

**WHAT HAS BEEN AVAILABLE FOR ONLINE READING
ABOUT MIGRATION OF PEOPLE BELONGING TO ROMA MINORITY
OVER THE LAST FEW YEARS?**

Publikációmban a roma migrációval kapcsolatos internetes híryanagokról fogalmaztam meg gondolatokat. Az elmúlt évtizedben az írott sajtón, a televíziós vagy rádiós műsorokon túl már az internetről is hírek, információk tömege tárul elénk. A hírek egy-egy eseményt többször más szemszögből mutatnak be, eltérő véleményt levonva a fenti témában.

A roma migráció kérdésével a magyar sajtó nem vagy alig foglalkozik, az online sajtóbeli megjelenítésben is a rövid, semleges híradások dominálnak, az írások szerzőit és a híradások forrásait megjelölő, tényfeltáró interjúkkal, riportokkal szemben.

A sokszor szenzáció hajhász, felületes híradások időről- időre vitákat váltanak ki, az eltérő véleményű nyilatkozatokból viszont nem derül ki pontosan, hogy a romákat illető általános problémák mekkora mértékűek.

Áttekintve a roma kivándorlás előzményeit, okait és folyamatát az olvasó az elmúlt évek távlatában ismerhet meg gondolatokat e mindennapjainkat is érintő eseménysorozatot és annak hatásait illetően.

In recent decades a mass of news items and information has been unfolding before us not only through the written press, television or radio programmes, but also through the Internet. Media's coverage of certain events usually reflects differing points of view giving different opinions on the same subject.

Hundreds of news items related to Roma migration have already come out, but regarding the previous decade, this number cannot be considered really high. It can even be stated that the Hungarian press does not or hardly ever deals with Roma emigration. Besides, in any online press display about Roma migration, the short, neutral news coverage dominates as against the newsreports which indicate their authors and sources or fact-finding interviews and reports.

These news items, however, are not published on a regular basis: some periods of time abounding in articles are followed by terms of months when the press related to Roma migration is in complete silence. The question of migration and emigration typically arises again and again apropos of internal affairs when the Roma people are also directly involved.

Let us remember an incident in August 1999 when three young men from Csákvár appeared at the wooden houses of some Roma families housed temporarily in Zámoly and one of them died in the course of a fight with the Roma. Then, the wooden houses were set on fire by some unidentified people so the Roma families moved to Budapest into a house owned by the National Roma Self-Government, where they were later attacked by two men. Later on, someone broke the windows and painted swastika on the house in Csór where the Roma families had moved after the incident. Meanwhile, Dezső Csete the mayor of the settlement of Csór expressed his view that the increased rate of theft and robbery in their village was attributable to the people from Zámoly.

For fear of similar atrocities, these Roma refused to return to their village, and they wanted to be paid twenty million forints as compensation for their houses and further three million forints per family for their "three years of suffering". They were even ready to emigrate to Canada if their request was not fulfilled. [1]

In connection with the case the next quotation appeared in "Népszabadság": "the National Roma Self-Government refuses to be blackmailed by the Zámoly Roma". [2]

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Peter Harrach, social and family affairs minister of the time put it like that at an ecumenical meeting: *"Some people go abroad to discredit the nation and demand not only compensation but they make false statements about the country and the government although they have done less for themselves than their country has done for them. Yet, they make excessive demands with menaces. If it can happen even with widespread appreciation, there must be something wrong with moral standards.* [3]

After the statement above, the minister was heavily offended and certain Roma organizations urged him to resign.

The government, however, stood up for the minister and taking his standpoint into consideration, in 2000 the State spent 4.8 milliard HUF on the Roma from the taxpayers' money in order to help their social integration. It is also well-known that education and work may mean the path that leads to Roma's upward mobility, and in Hungary everyone has the opportunity to follow this path irrespectively of their birth and social background.

Following this case there were several news reports about Roma families that had emigrated to Canada and since it did not live up to their expectations, they returned to Hungary and as a result many of them became homeless. [4]

The Zámoly Roma, however, travelled to Strasbourg in summer of 2000 and applied for refugee status in France and filed a case against Hungary at the European Court of Human Rights.

