

SOCIAL AND LIFE ASPECTS OF ROMA MIGRATION

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Submitted: 2019-08-18

Accepted: 2019-12-11

Published online: 2019-12-31

Abstract

The article describes and analyses factors that influence the migration of the Roma from Slovakia to the Czech Republic. The qualitative study was conducted via an interview method and with help of biographic interview techniques with specified target groups. The research set consists of Roma females and males ($N = 12$) who moved from Slovakia to the Czech Republic between 2008–2018. The interviews were recorded on a recording device with the respondents' consent. The results were analysed through open and axial coding in the Atlas.ti program. The results show that the main motivation to leave their current location is a vision of a better life and that the decisions are mostly impulsive. The results also show that the migrants face a number of problems, primarily financial ones. From the migrants' perspective, the Czech Republic constitutes a transit country, but due to financial problems and the language barrier, it also becomes the country of their final stay. After arriving, the migrants often find themselves in an adverse social situation which may lead to living on the street.

Keywords: Coping strategy; Migration; Mobility; Motives for migration; Roma people

INTRODUCTION

Roma migration waves and motives were previously monitored until the 1980s. From the 1990s onwards, no wider studies and mappings of Roma migration have been conducted, although some studies (e.g. Davidová (2010) suggest that migration between the Czech Republic and Slovakia continues to occur and the migration potential in question is certainly not insignificant. Therefore, this article is aimed at describing and analysing the factors which influence the migration of the Roma from Slovakia to the Czech Republic. We also focus on discovering why the Roma families or groups leave the settlements in Slovakia and why others stay (what are the motives/preconditions for leaving and what are the motives/limi-

tations for staying). Our study dealt with uncontrolled migration, over the period of the past ten years, in order to filter out the factors of political and global changes (controlled migration). We also intentionally focus on long-distance migration, as the factors and motives for it are different from those of short-distance migration. We do not exclude seasonal migration, i.e. migration of individuals coming only to work and returning to their families in Slovakia after the season is over.

Theoretic delimitation of migration

Historically, migration is considered a social process which has functioned as one of the strategies to acquire resources for subsistence and energy, to cope with adverse natural influences, to solve social conflicts, and to achieve innovations

(Bade, 2005). Essentially, we can divide migration into voluntary (covered in our article), involuntary, or forced (Janků, 2006).

There are several factors that motivate individuals to migrate. Poverty is one of the most frequent ones; mobility is motivated not only by economic shortage but also by a feeling of discrimination, inequality or symbolic exclusion etc. (Kajanová, 2009; Portes and Rumbaut, 1990). When migrating, individuals or families do not only consider the so-called “job opportunities”. They also take into consideration the improved housing situation, improved conditions and environment, better accessibility to services, and social networks in the new place of residence, etc. (Lux et al., 2006). The question is, however, whether migration works as a strategy to reduce poverty (Snel and Staring, 2001). The consequences of migration differ by social classes (De Haan et al., 2002). Some studies (Snel and Staring, 2001) state that if poor people migrate in order to improve their life conditions, they do not in fact achieve the improvement and stay poor in the new destination as well, or they constitute the poorest group of inhabitants of their new country or locality.

Bakewell (2014) states that at present, there is an infinite number of opinions presented in literature that focus on migration systems – and that they almost cannot be compared, as each of them is based on the context of the individual situations which gave rise to them; on principle, functionalist and functionalist inserted migration can be primarily distinguished.

The functionalist inserted migration is characterized by a self-regulation approach in the social system (Arrighi and Saul, 1968). This system is also supported by Simmons and Guengant (1992), as their analysis observing migration from 1650 to date clearly shows structural elements.

The functionalist migration is characterized by Mabogunje (1970) as the regular and structural exchange of a population between individual localities based on comprehensive integrating elements and particularities of relations and spatial attributes.

If we understand mobility as a coping strategy for excluded persons to improve their life situation (Davies, 2016), then we must differentiate between whether it is (1) a survival strategy, i.e. to satisfy the basic needs, or (2) a

strategy aimed at a long-lasting improvement of the situation – so-called “social mobility strategy”. The survival strategies are focused on the present (“here and now”), on the personal needs of the persons own needs and activities related to faster earning (primarily in grey economics), and they also reflect the values and social patterns of behaviour of local communities. The social mobility strategies are related to the migrating person’s wider environment (the whole family); the activities are focused on the future and are of a more permanent character (e.g. the effort to provide the children with a higher-quality education).

