Special Issue Local Economy

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**Governing underprivileged Roma migrations within the EU: Receiving country responses and Roma resilience**

This special issue is based on papers presented in the conference *Communicating with States: Underprivileged Roma Migrations within the EU* at Uppsala University’s Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies in October 2015. The idea was developed with the collaboration of Ildikó Asztalos Morell, (Mälardalen University, Sweden), Yulian Konstantinov, (Department for Archeology and Social Anthropology, University of Tromso, Norway), Margaret Greenfields (Bucks New University, UK) and David Smith (Anglia Ruskin University, UK). The theme for the conference emerged during an earlier workshop on Central and East European (CEE) Roma migration at *ETMU Days conference: Inequalities in Diverse Societies* Centre for Research on Ethnic Relations and Nationalism, University of Helsinki, Finland (23rd-24th October 2014). The workshop was organised by Margaret Greenfields, David Smith and Jenni Berlin (post-doctoral researcher University of East Finland) and initiated the theme of sociologically informed research into underprivileged Roma migrations as an aspect of wider processes of precarity (Standing 2011) and urban marginality (Wacquant 2008) characterised, to varying degrees and in different guises, in contemporary European societies.

While the *Communicating with states* conference explored recent trends in Roma migrations within the EU and the complex interplay of push and pull factors emerging on multiple and intersecting levels (market, welfare state, civil society) this special issue has a more specific focus on the governance of CEE Roma migration and migrants in receiving states where they have been arriving in significant numbers since A8 and A2 accession.

Following the transition to a market based society in CEE countries and accompanying labour market transformations, large segments of the Roma population lost their economic basis for integration due to their typically low skills base and experiences of discrimination and have thus been transformed into clients of the state (Ringold, Orenstein and Wilkins, 1995). However the social problem of poverty has thus been increasingly interpreted as a product of inherited cultural traits and values, as poverty ‘obtained a Roma face’ (Szalai 2003). EU policies formulated following EU8 accession in 2004 amplified the concerns of the EU15 countries over the mass immigration of impoverished Roma, amidst calls for policy measures in Central and Eastern European countries to improve the conditions of Roma and reduce their mass westward migration (O’Nions 2011). These concerns sharpened following EU2 accession of Bulgaria and Romania (both member states with substantial Roma populations) in 2007. Following the mass expulsion of Roma by France in 2009 and 2010, and ethnic registration, deportations and repeated conflict in Italy, the European Commission launched its Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies in 2011. This required EU member states to develop strategies to facilitate Roma integration in education, employment, housing and health and to actively promote social integration (Matras 2015).

Our interest in underprivileged Roma migrations within the EU emerged following an increasingly restrictive approach towards Roma in member states which are enacted at the level of local municipal agencies and infringe the EU Freedom of Movement Directive in EU15 member states (2004/38/EC). Roma are increasingly racialised in specific policy measures to discourage their settlement in receiving countries. This takes various forms ranging from forced expulsions (e.g France, Italy and Germany); encouraging resettlement back to their home countries; policy measures prohibiting begging in some Scandinavian countries, such as Denmark and legal enforcement to remove unauthorized settlement of homeless migrants on private land as in Sweden (per Asztalos Morell in the issue). Other measures include increasing conditionality and restrictions on the receipt of welfare benefits for EU migrants which impacts most heavily on Roma due to low employment levels and/or involvement in informal work (per Nagy in the issue) as well as language requirements as a condition of receiving welfare benefits which again, disproportionately affects Roma migrants. In addition, the media and politicians have exploited widely held stereotypes to criminalise the Roma as agents of human-trafficking and abusers of welfare benefits, justifying crime control strategies such as profiling at border screenings (see Nagy’s paper in the edition).

