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Ana Maria PREOTEASA

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Roma Women and Precarious Work: Evidence from Romania, Bulgaria, Italy and Spain

Ana Maria PREOTEASA¹

Abstract

Roma studies conducted over the last 20 years, in different European countries, depict a general pattern regarding Roma women's employment. Traditionally, Roma women depended on male breadwinners; they worked as housewives and had very low education levels. For this reason, they played a crucial role in preserving Roma traditional culture, raising children and taking care of the family. This article compares data from four European countries in order to visualise the employment patterns of Roma women and to generate an explanatory model by means of logistic regression. Data used in this research come from an international database (EuInclusive, 2011) containing comparable samples for Romania, Bulgaria, Italy and Spain. The traditional model of inactive Roma women is maintained in Romania, Bulgaria and Italy, with very high rates of unemployment. While the employment rate of Roma women in Spain is lower than the country's national rate, it is significantly higher than rates from the other three countries (47 percent, in comparison with 26-29 percent). In the four countries, employed Roma women mainly worked under non-standard contracts (part-time, discontinuous, temporary or informal). The analysis of the employment explanatory factors controls for individuals, family/household and community factors. In Bulgaria, Romania and Italy, the individual factors (age and health status) are predictors for Roma women's chances of employment. Romania and Bulgaria show stronger relations between community type (isolated, urban/rural) and employability.

Keywords: Roma; gender; employment; ethnic minorities; vulnerable groups; precarious employment.

¹ Research Institute for Quality of Life, Romanian Academy, 13, Calea 13 Septembrie, Bucharest 5, ROMANIA. E-mail anita@iccv.ro

Introduction

The Roma's situation in Europe was given more attention after the European Union's enlargement process in 2004 and 2007, that permitted to all New Member States and Candidate States citizens to travel around European Union without visas. The free circulation rules increased the Roma people's visibility in countries with a lower Roma minority presence. After 2000, the Roma topic was approached in terms of a comparison across Central and Eastern Europe. Official demographic data showed that in 2008, the Roma population was about 10 milion (Corsi et al., 2010), while the unofficial data provided by Roma organizations in countries with a high Roma presence were three or four times higher. Romania reported 620,000 (Census, 2011); Spain reported 450,000; Bulgaria, 345,000 (Census, 2011) and Italy, 80,000-150,000 legal inhabitants and 150,000 illegal inhabitants mainly in Roma camps. The statistical general characteristics of Roma populations are quite similar in Europe: a young population (average age is 25.1 in 2011, in comparison with 40.2 with EU27) (FSG, 2009), low education and skill level and a high unemployment and inactivity rate.

The traditional image of the Romani minority is that of gypsy travelers with a nomadic lifestyle (Matras, 2000, p. 33). Many studies have considered the topic of Roma identity from the non-Roma population's point of view and the Roma's self-image (Csepeli & Simon, 2004; Nacu, 2011; Vermeersch, 2002). Homogeneity and heterogeneity are opposite concepts that are frequently disputed regarding the Roma population. The general perception of the Roma population is stereotypical; they are considered a homogenous group. Recent studies found that across Europe, Roma communities are very heterogenous (Zamfir, 2013; O'Nions, 2010). There are discrepancies among Roma people in different countries and throughout individual countries in terms of culture, language, history, settlement type and legal status (Bauman, 1998; Csepeli & Simon, 2004). 'The gypsies are a people with a social structure but with no common language, territory or religion' (Moscovici, 2011: 443).

Roma women in particular are in a very vulnerable position because they are exposed to both racial and gender discrimination. They hold a traditional role in the family because they are charged with the children's primary education (for language and Romani traditions); further, they hold the primary domestic role. Statistics show a very high rate of unemployment among Roma women. Because of this, Roma women are financially dependent on men; they do not have economic and financial autonomy. Roma women have a very high risk of social exclusion in comparison with non-Roma women and with Roma men. In this article, I will describe Roma women's employment situation and try to identify the main factors behind the employment situation in Romania, Bulgaria, Spain

and Italy. The data I used are provided by an international comparative study carried out in the four countries on both Roma citizens and migrants².