As the impact of the case, the amount of press matter related to Roma migration (mostly to the Zámoly case) has multiplied compared to its prior quantity. So, the previous statement about the passivity of press is not really relevant. The Roma claim they have been escaping from racism, and according to the human rights defenders the emigration process is justified.

The increased press interest in this affair was explicable not only by its value of precedent, but also by the fact that protecting human rights was even then very important with regard to the international image of Hungary, which was just approaching the finishing line in its EU-accession. "... I also firmly repudiate the statement of the petitioners which claims that the government is not able and even not willing to stop the persecution of the Roma. This claim is not only prejudicial to the reputation of the government, but it is also able to discredit our country," Csaba Hende said on the part of the government. [5]

After the Zámoly Roma affair the number of Roma emigrating to Canada doubled and several Roma communities living in rural areas, 'quiet' so far, also began to consider the idea of leaving the country. [6]

Families planning to emigrate from Körmend asked the local self-government to pay for their journey. The mayor of Körmend, however, declared that the town had no money for this cause, not to mention the fact that the families involved had not paid the rent for their accommodation properly. Meanwhile, some local entrepreneurs collected signatures for a petition in order to call on the town council to take control over the gypsies' behaviour. According to the petition, a few families that pursue a criminal way of life deter tourists from visiting the town. [7]

The Zámoly Roma affair inspired the whole public life in Hungarian politics and even the broader public opinion was expressed. The "Zámolyers" were often identified with all the Hungarian gypsies and there appeared some Internet news comments claiming: "Most of the Roma are usually criminals, that is why they are not accepted by the general opinion." [8]

Before the Zámoly Roma journey the Roma migration was usually mentioned just as a side-issue of some internal affairs, since then, however, the topic has been mentioned in the media in correlation with the general situation of the Roma.

The incident occurring in autumn of 2006 - when more than 200 people applied for asylum in Sweden within a month - triggered a considerable press interest. After hearing rumours of good job offers and large sums of financial support in

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Sweden, some Roma families travelled to the northern country, mostly from the Hungarian counties Baranya and Tolna, to seek their fortune there.

Certain people urged them to travel, others tried to restrain them from the journey. According to a report of the Origo news portal, one of the latter was the Swedish Embassy in Budapest, which was trying to divert the Roma from their intention in a paid advertisement. The advertisement made it absolutely clear: *"There is no officially supported possibility of employment-related immigration to Sweden."* Hungary had already been the member of the European Union by this time, so its citizens could not apply for refugee status in the Union. [9]

The Hungarian News Agency (MTI) was informed that the people arriving in Malmö had expected buses or cars to pick them up from the airport, but it turned out differently.

Since the Roma did not speak the language, they asked the foreign and Hungarian journalists waiting for them to help. According to the local correspondent for MTI, there were some tumultuous scenes and total chaos in the hours after the arrival. The Roma were informed about the possibilities and regulations in the immigration office, then they received 300-400 Swedish crowns (about 10 thousand forints then) per family as emergency aid. [10]

Another contributor to Origo news portal reported on a Swedish official who had been dealing with migration affairs for several years, and yet he was deeply astonished by the mass influx of the Roma from a country of the European Union. By that time the Swedish State had already been dealing with the Hungarian affair to a distinct degree. The deputy mayor of Malmö, Kent Anderson said that the Roma who would not be able to certify that they could maintain themselves without the support of the Swedish State might expect to be deported from the country.

After the consideration of their applications for asylum and work permit, the originally self-assured Roma felt disappointed and said they "had misinterpreted the news from Sweden", so they decided to leave for home very soon. For days on end the Swedish media also published articles about the Roma families coming from Hungary, but later they dropped the subject. [11]

"Those eight people from the "home-comers" who I still keep in touch with, have confessed they had expected something different, something better in Sweden", said József Kovács, the president of the Roma Minority Self-Government in Mohács.

