

LAKE OF UTILITIES. ACCESS TO LOCAL
UTILITIES OF ROMA CITIZENS
COMPARATIVE WITH NON-ROMA
POPULATION

Abstract

The main object of this article is to appoint this minority's lack of access to the Romanian public utilities system, as discrimination and exclusion is still leading to a lack of access at primary resources for disadvantaged people. The national strategies designed over the past two decades were unable to reduce the effects of these socio-economic unfavorable conditions for the Roma citizens. The used data is from a research conducted in 2013, with main purpose in exploring and describing all forms of exclusion of the Roma population. The uniqueness of the research is given by the comparison character, using two separate samples, one representative for the general population and one representative for citizens of Roma ethnicity. The results are focused on these exact differences, regarding access and connection to the public utilities network, between the Roma minority and the general population.

Keywords: Roma, ethnic minorities, public utilities, public policies, household

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**LIPSA UTILITĂȚILOR.
ACCESUL CETĂȚENILOR
ROMI LA UTILITĂȚILE
LOCALE COMPARATIV CU
POPULAȚIA GENERALĂ**

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Rezumat

Principalul obiectiv al acestei lucrări este evidențierea lipsei de acces a cetățenilor etnici romi la sistemul public de utilități. Discriminarea și excluderea continuă să limiteze accesul la sursele primare pentru persoanele dezavantajate. Strategiile naționale din ultimele două decenii nu au reușit să reducă factorii socio-economiци nefavorabili pentru minoritatea romă. Datele analizate în articol au fost colectate în cercetare "Observatorul pentru romi" din 2013, care a avut ca scop principal să descrie și să identifice formele de excluziune ale cetățenilor etnici romi. Unicitatea acestei cercetări este caracterul comparativ, folosind două eșantioane cu volume egale, unul reprezentativ pentru întreaga populație, și unul reprezentativ pentru populația etnică romă. Rezultatele sunt axate pe diferențele dintre lipsa de conectare la sistemul public de utilități a romilor comparative cu a ne-romilor.

Cuvinte cheie: Romi, minoritate etnică, utilități publice, politici publice, gospodărie



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1. INTRODUCTION

The Roma ethnic population, mainly the Eastern European one, still finds itself in disadvantage by the lack of access (and here the discussion can be taken so much further) to the public health system, access to the education system, access to adequate housing and access to basic utilities.

Matter of fact, this article is going to tackle this exact subject: Roma population's lack of access to the Romanian public utilities system, a paradox that characterizes the modern society in which discrimination and exclusion will, without any doubt, always lead to a lack of access to primary resources for some individuals. According to the European Council, an estimated 1.85 million Roma ethnics live in Romania (8.32% of the entire population), from which 22% are living in compact communities.

Using the water utilities, electricity, gas or the sanitary sewers system are part of our daily routine. Our imagination is being reduce when, occasionally, one of the above resources in not functional. The level of stress and discomfort automatically increases in the event of restrictions in using one or more of these utilities. It is a challenge for most Europeans to envision everyday life without using water, electricity or gas to their own liking.

2. AIM AND METHODS

The exclusion of the Roma ethnic citizens from the rights of using the Romanian public utilities system is not a unique situation in Europe; Roma individuals from all over Central and Eastern Europe, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia, Hungary and Bulgaria are having similar problems regarding the access to the main public utilities system.

Data from the "**Housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in the European Union**" report, gathered from various countries, brings to light the degree of access to public utilities of this ethnic group. For example, In Slovakia only 19% of the Roma settlements had access to sewage, 41% had access to gas supply and 63% to the main water supply, although 91% had access to the main power supply (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2009, 66).

A similar situation can be found in Slovenia, "where only 51% of the Roma households have access to main electricity network, and only 75 % have access to safe drinking water".

In Serbia only 78% of Roma homes benefit from safe drinking water, 79 % have electricity, only 60 % are situated nearby paved roads and street lighting, and only 14 % are connected to the sewerage system (European Roma Rights Centre, 2012, p. 11).