Scholarly articles prove that employment patterns are highly gender driven. Even in many European countries where female employment rates have increased, the differences between genders continue to be high, especially concerning formal and standard employment (Yerkes, 2010). In 2012, for EU27 (total population), the male employment rate was 12 percent higher than the female employment rate (Eurostat, 2013). Women were more employable in non-standard jobs as they were considered less likely to be ‘militant trade union members, more prepared to undertake part-time work and other forms of ‘non-standard employment’, and more ready to accept changes in working practices and conditions’ (Bradley et al., 2008: 10). In 2011 (EU27, Eurostat), the risk of poverty for people working under part-time contracts was approximately double that of people with full-time contracts. Women are significantly more involved in part-time employment than men. In 2012, the part-time male employment rate (EU27) was 9.4 percent, while 32.5 percent of women worked with the same type of contracts. In many countries, women are primarily responsible for the house, the family and child care (Fredman, 2004). In Europe, non-standard employment increased after 1980. The Employment Flexibility Policy designed by non-standard employment measures was implemented as a solution to chronic unemployment or underemployment and also as a work life conciliation measure. Recent studies have demonstrated the negative consequences of employment flexibility: high job volatility, low employment rates and low social security.

Two socio-economic theories explain the division of the labour market into standard and non-standard employment. First, the Stepping-Stone Theory stems from the hypothesis that temporary contracts might act as stepping stones to regular jobs; it usually looks at transition patterns from temporary to permanent jobs (Leschke, 2009). The second, Segmentation Theory, explains the dichotomisation of the labour market into ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’, characterised by diverging features (Doeringer & Piore, 1971: 165ff). The primary labour market consists of well-paid jobs, good working conditions, employment stability, high promotion and equity. The secondary labour market is defined by lower salaries, poorer working conditions, low employment stability and low equity. Vulnerable categories include women, migrants, youth, ethnic minorities and disabled people; they have restricted access to the primary labour market (Günther & Launov, 2012; Leshcke, 2009) and are employed predominantly on secondary labor market. The Roma employment rate is a polemic topic, among other dimensions of Roma social exclusion (housing, access to public services, standard of living,

² EU Inclusive – Data transfer and exchange of good practices regarding the inclusion of Roma population between Romania, Bulgaria, Italy and Spain, POSDRU/98/6.4/S/63841, (The Soros Foundation Romania, Open Society Institute-Sofia, Fundación Secretariado Gitano, Fondazione Casa della Carità Angelo Abriani, Italy).

health, etc.). The empirical research on the Roma population in Central and Eastern Europe discusses the social and economic situation of the Roma population. In 2003, an international survey conducted on Roma samples in five European countries (Romania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary) concluded that the Roma employment situation was very poor, with a very low rate of employment. Also, Roma people's employment in the informal market was quite high, especially in Romania (Ivanov, 2002).

There is a major gender gap in the Roma employment rate, with women involved in more domestic activities and men in more paid economic activities. A survey across 11 European Member States showed that 21 percent of Roma women were in paid work, compared to 35 percent of Roma men (FRA, 2012: 24). The same report concluded that 'the employment of women is often seen as an important factor for alleviating poverty'. The general Roma employment situation has been explained mainly by individual factors such as health status or very low human capital - low educational level, low skill level, illiteracy and sometimes lower official language proficiency (FRA 2012, Tarnovschi et al., 2012; Vincze et al., 2011). Correspondingly, their work-based skills are not appropriate in a modern labour market, where computer literacy or foreign language proficiency are compulsory requirements. Roma women have a lower education level than men. Roma girls are not encouraged to complete their formal instruction and are involved in household tasks at a very young age. A Roma woman's main role is that of custodian of traditional values; she preserves Roma culture and raises and educates children in Roma standards (Corsi et al., 2010; A.A., 2002; Cace & Ionescu, 2006). Traditional Roma communities consider formal education a threat to their long-established lifestyle. The isolation of Roma communities makes access to school very difficult; one solution for this problem has been to institute segregated schools in Roma communities (O'Nions, 2010; Vincze et al., 2011).

