

ROMA AT A GLANCE

OVERVIEW

Roma have origins in North India, and scholars estimate that their migration happened more than a thousand years ago.

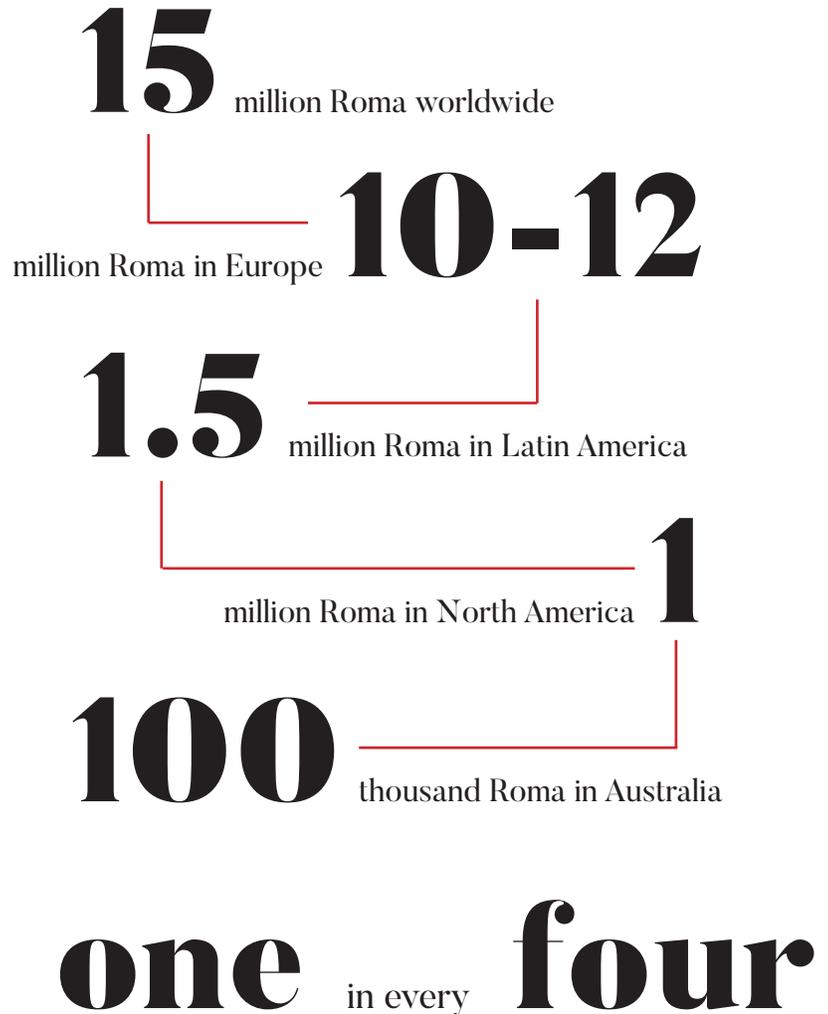
There are currently upwards of 15 million Roma living across the world. Roma are citizens of the countries they live in unless institutional barriers hinder it.

Throughout the centuries, a persistent mechanism of oppression has been established against Roma populations. In Europe, for more than seven centuries, Roma went from one harmful policy to another: enslavement for 500 years in Romania, mass killings during the Holocaust, forced assimilation until the early 2000s in some Central and Eastern European countries.

More so, the history and the collective memory of domination and violence, and power imposed through enslavement, mass killings, expulsions, forced assimilation, or forced sterilization of Romani women, has received no recognition, but still informs the inequalities and the anti-Roma sentiments prevalent today.

Roma or the Romani people is an umbrella term for groups identified, amongst others, as Roma, Gitanos, Sinti, Manush. Oftentimes, they are pejoratively called “Gypsies”.

The ideas of “Gypsy criminality” and “Gypsy inferiority” have been embedded in European culture.



Roma in the EU has been discriminated against in the past year because of their ethnicity.¹

¹ 2016 FRA survey



Across EU countries, only **1%** of the Roma are enrolled in third-level education and only **12%** in secondary education.

In southeastern Europe, only **18%** of Roma attend secondary school vs. 75% of the majority community, and less than **1%** of Roma are enrolled in university.

EU MIDIS 2016: paid work rates for Roma aged 20-64 are **30%**, which is well below the EU average of **70%** in 2015.

EU MIDIS 2016: **80%** of Roma surveyed and live with an income below the respective national at-risk-of-poverty threshold.



ABOUT THE TERM “GYPSY”

In Romani, the language of the Roma, the word “Gypsy” does not exist at all. The people have called themselves for centuries Roma and their language was always Romani. Similarly, the well-known pejorative expression to be gyped (cheating, swindle and fraud), etymologically rooted to the word gypsy infers a negative reference to the Roma population.

Although commonly used due to the lack of awareness about the Roma terminology, the “Gypsy” term is pejorative, as it persists and holds within a whole range of stereotypes about thieves, violence, and exotic people. In the US, TV shows such as Gypsy sisters or American Gypsies are also playing a significant role in consolidating stereotypes, both in terms of terminology used but also in terms of portraying the Roma in an awful demeaning way.

Thus, unless we are in very specific contexts, such as the UK, where Roma call *themselves* Gypsies, calling someone a Gypsy is as offensive and disrespectful as calling an African American the N-word.

Moreover, in Europe, up to present day, Roma have been called Tigan/Tzigane/Zigeuner deriving from “athinganos / athinganoy,” which in the old Greek language translates into untouchables, impure.

It is not just Roma identity that has been shaped by (predominantly) negative stereotypes. The representation of Roma arts and culture has also been corrupted by the imposition of a critical or condescending outside gaze. Many non-Roma, particular those who have never met a Roma person, imagine them as exotic and free spirited bohemians, fortune tellers and spell casters or as dangerous thieves or criminals.

ROMA CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD’S CULTURE

To date, fiction, academic literature, history, arts and cultural products have been extremely slow to depict the contribution of Romani people to the world’s ideas, economy, arts, and culture. Throughout history, from skillful craftspeople, soldiers, musicians, intellectuals, athletes, writers, through to politicians, prominent Romani people who have made contributions in their countries of origin or broadly in the world have been mostly identified as nationals of their country, not as Roma.

Moreover, for instance, although traditional Romani music has gained some recognition throughout the world, little notice has been taken outside and inside Spain to flamenco as a Romani genre, and little is known about the impact of Romani music on different genres including classical, jazz, or modern techno music.

Romani culture has been a source for inspiration for artists, composers, and authors for centuries. Some of the compositions of Antonin Dvůrak, Franz Schubert, Franz-Josef Haydn, Franz Liszt, Ludwig van Beethoven, Johannes Brahms, Maurice Ravel, Sergei Rachmaninov, Georges Bizet were inspired by Roma music or by “Roma” themes, although often stereotypical. More so, there is a “lack of justice” for the Roma contribution to musical compositions.

**We were silent for thousands of years
But our hearts are full
Of unuttered sentences,
Like a sea receiving
Blue river waters
All its life long.**

– Dezider Banga, from “The People With the Face of the Sun,” in *The Roads of the Roma*