



## Article

# The Roma Population: Migration, Settlement, and Resilience

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**Abstract:** The Roma population—with a unique history marked by migration, settlement issues, and ongoing resilience—has always faced significant social marginalization and has often been subjected to forced migration. Despite being one of the largest and most diverse ethnic groups in Europe, Roma continue to face systemic discrimination and social exclusion, leading to poor outcomes in education, employment, health, and housing. This article analyses the migration pathways, settlement experiences, and persistent obstacles faced by Roma. We argue that removing historical and systemic barriers to create a more equitable and welcoming environment for the Roma community is their right. The resilience of the Roma community in the face of adversity is a testament to their cultural strength and adaptability. This research aims to document these aspects and thus provide a basis for policies that promote social inclusion, equality, and respect for cultural diversity.

**Keywords:** social inclusion; migration; gypsy; resilience; Roma; Romania

## 1. Introduction

The Roma are Europe's largest ethnic minority, with an estimated 10–12 million people spread across the continent. They have a long history of migration and settlement and have shown remarkable resilience despite centuries of marginalization, discrimination, and social exclusion ([European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights \(FRA\) 2020](#)). Despite these challenges, the Roma have shown remarkable resilience. They have preserved their cultural identity and traditions while adapting to the changing sociopolitical landscape. The Roma people migrated to Europe from northern India over a thousand years ago ([Kenrick 2007](#)). Since then, they have led a nomadic life, travelling across Europe in search of work, shelter, and safety. Over time, their migration patterns changed, and many Roma communities settled in cities or specific camps. These shifts were often influenced by socioeconomic pressures and government policies aimed at either assimilating or containing them ([Crowe 1994](#)).

Researching the migration, settlement, and resilience of Roma populations demands attention to the historical and contemporary experiences of the largest and often marginalized ethnic minority in Europe ([Gheorghe et al. 2016](#)). By exploring what causes Roma migration, how they form communities and how they deal with challenges, we gain deeper insights into the social, economic, cultural and political contexts that shape their lives. This understanding serves as a basis for policies and practices aimed at combating discrimination and promoting the integration of the Roma population and helps develop policies and strategies that support their rights and well-being ([Vanko 2015](#)). Some existing research highlights the barriers Roma face in integrating into society, including difficulties in accessing education, healthcare, and employment. Understanding this as well enables policy makers to develop targeted solutions that promote inclusion and equality. This could mean developing educational programs that take into account the unique cultural context of Roma, improving access to healthcare, or creating employment opportunities to reduce



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unemployment within the Roma community. This research lays the foundation for policies that not only address immediate needs, but also work towards long-term social acceptance and equality.

The term “Roma” is a complex and contested identifier that has been constructed and reconstructed throughout history. It is often used to describe a diverse group of people with distinct linguistic, cultural, and historical experiences, primarily across Europe. However, Roma people themselves have rarely been the ones to record or shape their own historical narratives, which has resulted in an external construction of their identity by dominant societies. The absence of Roma voices in historiography—a field concerned with how history is written and by whom—means that the Roma’s lived experiences have often been filtered through the lenses of power, prejudice, and misrepresentation. Historiography traditionally privileges written records, often overlooking oral histories and marginalized voices, which complicates the accurate representation of Roma histories (Mirga-Wójtowicz et al. 2023). Given this historiographical context, the portrayal of Roma people in history is often a product of external interpretation rather than self-representation. This is evident in the way that Roma identity has been defined by outsiders, leading to essentialist or homogenized views that overlook the diversity within the Roma population. Historians such as Ian Hancock and scholars of Roma studies emphasize the need to decolonize Roma historiography by integrating Roma voices and perspectives into historical writing. Our position in this discussion aligns with this approach, advocating for a more inclusive historiography that challenges dominant narratives and allows for Roma people to shape their own histories and identities. Through this lens, the term “Roma” should be understood not as a fixed label but as a dynamic and multifaceted identity that reflects the group’s complex history of migration, persecution, and resilience (I. Hancock 2003; Marsh and Strand 2006).

We argue that the historical and contemporary experiences of Roma migration and settlement are characterized by a combination of socioeconomic factors, political processes, and cultural dynamics. Despite systemic discrimination and social exclusion, the Roma community has demonstrated remarkable resilience by relying on its cultural heritage, social networks, and collective action to cope with and overcome adversity. This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the migration history, settlement patterns, and resilience strategies of the Roma population by highlighting the challenges and strengths for a more inclusive policies and practices that uphold their rights, dignity, and well-being in Europe and beyond.

The history of Roma, also known as the Romani people, spans several eras characterized by complexity and resilience. Scholars have argued over the origins of the Roma, but there is consensus that they originated in India and have lived in Europe since the 11th century. From the late 14th century, Roma in Europe faced skepticism and hostility and endured persecution, forced assimilation, and genocide, particularly during the Second World War, when hundreds of thousands fell victim to the Holocaust (Zimmermann 2007). Despite these adversities, Roma continued to adapt, travelled further, and tried to settle down with remarkable resilience.

Throughout history, the integration of Roma was hindered by coercive practices that determined their migration routes and destinations. The Roma’s history of centuries of slavery, persecution, and social exclusion, together with their traditional values and nomadic past, has contributed to their marginalization in Romanian society (Yıldız and De Genova 2018). To shed light on this history, we provide a brief historical overview of the arrival of Roma in Europe, followed by a detailed examination of the Roma, covering 400 years of slavery from the late 14th century to the present.

