

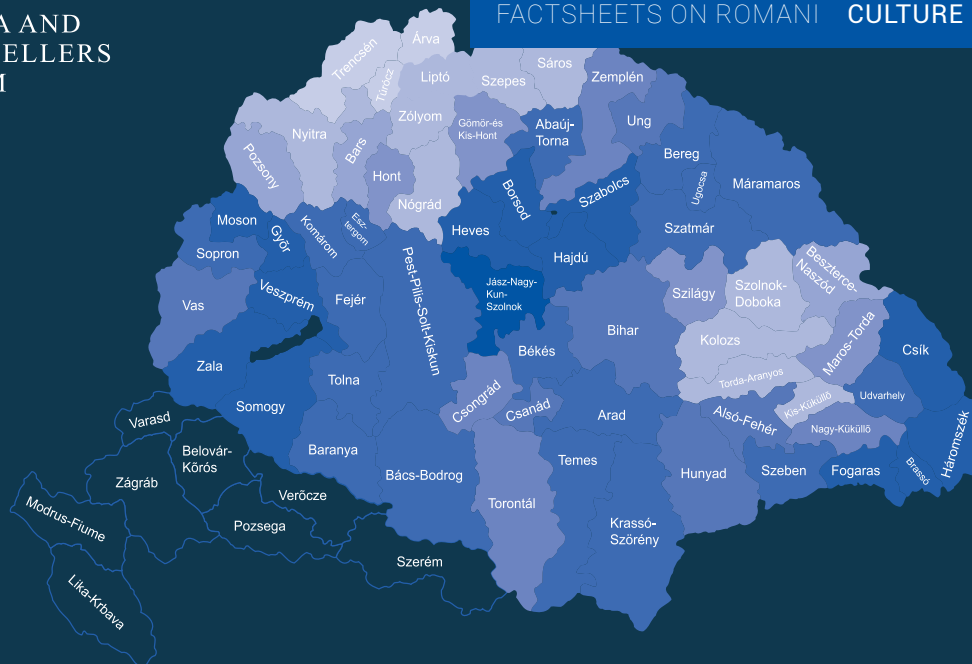


III. 1

Map with various shades of blue showing the number of Roma who does not speak Romani in 1893.

The darker the shade is, the more Roma of that region has no competence in Romani

(adapted from Az Országos Magyar Királyi Statisztikai Hivatal (ed.) 1895, p. 56-57)



3.5

# Hungarian Roma in Hungary and Slovakia

compiled by Zuzana Bodnárová

Hungarian Roma, also called Musician Roma, are the descendants of those Romani groups which have arrived to and settled in the Hungarian-speaking part of the Carpathian basin since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The group of Hungarian Roma is characterised by heterogeneity, regarding socio-economic status, culture and even language. Those Hungarian Romani communities which have preserved Romani are small in number and often omitted in the scientific literature, since it is a common practice to define the group of Hungarian Roma primarily by the lack of Romani language competence as opposed to the Vlach Roma and the Boyash. Besides the absence of Romani, the group of Hungarian Roma is usually linked to the profession of musicians which is indeed, as historical sources indicate, a profession often performed by the Hungarian Roma since their arrival to Hungary. Therefore, another ethnonym referring to this group is Musician Roma. *Romungro* 'lit. Hungarian Rom' is originally a term used by the Vlach Roma when referring to the Hungarian Roma.

## ETHNONYMS AND GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

Hungarian Roma represent the most numerous Romani group in Hungary. The appellation Hungarian Roma has been transmitted to this Romani group from the surrounding population of ethnic Hungarians. Thus, there are also Roma who call themselves Hungarian Roma in the ethnically Hungarian parts of Slovakia. The distribution of Hungarian Roma does not show a clear geographical pattern: They live scattered all over Hungary and in the adjacent, Hungarian-speaking, areas of Slovakia. As it may seem, the common group name does not imply that Hungarian Roma form a homogenous group, even though it may be defined along the line of linguistic and some selected cultural characteristics. In fact, Hungarian Roma represent a kind of meta-group which embraces numerous Romani groups that are highly heterogeneous regarding their kinship system, way of life, economic

situation, occupation or social status among others. These sub-groups may also practice endogamy.

