

CONTRIBUTION

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Roma in Ukraine: Ethnodemographical and Sociocultural Contexts

General remarks

Before starting to discuss the situation of Roma in Ukrainian ethnodemographical and sociocultural contexts I would like to propose to clarify, in my opinion, two very important positions which strongly influence the approaches concerning analysis of the situation, perception and treatment of Roma in Ukraine.

First, Ukraine is a country with a poly-ethnic composition of its population: the representatives of about 130 ethnoses inhabit Ukraine. They have their different histories on the territory of Ukraine, they are different in numbers, their role and status differ. My experience in researching ethnic issues both in Ukraine and abroad (over 200 publications), knowledge of theoretical concepts of American, Canadian and European colleagues gives me the opportunity to interpret the ethno-national structure of Ukrainian society as consisting of four components:

- “Ethno-Nation”: ethnic Ukrainians
- “National (Ethnic) Minorities”: Armenians, Azerbaijanians, Bulgarians, Czechs, Estonians, Georgians, Germans, Greeks, Hungarians, Jews, Lithuanians, Moldavians, Poles, Roma (Gipsies), Romanians, Russians, Slovaks, Tatars
- “Ethnic Groups with not Identified Status”: Crimean Tatars, Gagausians, Karaims, Krymchaks
- “Representatives of individual Ethnoses”: in numbers from 5,500 (Kazakhs) to 6 (Aleuts) (State Statistics Committee 2001).

The criteria of such a typology are analysed in my previous works (Yevtukh, 2004, 2009).

Second remark concerns the terms “Gipsy” and “Roma”. The first one is widespread in Ukrainian public opinion and in mind of the population; the latter is a very new one and is not understandable for the majority of citizens in Ukraine. That is why in Ukrainian practices (everyday life, research) these two terms are used; now more often “Gipsy”, however, without a negative context. And one more, to my mind, remarkable moment: Searching the answer to the question “What do Roma, themselves, think about these two ethnonyms?” we found the answers in the sociological survey conducted by the Ukrainian Institute of Social Research and the International Renaissance Foundation in 2003: 29% prefer “Roma”; 21% - “Gipsy”; for 48% it does not matter, the main thing is good treatment (Yaremenko, Levzun, 2003: 158). By the way, in order not to lose outside interest to their artistic activities associated by broader Ukrainian audience with the words “Gipsy – Gipsian”, many dance-music-drama groups are using them in their names, for example “Gipsy Musical and Drama Theatre “Romance”.

Short historical backgrounds

The history of Roma in Ukraine begins in the XVIth century: a) The first written mention dates back to 1501 – in the Safe Conduct of the Grand Duke of Lithuania Alexander presented to Gipsy leader Vasyl’. b) In numbers, they appeared on the left bank of the Dnipro-River, Bessarabia (the South of the country) and on the territory of the Crimea (before 1956 a part of Russia) and for a long time they were a visible component of social developments in these parts of Ukraine. Roma (in the terminology of the XVIIIth century – Gipsy) were to be seen among Zaporizhya Cossacks, sometimes even as Otomans (leaders of Cossack divisions). Traditionally, Gipsies were busy with handcrafts (blacksmiths, joiners, horse breeding, and travel trade); they earned their living by making music, singing, dancing and fortune-telling. As to religion, the Ukrainian Gipsies were divided between Orthodoxes (Dnipro regions) and Greek-Catholics (Galicia and Transcarpathia).

Dynamics of Roma Population in Ukraine (Soviet time)

To collect data on Roma not only in Ukraine, but all around the world is a difficult job. It is due to the nomadic mode of life and as to Ukraine, Russia and later the Soviet Union, more than anywhere else, due to the ideology which ignored the problematic issues in ethno-national developments. To estimate the dynamics of Romani population in Ukraine we have to come back to the censuses although one

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has to bear in mind that these under the Soviet regime were imperfect and the census data were interpreted in the manner to please the two main ideological postulates about: 1) "the friendship of Soviet people" and 2) "non-problematic development of interethnic (in Soviet terminology – international, between nationalities) relations". However, we use the data to look at the tendencies in this dynamics.

Thus, the census of 1926 identified 19,300 people of Romani nationality within the contemporary territory of Ukraine (at that time different; its parts belonged to different states – Russia, Romania, and Czechoslovakia). Strictly speaking, 13,000 Roma lived on the territory of Ukraine (at that time the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic). The next census (1959): 22,500; 1970 – 30,100; 1989 – 47,900 (Naukovi Zapysky, 2008: 297).

Two tragic episodes influenced the number of Roma under the Soviet time: 1) 30,000 were killed; the exact number of Ukrainian Roma is impossible to indicate. 2) Almost all Roma who lived in the Crimea were deported from the peninsula together with Crimean Tatars being accused of treachery as regards the Soviet Union.