### *The Origins and Migration*

Today, the Roma population numbers around 10 to 12 million people worldwide, with significant concentrations in Europe, North and South America, and Australia (Kalaydjieva et al. 2001). “Romani” refers to the ethnic group of the Roma people, while “Romanian”

pertains to the citizens of Romania and their language. “Romani” is not related to the country of Romania, despite the similarity in terms.

In countries such as Bulgaria, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, and the Slovak Republic, Roma make up between 6 and 9 percent of the population, a proportion that is expected to increase due to population growth and the declining birth rate in the majority population (Slovakia). With 1 to 2 million people, Romania is home to the highest absolute number of Roma in Europe, followed by Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia, Montenegro, the Slovak Republic, and Turkey, each with between 400,000 and one million inhabitants. Spain, France, Italy, and Germany also have significant Roma populations, although estimates vary (Ringold et al. 2005).

Today, the term “Roma” is favored by advocates over the term “gypsy”, as the latter has intrusive and negative connotations. Most international organizations and institutions, as well as their counterparts in several countries, have adopted the term “Roma” (Toma 2019). Therefore, we predominantly use the term “Roma” and less often “Gypsy” (when context demands) to refer to their history.

The origins of the Roma in Europe are disputed (I. Hancock 2003). According to historical records, they migrated to Europe in waves from northern India between the ninth and fourteenth centuries (Figure 1). Studies of Romani culture have revealed significant similarities between Romani and Indian culture, such as the caste system and endogamous customs, i.e., exclusive marriage within Romani sub-ethnic groups (Melegh et al. 2017, p. 1; Fraser 1992). For centuries, however, Gypsies were thought to have originated in Egypt, which explains the similarity of their linked first names in many European countries, including Gitans in France, Gitanos in Spain, and Egiftos in Greece (Frère 1973, p. 23). While some Roma were nomadic, the majority in central and eastern Europe have become sedentary over time, some during Ottoman rule and others more recently (Ringold et al. 2005). They were traditionally nomadic, travelling in caravans of single or multiple families and living in rural camps on the outskirts of towns or rural areas, working in the informal sector and performing menial labor (Martínez-Cruz et al. 2016; I. Hancock 1987; Sanborne 1996, p. 104). The many Gypsy tribes were traditionally categorized according to their respective occupations, such as blacksmiths, coppersmiths, horse traders, or artists (Minority Rights Group International 2008).

The origins and migration path of the Roma population are rooted in a rich and complex history spanning over a millennium. Scholars largely agree that the Roma, also known as Romani or Gypsies, originated in northern India and probably migrated from this region around the 11th century (Kenrick 2007). The reasons for their migration from India are varied and range from economic opportunities to social and political unrest. The Roma embarked on a migratory journey and gradually spread across Europe and beyond, with migration routes branching out into different regions over time. Some historians believe that they were taken as slaves by Mahmud of Ghazni during the advance of the Ghaznavid Empire into India around the tenth century (Martínez-Cruz et al. 2016), which led to the Gypsies eventually finding their way to Afghanistan, Persia, Byzantium, and finally Europe (Shastri 2007). The Romani, on the other hand, began to leave India around 1000 years ago. They probably fled to escape the invasion of the Afghan general Mahmud of Ghazni in the early 11th century. Mahmud’s troops most likely expelled the Romani from northern India into present-day Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran (Crowe and Kolsti 1991).

Some scholars suggest that there may have been an early Roma presence in colonial America. Two mixed-race groups, the Melungeon people of southwestern Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky, and the Lumbee Indians of eastern North and South Carolina, have intrigued historians due to their ambiguous origins (Stachowicz 2013). Some theories propose that these groups might have links to early Roma settlers, although their exact ancestry remains a subject of debate and ongoing research.



**Figure 1.** Map showing the movement of the Romani people between approximately 1000 and 1500 CE. Source: (King 2023).

The migration process of the Roma population is characterized by a combination of voluntary movement, forced displacement, and nomadic lifestyle. Initially, Roma communities travelled through Persia and Armenia, eventually reaching the Byzantine Empire and the Balkans in the late Middle Ages (Fonseca 1995). Subsequent waves of migration led to Roma settling in various European countries and adapting to local conditions while maintaining their own cultural practices and identity. Throughout their history, they have been subject to widespread displacement, persecution, and discrimination, contributing to fragmented settlement patterns and ongoing struggles for integration and social inclusion (Liégeois 1994; Chatteraj 2022). This systematic oppression began as early as the Middle Ages, when many European regions enacted laws specifically targeting Roma, restricting their freedom of movement and ordering their expulsion (Kenrick 2007). In the 16th century, for example, several European countries, including England and France, issued orders for the expulsion of Roma communities, often with violent consequences (Fraser 1992).

As a result of these expulsions and persecutions, Roma settlements were dispersed throughout Europe, leading to the formation of different regional groups with different cultural practices and languages. This fragmentation also increased social marginalization, as isolated Roma communities were pushed to the margins of society and discriminated against in education, employment, and housing (Liégeois 1994). Attempts to integrate the Roma population often took the form of forced assimilation policies that further eroded their cultural identity and exacerbated social divisions.

These historical patterns of displacement and discrimination continue to affect the experiences of Roma today, reinforcing negative stereotypes and hindering their access to basic rights and services. Consequently, overcoming these persistent challenges requires a comprehensive approach that recognizes this history while promoting social inclusion and equality. Despite these adversities, Roma communities have maintained their mobility, resilience, and culture, contributing to the diversity in European societies.