Another ethnonym used by the group is Musician Roma, which refers to the traditional profession of performing music regardless of the fact whether this profession was carried out by their ancestors or not. In contrast to other Romani groups, the vast majority of Hungarian Roma shifted from Romani to Hungarian already some centuries ago. The lack of Romani competence is also one of the main characteristics mentioned in the scientific literature when referring to this group. Such approach, however, excludes those from the group of Hungarian Roma who preserved the Romani language until today. The Romani dialect spoken by the Hungarian Roma is found in southern Slovakia as well as in northern Hungary, namely in the Nógrád county and in a few localities of the Pest county. Today, there are many Hungarian Roma who live in the

## III. 2

MOST COMMON OCCUPATIONS AMONG THE PERMANENTLY AND TEMPORARILY SETTLED ROMA  
IN THE KINGDOM OF HUNGARY, EXCLUDING TRANSYLVANIA, IN 1893.

day labourer	63293
industrial worker	47049
musician	16429
farmer	5630
trader	4087
servant	1014
intellectual	184
housewife	17816
other	529
unemployed older than 15	11770

The census classifies the Roma into three groups: 1) permanently settled Roma, 2) Roma who dwell in once place for a longer period and 3) travellers. The table accounts only for the first two groups. Therefore, it is very likely that the numbers also include other Romani groups. However, since Hungarian Roma make up the majority of Roma in Hungary in the 19th century, the numbers in the table is more likely to reflect the status quo of this Romani group. As may be observed, the number of day labourers is the highest, followed by the industrial workers and musicians. Among the industrial workers, the metal workers (blacksmiths and nail makers) are represented by the highest number of 13570, followed by the adobe makers and mud workers of 10822, and brick and tale makers of 3815. Further industrial works are represented by less than 2000 workers.

(adapted from Az Országos Magyar Királyi Statisztikai Hivatal (ed.) 1895, p. 60-79)

Czech Republic, due to the extensive westward migration of Roma within Czechoslovakia after WWII.

The Romani ethnonym among those Hungarian Roma who still speak Romani is *Roma* ‘Roma’ or, less commonly, the more specific term *Ungrika Roma* ‘Hungarian Roma’ is used. In Slovakia, the ethnonym Hungarian Roma may refer to the Romani-speaking Roma with Hungarian as the second language or exclusively to the Hungarian-speaking Roma. Most Hungarian Roma who have shifted to Hungarian prefer to use the Hungarian ethnonym *cigány* ‘Gypsy’ instead of the original Romani designation *Roma* ‘Roma’. Another term used for the Hungarian Roma is *Romungro* ‘lit. Hungarian Rom’ which is a name given from outside, more precisely from the Vlach Roma. Interestingly, this term has been internalised by some communities of Hungarian Roma who use it now for self-appellation.

When it comes to the classification of Romani groups in Hungary, Hungarian or Musician Roma are opposed to the Vlach Roma who speak Romani as well as to the Boyash who speak a dialect of Romanian. Other Romani groups which are small in number such as the Sinti or the Vend Roma play a role in the classification of Romani groups only in the local context. Thus, Romani groups in Hungary are primarily characterised by their language usage. Regarding the self-proclaimed traditional professions, Hungarian Roma are believed to be descents of musician families, Vlach Roma are seen as traders and dealers, while the Boyash are connected to the traditional profession of tub and wooden spoon makers.

In Slovakia, the Hungarian Roma are differentiated from the Slovak Roma and the Vlach Roma. The number of the Sinti and Boyash is very low in Slovakia, and thus most Hungarian Roma are not aware of these Romani groups.

As mentioned, the group name Musician Roma is used by various Romani communities even though their ancestors never worked as musicians but adobe makers or unskilled industrial or agricultural workers. The definition of the group of Musician and Hungarian Roma is somehow different from the point of view of real musician families. According to them “all musicians are Hungarian Gypsies, but not all Hungarian

Gypsies are musicians” (from Szuhay 2002, p. 25). Accordingly, the term Hungarian Roma is used as an umbrella term for various Romani communities while the term Musician Roma is reserved for the real musicians. In other words, real musicians classify themselves as a sub-group of Hungarian Roma that is defined by their traditional profession.

## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The ancestors of the Hungarian Roma were the first ones who chose to settle in the Kingdom of Hungary in the beginning of the 15th century. The Vlach Roma, the Boyash and the Sinti migrated to Hungary centuries later, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries. While in Western Europe the Roma were persecuted, they were tolerated in Hungary, especially in the regions under Ottoman rule.

During the 16th and 17th century the Roma were protected by letters of recommendations and safe conducts issued by authorities and nobilities of the time. On the other hand, some counties of the former Hungary followed the policy calling for the expulsion of the Roma from their territories.

