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ECONOMIC STRATEGIES AND MIGRATORY TRAJECTORIES OF VLAX ROMA FROM EASTERN SLOVAKIA TO LEICESTER, UK[1]

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The article is based on long term field research and focuses on a community of family-related Vlax Roma from the Prešov, Sabinov and Košice regions who created a large community in Leicester, UK. The massive wave of labour migration to UK started in 2004, in the year of Slovakia's accession to the European Union. The migration to Great Britain has been based on family networks and represents an example of chain migration based on the reciprocal help of family networks. Besides their own relatives other different non-related Roma intermediaries had an important influence on their arrival to Britain. The article focuses on the changing economic strategies of new migrants from the group in focus after their replacement to UK. In the years following Slovak accession to the EU, the prospective Romani migrants explored many illegal paths to arrive to Britain in their struggle for a better life. Approximately after a decade since their arrival, we can find this community as fully integrated into the local British working class, spending their time between *my work* and *my house*.

Key words: migrations, migration trajectories, migration narratives, economic strategies, grey economy practices, life strategies, Vlax Roma

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Methodology

The migration of Roma into Western Europe has been a frequently researched and described topic in recent years (see, for example, Castle-Kanerova, 2003; Dobruská, 2016; Grill, 2008, 2013, 2015, 2016; Guy, Uherek & Weinerová, 2004; Janků, 2004; Matras, 2000; Uherek, 2007; Vašečka & Vašečka, 2003; Vidra, 2013). My contribution takes into

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account the findings of these researchers and complements them with new perspectives. This is a qualitative study based on long-term research in which I was able to observe the members of the studied community before their migration[2], during migration, and also in the decade following migration. Due to the good knowledge of the community members and mutual trust, I managed to collect rich material showing migratory processes and economic strategies from the point of view of the actors themselves.

In 2015, 2016 and 2017, I had three three-week stays in Leicester where I conducted informal and structured interviews focused on migration topics with the Roma. My communication partners in the UK were a branched family of about twenty adults whose younger generation I knew in their youth while in Slovakia; nowadays they all have partners and their own children. I also conducted research based on structured interviews with several individuals from outside of this family group. I was interested in the overall structure of the migration process, including motivation as well as the gradual involvement in the life of the target country up to the current (post-migration) situation. In my contribution I also use my field notes and recordings from Slovakia from 2003 – 2007 and my other related recordings. Most of the recordings were conducted in Vlax Romany, some in Czech and Slovak.

The presented findings are based on my field observations. In the text, I combine my conclusions with similar findings of other researchers in the area of Roma migration from Slovakia to Great Britain. I am aware of the distortion that can occur by comparing phenomena originating from two different communities and, therefore, I make an effort to clearly distinguish between these findings.

Structure of the paper

In the introduction, I will discuss the pre-migration period (until 2004) during which the Roma lived permanently settled in towns and villages in Eastern Slovakia with minimal migratory movements. Looking for experiences that could have affected future migration, I will focus mainly on members of this group migrating to Sweden during communism and subsequently to Belgium at the end of the 1990s. Next, I will describe migratory trajectories that brought the studied group to Leicester, UK, and the functions of the family networks in these trajectories. I will focus especially on the economic strategies that Vlax Roma used in this city at the beginning of migration and their transformation in the course of the last decade. I will pay special attention to Roma intermediaries who have influenced both the form of these strategies and, to a large extent, encouraged migratory movements of certain social strata of (not only) Roma from Slovakia. At the end of this article, I will focus on the process of the gradually changing approach to work in the culture of Vlax Roma living in Leicester.

PART ONE: UNANTICIPATED MIGRATION

In the spring of 2004, as part of annual research for the International Organization for Migration, I arrived in Prešov at a settlement inhabited by Vlax Roma. Our aim was to

2 The community of Vlax Roma living in Prešov and the surrounding area, which I am discussing in this paper, has been the subject of my observations during my research activities conducted since 2000 up to the present. So far, I have mainly focused on the analysis of their historical migration trajectories (Hajská, 2016) and the various aspects of language use from a sociolinguistic perspective (Hajská, 2014; Hajská, 2015).

identify the potential of Slovak Roma to migrate to Western Europe, particularly Great Britain, after Slovakia's accession to the European Union. On the basis of interviews with the representatives of institutions and with the Vlax Roma themselves, my colleagues and I came to the conclusion that *"there is no threat of a migration wave"* (IOM, 2004: 38). In the structured interviews, the Roma declared their low motivation to leave Slovakia and little interest in Great Britain. This was associated with the unaffordability of the trip to this destination and with their fears due to the language barrier. Nonetheless, a massive wave of migration to Great Britain arose that same year. Over the course of the next few years, the greater part of the Vlax Roma from Prešov and the surrounding villages and towns, amounting to several hundred people, left for Britain. In our research, we completely underestimated the high spontaneity of Roma migration as well as their ability to quickly react and organize the whole process at the level of family networks. We also underestimated the role of the so-called "intermediaries" who were willing to cover the travel costs of migrating Roma.

Static period: 1990s and the turn of the millennium

I will pause briefly at the year 2004 and attempt a retrospective look from that perspective. That year represents a turning point, not only in the modern history of Slovakia (accession to the EU), but also in the migratory behaviour of this particular Roma group. The preceding period after the fall of communism in 1989 until 2004 appears to be a very static period in this group with a minimal amount of migration. The only exceptions are moves to Belgium by several families at the end of the millennium. Most of the Vlax Roma in Eastern Slovakia had a permanently settled life. Most of them occupied apartments in "Roma neighbourhoods", i.e. places which later started to be referred to as socially excluded localities. In these localities they occupied substandard apartments and lived in decreasingly favourable conditions. Other Vlax Roma lived on the outskirts of Prešov or in houses in the surrounding villages whose size and quality reflected their owner's abilities and skills to build housing under the previous regime, ranging from spacious houses from the period of socialist construction in one village to illegal huts made of clay and logs in another village.