Roma history and origins have been constructed and interpreted in multiple ways, often by external researchers using genetic, linguistic, and social frameworks. Genetic research, as reviewed by Kalaydjieva et al. (2001) and Ena et al. (2022), has traced the origins of the Roma people to northern India, based on specific markers found in Y-DNA,



mitochondrial DNA, and autosomal DNA studies. These studies emphasize a shared ancestry among the Roma, while also highlighting the complex patterns of migration and admixture that occurred as the Roma dispersed across Europe. This approach seeks to define Roma identity in biological terms, which can at times conflict with the group's self-identification and cultural diversity.

Linguistics has played a role in constructing Roma history by linking the Romani language to Indian roots, further supporting the idea of a south Asian origin. Social construct narratives, however, focus on how Roma identity has been shaped by the external pressures of marginalization, persecution, and assimilation in Europe. These narratives emphasize that Roma identity is not solely defined by genetic or linguistic heritage but by the lived experiences of the people themselves (Ena et al. 2022). Together, these differing interpretations illustrate the contested nature of Roma history, as it is frequently studied and defined by "others" through scientific and social lenses, rather than by Roma themselves.

Some other evidence suggests that the Roma migrated to the Byzantine Empire in the 11th century, where they were referred to as "Atsinganoi" or "Athinganoi". From there, they spread throughout the Byzantine Empire, eventually migrating to the Balkans in the late 14th and 15th centuries. By the 15th century, the Roma had migrated to the Balkans, where they established significant communities in what is now Romania, Bulgaria, and Serbia (Saitta 2010). They also migrated to Hungary and Poland and reached Spain and Portugal in the 16th century. In the 18th and 19th centuries, they continued to migrate across Europe, establishing significant communities in Russia, France, and the United Kingdom. In the 19th century, they also began to migrate to North and South America, establishing communities in the United States, Canada, Brazil, and Argentina (Kocsis 2004; Kemény and Janky 2005; Hablicsek 2008). Although scholars argue about the exact date of the Roma's arrival in Europe, it is certain that they had settled in Europe by the 14th century. Some Roma communities settled on the outskirts of existing towns, while others maintained a nomadic lifestyle. Notable records show Roma in Crete in 1322, in Serbia in 1348, in Wallachia around 1370, in Germany in 1407, in Zurich in 1418, in France in 1419, in Italy in 1422, and in Spain in 1425 (Martínez-Cruz et al. 2016; Melegh et al. 2017; Dická 2021; Lewy 2000; Strom 1993). These early settlements laid the foundations for the diverse and dispersed presence of Roma across Europe, a pattern that continues to characterize their community today.

The origins of the Roma have been the subject of numerous studies, often rooted in linguistic, genetic, and social research. Yaron Matras, in *Romani: A Linguistic Introduction* (Matras 2002) and *The Palgrave Handbook of Romani Language and Linguistics* (Matras and Tenser 2020), emphasizes the linguistic evidence tracing the Roma back to northern India, a perspective supported by the strong connections between the Romani language and Indo-Aryan languages. Linguistic approaches thus provide a structured framework for understanding the migratory paths of the Roma, cementing a historical narrative of dispersion and settlement across Europe. Similarly, genetic studies, as discussed earlier, add another layer of complexity, revealing shared ancestry markers that point to India as the likely origin of the Roma people. However, these biologically grounded approaches do not fully account for the ways in which Roma identity has been socially and culturally constructed across different contexts.

Social construct narratives offer a counterbalance to biologically deterministic views, focusing on how the Roma have been racialized as a community of difference. Authors such as Acton (2016) and Kligman (2001) argue that these constructions are often external impositions, shaped by popular racism and political discourses that further marginalize Roma populations. Tremlett (2009) highlights the importance of embracing the hybridity and heterogeneity within Roma identities, arguing against monolithic portrayals. These perspectives emphasize the importance of examining how Roma identities are socially produced and contested within broader systems of power and inequality. In this paper, we adopt this social constructivist approach, as it allows for a more nuanced exploration

of Roma identity that goes beyond genetic and linguistic determinism, recognizing the complex sociohistorical forces at play in shaping Roma history and culture.

While some of these issues are touched upon in the broader discussion, the historical construction of the Roma, particularly through the lenses of racialization and social marginalization, remains underdeveloped in many existing narratives. This paper seeks to expand on this critical area by engaging more deeply with the ways in which Roma history has been shaped by others and how Roma communities have navigated and resisted these externally imposed identities. Through this lens, our aim is to contribute to a more holistic understanding of Roma identity that acknowledges both the historical and contemporary dimensions of their lived experiences.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Our methodological approach began with a comprehensive literature review to investigate the migration, settlement, and resilience of the Roma population. We examined a broad range of scholarly articles, books, historical records, and other academic sources. Initially, we used broad search terms like “Roma migration history”, “Roma settlement patterns”, and “Roma resilience” across academic databases such as JSTOR. This initial search yielded a vast array of sources, which we subsequently narrowed down based on relevance, publication quality, and depth of content.

Our approach was rooted in a thematic literature review that aimed to investigate the migration, settlement, and resilience of the Roma population. To conduct this review, we implemented a systematic search strategy across several academic databases, including JSTOR, Scopus, and Google Scholar. We drew on the literature in disciplines of history, sociology, anthropology, and political science, focusing on peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and historical records. Specific journals included *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Romani Studies*, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, and *Social Science & Medicine*. The rationale behind this selection was to gather cross-disciplinary perspectives that provide a comprehensive understanding of the Roma’s complex sociohistorical context. We used broad Boolean search operators like “Roma and migration”, “Roma and settlement patterns”, and “Roma and resilience” to refine our search. This approach allowed for us to capture a wide range of studies that highlighted the multifaceted nature of Roma identity and history.