Distance is another factor of migration to be considered. Long-distance migration is usually motivated by job opportunities and by the solving of adverse economic situations, while short-distance migration is more frequently motivated by factors related to the life cycle theory – birth of a child, detaching from parents, marriage, etc. (Owen and Green, 1992).

The new migration economy (Stark and Bloom, 1985) understands migration not as an individual act but as a process of decision-making of larger social units, primarily of the family. It also works not only with the calculation of profits and losses from migration but also discusses potential risks (Henig, 2007). The said costs and potential obstacles related to migration cannot be ignored, as moving house requires increased financial costs related for example to rental or purchase of a flat/house in the new locality, costs for the actual moving, etc. (Lux et al., 2006). Those who have functional social contacts in the place of destination migrate within social networks. The theory of social networks (Hugo, 1981) is based on family, friendly and other bonds which can be understood as a form of social capital, as it provides important sources of information and different forms of social and financial help, which are crucial in the decision-making process of whether to migrate or not. The networks also minimize the risks and difficulties related to immigration (Lux et al., 2006). However, migration costs are not only limited to the above stated items; they are actually higher. They include also the so-called “psychological migration costs” related to the separation of the individual from the (broader) family, friends and familiar environment; the importance of family and

friends grows with increasing inaccessibility to the original region (Lux et al., 2006).

Cultural capital is another variable that must be considered; it is manifested by gender aspects – men migrate for work most often, while women tend to stay at home with the children (Chant, 1992). In the area of human capital (from the perspective of age), De Haan et al. (2002) state that younger adults migrate the most; from the perspective of personality characteristics, innovative and dynamic people are those who migrate the most (Skeldon, 2002).

Migration of the Roma – historical context and starting points

The issue of migration of the Roma (mainly in the 20th century after World War II) has been primarily covered by Davidová (2004). She describes several Roma migration waves from Slovakia to the Czech Republic, and includes the motives of the migration. The first great migration wave can be seen in the post-war period; not only the nomadic Roma but also the traditionally settled Roma groups and families migrated. This wave was primarily motivated by industrialization and the developing new labour-social positions, as well as the ongoing urbanization which provided the Roma with an opportunity of settling in an urban or another environment that was not so secluded. The above stated better social position was usually more determinative for migration than the economic motives (Davidová, 2004).

The number of Roma in the Czech Republic gradually grew in the course of the post-war years and, due to the migration movement, the proportion of their distribution in the Czech and Slovak parts of Czechoslovakia changed year by year. For example, from 1966 to 1968, in Slovakia there were 165 thousand Roma and they usually lived in crowded Roma settlements, while in the territory of the now Czech Republic, the number grew from 56 thousand Roma in 1966 to 61 thousand Roma in 1968 – and they were rather dispersed among the rest of the population (Davidová, 2004). Nečas (2002) states that the migration from Slovakia to Czechia was mainly motivated by escaping from a deep economic crisis in Slovakia; in late 1973, 44,705 persons from a total of 179,000 Slovak Roma still lived without job opportunities in 6,195 primitive shacks (Nečas, 2002).

In Bohemia, the Roma are concentrated in industrial areas and in the borderlands (Davidová, 2004). These regions provide them with stable work, mostly hard auxiliary work, and in many cases with higher quality housing (despite living in old buildings or the lowest-category flats, the housing quality is better than in their original locations). These regions also have better municipal sanitary facilities and more social activities (Nečas, 2002). Additionally, young Roma men learned about new economic and social opportunities during their military service and, after finishing there, they often migrated with their families and sometimes with other relatives as well (Nečas, 2002). Jurová (1993) and Haišman (1999) add that it is still being debated to what extent voluntary, innovative migration (with families leaving spontaneously for better living conditions) took place and to what extent these migrations happened as a result of violent migration – which aimed at settling the Roma among the majority population. The way to reach this goal lay in the abolition of rural settlements and parts of settlements with a high concentration of Roma in Slovakia.

