

Roma in Croatian society and state: from stigma and segregation to a “new” identity and integration¹

Abstract

The Roma people originate from India; they arrived to Croatia (Dubrovnik) in the 14th century, and later settled in other parts of Croatia. Roma are a relatively numerous ethnic group in Croatia, and their numbers have increased since the wars in the 1990s. They have been present in the region for centuries with a similar status in various states and state orders, with the exception of times of war, and especially World War II, when the Roma were victimised and persecuted as an ethnic group. Roma genocide in Croatia was perpetrated by the Ustaša regime, which was a faithful copy of the national socialist programme and its ‘final solution’ to the national issue. Roma are marginalised among Croatia’s nationalities, and are a poorly included ethnic community. Their subcultural way of life differentiates this community from others, which makes their integration even more difficult. Although they are normatively in the same position as other ethnic/national communities, they are greatly socio-politically, economically, and culturally marginalised, and members of this population are insufficiently included in Croatian society. Roma are a stigmatised community, generally poorly educated and with a high percentage of unemployed or underemployed members. Public policy in Croatia also contains specific programmes for Roma, which are generating positive change in the social life of the Roma population; however, the tempo of these changes is still slow. Education and employment are a special issue, placing challenges before both Croatian society and state and the Roma ethnic community that influence this community’s perspectives. The essential issue is how to gradually create a ‘new’ Roma identity that might bring members of this ethnic community closer to the (post-)modern lifestyle and economy. Can the Roma break their vicious cycle, and what must change within the community itself? The perspective of members of this community are correlated with exterior circumstances, including the normative order of national minority issues, the socio-political atmosphere, economic progress, and the activities of Roma themselves, primarily in families, associations, and local communities.

Keywords: Roma, Croatia, stigma, ethnic identity, integration, segregation

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The ethnic structure of the Croatian population consists of an ethnic majority (Croats), 22 ethnic minorities, and citizens who have not stated an ethnicity. The multi-national characteristics of Croatian society are reflected on the level of constitutional law, which is applied and implemented to a certain degree in public and state administration, education, culture, and other segments of public life through the proportionate representation of particular ethnic communities. While the great majority of ethnic communities are well integrated into the socio-political, cultural, and economic state order, only two ethnic minorities are not fully included—Serbs and Roma. Why these two communities, and what is the situation among the Roma population?

To understand the position and status of Serbs, it is important to distinguish between the 'old' and 'new' minorities. These communities are divided into those who had this status in the prior state orders. The 'new' national minorities were created through the collapse of the Yugoslav state out of national communities that had the status of constitutive nations in Yugoslavia. Due to tradition, history, their number, their status prior to the war and their role in it in Croatia, Serbs played the most important role. With the exception of specific post-war issues, Serbs are integrated across the majority of the Croatian state, with the exception of Croatian Podunavlje, where they are still partly segregated. The Roma are a unique ethnic community with an exceptionally sub-cultural way of life that differs greatly from the majority of Croatia's other residents. Very few Roma are integrated into the economic sector of society; they are present in the education system on the level of primary education with poor results, and to a lesser extent in secondary and higher education. Despite state efforts to include Roma into society, results are still lacking; this should represent a challenge for the Croatian state and society, as well as for the Roma population itself, especially those actors who serve as their representatives in society.

Roma are a stigmatised group that were previously used to frighten children ("if you're bad, the Gypsies will steal you"); at present, they serve as a pejorative term in football supporter outbursts and conflicts. Despite these problems, the Roma's status is better than in some previous societies, states, and state orders. Public awareness of the need to include them in Croatian society is growing; this has shown to be a challenging, difficult process. Roma are the fifth most numerous ethnic community in Croatia (*Census 2011*) with the highest demographic growth of all national minority communities in the post-war period, as indicated by the past three censuses. The reasons for the increase in number of this population are high natality and reduced ethnomimicry, which was especially notable amongst Roma during the war. Various forms of social aid can also be accessed by declaring Roma nationality, which additionally motivates Roma to declare themselves ethnically.

Although this situation is improving, the strength of tradition and inertia in changes to way of life mean Roma are still stigmatised, which is hindering their integration into Croatian society. Prejudice and stereotypes towards this community are changing slowly and with difficulty; often, despite small changes, the reality of this situation seems to be moving in circles. Segregation in the case of Roma is not systematic; although the state attempts to include them, the Roma are a separate, dynamically segregated ethnic body that is difficult to integrate. The central interpretative topics in the case of the Roma population in Croatia in this research are the aforementioned social forms (stigma, social segregation) and the creation of a 'new' identity that differs from what the Roma were in the past, as well as social integration, which will initially reduce differences between Roma and other ethnic communities in Croatia with the intent of integrating them as best possible.

The Roma's ancient homeland is India; they arrived in Dubrovnik, in the territory of modern-day Croatia, in the 14th century (Hrvačić 2004). The Roma exodus from India dates to the 9th century and their struggle against the Arabs; wars against India in the 11th and 12th centuries led to their further displacement² (Đurić 2007; Liégeois 2009). Roma are mentioned under various names in textual records, the three most common of which are *Cigani*, *Gypsies*, and *Gitanos*. Like the Jews, Roma have settled on nearly all continents. As India was poorly known amongst Europeans, Roma described themselves as "pilgrims from Egypt", which was better known, thus creating the myth of Roma as Egyptians (Đurić 2007). Roma moved in groups of entire families, led by a leader, count, captain, or duke. Roma are craftsmen and traders, which additionally indicates migration and seeking new destinations in which to practice these activities. Roma occupations are various and changeable, including metallurgy, gathering and selling various objects, circus performances, operating amusement parks, producing and selling various objects, seasonal work, fortune telling, etc (Liégeois 2009).

