version=1.0>.
- [3] Gabal, I., & Víšek, P. (2010). Východiska strategie boje se sociálním vyloučením [on-line]. Praha, 2010 [cit. 2019-11-06]. Retrieved from: [http://www.gac.cz/userfiles/File/nase\\_prace\\_vystupy/GAC\\_Strategie\\_soc\\_vyloucení.pdf](http://www.gac.cz/userfiles/File/nase_prace_vystupy/GAC_Strategie_soc_vyloucení.pdf).
- [4] Gulová, L., et al. (2012). Aktivizace sociálně znevýhodněných skupin v pedagogické praxi a výzkumu. Brno: Masarykova univerzita.
- [5] Marušiaková, E. (1999). Romské skupiny ve střední a jihovýchodní Evropě. In: Romové – tradice a současnost. Brno: Moravské zemské muzeum.
- [6] Horváthová, J. (1999). Historické osudy Romů od jejich odchodu z Indie do 19. století. In: Romové – tradice a současnost. Brno: Moravské zemské muzeum.
- [7] Davidová, E. (1999). Osudy a cesty Romů v letech 1945–1989. In: Romové – tradice a současnost. Brno: Moravské zemské muzeum.
- [8] Keller, J. (2006). Soumrak sociálního státu. Praha: SLOŇ.
- [9] Kumanová, Z., & Zelinová, H. (1999). Rómovia na Slovensku. In: Romové – tradice a současnost. Brno: Moravské zemské muzeum.
- [10] Toušek, L. (2006). Kultura chudoby, underclass a sociální vyloučení. In: Hirt, T., & Jakoubek, M. (eds.) „Romové“ v osidlech sociálního vyloučení. Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk.
- [11] Bittnerová, D., Doubek, D., & Levínská, M. (2011). Funkce kulturních modelů ve vzdělávání. Praha: Univerzita Karlova.
- [12] Krištof, R. (2006). Romové, Evropa a mezinárodní situace. In: Hirt, T., & Jakoubek, M. (eds.) „Romové“ v osidlech sociálního vyloučení. Plzeň: Aleš Čeněk.