In the memories of the Roma across the territory of former Czechoslovakia, the arrival of democracy is generally associated with the loss of employment among those who had spent the previous decades working in various state-owned enterprises such as construction and agriculture as well as with rising poverty (Ringold, Orenstein, Wilkens, 2005: 63). After 1990, the situation of the Roma in Slovakia deteriorated significantly due to the collapse of the socialist economy and the rise of unemployment from zero to 10% (Gallová Kriglerová, Chudžiková, 2013: 169–170). Eastern Slovakia especially became a structurally disadvantaged region where Roma are the most endangered group due to ethnic-racial discrimination in the labour market (Grill, 2015: 161). For the Roma population this period, therefore, meant a collective transition to a system of welfare benefits which most of those who still live in Slovakia continue to be dependent upon today.

Also from the perspective of Vlax Roma in Prešov, which I had the opportunity to record in 2004, the 1990s appeared to be a decade of gradual decline which culminated in a drastic reduction of welfare benefits in 2003 – 2004[3]. This was often followed

3 The far-reaching reform of social policy resulting in a sharp reduction of social benefits triggered a wave of riots on the side of the Roma which consequently raised a panic among the non-Roma

by an incremental worsening of the socio-economic status of many Roma families. This reality reinforced the conviction of many Roma that life in Slovakia was becoming unbearable.

In the spring of 2004, when I arrived in Prešov to conduct the above-mentioned research into migration potential, most of the Roma were trying to cope with the worsening economic situation. My field notes point to a great lethargy in the studied community and to the people's passive surrender to a quite hopeless situation in the labour market as well as a growing discriminatory atmosphere in society. At that time many of the Romanies faced an imminent loss of housing (or suffered from it)[4] stemming from their inability to pay rent and energy bills.

PART TWO: PO DROM (ON THE ROAD)

Migration history and journeys to the Czech Republic

Despite the minimal migration potential displayed by this Roma group in 2004, it is interesting to note that this state was quite transient since in the past these Roma were, on the contrary, highly migratory. Parents and grandparents of middle-age typically had engaged in various forms of livelihood on their nomadic routes (which I discuss in detail in my paper for Romano Džaniben 2/2016), and many older Roma still remember the nomadic times from their childhoods[5]. In this respect, the studied community is different from most Slovak Roma whose current migration from Slovakia, as shown by Vašečka and Vašečka (2003: 35), is not a reflection of the nomadic Roma past. The potential impact of the nomadic life experience must be taken into account in the studied community.

Migratory movements of the Roma population continued in the communist era when migrations from the countryside to the region's bigger cities in search of work and a better life were common; also to the Czech Republic where many families consequently settled down permanently. These families' mutual contacts with Slovakia gradually ceased until most of them became entirely interrupted in the 1990s due to the last direct relatives in the source locality either passing away or moving away. Even the studied group displays the societal trend of labour migration to the Czech Republic in the 1990s[6]. At that time, the Czech Republic was the most frequent migration destination for the citizens of Slovakia (Gallová Kriglerová, Chudžiková, 2013: 16). This was also the case for many eastern Slovak Roma who were leaving the region affected by an economic crisis in order to escape the trap of unemployment. The most frequent was a cyclic migration with longer periods in the Czech Republic and shorter

inhabitants and turned public opinion against the Roma (Marušák and Singer, 2009). According to some authors, it seems that the reform of Ľudovít Kaník in 2003 - 2004 was aimed at punishing the long-term unemployed rather than helping them overcome their poverty (Gallová Kriglerová, Chudžiková, 2013: 167).

4 At that time I noticed a few cases where the inability to pay rent forced large families to move "back" to the Romany settlements that they had abandoned many years ago in search of a better life in a city. After housing market liberalization and rent deregulation, similar cases are not exceptional in Slovakia. (See, for example, Radičová, 2001).

5 Although a large part of the Vlax Roma stopped carrying on their nomadic livelihoods in the 1950s, some families kept their horses and carriages up to the early 1970s.

6 In the monitored community the trend of leaving for work in the Czech Republic cannot be observed until the first decade of the new millennium.

visits home (Grill, 2015: 161). This trend can also be observed in the studied group where a number of Roma tried to find work in the Czech Republic with only a few succeeding. At that time, most of the contacts with relatives in the Czech Republic were already interrupted and the Roma from the studied group, therefore, had no choice but to rely on (often insecure or even illegal) networks of employment agents. This predominantly male migration was, and still is, characterized by its lack of organization. Most often, jobs were randomly found through other Roma (mostly *Rumungri*[7]) or through random tips provided by employment offices and various employers and agents. Labour migration to the Czech Republic was often short-term and frequently unsuccessful. I recorded dozens of stories similar to the following one:

> *(1) „Kerasas po Čecho. Andi Plzňa. De o podnikateľi , Rumungro sas… haj našlas tar le lóvenca, vaj dopaš miliono čordas haj ame khote mukhlas. Vi khote jive kerdam. Mek nás ame sar te žal khere"* ("We worked in Bohemia, in Pilsen. But the businessman, he was Rumungro … and he ran away with the money. He stole about half a million and left us there. We worked there for free. We did not even have a way to get home.")

Migration to the West

Leaving aside the domestic migration of Roma to the Czech Republic, the Vlax Roma from the studied group also followed other experiences regarding migration to Western Europe. In the times of communism, several large families left for Sweden between the 1960s – 1980s.