In the late 18th century, the field of linguistics discovered that the Roma language is an Indic language that developed out of dialects similar to Sanskrit (Liégeois 2009). Upon arriving in Europe (including Croatia), the Roma were well received as they presented themselves as pilgrims. This justified their constant movement; however, changes in relations date back to the 15th century. They began being accused of witchcraft, kidnapping, and other deviations; similar things took place in Austro-Hungary, of which Croatia was a part (Vojak, Papo & Tahiri 2015). This is the opposite situation experienced by most other migrants, who have problems with integration from the outset; integration problems with Roma are generated by and increase with the passage of time. The origins of the Roma would later be used as a stigma, which, in addition to their subcultural lifestyle, serve as the main generator of stereotypes and prejudice towards this ethnic community. The Roma are a unique ethnic community that differs significantly from other such communities. They suffered exceptionally great losses during World War II, both in Europe and in the former Yugoslavia, especially at Jasenovac internment camp in the village of Uštica. As noted by some authors (Vojak, Papo & Tahiri 2015), the most recent data shows that the Ustaša regime killed 16,173 Roma, of whom 5,688 were men, 4,877 were women, and 5,608 were children, although these numbers are not final. Roma casualties during World War II have been systematically neglected, leading to their description as a forgotten holocaust (Vojak, Papo & Tahiri 2015).

The end of the war and the establishment of the new state brought peace for the Roma. However, their status did not improve significantly in the new state order, except in terms of safety and social rights. Roma are dispersed throughout the world and lack the characteristics of a modern nation insofar as they are not organised on any political or social level that might result in demand for a state. The main socio-cultural patterns of the Roma are their nomadic and semi-nomadic way of life, poverty, poor education, temporary employment, dominant patriarchy, and generally subcultural way of life. Even when they do become sedentary, Roma maintain their nomadic spirit, as they have lived for centuries in uncertain circumstances; also, pogroms against them have historically been quite frequent, resulting in this ethnic group perceiving space and many activities within it as temporary (Liégeois 2009). For lack of more permanent connections, whether territorial or professional, there is a point of stability in Roma life around which life in all its forms unfolds—the family. It is difficult to find an ethnic community in which family plays a more important role than amongst the Roma, especially in modern

times. Family is the economic unit within which work unfolds, and this strengthens the group and contributes to solidarity; the family raises children and teaches values, and exclusion from the family is tantamount to death (Liégeois 2009). This raises the issue of the individual and his/her rights, obligations, and all presumptions upon which (post-)modern society is founded. How can one affirm one's individualism in an expressly traditional environment, with the role of the family connecting its members on a level not comparable to other communities? The family draws its function as a protector from limited, mostly negative relations with the outside world. The presumption of increased affirmation of members of the Roma community lies in a departure from the grip of the family and an affirmation of the individual, from education and work to all other segments of life. School, labour, and the institutional regulation of social relations are at odds with the Roma way of life founded on family cohesion; amongst Roma, this mainly sparks uncomfortable memories (Liégeois 2009).

Roma are portrayed throughout history as a hated people, with comparisons to the Khoekhoe, Pygmies, Sámi, and Eskimos, who were considered the lowest human races during the early Enlightenment. Roma are perceived as "blacks", "Moors", and "Egyptians" (Bogdal 2019). These deeply-rooted prejudices change slowly and with difficulty, and so Roma today have an entirely different status than other ethnic communities. The question thus arises as to how to change this, and whether it is even possible to integrate the Roma into society? What is being done in this respect in Croatia, both by the Croatian state/society and by Roma themselves? This and the corresponding theoretical framework will be the subject of analysis in this work on Roma in Croatia. When did the Roma arrive in Croatia, and what status and role did they have during this centuries-long period? Roma have been present in Croatia for more than six centuries. The first written mention of the Roma dates to 1362 in Dubrovnik. Roughly ten years later (1373), they are mentioned in Zagreb (Hrvatić 2004). The official terminology in sources from the time referred to Roma as Egyptians. According to similar sources, it is known that a small Roma colony lived in Zagreb in 1378; its members dealt in trade and crafts, and were frequently accused of crimes (Đurić 2007, Hrvatić 2004). Even these early sources show an ethnic community that differed from the Europeans of the time; frequent trials indicate a special relationship towards members of the group, although the question remains as to the degree to which prejudices and marginalisation of members of this group were involved in these trials.

Later on (in the 18th century), Roma were relatively numerous in Croatian counties according to censuses at the time—Virovitica (648), Srijem (471), and Požega (186). The situation changed, and from a somewhat later time until modern day, the Roma display a different geographical distribution; they are most numerous in Međimurje County, followed by Brod-Posavina County, Sisak-Moslavina County, Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, and the city of Zagreb. In the 19th century, large groups of Roma came to Croatia as a result of the abolishment of Roma "slavery" in Romania. These Roma belonged to a group called Bayashi, although the non-Roma population referred to them as *Koritari* as they were woodworkers. They settled in Međimurje and Podravina, and they speak *ljimba d bjaš*, a Romanian dialect (Hrvatić 2004). After World War I, the Roma and other ethnic communities became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which later became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. With some reservations, it can be claimed that the Roma population of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia prior to World War II amounted to more than 70,000, of whom roughly 15,000 lived in Croatian regions (Banošina of Croatia). The majority lived in Slavonia, Baranja, and Srijem, most of whom were Roman Catholic and illiterate (Vojak, Papo & Tahiri 2015).

