

ROMANIES IN NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands we find two groups of the Romany people, Sinti and Roma. We use here the term Romany proposed by Ian Hancock, as alternative to the term “zigeuner”, commonly used in Netherlands. This term most Sinti and Roma experience as derogative and prefer to be called by their own ethnic names. Since both groups speak the same language which they both call “Romane/s/” the term Romany seems plausible as a common name for both branches of the “Gypsy nation”. Besides, the term “zigeuner” is usually spelled with a minuscule, thus not as an ethnic name.

The history of Romanies in the Netherlands spans for almost 600 years, since the first notices about them reaches as far as to 1420, when they first appeared at Deventer. After that many records can be found about various groups in different parts of the Low Countries. Although the acceptance in the beginning was good the following three centuries were marked by persecution and expulsion, so that in the period from the middle of the 18th to the middle of 19th century we have no records of Romanies in the Netherlands. After that a migration of Sinti and Roma resumes. In that period few hundred Sinti came from Germany, Italy, Hungary, France, Belgium, Lithuania and some other countries. They settled in the southern and eastern parts of the country where the majority of them still live. More than 95% of them still speak the Sinti dialect of the Romany language.

About the same period began the first migration of the Vlach Roma, mostly Calderas, Ursari and Lovara, which came, seemingly, from Hungary and Bosnia. Descendants of this group still live in the province of Brabant and some other parts of the Netherlands. Nowadays, the total number of the Sintis is estimated to be about 4000 people and about 3000 few hundred of the “old” Vlach Roma descendants. These groups suffered severe persecution during the World War second by the Nazis and many of them landed in concentration camps. Only a handful of the deportees survived the camps. An agreement has been made about payment of compensation money to the families and Sinti and Roma organisations. Most of these Roma speak variants of the Vlach dialect of the Romany language. They also speak the Sinti dialect as they interact with Sinti a lot in every day life.

Later migrations include mostly Balkan Roma, mostly speakers of Western Vlach dialects (Serbia and Bosnia) and Arli/Erli dialects (Macedonia, Bulgaria) or some Rumania based Roma dialects. These people came to Netherlands in three migration waves:

1. During the seventies the Dutch government accepted a group of Yugoslav Roma which has been reportedly refused entrance by Belgium, and Germany. This group settled in a dozen of municipalities and their members are naturalized as Dutch citizens.

Nevertheless this group, consisting of perhaps one or two thousand persons, remained as subject of many policy controversies. After various projects and campaigns the general conclusion was that the integration to the dominant culture and society has failed. Some integration projects are still en marche. Unemployment, low school attendance and conflicts with social environment (including conflicts with the law) have been regular companions of this groups life. Recently there are some signs of progress in educational domain and there is also an experimental project to be started soon concerning the work integration. This project should take into account the traditional vocational preferences of the Roma themselves.

2. The second wave of the Balkan Roma came as migrant workers or/and as refugees of various recent war conflicts on the Balkans and they originate mainly from Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia and Croatia. These people were, as a rule, accepted and treated as refugees of war if provided they entered the country in a legal way. The number of the illegal emigrants is not possible to estimate.

It is also, in general, not possible to estimate even the number of the legal Roma refugees and immigrants, since the Dutch authorities do not keep record of ethnic allegiance of immigrants, but only their nationality (statehood, country of origin). There might be few thousands members in this group.

This group is very heterogeneous but it also includes a portion of well educated people and Roma intellectuals who brought a new life to Romany emancipation in Netherlands. School attendance and working situation is better than by the first group, but still worrying as it is for almost all asylum seekers and fresh immigrants. By Roma this situation is always additionally complex and heavy.

3. And, finally, the very last wave includes Roma migrants of the recent period (late nineties and the first years of the millennium). Except from ex-Yugoslav countries these people come also from Rumania and Bulgaria and sometimes from other Eastern European countries.

Most of them are illegal strangers without any status and living in fact a hidden life on the very margins of the society. The estimate about their numbers and living conditions is not easy to be made, but it probably reaches few thousands. As hidden fellow citizens they are out of reach of usual facilities for work and education. Theoretically the educational situation could be better because even the illegal residents may enrol children in schools without fear of being trapped as illegals, but most illegal Roma make no use of this facility. It is hardly probable that many of them know about this possibility.

Romanies are not recognized as an ethnic minority in Netherlands. A recent claim by National Sinti and Roma organization has been rejected by Minister of Immigration and Integration under pretext that Roma do not inhabit a defined territory. Reportedly the National Sinti and Roma organization lost subsidies for its regular activities. If that remains so it will make the general chances of improving the situation even more restricted.

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PARTNER INSTITUTIONS.

There is a range education projects and initiatives directed to a higher participation and better school results of the Romani children in Dutch schools. Most of these activities are coordinated by KPC Groep (Catholic Pedagogic Centre) in 's-Hertogenbosch (Den Bosch) and Forum - Institute for Cultural Development in Utrecht. The latter is a central point of coordination of other activities related to Romany emancipation in Netherlands.

Forum. *Instituut voor Multiculturele ontwikkeling*, based in Utrecht, is a leading Dutch institution in the field of multiculturalism. Besides supporting and developing scientific research, Forum is also important as a consultancy and advisory partner for government bodies on issues of multiculturalism. On the field of Romany related issues Forum is the most important institution in Netherlands, being a focal point of various cultural, research and policy oriented activities regarding Romanies in Netherlands.

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KPC Groep, evolved from former *Katholiek Pedagogisch Centrum*, based in s Hertogenbosch (Den Bosch) is for many years the focal point of various activities aimed to the study and improvement of Romany and Travellers children at school. KPC keeps regular coordination of educational activities for Roma and Sinti in the Netherlands.

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ASSOCIATE ROMANY ORGANIZATION. The National Sinti and Roma Association (LSO) is the umbrella organisation for Sinti and Roma affairs in Netherlands. LSO also runs a well equipped and rich documentation centre.

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