

Who are the Roma

Lucie Fremlova Consultancy

17 October, 2013



Roma flag and anthem

Flag of the Romani people, created in 1933 and accepted by the 1971 World Romani Congress

Gelem gelem

Gelem, gelem, lungone dromensa
Maladilem bakhtale Romensa
A Romale katar tumen aven,
E tsarensa bahktale dromensa?
A Romale, A Chavale Vi man sas
E k bari familiya,
Murdadas la e kali legiya
Aven mansa sa lumniake Roma,
Kai putaile e romane droma
Ake vriama, usti Rom akana,
Men khutasa misto kai kerasa
A Romale, A Chavale

I went, I went on long roads
I met happy Roma
O Roma where do you come from,
With tents on happy roads
O Roma, O brothers I once
had a great family,
The Black Legions murdered them
Come with me Roma from all the world
For the Roma roads have opened
Now is the time, rise up Roma now,
We will rise high if we act
O Roma, O brothers

Who are Roma

The Roma (also called Gypsies/Romany Gypsies/Travellers) but not Irish Travellers!

One of the largest ethnic minority groups in Europe with an estimated 10-12 million people

The most sizeable, vulnerable, socially disadvantaged and discriminated against ethnic minority in the European Union (EU), the Council of Europe (CoE) and Organisation for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) areas.

Who are Roma

'Roma' = different groups
familial/geographical/territorial associations: Vlax
Rom, Rumungro Rom, Kalderash, Sinti, Ashkali,
Lavari, Manouche, Tattare, Kaale, Cale, Ursari, Luri
and many more.

Most CEE Roma are settled!

Spanish Gitanos, French Gens du Voyage/
Tsiganes/Gitanes or British Gypsies still nomadic or
semi-nomadic.

Historical distribution of
the Romani people:

- Roma
- Sinti
- Manush
- Romanichal
- Romanisæl
- Welsh Kale
- Finnish Kale
- Iberian Kale



Who are Roma

Roma also related to British (or English, Welsh and Scottish) Gypsies of the Romanichal and Kale Romani groups

English Romany Gypsies (or Romanies or Romanichals) in Britain since at least 1515 after migrating from continental Europe.

The Kale, who became the Welsh Gypsies, are believed to have come from Spain, through France and landed in Cornwall, eventually making their way to Wales.

Who are Roma

Very closed, isolated communities/family “clans”, large extended families

Governed by the Romani Code/Romano Zakono (a set of rules)

Still heavily male dominated despite modernisation dues to moving West and globalisation

Households run by the woman, important decisions made by the man

Who are Roma

Traditions/customs still observed in most Roma communities

- cleanliness/purity (illness, death)
- virginity
- child marriage in some communities (due to a different perception of age/maturity)
- respect for the elderly
- bride kidnapping (also present in Eastern European non-Roma cultures)
- the groom's family pays a bride price/fee for the bride to the bride's parents
- Often confusion re the difference between beneficial traditional practices and those that are harmful and associated with severe exploitation and trafficking.

Arrival in Europe

Estimated arrival in Europe from India some 700-1000 years ago

The emigration from India likely took place in the context of the raids by Mahmud of Ghazni.

Linguistic analysis of Romanes (the Romani language) proves that the language originates in Sanskrit and that Roma came from India, probably as warriors and/or craftsmen.

Language

The various sub-groups of European Roma have their own dialects of Romanes.

Loanwords and calques (words that Romanes does not have.)

Roma speak the language of their home states (i.e. Roma from Slovakia speak Romani and Slovakian equally well)

Some Slovak Roma have very little or no Slovakian at all.

Language

Younger Roma born/ brought up from their early years in the West may not speak their home country language

Romanes at home and English in the school setting and/or out in society.

Younger children: language may be restricted to just Romanes (recent example from Sheffield)

Appear to have a well-developed ability to become multi-lingual.

History

Slavery, systemic racial persecution and social exclusion

The Holocaust and the Nazi genocide of the Roma and Sinti: Porajmos (also Porrajmos or Pharrajimos = the great devouring)

In 1935, the Nuremberg laws stripped the Roma living in Nazi Germany of their citizenship

Subjected to violence, imprisonment in concentration camps and later genocide in death camps

History

Policy extended in areas occupied by the Nazis and applied by their allies (the Independent State of Croatia, Romania and Hungary)

Estimates of the number of victims

Minimum of 220,000 (Sybil Milton, formerly senior historian of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum)

Maximum 1,500,000 (Ian Hancock, director of the Program of Romani Studies at the University of Texas at Austin).

History

Extermination in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia thorough: dialect extinct

Most of the 5,500 Bohemian and Moravian Roma and Sinti murdered in Auschwitz

Independent Slovakia: some Roma from southern and south-east Slovakia sent to Dachau; most Slovak Roma spared: many ended up hiding in forests for months or years. Women raped by Russian and Romanian soldiers

Of the 25,000 Romanian Roma deported to concentration camps in Transnistria, 11,000 murdered

Present

Roma marginalised, excluded and discriminated against on a day-to-day basis

all spheres of social, political and economic life

racial profiling by police and the criminal justice system

sentences disproportionately higher

violence and maltreatment in detention and prison by state and non-state agents

no protection, victimisation

Historical stigma

Roma historically seen as

- strangers, non-Europeans, aliens, intruders
- beggars, thieves, criminals, liars
- not trustworthy, lazy, filthy, reliant on benefits
- “bogus refugees”

Although routinely used in UK context, the word “Gypsy” is seen as pejorative and vulgar, never to be used by non-Roma

Implications for provision

In order to provide a culturally sensitive service, one has to take into account

- all of the above
- Roma may overreact when approached by social workers
- men may speak for women in line with their traditions
- women may be reluctant to speak