During World War II, the Roma suffered great casualties, deportation, imprisonment in concentration camps,

and genocide. Under Nazi policies, they were subjected to systematic destruction; with the Ustaša's rise to power in April 1941, the government adopted the resolution of the Roma issue (anti-Roma discrimination) as a model. Orders followed limiting the movement of Roma and concentrating them in certain areas in order to more precisely register them for the final solution of genocide against this ethnic community. Deportations followed to Jasenovac concentration camp; the Ustaša regime committed genocide against the Roma both there and in surrounding settlements (Vojak 2021). The most recent data shows that the Ustaša regime killed 16,173 Roma, of whom 5,688 were men, 4,877 were women, and 5,608 were children, although these numbers are not final. Roma casualties during World War II have been systematically neglected, leading to their description as a forgotten holocaust (Vojak, Papo & Tahiri 2015).

During the socialist period, Roma were treated as an ethnic community; they had the right to education, and a level of security that allowed them to do specific jobs. Their subcultural status was not endangered by the socialist order, however no more was done to better integrate the Roma into society, an issue that is still relevant and challenging today to both Croatian society and to the Roma themselves. The last four censuses have registered constant growth in the Roma population in Croatia. The 1991 census immediately prior to the war recorded 6,695 Roma; the 2001 census recorded 9,436, and the 2011 census 16,975. The 2021 census in Croatia recorded 17,980, which represents an insignificant increase as compared to the previous census. By county, the most Roma in the 2011 census were recorded in Međimurje County (5,107), followed by the city of Zagreb (2,755), Osijek-Baranja County (1,874), Sisak-Moslavina County (1,463), Brod-Posavina County (1,178), Primorje-Gorski Kotar County (1,072), Koprivnica-Križevci County (925), Istria County (858), Varaždin County (711), etc.

3. Roma: education and employment

Roma education is a European issue encompassed by measures to include members of this ethnic community into European and Croatian society. A 2020 Council of Europe report notes that the Roma are the largest European ethnic minority. It is estimated that, of the 10–12 million Roma in Europe, roughly 6 million live in the EU, the majority of which are citizens of an EU member state (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0147_HR.html). The European Commission called for the establishment of national Roma integration strategies in 2011. The EU framework for national Roma integration strategies encouraged member states (and candidate states) to adopt a comprehensive approach to integrating the Roma, and to incorporate Roma inclusion into all policies using political, legal, and financial instruments, to adopt national Roma integration strategies, and to establish coordination, advisory, and monitoring mechanisms.

Member states are expected to ensure the socio-economic and normative means for young Roma to complete primary school, as well as to minimise differences in economic status and the provision of health services. Roma pupils ending their education early is a serious problem; in 2019, 68% of Roma had left school early. After 2020, the European Commission recommended increasing investment into Roma youths, women, and children (especially primary school aged children, who have difficulties due to the poor financial and social status of their families), as well as increased attention to Roma mobility within the EU (https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0147_HR.html).

Table 1. Roma and pre-school education from school year 2007/2008 to 2017/2018³

School year	Number of girls	Number of boys	Total
2007/2008	401	409	810
2008/2009	342	350	692
2009/2010	402	422	824
2010/2011	301	322	623
2011/2012	301	322	623
2013/2014	405	364	769
2015/2016	513	513	1,026
2016/2017	518	600	1,118
2017/2018	532	488	1,020

As shown in reports of the *Government Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities*, from 2007 until today, there has been a notable increase in the number of Roma minority children enrolled in pre-school and primary school, however still less than that of the general population. Only 31.1% of Roma children aged 3–6 attend pre-school or primary school; amongst the general population, this number amounts to 82.8%. By region, the most young Roma attending pre-school and primary school are found in Istria and the Croatian Littoral, followed by Zagreb and the surrounding area; the least are found in Međimurje and Slavonia. In Istria County, Vukovar-Srijem, and Zagreb County, Roma children are fully integrated into classrooms in which the majority of children are non-Roma.

In the city of Zagreb, Sisak-Moslavina County, Koprivnica-Križevci County, and Osijek-Baranja County, the share of children in integrated classrooms ranges from 90.2%–95.9%. The highest level of education completed by 85% of Roma in Croatia is primary school or less; the share of Roma women with completed primary school (25.7%) is less than the share of Roma men (31.1%). Also, the total share of Roma who have not completed primary education is higher among Roma women (62.5%); Roma women are also more likely to be illiterate. A total of 17% of Roma women are illiterate, two and a half times more than the share of illiterate Roma men. The highest share of illiterate Roma women are found in northern Croatia (27.2%), while the lowest is in Zagreb and the surrounding area (11.2%). However, it should be noted that these findings primarily relate to Roma women aged 35–60 and 60 and above, as no gender differences in literacy have been noted in younger generations. Among youths, 4.2% of women and 3% of men are illiterate. Data regarding the regional distribution of early school leaving correspond to regional data on illiteracy. Nearly half of the Roma women in northern Croatia (49%) and Međimurje (44%) left primary school early. Older women note their key reasons for leaving school as poor financial conditions, while younger women note marriage (27%), poor marks (15%), and pregnancy and parenthood (15%). Only 0.5% of the total Roma population in Croatia have completed three-year college or higher

³ Table taken from *Uključivanje Roma u hrvatsko društvo: obrazovanje i zapošljavanje* (Potočnik, Dunja; Darja Maslić Seršić & Nenad Karajić, 2020). Zagreb: Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities.

education; an insignificant share of Roma (6.3%) are involved in adult education and training. Furthermore, only 3% of Roma complete secondary school at an adult age (Potočnik, Masić Seršić & Karajić 2020). Education for young Roma is a segment of the struggle against discrimination and poverty, and a prerequisite for entry into the working world. Educating Roma parents, teachers, and all activists working to integrate Roma into society is important in all of these processes.