In Romania, 2009 data reveal large differences in access to the main utilities network between Roma ethnics and the rest of the population, "75 % had no access to gas supply (compared to 21% in other groups), 72 % had no access to sewage (compared to 15% in other groups), 73% had no running water in the house (compared to 10 % in other groups), 12 % were not connected to the power network (compared to 1% in other groups), while 14% are using waste for home heating or they are not heating the household at all" (Housing Conditions, 2009, p. 66).

My analysis is based on research that was conducted in 2013 by the *Împreună* agency at *Observatorul pentru romi's* initiative, with main purpose in exploring and describing all forms of exclusion of Roma population compared to other ethnicities. The main research directions were: employment, health, education, housing and infrastructure, but also specific issues: migration, inter-ethnic relations, public participation. Worth mentioning the authenticity of the research through its design and practicality, by using two separate samples, one for the general population and one for citizens of Roma ethnicity. (Sandu, 2005, p. 32)

The two samples were created based on the random sampling method, multi-staged, stratified, and representative at national level, with a margin of error of 3% at a 95% confidence interval (Cace et al., 2013, p. 14).

The volume of the two samples was represented by 2050 respondents, 1025 respondents from Roma households and 1025 respondents from other ethnicities households.

3. ACCESS OF PUBLIC UTILITIES

I will further explore the infrastructural dimension of the issue, with focus on the Roma population's degree in using all of these utilities in comparison with the degree in which the general population does. Living conditions and the quality of life determine the socio-economic development of a household. (Fésüs, 2012, p. 26) This includes aspects of health status, the educational act, and professional development, only to finally get to Maslow's paradigm claiming that we need to satisfy our basic needs in order to reach perfection.

If we are to look at the health dimension we can identify in the specialty literature a direct causal connection between access to utilities and health, Masseria and Co identifying in Bulgaria, Hungary and Romania the following: "developing illness because of living in unhygienic conditions were estimated

only for the head of the household in Romania and Bulgaria since no information was available at the individual level. The proportion of people reporting high levels of feeling threatened by illness varies widely across the three countries. In Bulgaria, 41% of the respondents selected the two highest levels of threat, but in Hungary only 18% did so. The Roma and those belonging to other ethnic minority groups are more likely to feel threatened because of the unhygienic conditions in which they live than the national majority population in all three countries" (Masseria et al., 2010, p. 551).

Access to utilities, such as connection to the public main sewer network, electricity, gas, district heating, running cold and hot water, are the main indicator of housing comfort and quality of life (Zamfir et al., 2002, p. 184). From this point of view, comparing non-Roma households with the Roma ones, significant differences can be noticed, as seen in Figure 1. The dates reveal that utility least accessible for the Roma population is represented by gas (28%), while electricity is the most accessible, with only 7.4% of Roma households lacking electricity. However, the fact that they not have access to gas, doesn't necessarily translate in a negative point on the comfort scale, since they may opt for another form of heating the household, most common amongst Roma being the wood or the coal stove at a rate of 76%. We can here bring in the discussion the usefulness of using there other forms of heating, because although one could say it might be is cheaper to use a wood or coal stove, a lot more time and effort will be allocated. If you are looking at this matter in terms of efficiency you could just measure the time lost for cooking, heating the house, heating water and see the implication of using these alternatives to hygiene. The comfort of a residence and all of its inhabitants is all about this and more.

