

# ROMA ETHNICITY AND CULTURE

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## INTRODUCTION

This book deals with the Roma people, Roma community and Roma family. The author who deals with the Roma issues and she is a member of the Department of Sociology at the Faculty of Arts of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, focus on this ethnic group from various perspectives. The Roma are well known, yet the views of the majority society on them are often stereotypical. The stereotypes are based on two distinct images. On one hand, the Roma are viewed negatively; they are associated with laziness, unreliability, danger and uncleanliness. Even today, some mothers tell their children that if they misbehave, they will be given to Gypsies. The second image is more flattering. It speaks of the Roma as good musicians and talented dancers.

The chapters are grounded in research conducted by the author of this book in the Roma settlement of Orechov dvor in Nitra, Slovakia. The research methods are detailed in the first section. The first chapter also provides a crucial definition of ethnicity since the Roma have not been recognized as an ethnic minority for a long time (they have been identified *only* as an ethnic group). This chapter includes a detailed definition of the Roma and their identity, as well as their anthropological, demographic and ethnic characteristics. The author of the chapter also comments on the demographic situation of the Roma in Europe, with a specific focus placed on Slovakia and Poland. A difficult comparison at international level shows that the share of the Roma population living in Slovakia is one of the highest in the countries of present-day Europe. When compared to other minority groups, the Roma represent a significant part of the Slovak population not only because of their number, but also because of their specific diversity and uniqueness, social way of life and their hierarchic position within society. Interestingly, the Roma have preserved their ethnocultural attributes despite centuries of social exclusion and marginalization.

In order to provide a detailed characterization of the Roma ethnic group, the author also discusses Roma traditions and the causes of deviant behaviour among Roma from a socially disadvantaged background. Traditions are still kept in Roma communities and are passed on from generation to generation. Of course, traditions might differ across communities in both space and time. The richness of spiritual culture is reflected, among other things, in the way how individuals and the community spend special events, such as the birth of a new family member, marriage or funeral of a close relative. Similarly to people all over the world, Roma keep a lot of traditions and superstitions during special occasions not only to celebrate these events but also because they believe they are protecting themselves against evil spirits Orechov dvor in Nitra is a segregated settlement of Roma who were expelled from the city because of their non-adaptive behaviour. Therefore, we have decided that this monograph will also include a chapter on the deviant behaviour of Roma and the factors that affect it.

## METHODOLOGY

The issue of the Roma community and of the ever-expanding Roma settlements is considered a major problem, and not only in the Nitra Region. Therefore, it is important to discuss it also within the context of sociology. The aim of research conducted Štrbová, Selická and Šarvajcová was to find out whether certain stereotypes found in literature are also present in the lives of the Roma – whether one can still talk about the traditional family relationships and way of life that have been presented to wider society. For this reason, qualitative research in the form of group interviews was conducted in the segregated area of Nitra called Orechov dvor in cooperation with the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. The research was conducted on the premises of the reception school, which was founded and intensively developed by the Salesian sisters from the Institute. They have been very helpful in selecting the Roma participants since they know them personally and were able to assess their communicative skills. It was of utmost importance to secure the absolute anonymity of the discussion participants, as the Roma have been worried about media publicity of their settlement. The selection criteria are specified as follows:

### 1st group – adult citizens of Orechov dvor in Nitra

- capable of providing information concerning their generation, as well as the generation of their parents and children
- number of participants: 8
- length of focus group discussion: 55 minutes

### 2nd group – pupils from an elementary school living in Orechov dvor in Nitra

- capable of providing information concerning their generation and relationships with their families
- number of participants: 12
- length of focus group discussion: 23 minutes

| <b>Adults</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Number of children</b> | <b>Number of siblings</b> |
|---------------|------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>R1</b>     | 48         | 7                         | 9                         |
| <b>R2</b>     | 40         | 5                         | 5                         |
| <b>R3</b>     | 36         | 5                         | 4                         |
| <b>R4</b>     | 28         | 3                         | 3                         |
| <b>R5</b>     | 22         | 2                         | 5                         |
| <b>R6</b>     | 19         | 0                         | 7                         |
| <b>R7</b>     | 27         | 2                         | 2                         |
| <b>R8</b>     | 23         | 0                         | 7                         |

| <b>Children</b> | <b>Age</b> | <b>Number of siblings</b> |
|-----------------|------------|---------------------------|
| <b>R1</b>       | 12         | 3                         |
| <b>R2</b>       | 16         | 0                         |
| <b>R3</b>       | 12         | 6                         |
| <b>R4</b>       | 16         | 3                         |
| <b>R5</b>       | 18         | 6                         |
| <b>R6</b>       | 13         | 5                         |
| <b>R7</b>       | 12         | 4                         |
| <b>R8</b>       | 14         | 3                         |
| <b>R9</b>       | 12         | 4                         |
| <b>R10</b>      | 13         | 9                         |
| <b>R11</b>      | 12         | 2                         |
| <b>R12</b>      | 12         | 3                         |

While analysing the obtained data, it was vital to consider the subjective character of participants' statements. The questions had to be articulated in a simple way, since the interviews were conducted mostly with people without basic education. Focus group discussions were aimed at studying selected categories and the relationship among particular categories, which will be presented in the following passages.

| CATEGORIES                                                                   | SUBCATEGORIES                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Accommodation</b>                                                         | Segregated                                     |
|                                                                              | Multigenerational                              |
| <b>Education</b>                                                             | Sex differences                                |
|                                                                              | Generational differences                       |
| <b>Labour market</b>                                                         | Sex differences                                |
|                                                                              | Generational differences                       |
| <b>Leisure time</b>                                                          | --                                             |
| <b>The position of members within Roma families and mutual relationships</b> | The position of grandparents in Roma families  |
|                                                                              | The position of children in Roma families      |
|                                                                              | The position of men and women in Roma families |

The outcomes of each category are presented in the individual chapters of this monograph. Since they represent categories from the everyday lives of all individuals in society, we have attempted to interconnect them and point to lingering stereotypes and the real life of the Roma in the settlement. Naturally, the outcomes cannot be generalized to all settlements or segregated areas. At the same time, however, the settlement Orechov dvor can be considered as a valid and inspiring example, especially in the Nitra region.

### **Description of the locale**

Orechov dvor is located in Horné Krškany, an urban district of the city of Nitra. It is in an outlying area of Nitra, located outside important transport gateways to the city. In 2005, the city of Nitra built a residential development in the area with thirty-six flats that were meant to solve the persistent housing problems of the socially disadvantaged inhabitants of Nitra. Twenty-five new flats were built in the second phase of construction, which started in 2009. By building a residential development, the city of Nitra would at least partially prevent the eviction of

socially disadvantaged citizens due to their long-term inability to pay rent. The area on which the residential development is built is adjacent to the former premises of the agricultural facility Orechov. The buildings form one entity with flats located around an open staircase. Initially, the flats had electric heating as well as solid fuel cookers for the preparation of food. Wastewater is collected in cesspits and regularly transported to a wastewater disposal plant. The area is connected to a network of roads, namely Jakuba Haška Street which interconnects the area with the Nitra-Cabaj road. The area can be accessed via a dirt road that has been reinforced with road metal to facilitate access to the inhabitants of the community. The nearest bus stop is located around 2 km from the residential buildings. In 2016, the city of Nitra declared a will to improve local roads and build a sewage system. “The area around the residential houses will be reinforced with crushed gravel; the ground in front of the community centre will be reinforced with asphalt concrete. Local roads are always flooded or filled with mud in case of bad weather.” ([www.nitralive.sk](http://www.nitralive.sk))

As of 31 May 2014, the segregated settlement of Orechov dvor had 353 inhabitants; they are mostly of Roma ethnicity (289). There were 164 men and 189 women (unofficially, the settlement has double the amount of inhabitants). The inhabitants do not have a regular income; they are long-term unemployed, have only basic education and are therefore dependent on benefits. After losing their own homes, they have been gradually relocated to the area by the city of Nitra since 2005. They were evicted from their homes after being unable to pay rent. Most of the inhabitants are registered as jobseekers at the Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. However, some families are not officially registered with any office. Therefore, the chances of improving their economic situation are very limited.

These people have been moved to a socially disadvantaged environment. There are almost no amenities in the settlement. This iso-

lated community is linked to services only via bus transport, which the inhabitants use to get their groceries and send their children to schools. However, the bus connections are limited and also put a financial strain on the families. Consequently, this leads to irregular school attendance and apathy in adults who are looking for a job. Since 2005, two missionary sisters from the institution of Missionary Sisters Servants of the Holy Spirit (in cooperation with the Administration of Social Services) have been providing afternoon leisure activities for children and young adults directly in the community that attempt to activate and motivate them to learn and educate themselves. In addition, an allocated preschool class has been established here since 2006, equipped with the support of the Government Office of the Slovak Republic. In 2008, a community centre was built. At present, a day-care centre, kindergarten and first grade of elementary school are available ([www.orechov-dvor.webnode.sk](http://www.orechov-dvor.webnode.sk)). There is also a sports facility in the settlement, which was funded by the Pontis Foundation.

The most significant problems in Orechov dvor include: living below the poverty line, a high unemployment rate and dependence on the state social-benefit system, neglect of compulsory school education, inadequate hygiene in households, improper financial management in households, inadequate care for minors and securing the primary needs of children, and coexistence with the majority society.

A demand-oriented project entitled “Field social work in Orechov dvor settlement” was conducted by the city of Nitra during the period 2008-2010. The sustainability of the project as well as its results inspired the city of Nitra to continue social work in the Orechov dvor settlement. The city received financial support for the realization of another demand-oriented project aimed at field social work in the settlement covering the period of 2011-2013. The main contribution of the project lies in the integration of the citizens of this marginalized Roma community into majority society.

A field social worker and an assistant provide community and field social work in the community centre. They specialize in social counselling services, prevention and social inclusion activities, which aim at the gradual social inclusion of the ostracized inhabitants of the settlement. Further efforts aimed at improving the social habits of the inhabitants and helping them to maintain cleanliness and hygiene in the household as well as in the surroundings. The social workers were actively engaged in selecting new tenants for the newly built low-standard flats. They also helped to solve problems with rent arrears and with housing-related services. Regular checks, communication and explanation helped reduce the truancy of children and young adults. The project School Bus has been initiated for that reason. The field social workers also assisted children with schoolwork and organized several tutoring activities for children of school age. The city of Nitra focused predominantly on the opening of the kindergarten so that the children of Orechov dvor at preschool age could acquire basic knowledge and habits necessary for attending elementary school.

# 1 ETHNIC GROUPS AND MINORITIES

Though these two terms overlap and are often interchangeable, national origin is derived from a person's affiliation to a specific nation, while ethnic origin is based on affiliation to a particular ethnic group. (Jakubovská, 2015, 2016) The difference between a *nation* and an ethnic group resides in the fact that a nation occupies a particular territory and has a tradition of statehood or autonomous self-government. Both nations and ethnic groups are characterized by their own language, culture, customs etc. An ethnic minority can be defined as a group of inhabitants that constitutes a minority in a given region (i.e. it has fewer members). A majority group represents a major ethnic group (i.e. it has more members).

According to Giddens (2013), ethnicity, unlike race<sup>1</sup>, is social in meaning. "Ethnicity refers to the cultural practices and outlooks of a given community of people that set them apart from others" (Giddens, 2013, p. 582). Ethnic groups are often distinguished by language, shared history, religion or styles of dress.

The terms 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic group' were first used after the Second World War to refer to a people affiliated with the same cultural group sharing the same culture and language (Barfield, 1997).

Theories of ethnicity, which emerged during the 20<sup>th</sup> century and are constantly debated, can be divided into two main schools of thought. The first group is represented by the primordialist school, which understands ethnicity as something deeply rooted: "The identity of an individual and his affiliation to a group is defined by objective criteria. Ethnicity is inherited genetically and each individual becomes a member of a group by birth" (Šavelková, 2007). While this theory still has some adherents, at present there is a tendency to understand ethnicity from the perspective of constructionist theories (more about

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<sup>1</sup> Race as something fixed and biological.

social constructionist approach see in: Marková, 2009, 2012, 2015). These define ethnicity as a product of time. Ethnic groups are seen as results of social construction and are not biologically determined (Hirt, in [www.varianty.cz](http://www.varianty.cz)).

According to Brubaker (2011), one can distinguish two ways ethnic heterogeneity can be socially organized and politically expressed: “The first I call ‘immigrant ethnicity’ and the second, ‘territorial nationality’”.

The first model is characteristic mainly of Western Europe and North America. In this case, ethnic groups arise through migration and are usually territorially dispersed. The second model is characteristic primarily of East-Central and Eastern Europe. Here, ethnic groups are indigenous. Their members are “ordinarily citizens of the country in which they reside, yet they often identify culturally and sometimes politically with a neighbouring ‘kin’ or ‘homeland’ state, to which they see themselves as ‘belonging’ by shared ethnicity or culture but not by legal citizenship.” In fact, they define themselves in national terms: “They see themselves as belonging not simply to a distinct ethnic group but to a distinct nation or nationality that differs from the nation or nationality of their fellow-citizens.” In this second model, ethnicity takes the form of nationality, and ethnic heterogeneity is understood and interpreted as national heterogeneity. Such a configuration, in which territorial ethnicity equals nationality, differs greatly from immigration-engendered ethnic heterogeneity (Brubaker, 2011).

Affiliation to any nationality is a matter of individual choice; it is an exclusive right of an individual that cannot be subjected to influence or discrimination. Such an understanding leads to ethnic self-identification, i.e. every individual has a right to define himself/herself as a member of a particular ethnic group as well as a right to be accepted, tolerated and recognized, based on this self-identification, by others. This can be regarded as the “endo-definition” of a minority (Jankův,

2000). The British sociologist A.D. Smith (2003) mentions six attributes crucial for determining or acknowledging one's ethnicity or affiliation to a specific group:

1. a collective name
2. a common myth of descent
3. a shared history
4. one or more distinctive elements of shared culture
5. a common territory
6. a sense of solidarity with a substantial part of the population

These attributes are certainly not absolute; however, they do provide a certain clue to understanding ethnicity and its definition.

Ethnicity is part of human identity. In general, the definition of one's identity could be, in fact, deduced from the answer to the question "Who am I?". One could claim it is our own self-awareness, or awareness of one's identity. Our identity is created in contact with other people from whom we are distinguished to a certain degree and thanks to whom we delineate our own sense of self. Identity is attributed not only to individuals but to groups as well. The creation of group identity is based on "how the members of the group see themselves, how they construct its past, its duration in time, meaning and objectives and how, on the other hand, it is perceived by those who stand outside and take a stand towards it" (Uherek, Novák, 2002, p. 98). The significance of individual or group identity might vary amongst individuals. It can "provide an important thread with the past and is often kept alive through the practices of cultural traditions" (Giddens, 2013, p. 584).

Some theories contend that even if legally subsisted on the principle of individual rights, it would not even be necessary to officially define a national minority. It would be sufficient if the state recognizes (identifies) minority groups and ensure that their minority rights are respected and guaranteed (Jankův, 2000). The Constitution of

the Slovak Republic does not define national minorities, members of which are guaranteed minority rights by the constitution. The only legislative measure that mentions minorities is the Education Act, which guarantees the right to education in minority languages for members of minority groups (Somorová, 2000). According to the Constitution of Slovakia (Section Four, The Rights of national minorities and ethnic groups, Article 34, paragraph 1), citizens belonging to national minorities or ethnic groups in the Slovak Republic (though these are not further specified) are guaranteed universal development, particularly the rights to promote their culture together with other members of the minority or group, to disseminate and receive information in their mother tongues, to associate in national minority associations, and to establish and maintain educational and cultural institutions.

## 2 WHO ARE THE ROMA?

“The word Roma is of very old origin and is probably derived from the word dom, which was used to refer collectively to members of Indian castes with similar social status. Tsigan – which is one of the most frequently used names for members of this ethnic group in Europe – is most commonly derived from the word Atzigan – Atsigan” (Horváthová, 2002, p. 16). In *Romové – vhléd do problému (The Roma – an insight into the problem)* (Rous, 2003), the word Roma is used to refer to ethnic affiliation or to a married man of Roma origin. Rous states that around half of Roma people are deeply offended by the term Tsigian, while the term Roma is not seen as insulting. Therefore, it is better to use the term Roma since the Roma are very sensitive to matters that concern ethnicity.

The Roma are well known, yet the views of the majority society on them are often stereotypical.<sup>2</sup> The stereotypes are based on two distinct images (Cohn, 2009). On one hand, the Roma are viewed negatively; they are associated with laziness, unreliability, danger and uncleanness. Even today, some mothers tell their children that if they misbehave, they will be given to Gypsies. The second image is more flattering. It speaks of the Roma as good musicians and talented dancers. The Roma themselves feel misunderstood and marginalized.