Papers in this special issue thus problematise the interplay between the restrictive measures discussed above, and the agency and capacity of Roma migrants in counteracting these measures through various strategic and adaptive responses (papers variously by Smith, Slavkova and Szabó in this issue). Submissions to this journal edition have considered how the differentiated national and local contexts in receiving countries provide strategic pathways for Roma to navigate migration through for example, “invisibility” and identification with other CEE migrants (for example see variously Nagy’s and Smith’s papers in this issue). This latter strategy in particular acts as a counterbalance to widespread racialised negative discourse on Roma common in receiving countries (Grill 2012; Clark 2014). Papers in this volume suggest that media sensationalism and politicisation can result in heightened visibility of Roma migrants through racialising this migrant population (Asztalos Morell in this edition) impacting their treatment at municipal and national level. Moreover, a secondary strand of argument considers how at the national (receiving state) level the structure and administration of welfare benefits and services and the nature of labour and housing markets have a considerable impact on the social inclusion of Roma migrants and other EU migrants (Smith’s paper in this volume). In particular, the readiness of civil society, local authorities and service providers to engage with the accommodation of CEE Roma is shown to both mediate and problematise concerns impacting Roma migrants (per Asztalos Morell in the issue).

Meanwhile, in contrast to the focus on the North and West, we also present case-studies which engage with the agency and network mobilization of CEE migrants in Croatia and Spain (Slavkova writing on Bulgarian Roma migration to Spain and Sikic-Micanovic et al on Roma marriage migration to Croatia). This latter paper explores how legal frameworks regulating transnational marriage interplay with vulnerabilities and influence migration experience and access to human rights for underprivileged Roma women marrying transnationally, whilst Slavkova explores the social ties and opportunities created post-migration by membership of a particular faith community.

Contemporary Roma migration thus provides an angle from which wider issues can be illuminated. Accordingly this special edition engages with current academic and political debates over social cohesion, national identity and population diversity (Goodhart, 2014; Modood 2007; Parekh, 2000). In several EU ‘receiving’ states Roma migrants have been singled out in terms of policy, media and political discourses and practices as a key example of all that is dysfunctional about the EU and its core principle of freedom of movement. An influx of ‘unproductive migrants’ of which Roma have been foregrounded as a prime example has fed into anti-immigrant sentiments and by extension, anti-EU sentiments. The possibility of large numbers of Roma migrants entering western European member states was a central theme in the United Kingdom Independence Party leader Nigel Farage’s opposition to Romania and Bulgaria accession to the EU for example and emerged as a subtle sub-text within UK ‘Brexit’ campaigning.

Finally, papers in this issue locate the increasing precarity of Roma minorities in recent years in the complex interplay between structural transitions rooted in post-socialist transformations and EU enlargement on the one hand, and classificatory struggles of ethnicity and race on the other hand. This double-bind which impacts poor Roma who elect to remain in their country of origin – or who face exploitation during (sometimes ‘failed’) temporary mobilities, is unpacked in Szabó’s exploration of Transylvanian Roma life histories which discusses both the changing circumstances of low-skilled Roma workers during socialism and after 1990, focusing on how the migration cycle is integrated into local social and economic practices of those who remain in their country of origin.

Throughout this edition we can see how underprivileged Roma migrations are problematised in the context of the EU’s neoliberal regime and the systemic crisis it is currently experiencing in an EU constituted upon inbuilt regional and economic inequalities along dimensions of both core and periphery (Schierup et al 2010). Work related migration within the EU is a multifaceted phenomenon out of which underprivileged migrations form the core concern of this special edition. Precarity is enhanced by delocalization of migrants from nation state based welfare systems, as well as by ‘flexible’ labour markers and increased temporality, spatial dislocations of labour and competition, continually exacerbated by fresh waves of EU and non EU migrants (Standing, 2011). These processes combine, as we demonstrate, to impact most severely on the most underprivileged migrant groups and individuals, particularly the Roma.

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1. All three authors contributed equally to the realisation of this special edition and to the authorship of this introductory editorial. Therefore the order of authors is alphabetical. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)