Material resources for Roma education are important; for this population, they should be either free or inexpensive and accessible. The barriers to their education significantly outweigh their means. Some of these barriers include low parental levels of education, poor or insufficient knowledge of the Croatian language, and especially the poor material status of the majority of Roma families. The following factors can also be included: child labour, early marriage, and moving (Klasnić, Kunac & Rodik 2020). The Roma population's marginal position in society manifests on the *economic*, *spatial*, and *political* level (Šućur 2000). Economic marginalisation primarily means dependence on others through various forms of social aid, as well as low standing and poor income from traditional Roma occupations; poverty is thus perpetuated, limiting personal aspirations, especially amongst young Roma. Spatial marginalisation manifests as segregation and life in the urban periphery or in Roma settlements as relatively separate spaces; political marginalisation manifests as insufficient or low participation of Roma in structures of government and power, although these relations are changing gradually (i.e. a Roma man was elected to Croatian Parliament, Roma National Minority Councils are being organised, etc).

Another issue with Roma social integration is the lack of "mediators"—those who can serve as community leaders. As noted by M. Štambuk, the Roma have no elite to serve as a mediator between 'big' society and their small community (Štambuk 2005). With an increase in the educational level of Roma, the creation of a Roma elite could be the greatest boon to the Roma population in terms of their better social inclusion, which should increase the number of Roma who can influence change in the Roma community, as well as in the perception of Roma and the action of actors and societal institutions involved in improving the status of Roma in Croatia. The Roma have problems with consistent income, which causes difficulties in their everyday lives and social inclusion. Data from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (EU-MIDIS II) affirms high unemployment rates among the Roma in Croatia, noting that 74% of Roma men are unemployed, and that 85% of Roma women are either unemployed or housewives. Furthermore, comparative data from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights shows that Croatia recorded a decrease in Roma employment from 2011 to 2016, as 14% of those surveyed listed involvement in paid work as their primary status in 2011, while just 8% provided the same response in 2016. Data from national research in 2018 are in accordance with the aforementioned results. This research shows that just 7.3% of Roma in Croatia have a paid full-time job, while 9.2% have part-time or temporary jobs, and 2.1% are self-employed, comprising a total of just 18.7% of the Roma population. A large number of Roma are recipients of social aid. The three most common forms of social aid received by Roma are *minimum allowance*, *right to heating expense costs*, and *housing costs allowance*. Nearly two thirds of Roma are in contact with social aid institutions (Milas & Martinović Klarić 2020).

The Croatian government is continuing with policies towards the Roma initiated by the 2003 National Programme for Roma through its *National Strategy for Roma Inclusion* for the period from 2013 to 2020. The Croatian government adopted this strategy at a session on 29 November 2012. The strategy is founded on international documents on human rights and the rights of ethnic/national communities, as well as similar Croatian normative solutions. The goal of the strategy is to socially include the Roma on all levels, from the local and

regional levels to the national and European levels. Key areas that should be taken into account are education, employment, health care, and housing. The strategy was followed by the *National Plan for Roma Inclusion (2021–2027)*, which contains a broad spectrum of measures intended to bring this marginalised ethnic community closer to Croatian society and include its members in Croatia's societal structure, including the economy, culture, and politics. In addition to existential issues, the National Plan pays special attention to the legally non-binding working definition of anti-Roma racism and discrimination, according to which anti-Roma racism and discrimination comprise of

*"the use of particular expressions and acts, as well as institutional policy and marginalization practices, exclusion, physical violence, the denigration of Roma culture and lifestyles, and the use of hate speech directed towards Roma and other individuals and groups perceived, stigmatized, or persecuted as 'Gypsies' during the Nazi era and today. This results in an approach to the Roma as a supposedly foreign group, as well as in their connection to a number of derogatory stereotypes and distorted images representing a specific form of racism."*⁴

The National Plan for Roma (2021–2027) thus emphasises the importance of security to the Roma population, which should be contributed to by the police, the Office of Human and Minority Rights, and the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs. One point relates to the protection of traditional Roma culture, which lies mainly in the domain of associations and/or Roma minority cultural and arts associations. The framework of this plan also emphasises the need to encourage integrative processes and strengthen social cohesion between the Roma and the majority population, including foreign language learning, financial and civic literacy, and raising awareness of Roma culture, language, and history. Civil society and local and regional government play a significant role in these activities. The *National Plan* places a special emphasis on Roma education from pre-school to university as one of the most important factors in Roma integration.

4. Prejudices and stereotypes

Our views of other people and their perceptions of us and our small and large communities are important to social interaction and communication in primary social groups, as well as for inclusion into society in general. It is impossible to perceive social actors without "pictures in our heads" (Roth 2000); knowledge of them is superficial and burdened with *a priori* schemas and "foreknowledge". This is also a problem in scientific analysis, whose actors can also never fully free themselves of deep-rooted, traditional, and hard to change observations and "views", especially those regarding ethnic communities; this certainly also applies to views of the Roma.

The problem lies in the fact that the interpretations of Roma problems and behaviour contained in public policies on the Roma start from a position of significantly greater power than that of the minor power of the Roma population, which is a barrier to a better view of the state of this ethnic community. However, without bringing the Roma closer to society in general and the dominant value system, they cannot be well integrated into society. Only nuanced, sophisticated public policy can contribute to a gradual "entry" into society on all levels and in all its sub-systems in a way that is acceptable to the Roma themselves. Stereotypes and prejudices are a part of everyday life; the question is how individuals can at least partly distance themselves from such *a priori* socio-cul-

⁴ <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definitions-charters/working-definition-antigypsyism-anti-romadiscriminati>

tural forms. Individuals, groups, and entire communities build their identities through an interplay that implies social interaction and communication between 'us' and 'them'. The quality of these social and interpersonal relations depends on how we perceive/interpret others/those different from us. Elaborating upon stereotypes and prejudices, numerous authors have noted the enormity of the gap between what we think of ourselves and what others think of us.