To ensure the literature review was thorough and credible, we established clear inclusion and exclusion criteria. Articles were included if they were peer-reviewed, focused on Roma history or resilience, and contributed new insights to migration patterns or socioeconomic conditions. Sources were excluded if they lacked a direct connection to these themes, were outdated, or were not from reputable academic publishers. In total, we reviewed approximately 85 journal articles and books. These were classified using a thematic analysis approach, categorizing the sources into three key themes: migration, settlement, and resilience. This classification process allowed for an in-depth exploration of enduring inequalities faced by Roma populations and how these challenges have shaped their identity over time. While the review did not seek to test a hypothesis, transparency in our approach ensures that the conclusions drawn from the literature are well supported by the existing body of scholarly work, giving readers greater confidence in our findings.

To refine our focus, we concentrated on the literature that specifically addressed the Roma’s unique migration patterns, reasons for settlement, and their resilience in the face of adversity. We prioritized peer-reviewed articles and respected academic publishers to ensure a high level of credibility. We also focused on cross-disciplinary studies that provided a more comprehensive understanding of the Roma experience, incorporating insights from history, sociology, anthropology, and political science.

Once we compiled a curated list of relevant sources, we applied thematic analysis to identify key concepts and recurring themes. We organized our findings around the three primary concepts: migration, settlement, and resilience. Migration-related sources detailed the Roma’s historical movements across Europe, emphasizing forced expulsions and nomadic trends. The settlement-focused literature explored the adaptation and integration of

Roma communities within various regions, noting the socioeconomic challenges they encountered. Finally, the resilience theme highlighted how the Roma have managed systemic discrimination, preserving their culture and identity despite persistent marginalization.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Underlying Theories

Theorizing the interplay between migration, settlement, and resilience in relation to the Roma population involves understanding how historical migration patterns have influenced settlement decisions and how resilience has enabled Roma to overcome persistent discrimination and social exclusion. Migration theories, such as push/pull factors and forced migration, help to explain the historical migrations of Roma across Europe, which were often triggered by displacement, persecution and socioeconomic pressures (Massey et al. 1993). Settlement theories that focus on integration and social stratification show that Roma communities often settled on the margins of established societies where they faced systemic marginalization (Castles et al. 2014). Despite these challenges, the concept of resilience is key to understanding how Roma have maintained their cultural identity and continuity. From a sociological perspective, resilience encompasses the ability of Roma to adapt, preserve their traditions and build supportive community networks in the face of adversity (Luthar et al. 2000). The overlap of these concepts suggests a dynamic process in which migration leads to settlement patterns characterized by social exclusion, while resilience enables Roma to overcome barriers and persist as a distinct ethnic group (Matras 2015). This theoretical framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the historical and contemporary experiences of Roma and emphasizes their continued resilience amid ongoing migration and settlement challenges.

Understanding the migration, settlement and resilience of Roma populations demands a multi-layered theoretical framework that draws on a variety of academic disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and migration studies. Several established theories and conceptual frameworks offer valuable insights into the complicated dynamics that shape the Roma experience. Theories of migration patterns, such as push/pull factors and transnationalism, help to explain the historical and contemporary cross-border movements of Roma (Massey et al. 1993). Sociological perspectives, particularly those focusing on marginalization and social stratification, shed light on the challenges Roma face in integrating into mainstream society (Castles et al. 2014).

Anthropological approaches that address cultural identity and adaptation are critical to understanding how Roma have maintained their unique heritage amidst assimilation pressures (Okely 1994). These interdisciplinary approaches allow for a more nuanced analysis of the historical trajectory of Roma by emphasizing the interplay between social exclusion, resilience and cultural continuity (Stewart 1997). By integrating these different theoretical perspectives, researchers can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complex factors driving Romani migration and settlement, as well as the enduring resilience that has characterized the Romani community over the centuries. This holistic approach not only deepens academic discourse, but also provides a basis for addressing the broader societal implications of Roma marginalization and promoting greater inclusion and equity (Matras 2015).

The theory of transnationalism emphasizes the flowing social, economic, and cultural connections across national borders (Glick Schiller et al. 1995). In the context of the Roma population, transnationalism theory emphasizes the importance of maintaining links with their home country while actively participating in social and economic activities in host countries. Roma communities often engage in transnational networks to support each other, preserve their culture, and capitalize on economic opportunities, which contributes to their resilience to migration-related challenges. Intersectionality theory explores how multiple dimensions of social identity, such as ethnicity, gender, and class, intersect and shape individuals' experiences of discrimination and marginalization (Crenshaw 1989). For the Roma population, intersectionality theory helps to understand how factors such

as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and historical oppression intersect and influence their migration patterns, settlement experiences, and resilience strategies. It highlights the complex and interconnected nature of Roma identity and the need for holistic approaches to address their multiple needs and vulnerabilities.

Structural violence theory examines how social structures, institutions, and power dynamics perpetuate systemic inequalities and injustices (Farmer 2004). In the context of the Roma population, structural violence theory highlights how historical and contemporary forms of discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization contribute to their vulnerability and resilience. Structural violence theory emphasizes the role of structural factors such as government policies, institutional practices, and social norms in shaping Roma migration, settlement, and resilience.

The cultural resilience framework focuses on the ways in which cultural practices, values, and beliefs contribute to the ability of individuals and communities to adapt and thrive in the face of adversity (Ungar 2008). For Roma populations, the cultural resilience framework emphasizes the importance of cultural heritage, kinship networks, and collective identity in promoting resilience during migration-related challenges. It emphasizes the role of cultural values in creating a sense of belonging, social support, and empowerment within Roma communities.