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<sup>2</sup> Existing concepts of stereotypes are derived from the elementary line of thought introduced by the American journalist and sociologist Walter Lippman in 1922 in his work *Public Opinion*. Here, Lippman defines stereotypes as mental images (he uses the expression “pictures in our head”). The German expert on cultural history Hahn views stereotypes as social products which are emotionally loaded; in most cases, they are not based on reality and only represent reproductions, stylizations and simplifications of the social reality which they stereotype (HAHN 12 Thesen zur Stereotypenforschung 1995)

## 2.1 THE HISTORY OF THE ROMA

Unambiguous written records of the history of the Roma do not exist. The Roma are a non-literary nation. However, current research on the Romani language suggests that the Roma come from India. The language of the Roma and Manus (Germany) is close to Indian languages at a lexical, grammatical and phonological level. “Linguists assume that the Roma people originally belonged to the Dom... The Dom are associated with the Pariah caste from southern India and the “untouchable Chandals” (Cangár, 2003, p. 24). The linguistic, ethnographic and anthropological evidence proves that while travelling across the Indian subcontinent, the nomadic Roma did not only adopt linguistic and ethnic elements from other communities but some Roma groups were probably recruited from them. The Hindu population is identified by its classification into castes. Hierarchically, Indian society is divided into four classes. The affiliation to a particular class defines social hierarchy, professional orientation and social homogeneity. The classes are divided into castes (jati = from a particular lineage). Castes are further classified into sub-castes (upjati) which are endogamous; affiliation to a clan (gotra) determines one’s professional orientation as well as the position of its members within the social structure. Hindu social classes are divided into: 1. the Brahmins (priests, scholars); 2. the Kshatriyas (soldiers); 3. the Vaishyas (farmers, craftsmen); 4. the Shudras (unclean jobs) (Lužica, 2004). Members of these strictly segregated castes cannot get married outside of their own caste. Moreover, each caste is assigned specific jobs. Caste affiliation is given at birth and cannot be changed; fluctuation between higher or lower castes is impossible. However, there are groups of people who are considered lower than the lowest class in the caste system. Mahatma Gandhi called them Harijan (God’s children). In Tamil, the members of the lowest castes are called pariah/paraiyar; in Kashmir they are referred

to as the Dom people. It was probably this name that the word Rom originated from (Lužica, 2004). Despite the thousand-year separation of European Roma from their Indian cradle, there are several signs connecting these two, such as anthropological affinity in the form of various professional and visual activities, peculiar lifestyle and specific ethnocultural manifestations.

It is unknown why the Roma decided to leave India. The reasons might have included social conditions (lack of food because of frequent droughts) or pressure from Arab and Mongol invasions. The most frequently quoted reason is their alleged desire to liberate themselves from the strict caste divisions of Indian society where they belonged to the lowest caste.

The oldest written record of the Roma in Europe dates back to 1068 and appears in the manuscript of “The Life of St. George the Antonite”, written by his student Little Georg in the Monastery of Iveron in Mount Athos on the peninsula of Halkidiki. It portrays the story of the Byzantine emperor Constantine Monomachos who, in 1050, called a group of sorcerers to Constantinople (present-day Istanbul) to use their magic and destroy wild animals in his hunting grounds. The writer referred to them as Adsincani. (Mann, 2000) Experts in Romani studies assume that the term Adsicani used in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and Athinganoi used in the 12<sup>th</sup> century in the territory of present-day Greece originally referred to members of a religious movement – the Manichean. Like the Roma who came to this area in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, members of this group were interested in divination and magic. That is why the Roma were “assigned” the name of this religious group, which has since then disappeared. The most frequently used words to refer to Roma were derived from the word Atsigan: Acinganus, Cingerus (Latin); Zingaro (Italian); Zigeuner (German, Dutch); Tigan (Romanian); Czigány (Hungarian); and Cigán, Cikán and Cygan (in Slavic languages) ([www.archiv.vlada.gov.sk](http://www.archiv.vlada.gov.sk)).

The latest research in the area of European Romani studies indicates that the Roma began to migrate from the Balkan Peninsula all the way to Central Europe in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. A hundred-year-old migration through the Old Continent ensued, though some periods were relatively controversial. For example, the 15<sup>th</sup> century is often regarded as the Golden Age of the Roma in Europe which is documented not only by the initial warm welcome by the domestic population but also by numerous safe conducts (documents authorizing their security) issued by European rulers.

With the onset of the modern age, the position of the Roma in Europe started to become problematic. Over the next five centuries, several laws were enacted which enabled restrictions, banishment, persecution or even elimination. These culminated in the Holocaust (Korim In [www.aryanrebel.files.wordpress.com](http://www.aryanrebel.files.wordpress.com)).

Many groups of Gypsies were living in Europe at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. As far as Cohn's research (2009, p. 26) indicates, France has three major types of Gypsy: the Rom, the Spanish Gypsies and the Manus. The Manus are known as Sinti in Germany. Cohn makes a clear distinction between Gypsies and the Roma (2009, p. 26). He claims that while the Gypsies are musicians, it is not the case with the Roma. Another large group of European Gypsies is represented by the Romanian Gypsies whom the Roma call Boias. Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria and the countries of the former Yugoslavia all have substantial Gypsy minorities, but these Gypsies are culturally very heterogeneous. The Gypsies of Britain and of Spain form "special cultural islands" (Cohn, 2009, p. 28).

As far as Slovak historiography is concerned, the oldest recorded history of the Roma is still unclear. The first written record mentioning them dates back to the 14th century (as listed in E. Horváthová's book

written in 1964 using a secondary source) but it was never verified nor specified (Jurová In [www.saske.sk](http://www.saske.sk)).

A difficult comparison at international level shows that the share of the Roma population living in Slovakia is one of the highest in the countries of present-day Europe. When compared to other minority groups, the Roma represent a significant part of the Slovak population not only because of their number, but also because of their specific diversity and uniqueness, social way of life and their hierarchic position within society (Jurová, 1989). Interestingly, the Roma have preserved their ethnocultural attributes despite centuries of social exclusion, marginalization, discrimination and racism. A strong feeling of solidarity has been created through the interplay of various factors, such as a later arrival to the continent, a significant difference from the European culture, and social or political powerlessness (Petrova, In [bwp.findarticles.com](http://bwp.findarticles.com)).

Part of the Roma population in Slovakia still lives in communities, as was the case in the past. "The Roma community, whether living as nomads or settled in one place, was mostly composed of a clan or a multigenerational family" (Horváthová, 2002, p. 24). Traditional anthropology characterizes the concept of community in terms of four key attributes (Jakoubek, Hirt, 2008, p. 703): common social structure, an awareness of otherness, common interests of community members and unity in achieving their goals, and physical concentration of community members in one geographical territory. In other words, the concept of community as related to the Roma population living in Slovakia or elsewhere in Europe can be used a priori without anyone focusing on the fact whether these Roma communities manifest essential signs of the community (Jakoubek, Hirt, 2008). The legal status of the Roma as an ethnic community has been defined by the Principles of Government Policy Towards the Roma, Resolution No. 153/1991, ratified on 9 April 1991. Recognizing the ethnicity of the

Roma led to their equality with other minorities living in Slovakia and, in fact, meant their recognition as a national minority. In 1971, the international Roma organization (World Romani Union, renamed the International Romani Union in 1978) asked the world population to accept the ethnonym 'Roma'. After Resolution No. 153/1991, this term was accepted in Slovakia as well (Cangár, 2003). In addition to the free choice of an individual to be assigned Roma nationality, a Rom can also be described as a person that differs from the majority society anthropologically, demographically and ethnically.

## **2.2 ANTHROPOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ROMA**

"The Roma belong – just like the Czechs, Slovaks and most of the European nations – to a Euroid race. Anthropological types represent lower taxonomic units of races. However, no nation, nationality or ethnic group is uniform in terms of typological classification; in general, they represent a mixture of different types" (Davidová, 1995, p. 16).

One can distinguish various anthropological types among the Roma, i.e. as far as their physical characteristics are concerned, the Roma are not homogeneous. The most significant characteristics typical for the Roma include dark eye and hair pigmentation and yellow-brown skin colour – ranging from fair to dark (Dávidová, 1995).

These anthropological attributes are fixed; they can change in the course of several generations in the case of frequent interethnic marriage. The phenotype, though, is a composite of genetic code and the influence of environmental and social factors.

One can conclude that whoever is regarded by most people in his/her environment as a Rom, can be identified as a Rom. However, anthropological research indicates the existence of anthropological differences between the Roma and the rest of the Slovak population. This was proved by the results of Bernasovský's research. For almost ten

years, Bernasovský has been examining physical and medical particularities of Roma (especially Roma children) in selected Roma populations in eastern and central parts of Slovakia. The anthropologists have examined around 6,000 Roma in Bystrany, Dobrá Vôľa and Dreveník in the region of Spiš; in Jarovnice and Pečovská Nová Ves in the region of Šariš; in Humenné, Podskalka, Gemer and Rimavská Sobota in the Horný Zemplín region, etc. Anthropometric measurements of preschool and school-age children have shown that Roma children are lighter and smaller than non-Roma children. It is also believed that Roma children are subject to an earlier development of secondary sexual characteristics. This has not been confirmed by the observations. Roma girls even get their first period eight months later than non-Roma girls. Differences have been observed also in hormone levels and biological maturation: “The results of our anthropological observations indicate that the differences in physical growth of Roma children is considered as permanent evidence of the anthropological distinction of this group.<sup>3</sup> Their development has its peculiarities, which need to be acknowledged. Roma children are smaller and lighter than other children. The differences in height are more substantial than the differences in weight. It is an ethno-anthropological specificity, characterized by a tendency towards stockiness rather than slenderness” (Bernasovská, Bernasovský In [www.unipo.sk](http://www.unipo.sk)).

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<sup>3</sup> Bernasovská and Bernasovský compare their research with that of Suchý from 1978.

**Picture 1:** *Children from Orechov dvor in Nitra*



Bernasovský and Duranková also observed Roma and non-Roma newborns in the Kežmarok district. They claim that “compared to non-Roma newborns, the Roma newborns lag behind in all observed anthropometric parameters: body length, thoracic circumference and head circumference. These lower values in our study may result either from external factors influencing the intrauterine development or primarily from genetic factors...” (In [www.konference.osu.cz](http://www.konference.osu.cz)).

Unfortunately, it is primarily anthropological differences that lead to racial discrimination against all individuals who are considered to be “Gypsies” on the basis of their striking anthropological type.

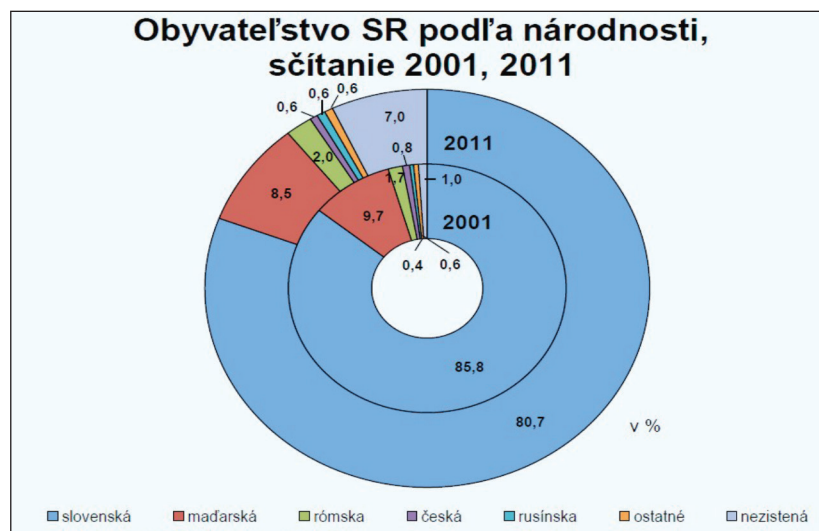
### **2.3 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ROMA**

The Roma population lives all across Slovakia, though there are regions and areas with a higher concentration of Roma. A higher number of

Roma as well as a higher population proportion is characteristic of the southern districts of central and eastern Slovakia (predominantly in the area from Lučenec through Rimavská Sobota and Spišská Nová Ves to Poprad, Prešov, Košice and Vranov nad Topľou). The demographic profile of the Roma population differs significantly from that of other populations.

The Atlas of Roma Communities 2013 (In [www.minv.sk](http://www.minv.sk)) has identified around 402,840 Roma, i.e. people who are considered to be Roma. According to the data of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, as of 31 December 2011, the population of Slovakia was 5,404,322, so the total number of Roma in Slovakia amounted to 7.45%. However, only 2% of the population registered as Roma nationality in the last census (see Graph 1).

**Graph 1:** *The population of the Slovak Republic according to nationality*



Slovak, Hungarian, Roma, Czech, Rusyns, other, unspecified

Source: [www.portal.statistics.sk](http://www.portal.statistics.sk)

The age composition of the Roma population differs significantly from the majority population. The Roma population displays a progressive type of age structure with a high proportion of children and low proportion of old people ([www.lekarsky.herba.sk](http://www.lekarsky.herba.sk)). Data from the 2001 and 2011 censuses document that individuals of Roma nationality in the pre-reproductive stage represented around 39%. Data from the latest census also show that individuals under the age of 15 represented more than 40% ([www.portal.statistics.sk](http://www.portal.statistics.sk)). There are significant differences in reproductive behaviour between particular Roma sub-populations constituted, for instance, by degree of segregation, education, place of residence, etc. Subsequently, these are reflected also in the character of the age structure. According to data from the 1980, 2001 and 2011 censuses, the highest proportion of children and, on the other hand, the lowest proportion of persons aged 50 and over, as far as Roma population is concerned, was documented in eastern Slovakia, namely in the Prešov and Košice regions. The lowest percentage of Roma children under the age of 15 was recorded in western Slovakia. There are differences in age structure based on the degree of segregation. In general, the youngest population is found in segregated Roma groups, while groups that are integrated have the oldest population. These differences in age structure are caused mainly by different fertility rates (Šprocha, 2014).

From the point of view of demographics, the Roma are associated with a higher birth rate as well as higher mortality, which depends on the integration of the ethnic group into mainstream society. In general, the Roma have a shorter life expectancy. When compared to non-Roma populations, the life expectancy of the Roma, regardless of sex, is 2.5 years shorter; with Roma who are not integrated into society life expectancy is 3 years shorter. The higher mortality of Roma is caused mainly by higher mortality in infancy. For nine years, Bartošovič and Hegyi (In Šprocha, 2014) have been studying Roma mortality by ex-

amining death certificates. Their conclusions confirm that the average age of the deceased Roma was much lower than that of the majority society; in some cases, they recorded a twenty-year difference to the detriment of Roma men. In one of the monitored districts, only 49% of the Roma reached “older age” (60 years and over) as opposed to 78% of the majority population. The biggest differences exist in the infant and child age groups; the mortality of Roma boys and girls was 2-4 times higher. On the contrary, the smallest differences are found in men aged 20-34 and in women at the end of reproductive age.

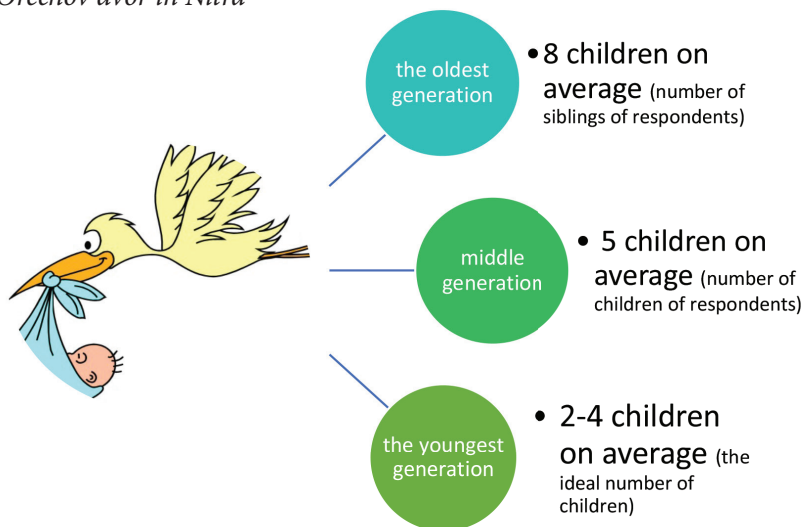
Reproductive behaviour of the Roma also differs from the majority society and depends on the abovementioned integration of the Roma and the degree of their segregation. The fertility rate of the Roma population is 2.5 times higher than that of the non-Roma population. In the Roma population, a woman of reproductive age gave birth, on average, to 3 children, and in Roma settlements to 4.6 children (in the Slovak Republic, a woman of reproductive age gives birth, on average, to approximately 1.2 children). The average age of Roma mothers when giving birth to their first child is lower (21.1 years; in settlements 19.6 years) than in the case of non-Roma women (24.6 years) ([www.lekarsky.herba.sk](http://www.lekarsky.herba.sk)). There was a drop, however, in the average number of children per one Roma woman between the censuses in 1980 and 2011 – the number was diminished by two. This was caused by the drop of fertility rate in older age groups as well as by intentional restrictions of family size (Šprocha, 2014).

The proportion of children born out of wedlock is higher long-term (37.4%) compared to the non-Roma population (around 20%). It is clear that the connection between marriage and birth is far from strong. A large proportion of births and even most of the first child-births is attributed to unmarried (mostly single) women (Šprocha, 2014).

Obviously, even Roma families have been affected by changes in family life and morality (Štefaňak, 2017, pp. 101-103). In terms of demographic indicators, one can talk about a certain ideal typology of the Roma family, i.e. a traditional and integrated family. The traditional Roma family represents a different type of a family demographically; it is characterized by cohabitation of numerous generations (mostly three and more generations) and by a significant degree of social dependency on elderly relatives. Secondly, they are characterized by a high number of dependent children and thirdly, by differing demographic characteristics of individual family members (young age in general; young age of the engaged couple when entering into marriage; young age of Roma women when giving birth to their first child). The most essential attributes of a traditional Roma family appear to be the larger number of family members and children. They are also characterized by a high proportion of children, low proportion of elderly people and high fertility rate during the reproductive age of women. These specificities of Roma families were and still are valid. The fact that Roma women had many children was determined by the necessity of survival considering their inadequate living conditions (material, hygienic, social, etc.) which led to high mortality in children.

The Roma from Orechov dvor in Nitra, especially members of different generations, have differing opinions on the ideal number of children. The generation of grandparents had 8 siblings on average but the youngest generation considers 2 to 4 children as ideal. They are aware of how demanding it is to raise, feed and clothe children. Although we are still talking about a higher number of children when compared to the majority population, there is a distinct shift from the views of the older Roma generation.