The pre-1989 Roma migration to western European countries is generally a very under-researched topic[8]. There is no data about the number of Romani migrants from Communist Czechoslovakia. Entire Romani families nonetheless occasionally fled to the West[9]. Although the strategies they used were similar to those of other emigrants we can state, on the basis of narratives, that Roma migration already had its specific features at that time. These included the escapes of large families including children, often as part of a chain migration to join other family members. Roma people often left without knowing any foreign languages, without contacts, or even without having any knowledge about the geography and political context of the destination country. Stories of (Vlax) Romani migrants often feature other (Vlax) Roma, whom they contacted in the foreign country and who did not refuse to help them, for example providing contacts, translation, and – not exceptionally – accommodation at home, sometimes for extended periods of time. The Vlax Romany language plays a crucial role in these stories as it allows the Roma to communicate with each other in an envi-

7 A term that Vlax Roma use when talking about non-Vlax Roma, in Vlax language sing. Rumungro, plur. Rumungri.

8 The only exception is information about important personalities with Romany origin, who emigrated abroad, e.g. Dr. Ján Cibula, the Romany activist who was elected as a first president of IRU (International Romani Union), who emigrated to Switzerland in 1968. The emigration of Roma to Western Europe is otherwise absent in Czech Romani studies literature although some authors confirm its existence through random references, e.g. Nina Pavelčíková (Pavelčíková, 2004: 85) mentions that the Vlax Roma in Opava organized the sale of used western cars in cooperation with their foreign relatives.

9 I managed to collect narratives concerning these forms of migration not only in the monitored locality but also in other communities of Vlax Roma, for example those living in Ostrava, Prostějov and Levice. The following generalization is also based on the narratives of these respondents.

ronment which they are completely unfamiliar with. As soon as some members of the family managed to establish themselves in the new country, a migratory bridge was created. This allowed other relatives to follow.

In a similar way, a migratory bridge was created to far-away Sweden. It was built not only on family networks but also on contacts with intermediaries in individual countries. According to memories, the Vlax Roma leaving Eastern Slovakia used the route which was also typical for other Czechoslovak emigrants but was little described in connection to the Roma – across Hungary and Yugoslavia.

(2) *"I came in 1982 to join my brother who had already been here for twenty years. …We all had fake documents. …In Yugoslavia, someone reported us because we wanted to flee. We were really lucky they didn't put us in jail. They just took us to Hungary across the border. …We spent one year with foreign gypsies in Budapest. …When our papers were done, we went across Yugoslavia and Austria to Germany, from Germany to Denmark and from Denmark we came here. And we had no problem. Nobody stopped us. I had a document like a diplomat, because I was political."*

The community of Vlax Roma lives in southwestern Sweden till now. They still maintain contacts especially with the closest family in Slovakia which they partly use as a marital circle. The Swedish branch of the studied group of Vlax Roma is perceived as one with a high social status. Legends about the wealth of these Roma circulate through the Roma across different localities and certainly might have been a factor in supporting migration to the West in search of a better life in the years following. Stories of successful migrants bring an idea that life "in the West" (*po západo*) is better and easier than in Slovakia.

Belgium

The period which I described at the beginning of this study as static in terms of migration was interrupted in the late 1990s by journeys to Belgium. At that time, it was one of the most common destinations of Roma from Slovakia (along with Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Denmark and Finland, see Uherek, 2007). According to Divinský, between 1998 – 2002 Belgium recorded the highest number of asylum applications by Slovak citizens: a total of 5,044 (Divinský, 2004: 35). As was also the case with other Slovak Roma, the studied group featured asylum migration where seeking political asylum[10] was mainly motivated by the financial means allocated by the Belgian state to the applicants. These were much higher than the social benefits in Slovakia and represented an escape from their frustrating socio-economic situation as well as a promise of a better life for the applicants. As shown by Zdeněk Uherek, the pocket money for asylum seekers, along with other provided services, represented an improvement of life status among the Roma asylum seekers (Uherek, 2007: 763). As shown by my own field observations, these benefits also constituted the main motivation for asylum migration among the most socially vulnerable families. In addition to receiving these financial means, some asylum seekers also managed to find in-

10 Asylum migration in western European countries represented a continual process of arrivals and departures of new asylum seekers. A majority of the asylum applications, with only a few exceptions, were declined (Vidra, 2013: 6).

formal employment (Grill, 2016: 98) and thus had the opportunity to gain extra income in addition to the regular benefits received from the state.

At the end of the 1990s, dozens of Vlax Roma families from Eastern Slovakia were also gradually aiming towards Belgium. Most of them arrived to refugee camps which they started to refer to as *lágro* and applied for political asylum. Some of them settled down with their relatives that had already managed to get their own housing.

One respondent who came to Belgium in 2000 described his enthusiasm for life there in the following way:

> *(3) „Bomba sas, igen mišto khote sas, denas tu te chas, lóve jive astarasas. Naj kadé dine ame po kher, haj khote sas amenge bezva! Žanes keči lóve denas ame? Me astarós korkóri le šánvenca seďemdesáť ťisíc. Kinasas peske, so pe amáre jákha dikhasas. Mekh andi Amerika kade či avilinó. Káde čáčes sar khote sas, vúbec šoha či avla khači.“* ("It was amazing, it was great there, they fed you, you got money for free. And then they gave us money for a house. We had a perfect time there. Do you know how much money they gave us? Just me with the children, I was getting seventy thousand! We were buying everything we saw. Not even in America could it be like this. Seriously, it was so good there that it can never be like this anywhere again".)

Legends about a better life in Belgium were a pull factor for other migrants from the studied group. However, many people did not succeed in the asylum process and after months in the so-called *lágro*, where they lived with children in very cramped conditions, went back to Slovakia. Some of them sold all their belongings in order to afford their trip to Belgium and, therefore, returned home penniless.

> *(4) „Gelam andi Belgia. Sa bikindam t' avel ame po drom. Sedemnáť tisíc počindam o taxíko. .... Ašadine ame pi hranica haj khére bišadine ame. Č' ašilas amenge khanči.“* ("We went to Belgium and sold everything to be able to pay for the trip. We spent seventeen thousand for a taxi. ...They stopped us at the border and sent us home. We had nothing left.")

Smaller groups of Roma managed to establish themselves in Belgium[11]. After the accession to the EU, asylum procedures for citizens of Slovakia were stopped (Uherek, 2007: 767) and most of the Roma from the studied group moved elsewhere. Some of them joined their other relatives in different European countries (such as France, Germany, and the aforementioned Sweden), some of them went back to Slovakia, and other families moved from Belgium to Great Britain. These families later became the basis for the ensuing massive migration from the localities in Eastern Slovakia to this country.

