

**Roma People and Their Difficulties in Daily Life  
Analysis of the Answers to A Questionnaire. Concerns, Attitudes and Behaviours  
Observed in The Target Families: Importance of Customs and Traditions.  
Reflections on the Daily Life of Romani People**

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**Introduction**

In Europe, there are currently between 12 and 20 million Roma people spread across the various European countries and in North Africa. However, most of them live in Central European countries, such as Germany, Slovakia, Hungary, Austria, Romania, Moldova. Others live in North Africa.

They have settled in most European countries. The largest concentration is currently in Central European countries and the Balkans.

Groups of Romani also settled in Bohemia around the 13th or 14th century, hence the name "Bohemia" and "Bohemians" when the authorities allowed them to settle there.

Many Romani arrived in the Balkans, such as Bosnia, North Macedonia, Serbia. Others still in Bulgaria or Turkey. They also came to Eastern countries such as Ukraine or Russia.

Many Romani also arrived in Western countries such as Spain or the "Manouches" in France or England. During their wanderings, they stopped in many places, as was the case in Persia and Greece.

Commonly, they are called "Gypsy, Roma, Manouche, Sinti, Gãbori of Romania, Romanichels, travelling people", etc. Their origin is in India. Some research places the Roma in Central India.

The Romanies are said to have left central India around the 5th century to go to northern India: to Rajashan.

Most of them left Rajashan (North East India) to come in successive waves, starting in the 11th century. The Romanies, who arrived in Europe, said that they came from "Little Egypt". They declared that they had to leave the country to atone for their apostasy from the Christian faith.

Romani people were not part of the "untouchable" caste in India, while being at the bottom of the social ladder. The place called "Little Egypt" is associated with Modon, a Greek city in Messenia, in the Peloponnese. It was a transit port for pilgrims leaving for the Holy Places.

Thus gypsy", "gitan" or gitano" find their root in "egyptian".

They appeared in the Eastern Roman Empire where they were tolerated, in Greece around the 12th century, where the natives called them "Asticians", that is, members of a heretical sect. The word "gypsy" finds its source in the Greek word "Asticians".

During their migrations, some groups were held in slavery, notably in the Moldovian principalities (1370 à 1856). They were deprived of all the comforts of the time and some even lived like troglodytes.

In Hungary, in the 18th century, they lived in tents or caravans and some even took refuge in caves in winter.

In France, under King Louis XI, their presence was reported in 1427. Their presence was also attested in England and North Africa. They were called "Bohemians in France", because they arrived in France with letters of recommendation from the King of Bohemia.

At the time, they were described as chicken thieves, good horse dealers, blacksmiths or acrobats and fortune tellers.

In Asia they were also called "Dom" to refer to them as singers, musicians, acrobats or snake charmers. It was not until around 1783, in Hungary, that an attempt was made to count them, arriving at an approximate number of around 50,000 souls at the time.

Currently, the Gypsies in Hungary represent approximately 8.8% of the population. However, it is important to know that during the census by the Institute of Statistics (HU), Romanies can declare themselves "Magyars" in their country of origin, as well as in their host country, which makes their enumeration difficult. The same is true in other countries.

They were known for reading palms or using crystal balls. They knew how to weave wicker to make baskets or different things, they worked iron to make household objects, they sold and sharpened knives. They mastered the art of training animals.

Over time, some groups specialized like some Sinti to excel in the world of the circus. The Tsiganes followed the advance of the Turks who invaded the Balkans, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary.

Finally, the Turks (Ottoman Empire) were stopped in Vienna and the Empire declined to collapse during the First World War (1914-1918) at the same time as the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed.

All these migrations since the 5th century, then the waves of larger migrations towards the Persian Empire, the Byzantine Empire, with the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, were able to create in the Romanies resilience transmitted from generation to generation, because they have always lived in precariousness, destitution, uncertainties of the future, persecutions, rejections and forms of discrimination.