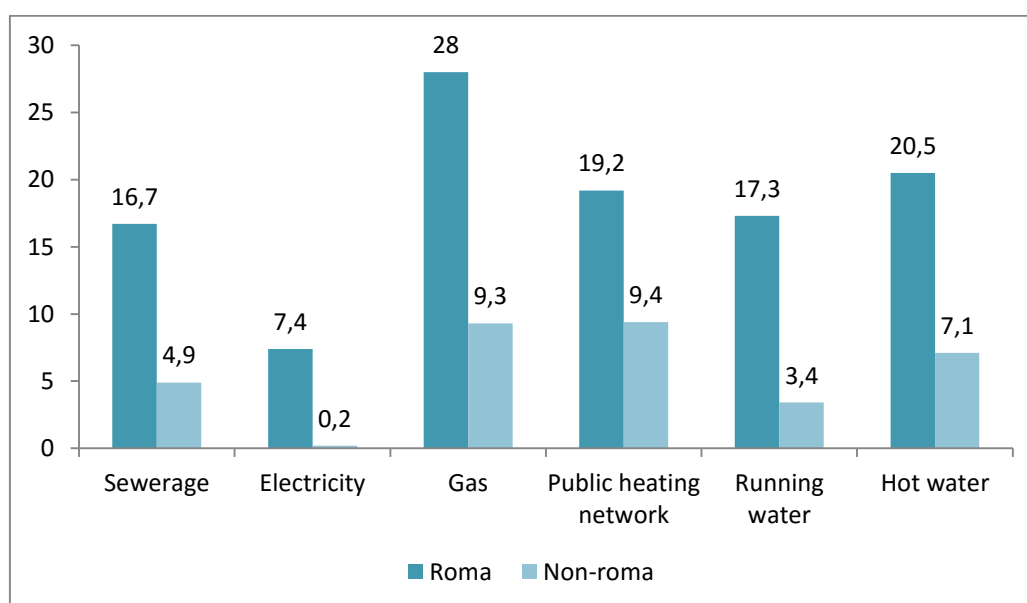


FIGURE 1. LAKE OF ACCESS TO PUBLIC UTILITIES BY TYPE OF HOUSEHOLD

Source: Cace et al., 2013, p. 40

To give a better image of the households comfort, I have used an index of *present utilities that* will include data about access to these six public utilities: sewerage, gas, electricity, public heating network, running water, hot water. Through these analyzed statistics we are able to see how many residences have access to these six utilities, and what percent of the Roma citizens are actually living in extreme poverty, suffering from a lack of any kind of utilities. I then compared the values in this index between Roma population and the non-Roma one, depending on the *exponential trend line* between both samples.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the Roma population will have less access to utilities than the non-Roma population has. For the Roma people without access to any of the six public utilities the gap is slightly higher, 8.4% houses are out of any kind of public utilities compared to non-Roma households, 1.2%. The differences between householders in accessing of all six utilities (sewerage, gas, electricity, public heating network, running water, hot water), is almost triple between Roma and non-Roma citizens, 8.6% of Roma houses are connected to all six utilities compared to 23.5% in the non-Roma houses. The tendency is negative in Roma population and positive in non-Roma population. These data are ultimately confirming the lack of comfort and the barrier in accessing the public utilities network of the Roma population.