The 18th century is characterised by the assimilatory policy of Maria Theresia and Joseph II directed towards the Roma. They issued several decrees which involved among others a ban on travelling and begging, keeping horses, making music, wearing different clothing, speaking Romani or marrying among each other. They went so far that they ordered the Romani children to be taken away from their parents in the age of four and raised by peasants. It was prohibited to use the ethnonym *cigány* ‘Gypsy’. Instead, the terms ‘new Hungarian’ and ‘new peasant’ were coined. Nevertheless, the authorities of the time were reluctant to implement the decrees or providing the necessary funding. By the end of the 18th century, the assimilatory policy was abandoned and the Roma issue was no longer on the agenda.

One of the most significant events of the 19th century was the census in 1893 that aimed to record demographic information about the Romani population in Hungary. The number of the Roma in Hungary of that time was around 280 thousand.

## III. 3

A letter written in Romani on the 30th of May 1890 to Archduke Joseph by Sándor Farkas, a Hungarian Rom from Pécs.

(from Rézműves 2003, p. 108-109)

Upronro Mro rom Herczego!

Pécs, május 30. 1890.

My Merciful Rrom, Prince!

Pécs, May 30. 1890.

Mé, sukáré Mangáhitut, te oveszáhi aszavo lácsó, té suneszáhi ámen, még na színyatut baszt, te sunen, ola Pécsszkra, Romane Banda, mé ándé kámáhi tuke te szikáven mra Pécsszkra Angluno Románe Banda, szopálál amen szinyam téle csittó upro Balatonfüredate té czidel, mé sukáré mangavtut Upronro Mro rom té oveszáhi aszavo lácso, te suneszáhi amen.

suzsipeha ácsovav  
Farkas Sándor  
angluno primási

I would beg you gently to be so kind and listen to us, if you do not have the opportunity, to listen the Rromani band from Pécs, that after we were put to Balatonfüred we are playing here music, I ask you gently, My Merciful Rrom, to be so kind and listen to us!

I remain with sincerity  
Sándor Farkas  
first violin

Regarding Romani language competence in the territory of today's Hungary, Hungarian was the native language of roughly 80 percent of Roma while Romani as native language was declared only by 10 percent. [III. 1] This shows that the linguistic assimilation of Hungarian Roma has become prevalent already by the end of the 19th century.

#### CHANGE IN WAY OF LIFE AND PROFESSIONS

The occupation of professional musicians among the Hungarian Roma is already mentioned since the 15th century. In the same century, the Roma were also engaged in strengthening fortifications and manufacturing weapons, or employed as soldiers. During the 16th and 17th centuries, the most common occupations mentioned in connection with the Roma were blacksmiths and professional musicians. Performing music was prohibited by the decrees of Maria Theresa and Joseph II in the mid of the 18th century, but this policy was abandoned by the end of the century. This time the number of Romani musicians rapidly increased. They offered entertainment to the landlords and gradually settled down. By the end of the 19th century, the vast majority of Roma in Hungary were settled permanently or had a temporarily residence. Only around 3 percent of the Roma were itinerant. Since the 1893 census does not differentiate between Romani groups, we can only assume that the itinerant groups most likely include the Vlach Roma and the Vend Roma. The census also gives an account on the segregation of Romani communities. In this regard, István Kemény, a Hungarian sociologist points out that at the time of the census the Roma more likely lived among the non-Roma in the territory of today Hungary than at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Thus, the formation of segregated settlements accelerated especially during the last centuries.

Between the two World Wars, the most common occupation among the Hungarian Roma was adobe making in combination with playing music, and another significant part of the Hungarian Roma lived from agricultural work. Only a small minority of the Hungarian Roma lived exclusively from playing music. The profession of blacksmiths was on decline. In gen-

eral, the source of income of most Romani families was made up from several different work opportunities.

After WWII, most Hungarian Roma still lived in the rural areas of Hungary. The industrialisation between the 1950s and 1980s had a significant impact on the employment of the Roma. The majority of Roma received permanent employment as unskilled or agricultural workers, which consequently led to the improvement of their living condition. Romani men were usually commuting. This time many Roma families could afford to build low-value houses or buy old peasant houses. However, after the political transition in 1989 the employment rate critically dropped. The Roma were among the first to lose their permanent employments which resulted in that the majority of Roma became unemployed at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. Consequently, the standard of living of the Roma lowered and the residential segregation increased. Unemployment hit most the semi-skilled and unskilled Romani workers. Some Hungarian Roma sought for different economic strategies to survive, such as for street trading and peddling, an economic activity which has not been traditionally carried out by them.