They undoubtedly draw their desire for independence, their taste for travel or their mobility, their gregarious instinct, from the difficult and heartbreaking periods during the migratory phases.

They have learned to survive while remaining wary of authority and the world around them. It is undoubtedly because of the past that they hold so dear their traditions and their language.

An important fact noted is the very high illiteracy among adults, as well as the difficulties of learning the language of the host country. This reality followed the Romani people until the aftermath of the Second World War (1939-1945) when in the Eastern bloc, the communist regime wanted to assimilate them and forcibly settle them.

However, if full employment (mandatory work record under the communist regime) ensured daily life, the Romani people did menial jobs, with the exception of the famous gypsy orchestras that proliferated during the communist period.

The fall of the Berlin Wall, the fall of the USSR, the breakup of Yugoslavia following NATO intervention and the fact that the former satellite countries of the USSR turned to a Western-style market economy meant that the Romani people found themselves without work, living on their wits, gathered in shanty towns and stigmatized, discriminated against by the "Gadjé" (non-Romani people).

1989-1990 was for them the obligation to leave their country, whether for reasons of racism and discrimination in their country of origin, political reasons and economic reasons.

Even the orchestras and musicians adored under the communist regime lost their livelihood and had to find other ways to survive. This is how from the 90s, musicians, however good, found themselves in the street, as beggars playing the violin or the accordion.

1989-1990 is therefore a period of disorientation and uncertainty for them.

They had the hope of finding the Eldorado in Western countries, in the hope of a better life for their children. This research work tries to go around their perception and their feelings, with regard to their daily life and the preservation of their traditions.

### **Naming Problem**

While there are different words to name them, some words are pejorative, such as "gypsy" for example. Finally, they are commonly called "Roma", but this denomination is not accurate, because "Roma" is only addressed to men and means "man". In addition, it assumes a married man. The words "Romani" and "Romnyí" for women would be the correct words to designate them.

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### **1. Objective of This Research Work**

This research work concerns the Roma or more precisely the Romanies. The objective was to highlight factors of precariousness and the difficulties of daily life.

The following factors were addressed and grouped into five categories:

- Housing
- Work
- Importance of religion
- Importance of tradition
- Importance of school
- Importance of family celebrations
- Parents' training
- Discrimination, stigmatization
- Feeling of well-being in the host country
- Feeling of insecurity
- Language and fear of speaking Roma
- Illiteracy
- Clothing

The answers to 41 questions made it possible to highlight certain forms of discrimination to which the Romani are subject.

Population: 100

Meeting places: France, Belgium, Germany

Cities: Brussels, Liège, Charleroi, Dour, Lille, Longwy, Aachen.

Duration of research: 24 months.

According to the Declaration of Helsinki, all families accepted to take part in this research, but the Romanies asked to remain anonymous.

### **2. Example of Progress**

It is unthinkable that a member of the family, of the chosen clan, responds in isolation to the questionnaire, without the presence of other members of the family or clan.



You have to act with caution so as not to offend the family members, who do not always understand that they cannot intervene.

Very often, the meetings were easier to the extent that I was recommended or sometimes accompanied by a member of the family.

What made the meetings easier was the fact that I worked with the Romani people for a long time as a speech therapist and educational psychologist.

It was not a question of passing the questionnaire all at once, saying thank you and leaving. There is a whole ritual of welcoming the Romani people and an observation stage to know if you are acceptable, not hostile towards them.

If all goes well, then they can even invite you to their table, once trust has been gained.

In several families, they asked me to do them a favour in exchange, showing their trust. For example, explaining a letter received from the municipal administration, the city authorities, the school, etc.

Initially, we had planned to address the questionnaire to the father and the mother, but 48 mothers out of 100 refused, designating the husbands so that they would be the ones to intervene or at least be present.

Finally, 35 fathers answered the questions in the presence of their wives who did not intervene.

It was easier to obtain agreement if the couple could be present.