**Picture 2:** *The ideal number of children according to the Roma from Orechov dvor in Nitra*



According to the 19.9.2006 data ([www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk](http://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk)), “at present there are 619 spatially separated or segregated settlements in Slovakia, which the majority perceives as Roma. Of this number, 338 are located on the outskirts of municipalities and towns – separated, and 281 are isolated from the village or city, separated by a natural or artificial barrier (creek, railroad, road etc.) – segregated. The population of settlements located on the outskirts of the municipalities is 64,661 and the population of settlements distant or separated from the municipalities is 49,586.”

Satisfying the housing needs of socially disadvantaged citizens living in these settlements presents a problem since the quality of their homes does not meet basic living standards. A significant number of the dwellings in these settlements are huts built of wood, clay and sheet-metal which do not comply with valid building standards and environmental health regulations. Most of these settlements struggle with problems of poor technical infrastructure – low water quality,

lack of sewerage, electrification and gas supply, poor road quality, lack of street lighting and public amenities. Many settlements do not have settled land ownership, which raises problems in legalizing the development of these residential areas.

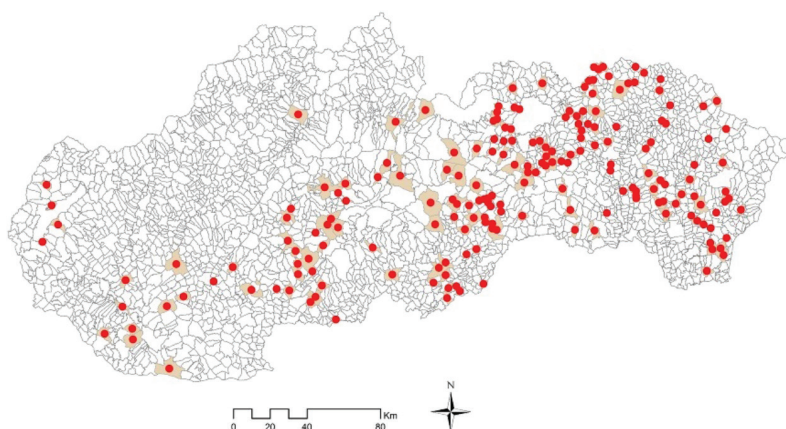
In Slovakia there are “46 settlements with almost no technical infrastructure, i.e. they have no water supply, sewerage, gas and asphalt access road. Electricity is the most accessible (91% of settlements) while sewerage is the least available (81% of settlements have no sewer at all). 39% of the dwellings are connected to the water supply, 15% of the dwellings use gas, and 20% of the dwellings do not have an asphalt access road” ([www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk](http://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk)). “The housing conditions of Roma living in integrated and segregated areas vary considerably. The worst conditions are in the most isolated and most segregated settlements” (Radičová, 2002-2004, p. 21). Various types of settlements differ according to the socio-cultural level of the local Roma community, its economic potential, level of integration with the majority society, or its ethnic composition. Currently, there are several types of Roma settlements in Slovakia.

Mušinka (2002) distinguishes Roma settlements according to their location in relation to municipalities:

*Fully segregated Roma settlements* – this separate urban unit is physically separated from the municipality and in fact forms a stand-alone unit. Often they are located a few kilometres away from the municipality. In some cases, these settlements are not connected to the available infrastructure.

*Segregated Roma settlements* – these residential units are physically separate from the municipality but are actually located near it. The separating element is mostly a natural formation (most often a stream or field), a road or a railway.

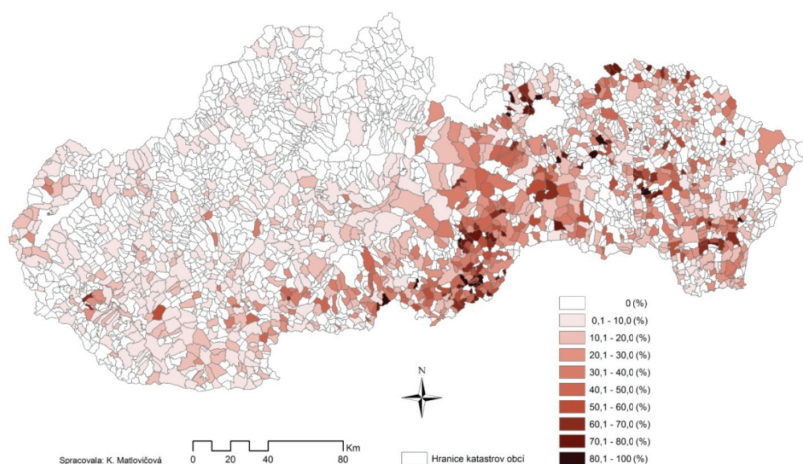
**Picture 3:** *Municipalities with segregated concentrations of Roma population – Qualified estimate Atlas 2012*



Source: [www.minv.sk](http://www.minv.sk)

*Separate settlements within municipalities* – most often, these represent separate streets or districts that are an integral part of the municipality but form a separate socio-cultural entity.

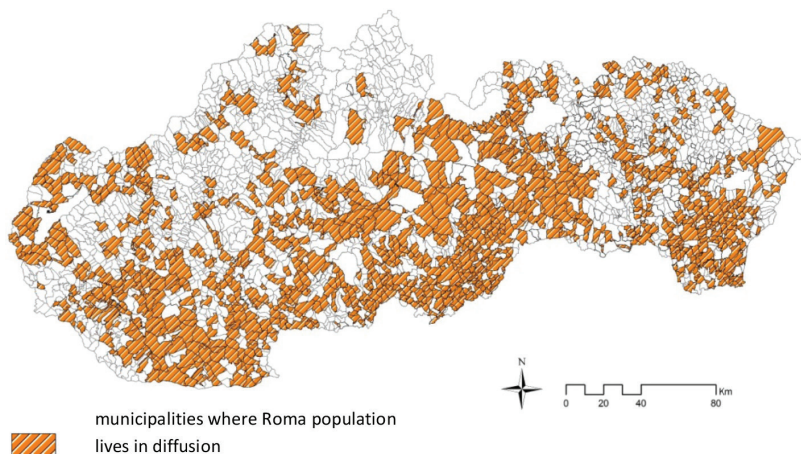
**Picture 4:** *Percentage of Roma in Slovak municipalities – Qualified estimate Atlas 2013*



Source: [www.minv.sk](http://www.minv.sk)

*Scattered communities* – these are municipalities where Roma are scattered among the majority population. However, the dispersal of the Roma community in the municipality does not necessarily equal its integration with the majority society.

**Picture 5:** *Municipalities with a scattered Roma population – Qualified estimate Atlas 2013*



Source: [www.minv.sk](http://www.minv.sk)

There is a characteristic typology of houses and dwellings associated with rural Roma. The most widespread dwellings in poorer Roma settlements are single-room and double-room houses. The construction of homes is, as in the past, influenced by the majority, and from an architectural point of view, the construction itself does not differ that much. The quality of construction is directly proportional to the standard of housing of the Roma community in a particular municipality (Mušinka, 2002).

*Living in portakabins.* A portakabin is a portable single-room building of rectangular shape with dimensions of approximately 2.5 x 5 m, covered by a flat roof. It is mostly built on a metal frame, making it easy to transport if needed. Portakabins arrived in Roma settlements

because Roma had bought them from individual agricultural holdings or construction companies where they worked, or they were provided by the state to solve critical situations – mostly after fires or floods.

*Living in flats.* This type of housing appeared in Roma settlements after the Second World War, thanks to the process of demolishing the poorest Roma settlements and integrating the Roma into majority society (Jurová, 2002).

*Flats with a different standard of living.* In addition to standard, mostly small-scale, housing units, rural Roma communities also feature flats with a different standard of living. These are two-story blocks of flats with six two-bedroom and two-and-a-half-bedroom flats. These flats consist of a large kitchen, living room, toilet and small hallway. Two-and-a-half-bedroom flats have an additional small room. Typically, they were connected to electricity, the water supply and a sewerage system. If there was no public water supply in the municipality, a water supply and sewerage system were created for the needs of these blocks of flats.

Most Roma living in settlements live in dwellings that are considered inadequate due to several factors (location, accessibility, habitability, availability of services and infrastructure, affordability, and so on). Our research indicated that the Roma themselves are not happy about this fact. The issue of Roma segregation in Slovak cities represents one of the greatest challenges of the present day. As far as the Orechov dvor settlement in Nitra is concerned, we are referring to involuntary segregation with housing conditions becoming unsuitable for residents. Financial, institutional or other barriers hinder any change in the housing situation.

Living on the outskirts of the city is one of the main things that the Roma living in Orechov dvor would change in their lives. They are not happy that they are far from the city centre. This type of housing complicates the life of the Roma mainly because they have no supermarkets

or schools nearby. As there is not even a bus stop in this area, the Roma have to walk several miles to the nearest stop. Life in a segregated part of the city directly affects quality of life and access to goods and services. According to the Roma, this is the reason why children do not attend school regularly and adults do not go to work.

The Roma population is generally very sensitive to the issue of housing; they realize that they have been moved out of the city because they did not pay their rent and damaged their homes, but they feel it is not fair that they are living in such an environment. They do not blame themselves for the situation and think they do not deserve such housing. On the other hand, they recognize the fact that housing in the city is unavailable due to their compromised social situation.

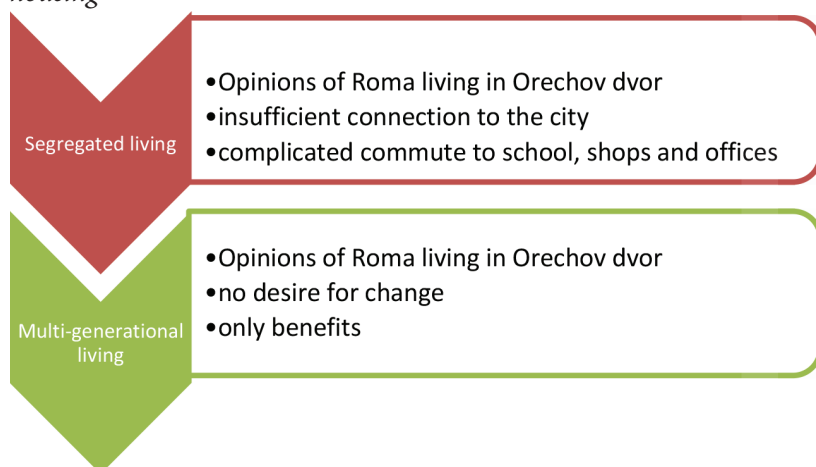
**Picture 6:** *Living in Orechov dvor in Nitra*



Analyses show that about a third of the Roma live in Roma settlements and ghettos completely isolated from the majority population. Some members of this group of Roma live in shacks or dwellings of

the lowest standard – without water or electricity. Moreover, the fact that the vast majority of these inhabitants do not have any, or only primary education and live in these conditions with their large families, significantly affects their overall health. Besides this segregated type of housing, it is very important to talk about multi-generational housing, which is typical for this population. While segregation does not appeal to any of the respondents, they are all content with multi-generational housing, and definitely would not change this way of living. Women live with their in-laws, partners and children mostly in one- and two-bedroom flats. Even if they had other housing options, they would choose a shared home. According to their statements (but also according to the Salesian sisters who work in the settlement), the flats have standard amenities; most of them are one- and two-bedroom flats with kitchen, bathroom and toilet. However, these flats are small for the families, which significantly reduces quality of life; parents and children lack privacy. This environment can be related to the very significant reproduction of negative social phenomena.

**Picture 7:** *Selected opinions of Roma from Orechov dvor in Nitra on housing*



It is well known that low quality housing is associated with an increased environmental risk and poor health (Braubach and Fairburn, 2010, Evans and Kantrowitz, 2002). According to the available data, the health status of the Roma population is worse than that of the majority population and is significantly affected by their poor lifestyle associated with poor eating habits, increased alcohol consumption, frequent smoking, higher weight and lower physical activity (Bartošovič – Hegyi, 2010; Hubková et al., 2012).

This is reflected in the median life expectancy, which is, according to demographic data, lower than for the rest of the population. According to estimates, there is a difference of 7.5 years for men and 6.6 years for women to the detriment of the Roma (Moricová and Raučinová, 2006). The situation is exacerbated further by poor access and use of health services (Fésüs et al., 2012). However, when characterizing the health status of the Roma, it is necessary to specifically assess the Roma who are fully or partially integrated within society. This group represents a notable percentage of all Roma (Popper et al., 2009) and has better health than Roma living in settlements. Due to diminished hygiene standards, the Roma population has a high incidence of infectious disease (Gerbery a Lesay 2007).

Uhl (2006) subjects the housing policy of municipalities to great criticism. Municipalities segregate socially disadvantaged people into less expensive housing. “In order to achieve maximum cost effectiveness, the municipality concentrates such persons into a single location where a ghetto thus arises” (Uhl, 2006, p. 75) or they somehow move the community out of the municipality where another ghetto arises. This means that the ghetto is thus “territorialized and preserved, with its inhabitants adapting to its conditions so much that they are losing interest in settling down outside the ghetto” (Uhl, 2006, p. 75). As we have already mentioned, segregated dwellings are most at risk of social exclusion. In our opinion, such segregated dwellings are a “time bomb”.

## 2.4 ETHNIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ROMA

Davidová (1995) defines ethnic characteristics as “a set of rules, internal laws and norms, value systems and normative behaviour that evolved gradually” (Davidová, 1995, p. 17); these give rise to the traditional Roma lifestyle and culture. The awareness of a common Roma origin represents a fundamental ethno-identifying factor by which people affiliate themselves with Roma identity (Romipen). Davidová (1995) sees ethnic culture as a combination of Roma lifestyle and culture on one hand, while on the other hand she understands it as ethnic awareness and identification with Roma identity.

“The identity of individual Roma differs in education, social status and the fact whether the individual lives in a city or in a settlement” (Uherek, Novák, 2002, p. 97). However, the individual, personal identity of members of Roma communities is secondary; the focus is on group and collective identity within the framework of the clan, family line and family. As an example, one can mention the ritual of getting to know each other. The questions are asked in a strict hierarchical order: “the first question is ‘Where do you come from? From a village or from a city?’ which is followed by ‘Who are your parents?’ and questions about age. Only then does one introduce one’s name as an expression of personal identity” (Lehoczká, 2006, p. 61).

Even with Roma living in cities, there is a danger of their self-image sharply contrasting with the perception of the outer society, which may be based on various stereotypes. Říčan (1998) points out that this incongruity may elicit different reactions in Roma, e.g. loss of self-confidence, isolation from the majority society, self-pity or even open confrontation. The self-confidence of Roma is closely tied to their families. The Rom sees his worth mainly as the worth of his family. To speak negatively about the members of his family is regarded as a personal insult to the Rom; to praise the members of his family means to praise

him as well. Romipen, the so-called unwritten law that constitutes Roma identity and value system and which is in theory universal and typical for all Roma, is an essential part of Roma families. Fonsecová sees Romipen as follows: “[...] the Gypsies do have fervently held beliefs [...] and they are strictly and unquestioningly honoured [...] These beliefs are tightly woven taboos and forms which guard against contamination – of the group, the person, the reputation. They constitute Romipen – ‘Gypsyhood’ - and they are the key to the unusual ability of Gypsies everywhere to endure persecution and drastic change of many kinds and remain Rom. Relations between *gadje* and Gypsies are highly regulated and restricted, as are relations between Gypsy men and women – and the burden for keeping such customs falls mainly on the women” (Fonsecová, 1999, p. 46). As far as a different value orientation of the Roma is concerned, Krech, Crutchfield and Ballachey emphasize that “people are influenced by their values and tend to accept, as their own needs and goals, those values which are shared by members of their group rather than values of the mainstream society” (1968, p. 105). “The most significant goals are those which represent the dominant goals of the group”; therefore, if a member of a relatively isolated social group is strongly influenced by more universally valid social norms, the person may face a value conflict. The more socially disadvantaged a person is and the bigger his/her subjective dependency on the social group s/he is a member of is, the more dominant the norms of his/her ethnic group would be. This is typical predominantly of the most backward groups of Roma in Slovakia. Those Roma, who live on the periphery of cities and villages, experience incongruity between their self-perception and the perception of others, since personal identity is developed in the primary group. The majority society is most often understood as an opposition group that the individual compares himself/herself to. “Such situation leads to application of

double standards, values and norms, when acts, which are condemned in one's group, are allowed against the majority population.”

Moravec (2006) noted that a theoretical model of the Roma culture in the Czech Republic (and also in Slovakia – author's note) has not yet been formulated because the Czech (or Slovak – author's note) Roma are not clearly identifiable and bound as a society. In addition, cultural patterns exhibit great variability both between groups and in locations where they live. In this context, Jakoubek (2005, p. 227) identifies three cultural complexes of the Roma people (within the framework of Weber's ideal type):

1. Traditional Roma culture (Subethnic affiliation, The concept of ritual im/purity, Organizational structure of kinship)
2. National Roma culture
3. Culture of poverty (the culture of poor peri-urban neighbourhoods)

### **1. Traditional Roma culture**

Moravec characterizes the Rom, the bearer of traditional Roma culture, as a man who “has adopted and practised a comprehensive integrated system of values, norms, principles of social organization, ways of problem-solving, etc...” (2006, p. 14).

The main characteristics of the traditional Roma culture include the dominant organizational structure of kinship (the Rom derives his/her identity from his/her family group), the concept of ritual purity (this concept is reminiscent of the situation of Indian castes) and subethnic affiliation (Jakoubek, 2005).

**Picture 8:** *Roma from Orechov dvor in Nitra*



## **2. Subethnic affiliation**

Hübschmannová (2002), an expert on Roma issues, admitted that it is incredibly difficult to understand the various groupings of Roma. One group can be labelled with several names, depending on “who”, “where” and “why” factors. The “who” factor determines what other groups the Roma come into contact with; “where” refers to different ethnoregional environments; and “why” highlights the profession as a reflection of caste relationships, customs, etc. (Sekyt, 1998).