In the post-war period (1959-1989), Romani population increased more than twice. Specific gravity of them among urban population was 53.4% (1959) and 72.8% (1970) (Naukovi Zapysky, 2008: 112). It is a remarkable trait of Roma dynamics: increase of urban inhabitants between 1959 -1989 is triple. Gender statistics for Roma is the following (women): 1959 – 51.7%, 1989 – 50.6%; in urban areas accordingly 51.8% and 50.8% (Naukovi Zapysky, 2008: 142).

Contemporary Situation

Number

The last census and the first one in Independent Ukraine (2001) was conducted on the basis of a new methodology and it provides the users with more adequate general data and other useful information, for example, concerning language, social status, religion. New comprehensive data appeared for Roma, too. Now, 47,600 Roma are indicated in the census. That means a decrease of 330 persons. Roma amount to 0.10% of the population of Ukraine (during 1989 census – 0.09%) (Sklyar, 2009: 422). An increase is caused by reduction of the total number of Ukraine's population from 51,452,034 to 48,240,902 (Tabachnyk, 2007: 12).

These are official data based on the census; however, the researchers suppose that not all Roma can be calculated because of their specific mode of life. The estimations surpass the census numbers four times (200 thousand). Such statements refer to the results of different ethnographic field research and calculation of children in the families.

Territorial Distribution

Speaking about distribution of Roma on the territory of Ukraine, three characteristic features are to be mentioned: 1) generally, they live dispersed – they are presented (in different quantity) in all regions of the country, 2) they have their traditional areas of settlement: Western (Transcarpathia) – more than 14,000; Eastern (Donezk, Lugansk, Sumy) – over 7,760; Southern (Odessa, Mykolayiv, Kherson) – over 7,200; Central (Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhya, Cherkassy) – about 7,000 (Yaremenko, Levzun, 2003: 20), 3) the majority of Ukrainian Roma is concentrated in cities – 33,400 are urban and 14,200 are rural (Naukovi Zapysky, 2008: 112).

Economic Situation and Employment

We would like to mention markers which allow estimating the level of social being of Roma in Ukraine: situation concerning their employment (1); level of education (2); migration (3); self-estimation of the well-being (4).

1) The sociological survey we mentioned above provides us with following information: 1) Employment: 18-24 years – 17% (Ukrainian average is 30%), 25-28 years – 27 (73), 29-39 years – 43 (78), 40-49 years – 27 (78), 50-70 years – 11 (45). Attention should be drawn to the fact that the unemployment among women is twice higher than among men: accordingly, 35% and 16%. We cite the mentioned survey to show a correlation between gender and age concerning employment of Roma: 18-24 years – 28% for men, 9% for women; 25-28 – 43% / 17%; 29-39 – 50% / 36%; 40-49 – 38% / 16%; over 50 years – 18% / 3%. The occupational structure of Roma who constantly have their work: 28% are employed in agriculture, 25% in services, 13% in trade, and 11% in constructing industries. (Yaremenko, Levzun, 2003: 74, 75). A great part of physically able Romani population works in black labour market. Roma are practically excluded from such occupational spheres as medicine and education.

2) The education in general is one of the most actual problems for Ukrainian Roma – only 2% of them graduated from universities (bachelor, master), another 6% finished secondary level schools, 49% attended primary schools and more than one third did not visit the school at all. This fact determines to a great degree not satisfied situation with employment of Roma, especially in cities, where more qualified labour is needed. Coming back to correlation between education and occupation, we can see that more than a half of constantly employed Roma is busy with works which do not need high level of qualification; instead only 11% occupy places where high qualified labour is required (Yaremenko, Levzun, 2003: 75). As to villages, the level of employment is higher because there is a lot of unqualified work (both seasonal and temporal).

3) Migration with the aim to earn is one of the indexes which characterize the social situation among Roma: from 10% to 50% of them migrate outside regions where they constantly live. In the structure of Romani migrants males dominate – 42%; the majority of migrants are young people: 47% at the age of 18-28 years and 24% at the age of 29-39 years. A very considerable part of Ukrainian Roma (41%) would like to take an opportunity to emigrate out of the country (Yaremenko, Levzun, 2003: 82, 83).

4) The well-being of Ukrainian Roma can be evaluated using their answers to the question about their material status: 59% lack money for the most necessary things, only 3% live under good conditions – it means that they have everything they need in everyday life, but cannot afford to buy, for example, a car or an apartment (Yaremenko, Levzun, 2003: 30).