When a parent did not speak French well, he or she was helped by a family member who spoke French well.

### 3. Frequency Table and Data Results

#### Housing

##### 1.1 Do You Own Your Home?

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	15	15,0
	no	85	85,0
	Total	100	100,0

##### 1.2 Are You Satisfied with The Accommodation?

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	21	21,0
	no	79	79,0
	Total	100	100,0



**1.3 Is There a Room for Each Child?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	15	15,0
	no	85	85,0
	Total	100	100,0

**1.4 Are Heating and Electricity Costs a Financing Problem?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	65	65,0
	no	35	35,0
	Total	100	100,0

**1.5 Are the Prices of Homes for Sale Affordable for You?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	12	12,0
	no	88	88,0
	Total	100	100,0

**1.6 Would You Like to Buy a Home?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	76	76,0
	no	24	24,0
	Total	100	100,0

**The Work**

**2.1 Do You Have Contracted Work in A Company?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	34	34,0
	no	66	66,0
	Total	100	100,0

**2.2 Are You Happy with Your Workplace?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	58	58,0
	No	42	42,0
	Total	100	100,0



**2.3 Have You Ever Been Made Negative Comments at Work About Your Origin?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	23	23,0
	no	77	77,0
	Total	100	100,0

**2.4 Have You Had Difficulty Finding Work Because You Don't Speak French Well?**  
(Adaptation For Germany Concerning the Language)

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	43	43,0
	no	57	57,0
	Total	100	100,0

**2.5 Do You Think It Is Possible for You to Receive Training Within the Company?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	33	33,0
	no	67	67,0
	Total	100	100,0

**Language, The Shame of Speaking the Roma Language, Illiteracy**

**3.1 Can You Read and Write in Your Mother Tongue?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	21	21,0
	no	79	79,0
	Total	100	100,0

**3.2 Can You Read and Write in French? (or German)**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	9	9,0
	no	91	91,0
	Total	100	100,0

**3.3 Does Someone Need to Help You Understand the Correspondence You Receive?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	81	81,0
	no	19	19,0
	Total	100	100,0



**3.4 Is It Important to You That the Family Preserves the Roma Language?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	88	88,0
	no	12	12,0
	Total	100	100,0

**3.5 Do Your Children Speak Romani Well?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	58	58,0
	no	42	42,0
	Total	100	100,0

**3.6 Do You Speak Several Languages in Your Family?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	23	23,0
	no	77	77,0
	Total	100	100,0

**3.7 Do Your Children Mix Languages?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	57	57,0
	no	43	43,0
	Total	100	100,0

**3.8 Do You Understand What Children Tell You?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	76	76,0
	no	24	24,0
	Total	100	100,0

**3.9 Do Children Tell You That They Are Embarrassed When You Speak the Roma Language in Public?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	35	35,0
	no	65	65,0
	Total	100	100,0





**3.10 Do Your Children Speak the Roma Language Among Themselves?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	58	58,0
	no	42	42,0
	Total	100	100,0

**3.11 Do Your Children Speak the Roma Language with You?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	76	76,0
	no	24	24,0
	Total	100	100,0

**Identity, Tradition, Religion, School**

**4.1 Did You Go to School in Your Home Country?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	16	16,0
	no	84	84,0
	Total	100	100,0

**4.2 Are You Proud to Be a Romani?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	96	96,0
	no	4	4,0
	Total	100	100,0

**4.3 Do You Ever Have to Hide the Fact That You Are Romani in Public?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	25	25,0
	no	75	75,0
	Total	100	100,0

**4.4 Is It Important for You to Keep Your Family Traditions?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	95	95,0
	no	5	5,0
	Total	100	100,0



**4.5 Are Family Relationships and Celebrations Important to You and Your Family?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	97	97,0
	no	3	3,0
	Total	100	100,0

**4.6 Is Religion Important to You and Your Family?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	85	85,0
	no	15	15,0
	Total	100	100,0