There are three so-called *subethnic Roma groups* living in Slovakia. The Vlachi Roma, who identify themselves as *Vlachike Roma*, came from Walachia (the historical region of Romania). The second group is represented by the so-called Slovak Roma – *Servika Roma*. The third group is represented by *Ungrika Roma* – Hungarian Roma who, however, often call themselves *Rumungri* (Jakoubek, 2004).

Vlachike Roma are known for preserving their traditional culture, internal laws, specific way of life and Vlachike language. “They are

internally divided into many subgroups – Kalderare (boilermakers), Lovare (ostlers), Churari (knifemakers) and Bojachs, Machvajš (living in the USA, Canada, and Serbia), Ursars or Mechkari (in Romania – Banat and in Serbia, bear-leaders), Rudari – tubmakers (Romanian Roma, also living in eastern Slovakia), Gurbeti, Burbati and others” (Davidová, 1995, p. 35). According to Petrova, externally identified groups, such as Gypsies who are not considered ethnic Roma, represent another group (In: [bwp.findarticles.com](http://bwp.findarticles.com)). These include “the Jevgijs in Albania, Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo and Macedonia, Travellers in the UK and Ireland, Rudari and Beyash in Hungary, Romania and other countries.” Sinti – the group of so-called German Roma, who live mainly in Germany, Austria, northern Italy, but also in Slovakia and other countries, also refuse to identify as Roma. Some French groups label themselves as *Manus*, which mean a man. The Roma of Spain and southern France use the name Gitanos (Davidová, 1995).

Matulay, Bôžik a Valach (2011) claim that the Roma minority is stratified in a disparate and relatively ample way. They also add that the abovementioned ethnic and subethnic classification represents the essence of Roma stratification. According to Dubayová (2001), there are two other aspects of stratification mentioned in other sources: the linguistic aspect and the professional aspect. Family also represents another important category of subethnic differentiation. Jakoubek claims that “[t]he family in a Roma settlement is not seen as a unit of unique and autonomous individuals; the individual gains respect and identity only when acting as a member of his family” (2004, p. 119). “These subethnic groups usually consider each other as impure and for that reason are mutually endogamous... In this culture, the public sphere is not identified in a strict sense of a word... The only accepted and legitimate authority and representation of traditional Roma culture is the representation and authority based on kinship” (Jakoubek, 2005, p. 228).

### **The concept of ritual im/purity**

The concept of ritual im/purity is closely tied to the subethnic division of the Roma. It is assumed that this set of rules and taboos are typical of all Roma groups although they might be expressed in different ways. The intensity with which the concept of ritual im/purity is manifested in the lives of particular Roma groups also varies. The concept of ritual im/purity establishes clear boundaries between us vs. them, Roma vs. non-Roma, pure Roma vs. impure Roma.

The concept of ritual im/purity is derived from the existence of a specific immaterial, irrational quality which ritually defiles its bearer. The bearers of ritual impurity can be divided into two groups:

- 1) those who are impure because of their essence (for example, specific animals, such as dogs, snakes, frogs as well as carcasses and excrement)
- 2) those who lost their original ritual purity by contact with impure bearers (Jakoubek, 2004).

There are many ways of losing one's purity; yet the most frequent and the most basic way is by food consumption, especially food from impure animals, such as dogs, frogs but also horses. In some Roma settlements, people eat dogs and for that reason these Roma are labelled *degesh* (impure).

Female purity is associated not only with hygiene procedures observed during cooking or housework but also with chastity and faithfulness. Stojka and Pivoň (2003, p. 16) state that when a woman gives birth to a child, she is not allowed to visit anyone or step outside the house because she is considered impure before the child is christened. A Vlachi Roma woman is purified on the day of the christening when she goes to the church with her godmother. The mother of the child is not allowed to do any work in the kitchen before the christening. Cohn also mentions a "sacred separation from outsiders" (2009, p. 51), i.e. Roma do not contact or associate with outsiders (non-Roma).

## Organizational structure of kinship

Traditional Roma communities are based on social organization, which is derived primarily from kinship. “In the Roma community, kinship functions as a certain idiom which expresses all other relationships. It is a privileged, and in fact, a totally institutional framework; other institutional spheres have not yet detached themselves into separate social subsystems with their own channels and terminology” (Jakoubek, Hirt, 2008, p. 741). The concept of community has been featured quite prominently in the social sciences. There are many definitions which overlap, though there is no definite, consensual definition of the term as such (Jakoubek, Hirt, 2008).

Aside from subethnic entities and groups determined by ritual impurity, family represents the fundamental social unit in traditional Roma culture. The term family can be translated into Romani in two ways – *famelija* or *fajta*. The term *famelija* refers to relational solidarity reaching through three to five generations, including those who married into the family (Hübschmannová, 1992, p. 42). *Famelija* “spreads to the width – it is, first and foremost, horizontal” (ibid.) while *fajta* (family line) accentuates the vertical line, including both the family on the father’s side (*fajta pal o dad*) and on the mother’s side (*fajta pal e daj*). Members of the same *fajta* share awareness of their common origin and mutual family ties and this awareness constitutes one of the basic layers of their identity. Identity is not regarded as independence of an individual within the family but rather as a certain position within it. The individual is inseparable from the family; individualism is not accepted (Jakoubek, 2004). All this affects family integrity in Roma communities. While single-parent families are on the rise in the majority society, in the case of Roma, especially those from a socially disadvantaged environment, they are a rare phenomenon.

Pekárek (1997) mentions ten fundamental features of the social system of Roma families in the past:

1. decision-making is collective
2. the inability to be alone
3. expulsion from the clan is considered the severest punishment
4. plurality is a prerequisite to happiness
5. time is past and present, the future does not exist
6. time is not derived from seasons
7. constant change of place and environment increases the chance of survival
8. staying in one place increases danger
9. trades as means of subsistence are subordinated to this constant change
10. to avoid and escape danger is considered a fundamental skill

On a pragmatic level, *famelija* protects every member as part of the community and secures the individual at a social and economic level (Lázníčková, 1999). Hartl states that traditional Roma families have always functioned either as large units or wider family groups. This is also reflected in the term *familija*. The extended family is based on family relationships that go back generations. It is characterized by the inclusion of wider kinship, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins. This large group is interconnected not only by blood ties but also by family traditions, attitudes, customs, common characteristics and language. Each household within the *familija* (which may include up to three generations) is called a *tsera* (Fraser, 2002, p. 198). Besides *famelija*, Fraser also identifies another unit – the so-called *kumpania*. This is not necessarily a community of family members but a community tied by economic needs and its effort to take advantage of a specific territory. The *kumpania* is also the primary advisory unit. Agreements are achieved either by the so-called *divano* (discussion) or, if the matter is

more serious, by the *kris romani* (Romani court). The decisions in the court are made only by men.

Hübschmannová (1977) classifies Roma families according to their way of life into three groups:

1. Families that are socially integrated and lead an orderly life among the rest of the population. The parents are hardworking and some of them have even acquired work qualifications. Children attend school on a regular basis and are adapted to their environment. They feel internally satisfied and the society accepts them.
2. Families who have not yet adapted to commonly accepted social norms. They have basic hygiene and work habits; they work (if that is the case) without any qualification; children attend school irregularly; proper education and basic conditions for the healthy development of children are not provided. These families desire to imitate the lifestyle of the first group and the families from majority society, but only superficially, in terms of material possessions as cultural consumers. There is no need to educate oneself or contribute to the creation of positive social values. The traditional Roma family represents an extended multigenerational family, which consists of nuclear families. The privileging of men, fathers, sons, brothers and husbands manifests the strong male authority and patriarchal pattern of family organization. All members of the family, according to their capacities, contribute to supplying the family with necessary means. The identity of the family is preserved by keeping existing traditions. As a socializing factor, the Roma family has always had a dominant position in the process; the upbringing and education within the family has a so-called chain character, i.e. older children took care of the younger ones.
3. The most backward families, whose members are not interested in changing their lives or their social status. These live in clan communities; they are not nomadic but live mainly in settlements

which are characterized by inadequate hygiene and social conditions. Members of these families work only rarely; they are not very interested in sending their children to schools and the inappropriate environment has a seriously negative impact on the healthy development of children and their education. The low age of women giving birth to their first child is rooted in the fact that the younger they start, the more children they can have. At present, the number of children in Roma families is lower because of economic pressures (especially in the families of the first type). The most backward families still have many children; because of the high unemployment rate it is regarded as “an economic necessity” – this was indicated by the statement of one father who declared that he was not able to provide for ten children but ten children could provide for him. He was, of course, referring to social benefits and child allowance.

## **2 National Roma culture**

National Roma culture is based on the idea that “all Roma are members of a Roma nation and share one – Roma – identity as well as loyalty to ‘their’ nation” (Jakoubek, 2005, p. 229). This culture is spread at schools via standardized language. Jakoubek (2005, p. 229) claims that this culture is supported significantly, but the Roma nation does not have a distinct amount of members who would register as a Roma nationality (see the subchapter “The ethnic composition of the Slovak population”).

## **3 Culture of poverty (the culture of poor peri-urban neighbourhoods)**

The concept of the culture of poverty was proposed by Oscar Lewis in 1959. This theory has been criticized greatly, e.g. by Murray (1984) who claims that social welfare encourages sloth, violence, sexual immorality and drug abuse. According to him, these people need to be

held responsible for their poverty; they create a *dependency culture*. The concept of the culture of poverty (in the context of social exclusion or the concept of the underclass) is based on the premise that “the inhabitants of socially excluded localities become bearers of a specific cultural model that arose in the process of adaptation to long-term poverty” (Jakoubek, 2006, p. 324).

Lewis (1966, p. XLV-XLVIII) has identified 70 traits that characterize the culture of poverty which are described in four dimensions:

- the relationship between the subculture and the majority society, or its integration into the majority society (inadequate integration of members of the poor subculture and their disengagement with respect to the institutions of majority society may lead to deviations, especially within the context of Merton’s strain theory)
- the nature of the slum community which is characterized by minimal organization
- the nature of the family – in the absence of a carefree childhood, initiation to sex comes early, there is no privacy or individual property, family solidarity is emphasized and there is sibling rivalry for the limited supply of goods
- the attitudes, values and character structure of the individual which are characterized by the feeling of helplessness, inferiority, suspicion, apathy, etc.

However, it is important to note that not all communities who live in poverty represent this model of the culture of poverty. As Lewis claims: “The most likely candidates for the culture of poverty would be the people who come from the lower strata of a rapidly changing society and who are already partially alienated from it” (2006, p. 409).

Mareš (1999, p. 176) summarized the culture of poverty in five points:

1. Because of their living conditions, the poverty-stricken have to face different life challenges from the rest of the population.
2. In order to solve their problems, these people create a specific lifestyle, frequently reflecting their attempts at solving their problems. These are not addressed by relevant institutions and authorities because these people are not eligible for help, they cannot afford it or do not know about it. They do not trust it.
3. Due to collective interaction in relative isolation from the environment of the non-poor population, such a lifestyle becomes a common characteristic of the poor – it represents their shared values, attitudes and behavioural patterns. Thus, the specific lifestyle is turned into a subculture.
4. As soon as the subculture becomes institutionalized, it has a tendency to reproduce itself. Its values, attitudes and behavioural patterns are transferred between generations from parents to children, meaning that children are socialized in a culture of poverty and are not familiar with the values, norms and aspirations of the majority society. “The culture of poverty is persistent, therefore it is stable. Its attributes are transferred – passed on – from generation to generation. Once such a culture comes into existence, it excludes itself from the conditions it was generated from and it continues to exist even after these conditions cease to have an impact or cease to exist” (Ondrejko, 2009, p. 94).
5. This culture shapes people’s character and personality, which help them adapt to life in poverty and survive in its environment; at the same time, however, they do disadvantage people in their attempts to escape the culture. Even when faced with opportunities to escape poverty, these people remain poor because they are not able to take advantage of them.

The culture of poor peri-urban neighbourhoods is, of course, not the Roma culture but “the culture of socially excluded localities (contaminated by various traditions and trends)” (Jakoubek, 2006, p. 326). Ferko (In Jakoubek, 2006, p. 398) states that the culture of poverty of the Roma has been passed from generation to generation since they lived in India. He claims: “As they were moving out of India, they always remained on the fringe of society. At first, it was society that rejected them and placed them on the fringe of society. Later it was the ‘Gypsies’ who isolated themselves and withdrew to the edge of society since they were already so adapted to this lifestyle that they were unable to get out of the trap of the culture of poverty” (Ferko, In Jakoubek, 2006, p. 398). It is quite different to be poor when you are not a Rom than to be a poor Rom.

According to Kompaníková and Šebesta, the main problem of Roma poverty is the fact that it is turning into a norm and an expected lifestyle – that of the culture of poverty. In other words, children do not embrace values that would motivate them to get out of the environment in which they are growing up. At the same time, while the Roma learn how to live with their poverty in this culture of poverty, the mechanisms of adaptation, which enable them to survive this situation, also lead to the acceptance of this situation as normal (Vašečka, 2002, p. 609).

In her study “Frameworks for understanding the inter-generational transmission of poverty and well-being in developing countries” (2001), Moore suggests that the following is transmitted from parents to their children:

- human capital – care; investment in education, training, health, nutrition; knowledge and skills useful for life; inheritable disease or impairment, etc.;
- financial / material capital – insurance, pensions, inheritance, dowry, etc.;

- socio-cultural capital – traditions and value system that includes the culture of affluence / prosperity

Poverty can be explained as a structural phenomenon, i.e. the lack of ambition of impoverished people, which is seen as a sign of the above-mentioned culture of dependency, is, in fact, a result of forced conditions that the poor are in and not their cause (Giddens, 2013).

Šarvajcová (2013) thinks that income difference impacts the perception of life opportunities in families, their motivation as well as the aspirations of children and their parents. One can claim that children and parents who find themselves in the lower spectrum of social stratification are often frustrated and depressed. There is a risk of tension and arguments in such families, which inevitably affects family atmosphere and children's school performance.

Another aspect of Roma poverty in Slovakia resides in the fact that it is the only poverty that is concentrated. Poverty assumes different forms when it is diffused and when it is concentrated. The poverty-stricken non-Roma population is allowed to live among the majority while poor Roma are forced into settlements (Bán – Majchrák, 2009). This entails socially constructed crime of an ethnic character. Granovetter (quoted in Jakoubek, 2006) develops the notion of the culture of poverty by elaborating on the concept of strong and weak ties. Inhabitants of socially excluded localities are characterized by specific types of social networks, which are structured on strong ties and lack weak ties. Strong ties are associated with family networks and weak ties refer to the ties between families and the wider environs.

However, “relying on family networks in a modern market-oriented society leads to a retrogressive strengthening of exclusion” (Jakoubek, 2006, p. 334). According to Džambazovič and Jurásková, this exclusion can be manifested in the following forms:

- economic exclusion (labour market exclusion, low level of consumption, inadequate standard of living, insufficient income, etc.)
- cultural exclusion (access to education and its possibilities, possibilities of mother tongue usage in official communication, etc.)
- symbolic exclusion (existence of prejudices and stereotypes, etc.)
- spatial exclusion (segregated Roma settlements)
- exclusion from social services access
- mobility exclusion in physical space and in the hierarchy of social positions;
- exclusion from safety and exposure to higher risks, etc. (Džambazovič – Jurásková, 2002).

In our context, exclusion is connected to regional concentration. There are whole regions in Slovakia with high unemployment, economic backwardness and minimal career opportunities. This has led to a departure of skilled people and concentration of those dependent on social assistance, subsequent decline of social capital, accumulation of social disadvantages and growth of social pathology (Lubelcová, 2009, p. 233). According to data obtained from research conducted by the World Bank, Foundation S.P.A.C.E. and INEKO, the Roma can be categorized into four groups, based on their perception of their social status and poverty (“Poverty and welfare of Roma in the Slovak Republic”, 2002):

*Non-Poor:* These Roma view themselves as average Slovaks. They are aware there are many who are much worse off than themselves and that the transition has not led to dramatic changes in their lives: “The only difference between Christmas today and Christmas during the Communist period is that today there are fewer presents.” The prob-

lems, in their view, are national, including inflation, unemployment and subsequent constraints on living standards. This group constitutes a relatively small share of the respondents living in integrated areas (e.g. approximately 25 percent in Malacky), who are either employed or engaged in the informal economy.

*Subjectively poor:* This group can be characterized by the statement: “We are not rich but we are able to support ourselves.” This is typical of integrated Roma who believe that the demographic groups hit most severely by poverty include elderly people, young families and Roma from eastern Slovakia. Their views about the more segregated Roma are similar to the non-Roma view of the Roma: “People there are worse off than dogs, but they are to blame. They should take better care of themselves. When they don’t have a job, they should at least keep themselves and their house clean.” The majority of the respondents expressing these views had a better starting point after 1989 since they lived in integrated localities.

*Relatively poor:* These Roma perceive themselves to be poor and are generally unemployed, living on social benefits. “It is bad without a job, we live from one day to another.” Most live in integrated and partially separated types of settlements, and face difficulties in re-entering the labour market because of low education levels: “I have no clue what could help us out. If we could turn back time, we would get proper vocational training or move to another country. People on TV say that everybody is doing better there and that everybody has a job.”

*Absolutely poor:* This group of poor Roma live mostly in segregated settlements in marginalized regions. They express a strong sense of apathy and helplessness and feel totally excluded from mainstream society: “We have nothing here, no roads, no electricity, no running water, no job. Nobody helps us either, not the mayor, or even the priest in the village.” Some receive social assistance benefits; however, in certain

cases some have lost eligibility because of lack of documentation and unofficial residency status.