Postcolonial theory examines the legacy of colonialism and imperialism on today's social, political, and economic structures (Said 1978). In the context of the Roma population, postcolonial theory helps to place their experiences in the context of broader historical processes of colonization, exploitation, and cultural hegemony. It highlights the continuing impact of colonialism on Roma identity, representation, and agency, as well as the ongoing struggle for self-determination and decolonization. It provides a framework for understanding the migration, settlement, and resilience of the Roma population. This framework considers the overarching nature of Roma identity, the structural forces that shape their experiences, the cultural values that underpin their resilience, and the historical legacies that shape their contemporary realities. By integrating these insights, researchers can analyze the multi-layered dynamics of Roma migration and settlement and develop policies and interventions to promote their rights, dignity, and well-being.

Theories of migration, settlement, and resilience provide useful lenses for understanding Roma experiences, yet they often require concrete evidence to fully apply to Roma history. The theory of transnationalism, for instance, suggests that Roma communities maintain cultural, social, and economic ties across borders, which have played a crucial role in their survival and cohesion. Recent scholarship, such as Matras (2015), provides empirical evidence for this theory, documenting how Roma populations maintain strong networks that facilitate migration and economic cooperation across Europe. These networks are critical for supporting families, preserving cultural identity, and navigating socioeconomic challenges in various countries. Similarly, structural violence theory helps to explain the systemic marginalization that Roma people face, as noted by Farmer (2004), by connecting historical and contemporary discrimination with broader social and political structures that perpetuate exclusion.

Cultural resilience frameworks offer further evidence of how Roma communities have adapted over time. For example, Ungar (2008) emphasizes the importance of kinship networks and cultural practices in Roma resilience. These networks have helped Roma populations to maintain a strong sense of identity and belonging, despite the challenges of displacement and marginalization. Modern Roma communities continue to rely on these networks to create social capital, ensuring mutual support in the face of adversity. The preservation of Roma traditions, values, and languages, even in hostile environments, demonstrates the significance of cultural resilience in sustaining Roma identity. This resilience, however, should not be romanticized without recognizing the structural violence that limits Roma opportunities.



### 3.2. Mapping Migration Route

Mapping the migration routes of the Roma population from history to the present reveals a complex and dynamic trajectory characterized by a series of movements, settlements, and dispersals across continents (Kenrick 2007). Gypsy/Roma migration is unique due to its complex historical roots and the continuous movement of the group through different regions over many centuries. The Roma migration, which came from northern India over a thousand years ago, differs from other historical migrations in its long, dispersed, and often involuntary nature. Unlike other groups that may migrate due to a single major event, Roma migration was a long-term, dynamic process influenced by a changing sociopolitical environment, forced displacement, and social discrimination (Kenrick 2007). This nomadic lifestyle has allowed for Roma to adapt to different cultures and languages, but it has also made them the target of marginalization and prejudice. Their unique pattern of migration has led to the development of a rich cultural diversity, while at the same time exposing them to increased levels of discrimination and marginalization (Crowe 1994). Gypsy/Roma migration is thus characterized by resilience against a backdrop of constant displacement and adaptation.

In the early stages of their migration, Roma followed trade routes and established temporary settlements in regions such as Anatolia, the Caucasus, and the Balkans. However, the nomadic lifestyle of the Roma and their cultural distinctiveness often led to mistrust and hostility from the local population, resulting in regular expulsions and forced migrations (Fonseca 1995).

In the early modern period, Roma migration routes expanded further into central and western Europe, favored by economic opportunities, political upheaval, and advances in transportation (Fonseca 1995). Roma groups settled in regions such as Spain, France, Italy, and Germany, contributing to the cultural diversity in these societies. However, their presence also triggered discrimination, persecution, and legal restrictions, leading to cycles of displacement and marginalization. In modern times, Roma migration routes have further diversified to include global destinations outside Europe. Economic globalization, political instability, and the search for better living conditions have driven Roma migration flows to North and South America, Australia, and other regions (Kenrick 2007). Roma communities continue to face challenges such as discrimination, poverty, and social marginalization in both their countries of origin and destination. Despite these obstacles, Roma migration remains a resilient and adaptable phenomenon, reflecting the ongoing struggle for recognition, rights, and integration within different societies around the world.

The Roma population in Europe is the result of three overlapping waves of migration up to the 21st century: the first in the late 19th century following the abolition of Gypsy slavery in Romania, the second in the 1960s and 1970s from Yugoslavia, and the third in the last decade following the political and economic changes in eastern Europe (Gresham et al. 2001, p. 1314; Reyniers 1995; I. Hancock 1987; Fraser 1992; Liégeois 1994). In the four decades since the founding of the International Romani Union, the population of Roma in Europe has more than doubled. As of recent estimates, Roma now constitute over 7 percent of the population in countries such as Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Hungary (Dická 2021, p. 1; Süli-Zakar 2012).

Their patterns can be documented in written accounts of people who encountered them during their travels. With the help of linguistics, the routes of the Gypsies on their migration from India to the west have been roughly reconstructed, whereby it is assumed that the migration to Europe took place in several waves between the ninth and fourteenth centuries (Achim 2004, pp. 7–8; Boerger 1984; Turner 1926). Linguistic evidence and documents suggest that Roma first came to southern Europe via Persia and the Caucasus and then via the Byzantine Empire (Fraser 1992), although some Macedonian legends place Roma in Europe as early as the fourth century BC. The first detailed references to Roma in central and eastern Europe are found in twelfth-century records from the Dalmatian coast and from Hungary, now the Slovak Republic (Crowe 1994).