**4.7 Is It Important for Your Children to Go to School?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	100	100,0
	no	0	0,0
	Total	100	100,0

**4.8 Do You Think Children Are Taught Things That Go Against Your Traditions?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	69	69,0
	no	31	31,0
	Total	100	100,0

**4.9 Are You Planning to Leave Your Host Country to Return to Your Country?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	16	16,0
	no	84	84,0
	Total	100	100,0

**Discrimination, Stigmatization and Sense of Well-Being in Belgium, France, Germany**

**5.1 Are Your Children Discriminated Against at School?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	29	29,0
	no	71	71,0
	Total	100	100,0



**5.2 Do You Have a Good Relationship with Your Children's School?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	49	49,0
	no	51	51,0
	Total	100	100,0

**5.3 Have You Ever Felt Discriminated Against in Public, At the Store or At Your Children's School or Elsewhere in The Host Country?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	38	38,0
	no	62	62,0
	Total	100	100,0

**5.4 Have You or Your Children Ever Been Teased Because Of Your Origins, The Colour of Your Skin or The Way You Dress?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	19	19,0
	no	81	81,0
	Total	100	100,0

**5.5 Have You Witnessed Discrimination Against Your Children by A Teacher?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	15	15,0
	non	85	85,0
	Total	100	100,0

**5.6 Have You Ever Had to Hide the Fact That You Are Romani in Your Host Country?**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	70	70,0
	no	30	30,0
	Total	100	100,0

**5.7 Do You Go to An Adult School to Learn French? (or German)**

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	10	10,0
	no	90	90,0
	Total	100	100,0

### 5.8 Do You Feel Safe in Your Host Country?

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	92	92,0
	no	8	8,0
	Total	100	100,0

### 5.9 Are You Happy and Satisfied in Your Host Country?

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	42	42,0
	no	58	52,0
	Total	100	100,0

### 5.10 Have You Ever Experienced a Humiliating Situation in Your Host Country?

		Number	Pourcentage
Valid	yes	22	22,0
	no	78	78,0
	Total	100	100,0

## 4. Analysis of The Responses Collected in The Five Categories

We will now analyse the responses to the 41 questions.

### 4.1 Housing

We can note that only 15% of families own their own home. The difficulty in committing to buying a home is linked to the real estate prices that have increased dramatically over the past twenty years. Salaries have not kept up.

Moreover, only 12% consider that prices are affordable. However, 76% would like to buy a house. Those who own a house would also consider buying a second house close to theirs for their grandparents.

Another reason for the difficulty in becoming a homeowner is the fact that a large majority of Roma families live on replacement income, social assistance.

Only 21% express the fact that they are satisfied with their housing. The problem is significant because Roma families have many children and it is very difficult to find housing for large families.

Most of the time, there are not enough rooms for each child.

In terms of energy costs, there are still 35% of families who admit to having financing difficulties with heating. These same families admit that they have to save a lot, because they have difficulties at the end of the month.

## **4.2 The work**

Among the families questioned, only 34% say they have a contract job in a company. Among the rest living on social benefits, a third improve their daily lives by accepting small seasonal jobs, including picking or working with market gardeners. Finally, others restore furniture and household appliances to resell them later.

Only 58% are satisfied with their job. They say the boss is "mean" or "demanding", that they are not always paid for overtime.

In the workplace, 23% of Romani people believe that they have received negative comments about their Roma status or about where they come from (Serbia, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania, Bulgaria).

47% of Romani people say that they have or have had difficulties finding work because of a lack of knowledge of French. Only 33% say that it is possible to follow training in a company or outside. What is at play here is illiteracy, but also a feeling of incapacity.

## **4.3 Language, Shame of Speaking Romani, Illiteracy**

Among the Romani people questioned, regarding their mother tongue, illiteracy is 79% and 91% cannot read or write in French.

Because of these difficulties, 81% say they need help to understand what they receive in the mail.