PART THREE: UPRE ANDI ANGLIA (IN ENGLAND)

Following the accession to the European Union, Great Britain became the most popular destination for Roma from Eastern Slovakia (Grill, 2008: 2). In line with this trend, Vlax Roma from the areas around Sabinov, Prešov and Košice gradually started to move there.

11 Often by combining legal and illegal activities, for example by finding ways of becoming part of the social system or by a combination of illegal work, marriages with a Belgian citizen or other illegal activity.

In the beginning, Great Britain represented just another place where the Roma tried to succeed after fruitless attempts to migrate to Belgium and other western countries. The first members of the studied group arrived in Britain at the turn of the millennium. However, more frequent departures of Vlax Roma from Eastern Slovakia were recorded shortly after Slovakia's accession to the EU in 2004 and 2005. Massive migration waves followed between 2006 and 2008. Roma were also arriving during the following years but to a lesser extent. Most of the Vlax Roma from Eastern Slovakia settled down in Britain's most multicultural city, Leicester, which has a foreign population of more than 50%[12]. In the northern parts of the city especially, more than 70% of the population is of Asian descent. It is in these neighbourhoods where Vlax Roma settled down and formed another of the many minority enclaves in the city. According to some respondents, their community in Leicester has more than a thousand which is probably an exaggerated estimate. The exact number cannot be determined.

Vlax Gypsies in Leicester – image of the community

Leicester is the destination not only for Vlax Roma from the towns and villages of Eastern Slovakia but also for those coming from other countries in Western Europe, especially from Belgium and Sweden. This allowed for an interesting re-integration of some of the often extinct social contacts between very distantly related families which belong to the *jekh nípo*, one broad family.

The whole community is nowadays multi-directionally interconnected by various family ties. As regards to their settlement patterns, the Vlax Roma do not form a spatially concentrated community in Leicester; they are dispersed mainly in the northwest part of the city. This is due to the fact that most Roma search for housing in a way that is primarily driven by affordable offers on the housing market. Spatial de-concentration associated with the maintenance of mutual contacts requires mobility of community members; most of them soon get a car. In some places in the city the incidence of Vlax Roma is higher. Those who live isolated from the community often come to these places whether it is for a visit, to do shopping, and so on. Vlax Roma with roots in Eastern Slovakia meet in different places: at work, in their favourite shops, at schools, at parties and celebrations, at church, and on social networks. In addition to other aspects, the community is distinguished by its language; together they speak Vlax Romany which has some distinctive dialectical elements that distinguish members of the community from other Vlax Roma. As far as language is concerned, it is important to mention that even at the beginning of the second decade of their stay in England, English is frequently not spoken by the first generation of migrants, or its knowledge is only passive.

"Intrégo Perješi khate le. Mejg vi le Rumugri." ("All Prešov is here, even the Rumungri.")

Given that some Vlax Roma people lived in Slovakia in exogamous partnerships with non-Vlax partners, some of the Romungro families came to Leicester through the help of family networks. These families helped other relatives (again, mostly Romungros) to get to Britain. Some of the families came here thanks to the Vlax networks of inter-

12 According to the Commission for Racial Equality, since 2011 Leicester has been the first British city where white British people represent a minority.

mediaries who I will discuss in more detail below. As a result, we can also find a relatively large group of non-Vlax Roma from Eastern Slovakia in Leicester. We can assume that another part of the non-Vlax Roma came to the city completely independently. In comparison with the Vlax community, communities of the Roma-speaking North Central Romany are less numerous and far more fragmented.

Aside from Vlax Roma from the East, Vlax also from Western Slovakia (especially from around Nitra, Lučenec and Levice) settled in Leicester. They are in contact with the studied group but for various reasons, some of which I will discuss below, they distance themselves from each other. According to one Vlax woman from Levice, the Vlax people from Eastern Slovakia have gained control over the city: *"Intrégo fouro fere lengo"* ("The whole city is theirs"). By this, she means that they represent the most numerous group of Roma[13].

Reasons for migration to England

(5) „Kana avilam, igen lošós, hoj podarindas pe amenge, hoj astardam pe ande búča. Hoj ávla ma maj lášo trajo. Maj feder cítijas ma. Žanós hoj kerasa vareso. Avla ma. Mange khate si maj feder. Po Slovensko nas ma khanči." ("When we came, I was very happy that we had good luck, that we managed to get a job, that we were going to have a better life. I felt much better. I knew that I would be doing something, that I would have something. I am better here. In Slovakia I had nothing.")

The main causes and motivations of the Roma for their migration to Great Britain and other destination countries in Western Europe have been described by many researchers (Grill, 2015; Grill, 2016; Kováts et al., 2002; Uherek, 2007; Vašečka and Vašečka, 2003; Vidra, 2013 and others). The migration of Roma to Britain is often referred to as labour migration or economic migration (Uherek, 2007: 748). Of course not only Roma leave Slovakia for Great Britain as non-Roma do as well[14]. The migration of non-Roma however has a different dynamic than that of the Roma; typically it involves young people who migrate for work and economic opportunities (Grill, 2015: 161). In the case of Roma, entire families are migrating and use family networks which I will discuss further. Unlike non-Roma, who mainly rely on institutionalized networks (intermediary offices and agencies, advertisements, etc.), the Roma use the help of their own family network during their migration (Uherek, 2007: 769–770).

According to Vašečka and Vašečka, emigration is one of the ways that the Roma from different local communities employ in order to cope with their low status in society (Vašečka and Vašečka, 2003: 35). The Roma leave Slovakia for reasons which are a combination of social deprivation on the one hand and general discrimination of the Roma in society on the other (Vidra, 2013: 6–7). These factors also motivated the departures of the studied group. My respondents consistently state that they left for England (*upre andi Anglia*) for a better life. They left Slovakia where they had minimal opportunity to find a job and where social benefits were repeatedly reduced,

13 According to the respondents, there are also numerous communities of Hungarian Vlax Roma and also Roma from Romania, Lithuania and other countries.