One of these authors, Jean-Claude Kaufmann, emphasises that what we may experience as an endless treasure trove, others most often reduce to a simple picture, condensing us to just a few criteria depending on the need and situation (Kaufmann 2006). We do the same to others, and such observations/interpretations serve as fertile ground for the socio-cultural framework of what we understand as stereotypes and prejudices. These socio-cultural constructs function on an interpersonal level, often intensifying on the intergroup level, especially between ethnic/national and religious groups; this may bring these forms to extremes with severe consequences for individuals, groups, and communities. Peaceful periods in social development are not free of these forms; however, political conflict and (especially) war generate prejudices and stereotypes to the greatest extent; the consequences for actors in local communities subject to these can be and often are quite serious and traumatic. It is enough to be marked and denounced as insufficiently like 'us' to result in physical attacks on individuals and entire communities including persecution, murder, and genocide, often regardless of the behaviour of those marked. Prejudice consists of marking any group uncritically or without verifying the adopted beliefs and values an individual or group express for or against the members of another community or social group (Heršak 1998). Of course, it is impossible to know or verify the behaviours and activities of all members of large communities such as ethnic and national groups are concerned; this means generalisations must be present in speech or discussion involving them. Everything outside our own community is thus easier to generalise and rate negatively, which generates prejudices and stereotypes on an increasingly larger scale.

In another interpretation, prejudices are speech about racial relations used to indicate antagonistic opinions or active hostility towards another social group, usually defined on the basis of race (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner 2008). This definition places an emphasis on the perception of race and race relations, which is a primarily Western experience based on political forms; in societies with an ethnic national form, prejudices are most strongly expressed in relations between nationalities. As noted by I. Šiber, the literature describes prejudices as *traditional*, *conformist*, and *frustrational* (Šiber 1998). *Traditional* prejudices are those transmitted through communication memory within primary socialisation processes and networks. In this type, actors discover who "we" and "others" are and how others differ from them, as well as how to behave towards them. While institutions of liberal democratic society should reduce traditional prejudices in principle, in many situations they actually generate them. *Social conformism* is an important source of prejudice, characterised by pressure and demands of loyalty from the group towards the individual.

While group strength was crucial in the past, these connections are weaker in more modern societies, although not lost entirely. Belonging to a religion or nation is also important in modern times; some "thick" social situations require nearly unconditional loyalty to these communities. The third reason behind prejudices are individual psycho-physical experiences, or difficulties in meeting one's needs. As opposed to prejudices, stereotypes are firm, simplified generalisations people hold about the social behaviour of other people or groups, usually based on negative and (occasionally) positive prejudices (Heršak 1998). Elsewhere, stereotypes are similarly defined as a one-sided, overemphasised opinion about a group, tribe, or class, usually characterised

by prejudices. They are most often tied to racism or sexism. Faced with opposing evidence, stereotypes often oppose change or correction, as this produces feelings of social solidarity (Heršak 1998). Traditional prejudices are thus transferred from generation to generation, while contextual reality either reduces or intensifies them. Ethnocentrism and ethnic nationalism are based on social and political power; they thus most often target national or ethnic minorities, communities with little or no power in the socio-political space. Hierarchy is present in national prejudices; post-war research in Croatia shows that the least desirable ethnic groups are Albanians, Roma, and Serbs (Banovac & Boneta 2006).⁵

Prejudices towards Roma have long been a part of the collective imaginary of the majority nationality and other national communities in Croatia. This is especially the case in traditional village society. In the popular culture, Roma (Gypsies) are used as a threat against disobedient children. Prejudices against the Roma were similar in previous centuries, when threats and fabrications turned them into a new danger. During times of war, when interpretations of and often relations towards others are binary, prejudices turn into the foundation for violence and aggression towards particular groups. Roma often become a target in such events, although they are not necessarily part of the basic conflict. The era of mass communication, the spread of education, and digital networks mean the world is demystifying, and the Roma (Gypsies) are no longer mysterious, unknown, or threatening. However, prejudices towards this ethnic group are still broadly present, founded on traditional and deeply-rooted forms of behaviour, as well as the slow change in the Roma identity, which is still quite distant from the way of life of the non-Roma population. What is at hand is what the field of sociology refers to as a "self-fulfilling prophecy"; prejudices find affirmation in the relative fixation of the Roma identity and the traditional forms of behaviour and ways of life of members of the Roma community. During such times, the Roma population, which stands on the lowest rung in hierarchical spaces and whose diversity (Pusić 1995) is exceptionally distinct, has been a target for those with weapons and power.

Although the Roma have been victimized and suffered great losses at many points in history, Nazi Germany and the Ustaša Independent State of Croatia were the regimes in which they were subjected to the most severe forms of suffering and genocide. Roma or Gypsies, treated as useless and harmful, were to be thrown out of society; throughout history, this has manifested as deportation, persecution, and extermination (Vojak, Papo & Tahiri 2015). This opinion and political relationship towards the Roma reached its peak during World War II and Hitler's "final solution", with concentration camps and gas chambers in which, alongside the Jews, the Roma were among the greatest victims.