88% of Romani people believe it is important to preserve their language of origin.

But only 58% of children express themselves well in the Roma language.

Moreover, 24% believe that they do not always understand what their children say. By asking questions (outside the questionnaire), I learn that children speak a mixture of languages and neologisms to them.

23% of Romani people say they speak several languages at home. This situation exists because there are variants of the Roma language depending on the country; on the other hand, a family from Kosovo can speak Albanian and the Roma language.

With French learned at school, children come home with an additional language! According to them, it often follows that children mix languages. Some parents admit to mixing the two languages of the country of origin themselves. Little by little, a hybrid language sets in and can evolve to the point where only the family and the clan understand this hybrid language.

## **4.4 Identity, Tradition, Religion, School**

Among Romani parents, 84% say they did not go to school.

It is interesting to learn that 96% of Romani are proud to be Romani.

This statement is very identity-related. 25% say that they sometimes hide

their Romani identity. Why hide their Roma status then? The following answers were collected to this question:

- For practical reasons, such as finding accommodation (possible discrimination)
- Being a gypsy, "manouche" in France, gypsy or Romani is not well regarded by some teachers, according to them; so, they prefer to declare the nationality of the country of origin.
- The same goes for the authorities, the administration: most prefer to give the nationality of the country of origin rather than highlight the fact that they are Romani.

Among the Romani, 95% consider it important to keep family traditions. For them, preserving traditions strengthens their identity and their clan. In the same way, large family celebrations strengthen identity and ancestral traditions. Thus, we can say that a certain "gregariousness" maintains ties and customs and traditions. Traditions are part of a whole (preservation of the Romani language, music for example, songs, etc.) making the Roma culture alive.

85% of Romanies consider religion to be important. Some say that marriage is a "sacred" matter and for example, it is important that the girl to be married is a virgin.

There are also pilgrimages for Romanies, such as the one to Sainte-Marie de la Mer, where thousands of Romanies gather. Whether it is Christian or Muslim, religion holds an important place among Romanies.

Romanies consider school to be important for their children (100%), but 69% say that their children learn things that are contrary to their traditions. When asking questions, they mention several problems:

- Talking about sexuality at school
- Some have reservations about saying that boys and girls should have the same status in all areas
- "Wokism" is rejected by the majority of Romanies
- Some content in philosophy courses may offend their beliefs
- Among Romanies, the role of the mother and father is very codified, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the extended family and the clan actively participate in what could be called the "initiation into real life" of children, depending on whether they are girls or boys.
- School does not provide all the necessary baggage for the child to become a responsible man or a woman, a mother capable of managing her family.

Finally, 16% Romanians plan to return to their country one day. To do so, they mention conditions:

- Financial conditions (saving a lot of money)
- Political conditions. Some say that if Bosnia were a member of the European Union, living conditions could be better. They could return.
- Some say that they miss their country of origin because members of their family or clan have stayed behind. This can be felt as a tearing apart.

#### **4.5 Discrimination, Stigmatization and Feeling of Well-Being (Roma People of Belgium, France and Germany)**

29% of Romani people say that their children are discriminated against in the host country. For 51% of Romani people, the relationship at school is not good. Indeed, they feel misunderstood, when mothers prefer to keep their children at home as long as possible.

These Romani people do not seem to understand the importance of the children's development in nursery classes. It should be noted that in Belgium, for example, attendance for children has become compulsory in the third year of nursery school. But there is still a lot of absenteeism.

38% of Romani parents say they have been discriminated against in a store, or in public or at school. For example, mockery because of origin or skin colour (19%). As for teachers, 15% of Romani parents believe that their children have been discriminated against.

Regarding the fact of having to or wanting to hide that they are Romani in their country of origin, 70% answered in the affirmative. This indicates in any case that in their country of origin, the fear of being categorized as Romani was important. Some stressed the fact that those who lived in the ghettos for Romani (Slovakia, Bulgaria, Ukraine, ...) could not hide their identity anyway.