The situation of the Hungarian Roma in former Czechoslovakia which was formed after WWII roughly agrees with that in Hungary. The traditional occupations between the wars included musicians and blacksmiths. Others made their living as basket weavers and broom makers. Some Hungarian Roma used to trade with agricultural products. They usually went from village to village and bought up the vegetables and fruits from the farmers and sold them in the town. Under socialism, the employment rate of the Hungarian Roma largely increased, including that of the women. However, the same scenario happened after the political changes in 1989: unemployment affected the whole population, but especially the Roma. Yet, generally speaking, the living standard and the social status of the Hungarian Roma are higher than that of the other Romani groups in Slovakia.

The time after WWII was characterised by a mass migration of Roma from the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia to the Bohemian and Moravian parts. All Romani groups were represented in this migration. It was a significant change in the way of



## III. 4

The so-called Stick Dance (Hungarian *botoló*) is a dance which involves the use of a stick (optionally a spade, pitchfork, broom, sunflower stalk or knife) and is performed in the East of the Carpathian basin by not only several Romani groups including the Hungarian Roma but also the Hungarian herdsmen, though there are certain differences in dance figures and technique between the two. Stick Dance is generally performed by one or two men or by a man and

a woman. The stick or the other dance implements are held exclusively by the man. (photo by F. Pesovár, from Erdős 1960, p. 128-129)

## III. 5

(source FOTO: FORTEPAN / Magyar Bálint adományozó.)

Hungarian Romani band playing while Hungarian troops marched to southern Slovakia in 1938



life of the Roma since they moved from the rural Slovakia to the industrialised Czechia, especially to bigger towns.

Hungarian Roma are often seen by other Romani groups as 'less Roma' in the notion of that they abandoned the Romani language, live a less traditional lifestyle and that they try to imitate the non-Romani way of life. In this sense, the stereotypical notion that the Hungarian Roma have yet not been accepted by the Hungarians while they are no longer accepted by the other Romani groups is often cited. From the point of view of the Vlach Roma who are proud to be dealers and traders, the participation of Hungarian Roma in paid work which belongs to the world of the non-Roma is perceived as the most important factor that leads to the loss of their Romani identity. Indeed, many anthropological works refer to the resistance of

Roma towards paid work which is considered a specific feature of the Romani culture.

This view is challenged by the Hungarian anthropologist, Kata Horváth who conducted field research among the Hungarian Roma in 2000 and focused on the issue of paid work as perceived by them. She observed that paid work is not necessarily in opposition with their own Romani identity since some Hungarian Roma transform the non-Romani working environment to a Romani environment that reflects their image of a Romani world within it. In fact, several workplaces are gradually becoming ethnicised, meaning that all employees except of the boss are Roma. This is also the case of the Hungarian Roma among whom Horváth provided field research. There, public work was exclusively done by the Hungarian Roma while the bosses were non-Roma.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Az Országos Magyar Királyi Statisztikai Hivatal* (ed.) (1895) A Magyarországon 1893. január 31-én végrehajtott cigányösszeírás eredményei Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények, Új folyam, IX. Kötet.
- Erdős, Kamill (1960) Dances of the Hungarian Gypsies. *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* XXXIX (3-4), 127-130.
- Horváth, Kata (2005) Gypsy work – gadjo work. *Romani Studies* Romani Studies 5, Vol. 15, No. 1, 31-50.
- Hübschmannová, Milena: *Ungrika Roma* (Hungarian Roma), <http://rombase.uni-graz.at/>.
- Kállai, Ernő (2002) The Hungarian Roma Population During the Last Half-Century. In: Kállai, Ernő (ed.) *The Gypsies/The Roma in Hungarian society*. Budapest: Teleki László Foundation.
- Kemény, István (2002) The Roma/Gypsies of Hungary and the economy. In: Kállai, Ernő (ed.) *The Gypsies/The Roma in Hungarian society*. Budapest: Teleki László Foundation.
- Kemény, István (2005) History of Roma in Hungary. In: Kemény, István (ed.) *Roma of Hungary*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Szuhay, Péter (2002) Self-definitions of Gypsy ethnic groups. In: Kállai, Ernő (ed.) *The Gypsies/The Roma in Hungarian society*. Budapest: Teleki László Foundation.