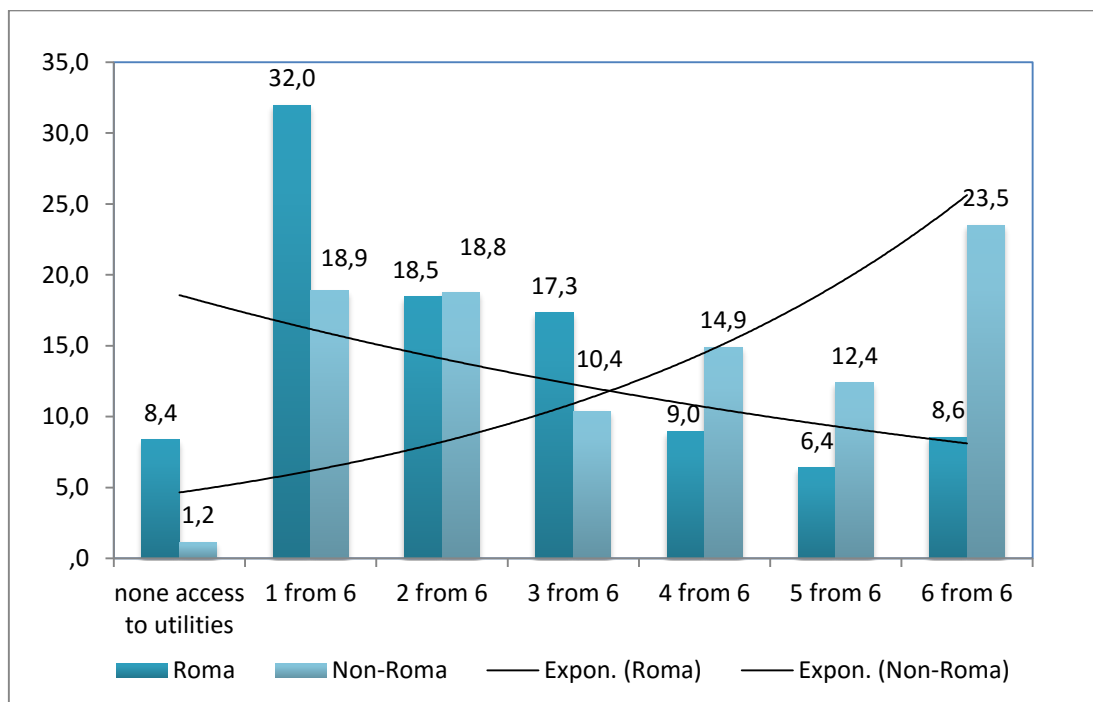


FIGURE 2. INDEX OF PRESENT UTILITIES, INCLUDING DATA ABOUT ACCESS TO SIX PUBLIC UTILITIES: SEWERAGE, GAS, ELECTRICITY, PUBLIC HEATING NETWORK, RUNNING WATER, HOT WATER

Source: Statistical analysis by author

One explication for this different degree in connection to the utilities network is the position of the Roma households, inside or outside of the villages, considering that 22% of Roma population is living in compact communities. In regard to the issue of marginalization of the Roma communities, I can here trace some aspects. First, we must establish if there is a significant relationship between the position of Roma people housing in relation to the city grounds - on the edge or inside - and the type of community - homogeneous or heterogeneous. The correlation between these two variables is statistically significant and has a positive trend, registering a Spearman coefficient of 0.25. Therefore, if these individuals have residence on the outskirts of the village they are likely to be surrounded only by Roma families. More than a third of those who consider they are living in the village periphery say they are solely surrounded by Roma families. Also more than one-tenth of the Roma ethnicity respondents live in communities consisting entirely of people of the same ethnicity. Other than that, for all the other cases a high degree of heterogeneity in the community can be observed. The marginalization of the Roma individuals, with or without their consent, represents a barrier in the way of their access to the education system, health services and even the labor market opportunities (Zamfir et al., 2002, p. 285).

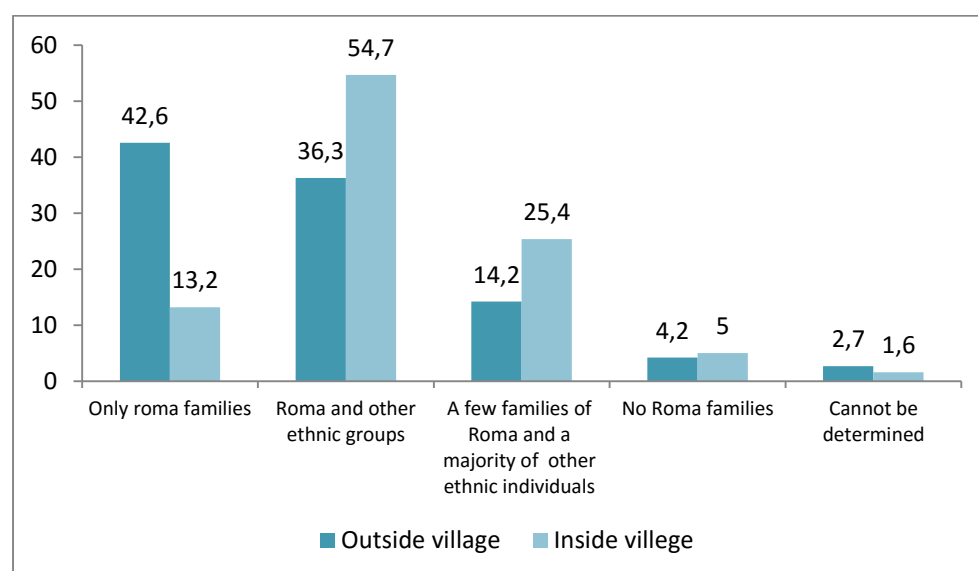


FIGURE 3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE POSITION OF THE HOUSEHOLD IN RELATION TO THE VILLAGE (OUTSIDE / INSIDE) AND THE SUBJECTIVE ESTIMATION OF THE ETHNIC HOMOGENEITY OF THE COMMUNITY.