Unfortunately, only 10% of the Romani questioned take a French course. 92% feel safe in their host country, but only 42% are satisfied and content in their host country. The lack of satisfaction is explained as follows:

- Cost of living which has increased since 2020-2021 (corresponding to the beginning of the Covid-19 period). It is increasingly difficult to feed one's family, pay for heating, water and electricity.
- Large families seem to be paying the highest price for increases
- Access to property has become almost impossible, as real estate prices have increased so much

Finally, 22% of Romani people have experienced humiliating situations. Most of the time, it was linked to hide illiteracy, having to ask for correspondence to be read to them, etc. Another humiliating situation is the way others look at me, especially when it is a large family going to a store or elsewhere together.

### **5. My Thoughts on My Meetings with Romani People**

During my meetings with the families, I was, of course, able to talk about the questions I was going to ask in the form of a questionnaire that I had to fill out.

Most of the families had to be reassured that this was researching where anonymity would be guaranteed and that I was not going to talk about it to the authorities, the school (or other authorities).

I also had the opportunity to see that the families opened up to me and dared to ask me questions about their daily life's difficulties.

These meetings allowed me to construct a grid concerning my experience with them.

#### **Here Are the Main Findings:**

- The reception, which can be difficult at first, can lead to rejection or trust in the other. In fact, the admission of the intruder is done gradually, because there is mistrust at the beginning. The fact that children find you sympathetic is a positive point.
- There is a strong intra-family and inter-group cohesion (importance of the clan). The members of the family are the cement of the large family clan (uncles, aunts, cousins, grandparents. Then the Romani friends. All in all, there are few Gadjés at family celebrations.
- Sharing festivities in large family gatherings. Music is important during family gatherings, with friends, at a wedding where there are often many people. The number of guests can reach dozens, even 100 to 300 people. Gold and jewellery are part of Roma culture and family heritage.
- Sharing information between them is essential, and in the clan, everyone knows a lot about everyone else. This allows cohesion and reassures about the behaviours and future intentions of others. This cohesion implies solidarity and mutual aid. Once, I saw a dozen boys and adults dismantle a car to be able to resell the parts.
- The adoption of foreign children is essential for parents to accept the intruder more easily. If during a meeting you are offered something to drink or even something to eat, it is a positive sign. Indeed, sharing a meal with them is a sign of respect and openness. Refusing to eat or share tea is therefore an indelicacy, because among the Romanies, good relations involve sharing.



- Family identity is strong, with the dominant role of the mother for the children. However, around 10-12 years old, it is gradually the father and the clan who will take charge of the boy to prepare him to become an autonomous, responsible and resourceful man. It is at this level that the Roma family trusts the school less. But this family identity is also part of the clan of the wider family and friends. In this way, there is a whole ritual to prepare a girl for the management of a household and children. The mother and aunts or grandmothers participate in this.
- The overflowing friendship once someone is admitted. However, he will not be considered a Roma. Very quickly, the practical aspect of the relationship will be felt: the usefulness of having a relationship with a "gadjo".
- The group spirit is important: the origin is in the shanty towns where Roma families lived in deplorable conditions where everyone participates in everything to survive.
- Initiation of young people to culture and belonging to the clan are important things in Roma culture. This initiation is focused on needs, practical things in life and the preservation of traditions. In the Roma world, it is the husband who must provide for the family. Few women work; besides, how could they do it in large families?
- Educational tolerance for the little ones who are taken care of by the mother, the older sister, the aunt, etc. A laissez-faire behaviour leads to a period where the child is king. Roma families have many children. Children strengthen the clan and the child is considered a blessing.
- The initiation of girls by the mother and the initiation of boys by the father are important steps in preparing the young to adapt and live in the different world of the Gadjés. At times, the girl may not go to school, because the mother needs her in the household or to take care of the baby.
- The girl is very protected from the outside, because the girl's virginity must be preserved, otherwise, it can dishonour the family. The boy is freer to go out when he becomes a teenager.
- The Roman is often marrying among themselves and there are big festivals to meet. There are also meeting codes. There are therefore few mixed marriages. A Gadjo, in any case, will therefore have to accept the traditions if he wants to be accepted by the clan.
- Mobility is also part of behaviours and customs: in an unpredictable, unplanned way, family members come and the house can be full of people.
- The role of grandparents is essential. They are catalysts of tensions, help with housework, education. For a Romani, it is therefore inconceivable to send his parents to a rest home.

