

ROMANIA

While the number of Roma who have a high-school diploma has doubled in the last 15 years¹, the tone of the articles in the Romanian mainstream media about this ethnic group remained pretty much the same. Between November 2011 and January 2013, The Intercultural Institute Timisoara² monitored the most important online platforms, both national and local, on stories referring to minority groups. A total 2,100 articles about Roma. According to the authors, 801 were positive and neutral and 1299 were negative and incorrect.

The most common violations of the Code of Ethics for Journalists were related to:

- the use of information regarding race, nationality or ethnicity, without any relevance for the story.
- the lack of compliance to the presumption of innocence of those involved in a story.
- the lack statements from all the relevant people.
- the release of unverified information.
- the mixture of opinion and information.

The Roma ethnic group is associated with the real or alleged problems which Romania is facing in the last decades, shows a study released in 2013, called "The Roma in Romania. From Scapegoat to Development Engine"³. For instance, after Netherlands or France opposed Romania's accession to the Schengen area because they considered that the Eastern European country failed to comply with the standard on fighting crime and corruption, a series of articles associated this failure with the presence of Roma beggars in those countries. Most articles are accompanied by racist comments, which are rarely filtered by the online newsrooms.

In the last decade, most media attacks against Roma were linked to a murder which took place on the outskirts of Rome. In October 2007, an Italian woman was murdered close to an illegal camp. Romulus Mailat, a Romanian Roma ethnic, was arrested. His picture, showing a dark haired man with a thick moustache, poorly dressed, was the perfect cliché for the Roma community, so the newspapers and TV stations published it avidly. The next day after the murder, the Italian government gathered in an emergency meeting and proposed strict anti-immigration measures. The story exploded in the Romanian media. The Media Monitoring Agency analysed 78 articles published by three main newspapers between 1 and 10 November 2007, immediately after the murder⁴. The presumption of innocence was needed in 61 articles, but it was violated in 44 stories. The authors used generalisations which stigmatized the Roma and created a clear distinction from the Romanians. The paradox was that the same Romanian press has branded "Gypsy danger" Italian journalists accused of xenophobia and racism: "The Romanian-Italian crisis offered the ideal setting to bring the image of "the honest Romanian" to the collective mind, a victim of xenophobia and/or racism in the Peninsula".

Media sideslips seem to correspond to a high degree of discrimination in the Romanian society. A research published in 2012 by the National Council for Combating Discrimination (CNCD)⁵ found that 15 per cents of total Romanians "feel uncomfortable" in the presence of a Roma. The highest level was recorded among women over 50 years: 49 percent of the total respondents in this category. In the same time, 51 percent of the total Romanians consider discrimination an actual problem in their country. Half of the respondents said that ethnicity is an obstacle when it comes to the access to medical services, justice or education.

¹ "The Roma in Romania. From Scapegoat to Development Engine", coordinators: Gelu Duminica and Ana Ivasiuc, July 2013 (Available at http://www.academia.edu/6037269/IN_ROMANIA_ROMA_From_Scapegoat_to_Development_Engine)

² The results of media monitoring (November 2011 - January 2013) (RO) <http://www.inotherwords-project.eu/content/iit/in-cuvintele-mele/monitonizarea-presei/2013-02>

³http://www.academia.edu/6037269/IN_ROMANIA_ROMA_From_Scapegoat_to_Development_Engine

⁴ "The Mailat Case in Media. Media Analysis Report", Media Monitoring Agency, February 2008

[\(RO\)](http://media.hotnews.ro/media_server1/document-2008-02-20-2408263-0-raport-amp-cazul-mailat.pdf)

⁵http://www.cncd.org.ro/files/file/Raport%20de%20cerchetare%20CNCD_Discriminare.pdf

However, as noted in a report released on June 3, 2014 by the Council of Europe⁶, there were also some steps towards a more tolerant climate of opinion on Roma. In 2007, the Romanian National Television launched a two-year programme meant to promote the Roma culture and to fight against prejudice. In the following year, the Department for Inter-Ethnic Relations and the National Agency for Roma launched another programme, dedicated to the improvement of media reports on this ethnic group. As a possible consequence, between 2007 and 2012, CNCD received 159 complaints on grounds of racial discrimination⁷.

