Introduction

The Roma also known as the Romani or Romany, or colloquially Gypsies (which is often considered pejorative) are an ethnic group of people. While they originated from Punjab region in northern India, today they live all over the world with a significant population in Iberian Peninsula, the United States, Brazil and the Balkans. Historically, the Roma have been a nomadic internant people and while they do not have their own land, they have a flag, a language and a strong sense of culture and national identity.

For nearly all of their entire history the Roma people have been subjected to discrimination and this problem remains a significant one today. The word for the discrimination faced by the Roma is “Antiziganism” or “Antigypsyism”. The two terms are officially recognized by the European Parliament. According to a survey conducted in 2019, 63% of all European countries hold an unfavourable opinion of the Roma. In another survey conducted by the European Commission 20% respondents said that they would feel uncomfortable working with a Roma person. A Thomas Hammarberg, the commissioner of the human rights council of Europe said himself:

“Europe has a shameful history of discrimination and severe repression of the Roma. There are still widespread prejudices against them in country after country on our continent”

The Romani people are also forced to deal with many humanitarian problems. In 2016, more than 80% of all Roma in Europe were living under the poverty line. Many Roma are also at a high risk of statelessness which means that they are often denied the access to many public services. Even though the Roma live all over the world the continent in which they face the most discrimination is Europe.
Definitions of Key terms

Roma (Romani or Romany)
An ethnic, traditionally itinerant group. The term “Gypsies” is considered pejorative.

Sinti
The group of Roma people in Central Europe.

Antiziginizm
The prejudice, racism and other forms of discrimination against Roma people.

Institutional Discrimination
The discrimination and unjust treatment of a group by a country or a society, as opposed to individuals making a deliberate choice to discriminate.

Ethnic Penalty
The economic but also the non-economic disadvantages experienced by an ethnic minority compared to other ethnic groups.

Discrimination in Education
The act of discrimination against certain groups of people in the form of taking away their right to full education.

Parajmos (The Romani Holocaust/ Genocide)
The efforts made by Nazi Germany to eradicate the Roma population during WWII.

Institutional Racism- Racism that has been established as normal by a society or organization

Hate Crimes
Crimes motivated by hatred and prejudice, when the victim of the crime was persecuted because they were a member of a social, racial or ethnic group.

Statelessness
The state that a person experiences when they are not considered a national by any state.
Background

The Origin of the Roma

Since the Roma people have not kept a written account of their history their origin is not entirely clear however based on the linguistic and genetic evidence many have speculated they come from the northern region of India. It’s estimated that the Roma reached the Balkans in the 12th century. Their earliest description created by a European chronicler can be traced down to 1322 Symon Semeonis, an Irish Franciscans encountered some of the the Greek island of Crete. He famously referred to them as the “sons of Cain”. Since then the Roma have spread all over Europe and received a mixed welcome and many of them have faced severe discrimination as even back then many countries had laws that denied the Roma certain privileges. In 1717 Spain created a law that restricted the Roma to 75 towns.

In 18th and 19th century the Roma were subjected to ethnic cleansing, forced labour and slavery. In Wallahia and Moldova it was not until mid 19th century that the law against keeping Roma slaves was passed. As a result of the persecution many of the Roma moved to Poland and Russia were at the time people were more tolerant. During the colonial times there was also a large Roma migration to the Americas, mainly to the US, Argentina and Brazil.

The Romani Holocaust

During World War II Nazi Germany and it’s allies committed a genocide against the Roma, sending them to death camps and making other systematic efforts to eradicate their existence. It’s estimated that anywhere between 200 000 and 1 000 000 of them were killed. It was not until 1982 that Germany recognized their actions against the Roma as genocide and only in 2016 did France apologize for their assistance in those actions. While the genocide happened long ago it was never properly addressed or recognized by most of the countries that participated in it and the Roma have not received any form of recomensation for what has happend.

Recent forms of Discrimination

Even after the war the Roma in Europe were still facing significant discrimination. Many countries such as Germany, Norway and Switzerland tried to control the Roma population through forceful sterilization. In countries with significant Roma populations, the Roma are
suffering the most, often seen as thieves or unproductive members of the society, especially in Bulgaria, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania and Italy. Germany, France and Great Britain all made significant attempts in trying to reduce their Roma population through the means of forceful and often violent deportation. Because the Roma are often seen as stateless in many countries they are denied the rights to basic services such as education and medical support. It’s worth noting that Roma discrimination has taken place all over the world, however historically it is mainly a European problem and a European shame to bear. Even to this day most citizens of the EU hold an unfavourable opinion of the Roma. On average, the Roma people of Europe tend to have shorter lives, live in worse conditions and have access to less education.

**Major countries and Organizations Involved**

**European Roma Rights Centre**
The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), founded in 1996 is a Roma-led international law organization that aims to combat the discrimination and the human rights abuse of the Roma people. It’s headquarters are located in Brussels and it has received multiple human rights awards. Since it’s founding the ERRC has taken on more than 1000 cases related to human right abuse and won several cases against countries such as France, Italy and Greece.