Source: Cace et al., 2013, p. 48

4. AMENITIES PRESENT IN THE HOUSEHOLD

Besides access to utilities, to correctly assess the comfort level, we must also consider the amenities present in the household, appliances that, without access to the public range of utilities, would be considered meaningless. In Figure is the situation of appliances: cooker stove, phone, refrigerator,

washing machine, computer, television, internet connection, TV cable, in the Roma households. We can also observe the percentages for devices that cannot be found in Roma households. The largest deficit is in the communications sphere where, a landline, Internet access and a computer are missing in more than three quarters of the Roma households. At the same time, the lack of a washing machine in two-thirds of these households can be accounted on poverty or the continuing the tradition of washing clothes by hand, either at home or at a river.

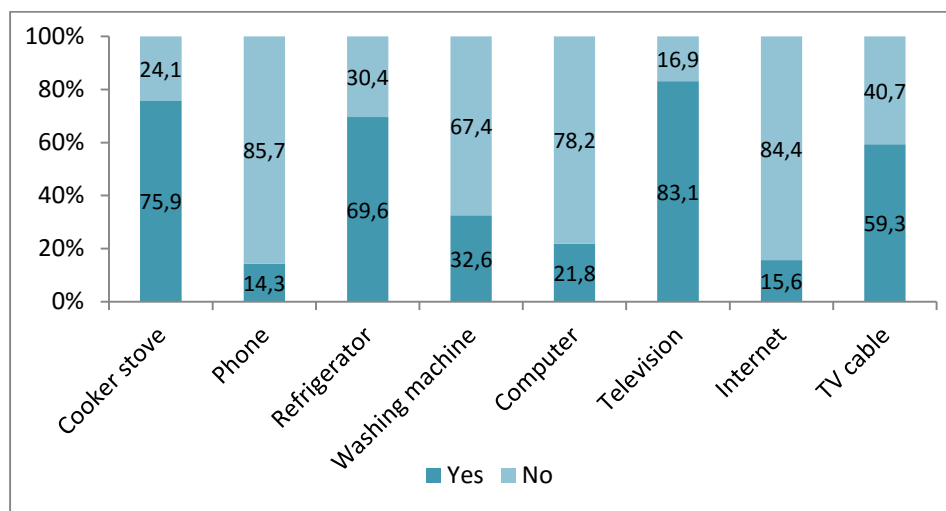


FIGURE 4. DISTRIBUTION OF APPLIANCES IN THE ROMA HOUSEHOLDS. PERCENTAGE VALUES FOR "YES" AND "NO" ANSWERS AT "HOUSEHOLD IS EQUIPPED WITH..."
Source: Cace et al., 2013, p. 46

Because we mentioned items of domestic use and public utilities access, we must also take into account the means of actually supporting the expenses that both of them come with, situations where bills aren't paid on time arising as a possibility. Meaning now we can compare the percentage of those who are falling behind with utility payments, depending on the type of household. In order to make a fair comparison we considered the prevalent utility in both categories - electricity - and, in a more generic way, its maintenance costs. It appears that about a quarter of Roma households have had delays in paying their utilities and almost a third have delayed payment of their electricity bills, while for non-Roma households the number is much smaller, with only a tenth of them falling behind.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this article would be that specific public policies for improving access need to be developed. And this is necessary for all population, not just this specific minority since this is fundamental right of any citizen, no matter the ethnicity. The debates on the social economic status of

the Roma minority are starting from basic resources, like utilities, and furthermore continue with improving education, health, employment and so on. Hopefully the next strategy for Roma integration will take act in this direction and will provide basic recourse.

"National Roma Integration Strategies 2015-2020" aim is to create a legitimate framework for developing public policy for social integration of the Roma population, with principles of national strategy such as: consensus, social utility, sectorial distribution, integration, reach the goals, mechanism, technical measures, concrete actions. To reach these goals, the national strategy needs to implement mechanism, technical measures and concrete action at local level to improve access of public utilities (European Commission, 2014).

Roma communities through their unique diversity impose specific actions, and in order to answer to all these challenges and needs, local level administration must find positive and practical mechanisms for integrating Roma ethnics. Developing human resources in the public administration, both central and local, developing the collaboration between institution can be a good start for the local authorities in implementing a national strategy an success in the inclusion of the Roma population.

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