The marginalisation of the Roma population can be understood by looking at their migration path: their initial slavery state to their later nomadic lifestyle (Moscovici, 2011; Ivanov et al, 2002). The Roma population's recent history in ex-communist countries was distinguished by forced assimilation and labour market integration. Multiple discrimination is a concept very often used in relation with Roma women, in this case, their ethnic affiliation and gender. Anti-Roma prejudice and hostility are considered in relation to access to services, education and employment (Corsi et al., 2010; Bradley et al., 2008; ERRC, 2007). Access to the labour market is directly or indirectly impaired by employers' racial preconceptions and by self-discrimination and discouragement. The Roma's traditional employment model, with men as the breadwinners and women responsible for raising children and household care, makes women economically dependent on men. Social exclusion could be a social effect deriving from this dependency.

Data and methodology

The database used in the analysis is provided by the EuInclusive project, an international comparative survey conducted in 2011 in four European countries: Romania, Bulgaria, Italy and Spain. The survey comprises Roma citizen samples in the four countries and Bulgarian and Italian Roma migrants in Italy and Spain. Romania and Bulgaria are the origin countries for the Roma migration; Spain and Italy are the destination countries. The cause of the Roma migration from Romania and Bulgaria is more economic than cultural, being an alternative strategy to poverty (Vlase & Voicu, 2013, Vlase & Preoteasa, 2012).

The research areas included in the survey were very broad and included employment, discrimination, health and social inclusion indicators. The original questionnaires were based on the Labour Force Survey questionnaire in order to permit comparability with national data in the four countries. The four databases are probabilistic and representative for the Roma population in Romania, Bulgaria, Spain and Italy. The sample sizes are as follows: Romania (1,109), Bulgaria (1,100), Italy (801) and Spain (1,494), and were collected in Spring/Summer 2011.

My research questions considered the possibility of a common employment pattern in the four countries; further, they attempted to identify the main factors explaining the employment situation. The concept of employment is very complex, and studies on the Roma show a high level of difficulty in attempting to refine and operationalize this concept for a vulnerable population. Such a non-specific category is usually not included in formal labour market activities; consequently, it is difficult to tackle Roma employment in exclusive and divided categories. It is problematic to divide occupation statuses into categories as many people considered 'unemployed' are working in the informal economy (i.e. housewives that have temporary or informal jobs). The LFS questions made it possible to gain a very correct image of Roma employment, as they covered information on the informal labour market. The quantitative analysis involves logistic regression models run separately for each of the four countries.

Descriptives

This data is in alignment with previous studies that found very low employment rates and high unemployment rates (Ivanov et al., 2002; FRA, 2013). Gender distribution illustrates the differences among women and men, including the fact that the Roma situation is better in Spain than the other three countries. The analysis of work history shows that more than 40 percent of Roma women in Bulgaria and Romania are chronically unemployed,³ while their situation in Italy

³ Did not work within the last two years.

and Spain is slightly better (but has high numbers in the category of discontinuous employment). There are significant differences between gender in terms of women's chronic unemployment in Italy, Romania and Bulgaria. The majority of these women are discouraged from being employed, become very pessimistic and eventually stop looking for work. Therefore, in all four countries Roma employment indicators (work history, work contracts) reveal those Roma women are in the precarious employment category.

Table 1. Work history for the last two years

		Men	Women
Bulgaria	Steadily	23%	20%
	Sporadically and periodically worked	25%	23%
	Never worked	41%	58%
Romania	Steadily	14%	7%
	Sporadically and periodically worked	47%	30%
	Never worked	39%	63%
Italy	Steadily	39%	11%
	Sporadically and periodically worked	38%	22%
	Never worked	24%	66%
Spain	Steadily	27%	18%
	Sporadically and periodically worked	43%	37%
	Never worked	30%	46%

*(Data from EUINCLUSIVE, 2011; my computation)