Linguistic and Cultural Characteristics

We can state that Roma of Ukraine preserve to a great degree their native language and their ethnic cultural traditions. Three languages are mainly used now among Roma: Native (21,266; 44.69%), Ukrainian (10,039; 21.1%) and Russian (6,378; 13.40%); other languages – 9,880 (21%). In comparison with the census of 1989, Roma are losing their positions in Native language (-13.90%), adding in Ukrainian (+8.76%) and in Russian (+3.12%) (Sklyar, 2009: 419). The reasons of such changes can be explained by the following factors: 1) During the Independence time Ukrainian turned into the state language and it opens the ways to education and jobs. 2) Russian is a widespread language in Ukraine and it is often the language of an everyday communication. 3) There is no state school with Roma Native language; only several Sunday-schools are active in Transcarpathia region – the area with the highest concentration of Roma population.

The results of sociological survey well reflect the real picture of circulation of languages in Roma environment: 50% communicate in families in Roma language; 16% do it both in Roma language and the second one (Ukrainian, Russian, Hungarian, Moldavian); 22% communicate only in Ukrainian, 3% - Russian, 2% in Hungarian, 1% in Moldavian. It is to be mentioned that outside of Romani environment the frequency of the use of Roma language is different of that in family: only 32% are using Roma, 14% communicate solely in Roma, 18% (dependently on a situation) are using together with Roma other languages, too (Ukrainian, Russian, Hungarian, Moldavian) (Yaremenko, Levzun, 2003: 88,90).

In Ukraine, Roma are one of the minorities which preserve and cultivate their ethnic traditions and native culture as an element of their mode of life. There are a number of artistic groups, theatres, annual festival of Gipsy music and dance “Amala” in which other nationalities also take part, festival of children’s art activities “Ame Roma” (Kharkiv), Roma “Pap-Jazz-Fest” (Uzhgorod). Media, especially in Gipsy language (there are 4 newspapers), inform the population about cultural events in Roma environment. Museums are good ground for preservation and cultivation of cultural traditions and ethnic heritage of Roma: there are several collections devoted to history and culture of this minority in museums of the Crimea, Transcarpathia and other regions.

Organizational Activities

One of the characteristic features of the ethno-national development of independent Ukraine are the civic activities of minorities. Ethnic and national minorities have established their organizations on ethnic basis. Today, there are over 1,300 of them at national, regional and local level. Roma are not an exception here: 88 Roma units are registered in Ukraine (data of the State Committee on Nationalities and Religion), three of them with all-Ukrainian status: “Congress of Roma of Ukraine”, “Centre for Unity and Protection of Roma Rights”, “All-Ukrainian Legal Roma Association “Chapiche””. There are two organizations which are working at international level – international civic organization of Roma “KETANE”, international charity organization “Roma Women Foundation “Chirikli””. The majority of Roma organizations are active in Transcarpathia, in the places of their compact settlements.

The activities of Roma organizations focus mainly on revival and development of native language, culture, traditions and habits. There is a number of organizations conducting also legal activities targeted at the protection of rights of Roma.

Roma in Interethnic Communication

Speaking about the situation concerning the position of Roma in interethnic relations in Ukrainian society, we have to keep in mind two very important things: 1) self-estimation as an ethnic minority and as an actor of these relations; 2) attitudes of surrounding people towards Roma and their stereotypes. We can get the information for our conclusions from censuses, surveys, monitoring, media and fiction. One has to take into consideration the spaces where interethnic communication with the participation of Roma occurs. These for direct communication are strictly limited by the areas of their compact settlement, mainly in regions mentioned above. The indirect communication does not have so many opportunities to be realized – Roma are not often, especially today, a subject of fiction or films. From time to time, they appear in media in two facets: as criminals and as a very merry people (“carnival minority”).

Attitudes of Ukrainian Population towards Roma

To draw a conclusion concerning measuring the level of tolerance-intolerance in interethnic communication, Ukrainian sociology uses the Bogardus Social Distance Scale, including seven questions. The scale asks people about the extent to which they would be accepting of each group (a score of 1.00 for a group is taken to indicate no social distance; cumulative Guttman scale):

- 1) as close relatives by marriage (score 1.00)
- 2) as my close personal friends (2.00)
- 3) as neighbours on the same street (3.00)
- 4) as co-workers in the same occupation (4.00)
- 5) as citizens in my country (5.00)
- 6) only visitors in my country (6.00)
- 7) would exclude from my country (7.00)

Table 1 shows the data of the monitoring “Ukrainian Society”, which has been conducted at the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (1992-2008):