5. Stigma, segregation, and Roma integration: manifestations and solutions

Although 'others'—those who are systematically segregated, or who are not normatively unlike 'us'—exist in all societies, Roma can be considered to be a "third" group, one whose capacities are nearly non-existent, and who are marked recognisably even to those more poorly versed in the national mosaic of a given state and its corresponding society. As the case in Croatia is similar, the question arises as to what kind of stigma follows the Roma, what the roots of this unique stigma are, and how it differs compared to other ethnic/national

⁵ Banovac and Boneta researched ethnic distance in Lika, Gorski Kotar, and Istria from 2003–2005; their findings are interpreted in the text "Etnička distanca i socijalna (dez)integracija lokalnih zajednica", *Revija za sociologiju*, 37 (1/2): 21–46, 2006.

communities. The definition of stigma emphasises this strong demarcation; stigma is thus considered a social mark used to discredit an individual or group, whether a stigma of body, of character, or of social collectives (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner 2008).

The most significant stigma for an ethnic community—and the most difficult and traumatic for its members—is tribal stigma, a stigma of social character. This type is apparent in the perpetuation of long-lasting, fixed, and mostly negative characteristics of a particular ethnic community, which often serves (as it has in the past) as a field for the generation of hatred, resulting in everything up to armed attacks, pogroms, deportation, and genocide. Roma were all too often party to such criminogenic and socio-pathological processes, the culmination of which resulted in their suffering during World War II, in Croatia especially during the Independent State of Croatia and at the Jasenovac internment camp. The levers of state and political power are important to this type of stigma. Individual acts of violence are possible and frequent in the micro-social environment of the local community, resulting from the negative energy of individuals and groups towards marked individuals and groups. When pictures of others as undesirable and socially unacceptable are generated within political and cultural institutions, the result is stigma against a social collective, which leads to pogroms against many ethnic/national communities.

Roma often appear in narratives as the dregs of society, for whose fates one need feel no regret. The ethnically-based hierarchisation of war victims quite often begins with Western European nations as central and civilised, then moving towards the East and South; Roma are positioned even lower, near the bottom. In *How Europe Invented the Gypsies*, the author cites the reaction of a sixteen-year-old girl from Germany involved in racist attacks against asylum seekers; she differentiates between Vietnamese people, for whom she does feel some pity, and the Roma, for whom she has no feelings whatsoever and would not have cared if they were burnt alive (Bogdal 2019). The hierarchisation of victims is a rule in war; 'our' victims are nearly made sacrosanct, and their death or suffering bears national pathos, while the lives and deaths of 'others' are worth little, if anything at all. This is the case with the Roma in the hierarchisation of victims, reduced to beings beneath any human level.

Are Roma in Croatia segregated, and if so, what are the reasons? What is segregation, and how does the sociological literature define it? The *Dictionary of Sociology* defines segregation as division amongst a community according to racial, religious, ethnic, or some other criteria. Segregation can be normatively regulated; it can also be realised through informal means (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner 2008). We find a similar definition in the *Lexicon of Migrant and Ethnic Terminology*, which emphasises the spatial and physical division of people or groups from the body of the whole (Heršak 1998). There is no segregation in Croatia in the full meaning of the term; however, there is partial segregation of Serbs in Croatian Podunavlje and Roma throughout Croatia. What is the partial segregation of the Roma ethnic community, and how can this negative social form be overcome to integrate Roma into the Croatian state and society?

Although Roma are socially accepted in terms of basic tolerance, the non-Roma population shows distance towards them. Roma are potentially of interest as entertainers and examples of the exotic; however, there is resistance against them in labour and education, and they are often faced with barriers. Students have trouble finding apprenticeships during school, and later in finding work; the parents of non-Roma students (as was the case in Međimurje) also protest against their children sharing classrooms with Roma children. Roma live in settlements that are mostly separate from the majority population of a given area, which can be described as

residential segregation.⁶ Desegregation is possible as integration into all segments of society; in the case of the Roma, this will be a gradual and lengthy process. It is a basic problem in every society to integrate its parts into the sum total of its organisation and function in a shared paradigm. We may find definitions of *integration* in the literature. The *Dictionary of Sociology* defines integration as a constant problem in classical sociological theory; it reduces it to the way in which various elements in society keep together and integrate, describing this process mostly through two explanations.

The first is integration based on shared values, while the second is based on the social division of labour according to functionalist theory, i.e. integration on the basis of interdependence in the division of labour (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner 2008). Even this definition of integration makes it apparent that complete, conflict-free integration is mostly lacking, and that societies are undergoing processes marked by simultaneous stability and conflict. Only those societies marked by stability have less conflict, which is solved through procedures within the framework of the existing system. A similar explanation of this concept is found in the *Lexicon of Migrant and Ethnic Terminology*, which defines integration as encompassing the ideas of intactness, completeness, wholeness, unmixedness, or the creation of larger societal units out of many originally unconnected or poorly connected parts (Heršak 1998). What are the mitigating circumstances supporting Roma integration, and what are the main barriers?

Integration of Roma in Croatian society

Opportunities	Barriers
Political agenda (Decades of Roma etc.)	Roma primary social atmosphere – Identity
Roma associations	Stereotypes and prejudices about Roma
Educational system	Roma segregation

The most important mitigating circumstance is the readiness of the Croatian state to actively participate through programmes and practical solutions through legal norms and in the field of education, employment, and the overall standard of living of Roma. On the normative level, the following acts are of importance: *Croatian constitution*; *Constitutional Act on the Rights of National Minorities*; *Act on the Use of Languages and Scripts of National Minorities in the Republic of Croatia*; *Act on Teaching and Education in the Languages and Scripts of National Minorities*. Thanks to some of these acts, the Roma have a representative in Croatian Parliament, which is certainly of significance to this ethnic community.