What does it mean being a Roma journalist in such an environment? When **George Lacatus** decided to leave his town and work in Bucharest, his father warned him: "To make it there you must be better than 1000 Romanians at once! » Indeed, George didn't have an easy road: he failed twice at the Military Academy and had to return home and do physical work, including digging ditches for a few months. He was finally admitted in a pedagogical college and he taught English in two schools. George became journalist by accident: he was commenting a movie and a friend proposed him to do it again, on air. The 20 years old was very nervous and nothing came out of that play, but he became interested in radio. He became a reporter and he did shows for young people and started to learn from some of the best Romanian journalists.

In 2007, his investigations about the dirty affairs of the Romanian Lottery troubled the Romanian politics scene and brought him an award from the Romanian Press Club.

In August 2009, he and four other colleagues founded the Association of Roma Journalists in Romania, with the support of the Centre for Independent Journalism. In the letter that announced the establishment of the Association⁸, George mentioned its goals: "*The promotion of quality standards in media accounts of Roma. To this effect, we intend to organize courses for journalists in mainstream media reporting about Roma, in order to eliminate stereotypes and prejudices about Roma. We also want to organize training courses for Roma journalists (...). We want to monitor the media reports on Roma. We will take action if the media materials do not comply with the principles of objective reporting on Roma.*"

George Lacatus is still the president of the organization. He is now working as a correspondent for Digi 24, a new TV station in Bucharest.

FINLAND

Roma in Finland: 10.000

Finnish Roma migrated to Sweden: 3000

In Finland we were especially interested as a possible model when it comes to the reflection of Roma communities and their activities in media.

ROMANIAN ROMA IN FINLAND

In Finland the flow of Romanian Roma to Finland since the country joined the EU has aroused a lot of discussion about the reasons and causes of them arriving to the country. Especially the fact that they beg and collect bottles has been something that has caused a lot of talk in the Finnish society. The public is strongly separated: to those feeling pity

⁶ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance - Report on Romania (fourth monitoring cycle), adopted on March 2014, published in June 2014, Council of Europe (Available at <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/er/Country-by-country/Romania/ROM-CbC-IV-2014-019-ENG.pdf>)

⁷ Ibidem

⁸ "Asociația Jurnaliștilor Romi a făcut primul pas" (ReporterVirtual.ro, July 15, 2009) <http://www.reportervirtual.ro/2009/07/asociatia-jurnalistilor-rromi-a-facut-primul-pas.html>

towards the Romanian Roma and to those who completely disapprove of them being here, out on the streets. The police has constantly given public statement about organized crime and human trafficking and suggested the public not to give any money to the beggars. Only in the beginning of summer 2014 did the Finnish police for the first time admit that most of the Roma beggars on the streets of Finnish cities are here simply to collect money to their families and that they are here by their own will, not forced by another person, but by poverty and the situation in their home communities.

In Helsinki we visited a day centre that helps the Romanian and Bulgarian Roma in Helsinki. The centre, supported and owned by the Helsinki Deaconess Institute, opened in 2008. It serves around 300 Roma unregistered immigrants living in the Helsinki metropolitan area. We discussed with **Anca Enache**, the Romanian researcher coordinating the centre. She told us that the Finnish government didn't have any initiative regarding the situation of the recent Roma migrants, and that only local authorities had to deal with it. It's the way the centre started: from the city hall of Helsinki and with the participation of the Institute. First, mobile teams went to the streets to meet the immigrants who were begging in Helsinki and did reports on their situations. After two years, the Institute saw a clear need for a place where these people can prepare their food, wash their clothes, contact their relatives via internet and be directed to the medical and social services which they need.