Table 1: Social Distance of Ukrainian population towards Roma

Questions (see above)	1992	1994	1996	1998	1999	2000	2002	2004	2005	2006	2008
1	2.4	5.0	5.8	4.6	3.4	2.8	0.6	0.6	1.4	1.0	0.5
2	4.3	5.1	5.3	4.3	3.8	3.3	2.0	1.2	1.2	0.7	1.3
3	6.3	6.6	4.6	4.9	4.7	4.8	2.0	3.1	2.7	1.8	3.0
4	3.2	2.9	1.7	1.1	1.7	1.3	1.6	0.7	0.9	0.7	0.7
5	21.2	24.6	29.4	28.2	29.3	28.6	19.2	21.2	22.9	20.0	21.1
6	24.9	20.0	20.2	19.6	23.8	22.5	28.6	25.7	28.5	30.3	29.9
7	33.0	19.5	28.2	32.3	30.2	34.1	42.9	46.0	42.1	45.3	42.6

In the period 1992-2008, the average index of social (sometimes we call it national) distance concerning Ukrainian Roma was from 5.1 to 6.0; for Ukrainians, for example, 1.4 – 2.4; for Russians 1.9 – 3.3; for Byelorussians 2.4 – 4.2; for Poles 3.8 – 5.0; for Germans 4.3 – 5.3; for Turks 4.9 – 5.9; for Arabs 5.1 – 6.0; for Negros 5.9 – 6.0; for Afghans 6.1 – 6.2 (Vorona, Shulga, 2008: 542, 544). It means that Roma are at the bottom of the hierarchy (tolerance-intolerance) of interethnic relations.

Now, we can compare these data with the survey data: 20% have estimated the attitudes to Roma as benevolent; 63% as “normal” - not worse as towards representatives of other nationalities; 15% mean that Roma are treated worse than other minorities. On this basis we can conclude that the monitoring data and survey data correlate, however, we have to mention two more things: 34% of respondents reported that they know about numerous cases when Roma were victims of violence because of their nationality. Among the reasons why Roma children do not attend school is bad treatment by teachers (7%) (Yaremenko, Levzun, 2003: 114, 106).

The analysis of “Roman information” in Ukrainian media leads to the following statement: they built up a rather negative than positive image, giving such information: exclusively negative – 3%; rather negative than positive – 23%; in the same proportions – 51%; rather positive than negative – 6%; exclusively positive – 1% (Yaremenko, Levzun, 2003: 117). From time to time, the media reports about cases of discrimination of Roma in social and political spheres and the media also present hostile

(towards Roma) information and “the language of hostility” is being formed (Skhidno-Yevropejskyj Instytut Rozvytku, 2008).

Prospects for Roma

It is beyond doubt that the situation of Ukrainian Roma must be improved first of all in social and political spheres as well as in respect to their representation in authority bodies. Prospects for development of Roma depend to a great degree on the attitudes, positions of Ukrainian officials and authorities towards this minority which can be declared first of all in the State Policy and can be realized in politics at national, regional and local level. We can state that in the period of existence of Independent Ukraine several measures were undertaken with the aim to support this disadvantaged ethnic community and to open new opportunities for taking more active part in social, cultural, civic-political developments of Ukrainian society.

Following initiatives have been undertaken: 1) The Government adopted a “National Actions Plan of Ukraine” in the Frame of the “Decade of Roma Integration 2005-2015”. 2) The State Committee of Ukraine on Nationalities and Migration (now and Religion) – the central body in executive power of Ukraine responsible for ethnic and migration issues – has developed a special branch “Programme of Social Spiritual Revival of Roma of Ukraine (2003-2006)” with the purpose to create conceptual approaches and ways of integration of Roma into Ukrainian society. 3) In 2004, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine (Parliament) adopted “The Resolution concerning the International Day of Holocaust of Roma”. 4) In 2005, the Committee on Human Rights, National Minorities and Interethnic Relations of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine organized Special Hearings with the title “Contemporary situation of Roma in Ukraine”. 5) The opened hearings “Roma of Transcarpathia: Status, Experience, Solving of problems” (April 2005) took place in Uzhgorod to discuss Roma issues in the region. 6) In 2007, Roma public hearings on effectiveness of implementation of the Programme 2003-2006 took place.

We can find several steps for support of Roma in other official documents and declarations of Ukrainian authorities concerning ethnic minorities in general – “Complex Measures on Realization of State Politics in the Sphere of International Relations and Development of Cultures of Ukraine’s National Minorities in the Period until 2010”; project “Protecting of Roma’s Rights and Providing their Access to Justice” has been carrying out.

Concrete activities and some positive results of them are more evident on the regional level, especially in Transcarpathia region where the majority of Roma population is concentrated and where they live in compact settlements. In this region, Roma are even represented in electoral bodies - 1 at the level of the city Uzhgorod (the capital of the region) and 2 in rural districts of the region. It amounts to 0.3% of all deputies in the region, which, in my opinion, does not correspond to their percentage in the population (1.1%) (Sagan, 2008: 236).

We have to pay attention to the fact that social assistance to Roma families in this region is quite high in comparison to average in Ukraine (10.1%); however, in any case, it is not enough to cover their needs.

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