The comparison with national data (Labour Force Survey, 2011) reveals high discrepancies (indicating a very poor occupational status for Roma people) in Romania, Bulgaria and Italy. In Spain, there are slight differences between the total population and Roma samples. In all four countries, Roma women are in a disadvantaged situation in comparison with men, taking into consideration the type of employment, occupation, profession and activity sectors. The majority of employed women are involved in elementary occupations (with low qualifications and skills) and services (in Italy and Spain); they work in agriculture (Romania and Bulgaria), wholesale and retail (Romania and Spain), construction (Bulgaria) and the services sector (Italy and Spain). In Romania, Spain and Italy, the majority of employed Roma women work under non-standard contracts: Romania 79%⁴, Italy 80% and Spain 85%. In Bulgaria, the situation is different – 60% of Roma women works in the public sector and has regular contracts (.

⁴ % of employed women

Table 2. The employment status by gender (Roma samples and LFS) for 2011

Employment ⁵ status		Males			Females		
		Employment	Unemployment	Inactivity	Employment	Unemployment	Inactivity
Bulgaria	Roma sample	42.40 %	42.00%	13.00%	29.40%	46.20%	22.70%
	Total population	66.00 %	12.30%	30.60%	59.80%	10.10%	39.00%
Romania	Roma sample	47.80 %	33.70%	18.10%	29.20%	34.50%	34.70%
	Total population	69.90 %	7.90%	29.50%	55.70%	6.80%	44.60%
Italy	Roma sample	68.50 %	34.50%	1.30%	26.00%	75.10%	1.10%
	Total population	72.60 %	21.20%	26.90%	49.90%	9.60%	48.60%
Spain	Roma sample	53.50 %	30.80%	16.00%	43.50%	20.10%	38.60%
	Total population	67.60 %	7.60%	19.80%	55.50%	22.20%	33.50%

*(EUINCLUSIVE, 2011; Eurostat, 2013; my computations)⁵

The explanatory model for the employment pattern of Roma women was tested using binary logistic regression. Regression was run for the four datasets in comparison with the male population. First, I employed a regression analysis in order to test the differences between gender: for all four countries and the results are highly significant. Data analysis was done using SPSS 19. The central variable is binary, coded 1 for employed (standard, non-standard and self-employed) and 0 for unemployed or inactive. The standard category includes formal employment, full-time work and permanent contracts. The part-time, short-term contracts and informal contracts are comprised by the non-standard employment category. Self-employment is a special situation in the case of the Roma because it hides daily-basis activities (informal employment). The explanatory variables are grouped into three categories: individuals, household characteristics and community. The individual variables I controlled for are the socio-demographics: age (continuous) and education (re-coded in four categories: 1. illiteracy/no formal education, 2.

⁵ The computations are done following Eurostat age references for employment (20-64), unemployment (15-74) and inactivity (15-64) in order to make possible comparisons.

incomplete primary school/less than 8 classes, 3. gymnasium and 4. High school or higher education as reference category). Health status evaluation was re-coded into three categories: 'bad or very bad', 'average' and 'good or very good' (the original scale was 'bad', 'very bad', 'average', 'good' and 'very good'). Occupation was re-coded according to the ISCO scheme. The household level variables are: motherhood - number of children under 16 years old (numeric variable), marital status (re-coded into dummy variable 1 - married or co-habiting, 0 - unmarried) and deprivation (numeric, sum of material deprivation, durables and economic strain, 0-22). At the community level, I controlled for the following: residence dummy variable (1 - urban, 0 - rural). The discrimination question: 'Have you ever felt discriminated against in the last year?'. Possible answers were 'Yes' and 'No, never'. Isolation was measured with the following question: 'Are your closest friends only Roma, or other?'. Possible answers were 'Only Roma/Sinti/Travellers', 'Mostly Roma, but also not Roma', 'It is not important to me if they are Roma or not' or 'I have no friends'. Discrimination was re-coded into a dummy variable (1- felt discriminated, 0 - not felt), integration dummy variable (1- not integrated, 0 - integrated). For integration/segregation, I only considered the answer 'Only Roma/Sinti/Travelers'.