The migration decreased around the 1970s, although some movement persisted (Davidová, 2004). In the 1980s, the urbanization accelerated again, primarily in Bohemia where the Roma lived in towns in more than 80% of cases. The number of the Roma in Czechia grew from 1970–1980 even more than in Slovakia, specifically by 47%, while in Slovakia the number rose by 25.5% (Davidová, 2004). Víšek (1999) states that Czech industrial cities absorbed approximately 100,000 new Roma from 1945 to 1992. These Roma now live in the Czech Republic and their number has at least doubled due to the high natality.

Despite the higher migration to the Czech Republic, we can also observe examples of migration from Czechia back to Slovakia (Víšek, 1999). Some families only travelled to Bohemia (primarily to industrial regions offering higher earnings opportunities) in order to earn money to be able to build a house in Slovakia where they had bought land. (Davidová, 2010). Other motives were a widowed woman returning back to her parent's or the migration of sick parents to their relatives in Slovakia (Uherek and Weinerová, 2005). Moreover, in-

dividuals and families whose expectations of easy earnings in Bohemia or in Moravia were not met, and those who could not adapt in the new environment, find a better housing or a stable job, returned (Davidová, 2004).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research set consisted of 12 communication partners from among Roma males and females who have moved from Slovakia to the Czech Republic – specifically to South Bohemian Region – over a recent period of ten years (i.e. during 2008–2018). The respondents were acquired with the snowball sampling method; we tried to achieve the highest possible variability based on socio-demographic factors (i.e. age, gender, locality, socio-economic status).

The size of the set was determined by the information saturation. It included eight males and four females with an average age of 36 years, the youngest being 25 and the oldest 63. The respondents were currently living in the cities of Písek, České Budějovice and Tábor and had come from the regions of Central and Eastern Slovakia (Spišská Nová Ves, Bardejov, Vranov nad Topľou). The research was done through biographic interviews; we asked about the following thematic groups and allowed the communication partners to freely narrate:

- original locality;
- motivation for leaving;
- planning of leaving;
- choice of the place of migration;
- migration companions;
- capital needed for leaving – resources of support;
- motives of other Roma people to stay in the original locality.

The interviews were recorded on a voice recorder with the respondents' consent and afterwards transcribed verbatim. The interviews took 30–90 minutes. Then the data were encoded in the Atlas.ti program and processed by axial coding.

RESULTS

Diagram 1 (on the next page) shows the codes and categories acquired within the data analysis. The categories are based on the thematic groups discussed with the partners.

Motive for and planning of leaving

There are many motivations for leaving the original locality. The first motive consisted of the vision of better housing or a better life: *"We are living in a housing estate, the housing is much better here"* (IN5), *"... just bad situation in everything"* (IN4), *"And they heard that people in Switzerland and England live well"* (IN9). This motive is related to the fact that an overwhelming majority of the respondents come from Roma settlements where poverty and socially excluded persons accumulate and there are a lack of jobs: *"There is no job, nobody will hire you, the situation is worse there. The situation here in the Czech Republic is not the best, but compared to Slovakia, it is definitely better"* (IN12). The analysis showed discrimination as another motive for some respondents: *"We were discriminated against there, the children had problems at school"* (IN4). But the respondents also report specific motives, like domestic violence: *"... I had another guy... he tormented me, destroyed my nerves, so I left. It wasn't worth living with him"* (IN6), or attacks by public servants, specifically by the police: *"His brother was beaten down by the police at one event, we couldn't withstand it any more..."* (IN4). In connection with this, it must be mentioned that a great number of the respondents had not planned to leave, but decided impulsively because of their current situation. Only one respondent stated she had planned to leave for one month; but in her case the motive was a lack of money, which she solved by social benefits, specifically unemployment benefits which were only paid in the subsequent month: *"Nothing, I just decided to leave when I got the unemployment benefit. I took my money and left"* (IN10).