Šarvajcová (2014) claims that the fight against poverty should focus on enhancing quality of life, especially by supporting families, adequate education and health. Children should participate in the decision-making process. The quality of a child's life is directly linked to its physical, emotional and mental development.

**Picture 9:** *Children in Orechov dvor*



## 2.5 TRADITIONAL ROMA CULTURE

### Roma traditions and customs

Traditions are still kept in Roma communities and are passed on from generation to generation. Of course, traditions might differ across communities in both space and time. The richness of spiritual culture is reflected, among other things, in the way how individuals and the

community spend special events, such as the birth of a new family member, marriage or funeral of a close relative. Similarly to people all over the world, Roma keep a lot of traditions and superstitions during special occasions not only to celebrate these events but also because they believe they are protecting themselves against evil spirits and are thus securing health and happiness for their families. (Štefaňak, 2018 too). The spiritual culture of the Roma also varies in form according to their social status – the more backward communities tend to cling to traditional culture more than the more developed ones.

### **Birth**

The age of Roma parents at the birth of their first child is very low and so is their age at marriage. In this context and in relation to children's education, Fliegel (1992, p. 20) writes: "Young people are founding families before adulthood... Often there is a violation of the Family Act." Young parents are not ready to raise their children. In their attitude towards children, there is a predominance of spontaneity over purposefulness, the underestimation of independent practical activity of the child, insufficient verbal communication, misconception of basic needs and age specificities of the child. On the other hand, the upbringing of a Roma child is always collective and provided by the whole family. Children are controlled in a group (Liégeois, 1995).

Roma have a saying. "The more children you have the happier you are." Their love for children is proverbial. A woman who only has one or two children is considered weak while childlessness is the ultimate misfortune. A childless woman is despised by the clan and her husband can leave her anytime. There are many magical practices associated with the moon cycle that are supposed to ensure offspring. Water – especially rainwater – is used for magical purposes. Pouring water in a sieve while reciting magic words and performing other magic rites is supposed to break the evil spell. Marriage of the trees is another

tradition. A childless married couple plants two trees on the bank of a river and ties them. If they start to grow, it is a good omen. Pregnancy is announced first to the women in the community, only then to the husband because a pregnant woman is *marhime* (impure). Childbirth is also considered impure. A special tent is constructed for a woman in labour in which only her mother and the *phuri dai* (senior female elder) are allowed. All knots on the dress of the woman in labour are untied to ease the birth. A fire is lit in the front of the tent to drive away evil spirits.

Since evil fairies – *Urmas* – could harm the baby at the time of birth, Romanian Roma put a bowl of millet and honey in front of the tent to appease them. When the cry of the baby interrupts the tense wait, joy and happiness erupt. A young girl – in some communities the *phuri dai* – takes a bowl of water, a handful of twigs and sprinkles all the tents, greeting the new member of the clan with well wishes. This is followed by a congratulation of the happy father who pours a cup for each congratulator in the name of the new baby. They sit by the fire the whole night and celebrate the father. Male offspring is appreciated more than female (Lužica, 2004).

To prevent evil fairies from casting a bad spell on the baby, a piece of string or a red thread or ribbon is tied around the newborn's wrist. Both parents and the child are considered impure until baptism. Nobody can meet them except the *phuri dai*. With godparents present, traditional Roma baptisms were performed by a *vajda* (senior male elder) who submerged the baby into water. A Roma baptism does not exclude the christening ceremony of an official denomination, which the Roma usually adhere to, though it is always performed first. According to Roma tradition, each individual has three names. The first name is whispered into the baby's ear by the mother. It is a secret name, which is pronounced only once. It is not used but the name has a magical power to deceive demons. Nobody knows the name except the mother.

The second name is given to the child during baptism and this is the name the community addresses the child with. If it is revealed to the *gadje* (non-Roma), the person is given another name that is kept secret. The third name is recorded in the registry and is used in contact with the non-Roma population. Roma children are loved by the whole clan and the upbringing is collective. Childhood and preparation for life is filled with spontaneous imitation of the life of adults. Roma children are nursed for a long time, at the same time, many children start to smoke early – the time between these two opposites is usually very short. The childhood of the Roma is generally short. 13-year old girls and 15-year old boys are considered ready for marriage. It is almost unthinkable to remain unmarried. A young boy can enter the world of men only through marriage, which is considered the ultimate goal of young girls. Romantic literature has contributed to the image of Roma's wild love life, which was based on the assumption that they had brought their hot temperament, cult of love and love games from their homeland India that was renowned for them from time immemorial (Lužica, 2004).

Barányiová and Keresztes (In prohuman.sk) who conducted research in Orechov dvor in Nitra claim that even today the Roma observe some traditions. The Rumungri living in Orechov dvor view the birth of a child as follows: "We appreciate every newborn equally whether it is a boy or a girl" (Mrs N., 54 y. old). The Vlachi Roma wish for a boy more: "...we would hope for a boy more because our family will accept the bride and her whole family" (Mrs K., 42 y. old). The authors also observed some traits of ritual im/purity and magic: "When a child is born, we tie a red string on its wrist and no one is allowed to see it before baptism. It is not protected from evil spirits."

Love of children is a typical signifier of Roma families. This does not mean that in the families of the majority parents do not love their children, but in Roma families, the child is the centre of the world and

is loved not only by the mother, but also by the wider family and by the whole community. However, this fact is also seriously undermined today. In the case of a crisis or loss of traditional values in families from a socially neglected and disadvantaged environment, parents do not care very much about their children and they often end up in a children's home. Another negative example of "loving" children is abandonment by mothers shortly after birth. Mothers leave them in hospital and escape back to their men, so that they are not unfaithful while they are staying at the hospital. This also exemplifies the loss of traditional values in Roma communities. In the past, adulterers were ostracized from the community. There is also another reason why Roma mothers abandon their children. When a Roma family falls apart, a Roma woman finds it hard to find a new man, because they refuse other children; the new husband could abuse the child or even kill it.

### **Wedding**

The tribal life of the Roma is based on a system of strict norms and taboos. The word girl is synonymous with the word virgin. Virginity – once a very important factor in the selling and buying of brides – is strictly observed in traditional life. The youth does not need sexual education. Since children live with their parents in small spaces, they perceive intimate relationships as something natural. During puberty, the Vlachi Roma break all contact between girls and boys. Most boys, however, acquire some sexual experience, but only with non-Roma girls and under the pressure of external circumstances. Sexual interactions are not regarded by the Roma as reflections of one's opportunities. When a Rom talks to his friends about such an experience, everyone knows he is referring to his encounters with a non-Roma girl, because he would never speak publicly about his intimate life with a Vlachi woman. First of all, it is a taboo and it is also man's duty to protect her honour. Any transgressions against the set rules are strictly

punished. An unmarried woman (*biromengeri*) always stays with her parents and is not considered a woman (*romni*). In the past, parents selected partners for their children (Lužica, 2004). Cohn (2009, p. 41) states that the father of the bride and the father of the groom become “co-parents-in-law” (*chanamikura*) after their children’s marriage and are thus bound by a complex of financial and other reciprocal commitments which are expected to be adhered to for the rest of their lives.

Today, if the clan has stopped observing traditions, people can choose their partners themselves. The Roma claim that one of the reasons for their nomadism is the process of choosing brides for their sons. There is a saying that a bride is selected by the ears, not the eyes, which means the girl’s reputation is far more important than her looks. Parents suggest the selected girl to their son, but if he disagrees, there is no pressure. They continue looking for a girl until both parties come to an agreement. The marriage system of the Roma used to be strictly endogamous. Though they avoided consanguineous marriages, they married only within the same clan. Nowadays, only some groups keep this tradition (Lužica, 2004). Cohn (2008, p. 44) found out in his research that inbreeding (marriage between blood relatives) was represented by more than half of the Gypsy marriages he examined. Cohn (*ibid.*) also states that thanks to the bride-price institution, marriages within families became useful.

The choice of a bride is an important task that must be carefully considered by both parents because a wife has many obligations, economic and familial. Her rights, on the other hand, are very limited. There are many taboos that might render her impure; she is absolutely subordinated to her husband and mother-in-law. It is her duty to be totally faithful, although her husband’s transgressions – especially with a non-Roma woman – would be tolerated. A divorced woman, a woman expelled from the community or a woman who has returned to her parents because of mistreatment by her husband can remarry only a

divorced man or a widower (Cangár, 2003). A bride can be obtained in three ways: by agreement of the couple, by bride-purchase or by kidnapping. Today, agreement is the most frequent form although kidnappings also occur. In the past, a bride was usually purchased since the economic factor stabilized the marriage. When a boy wants to marry a girl against his parents' will, they elope at least for a night. Upon return, they say they had sex, which, in Roma culture, is synonymous with marriage. A dramatic scene always ensues and it is accompanied by a quarrel and a slap to the daughter. However, the Roma are tolerant so, in the end, the parents accept the reality. Marriage based on parental agreement and bride-purchase is preceded by a complicated ritual which has many tribal modifications. First, the young man's parents find out whether the girl's parents accept their proposal. If the answer is a resolute no, they send suitors who include respected men from the boy's family. Their function is embodied by an ornamental cane. They knock with it on the caravan door or the cart ladder – even when the family is sitting by the fire – and ask for permission to enter. All the time they pretend they do not see each other. The father of the girl gets up, comes to the suitors, welcomes them wholeheartedly and lets them know he is honoured by their visit. He invites them to the fire while both parties pretend they have seen each other for the very first time. The youngest daughter – standing in for the mother-in-law – brings in crates and buckets so that they can sit on them. They do so in a showy way, offering a better seat to one another. The future bride prepares some refreshment (*pařiv*) (Liégeois, 1995). Courting as well as the wedding are always organized in summer but even on a hot day, the bride's father claims it is cold and they need to warm up with a *palenka* (distillate). Guests hesitate to address the reason for the visit because etiquette requires a long introduction. Only later do the suitors ask for the bride. If it is a marriage based on agreement, parents, after some hesitation, give consent and the first phase of the ritual is

completed. If the marriage is based on purchase, a long negotiation about the bride's price ensues. Her imperfections as well as her assets are mentioned without reservation. The girl is not present so that she is not offended or humiliated. The first visit only confirms a preliminary agreement, not the price itself. Negotiations last several evenings. According to etiquette, future brides are meant to look irritated – as if they do not want to marry – while grooms look uplifted, unconcerned, reserved. When the bride's father gives preliminary consent, he comes with the suitors the next time. He is welcomed in a formal way as a distinguished guest. After a polite introduction, they discuss the bride price. When the bride's father announces the price, there is a wave of disappointment. The suitors and the groom's father flatter the bride's father and say that the "the price is too high" – not that the bride isn't worth it but it is unusual to ask that much. They suggest a lower price. Negotiation follows so that a mutually fair price is achieved. The main suitor brings a good *palenka* (or *pliashka*) wrapped in a satin towel. Both fathers drink from the bottle and thus seal the marriage contract of their children. Then they hug and call each other father-in-law. After negotiations, the mother-in-law visits the bride and gives her a necklace (its value depends on the economic situation of the family). It is a sign for other men that the girl is engaged. The groom is not present: he comes for his bride with his entourage on the wedding day (Lužica, 2004).

On the wedding day, girls from the family unfasten the bride's hair, kiss her and cry. The traditional wedding dress is red, though at present white is more popular. It is worn only for the ceremony. When the groom arrives, bridesmaids surround the bride in an open space between the carts and defend her. The ceremony is reminiscent of a kidnapping and has the form of a ceremonial game. The best men attempt to penetrate this living barrier or distract the girls' attention so that the groom can take the bride. Though the bridesmaids and the

bride resist, the groom always wins. The abduction or the departure of the bride from her parents is symbolically manifested by throwing a scarf, a belt or a harness over the bride's head. Another type of staged abduction takes the form of a struggle. When the groom arrives with his entourage to take his bride, the men from her family are waiting with sticks. They pretend they do not know the visitors, regard them as enemies and a staged fight starts. The groom's group needs to win and abduct the bride. After that, the couple and the rest of the company come to the *vajda*. A red scarf is laid down on the ground, the couple kneels on it while the *vajda* ties their hands with another red scarf and recites the wedding vows: "I am throwing the key into the water. If no one gets it out and unlocks something with it, you will not be separated." Then he unties their hands and pours wine or *palenka* into their palms. The bride drinks ceremoniously from the groom's palms and he drinks from hers. The marriage ceremony is thus concluded. When the newlyweds arrive at the groom's tent, they are sprinkled with water, and fruit is thrown at the bride as a symbol of fertility. The *phuri dai* gives them bread and salt and says: "*If you become fed up with bread and salt, you will be fed up with each other.*" Newlyweds exchange the pieces of bread with salt and eat them. Then the bride breaks a clay pitcher because shards symbolize happiness. After the marriage and welcome ceremonies in front of the groom's parents' tent, all the nomads nearby and, in the case of settled Roma, the whole community are invited to a wedding reception. The wedding represents a time of truce so all disagreements and misunderstandings are to be forgotten. In the evening, the newlyweds sneak away while the reception goes on until the morning. In the morning, the guests are shown the bed sheets as proof that the bride was a virgin. This fact is celebrated in the next part of the feast which congratulates the parents as well as the bride for not being defiled in her previous life. This part of the feast is paid for by the bride's parents. The groom shows off the scratches on his

face that the bride inflicted on him while defending her virginity; in the end, his manliness prevailed. The mother-in-law ties a scarf on the bride's head, which she needs to wear to indicate that she is a married woman. Roma wedding receptions usually last until all the money is spent. The wedding is seen as the most important ritual in life and for that reason, all money is usually sacrificed. When the bottles and pots are empty, they are all broken into pieces according to an old tradition, because shards bring happiness. The Roma are not tied to agriculture: they do not have any seasonal customs and they only know family ones (Lužica, 2004).

In Orechov dvor in Nitra, the Vlachi Roma used to ask for a bride through agreement or the bride eloped from her family with her chosen beau (Barányiová and Keresztes, In prohuman.sk). During our research in Orechov dvor, a Roma woman told us a story of how she came to Orechov dvor. She used to live in a Roma settlement in Kalvária in Nitra, but the Roma men from Orechov dvor kidnapped her. As she was telling the story, other women stopped her. It is, however, certain that even today potential brides are abducted. Cohn (2008, p. 41) also confirms the existence of this type of marriage arrangement – elopement (*nashimos*) and claims that this happens in a substantial proportion of marriages.

## **Funeral**

Funerals are tied to the most complex rituals. In Roma communities that live in traditional nomadic ways, people are not born and nor do they die in their beds. Believing that demons are active during birth and death, the dying person is placed under a cart or on the ground in an isolated tent (Lužica, 2004).

A tent is built over the dead body and seven candles are lit around it. Odd numbers are believed to have a magical protective power, so all objects used during funeral rituals must be used in odd numbers, in-

cluding the bottles and glasses that people drink from. The coffin of the deceased is filled with all the objects he used during his lifetime so that he has no reason to return and disturb the peace of the mourners. In Spain, musicians get a guitar or a mandolin, in Hungary a violin. Special attention is paid to pipes and tobacco, although matches are not provided so that the deceased does not cause fire upon his potential return. A fire is lit at the feet of the deceased and all the men sit around it. They repeat the words: "*Te aves jartime mandar*" ('let the dead forgive us'). The deceased is remembered without anger, envy, bitterness, regret or scorn. His wife, daughters-in-law and daughters sit by his feet and cry, rhythmically moving the upper parts of their bodies. At times, they scream, lament and protest his death. Young women offer coffee to men but they turn away, are quiet and behave as if in a trance. People do not wash, shave or comb their hair, only children get some cold food. There is no cooking until the funeral. The relatives stay with the deceased all the time. Their work is completed by others. The news of the death is spread by young messengers to all Roma in the surroundings who all come to the funeral. There is no sleep, no food, only a lot of drink. Elderly men – friends of the deceased – tear away buttons from their shirts and coats as a sign of their grief. Women cry, the elderly ones – especially in the Balkans – sing sorrowful songs. These are improvised elegies sung with a pseudo-melodic voice and they represent the best of Roma lyricism. They belaud the peace of the deceased and praise his virtues. Relatives coming to the funeral fill the deceased's pockets with money so that he does not leave the world as a beggar but has a better life on the other side, being able to buy whatever he wants with no need to come back. The coffin is carried away through the back door to confuse the spirits of the dead. When the coffin is carried away – whether from the tent or a house – water is poured out of all bowls because it has been touched by death and so that the soul of the deceased does not come back to quench his thirst.

