



# **Final Report: Romanian immigrants** **in Spain**

CEPS Projectes Socials



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## **Abstract**

This analysis has been done as part of the international EU project "Access to Rights and Civil Dialogue for All", that aims to examine the low civic and political participation of European Union members when residing in a member state that is not their own. As an action research project, further aims to develop a training or curriculum that fosters the citizenship involvement and political participation of EU national migrants in their host country, especially focusing on women. The project takes place in five European countries, each of them focusing on a chosen migrant community such as the Portuguese migrants living in France, Polish migrants living in Belgium, Bulgarian migrants living in Greece and Romanian migrants living in Italy and Spain. Spain, that since 2000 experienced a rapid exponential growth in the number of immigrants residing in its territory, chose to present and examine the patterns of the largest immigrant group it hosts, mainly, the situation of Romanian citizens living in the country.

## **Key words**

**Citizen participation, migration, transnationalism, social participation, network-based migration, the role of the Church in the Romanian migration process, integration, immigrant associations, electoral participation, gender differences in the pattern of immigration and integration**

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In order to describe from a demographic point of view the Romanian immigrant community currently living in Spain, we used 2011 data provided by the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE).

Aiming to make recommendations concerning the generally low participation of immigrants in the local civic and political life of their host

country, and willing to conform to the general objectives and indications of this project - to collect qualitative data provided by cultural and representative associations as well as by EU citizens residing in an other country where they are not nationals -, we conducted 6 interviews and 3 focus group discussions with Romanian citizens living in Spain and with members of Romanian associations and political parties.

The general characteristic of Romanian citizens living in Spain from the viewpoint of their political participation can be defined by their lack of interest in local politics leading to an almost non-existent attitude of political participation. The idea, that local policy is the closest to the citizen and, as a result, the most attractive to participate, probably has some difficulties that restrict the full usage of that right. Although it seems logical that electoral participation can be an indicator of the level of social integration, when talking with some of the migrants interviewed, even those who represent migrant associations and they affirm to be fully integrated (having job, speaking Spanish, speaking or, at least, understanding Catalan, having Catalan friends, etc.), their attitude towards political participation is not the expected one.

In the case of the Romanian Roma, their level of participation is altered by more social factors that derive from their specific marginal status in the society and the stigmatization they have to face as an ethnic group, both in their host country and in their country of origin. In the situation of Roma, the fear of being expelled from the country basically makes it impossible to relate with local authorities. We noticed a self-defence reaction (that resulted in silence or an immediate switch to Romani language by the focus-group participants) every time the slight possibility to get in touch with local or national authorities or the possibility for "going out public" in order to defend their rights has been mentioned. Going to any kind of state authority is unwanted and also undesired due to language problems and also due to their perceived status as irregular immigrants.

The very act of voting and participating in local and European elections is linked to the questions of whether or not the immigrants themselves feel as members of the local community, and whether or not they perceive themselves as members of the united Europe, as European citizens. It can be argued that voting, as an act of manifestation of ones self-understanding as a citizen with rights, very much depends on ones level of integration, following the logic of "the person with the highest integration level is the one who participates on the elections". As we will see it later, this logic cannot be applied to Romanian immigrants living in Spain.

This leads us to the question of how we understand integration in the general context of migration. We argue, that immigrants tend to reproduce and conform to the idea of integration understood on the level of national politics and in the context of a nation state; as is said before, the idea of being integrated is mainly individual-based instead of collective integration, consisting of working, learning and possessing the language of the country (and of the region in some cases), being a "good member of the community of locals" in the sense of not causing any problems, but mainly remaining in silence and not exercising your rights to vote as a citizen and finally, not claiming for more rights as a member of an integrated immigrant community.

As their strategy of integration they tend to use "navigation on the surface", close enough to the life of locals, but avoiding to "sink" in it, to actually become a part of them. There is always good to keep some demarcation lines ("we" and "them"), but also to remain silent and not to "cause more problems". As transnational migrants, both Romanians and Romanian Roma "use the possibilities of dual home bases, both "here and there" and "us and them" affiliations to help keep economic, cultural, and political options open (Bryceson and Vuorela, 2002 In Bailey, 2009)" and choose adaptation instead of integration.

Citizen participation from the perspective of gender keeps reflecting the patriarchal construction of the community the persons we interviewed come from. From a legal point of view, or from the point of view of the state, men

are those who could be considered as citizens in Mihaela Cosescu's (Cosescu, 2008) terms, because they have the right to participate in local elections, the right to vote in Spain, meaning that mainly they tend to be registered with local authorities. So officially and from the viewpoint of the state, men exist as citizens while women keep preserving their status as non-citizens. Although this was available for the Romanian Roma we talked to, and the difference in being registered from the aspect of gender might not be so articulated in the case of Romanians who successfully integrated to the Spanish job market.

In relation to the general context of migration, the labour market offers different job opportunities to Romanian men and women, being women most conducted to personal care and housework sectors, what fits with international division of labour perspective. Local women transfer their previous visible inequalities related to reproductive work to migrant women (Parella, 2003), establishing hierarchical relations between women of local societies and migrant ones.

In addition, the network-based strategy of job search constructs a trap for most of migrant women, making them unavailable to escape the job sectors that are traditionally meant to be theirs (family care, agriculture). Network migration, then, can be useful for the community or in economical terms, but it does not contribute to women empowerment.

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