Kovács gave an account of the situation of the Roma from Mohács who had tried to escape from their extreme poverty. They understood, however, that they had chosen a bad time period for job seeking. Despite this realization, each of them was resolute to travel somewhere else abroad to seek their fortune. [12]

Since the elimination of the obligatory visa system in March of 2008, six thousand two hundred of our compatriots have applied for asylum in Canada, including those nearly one thousand applications which were submitted in the first quarter of the previous year. The Canadian authorities have accepted only two percent of the latter ones - that is 22 altogether from the 1181 requests.

The Canadian government monitored the situation and worried about the increasing number of the applications for asylum from Hungary. That is why in spring of 2012 Ottawa was ready to introduce a refugee reform which was supposed to speed up the refugee claim process, so that the applicants could not spend years in the country waiting for the final decision collecting social security benefits during the long-lasting procedure.

As for the possibility of the accidental visa system recovery, Jack Branswell, the press officer of the Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) office confirmed the prior standpoint of his country expressing that Canada regularly revises its visa policy. "We are fully aware that our system can be abused and we are going to take steps to stop it," Branswell said.

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In 2009 Canada introduced visa requirements against the Czech Republic because of the Roma refugees escaping to Canada. It led then to a diplomatic scandal between the two countries.

Because of the increasing number of the asylum seekers, Canada is still holding out the prospect of the re-imposition of the visa requirements against Hungary, but it has not been ordered so far.

In the opinion of the director of the Roma Community Center in Canada, the migration flow could not be soothed by imposing visa requirements against Hungary, because some neo-nazis systematically prepare for violent actions against the Roma in "training camps". The asylum seekers often refer to the fact that they were persecuted in their country by "skinheads" and "nazis". After the Hungarian Roma murders and the Gyöngyöspata affair, the number of refugees to Canada has definitely increased.

"Here we are free. In Hungary we always felt a certain tension in the streets and at our workplaces", says a middle-aged Roma man, who worked as the only Roma employee for a nappy-making factory in Hungary and now lives in Toronto on his disability benefit of 2,500 Canadian dollar (537,000 Hungarian forints). [13]

The Roma arriving in Canada do not mind illegality either. The Canadian border guards report that hundreds of Roma have opted out of the refugee programme and decided to disappear in the country without a trace. [14]

The local media reported some news about punitive proceedings against several Hungarian Roma people who were charged with criminal gang involvement and conspiracy to commit human trafficking. Furthermore, several of them falsely claimed social benefits.

In connection with these cases some vitriolic comments were expressed by the Canadian authorities. *"Disgusting, stunning and shocking! The public needs to be aware that some Hungarian Roma criminals have been able to live in our city scamming the generous Canadian welfare system",* said one of the attorneys in court and he insisted on sending a message to Hungary: *"We do not want any of your criminals!",* he said. [15]

According to the information received by the Budapest Roma Press Center (RSK), however, the new Hungarian Roma migration flow in January of 2012 indicated characteristics which significantly differed from the previous ones. In recent months, mostly marketable skilled tradespeople and people with language knowledge left the country to get a job abroad, just because they had not been able to find employment in their own country.

The new migrants asked for certificates of their Roma origin at the minority self-governments just because their fellows from abroad had informed them about the fact that the Canadians being aware of the situation of the Hungarian Roma would be ready to employ them more easily than before. This is an unanimous opinion of the Hungarian minority leaders who were canvassed by the RSK (Roma Press Centre).

The Roma Press Centre interviewed a Roma man from Kőbánya about the subject, and he described his situation as follows: *"I am skilled in three trades, but they do not want me. Being unemployed, I have not been able to meet my mortgage payments so the bank has terminated our credit contract and initiated a distraint procedure against us."* He also explained that he was going to move abroad together with his family, because his family with their two children might be evicted from their home any day. He hoped, however, his skills would be in demand in other countries. [16]

In the future, virtually just the emigrants with intention to get a job will have the chance to obtain a residence permit for a longer stay in Canada, because in June of 2012 the House of Commons passed a bill, which was soon before the Senate and stated that it was within the competence of the Canadian government to compile a list of safe countries. This means that the applications submitted by asylum-seeking citizens arriving from safe countries, for example from the member states of the European Union – also from Hungary – will be judged much faster. The asylum seekers will not be allowed to stay in Canada - not even during the time for consideration – and they have no right to appeal against the decree.