The funeral is performed according to the practices of an official denomination. The Roma throw clay and money on the coffin. The grave is sprinkled not only by holy water but also by a drink and the bottle is then passed around the men standing around the grave. In Hungary, they put thorns on the grave to scare off vampires; in Greece they put a heavy stone on the grave, which also functions as a gravestone. Burials are often connected with intense expressions of grief. Women tear their hair and clothes, gnash their teeth and cry, and other family members try to prevent them from hurting themselves or from jumping into the grave. The expressions of grief are authentic and deeply passionate. The living assure the deceased that they have forgiven him and beg for forgiveness too. Then, they disperse quickly, saying: *"I leave you to God."* There are differences between the funerals of poor nomads and respected members of the Roma community. The feeling of solidarity and respect of the community toward its member are, however, the same. The funerals of famous musicians tend to be spectacular since they are attended by musicians from distant locales and even the whole country. They break a violin bow over the grave and the coffin is lowered to the ground to the sound of funereal music. There is a specific repertoire for such an occasion. The Roma view these melodies as mystic. They can be played only above an open grave, otherwise they bring death. Meanwhile, women prepare a feast in the camp – the first meal since the day of the death. All the people who attended the funeral are invited. The closest relatives, however, do not eat or drink anything. The first drink is poured on the ground ceremoniously. Before and after the meal, everyone says: *"This food is for you (says the name of the deceased) and your memory. Let it keep us healthy and in good spirits"*. At the end of the wake, the mourners burn or break all of the objects of the dead: the tent, cushions, carpet, plates, cups and glasses that he drank from. If he died on a cart, it has to be burnt as well or at least painted another colour so that his returning soul would not

recognize it. His widow and children are not allowed to cook food for a whole year. Other people do it for them. The camp is moved to another place. In some tribes, the widow cuts her hair up to her ears and the widower cuts his moustache as a sign of grief (Lužica, 2004). Stojka and Pivoň (2003, p. 120) state that in the community of Vlachi Roma in Slovakia the closest relatives had to do the following: "When a man dies, his wife cuts her hair because long hair symbolizes her beauty which a widow cannot show. She also puts away the clothes she used to wear when her husband was alive and dresses only in black – all her clothes are black. When a woman dies, her husband, sons and daughters all dress in black." The first night after the funeral, ash is scattered in front of the house. In the morning, people look for traces of whether the deceased has come back. There is an archaic ceremony with water that is performed the next day following the funeral. A boy, if the deceased was a man, and a girl, if it was a woman, takes a pitcher and a glass and each day at noon offers fresh water to every Rom he or she meets. This is repeated for six weeks. To keep count of the days, each day is marked with a notch carved on a stick. On the last day, the stick is broken in half, the pieces are tied into a cross and five candles are attached to them. The candles are lit and are released into water. Water is poured from a pitcher back into river as long as the water ceremony lasts. In other tribes, a girl puts a lit candle into a jar that the deceased drank from and releases it into water. On the ninth day and on the day the water ceremony ends, another wake takes place. It is forbidden to stand up separately; everyone has to stand up at once, or the first person to stand will follow the deceased. The rest of the food is thrown into a river before sunset. Another wake is organized six months later and then on the day of the first anniversary of the death. These wakes also include some rituals; after each wake a group of relatives – depending on their relation to the family – announces the end of the mourning period and any restrictions connected with it. After that

they can comb their hair, wear accessories, buy new clothes, dance, sing and have fun. The Roma traditionally do not wear black as a sign of grief. After one year, the mourning period is over: life must go on. For the peace of the deceased, it was important to pay them respects and assure them of the love and faithfulness of the mourners, but grief should not be exaggerated so that the deceased person does not come back to comfort the grieving. He needs to start a new life after some time. Therefore, grief ends with the following phrase: *“I open the path to your new life and release you from the shackles of your grief.”* The Roma do not have a clear idea about the afterlife. They believe neither in heaven nor hell. Life continues after death but in a different form. They speak about it only rarely and do not understand the curiosity of *gadje* about this topic. *“We will all go there anyway and then we will find out”*, they respond to the question. They do, however, believe that if the deceased was bad and sinned frequently, they will come back because they have not been forgiven (Lužica, 2004). Those who died suddenly, prematurely or tragically can also come back. The Roma long for a dignified, majestic death that they can get ready for and die surrounded by their family, relatives and friends. They fear an unpredictable death. The spirits of the dead (*mulo*) do not, as they understand, have an eternal life. They get weaker each year and when the last person who remembered them dies, the soul of the particular ancestor will die for the second time and definitively (Cangár, 2003). Even today, the Roma community (whether in Slovakia or in other countries with Roma populations) maintain many of these traditions; this can be helpful in explaining the behavioural differences of Roma families as opposed to majority society. In our personal experience with the Roma in Orechov dvor in Nitra, when we asked questions about funeral traditions, all the women remained quiet. It was obvious that they view death as some kind of taboo that is not supposed to be talked about. Death is associated with magic and superstition.

Births, weddings and funerals in Roma communities are tied to a lot of traditions. If the Roma are believers, the ceremony is also religious. Most of the Roma in Slovakia are Roman Catholics; in the north-eastern part of the country, with the dominance of Eastern Rite Catholicism and the Orthodox Church, they belong to this denomination. The faith of the Roma represents an interesting combination of Christian teachings, their own superstitions that originated probably in their Indian homeland, and the beliefs they absorbed from the non-Roma population and adapted to their own needs. Les Saintes Maries de la Mer, a town in southern France on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, is the centre of Roma spiritual gatherings. Roma have been meeting here since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to venerate their patron St Sara. A festive procession takes place on 24 May. The Roma also have their martyr: Ceferino Jimenéz Malla, el Pelé was born in 1861 in Benavent de Lérida, Spain. After forty years of nomadic life, he settled in the Aragonese town of Barbastro where he led an exemplary Christian life devoting his time to Roma children whom he introduced to faith and taught prayers. When he refused to renounce his faith during the Spanish Civil War and the period of religious persecution, he was imprisoned and shot dead in the cemetery in Barbastro on 9 August 1936. On 4 May 1997 he was beatified by Pope John Paul II in the Vatican with hundreds of Roma attending the mass. Since 1993, the Salesians have been organizing a Roma pilgrimage in the small village of Gaboltov (in the region of Šariš) on the first Sunday of every August. In the Czech Republic, Roma have been gathering at a pilgrimage in the village Osek since 1998 (Mann, 1992).

The Roma see society and religion as interconnected, they “choose wisely when considering contact with other communities and they only incorporate and absorb certain elements into their cosmology” (Museum of Romani Culture, 1999, p. 65). Roma religion cannot be formulated or summarized easily. It is associated with many modifiers,

such as “syncretism” and “adaptability” (Kováč, M. – Mann A., 2003, p. 11).

The Roma have always been closely tied to faith. Practically, there are no atheists among the Roma; their faith has always been very lively. It is based on the religion of the majority society, which is supplemented with spiritual and magical elements stemming from their Indian homeland, such as the influence of the caste system related to the ritual of purity or the influence of magic, and good and evil spirits. The magical, natural-animistic character of their religion is implicitly preserved even today through their belief in magic and conjury, and their fear of curses and the evil eye. Their faith in spirits is very strong as well. The Roma fear and respect them, especially the spirits of their deceased relatives. The world of the spirits is divided into good and evil. If a person's conscience is clear, they do not need to worry; if they have a bad conscience, they are scared. Fear can be repelled by thoughts of Jesus Christ. Prayers also help (Jakoubek, 2004).

### **Romipen – Gypsihood**

As mentioned above, Gypsihood (*Romipen*) represents a set of rules the Roma follow. It is characterized primarily by respect, justice, truth, togetherness and solidarity.

#### **Respect**

Roma often use this word during celebrations, but it also refers to an apology, agreement or permission to join a conversation. Respect can be illustrated by the perception of the senior female elder – the *phuri dai*. The influence of the female element is embodied in the function of the *phuri dai* (*phuri dei*), which represents the role of the senior female elder, fundamentally influencing the existence of the clan by selecting partners and distributing tasks among the female part of the clan. She is the female counterpart of the male chief (Mujalo, Chibalo, Baro

shero), whose position is higher because he controls several families associated in the clan (Mahlya, Nimpe) (Lužica, 2004).

At present, a man has a dominant position in the family; the value of the woman lies predominantly in her fertility. However, Mann (2000) adds that a man is presented as an authority only externally. At home, problems are handled primarily by the wife. "Puri dai" – the senior female elder is the most respected woman based on her wisdom and life experience. There is an analogous situation among children where sons are in a higher position than daughters. In lower social strata, the usual economic needs of the family are still provided by women, and daughters are groomed for this role as well. This value orientation of Roma families is, more or less, preserved in the consciousness and practice of families with a lower standard of living in a certain degree of fluctuation, but it often persists in the consciousness and value prejudices (though only in the deeper strata of the psyche) of families with a higher cultural standard.

Stojka and Pivoň (2003) use the example of women after menopause. "Such a woman is practically equal to men, young people hold them in high regard and respect them as elderly men (Stojka – Pivoň, 2003, p. 84). Fonseca (1999) sees the senior female elder as the highest position in the community. They can even eat and smoke with men. "In direct contrast to Western women, who may feel great depression during menopause as their biological allure looks like waning, Gypsy women of a certain age gain status. By becoming physically more like men, they overcome the social inferiority of their sex. Old people are generally revered among Gypsies [...] for their deeper knowledge and experience" (Fonseca, 1999, p. 73).

Fabianová (2005) states that the position of women in the family and in Roma society varies according to the group to which the family belongs. In general, however, her status was low. The woman was always in a submissive position with respect to the dominant position

of the man, and she was considered to be of lesser importance in the patriarchal society. Her job was to listen to her husband, to give birth to children and raise them, to care for the household and the livelihood of the family. This care was particularly important if the man had no employment and hence no financial or natural income. Typically, the woman usually walks several steps behind her husband, hands full of shopping bags and small children while the husband walks in front of her as a leader. Women were not present during men's discussions; they were not allowed to take part in some of the ceremonies. If a child is born, the relatives congratulate the father of the child; the wife is not at the centre of attention.

Respect is shown during the abovementioned celebrations with tables heaped with food and drink. "Exaggeration during Roma dinner parties demonstrates wealth but it is also a sign of respect extended to guests" (Bartos, 2004, p. 177).

### **Justice**

Among Vlachi Roma, justice is tied mainly to Romani judges and Romani courts (*kris romani*). These Roma see the courts of the majority society as secondary even today. "It is Roma judges who solve Roma problems (adultery, infidelity, fights and so-called impure family intentions). Roma judges are led by a person who is honoured and respected among Vlachi Roma... This person is referred to as the main, first Roma and his verdicts and judgements are respected by other Roma... Each Rom is honoured if he visits his house on some occasion" (Stojka – Pivoň, 2003, p. 50).

### **Truth**

Truth is understood by the Roma as truth within their community. Lying is not accepted – only if one lies to *gadje*. *Chachipen* means telling the truth, following the right principles, defending one's opinion, as well as describing a respected person. The word *chochano* is used to

refer to a liar, a person worthy of disdain. Of course, lying to a *gadjo* is not frowned upon, but is seen as an expression of cunning and skill and is regarded in a positive way (Bartosz, 2004, p. 182).

### **Togetherness and solidarity**

Solidarity is a mechanism that ties the whole community socially. The family pulls all of its members to the same level (Jakoubek, 2004).

Roma family as part of intergenerational cohesiveness and solidarity. Solidarity in Roma families is stronger, which results from their traditional way of life, where mutual help and respect was manifested especially in the process of settlement, acquisition of food and education of individual generations. The coexistence of three (exceptionally of several generations) includes many specifics, aspects and perspectives, especially when referring to the Roma family, where the position of the grandparent and the individual is fundamentally different from that of the majority society. Three-generation coexistence also provides an environment for learning behaviour patterns, their comparison, categorization and evaluation. In the past, the three-generation family was a norm rather than an exception in the majority. Its distinctive features were as follows: it was an integrating tool, a bearer of history and of cultural and moral values.

For example, Roma togetherness and solidarity is expressed through the choosing of godparents. "Choosing godparents is a sign of strengthening tribal and clan-family relationships, as well as of togetherness and solidarity within family relations" (Lehoczká, 2006, p. 58).

Other, equally significant, elements of Romipen include taking pride in one's Gypsiness, one's work (e.g. crafts Roma did in the past), etc.

### 3 THE ROMA IN CONTEMPORARY EUROPE

There are approximately 6 million Roma living in the European Union, and 10-12 million living in Europe ([euractiv.sk/fokus/socialna-politika](http://euractiv.sk/fokus/socialna-politika)). While it is rather difficult to gather any information about Roma minorities, they do represent the largest minority living in Europe. In his article “Roma integration in European labour markets” ([wol.iza.org](http://wol.iza.org)), Kahanec mentions several reasons why it is difficult to gather data about Roma minorities:

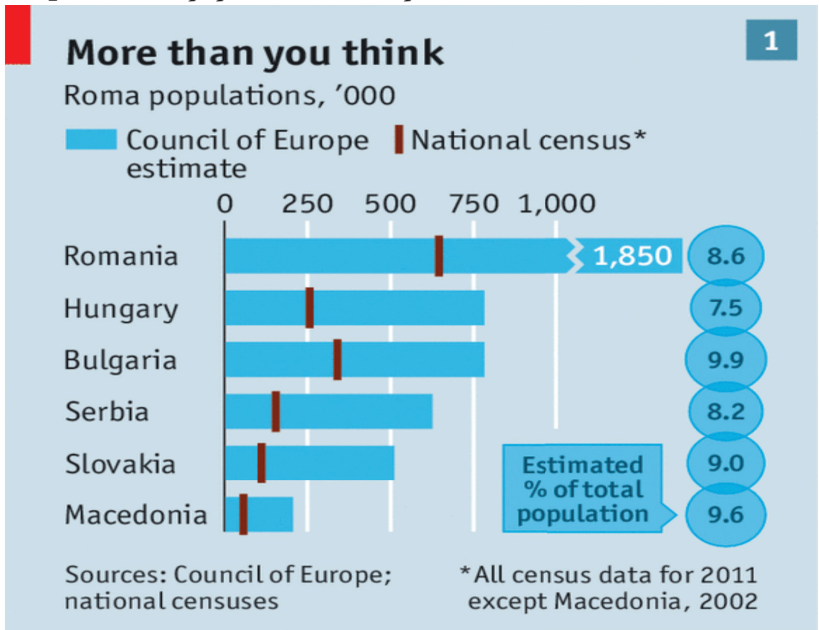
- The lack of data and multiple measurement biases make measuring Roma populations and their socio-economic conditions almost impossible.
- Roma are a highly heterogeneous population in their level of integration and labour market position, making generalizations problematic.
- Closing the human capital gap between Roma and non-Roma may not be sufficient to provide equal chances in the labour market, as differentials in returns to human capital, signalling unequal treatment, appear to be the norm.
- Political elites lack the will and courage to address Roma integration challenges.

In terms of absolute numbers, Romania has the largest Roma population in the EU. It is followed by Bulgaria, Spain, Hungary and Slovakia. In relation to the majority population, the order is slightly different. In this case, Bulgaria leads with more than 10% of citizens registered as Roma. Slovakia (9.17%), Romania, Hungary and Czech Republic are next ([euractiv.sk/fokus/socialna-politika](http://euractiv.sk/fokus/socialna-politika)).

According to the Berlin Institute for Population and Development, the Roma population represents more than 9% in Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia. The number is a bit lower in Serbia and Hungary. In Montenegro, Roma amount to less than 5%. The

Czech Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Greece and Spain register only a 3% share of Roma minority. In other European countries, it is less than 1% (<http://www.berlin-institut.org>).

**Graph 2:** *Roma population in Europe*



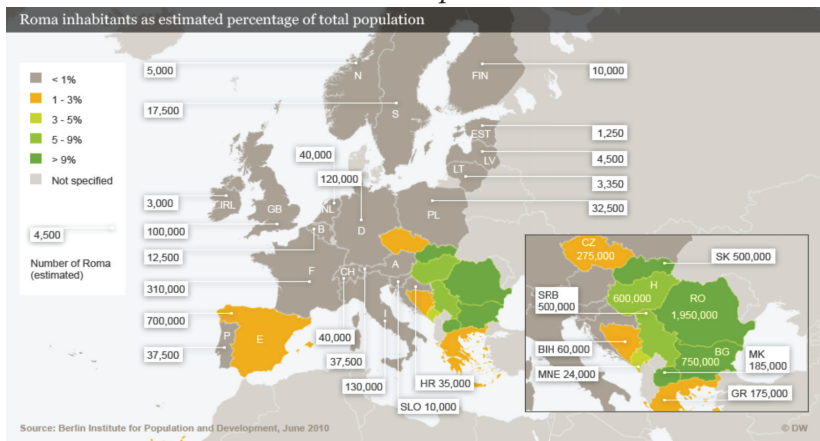
Economist.com

Source: [www.economist.com/news/europe/21653654-life-not-improving-one-europes-biggest-and-most-ostracised-minorities-left-behind](http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21653654-life-not-improving-one-europes-biggest-and-most-ostracised-minorities-left-behind)

The surveys of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights ([fra.europa.eu](http://fra.europa.eu)) indicate that in the 11 EU Member States covered by the surveys the socio-economic situation of the Roma in the four key areas of employment, education, housing and health is not satisfactory and is worse, on average, than the situation of the non-Roma living in close proximity. Across the 11 EU Member States, the two surveys interviewed 22,203 Roma and non-Roma providing information on 84,287 household members:

- participation in education drops considerably after compulsory school: only 15% of young Roma adults surveyed completed upper-secondary general or vocational education
- on average, fewer than one out of three Roma are reported to be in paid employment
- around 45% of Roma live in households that lack at least one of the following basic housing amenities: namely indoor kitchen, indoor toilet, indoor shower or bath and electricity.
- on average, about 90% of the Roma surveyed live in households with an equivalized income below national poverty lines

**Picture 10: Roma inhabitants in Europe**



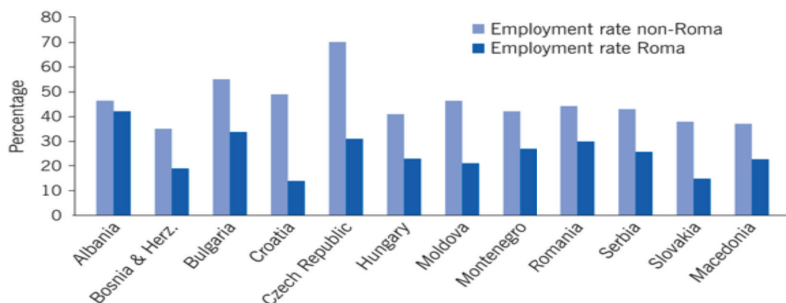
Source: [www.emaze.com/@AZRIQZRC/Roma-People-in-the](http://www.emaze.com/@AZRIQZRC/Roma-People-in-the)

Compared to the European (majority) population, the Roma population is young – almost 36% of Roma are younger than 15 years old, compared to 16% of EU citizens. The average age of the Roma is 25 years, while in the EU it is 40 years. By not using Roma potential, European Union is losing potential labour force. It seems essential to support higher levels of education so that they can apply for better jobs since they represent a significant group among the unemployed. According to some estimates, 23% of new workers on the labour market

in Bulgaria are Roma, in Romania it is 21% ([www.euractiv.sk/fokus/socialna-politika](http://www.euractiv.sk/fokus/socialna-politika)).