When the Gypsies moved westwards, there were probably two main migration routes: one overland through Byzantium and eventually through Thrace, and another along the coast of the Near East and across the Sinai to Egypt (Strom 1993, p. 10). According to the historian Nicolae Iorga, the arrival of the Gypsies in this region was caused by the Mongol invasions of eastern and central Europe led by Genghis Khan and later by Tamerlane, and they were later left behind as slaves of the Mongol military when the defeated troops withdrew (Crowe 1994, p. 107). In the studies of Franz Miklosich, who emphasized the differences between Tatar (Mongol) slaves and slaves of Gypsy origin, it was argued that their arrival in Europe must have taken place at different times, as the former were kept in permanent dwellings and had Turkish names, while the latter had Romanized names and lived in tents (Achim 2004, p. 16). What is certain is that in the late 14th century, there were several references to Roma in Romania who were treated as property by the church, the state, or wealthy landowners and shopkeepers. Those who remained in Iran were divided into two groups. One group travelled south through Syria, to North Africa and Greece. The other group travelled north through Armenia to present-day Bulgaria, Romania, and Serbia (Saitta 2010). Many Roma remained in these Balkan countries, while others travelled west to Europe.

In mapping Roma migration routes, it is crucial to connect their early movements with their modern migration patterns. The initial migration of the Roma from northern India, passing through the Middle East and into Europe by the 14th century, set the stage for centuries of forced and voluntary movements driven by sociopolitical upheaval, economic necessity, and persecution (Ullah 2014). The gap between the medieval migrations and modern movements can be bridged by considering the multiple waves of Roma migrations in the 19th and 20th centuries, such as those triggered by the abolition of Roma slavery in Romania and the collapse of Yugoslavia. These modern migrations reflect the ongoing patterns of displacement, adaptation, and marginalization that have shaped Roma communities across Europe and beyond (Kenrick 2007). The movement to global destinations in recent decades illustrates how economic globalization and political instability have further dispersed Roma populations.

Reflecting on the challenges of representing population histories, it is essential to recognize the ways in which authorial voices and ideologies shape the narrative. Representing Roma history as separate from the majority population's history can reinforce the very marginalization that has plagued Roma communities for centuries. Many writers have depicted Roma as existing outside the main currents of European history, reinforcing stereotypes of Roma as perpetual outsiders. However, recent works challenge this narrative by integrating Roma history into broader historical processes, acknowledging that Roma have not only been shaped by but have also shaped European societies. The role of the historian, therefore, must be critically examined, as narratives of Roma history can either perpetuate marginalization or contribute to a more inclusive and deep understanding of their place in European and global history.

### *3.3. Integration, Inclusion, and Resilience*

Integration, inclusion, disadvantage, and resilience characterize the complex relationships between the Roma population and European societies throughout history and up to the present day. From the earliest migrations to contemporary realities, Roma communities have faced a variety of challenges and opportunities that characterize their experiences of integration and exclusion across Europe (Crowe 1994).

Historically, the integration of Roma into European societies has been hindered by systemic discrimination, marginalization, and social exclusion (Gheorghe et al. 2016). They have faced barriers to accessing education, employment, healthcare, and housing, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and social exclusion (Ringold et al. 2005). These challenges are exacerbated by negative stereotypes, prejudice, and structural inequalities that have marginalized Roma communities (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) 2020).

Despite these adversities, the resilience of Roma has been a defining characteristic throughout their history in Europe. From the preservation of traditional crafts and languages to the creation of solidarity through music and storytelling, the resilience of Roma is a testament to their enduring spirit and cultural vitality (Fonseca 1995). In today's Europe, Roma communities continue to face the challenge of integration and inclusion, especially in countries such as Romania where they are a significant minority. Despite efforts to combat discrimination and promote social cohesion, Roma continue to be disproportionately affected by poverty, unemployment, and inadequate access to education and healthcare (Ringold et al. 2005). Persistent stereotypes, prejudices, and structural inequalities perpetuate the cycle of disadvantage and marginalization and hinder the participation of Roma in mainstream society (Gheorghe et al. 2016; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) 2020).

Their resilience remains a powerful force for change and empowerment. Grassroots initiatives, community-based organizations, and advocacy work led by Roma activists are challenging stereotypes, promoting cultural pride, and advocating for policy reforms to advance Roma rights and inclusion (Kenrick 2007). Roma youth are increasingly raising their voices to shape their future and are campaigning for education, employment opportunities, and recognition of their cultural heritage.

In Romania and elsewhere in Europe, their resilience manifests itself in everyday acts of resistance, creativity, and collective action (Stewart et al. 2018). Whether through art, music, education, or political activism, Roma communities are reclaiming their history, asserting their rights, and forging pathways to greater social justice and inclusion (I. F. Hancock 2001). As Europe grapples with the imperatives of diversity, equity, and social cohesion, the resilience of the Roma population is a reminder of the constant quest for dignity, equality, and belonging in a multicultural continent.

The integration of Roma communities into European societies has been a challenge in the past and is still an ongoing process. Throughout European history, Roma communities have faced discrimination, marginalization, and persecution, which has hindered their ability to settle and integrate into mainstream society (Fraser 1992). Integration involves not only recognizing but also respecting Roma culture and traditions. This is the key to breaking down the stereotypes and prejudices that often fuel discrimination against Roma (Liégeois 1994). Successful integration is a two-way process that requires the active participation of both Roma communities and wider European societies. For integration to progress, policies, and initiatives must promote social inclusion while preserving the unique cultural identity of Roma (European Commission 2020). This includes creating opportunities for Roma voices to be heard and removing structural barriers in the areas of education, employment, and healthcare. By promoting mutual understanding and cooperation, integration efforts can help to break down the historical prejudices that have isolated Roma from mainstream European society (Matras 2015). Throughout history, Roma have maintained a distinct cultural identity characterized by their language, rituals, music, and dance (Lidskog 2017). Their lives as migrants have had a significant impact on their identity and cultural customs, as they have been forced to adapt to new places and conditions while preserving their traditions and values.