**Human Rights Watch**
The Human Rights Watch, founded in 1978 is an important international NGO that monitors and raises awareness about the human rights worldwide. They have published multiple articles and reports about the mistreatment of Roma in Europe and made several efforts to improve their social status.

**Amnesty International**
Amnesty International is an international humanitarian body, founded in the UK in 1961. Similarly to the Human Rights Watch it promotes and protects human rights. Also similarly to the Human Rights Watch they have spoken against Roma discrimination and have made several efforts in raising awareness about the discrimination that the Roma are facing.

**Romania**
Historically Romania has always had one of the largest Romani populations in the world and this remains true to this day. The Roma form an important part of Romania’s history, but the relation. Just like most European Roma people the ones living in Romania are facing significant discrimination. Romania’s government has a very unfavourable view of the Roma similarly to the governments of Slovakia, Bulgaria and Hungary.

Spain
Spain has one of the largest Roma populations in Europe (right up there with Slovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania) estimated to be between 725 000- 750 000. While Spanish Roma still face some social problems, Spain is generally regarded to be the European country that has done the most significant and successful efforts in terms of Roma integration. In 2012, Spain adopted a National Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma. The Spanish government has also carried out many initiatives that aimed to help the Roma in the field of education. Sadly other south-european countries such as Greece, Italy and France have made much less progress in defending the rights of their Romani citizens.

Timeline of recent events

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of event</th>
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<td>1990</td>
<td>The fourth meeting of the World Romani Progress is held in Poland. During the meeting the topics of discussion were WWII reparations, language, culture and public relations. 1991- In Macedonia, Roma are accorded equal rights in the new republic. The university of Prague starts teaching Romani language and culture studies.</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td>The UN Commission of Human Rights passes a resolution on the protection of the Roma</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>The European Roma Rights Centre is set up in Budapest, Hungary</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>In Romania, a conference is held on the Prevention of Violence and Discrimination against Roma in Europe. In the UK, Romani refugees from the</td>
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Slovak Republic arrive in Dover seeking asylum and receive mainly negative reactions and scepticism from local residents and the national news media.

1998 In the United States, New Jersey Governor Christine Todd Whitman signs into law Assembly Bill 2654, repealing that state's anti-Roma law adopted in 1917. Governor Whitman's signature effectively rescinds the last anti-Roma law on the books of any American state.

2007 More than 100 Serbian Gypsies cross the border illegally into neighboring Romania in recent days and fill applications for asylum claiming they were subject to abuse and attacks in Serbia.

2008 The European Parliament censures Italy for its treatment of Gypsies.

2010 French President Nicolas Sarkozy begins a systematic deportation campaign against the Romani. His targets are Romanian and Bulgarian Roma. The United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern the deportations are evidence of growing racism and xenophobia in France.

2013 A Hungarian journalist, Zsolt Bayer, a founding member of the governing Fidesz party, wrote a newspaper column in which he said: "a significant part of the Roma are unfit for coexistence. They are not fit to live among people. These Roma are animals and they behave like animal

**Relevant UN treaties and events**

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- CERD- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, a UN convention, 1969
- Decade of Roma Inclusion- A 2005-2015 initiative launched by 12 European countries
- European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms
- ICESCR- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
Previous attempts to solve the issue

Outside of the general international treaties made there has been little initiative in trying to solve the problems faced by the Romani people specifically. The most significant step in trying to aid the Roma was the Decade of Roma Inclusion campaign, which had limited success. In 2011 the EU called for each European Country to design a national strategy that would improve the living conditions of the Roma in each of those countries. In 2013 the European Council made a document listing all the measures that should be implemented. The commission has been monitoring the progress ever since publishing annual reports. Project Pal might be the most successful step towards achieving equality for Roma yet.

Many countries, such as Ukraine have also implemented their own measures and Roma strategies in order to reduce the ethnic inequalities within their respective countries. Several diplomats and political leaders have spoken out against the discrimination of the Roma, however have not made any significant efforts in fighting this discrimination.

Possible Solutions

There are multiple frameworks that need to be implemented in order to reduce the discrimination endured by the Roma people. While there’s already an European body protecting the rights of Romani but not an international one, so creating a new UN body to protect those rights will improve the situation faced by the Roma. There needs to be more emphasis on raising awareness about the Roma people, not only the discrimination that they are facing but also their history and heritage, including the Holocaust.

The future of the Roma needs to be ensured by making sure that they are facing the threat of stateless and that they have access to all the basic public services such as healthcare and free education. The Roma are also suffering economically and many cannot afford tertiary education, which is why special financial support for their education is needed. There also needs to be more emphasis on stopping ethnic discrimination in the workplace and helping the Romani community to lower their unemployment rate. Furthermore, the crimes committed against the Roma need to condemned the and hate speech against the Romani, as well as other Ethnic minorities should not be encouraged.
Bibliography