Discussion and limitations

Despite the common elements retrieved in Roma women's employment rates, the explanatory models are heterogenous between the different countries. By statistical model a small part of the variance was explained by the proposed variables. The model tested exploratory variables at the individual, household and community level and could not control for country-level differences.

Looking at the figures, the individual characteristics seem to be strong predictors for Roma women's employment in Bulgaria, Romania and Italy, and in Spain for men. Family and household situation is a predictor in the case of Bulgarian women; and deprivation is negatively associated with chance of employment. For women in Romania and Bulgaria, the community is a very important predictor for employability. In both countries, a high percentage of the Roma population live in segregated communities in rural areas or cities' peripheries (Sandu, 2005) and demonstrate resilient traditional culture. Male employment predictors are very different across countries, but are also different in comparison with female employment predictors. Family and household situation (marital status, household size and the presence of young children in the family) is significantly related to work situation. Household deprivation is negatively associated with employment in all four cases, very probably being an effect of precarious employment situation.

REALITIES IN A KALEIDOSCOPE

Table 3. Logistic regression coefficients (women 18-64 years) (NBulgaria=560, NRomania=528, NItaly=346, NSpain=677)

Predictors	Bulgaria		Romania		Italy		Spain	
	B	Odds ratios	B	Odds ratios	B	Odds ratios	B	Odds ratios
Individual								
Age	-.004	.996	.031**	1.031	.038*	1.038	.016	1.016
Education								
Illiteracy (no formal education)	-1.360*	.257	-.178	.837	-2.830***	.059	-.034	.966
Incomplete primary school/ less than 8 classes	-1.270*	.281	.262	1.300	-2.144***	.117	.243	1.275
Gymnasium	-1.038	.354	-.019	.981	-1.522**	.218	.046	1.047
High school or more (ref)								
Bad health (subjective evaluation)	-.423**	1.527	-.696***	2.005	-.087	.917	-.609***	1.839
Household								
Married (or cohabiting)	.006	1.007	-.128	.880	-.130	.878	.127	1.135
Household size	-.031	.970	-.010	.990	.233	1.262	-.204	.815
Number of children (<16 yrs)	-.142	.868	.023	1.023	-.149	.861	.159	1.173
Deprivation index	-.067**	.935	.002	1.002	-.076	.927	-.171***	.843
Community								
Urban	.465	1.592	.428*	1.534	-.299	.741	-.392*	.676
Discrimination felt	.274	1.315	-.255	.775	-.443	.642	-.345	.708
Isolated (not integrated)	-.621**	.537	-.863***	.422	.242	1.274	-.402	.669
Constant	.136	1.145	-3.518	.030	.521	1.683	-1.236	.291
Model summary								
- 2 log likelihood	516.194		522.055		221.986		606.475	
Pseudo R2 Cox & Snell	.089		.088		.102		.086	
Pseudo R2 Nagelkerke	.129		.126		.164		.116	

(* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $P \leq 0.01$, *** $P \leq 0.001$) (EUINCLUSIVE, 2011; my computation).

Table 4. Logistic regression coefficients (men, 18-64 yrs) (NBulgaria=407, NRomania=484, NItaly=388, NSpain=646)

Predictors	Bulgaria		Romania		Italy		Spain	
	B	Odds ratios	B	Odds ratios	B	Odds ratios	B	Odds ratios
Individual								
Age	-.018	.982	-.008	.992	.011	1.011	-.020*	.981
Education								
Illiteracy (no formal education)	-.429	.651	-.194	.824	-1.450	.235	-.398	.672
Incomplete primary school/ less than 8 classes	-.796	.451	.242	1.273	-1.260	.284	.271	1.311
Gymnasium	-.503	.605	.182*	1.199	-.528	.590	-.144	.866
High school or more (ref)								
Bad health (subjective evaluation)	.310	1.363	-.647***	1.909	-.727**	2.068	-.575**	1.778
Household								
Married (or cohabiting)	.398	1.489	-.170	.843	-.208	.812	.665*	1.944
Household size	.088	1.092	.024	1.024	-.298*	.742	.295	1.343
Number of children (<16 yrs)	.038	1.039	-.136	.873	.281*	1.324	-.176	.839
Deprivation index	-.125***	.882	-.055*	.947	-.074*	.929	-.235***	.791
Community								
Urban	.042	1.043	.027	1.028	-.770	.463	-.024	.976
Discrimination felt	-.133	.875	-.290	.748	-.094	.910	.008	1.008
Isolated (not integrated)	-.725*	.484	-.341	.711	-1.357*	.257	.234	1.264
Constant	1.416	4.120	-.013	.987	1.201	3.323	.252	1.287
Model summary								
- 2 log likelihood	355.727		480.824		295.221		526.291	
Pseudo R2 Cox & Snell	.159		.094		.138		.147	
Pseudo R2 Nagelkerke	.216		.126		.193		.196	

(* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $P \leq 0.01$, *** $P \leq 0.001$) (EUINCLUSIVE, 2011; my computation).

One limitation of the model is its lack of subjective indicators, hindering a comprehensive explanatory model. The subjective dimension could enrich the analysis with attitudinal and cultural perspectives of work and gender. The survey was applied in the four countries following slightly different sampling selection procedures. The differences in Roma settlements, communities' types and country-specific factors made it impossible to have perfectly comparable samples. On the other hand, the lack of Roma minority data at the European level made it impossible to employ a multilevel regression model, in order to consider the context level with macroindicators.

In this article, I considered factors at the individual, family and community level with the aim of comparing employment explanatory factors in Romania, Bulgaria, Italy and Spain. The contextual factors are also very important and require special attention. Circumstances that are influenced by Roma policy and national employment strategies are very different and could be a very important explanatory factor. For instance, Spain is well known as a pioneer of Roma strategy in Europe during the last 20 years, with institutional recognition of Roma culture. Italy started transferring the Roma issue from a social policy perspective to public policy, paying special attention to Roma nomad settlements. Spain is mentioned as having a large amount of success in its attempts at social integration of the Roma minority. Furthermore, Romania and Bulgaria, being ex-communist countries with a common path, are in the process of implementing Roma integration strategies in order to ensure an intercultural approach to anti-discrimination policy and inclusion (ERPC, 2012).

Conclusions

My analysis highlights few common characteristics regarding Roma women's employment throughout the four countries: chronic unemployment, high unemployment and inactivity. Women are employed in the secondary labour market, having basic education and limited professional skills. In Romania, Bulgaria and Spain, the vast majority of employed women has non-standard contracts. The data shows that employment rate for non-standard jobs (temporary contracts, discontinued work, part-time or informal contracts) is not a personal choice, but the only possible solution for people facing poverty. The tests I employed also confirm the significant differences between gender in the four countries. In comparison with Roma men, Roma women are in a larger proportion not employed.

Therefore, the results confirm the traditional model of Roma male breadwinner in Bulgaria, Romania and Italy. In Romania and Bulgaria women are in a high extent houseworkers or discouraged unemployed. The two countries has a large proportion of Roma population living in traditional communities and having difficult access to labor market.

The comparison of Roma women situation among the four countries was very interesting by contextual, economic and development differences of cases. Even Spain was confronted in the last years with severe consequences of economic crises on labor market, Spain and Italy have a higher economic development level than Romania and Bulgaria. Spain and Italy are situated in the Western Europe, being favorite migration destinations for Bulgarian and Romanian Roma people. Bulgaria and Romania are ex-communist countries, passing through economic transition process and recent European Union integration. Despite the contextual dissimilarities, there are common elements regarding social and economic situation of Roma population living in the four countries. Roma women employment indicators show a very low employment rate in Bulgaria, Romania and Italy. Majority of employed Roma women have working non-standard contracts and precarious occupations. The poor human capital of Roma women (low formal education and professional skills) and traditional lifestyle could be an explanation for very high rate of non-standard employment. Spain has a special situation, having a higher employment rate of Roma women, and could be a good success model of reconciliation between Roma culture and social inclusion strategy.

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