The persistent discrimination, violence, and marginalization of Roma by the majority society shows that "certain profound and fundamental problems of Roma have been ignored" (UNDP 2002, pp. 5, 7). Despite their current marginalization, the Roma were initially welcomed by Europeans when they arrived in the 15th century. At that time, nobles who encountered the Roma issued them with letters of protection that allowed for them to travel safely from one country to another. As they travelled through different regions, the Roma demonstrated the ability to adapt to local cultures and customs. This adaptability also extended to religion, with the majority of Roma adopting the predominant faith in each area they settled in. For example, many Roma in the Middle East and Iran are now Muslims, while in South America, they are predominantly Catholic. In North America and western Europe, most Roma follow Protestant denominations (Sharp 2002). This flexibility

in religious practices is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of Roma, even though they have faced increasing hostility and marginalization over time.

Despite varying degrees of success, socialist governments attempted to assimilate the Roma and minimize ethnic differences. Communist parties issued decrees and implemented policies aimed at integrating Roma into society through the provision of housing and jobs (Ringold et al. 2005). Although these policies varied widely, they were often culturally repressive. Among the most repressive campaigns were those in Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia, which aimed to eliminate ethnic segregation. In socialist Yugoslavia, however, Roma were granted official citizenship status in 1981 (Poulton 1991).

The history of Roma integration into society has long been intertwined with policies and attitudes that oscillate between acceptance and exclusion. As Ullah (2013) discusses, integration policies play a central role in facilitating the inclusion of marginalized groups like the Roma into society as full members. These policies, while distinct from assimilation, often encourage Roma communities to preserve their cultural identity while simultaneously adopting certain aspects of the dominant society's lifestyle and practices. Yet, critics argue that integration often resembles assimilation in ways that diminish the ethnic significance of marginalized groups (Ullah 2010). However, it is important to differentiate between the two; integration policies aim to include Roma without erasing their cultural distinctions, offering protections for individual rights in the process (Pace 1993).

This modern struggle for cultural preservation and societal inclusion echoes the historical challenges Roma communities faced during the Middle Ages, when they encountered pervasive mistrust, persecution, and restrictive laws aimed at controlling their mobility and limiting their cultural practices (Fonseca 1995). The legacy of forced assimilation, slavery, and segregation has further entrenched marginalization within Roma communities, denying them access to basic rights and socioeconomic opportunities for centuries (Crowe 1994). The transition from these historical experiences to contemporary integration efforts highlights the ongoing tension between cultural preservation and societal inclusion, emphasizing the need for policies that genuinely respect and protect the unique identity of Roma communities while promoting their full participation in society.

In the past, the socialist governments of Czechoslovakia and Poland banned nomadism in 1958 and 1964, respectively, resorting to drastic measures such as the shooting of horses, the dissolution of caravans, and the banning of gatherings (Toma 2019). Other countries enforced settlement or resettlement through the demolition of ghettos, the allocation of state housing, and the dispersal of large families (Toma 2019). In the 1960s, the Czechoslovak government's "Dispersion and Transfer Programme" aimed to resettle Slovak Roma in areas with a low Roma density, but this failed and led to forced assimilation. Hungary's 1964 housing plan aimed to improve or destroy 2100 Roma settlements known as "shanty towns", with varying degrees of success (Kenrick 2007). Nevertheless, ghettos were occasionally rebuilt in remote areas. An example of this is the attempt by the Hungarian authorities in 1988 to resettle a large Roma community in Miskolc, which met with public resistance.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent integration of the former communist countries into the European Union have emphasized the importance of the social and economic inclusion of Roma in European society. As the countries of the former Eastern Bloc strive to join the EU, the integration of Roma in central and eastern Europe has become a priority (Ringold et al. 2005; Martínez-Cruz et al. 2016).

Slave Gypsies who worked as artisans, blacksmiths, or artists in the principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, which later became part of modern Romania, were integrated into the Romanian working class along with peasants and local craftsmen. In 1385, Prince Voivide donated the Monastery of St Anthony in Vodita to forty Gypsy families. In 1471, Prince Stephen of Moldavia returned with 17,000 Gypsy slaves from Wollache to integrate them into the labor force (Crowe 1994, p. 108). In Transylvania, which was under Hungarian control, the Gypsies were not kept as slaves, which led to a considerable number of them



abandoning their nomadic way of life and leading a more settled existence, which was a natural process of social development (Achim 2004, p. 20).

Slavery was abolished on 26 August 1864, leading to an unprecedented exodus of Roma from the nascent Romanian kingdom, partly out of fear of renewed enslavement. With a lack of money, land, and resources, and nomadism soon restricted, “the situation of Romanian Gypsies improved little” with liberation and many Roma “in desperation offered themselves for sale to their old masters” (Crowe 1994, p. 121). Although the abolition of serfdom represented a significant advance for the Roma, their socioeconomic position in Romanian society remained unchanged throughout the 20th century. The immediate post-socialist period significantly worsened the overall situation of the vast majority of the Roma population and may have contributed to the loss of momentum to promote change in their socioeconomic situation (Dická 2021; Šprocha and Tišliar 2016; Šuvada 2015).

**Resilience:** The resilience approach offers insights into the complex dynamics of Roma communities, which are characterized by regional settlement patterns, different levels of integration, and divergent economic and social development paths. Romania is characterized by the largest and most diverse Roma population in central and eastern Europe, reflecting a multi-faceted composition shaped by historical, religious, linguistic, and occupational factors (Brie 2014). Despite this diversity, major challenges remain, such as limited access to education, healthcare, social services, and housing, which emphasizes the resilience required to overcome systemic barriers.