As with any other ethnic community, the activities of Roma community representatives are key to solving the community's problems. The political agenda includes programmes with measures such as the *Action Plan Decade to Include the Roma 2005–2015*, the *National Strategy for Roma Inclusion (2013–2020)*, the *National Plan for Roma Inclusion (2021–2027)*. The National Plan for Roma Inclusion will be fully harmonised with the

⁶ The Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights discussed Roma segregation and indirect discrimination in 2010; their decision determined that separating pupils of Roma origin into exclusively Roma schools could be considered indirect discrimination (Baričić 2011).

proposal for a *Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation by 2030*. The aforementioned are significant elements of public policy towards the Roma, and gradually function as a set of measures in the process of Roma integration into Croatian society. Positive discrimination is desirable for all groups with little or no influence on social events. For example, encouraging craftsmen, traders, and entrepreneurs to accept Roma pupils for school apprenticeships would function along these lines. Roma associations and councils play an especially important role in mediating between the Roma population and broader society. The website of the *Government Office for Human Rights and the Rights of National Minorities* thus notes that funds were disbursed to seven Roma associations out of the Croatian state budget through the mediation of the National Minority Advisory Council: *Darda Roma Cultural Association, Darda; 'Bolja budućnost' Association of Roma Women, Zagreb; Kali Sara Alliance of Roma in Croatia, Zagreb; Roma Cultural Centre, Sisak; 'Romska prava', Sisak; the Association of Roma of Baranja, Beli Manastir; Roma National Forum, Beli Manastir; 'Korak po korak' Roma Association, Koprivnica.*

Despite qualitative improvements, insufficient integration and synergy amongst these associations, as well as the privatisation of some of them, is also hindering these processes. Roma education has two forms: mixed classes with non-Roma pupils and separate classes for Roma. There are problems in organising separate classes, from a lack of teaching staff to a lack of interest of Roma themselves, who prefer mixed classes with non-Roma pupils. In mixed classes, the problem is resistance from parents outside the Roma community; they emphasise difficulties the Roma pupils encounter, which they feel hinders the education process in general and prevents their children from learning.

6. What is the Roma identity, and can it be changed?

Although generalisations are unacceptable in interpretations of collective identities—including national identities—certain values are important to individual national communities, and the Roma community is no different. Variations are possible and frequent, although this does not diminish 'our' perception of 'them', instead only generating and deepening prejudices and stereotypes.

The Roma identity has long been characterised by a subcultural lifestyle, unique family relations, existential patterns characterised by nomadism and a gatherer's economy, a unique relationship towards education and work, as well as some other differences from the dominant culture. What is identity, what are its components, what is the difference between individual and collective identity, and why is ethnic/national identity a kind of super-identity? Finally, why did identity appear as a scientific, intellectual, existential, and practical-political issue in various places at the turn of the 21st century?

The root of the term identity is the Latin *identitas* 'equivalence'; all phenomena in nature, society and thought are equal to themselves, even though they undergo changes in the course of time (Heršak 1998). Another definition of identity is awareness of oneself, one's personality, and the features of one's individual character (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner 2008). Individual identity refers to individual existence in its current state of change and an individuals' self-definition and how they are perceived by others, which creates their status and defines their roles in society. Ethnic/national identity is a collective identity with special strength and significance to the members of such communities.

Why these identities? The basic theory of A. Smith is that national identity has greater, stronger influence than other collective cultural identities (Smith 2008). Primarily, the issue of collective belonging provides strength and meaning to its members; the creation of modern nations as "imagined communities" only strengthens this type of identity. Some periods of peace in international and, in this case, European history reduced its capacity; however, the collapse of socialism and wars in the former Yugoslavia led to a kind of "identity mania", which was most intense in the field of the ethnic/national. The role of the state is especially important in creating and shaping the modern national identity, turning local traditions, dialects, and ways of life into assumed unity and cohesion among a national community by way of defining, classifying, segregating, dividing, and choosing.

The role of the state is to choose the community/communities that comprise the foundation of the state, and to choose which 'others' are tolerated. The relationship towards the Roma, who the prejudiced consider not simply 'other' but a third category, is correlated with the value system of the social order and the perceptions of non-Roma. The more democratic a state order is, the better the status of the Roma, however they are mostly at the margins of all such systems. As noted by B. Parekh, the identity of a community is created through its attempt to meet all challenges placed before it in various points in history. It thus follows that a national identity can be redefined and renewed (Parekh 2008). What do such claims mean for the Roma identity, both throughout history and in modern times? The Roma identity does not have significant capacity in any society, thus resulting in a marginalised social status. This is passed on from generation to generation, thus creating a Roma population with a collective identity that is exceptionally defensive, with little initiative or will to struggle for rights and a better position in society. The prerequisites for this are missing, the most important of which are education and systematic inclusion in labour and production. The members of this community and society as a whole are faced with the demanding task of working to change the Roma identity to accept values that are recognised and accepted in broader society. This process must necessarily be gradual, insofar as habits and value forms cannot be changed quickly or by force. The question remains as to what the contribution of the Roma themselves will be in this process. Paradoxically, I. Fonseca emphasises that the Roma have made their identity into social capital, resulting in authentic Roma entertainers being especially well paid.

The more exotic they looked, the more 'authentic' they would be and thus better accepted in local preconceived notions, and even more so in the local pubs (Fonseca 2005). These are all the characteristics of peaceful times and relatively orderly societies; however, as soon as wars, revolutions, and other turbulent social processes begin, Roma again become a target and the differences among them are erased. The Roma identity is complex, and as with every (especially ethnic) community, there is an intricate relationship between the individual identity and collective identities, which are social constructs with intra- and inter-group content. Identity is a way of life; among the Roma, as with other ethnic/national communities, it is defined by a large number of various components.