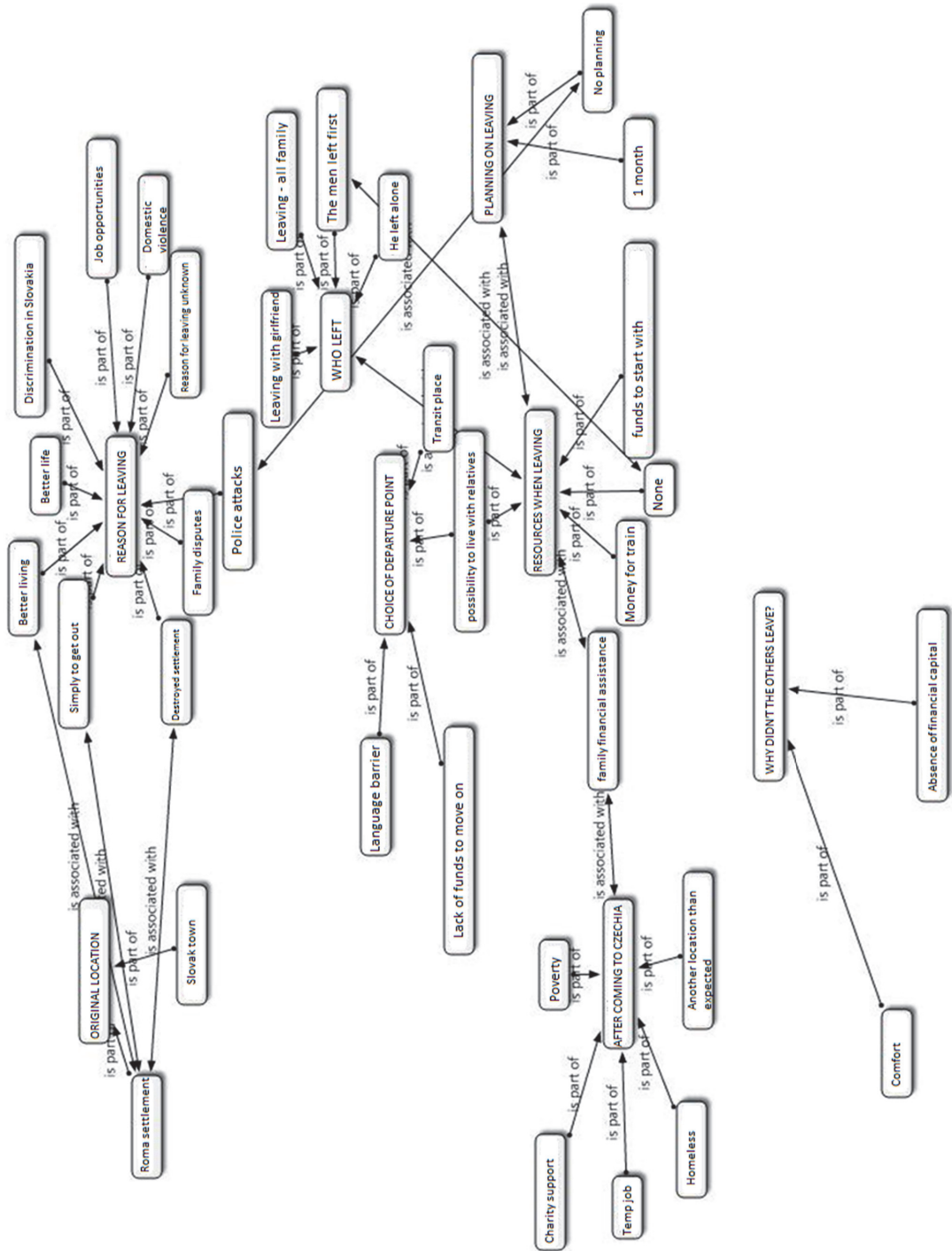


Diagram 1 – Axial coding results

Sources needed for leaving

For the respondents interested in leaving, the financial situation and access to funds or help were diverse. Nevertheless, the greatest problem consisted in lack of funds to travel and to start life in the new country. The respondents solved the situation differently, but most frequently they got help from their families: *“When our cousin, who lives in England, sent us some money, we had money to travel and to start a life here in the Czech Republic”* (IN3). One of the resources related to the family was housing. *“We were helped by our uncle who allowed us to live with him and even took some of us to work with him”* (IN1). On the other hand, some respondents did not have such opportunity; leaving was more difficult for them.

The number of people who left their original locality ranged from one person to whole families. In one case, in the 1960s, a whole Roma settlement moved: *“It seems that a whole settlement moved to the Písek Region”* (IN2). A specific case is the departure of men whose families followed later: *“In one family, the men came to find a job, they succeeded and were gradually followed by their whole family”* (IN2). When asked why the other family members or settled inhabitants did not leave, the respondents mentioned a lack of funds or laziness and disinterest in solving their situation.