14 In 2004, 13,020 applications were submitted to the UK's Working Registration Scheme (WRS) by Slovak citizens. In 2007, there were 22,425 applications. High numbers of migrants arrived in the UK after the enlargement of the EU also from Poland, the Czech Republic and Lithuania (Gallová Kriglerová, Chudžiková, 2013: 175).

leading to many families becoming increasingly poorer. As respondents recount, in Slovakia many of them had undignified housing and faced a multitude of discrimination (at schools, in the labour market, in services, and even during their simple presence in public). In addition, new emigrants depicted life in Britain in superlatives: hourly wages seemed to be breath-taking when converted to the Slovak crown, work seemed to be "easy" (*lóki búči*) in comparison with the jobs that were offered to the Roma in Slovakia or the Czech Republic (such as digging or auxiliary construction jobs). Leaving for Britain was also motivated by a generous system of social care[15]. In the later stages of the migration process, migration was undoubtedly also caused by the very existence of (very dense in some places) family networks through which England could be easily reached (see also Drbohlav and Uherek, 2007: 8–9).

Changes in the social structure of migrants

During the time of the Vlax Roma migration from Eastern Slovakia to Great Britain, the social structure of the migrants was gradually changing. Testimonies of the witnesses, as well as my own findings from the field, are in line with the findings of Vašečka and Vašečka, according to whom middle class Roma were the first migrants (Vašečka and Vašečka, 2003: 37). The first families arriving in Leicester were from economically secure families with a high status. As mentioned earlier, families first often came to Leicester from other Western European countries where they had often lived in emigration for several years. There were also Roma coming straight from Slovakia but also in their case the first wave tended to be economically secured individuals. The wave following after 2004 included mainly Roma from Prešov, Sabinov and Košice, and inhabitants of family houses in the surrounding villages, i.e. Roma who were also economically better-off or moderately better-off (at least in the past, before the rapid reduction of social benefits). Gradually the poorer strata, which lived in Slovakia without their own rental housing either with relatives in flats, or huts in Romany settlements, were also becoming involved. The involvement of the poorer strata occurred in two ways. For one, they constituted a natural overlap of family networks even into economically weaker groups. Aside from that, however, they were also clients of migration intermediaries. I will discuss both of these phenomena further.

Migration within family networks

From the very beginning, the characteristic of the migration to Leicester was that of a chain migration where family networks were frequently used for the arrival of new migrants. As soon as they became domesticated, new arrivals would help other relatives with their migration to the new country. Again, they first established themselves with their own relatives. With their help they found work, schools, the necessary documents and social security, and eventually their own housing. It is possible to see cases where the father of the family arrives first to arrange everything necessary for his wife and children who in the meantime wait in Slovakia. In other cases, whole large families arrive all at once to stay with their relatives.

The studied migration is characterized by the use of the migrant's family ties on different sides of their family network. In graphic representation this network takes the shape of a spider web. According to Zdeněk Uherek, this type of migration is un-

15 When describing asylum migration, Zdeněk Uherek also mentions that popular destinations were richer countries with better social care than that provided in Slovakia (Uherek, 2007: 274).

settled due to its dense networking (Uherek, 2007: 770). It is characterised by movement in different directions, not only to Britain and back, but also to other destinations depending on current needs or offers. Migrations of the studied group can hardly be separated from the migratory movements of other members linked to their family networks who settled in other western European countries in previous decades or, conversely, from (often temporary) migration to other destinations or returns. As Uherek notes, target migration can quickly and spontaneously change with changing migratory conditions. This statement holds true in the studied community to a large extent. It has also been repeatedly shown that the choice of a target country is a rather random decision in the case of a strong determination to leave Slovakia. It is important whether these countries are interconnected with a family network and how easily and quickly one can establish himself.

(6) A typical example of the spontaneity of migratory movements is the family of R. In 2015, R. attempted to leave for Great Britain where he had aunts and uncles. For more than a month he lived with his relatives and was looking for a job. Two days before starting a new job he got a phone call from a social worker[16]*, who threatened that unless he returned immediately, his whole family in Slovakia would be removed from the employment agency rolls and his four children would be taken to an orphanage. On the same day, R. bought an airplane ticket from money from his relatives and spent the following month in an intensive search for work and housing in the Czech Republic where he wanted to move with his children and join his father. The next month he suddenly changed plans from one day to the next and instead of going to the Czech Republic, travelled with his wife and children to Southern France, which is where his mother and his brother's family have lived for several years. In the meantime he finally managed to find money for his family's journey. A few months after settling in France, R. paid for the journey of his brother and his children, and a year later also for another brother and his large family. They were later joined by their father-in-law and one of the brothers' son-in-law. The entire "chain" is certainly not finished. Had there not been the intervention of the social worker, the whole family would have probably ended up in Britain.*

Function of the family network

(7) „O nípo le nípos žutij. Azír kade phenav, te žala jekh ando Bratford, dujto ando Londýn, aba či žutisa len. Khote o manuš si te žal, káj si les nípo, te žutij pre les. Vi me potom žutindem lake níposke. Me žutindem len kade, hoj na te kamav lendar – me žutindem jive! De mandar majinti lenas lóve. Aba o šavo žanelas anglicki, aba so-j kodo te skirij anglicki le formulára. Khanči." ("Family helps family. I say that because if someone goes to Bradford, the other one to London, you don't help them anymore. One has to go where their family is to be able to help them. Later even I helped her family. I helped them not in the way that I would ask them for something – I helped them for free! But before they were taking money from me. But my son can now speak English, now it's nothing, to fill in those forms in English. Nothing.")

16 I was a direct witness to this interview in a group conversation on Skype, therefore I can confirm that this relatively bizarre story is true.