- Romanies therefore live in large families, in a clan, made up of brothers and sisters of the families, uncles and aunts and their families, all the grandparents and then, in a wider sphere, friends... During big celebrations, that makes a lot of people!

## **7. Conclusion**

We are aware that we have not been able to cover the whole issue, but we will be happy to learn that this thesis could give rise to reflections and be continued in more in-depth research to improve the relationships between parents and the school, but also between teachers and Romani children; to better understand their specific difficulties linked to the memory of the Romanies who have been too often stigmatized, discriminated against and excluded.

Their way of life ultimately belongs to them and if by chance their community were to expand in Belgium, this would strengthen the identity, the links. The difficulty of assimilation of the Romani can undoubtedly be raised. How can their traditions be preserved while being assimilated in a society where they are largely a minority?

Our research questions concerning the difficulties of learning French by Roma children take on a more important dimension than we initially thought.

The hypotheses initially posed seem to be verified by the analysis of the data. Yes, the Roma people seem to have left their country because of discrimination and forms of exclusion. The deplorable living conditions, the precariousness affecting work and housing, the forms of discrimination affecting schools are the vectors of their arrivals in Belgium.

They came in the hope of a better fate for their children.

This is an impoverished population, weakened by illiteracy with unsuspected consequences even by the world of teachers if we refer to the analysis of the interviews.

Illiteracy and illiteracy make the transmission of memory fragile, but also the acquisition of "metaphonological" skills whose causes are the poverty of oral language among Romani children as well as the absence noted, for what concerns our sample, of a reference language.

These children therefore accumulate handicaps when they enter primary school and this is why we must pay particular attention to our psycho-pedagogical approaches and ensure that the school puts in place specific provisions, at the pedagogical level, to prevent Romani children from losing their footing or, even worse, sending them to special education.

But the school system in Belgium has shortcomings in terms of the educational support of Romani children, but also of newly arrived children. Teachers must be better trained in psycho-pedagogical terms, in order to better meet specific needs. The divide between nursery and primary school is still present and yet, it is time to look at the problems concerning learning and assessment.

Based on our sample, the interviews, but also our experience as a speech therapist for many years, we believe that the main way to resolve learning problems among Romani children would involve three necessary ingredients:

- First, the reconciliation of Romani parents in the relationships they have with the school and their understanding of our operating system.
- Then a more adapted school policy for this type of population that should not be limited to the determination of skills base as a benchmark to be applied in the form of systems for all without distinction, without seriously assessing these children at the start of primary school.
- Finally, it would be a good thing if mentalities changed in order to eradicate this conscious or unconscious negative reflex, of categorizing these children without knowing their way of life, their culture and without being able to know the causes of their difficulties. Acting without understanding the other opens the door to prejudices and stigmatization that kill the possibilities of coexistence and healthy mutual relationships for all.

The analysis of the testimonies reveals deep desires that are related to a desired better life. We can summarize them in ten points:

- regain their identity (young people)
- regain their language (many young people no longer speak the Roma language well)
- find work (and it is difficult, being poorly qualified)
- be where living conditions are better
- find more welcoming lands (where they are accepted as they are)
- resolve their lack of schooling
- not give up their traditions
- preserve their proud freedom
- preserve the family, the clan
- transmit practical things and tools to young people that they do not learn at school, so that they can always get by in daily life.

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