Choice of place of migration and the situation after arrival

Although the Czech Republic may seem to be the target country of the migrants, some cases were different. The Czech Republic was a transit country for them to travel to where they have family or friends (e.g. England). However, the respondents came up against some obstacles that prevented them from travelling further, for example lack of funds or the language barrier: *“They considered England, but they did not have the money for the flight ticket, and they can make themselves better understood in the Czech Republic”* (IN7). After arriving in the Czech Republic, the respondents faced a number of problems, which included poverty and homelessness: *“I was like a homeless person in Prague”* (IN7). The Czech Charity and its social and other services provided them with considerable interventions: *“Yes, I visited charities. Yes,*

they registered me as homeless. They have known me there for years. I was out on the streets for twelve years, so the social workers helped me, yes, I went there to have a bath, to get some clothes, to eat” (IN7). The respondents tried to solve their situation by self-help, through different temporary jobs and extra income which brought them at least enough money for sustenance: *“The guys went to help on building sites, they were offered that job and made use of it”* (IN1), *“I went to do some temporary work and earned money for sleeping”* (IN10).

DISCUSSION

In many regards, the results coincided with the migration theories, but they also brought some particularities and interesting contrasts. The migration motives were not exclusively economic – as Massey et al. (1993) describe – but were rather based on the vision of a better social status in the new place of residence (Portes and Rumbaut, 1990). The decision to migrate was motivated by emotional rather than rational impulses. It was not based on specific plans, the respondents did not prepare for it or had developed strategies needed for leaving, such as selecting a specific destination, finding housing, or job opportunities, etc. (Anderson and Smith, 2001). It was rather based on the feeling of “not being where I am now” and on the vision of a better life somewhere else. That may be the reason for spontaneous departures, from one day to another in some cases. Interestingly, the respondents reported different forms of sufficient capital (i.e. financial and social networks in the destination of migration) as a precondition for leaving (Fleischer, 2007). However, they often did not have such capital available, and the experiences of the respondents show that despite spontaneous migration being possible, it is complicated and it most likely connected to challenging beginnings in the new locality, where at the start, they did not escape poverty and had to rely on social services in the new location – a need that they still have until today. Before leaving, the respondents had expected more favourable life conditions (economic, working, housing conditions). Nevertheless, because of their social contacts among their relatives living in social-

ly excluded localities, they landed among the poorest people in the Czech Republic. That is the principle of the social component of social exclusion where the bonds between the excluded and the rest of the society are severed (Barnes et al., 2002). When making a general assessment, it must be stated that, from the perspective of quality of life, life with the lowest social status in the Czech Republic is still more favourable than life in a Roma settlement in Slovakia (Nečas, 2002).

The Czech Republic was not perceived as the dream destination by the respondents; they chose it because of better accessibility with respect to funds and language barriers (compared to the United Kingdom etc). The Czech Republic is described as a transit country, which means that the respondents are considering leaving in the future. Arltová and Langhamrová (2010) state that the Czech Republic was considered a transit country in the beginning, but over the course of time it became the target country of the migrants.

The co-migrants of the respondents were reduced to lists of persons in their narratives. The lists were completely individual and related to the specific cases and migration opportunities. They did not constitute a crucial category.

CONCLUSIONS

The article shows that the migration of the Roma between the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic has been a frequent phenomenon throughout history, and we predict that the situation will not be different in the future. At the same time, it is possible to identify a number of (a) motives which have led the said target group to migrate – e.g. the effort to improve their social status, to improve their socio-economic background, etc., as well as a number of (b) circumstances needed for the individuals or whole families to pluck up the courage to move – for example the need for (social, family, etc.) support in the new destination, adequate amount of funds for the journey, etc.

To further consider the topic, it would certainly be interesting to focus more intensively on the target group of the people staying in the settlements and not migrating. By focusing on the motives of the other Roma to stay in the Slovak settlements, the extent of this study was reduced to the subjective perceptions of the respondents approached by us. One of the reasons the respondents mentioned for staying was the lack of capital for leaving. We have considered persons staying in Roma settlements in Slovakia, but also consider leaving as a potential topic for further studies.

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