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On the pages of the Toronto Sun the immigration lawyer Richard Kurland explained that the Hungarian Roma refugees would not need to travel to Canada in order to find a job, because they could legally do so in any European Union country. Expectedly, in the second half of the year Canada will send home everyone who, in their judgement, has illegally applied for a refugee status. [17]

In recent years nearly four thousand Hungarian Roma people have arrived in the Canadian province of Ontario and as a group of 150 they make up the largest ethnic group in the local school.

In the view of the principal David Finkelstein the integration of the gypsies arriving in Canada is "in progress", but he has also pointed out that -because of the language obstacles - teachers are not able to prevent children from developing cliques.

Paul St. Clair, the executive director of the local Roma Community Centre thinks: *"The Hungarian Roma children do not understand what the school system wants from them and it typically takes a year for Roma parents as well to realize that education is the only way their children will advance in the city."*

The Canadian school made up a special curriculum for the 10th-graders, whose knowledge level, however, was only like that of the 4th-6th grade students. Some of the children simply neglected their teachers, they did not do their homework and played truant for days on end. It is also hard to convince parents that their children would benefit from school. A 14-year-old girl, for example, does not attend school just because her father thinks she is old enough to get married.

The leader of the school remedial programme said that six months after school had started, there was less absence and the children performed better at school, though they had sizeable gaps in their education. [18]

Beyond education and socialization, however, the local Roma Community Centre does even more: they take on conflict resolution since the Roma's neighbours have been upset as these people make more noise than it is acceptable, because they like to party. [19]

It is worth mentioning that the Canadian conflict resolution, communication and cooperation is not unique to the province of Ontario, it is much more a part of a state or community "problem-solving" project.

As after the turn of the millennium more and more Roma have attempted to immigrate from the regions of Central Europe to Canada, the Canadian Government - in cooperation with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and financed by the Canadian Development Institute - has worked out a minority affairs programme covering also Hungary by adapting the so-called CAPRA model applied in the country for decades.

The essence of the CAPRA model is that the lowest stage is empowered with licences to involve individuals, institutions in a particular community problem solving. This way, the people concerned will define the problems to be solved on their own, so everything will pivot around the communication between the "Partners", that is to say, between the parties involved.

A necessary condition of applying this model is certain infrastructure that supports the work and, during the preparation for the mutual communication, it is indispensable to contact the representatives of the local police, the self-government, the public education and health care organizations and the parties concerned – in the present case – the representatives of the Roma organizations.

Adaptation of CAPRA model to handling the Hungarian cases such as improving the communication and cooperation between the Hungarian Gypsies and the majority society has not been successful so far.

The continuous flow of Roma immigrants from Hungary seems to be unstoppable. There is a noticeable duality in the statements made by the associates of interest groups of the Roma. There are people who caution the Roma against immigration trying to dissuade them from planning to leave. Others do prepare for further journeys and - raising

contributions - they insist that the refugees need only to "list the insults that they have suffered in a well-documented way" and when they are already abroad, they need to pronounce only *one* word: "refugee".

A number of persons use the phenomenon of migration as a tool to draw attention to the general situation of the Roma, such as discrimination, poor social circumstances and unemployment. [20]

The articles on this issue tend to provoke arguments from time to time. Several Internet comments qualify the Roma recommending mostly radical solution to the problem and some of them even use abusive language. Some news stories are often sensational and superficial. The diverse opinions formulated in different statements do not exactly reflect the depth of the general problems concerning the Roma.

In connection with problem-handling we usually hear about the billions that the governments have spent on the Roma integration, about the minority law and about the efforts that the governments have made in recent decades to ease the difficulties that the Roma face. The politicians in their speeches continuously blame the presentday and previous parties for the Roma problem.

On the part of the majority society, which is also dissatisfied with their own standard of living, several condemnatory, stigmatizing statements are still being issued without asking and getting acquainted with the people personally involved - as it often happens in any kind of problem-solving process.

Kulcsszavak: roma, migráció, kivándorlás, Kanada, problémakezelés

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