Until recently, the waves of immigrants came mainly during summer. Nowadays, they say that they need to stay longer in order to cover the higher living expenses of their families at home and stay even during winter. One immigrant would get around 10-15 euro per day, from begging or selling issues of a special magazine, said Anca Enache. We also discussed with the beneficiaries of the centre. Some of the Roma immigrants complained about what they consider abuses of the Finnish police.

Researchers and journalists that have been investigating on the issue in Finland say that (1) in the beginning when the Roma started arriving to Finland from Romania, the local media wrote about the without actually interviewing them, without giving them a voice. They would be portrayed in pictures taken from a distance and without giving them a name. This way of showing them could be seen as degrading and it could be seen as proof of media's indifferent attitude towards the Roma.

According to the study carried out in April 2012, by one of the main TV stations and media houses in Finland, MTV3 (2) the attitudes of the Finns have become even harder and less tolerant towards the Roma during these last years.

But media has changed the way it writes about the Roma. Reporting on Roma has become deeper and more analytical. And newspapers have been sending their reporters to Romania as well, in order to understand the background better. And writing about Romanian Roma has become less sensational, and media has started to treat them more like any other person.

Still, it is not uncommon that media talks about Roma when they relate to criminal acts, even though, according to the Finnish Juridical Department (Oikeuspoliittinen tutkimuslaitos), in 2010 there were 1 254 foreigners in Finnish prisons and 13 per cent of them were Romanian. None of the crimes committed by them were serious. They mainly commit small theft (3) and (4).

We also met **Risto Uimonen**, journalist and writer, chair of the Council for Mass-Media in Finland. The institution, created 46 years ago, is a self-regulatory organ of the Finnish media, with. It making resolutions, in answer to appeals made by people who feel mistreated by the press. The council would judge the request using the good journalistic guidelines. "A citizen can say: "Look what they did to me. Can you investigate this matter?" (...) We say "guilty" or "not guilty"."

Uimonen said that the Council didn't receive any complaints about the way media covers stories regarding Roma immigrants. "These issues are covered quite normally, in my opinion. (...) They are not forgotten, they are covered, but the coverage is not biased, even though the matter is quite difficult. (...) The view of the press becomes deeper and more sophisticated over time, when they cover things from different perspectives. (...) The overall picture is normal, though there are stories that would need a more thorough investigation," he explained. Uimonen identified two main

issues in Finnish media: "Should we accept beggars coming from Romania in the street? The other big discussion we have, when a group of gypsies from Romania put up their tents here, in some parts of Helsinki?"

FINNISH ROMA IN FINLAND

Mr Uimonen mentioned some problems regarding the way Finnish media is reflecting the local Roma communities. For instance, mentioning the ethnical background of an author of a crime. Still, Mr Uimonen commented he thinks Finnish media nowadays treats Finnish Roma in a respectful way and he did not see any big problem in it. He commented that he thinks this is much linked to the fact that the Finnish Roma are not committing crime in the same way they used to do. Now it is the foreign Roma that do it."

LATSO DIIVES, A ROMA MAGAZINE PUBLISHED BY ROMA FOR ROMA

Latso Diives: language of publication Finnish

Published 2-3 times a year

Copies: 2000 out of those 1800 are sent to private homes in Finland, 400 abroad in countries such as Spain, Sweden, North-America, Croatia and Macedonia.

The magazine is sent to different public offices and bodies in Finland that are managed and frequented by non-Roma as well.

In Finland we met **Satu Bromerus** and **Marita Korp**, two Finnish Roma working for Latso Diives (5), a Roma magazine published with the help of the ministry of education in Finland. We discussed with them about the perception in the Finnish society regarding the old and new Roma communities.