During the actual migratory movements, Roma people in Leicester most often use the help of their close relatives, i.e. their siblings, children, aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers-in-law or sisters-in-law. It is less common to use the help of more distant relatives (in cases of close relations, e.g. cousin of a cousin, or godfather and godmother, etc.). In general, the closer the relative, the greater the chance of successful migration can be expected. It is often the relatives in Great Britain themselves who motivate new migrants to leave and join them. Depending on the social status of both parties, the family in England not only arranges but also pays for the journey for the new arrivals. This situation was not common for migrants in the first waves who had to find the means to buy their tickets to Britain in a complicated way. Moreover, they had to spend considerable amounts of money to pay for intermediaries. We can illustrate this different migration experience in the case of Tibor (born in 1965) from Prešov.

(8) Tibor first came to Leicester in 2005 to join his brother-in-law. However, his brother-in-law was busy and did not have time to help him find work and obtain all the necessary forms. A few other Roma offered to help him but for a fee which Tibor did not have the money to pay. After a month of an unsuccessful endeavour, he returned to Slovakia. He came back again in 2008, this time with money which he had saved up to pay for various intermediaries. This time he was lucky as during the meantime his son-in-law Láďo had established himself in Leicester with his family. Láďo introduced Tibor to Ahmed, an employee of Pakistani origin of a large job agency. Ahmed found a job for Tibor for an informal fee of 150 GBP. Láďo also helped Tibor with some of the formalities but he also had to arrange some of them through a Romany "interpreter" who charged 100-200 GBP to fill in a form. After two months Tibor rented a flat and paid for his wife and children's journey to Britain. He paid another 450 GBP to Ahmed to arrange a job for his wife and his two adult daughters who were able to start their jobs as soon as they arrived in Britain. Tibor later gradually helped to find work and flats for his three sisters-in-law and their large families, and also to his other nephews and nieces who stayed with him for several weeks upon their arrival until they found work and their own housing. He always helped all his relatives, as he emphasizes, for free.

Help from relatives is essential for navigation in a new environment where feelings of fear and helplessness tend to be enhanced by a language barrier. Immigrants are stressed by an unfamiliar currency and the associated confusion with local prices of goods and services. It is also hard to become acquainted with the different assortment of food and to find shops with good deals (see also Janků, 2004: 207). A fundamental problem is represented by a language barrier which, if not overcome, can isolate new arrivals from the job market and also from the social system. Tibor from illustrative case No. 8, like the vast majority of Roma in the studied group, arrived in Great Britain without any knowledge of English. As I will soon show, various intermediaries take advantage of this initial disorientation.

A family network represents a functional migration network which reduces the social, economic and emotional investment into the migration act itself. It also represents a system of social relations which also influence post migratory behaviour (Light et al., 1989 in Drbohlav, Uherek, 2007: 7). These networks can therefore be relied on not only upon one's arrival to the new country but afterwards as well.

Based on research among the Roma in Leicester, I came to the conclusion that most

of the economic activities are organized on the family principle. In particular, working groups are organized by this principle. Relatives not only work together but also travel together to work. It is not uncommon that Roma work tens of kilometres away from Leicester and therefore commute daily by car to work. The family group shares the cost of fuel, helping everyone to reduce expenses. Relatives help each other with children, bring them to school and pick them up, which can otherwise be a big problem for a family where both parents have to work. Family networks often replicate social networks of individuals and their children in all activities. Given the language barrier, contact with the non-Roma world is minimal for many Roma.

It is especially essential to help relatives in case of the loss of their housing. A family that loses its housing due to the inability to pay rent can find a temporary refuge with their relatives. If a family is large it is temporarily divided into different family segments. Due to the existence of functional family networks, the loss of employment, which is one of the main reasons for the subsequent loss of housing, is not considered a fatal problem. Those who have lost their housing can gradually find new housing or a new job at first. Staying with relatives usually does not last long especially because life in Britain is very complicated without a residence address and homeowners do not give consent to overcrowded dwellings. Relying on the help of family in the case of losing housing is a typical example of family networks' rescue and support mechanisms.

In England today and tomorrow

„Akanak mišto-j mange andi Anglia. De, ži kana, kodo či žanav." ("Now I am good in England. But I don't know how long it will last.")

Research in other Romany localities in Slovakia has led to conclusions that a large proportion of Roma leave for Great Britain in order to accumulate finances and other capital which they subsequently invest into housing and overall improvement of living standards back home in Slovakia (e.g. Grill, 2015; Dobruská, 2016). Migration is understood by Roma from these localities as a means of improving their lives at home, not as an objective. The main objective is in fact to return to Slovakia (see also Uherek, 2007: 771). This phenomenon can be observed in the studied community of Eastern Slovak Vlax Roma rather marginally. Until 2016 and the Brexit-induced panic, Roma returning to Slovakia were more or less limited to those who had not succeeded in Britain, whether they had failed to get or keep a job, had been unable to get initial help from the family network, and newcomers unable to establish themselves. The situation has worsened in the past four years during which the conditions of the social system have become stricter and some families were no longer able to obtain social benefits and were therefore forced to live in England only off their income from work. However, this income is often swallowed up by housing costs and other payments. In this context, some families lost their housing and therefore had to leave England.

Vlax families who return to Slovakia or invest their finances in Slovakia, so that they can come back, constitute a minority. Such families are most often those that owned a house in rural localities or families who bought a flat in the city. Such housing is kept by some families as a back-up in case the conditions in the destination country become worse. The majority of Vlax Roma do not have any property to which they could return to in Slovakia. Some respondents even declared their intention to stay in Britain.

After the Brexit vote, many Roma started to panic and considered leaving England. Several families from the studied community, according to information which my respondents shared via social networks, have moved to Belgium, Ireland or the Czech Republic while other families are planning a possible return to Slovakia. Most, however, are waiting to see whether the prognosis of a rapid deterioration of the status of immigrants in Britain will be fulfilled.

PART FOUR: ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

As has been said, the vast majority of my respondents came to work in Britain encouraged by the success stories of their close relatives who managed to have a better life in Britain thanks to their work. Their endeavour was first to find any job that would ensure regular weekly income to pay for housing and a basic livelihood. At the beginning, a number of Roma worked through agencies where work was rather precarious; such work tended to be uncertain and unstable. As my respondents stated consistently, their goal was to obtain a contract (*o kontrakto*) which would provide them with stable work, paid holidays, and above all, a higher hourly wage than that paid by job agencies.

