



Linguistic studies backed up by further genetic studies have shown that the Roma people are descended from the Dom/Domba, one of many people groups that make up the Dalit or untouchable caste in the state of Rajasthan in northwest India. Although there are many theories about why they left, many historians think that around 1000 AD they helped fight a war in what is now Punjab with the promise of a caste promotion. Inter-marriage and mixing with the local population led to expansion across Persia. Under the Byzantine and Ottoman empires, the Roma spread throughout the Balkan countries. During the Ottoman empire, both forced expulsion and slavery were instituted, and the Roma were enslaved over the next several centuries and taken forcibly throughout Europe. By the 14th century, Roma were enslaved in most major European countries. During the Holocaust about 500,000 Roma lost their lives.



Present Situation

There are an estimated 10-12 million Roma people (Gypsies) scattered across Europe, making them Europe's largest minority. Their collective population is greater than Austria, Sweden, the Czech Republic, and many other countries. Additionally, the Roma live birth rate is, in places, double that of their majority counterparts. In Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, and Macedonia, Roma comprise 10 percent of the population. With this continued high birth rate, it is realistic that Roma could become the majority in these countries by 2050. The population growth of the Roma has caused many European governments to implement integration strategies to avoid a burgeoning "socially excluded" population of Roma.



Despite judgments against several countries by the European Court of Human Rights, systemic educational segregation of Roma students is still happening in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Greece, Spain, France, Cyprus, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, and Slovakia. Sometimes, as a result of deliberate government policy, Roma are forcibly segregated or evicted from towns. This has happened recently in France, Italy, Romania, and the Czech Republic.



There has been a marked rise in anti-Roma protests and demonstrations in recent years. Marches on whole Roma communities with ensuing violence and murder have taken place recently in the Czech Republic, France, and Greece. Police brutality in Roma communities is also on the rise in these and other countries.



A 2010 US State Department report (TIP) discussed the overrepresentation of Roma as victims of trafficking and their high vulnerability to sexual exploitation, forced labor, and child begging in nearly half of the European countries cited. The European Roma Rights Centre research in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia during early 2010 indicated that Roma represent 50-80 percent of victims in Bulgaria, at least 40 percent in Hungary, 70 percent in Slovakia, and up to 70 percent in parts of the Czech Republic.



The Roma are turning to the Christian faith in increasing numbers. The Iglesias Filadelfia Church (Philadelphia Brethren) in Spain claims that there is a church in every village in Spain where there is a Roma community. Around one-third of all Roma in France, Spain, and Portugal are believers. In one area in Romania, all the bars in four villages closed after 75 percent of the population came to Christ. The list of countries where "hidden revival" is taking place is long, including the aforementioned countries, as well as Britain, Ukraine, Belgium, Holland, and Turkey.

Sources:

- <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/gypsy-roma-sarkozy>
- Another Darkness, Another Dawn: A History of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, Becky Taylor
- East-West Church & Ministry Report Summer 2002, Vol. 10, No. 3 by Frank Dawson.
- <http://www.errc.org/cms/upload/file/factsheet-roma-rights-record.pdf>
- <http://www.newsweek.com/2014/10/17/how-roma-are-becoming-europes-new-moral-army-276033.html>

Further Resources:

Film: A People Uncounted

Internet:

Overview of Roma culture and current issues in Europe: <http://romove.radio.cz/en/>

Detailed enough for academic study but written for a lay person:

<http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/index.php/culture/general-introduction/general-introduction>

Information about the people group and how to pray for them:

<http://joshuaproject.net/clusters/354>

Romani Language: www.ethnologue.com

Books:

We are the Romani People - Ian Hancock

Bury Me Standing - Isabella Fonseca

Another Darkness, Another Dawn - Becky Taylor

Recently in the news:

1. <http://www.newsweek.com/2014/10/17/how-roma-are-becoming-europes-new-moral-army-276033.html>
2. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/may/god-among-roma.html>
3. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/january-february/refugees-on-roma-road-syria-iraq-balkans.html>
4. <http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/gypsy-roma-sarkozy>