Data from the 2011 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank, and European Commission regional Roma survey can help us better understand the nature of labour market divergence between Roma and non-Roma populations. The survey provides comparable data representative of *vulnerable* Roma and non-Roma *living in their proximity* for a number of countries. Graph 3 provides a general overview indicating very large differences in employment rates between Roma and non-Roma. Specifically, there are considerably lower labour market participation rates among Roma than non-Roma in most countries, with the exception of Albania (both men and women) and Hungary, Montenegro, and Macedonia (men only). Employment rates mirror this picture, with markedly lower employment rates among vulnerable Roma than among non-Roma living in proximity to Roma. In Croatia, the Czech Republic, Moldova, and Slovakia, labour market gaps between Roma and non-Roma populations exceed 20 percentage points for men. For women, only Albania (6 percentage points), Romania (15), Macedonia (16) and Serbia (18) report employment gaps below 20 percentage points; in Croatia the gap is more than 30 percentage points, and in the Czech Republic it exceeds 40 points. (Kahanec In wol.iza.org)

**Graph 3:** Differences in employment rates between Roma and non-Roma populations are large



Note: Share of the employed as a percentage of the working age population (15–64). A random sample of Roma and non-Roma households living in areas with a higher density of Roma populations.

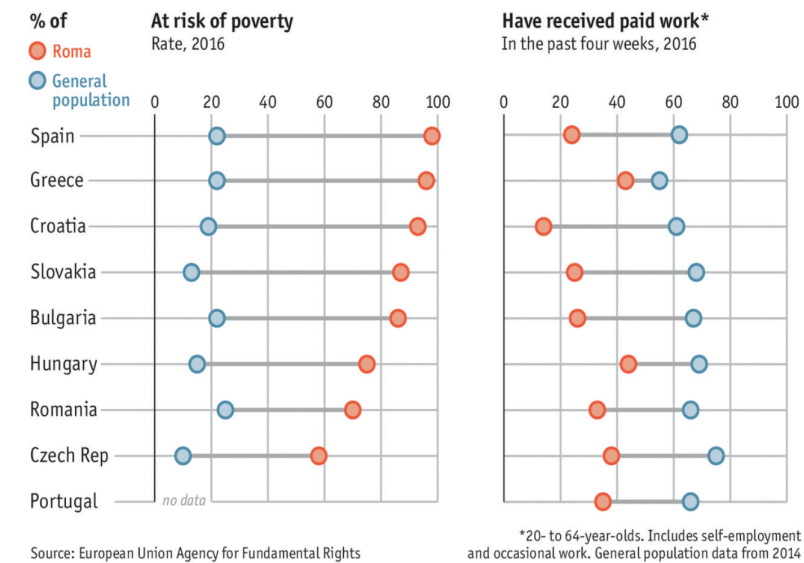
Source: UNDP/WB/EC (United Nations Development Programme, World Bank, European Commission).

Explore data. Online at: <http://www.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/ourwork/povertyreduction/roma-in-central-and-southeast-europe/roma-data/> [Accessed September 20, 2013] [1].

Source: Kahanec In [wol.iza.org/articles/roma-integration-in-European-labor-markets/long](http://wol.iza.org/articles/roma-integration-in-European-labor-markets/long)

17% of residents of EU countries are at risk of poverty (Graph 4). According to the FRA, that share is 80% among Roma. Similarly, almost a third live in households without running water, and around half have no toilet, shower or bathroom. Only 30% of Roma adults have worked in the past month, less than half the proportion for the rest of the continent. Moreover, Roma education levels are low: in Greece, whose Roma community is particularly hard-up, 42% of 16- to 24-year-olds have not completed any formal schooling (<http://www.economist.com/blogs>).

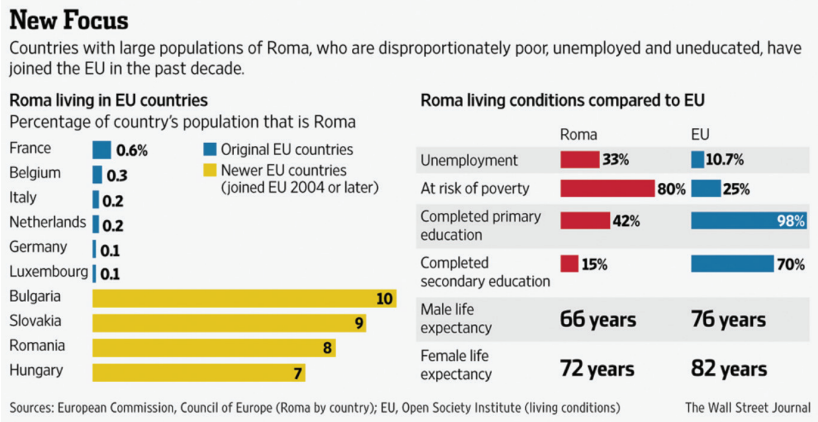
Graph 4: Risk of Poverty – paid work



Source: [www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2016/11/daily-chart-20](http://www.economist.com/blogs/graphicdetail/2016/11/daily-chart-20)

Picture 11 summarizes the life of Roma in Europe.

Picture 11: Roma living in EU



Source: [www.wsj.com/news/interactive/ROMAJP0423](http://www.wsj.com/news/interactive/ROMAJP0423)

“The Roma are the largest ethnic minority in Europe—as well as one of the most disadvantaged. A triple vicious circle is at play: Substandard socio-economic outcomes reinforce each other; they fuel negative attitudes and perceptions, leading to ill-chosen policies; and segmentation is perpetuated through (statistical) discrimination. A severe lack of data precludes progress. However, existing bits of evidence point to virtuous ways out” (Kahanec In wol.iza.org).

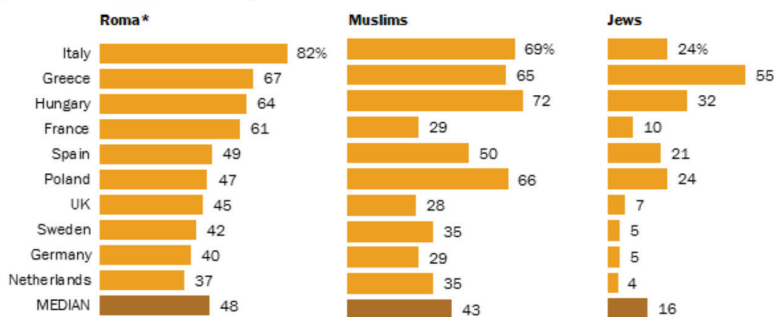
## The Roma in Poland

National minorities in Poland amount to only 3-4% of the population. Roma people represent a rather insignificant group. There are approximately 30,000 Roma, which, in relation to the country's population, represents around 0.05%; euractiv.sk cites 37,500 Roma, i.e. 0.10% of the population (euractiv.sk). Although the number of Roma living in Poland is insignificant, Graph 5 shows that almost 50% of the population has negative attitudes towards them (romovia.info/polsko.htm).

**Graph 5: Negative opinions about Roma**

### Negative opinions about Roma, Muslims in several European nations

*Unfavorable view of \_\_\_ in our country*



\*In UK, asked as "Gypsies or Roma."

Source: Spring 2016 Global Attitudes Survey, Q36a-c.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: [www.pewglobal.org/2016/07/11/europeans-fear-wave-of-refugees-will-mean-more-terrorism-fewer-jobs/](http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/07/11/europeans-fear-wave-of-refugees-will-mean-more-terrorism-fewer-jobs/)

There are two groups of Gypsies living in Poland, both of which have distinct cultural traditions. There are several thousand Carpathian Roma who have been living in Poland for generations; they call themselves simply Roma (Gypsies). Some of them refer to themselves as Bergitka Roma (Highlander Gypsies). They have been named Carpathian Roma by experts on Roma studies. Other Roma groups call themselves Ungrike Roma. Traditionally, Carpathian Roma live on the periphery of villages in southern Poland. Their houses form a characteristic cluster, distinguished by the density of development located on a hillside, isolated from the village. These Gypsies belong to the same group as Gypsies settled in the Slovak and Ukrainian Carpathian mountains. Since autumn 1990, the ethnic composition of Poland has been enriched by Romanian Gypsies. Their arrival can be compared only with the large migration of Lovare and Kalderash after 1850. They live mostly in larger cities but also in smaller towns. Their number oscillates between 11,000-19,000 ([romovia.info/polsko.htm](http://romovia.info/polsko.htm)).

## 4 THE ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE SLOVAK POPULATION

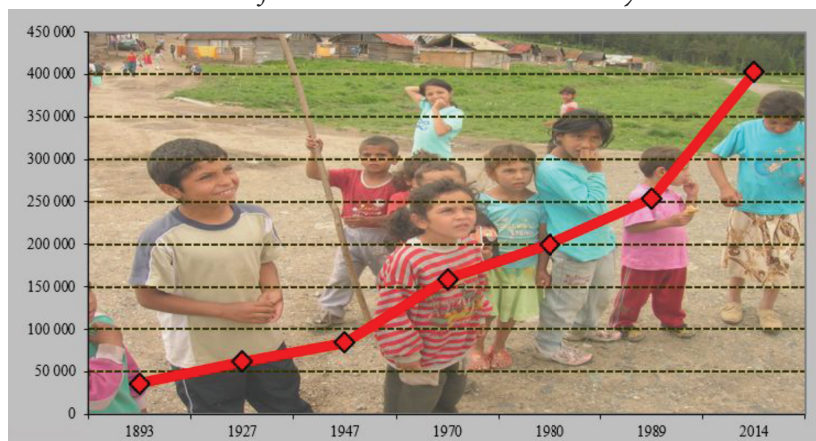
At present, there are no official statistical data on the ethnic composition of the Slovak population. Such data are available from various sources only until 1989; today, such data is in violation of human rights and therefore has not been collected since 1989. Ethnic data are thus frequently substituted by data on the national composition of the population (Vaňo, 2001). The current national composition of the Slovak population is a result of complex historical factors. Located in the heart of Europe, Slovakia has always been a place of frequent change and migration of various ethnic groups which has created the rather diversified ethnic structure of the population (Podolák, In [www.sav.sk](http://www.sav.sk)).

The latest census marked a decrease in Slovak nationality when compared to census results ten years previously – 80.7%. In the 2001 census the number was 85.8%. (Základné údaje..., 2012) The northern and central parts of Slovakia have retained their predominantly Slovak identity. The Hungarian nationality, the second most numerous in Slovakia, accounted for 8.5% of the total population in 2011. In 2001, 9.7% of the total was reported as forming this nationality (Základné údaje..., 2012). They live mainly in the southern part of Slovakia near the border with Hungary. The nationally mixed territory in the southern part of Slovakia used to be part of the ethnically diverse Austro-Hungarian Monarchy but after the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, it became part of the new state. There is an area along the Slovak-Hungarian border and its width varies depending on the dominance of the share of Hungarian or Slovak population. Other ethnic minorities in this territory are represented only minimally (Podolák, In [www.sav.sk](http://www.sav.sk)).

As far as the number of the Roma is concerned, the development is the reverse. In 2001, some 90,000 permanent residents (1.9%) de-

clared themselves of Roma nationality. Today, the number has risen to 105,700, which amounts to almost two percent of the total number. Roma people represent the second largest national minority in Slovakia. While members of ethnic groups living in Slovakia usually choose their nationality according to ethnic affiliation, most ethnic Roma prefer to select another nationality to Roma nationality (Vaňo, 2001). Therefore, the estimated numbers of Roma in Slovakia are diverse. In Picture 12, Šuvada depicts the development in the number of Roma in Slovakia between the years 1893-2014 according to the censuses conducted in 1991, 2001 and 2011 and data from municipal offices gathered two years earlier (in 1989). At that time, there were 253,943 Roma registered in Slovakia which is more than triple the amount of the number recorded in the 1991 census (Šuvada In suvada.sk).<sup>4</sup>

**Picture 12:** *Number of Roma in Slovakia between the years 1893-2014*



Source: <http://suvada.sk/kolko-je-na-slovensku-romov.html>

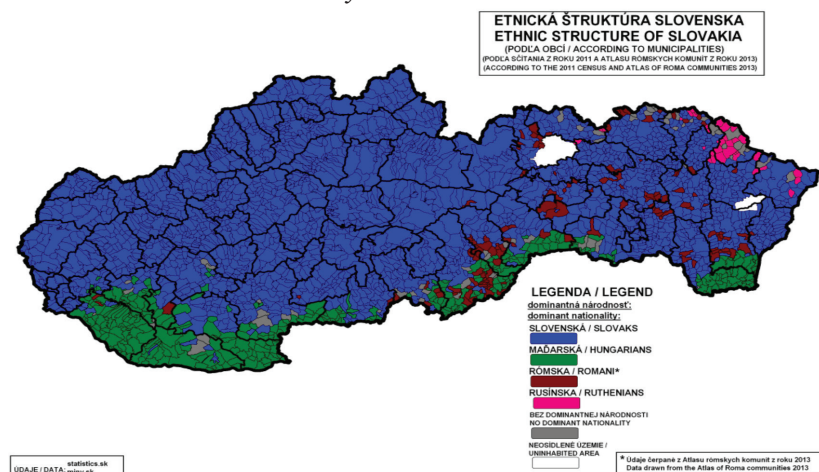
<sup>4</sup> M. Šuvada (Data from the years 1893 to 1989 are taken from censuses. The entry from 2014 is an estimate from *The Atlas of Roma Communities in Slovakia – Mušinka a kol.*, 2014). In: <http://suvada.sk/kolko-je-na-slovensku-romov.html>

There has been a growth in numbers, compared to 2011, of people of Rusyn, Moravian and Polish nationality (Základné údaje..., 2012). Citizens of Czech, Silesian and Moravian nationality living in Slovakia are a consequence of modern migration in our territory. The interwar years marked an increase in the Czech population, which was caused partly by interethnic marriage. After the dissolution of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, people of Czech, Moravian and Silesian nationality became the third largest minority in Slovakia following the Hungarian and Roma nationalities (Podolák, In [www.sav.sk](http://www.sav.sk)) though in 2011 not even 1% of inhabitants declared themselves as belonging to this nationality (Základné údaje..., 2012).

Rusyns and Ukrainians, living in the north-eastern part of Slovakia, make up part of the population of eastern Slovakia. They can be divided into several sub-groups based on their dialect, traditions and folklore. They refer to themselves as Rusyns, though some of them have considered themselves to be part of the Ukrainian or Russian ethnic group, and others saw themselves as an independent ethnic group without their own state and political independence. Their historical journey has been determined by the fact that the ethnic group lives in-between two cultural spheres – western and eastern, i.e. Catholic and Orthodox. The population was split in 1944 when Carpatho-Ukraine became part of Soviet Ukraine. From 1919, it had been an autonomous region within Czechoslovakia. Similarly to Rusyns, the citizens of Ukrainian nationality live predominantly in the north-eastern districts of Slovakia near the border with Poland and Ukraine. The spatial distribution of Ukrainians is sparser than that of Rusyns (Podolák, In [www.sav.sk](http://www.sav.sk)).

Picture 13 demonstrates the most common national minorities in Slovakia on a map based on the last census and data from the Atlas of Roma Communities.

Picture 13: *Ethnic structure of Slovakia*



Source: [www.jancer.blog.pravda.sk/files/2015/12/Slovenskoetnicka.pnga.png](http://www.jancer.blog.pravda.sk/files/2015/12/Slovenskoetnicka.pnga.png)

In the 2011 census, the majority of the inhabitants of the Slovak Republic (78.6%) declared Slovak as their mother tongue. 9.4% declared Hungarian as their mother tongue. The Roma language was declared as a mother tongue by 2.3% of inhabitants (Rusyn 1%, Czech 0.7%). When comparing the number and the share of the population according to nationality and mother tongue, some inhabitants with Hungarian and Roma mother tongue probably declare themselves as belonging to Slovak nationality. Between the 2001 and 2011 census, there was a slight increase in the number of inhabitants with Roma mother tongue (about 0.5%) and a decrease in the number of inhabitants with Slovak, Hungarian and Czech mother tongue (Základné údaje... 2012).

Inhabitants of Polish nationality represent only a minor group in the population of Slovakia. Most of them live in the northern districts. Small groups of Russians, Bulgarians and Croatians can be also found in Slovakia. The number of Vietnamese and Romanian inhabitants is minimal. From a historical perspective, Jews represented a significant ethnic group although Jewish nationality was not registered after the

Second World War up until 1991. At present, the identity, following their religious affiliation and cultural traditions, is spreading within the remaining Jewish community. (Podolák, In [www.sav.sk](http://www.sav.sk))

## **5 DEVIANT BEHAVIOUR IN A SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED ENVIRONMENT**

Orechov dvor in Nitra is a segregated settlement of Roma who were expelled from the city because of their non-adaptive behaviour. Therefore, we have decided that this monograph will also include a chapter on the deviant behaviour of Roma and the factors that affect it. The most common problem in terms of coexistence with the majority is crime committed by members of the Roma community.

### **Signs of deviant behaviour of Roma from a socially disadvantaged environment**

Uhrín (1995) claims that the Roma were not prepared for “new conditions” after 1989: “While in the 1950s, 60s and 70s Roma crime was “exhausted” by traditional theft (e.g. of domestic animals) and petty scams (which, according to the Roma value system, represented a demonstration of skill [“God himself allowed Gypsies to steal”]), the scope of Roma crime has been much less idyllic in recent years” (Uhrín, 1995, p. 37). Similarly, Hanobik (In: [www.prohuman.sk](http://www.prohuman.sk)) confirms that after 1989 socio-pathological phenomena among the Roma, such as unemployment, poverty, crime, drug addiction and prostitution, have begun to be more pronounced.

