

**SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF ROMA DURING
THE POST-COMMUNIST PERIOD¹**

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Abstract. *The article presents an analysis of the changes in the Roma's socio-cultural status during the post-communist period. It is disclosed how social exclusion of the Roma ethnic community took place in all major social spheres during the whole period. Spatial and social isolation of the Roma in relation to the rest of the Bulgarian citizens are presented and the concomitant risks of both types of isolation and exclusion.*

Key words: Roma social isolation, Roma social exclusion

Roma are one of the most stigmatised, marginalised and discriminated groups in Bulgaria, in the Balkans, and in all of Europe. Several consecutive waves of the European and World Values Surveys reveal that social distance from Roma is practically great in all countries; but it is considerably huge in the countries from Central and Eastern Europe wherein over two-thirds of the European Roma are concentrated. After 2001, their mass migrations to Western Europe and North America have led to a series of deportations, violence, and discriminatory policies in accepting countries, particularly in Italy, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, Canada, etc. The summarised data from the international comparative survey *European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey* (EU-MIDIS), conducted in 2009, reveal the following: *Looking at a breakdown of the results according to specific groups in Member States, "the top five" experiencing the highest level of discrimination over a 12 month period were, in descending order: Roma in the Czech Republic (64%), Africans in Malta (63%), Roma in Hungary (62%), Roma in Poland (59%), and Roma in Greece (55%). On average, each Roma person experienced more incidents of discrimination over a 12 month period than other aggregate groups surveyed – such as Sub-Sahara Africans or Turkish respondents. However, looking at a breakdown of results for specific groups in Member States, the highest average number of discrimination incidents over a 12 month period was experienced by North Africans in Italy: an average of*

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9.29 incidents for every North African person interviewed in Italy. The next highest number was 6.81 incidents for each Roma person in Poland and 6.69 incidents for each Roma in Hungary (EU-MIDIS:9).

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS AND NUMBER OF ROMA IN BULGARIA. FEARS AND PREJUDICES RELATING TO SOME SPECIFICS OF ROMA GROUPS

The years of deep economic and political crises during the post-communist period in Bulgaria coincided with significant demographic changes. A sharp decrease in fertility, emigration of hundreds of thousands of (relatively) young people, high mortality rates and rapid population decline were regarded by many politicians and ordinary people as phenomena threatening national security and weakening the economic and military power of the country.

Bulgaria is one of the European countries with the fastest population decline. According to the National Statistical Institute (NSI), at the end of 1989, Bulgaria's population amounted to 8 992 300 people, and the 2011 Census reported a decrease to 7 351 234 people – i.e. a decrease of 1 641 066 people during the post-communist period. Only the Roma community has been growing². It is the youngest ethnic group in the country. It is distinguished by a number of peculiarities of its demographic behaviour, exaggerated by the media and politicians and periodically (particularly before elections) provoking an orchestrated panic about “the demographic invasion of minorities, especially of Roma” - the invasion being represented as rapid demographic and cultural assimilation of Bulgarians. Demographic fear induces strong negative attitudes and gives rise to widely held prejudices against Roma in the country.

Data from the 2011 Census, conducted by NSI, indicate that Roma still remain the third largest ethnic group in Bulgaria. 325 343 people identified themselves as Roma. Their projected number, based on various rates of their natural increase for the period 1992 - 2004, produced significantly higher figures. It was anticipated that by 2011 their number would exceed 450 thousand people, with the reservation that a possible decline due to external migration was not considered in the projection and the natural increase rates would remain constant (Pamporov 2007, pp. 63-64). The census data were surprising for most experts and the majority of people. Nevertheless, they have their explanation:

- First, in 2011 no information was collected about the ethnicity of 9% of Bulgaria's population. The main hypothesis suggests that the majority of that population is Bulgarian Muslims, Roma and people who are identified as Roma/Gypsies by the neighbouring population but who prefer to identify themselves as Millet, Agyuyps, Turks or Bulgarians.
- The second valid hypothesis indicates that the discrepancy between the expected number(s) and self-identification arises from external emigration. Until 2001,

² The Roma community growth was absolute by 2001 and relative by 2011. In 2011, 4.9% of the Bulgarian population identified themselves as Roma: their relative number increased by 0.2 percentage points, but their absolute number decreased by 45 565 people (NSI 2011).