Changes in migration strategies

Many Roma were motivated to travel to Britain because of the social system which was perceived to be much more generous than the Slovak one. This incentive has been also described by other researchers focusing on Roma migration to the UK and other Western countries. According to Kateřina Janků, for many Roma the social security system in England represents a way of preventing the basic existential uncertainty in a foreign country and a way of satisfying their basic needs (Janků, 2004: 205). At the time of her research, a number of Roma (like the other tens of thousands of other emigrants) had a combined income from work and the British social system. The conclusions of Janků fully apply to the studied group as well. As we will see below, the system of social benefits was an incentive not only for migrants but also for various intermediaries. Motivated by commissions from the entire transaction, intermediaries were tempting the Roma by simply obtained money.

Providers

The British system of social benefits, which includes mainly various child and housing allowances, was seen in the first decade of the 21st century not only as generous but also as considerably benevolent. Information about the possibility of drawing benefits which some families would not be normally entitled to has spread quickly among the Roma coming to Leicester and in the source localities[17]. However, only those who knew the British system and its limits were able to secure such income. This gave rise to the creation of various economic activities for many people who gradually became intermediaries "helping" other Roma for a fairly high reward. These persons performed a combination of various activities aimed at profiting finan-

17 The use of social benefits is also the theme of other researchers (e.g. Janků, 2004; Uherek, 2007; Grill, 2015). The authors agree that the income from benefits made it possible to ensure a sufficient income from which some money could even be saved (e.g. Uherek, 2007: 765).

cially from the new arrivals from Slovakia. These intermediaries were not part of any organized group or mafia; most of them were Vlax Roma from the community of well-established families. In some cases they were former usurers (the same phenomenon is also described by Vašečka and Vašečka 2003: 35), or simply people who were able to take advantage of the opportunities arising from the new migration situation. The model that arose in Leicester can certainly be observed in other cities as well. It can certainly be a model that Roma people learned from members of other minority enclaves in Britain as was revealed by Jan Grill in his research (Grill, 2016: 101). However, I was not able to verify such information.

As evidenced by my communication partners' narratives and my field observations, the golden era of intermediaries was the early phase of migration to Leicester in the years before and after the EU accession during which the citizens of Slovakia were also allowed to draw benefits from the British social system. The first clients of the intermediaries were Vlax Roma and typically their acquaintances or distant relatives who came to Leicester to join their families but did not have anyone who could arrange all the necessities. These intermediaries took advantage of the newcomers' language barrier and disorientation in their new environment and built their services around it. In this way various "translators" as well as certain quasi "social workers" or "job counsellors" recruited among these self-appointed intermediaries who recommended to their "clients" procedures which often verged on illegality. They provided them with services ranging from finding employment, housing, filling out forms for insurance (*inšuránc*), child allowance, housing allowance, disability benefits and other forms of social benefits. All this was done for highly inflated prices.

(9) *„So mange jekh šávo anda Perješi skirindas le formi, pa tax credit, mangelas mandar pa kodo trin šela libri. Von varekana khate strašně but lóve kidenas le Romendar. Pa jekh papiroši pa doktori sto, dva sto libre. Pa akharsosko dilimáto lóve. Kodo naj mišto. Avilas kaso manuš opre, so nás les lóve, khate nas les šanca, mangenas lendar lóve."* ("One Vlax Roma from Prešov filled out my forms for me for a tax credit and asked me for three hundred pounds. They used to rip off the Roma. One or two hundred pounds for one paper from the doctor, money for every silly thing. That is not good. If someone who did not have money came here, he had no chance. They wanted money from him.")

Intermediaries were taking advantage not only of their language skills but also of their knowledge of the system of social services provided by state institutions and NGOs.

(10) „Sas po Evington charita. De ame či žanasas kodola charitatar. Kasi muslimka tuke skirijas avri le formi, sa jive, de ame pa kodo či žanasas. Von viužívinas le manušen haj kidenas pa kado lóve. Haj kodi charita sikhadas mange muro bratranco. Aba potom phírous khote, či počindem lóve lenge kana khote kernas amenge jive. Fere stačijas te phenes ando telefono 'interpret, please!', haj dine tuke les. De ame kodo či žanasas haj počinasas lenge pa jekh vorba sto libri!" ("There was a charity in Evington but we didn't know about it. This Muslim woman filled in your forms, everything for free, but we had to pay for it. They were using people and were ripping them off. It was my cousin who showed me this charity. Then I went there and I did not pay them anymore since they did that for us for free there.

All you had to do was say on the phone: 'interpreter please', and they gave you one. But we did not know about the charity, and we paid them one hundred pounds for one translation!")

Intermediaries often carried out various scams which they performed not only on the British social system but also on their own clients, most often Vlax Roma disadvantaged by a language barrier. They often experienced being cheated and robbed by intermediaries under the guise of providing various services.

Respondent GT described a situation when an intermediary arranged two cards at a bank for her right in front of her eyes and stole her money.

(11) „Ande banki žanas haj kerdine pe amende kase... sar kodo kerdas duj biznisova karči. Haj amenge trobujas te žan le lóve po amaro účto, de leske žanas le lóve po lesko účto. Ame kodolestar či žanasas. Haj vorbijas andi banka anglicki de me les či hačarós." ("We went to a bank and they made those... like that, made two business cards. And we needed money to be deposited in our account, but the money was deposited to his account and we didn't know about it. They spoke English in the bank and I did not understand him at all.")

Also, it was very common for intermediaries to steal money that their clients received through social benefits.

(12) „Sas len šavora maj but haj dohodnijas pe lesa po dopaš. Anda kodo tax credit so astarla hoj dela les dopaš. Sas kase manuš so lepindas pe pe kodo leske. Man šavora cine nas, de vi kade cera astardam. Kade kerdine. Dopaš lóve vi amendar line. Igen cerra astardam. Kade žalas, no." ("They had kids and they made a half and half deal that he would get half of the tax credit that they were going to get. There were such people who fell for it. I didn't have small children but we still got very little. They did the same with us. They also took half of our money. We got very little.")