Skupnik (2004, p. 118) states that the Roma started to create anti-worlds in their settlements. It is the “value anti-world” that gives its participants a sense of completeness in terms of their being. Dubayová (1996) also talks about a high degree of withdrawal from the socio-cultural norms of the majority. According to her, when the Roma were nomadic, they were very independent from other people, but, on the contrary, were very dependent on each other within the family. This feature of the Roma family persists to date, as the Roma identify very much with their family.

This is also manifested in increased crime rates. Hroncová (2004) claims that in the long-term development of crime in Slovakia the crime rate of the Roma ethnic group is much higher than that of other citizens. Being sent to prison is not a disgrace for the Roma; in many cases, it is seen as a manifestation of masculinity and the ability to oppose the acknowledged values of the majority. As far as the high Roma crime rate is concerned, it is important to add that in most cases we are talking about minor offences and petty crimes. Factors influencing the high rate of Roma crime include poverty, high unemployment, low levels of awareness of the law and low effectiveness of penalties. At present, Roma addiction to drugs and gaming machines is also a significant factor. Many of them see criminality as a rational way of solving their problems. Youth crime by Roma children in Slovakia is also addressed by Daňo (1999). There is a direct relationship: the lower the standard of living, the higher the incidence of socio-pathological phenomena. The causes of high crime rates among Roma people can be found in their lifestyle. They have always lived a challenging life, and theft often served them as a source of livelihood. This is true even today.

We are aware that there is crime occurring in social groups where the Roma are significantly represented. This means that there is crime that is typical of poor Roma, but it does not mean that it is Roma crime. If there were a typical Roma crime, we would find it in all social strata of Roma society. However, this is not the case (Bán, Majchrák, In tyzden.sk).

Krištof (2006) points to property crime as the most frequent criminal activity of the Roma, but he also highlights the factor of indirect perpetration. The Roma word *de man* means both lend as well as give. Roma do not expect the return of a loaned object because they would do the same thing. The principle of solidarity is adhered to in Roma families – today I have something, tomorrow you will have some-

thing – it is unacceptable for one member of the community to have something (food, money, clothing) while the other does not have anything (Ševčíková, 2003). Considering today's loss of values, however, it is not often the case (for example, there are Roma usurers living in the settlements). The whole family of the perpetrator exculpates him in terms of family solidarity and thus creates an environment where crime and its subsequent enforcement of the sentence, in fact, function as a possibility of gaining a position within the social hierarchy. "In this case, Roma criminality is really different from the criminality of the majority, in which the perpetrator is persistently (negatively) stigmatized" (Krištof, 2006, p. 159).

### **Etiology of Roma criminality**

"Etiology deals with the causes and conditions of criminal activity, as well as criminogenic factors leading to the emergence of criminal behaviour" (Šúryová, 2001, p. 484). According to Hanobik (In [www.prohuman.sk](http://www.prohuman.sk)), one of the causes of pathological phenomena in Roma people is premature sexual activity, births of young girls and women under the age of 18, the inability of many families to care for their children, fractured families or, vice versa, multiple families living in inadequate conditions.

Šúryová (2001) mentions the following criminogenic factors of the Roma population:

#### **– Factors resulting from the social status of the Roma**

Šúryová (2001, p. 484) divides the factors that result from the social status of the Roma as follows:

- A) Peripheral position in society.
- B) Education. Learning. In many member states, school attendance of Roma children is generally much lower and, in addition, they face segregation in schools. According to the above-mentioned research of the Open Society Institute, in the six EU

countries surveyed (Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia), only 42% of Roma children complete basic education, compared with 97.5% of the rest of the population. In secondary education, Roma attendance is estimated at 10% ([www.euractiv.sk/fokus/socialna-politika](http://www.euractiv.sk/fokus/socialna-politika)). However, the importance of education in today's society from the perspective of the Roma can be discussed only in a simplified way (completing secondary or university education is alien to children). The position of girls in the context of education is viewed differently when compared to boys. Girls' parents do not expect them to be educated because at that age they are supposed to be ready for marriage. That is their priority. As Magdolénová states (In [www.sme.sk](http://www.sme.sk)), education is regarded as valuable only by the middle and upper classes of Roma. Among the lower classes, parents see education as a burden. It is assumed that this is caused by self-pity, the idea that "*I cannot learn because I am Roma*". Besides, she claims that for some parents it is also comfortable: "The Roma are worried about their children; sometimes they do not want to let them out of the settlements. They would rather keep visiting the head of a special school until their child is accepted and does not have to attend a normal elementary school. If you say to them that their child will not be successful in life, they answer: "*So what? We also attended it*" (Magdolénová In: [www.sme.sk](http://www.sme.sk)).

- C) Employment. The high unemployment rate among the Roma is a long-term phenomenon and is disproportionately higher than the unemployment rate of the majority population. The Roma are usually unable to find a new job after a job loss, which devastates their workforce even more. They have also lost work habits, which have been criticized in the past and often rep-

resent the reason for losing their jobs. They are still not interested in professionalization, retraining or finding work outside their place of residence. This puts them in increasingly worse social conditions. The Roma themselves, apart from a few exceptions, are not looking for a way out of the situation. They expect help from the majority, while closing themselves off into the environment of their own families and wider family. Insufficient education also impacts the position of Roma people on the labour market. Europe 2020 sets a target of 75% of all EU citizens between the ages of 20 and 64 years to be employed. At present, the figure is almost 69% and far less in the case of the Roma. A World Bank survey covering Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Romania and Serbia states that the gap between the average population and members of the Roma ethnic group is 26%. The World Bank study also states that better integration of the Roma into the labour market could bring countries up to 175 million euros a year ([www.euractiv.sk/fokus/socialna-politika](http://www.euractiv.sk/fokus/socialna-politika)).

- D) Forced assimilation. In the 1950s and 1960s in Slovakia, Roma settlements were demolished forcibly, followed by a forced removal of Roma into new sites. All this was done without any preparation. They were moved to new homes, and thus the internal structure of their community was broken. The structure was based, and in the Balkans it still is, on clearly delineated rules. When a child was born, it was clear from the first moment what social role it would play in that structure. Magdolénová (In [www.sme.sk](http://www.sme.sk)) speculates that this structure was broken by the majority society moving the Roma to blocks of flats and not respecting their traditions. For example, families were moved to different locations and forced to live next to neighbours with

whom they would never live otherwise. Logically, antagonism spread and the arrangements did not work. They meant that part of the community, which has always been in a position of certain dependence, suddenly found itself outside of its support structure. Similarly, Štěchová and Večerka (1991) believe that the state's intervention in the 1960s, aimed at the diffusion of the Gypsy population, broke up many traditional Roma communities. This resulted in social disruption and an increase in crime. Říčan (1998) states that due to forced assimilation most of the Roma found themselves in a spiritual and ethical vacuum. As a result, they are now more susceptible to the risks posed by consumerism, alcohol and other drugs, gambling and lowbrow cultural entertainment.

- E) Membership of a minority group. As an ethnic group, the Roma are also anthropologically different (see above). The so-called status of minority may be very stressful and Roma must sometimes face hostile behaviour, prejudice and a lack of understanding. Perhaps that is the reason for Roma group cohesiveness. It is related to collectivism, the tendency to deal with everything together and to make decisions together. The unfortunate consequence of extremely high cohesiveness is the frequent reluctance of Roma families and the wider community to allow individuals freedom to act differently from the group. We address this factor of Roma mentality in connection with the need to improve the education and socialization of Roma youth (Cangár, 2003). The Roma family is also characterized by its defensive mechanisms against the majority society (Bakalář, 2004):

- *Mechanism of aggrievement* – feeling of unfairness, suspicion and rejection of any alternative remedies and assistance.
- *Mechanism of isolation* – voluntary social separation and voluntary rejection of self-reflexion and self-knowledge.
- *Mechanism of pronounced confrontation* – the *gadjo* is considered to be the universal guilty party responsible for all personal frustrations; he is labelled a public enemy and all means of his destruction even illegal ones, are legitimized.

The consequences of these mechanisms are most often social resignation, obstinacy, negativism, nihilism and hostility.

Group solidarity is also linked to non-reporting of crimes due to family or intra-community ties. (Krištof, 2006) This may also result in claims that Roma-perpetrated crime is primarily directed against the majority. On the other hand, there are claims that Roma who commit crimes against the majority will thus increase their prestige in the community and receive greater recognition. Krištof (2006) also mentions thefts from or robberies of the majority, which are not perceived as immoral. “These are, however, groups that are essentially in a permanent war with the surrounding world and consistently divide people into us and them” (Krištof, 2006, p. 160). The Vlachi king Lipa even stated in various Czech periodicals that a good Vlachi bride must be a good *chorkar* (thief). However, in our opinion, this propensity towards crime depends on the community and cannot be generalized. It may also be related to traditional Roma cultures (the already mentioned Vlachi Roma) or to the culture of poverty, which may disrupt intragroup cohesion.

F) Leisure time.

– Socio-cultural specifics

Šúryová (2001) mentions these socio-cultural specifics:

- A) Weak self-control - Roma act mostly intuitively, spontaneously, and cannot handle stressful situations very well.
- B) Fear – fear is conditioned by personal experience, or the experience of relatives or acquaintances. This group experience of fear contributes to cohesiveness and solidarity as opposed to other citizens.
- C) Understanding life with an emphasis on the present – the Roma live in the here and now. They are not much interested in the future. They do not plan and that is why they do not understand consequences. “By not attaching extraordinary importance to the future, it is difficult to motivate them by telling them that the results of some effort will manifest themselves in a positive way later” (Cangár, 2003, p. 190). On the other hand, however, it must be said that the primary concern of poor Roma is to ensure their everyday survival in the here and now. As Cangár (2003) continues, the focus on the present is also related to their lack of patience and punctuality at work, which is necessary.
- D) Education towards different values – “Legal standards are seen as foreign - heteronomously – they are neither accepted, recognized, nor respected in their behaviour” (Heretik, 1994, p. 169). For example, one can mention sexual intercourse of children under the age of 15, often supported by the family, especially in the community of Vlachi Roma (Krištof, 2006). The highest value is given to family, which stands for refuge from evil, help when in need and security. A Rom is willing to subordinate all actions to this value. Similarly, we underestimate the meaning Roma people assign to freedom, self-respect and primarily to

the feeling of instant security, in the broadest understanding of the term, which is much more meaningful to the Roma than the distant future or education (Říčan, 1998).

- E) Conflict between family interests and the interests of society – it is natural that the family cooperates and creates an intimate environment opposed to the surrounding society, especially at a time when there is a shift in social values and norms. However, too much dependence on family ties may have negative consequences for broader society, which is also pointed out by Fukuyama (2006). He speaks of the preference of family ties and kinship over all other kinds of social obligations and duties, which results in a dual morality. Based on their experience with long-term persecution in recent centuries, Roma culture also supports “familiarity”. For example, Vlachi Roma have their own court, the so called *kris*, which is much more meaningful to them than the courts of majority society. In an interview, a judge from the District Court in Nitra said that the *kris* is more important for the Roma and they often look upon civil courts with contempt. To a certain extent, this statement is also supported by Krištof (2006) who claims that submission to the judgment of this internal court is often enforced, but “convicts” do not seek protection from the state.
- Typical motivational factors for Roma-perpetrated crime. Šúryová (2001) mentions the following factors influencing the crime committed by Roma from socially disadvantaged environments:
  - A) Increased inability to defer gratification.
  - B) High need for stimulation. Roma seek out adventure.
  - C) Need for recognition. Roma have a strong need for recognition in their community, which also results in criminal activity in majority society.

According to Selická (2009), the Roma community is aware of the need, or in other words, the necessity of change. It is not only a question of representing Roma people, but especially of achieving some change in Roma communities, in educational and social structures, which will allow the development of the Roma minority in accordance with humanistic principles.

At the conclusion of this subchapter it is important to note that when talking about the social pathology of the Roma and the fact that this issue is important mainly because of the high proportion of Roma in prisons, some people claim that the figures may be distorted. Bakalář (2004, p. 94) talks about the following reasons:

- Greater security awareness among the majority when Roma are present (anthropological sign).
- Higher willingness to testify against Roma.
- Greater naivety of Roma when committing crimes.

Bakalář (2004, p. 95) then also mentions factors that may result in an underestimation of Roma criminality:

- A large number of juvenile Roma participating in criminal activities (these Roma cannot be imprisoned).
- The Roma community does not report criminal acts perpetrated by Roma.
- Many crimes perpetrated by Roma are trivialized (impossibility of restitution due to their economic situation).

We do not want this part of the book to represent the Roma as people who steal and commit crimes. Nor do we claim that criminality is in the nature of the Roma. We are aware that the abovementioned culture of poverty and anomie have a significant impact on the socio-pathological phenomena among the Roma. Forty years ago, Davidová (1965) talked about the loss of traditional values. She claimed that “we occasionally encounter cases of incest, when e.g. father and daughter,

mother and son or brother with sister live like a married couple – they are rare but they do exist and through them it is possible to observe the remnants of group marriage.” (Davidová, 1965, p. 161) Although our research was not focused on detecting socio-pathological phenomena in the Roma community in Orechov dvor, we have observed robberies between Roma, truancy and abduction and the sale of a future bride in this community. R2: “I did not marry, I was abducted by Gypsies. I used to live in Nemčináre in Zlaté Moravce District, I had a little baby. They visited me in the hospital and brought me to Nitra. Gypsies have a custom of putting 16-year-old girls in a car and giving them to husbands. For money.”

## CONCLUSION

The monograph discussed not only theoretical concepts and standpoints, but it also managed to identify and describe them, through qualitative analysis, in a particular segregated settlement in the Nitra region.

First, we considered it important to define the terms ethnicity and minority, since these two concepts overlap and are often used interchangeably. Then, we attempted to provide a definition of the Roma. This chapter includes a brief history of the Roma, which is closely related to the concept of ethnic identity. Ethnic identity is established in contact with other people from whom we differ in some way and which help to define our own selves. In addition to the free choice of an individual to be assigned Roma nationality, a Rom can also be described as a person that differs from the majority society anthropologically, demographically and ethnically. The Roma population lives all across Slovakia, although there are regions and areas with a higher concentration of Roma people. A higher number of Roma people as well as a higher population percentage are characteristic of southern districts of Central and Eastern Slovakia (predominantly in the area from Lučenec through Rimavská Sobota, Spišská Nová Ves to Poprad, Prešov, Košice and Vranov nad Topľou). The demographic profile of the Roma population differs significantly from that of the rest of the population. There is, however, a certain shift as was also observed in the case of Roma families living in Orechov dvor in Nitra. The Roma from Orechov dvor in Nitra, especially members of different generations, have differing opinions on the ideal number of children. The generation of the grandparents had eight siblings on average but the youngest generation considers two to four children as ideal. The demographic characteristics of the Roma in Slovakia also include the distribution of Roma settlements according to their location in rela-

tion to villages and the typology of houses and flats where the Roma live. Living on the outskirts of the city is one of the main things that the Roma living in Orechov dvor would change in their lives. They are not happy that they are far from the city centre. This type of housing complicates the lives of the Roma mainly because they have no supermarkets or schools nearby. As there is not even a bus stop in this area, the Roma have to walk several kilometres to the nearest stop. Life in a segregated part of the city directly affects the quality of life and access to goods and services. According to the Roma, this is the reason why children do not attend school regularly and adults do not go to work. Generally, the issue of housing is very sensitive to the Roma because they realize that they have been evicted from the city because they have not paid rent and destroyed dwellings, but they feel it is unjust they are living in such an environment.

Ethnic characteristics of the Roma have been defined in terms of three cultural concepts related to the Roma: traditional Roma culture, which is characterized by the dominant organizational structure of the extended family (the Roma derive their identity from the family group); the concept of ritual im/purity (this concept is similar to Indian castes); and sub-ethnic affiliation, national Roma culture and the culture of poverty (the culture of poor peri-urban neighbourhoods). As far as traditional Roma culture is concerned, we have described traditions that are passed on from generation to generation, such as childbirth, weddings and funerals. Traditional Roma culture is closely linked to Romipen – Gypsyhood – which represents a set of rules Roma people follow. It is characterized primarily by respect, justice, truth, togetherness and solidarity.

The third chapter deals with the situation of the Roma in present-day Europe, especially from the demographic point of view. The demographic characteristics of the Roma in Poland is highlighted since this publication is published by a Polish publishing house. However, the

following chapter pays special attention to the national composition of the population in Slovakia, focusing mainly on the Roma minority. In the last chapter, we dealt with the deviant behaviour of the Roma in a socially disadvantaged environment, because Orechov dvor in Nitra represents segregated housing for Roma most of whom were expelled from the city due to their lack of adaptability.

It may seem that most of the things in the life of the Roma have not changed, but the monograph lists several specific examples of a shift in perception and understanding of the reality of life, relationships and bonds in the Roma family and other interesting facts that provide further insights into the Roma issue.

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## SUMMARY

Roma families are not homogeneous. There is an internal differentiation of a cultural, educational, social and even sub-ethnic nature among the Roma. Both the theoretical framework as well as the qualitative research are based on Roma families living in a socially disadvantaged environment, thus they do not reflect the problems and way of life of integrated Roma in Slovakia. During their nomadic way of life, the Roma adopted values, norms and patterns of behaviour from the majority environment. Many features that are traditionally considered to be Roma are similar (sometimes identical) to the culture of poverty, so we can only guess at what is typical of the traditional Roma culture. The monograph therefore reflects, among other things, Roma traditions that, despite various external influences, are being preserved and observed by the present generations of Roma.

## ROMA ETHNICITY AND CULTURE

Monika Štrbová

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