Latso Diives is a magazine financed by Ministry of Education of Finland. It is published 2-3 times a year. The magazine mainly focuses on positive stories on education of the Roma minority in Finland, sharing stories of young Finnish Roma and their studies and career paths and future plans. The magazine also tries to deal with current affairs, but the editors try to connect the issues with educational point of views. There is for example a section in the magazine called "Find your way" where they interview young Roma about their careers and what they study and want to become. According to Mrs Bromerus, the editor-in chief of the magazine and educational advisor of the Roma, the Roma minority still is less educated compared to the mainstream Finns. Mrs Bromerus said that however, there is improvement to be seen and even adult education has taken big steps in the recent years. Mrs Bromerus said they do not have strong connections with Roma coming from other countries than Finland. They participate in international Roma conferences, but on daily basis the connections with foreign Roma are not regular. Mrs Bromerus and Korp said that the Finnish Roma have a very strong identity of being Finnish, apart from being Roma.

Mrs Bromerus said that in her opinion Finnish media does not treat the Romanian Roma very well. The stories that are being portrayed are always focusing on negative sides and telling how the Roma beggars bother the Finns, rather than trying to understand the background and the reasons for why they arrive here. Mrs Bromerus also emphasized the fact that the media is strengthening stereotypes and talking about all of the foreigners and beggars as being Roma, even when it is not the whole truth. Everything negative happening easily becomes related to Romanian Roma.

Mrs Bromerus has an educational background of only high school. She later started working, first as an intern as a school assistant and has developed in her career to become an editor-in chief and educational adviser. Mrs Korp drops out of school in the secondary school because she was the only Roma in her school and she was bullied. She has been working as a Roma trainer and professional adviser and done voluntary work, helping Roma in arranging their housing, child welfare of Roma etc.

Mrs Bromerus said that much of the overall wellbeing of Roma in Finland is related to the fact that the Roma have been actively involved in decision making processes in the country and that the third sector (NGOs) is strong. This is something that makes me draw the conclusion that it influences the media as well. If a minority group has no say in their issues, how could they be included in the media production and defining the image that is given of them?

Mrs Bromerus said that the Association of Finnish Roma was founded in the 60's and Romano Missio (6) that is a religious association was founded already in 1906. In addition to that there are local and regional Roma associations. Hence the third sector of Roma in Finland is relatively strong and the Roma has a say in their issues. They commented that there is another magazine of Roma, called Romano Bodos, published by Romano Missio. It is an NGO magazine and not directed to large public or audiences, the same way Latso Diives is.

How is the Finnish media handling the Finnish Roma according to them?

Mrs Bromerus and Korp said that until a few years ago if there was news about something bad happening, the media always mentioned the fact that they were Roma. Nowadays they go around the fact but it becomes clear from the description (they mention for example that it was a group of people, driving this and this kind of car etc. They are hinting they were Roma, but do not say it directly).

They commented that the media in Finland treats the Finnish Roma quite positively. But Bromerus said that she wonders why the Roma are not being interviewed or talked to about everyday issues and

There is general talk about the society etc. The Roma are always quoted only if it is an issue dealing with Roma. "*As if we did not understand anything else than Roma issues. Why don't they ask us about climate change for example?*", Mrs Bromerus said. She also commented that media is sometimes trying to find sensation and stories where there is none. "There is nothing mystical about us Roma", she said.

Mrs Bromerus and Korp also said that the Roma are not very visible in mainstream media. In another extreme, in some cases, Bromerus said, certain artists profit from the fact of being Roma in order to make themselves special or more noted.

- 1) Rauhanpuolustajat-magazine, 02/2012
- 2) <http://www.mtv.fi/uutiset/kotimaa/artikeli/mtv3-n-kysely-romanikerjalaiset-halutaan-karkottaa-pois-suomesta/1872842>
- 3) Kimmo Oksanen in Rauhanpuolustajat-magazine, 02/2012
- 4) <http://www.optula.om.fi/fi/>
- 5) <http://www.lyseo.edu.ouka.fi/suvaitsevaisuus/vahemmis/romanit/koulutyk.html>
- 6) <http://www.romanomissio.fi>