After the First World War, Romania experienced a demographic shift as the country’s borders expanded and the population quadrupled, fueling concerns about ethnic minorities (Sanborne 1996). The Roma, who made up about two percent of the population, faced pressure to abandon their nomadic way of life and assimilate as wage laborers, indicating forced attempts to settle down (Achim 2004). However, these efforts were met with resistance, leading to the marginalization and stigmatization of Roma communities, which was exacerbated by deportations and forced labor camps in the 1940s (Achim 2004).

During the communist era, policies aimed at integrating Roma into the working class failed due to underlying social marginalization and poverty (Stewart 1997). Ceaușescu’s regime intensified these efforts, resulting in widespread redistribution of housing and displacement and perpetuating intergenerational ethnic tensions (Fonseca 1995). The collapse of communism brought economic upheaval that exacerbated social inequalities and triggered violence against Roma communities (Helsinki Human Rights Watch 1990). The economic turmoil led to further marginalization of Roma, leaving many families without a livelihood and perpetuating the cycle of poverty and exclusion (UNDP 2002). Despite the challenges, Roma communities remain resilient, and efforts to address social and economic inequalities are critical to promoting inclusion and empowerment (Plájás et al. 2019).

#### 4. Discussion

The Roma population represents a unique case study to examine the consequences of repeated dispersal and settlement events. As a historically marginalized and socially ostracized population, Roma have been subject to widespread human rights violations, including targeted persecution during World War II known as the Porajmos, which resulted in the deaths of approximately 500,000 people (Lewy 2000). Originating from the Indian subcontinent, the Roma population is characterized by bottlenecks and gene flow dynamics that have shaped their complex genetic and cultural identity (Martínez-Cruz et al. 2016). Despite persistent discrimination and social marginalization, the Roma persevere in their quest for better opportunities, proving that they are resilient against all odds.

The genetic evidence supporting Romani origins points to a significant connection to the Indian subcontinent. Research on Y-DNA, autosomal DNA, and mitochondrial DNA has revealed that the Romani people trace their ancestry back to northern India, with migrations to Europe occurring approximately 1000 years ago (Ena et al. 2022). This complex



genetic identity results from centuries of migration and admixture with populations across Europe and Asia, which has shaped both their genetic makeup and cultural heritage.

Recent government measures, such as the deportation of Roma camps in France, emphasize the ongoing challenges in dealing with Roma rights and integration. The study by Toma (2019) shows that negative stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards Roma are widespread, further exacerbating their marginalization. These attitudes, coupled with structural barriers, hinder access to education, healthcare, and employment, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and vulnerability (UNDP 2002). The lack of available data on Roma makes it difficult to address their needs, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive research and data collection efforts.

While incremental change may occur, significant progress in Roma inclusion requires multi-faceted strategies that address the root causes of discrimination and promote equality and inclusion (UNDP 2002). Cooperation between governments, international organizations, and Roma communities is essential when it comes to advocating for Roma rights, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting meaningful participation in society. Ultimately, concerted efforts are crucial to breaking down barriers to Roma integration and achieving social cohesion in diverse societies.

Research on the Roma population brings a new perspective to an issue that has often been overlooked or misunderstood. While the marginalization and social exclusion of Roma has often been the focus in the past, this study uniquely combines migration, settlement, and resilience into a comprehensive understanding of the Roma experience. This article challenges conventional narratives that portray Roma as merely marginalized and instead highlights their resilience and adaptability in the midst of systemic discrimination. By examining Roma migration and settlement patterns over time, this study reveals how Roma have shaped their identity and preserved their culture despite facing significant assimilation pressures. The novelty of this study is its multidisciplinary framework, which incorporates insights from sociology, anthropology, and migration studies to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the Roma journey. This article offers an analysis of both the historical and contemporary experiences of Romani communities, effectively incorporating a wide range of theoretical frameworks and academic sources to support its arguments. This article's interdisciplinary approach, drawing on sociology, anthropology, and migration studies, provides a more comprehensive understanding of Roma migration, settlement, and resilience. These frameworks are skillfully applied to illuminate the complexity of Roma identity formation and their ongoing struggles for sociopolitical integration. Contemporaneity situates the Roma experience within current academic debates on marginalized populations, migration, and social exclusion. By interweaving historical analyses with current migration trends, this article addresses current issues of integration and Roma rights. Its contribution lies in linking historical injustices to contemporary realities and offers a critical narrative that deepens the academic discourse on Roma resilience and cultural adaptation.

The main theoretical contribution of this research is the emphasis on resilience as a central theme in the history and contemporary experiences of Roma. While traditional studies often focus on the obstacles and challenges faced by Roma, we emphasize their ability to adapt, survive, and maintain cultural cohesion in a hostile environment. This shift in perspective has significant implications for scholarship, as it reveals new ways of exploring ethnic resilience and cultural continuity in the face of adversity. This research is crucial, as it fills the long-standing gap in understanding the role of Roma in European history and society. The neglect of Roma studies is in part due to historical prejudices and discriminatory practices that have marginalized their stories. By foregrounding the resilience of Roma, this research not only contributes to academic scholarship, but also provides a basis for promoting greater inclusion, justice, and respect for the Roma population in broader societal contexts.

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to conceptualize the study and reviewing relevant literature, providing insights that shaped the direction of the research. J.F. assisted in reviewing the literature and played an essential role in fixing and organizing the references, ensuring the accuracy and completeness of the citations. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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