

## Roma

### Profile

According to the 2002 national census, there are 182,766 Roma in the Russian Federation. Roma in the RF are part of a much larger international Roma community. Roma in Russia can be divided into several groups differentiated by language, culture, kinship ties, dialect, and occupation. There is often strong rivalry between these groups and each has developed different relationships with Russian state and society. The leading group has achieved success in the performance arts. The official census data is believed to underestimate significantly the number of Roma in the RF.

Today the majority of Roma are sedentary.

### Historical context

Roma migrated to Russia in three main waves beginning at the end of the fifteenth century.

In the mid-1920s Roma were classified as a national minority of Indian origin and policies were developed to assimilate them. In the 1930s many were deported to Siberia. In 1956 Khrushchev decreed that Roma must be settled. There was a cultural revival in the last decades of the Soviet Union when the Moscow Romani theatre was established.

In the past their movement has been regulated; from 1759 to 1917 they were banned from entering St. Petersburg. After the demise of the Soviet Union, discrimination became more visible.

### Current issues

Roma in Russia, like other groups, have been targeted by racist violence. Roma homes were targeted in the Siberian village of Iskitim on three separate occasions in 2005, causing some 40 Roma families to lose their homes. In April 2006 two Roma in Volgograd region were beaten to death by a gang wielding baseball bats. Prosecutors investigated the case as one of 'hooliganism', causing an outcry from Russian and Roma human rights activists.

Roma advocacy organizations have also documented many examples of human rights abuses of Roma at the hands of law enforcement officials in Russia. These range from torture or other ill-treatment of Roma in detention, racial profiling, arbitrary police raids on Romany settlements, abduction and extortion and denial of fair trial standards to Roma under prosecution. The economic, social and cultural rights of Roma are also violated through blocked access to housing, health care and education.

Far from condemning these developments parts of the Russian press have praised them, fanning negative stereotypes of Roma as being associated with begging, drug dealing and other types of crime. Local and federal government officials have also made a series of public statements encouraging mass

violence against Roma in the case of a local official in Yaroslavl, and advocating the mass expulsion of Roma from Russia in the case of a State Duma deputy. Russian human rights activists believe this has contributed to a climate of impunity with regard to physical attacks on Roma homes and settlements and discrimination in society at large.

Roma face serious problems in securing employment due to negative stereotyping and obstructions to renewing temporary residence permits. Roma lack representatives in positions of authority and their political concerns have remained unheard. As a diaspora community without a recognized claim to a homeland their efforts for linguistic self-determination have also failed. Although UNESCO has funded a school for Roma in Moscow, requests by Roma organizations for the allocation of federal funds to improve sanitation and education standards among Roma have been refused.

Roma advocacy groups have also highlighted discriminatory practice disadvantaging women within Roma populations, including those in Russia. These include the removal of girls from education at an early age due to marriage and many women are not able to engage in any public activities due to their stereotyping within the community as belonging only to the domestic sphere.