According to some authors, the Roma identity primarily consists of language, music, and dance. Language is more important to older members of the Roma population. Some of the most important values in the Roma environment are family, health, and money, followed by education and religion (Rašić, Lucić, Galić & Karajić 2020). The Roma family is the most important element of the Roma identity; solidarity with all family members includes physical, financial, and emotional support (Liégeois 2009). Internal cohesion among the Roma is correlated to their lack of acceptance in society. The negative aspect of these social patterns is insufficient or lacking individualisation, which greatly hinders the educational and professional prosperity of the community's

members. The Roma habitus is not tied to territory or land; the current moment and living here and now are most important. This makes Roma life natural and unconventional, albeit at complete odds with market principles and business (the "Protestant ethic"), especially in Europe, the United States, and many other economic powers. The ultimate question for the Roma and the societies they live in is: how to integrate, and what is the "identity cost" of this process?

7. The outlook for the Roma population in Croatia

Has there been any improvement in Roma inclusion processes in Croatian society, or are these vicious circles with no way out? Better integrating Roma into Croatian society primarily includes changing the traditional Roma identity. Without this, the Roma will remain on the social margins and will not participate in modern society. All measures implemented by the government on all levels should correspond to changes within Roma families and the settlements in which they live. Without the widespread adoption of modern values (education, systematic employment, etc), it will be difficult for members of this ethnic community to become better included in Croatian society.

Changes in the Roma socio-cultural and economic environment are taking place, although with insufficient scope and intensity; changes are also coming slowly to the main trends of Roma existence, which have throughout history taken on a highly recognisable *sui generis* form. Roma are attending school more often, although they still leave it relatively early and in large numbers. There are more and more educated Roma, however, which provides hope for the community; the creation of an intellectual class in the population able to articulate the Roma's needs and turn them into action plans and programmes would result in the long-term solution of their problems, improvements in Roma everyday life, and their better inclusion into Croatian society. The basic prerequisite for Roma inclusion in society is education on all levels, from pre-school to university, as well as life-long learning, which would allow adult Roma to become literate and specialise professionally. Without their involvement in the education process on a massive scale, there will be no improvements in Roma integration, and they will remain a marginalised group.

The Roma and their environment are still insufficiently prepared for complete inclusion in the education process; the Croatian state and its institutions must gradually create and strengthen this atmosphere. Better education requires better infrastructure, from residential buildings to support to Roma pupils who need educational assistance; some forms of social aid should be channelled towards specific needs, and the misuse of such funds should be made impossible. Additionally, it is also important to create a socio-psychological environment in which the value system of the Roma will gradually change, with an increasing emphasis on better relations within Roma families and settlements, as well as with the broader community. This includes changing the relations and 'views' of non-Roma actors towards Roma, which is a part of improved democratic processes and raising tolerance within all micro/macro-social processes and interactions.

The Roma have been a travelling nation for centuries, and so their relationship towards labour and their chosen trades reflect this. A few crafts and trades are typical of the Roma, including woodworking, metallurgy, musicianship, and entertaining. Another is trade, which could be done while travelling and carrying items from one location to another. Problems appeared alongside the hyper-production of certain goods and the increasing

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Sažetak

Romi u hrvatskom društvu/državi: od stigme i segregacije do 'novog' identiteta i integracije

Romi su u porijeklom iz Indije, a u Hrvatsku (Dubrovnik) dolaze u 14. stoljeću, da bi se kasnije naseljavali i u druge krajeve u Hrvatskoj. Romi u Hrvatskoj su relativno brojna etnička zajednica, koja se nakon ratnih sukoba devedesetih godina prošlog stoljeća brojčano povećava. Njihovo prisustvo na ovim prostorima je višestoljetno sa sličnim statusom u različitim državama i poretcima, ako se izuzmu ratovi, posebno Drugi svjetski, u kojima su Romi bili stradalnici i proganjana etnička zajednica. U slučaju Hrvatske, genocid nad Romima učinio je ustaški režim, koji je bio vjerna kopija nacionalsocijalističkog programa konačnog rješenja nacionalnog pitanja. Romi su u nacionalnom mozaiku Hrvatske marginalizirani i u društvo slabo uključena etnička zajednica. Supkulturni način života razlikuje ovu zajednicu od ostalih, što je otegotna okolnost u njihovoj integraciji. Iako su normativno pozicionirani kao i druge etničke/nacionalne zajednice, njihov sociopolitički, ekonomski i kulturni status je uglavnom marginalan a pripadnici ove populacije su nedovoljno uključeni u hrvatsko društvo. Romi su stigmatizirana zajednica, u prosjeku slabo obrazovana, sa velikim udjelom nezaposlenih ili onih tek povremeno zaposlenih. Javne politike u Hrvatskoj sadrže i specifične programe za Rome, što generira pomake na bolje u društvenom životu romske populacije ali je tempo tih promjena još uvijek spor. Poseban problem čine obrazovanje i zapošljavanje, što pred hrvatsko društvo/državu kao i pred romsku etničku zajednicu postavlja izazove koji će utjecati na perspektivu ove zajednice. Temeljno pitanje je, kako postupno stvarati 'novi' romski identitet koji bi pripadnike ove etničke zajednice približio (post)modernom načinu življenja i privređivanja. Mogu li Romi izaći iz začaranih romskih krugova i što se treba mijenjati u samoj zajednici? Perspektiva pripadnika ove zajednice bit će u korelaciji između vanjskih okolnosti, od normativnog uređenja nacionalno manjinske problematike, ukupnog sociopolitičkog ozračja, gospodarskog napretka, te aktivnosti samih Roma, prvenstveno u obiteljima, udrugama i lokalnim zajednicama..

Ključne riječi: Romi, Hrvatska, stigma, etnički identitet, integracija, segregacija