This practice was also described by other Roma. Some intermediaries did not want just a one-time fee for arranging social benefits and demanded that their clients pay them a certain percentage of their social benefits either as a lump-sum payment, or as a regular levy from the social benefits received to their bank accounts. This was also the case in example No. 11 when the intermediary went to the bank with his clients and without their knowledge managed to fraudulently create two accounts. Intermediaries have often kept cards from accounts or kept access to internet banking which clients did not even know existed.

Another frequent fraudulent activity of intermediaries was to arrange social benefits for families who did not even live in England. These clients were often recruited in Slovakia among the poorest strata, whether from the Vlax Roma, Rumungri or even among the socially weakest non-Roma. These activities were often associated on the verge of human trafficking.

(13) „Avilas khate opre le níposa vaj avilas fere o murš, i romňi le šavoreca khére. Haj avilas o Rom, žalas andi búči haj vibavijas opre le lóve pe šavora pi romňi haj

žalas tar khere haj le love žanas lenge. Po Slovensko. Kade sas. Avenas sako dopaš berš, lenas peske le love avri anda banka haj žanas tar. But Rom kade kerenas. De le Angličanura či žanenas, gindonas hoj khate-j le. Von khate kernas kase ťahi pe kova… Napríklad das varekaske le rodna lila sar te avlinó les panž šavora. Von lenas, šudenas ande formi haj von gindonas hoj čáčes, pe sociálka, hoj le šavora-j lende. Varekana kodo či overujinas. Akanak fere, vaj 2013 vaj 2012, aba sa kontrolujin". ("He came here with his family, or the man came alone, his wife and children stayed home. The man went to work and arranged to get money for his family and went back home and money got sent to them in Slovakia. That is the way it was. They came every half a year, took money from the bank and went away. Many Roma were doing it like this. But the English did not know about it, they thought that they were here. They were pulling these kinds of scams here… For example they gave birth certificates to someone for five children. They took them with the forms and the social services thought that they really had the children. Back then, they did not use to verify. Since about 2012 or 2013, they have been checking everything.")

The practice of drawing double social benefits in Britain and in the home country was practiced successfully by some immigrants (and not only by Roma and not only by those from Slovakia) for several years. Some immigrants manage to secure a similar income through their close family which once again shows the help of the family network solidarity system. In addition, a very common practice was to secure such income through intermediaries. They often kept part of their clients' money either with their permission or sometimes without their knowledge.

In 2008, I met a few outraged Roma (Vlax as well as non-Vlax) in Slovakia, all with a low socio-economic status who told me the following story:

(14) One Vlax Roma from a nearby town tempted several Roma to go to England with the promise of employment. Upon their arrival they were asked to give him their passports and children's birth certificates, allegedly to arrange for their insurance. A few weeks later, a group of Roma men went back home with a few tens of pounds earned by brigade work. The intermediary, however, managed to include the very large families of these men into the social system and to keep their bank cards which allowed him to receive significant sums of money assigned to these men's large families. His "clients" did not know about it until they learned about it from their relatives in England who consequently helped them to terminate this practice. When they were able to receive a banking report from the British bank, the figures that intermediaries had stolen from them and from the British social system were four-figures (in pounds) in all cases.

Similar stories were not exceptional. It was a common practice of intermediaries to arrange money for someone whom they could subsequently steal it from. In the case of clients from the socially weakest environment, examples of classic human trafficking could also be observed. Intermediaries sometimes found the so-called "horse" (*grast*) who essentially worked for them for free, lived in their homes, often in undignified conditions. During this time intermediaries were able to arrange under their names various bank loans or mobile phone contracts which included the latest and most expensive types of mobile phones from the telephone company. Again, these

"horses" were often recruited from the socially weakest non-Roma or *Rumungri* (often homeless).

Some intermediaries literally became wealthy from one day to the next and began to show off their wealth by, for example, frequently acquiring new luxury cars, wearing large gold chains, and so on. It turns out that these intermediaries have influenced the form and character of migration. They certainly stimulated migration among the poorest strata which otherwise would not have enough funds to travel to England[18]. On the other hand, members of the socially weakest strata, without a functional family network, rarely stayed in England for a long time while finances stemming from their social benefits were for a long time (often without their knowledge) drawn by someone else.

The case of intermediaries and their "clients" again shows the importance of family networks: a person or a family with a well-functioning solidarity network was able to get support in Britain and thereby avoid being abused by intermediaries. In case of problems, support from relatives would prevent the necessity to leave the country.

In addition to these intermediaries, a strata of what we may call small intermediaries was also created. These occasionally provided similar services to other Roma (especially translations and arranging social welfare) for a much cheaper fee. Of course the boundary between these intermediaries is not entirely clear. It might be just a matter of time or opportunities for these small intermediaries to also become engaged in other activities. Aside from that, some Roma have learned tricks from intermediaries when arranging their personal matters, especially those related to the social benefits system, and continued to practise them when helping their relatives (mostly free of charge). We can therefore say that a wider group of people has been involved in the practises which Grill calls "fixing up money" (*vibavimen love*).

"Akanak aba či del pe." ("It is not possible today").

Nowadays, according to what respondents say, the activities of intermediaries are very insignificant and can be considered nearly dead. According to my research there are several reasons for this.

The main reason is the change in the social system. The use of the social benefits system for the most part ended along with the large socio-economic changes associated with the influx of new migrants from new EU countries into the UK. State institutions increased their control and became more suspicious (Grill, 2016: 102–103). Most practices linked to the use of this system therefore had to be terminated.

Another reason that diminished the need for intermediaries' services – "*interpret*" – is family members acquiring of linguistic competencies. English is most often learned by young people who came to Britain at school age and within a short time learned the language well enough to be able to arrange everything for their family[19]. Intermediaries who built their overpriced services around the language barrier of their clients have become redundant in other services as well. Members of dense family networks of this community have become familiar with the English environment and have been able to navigate through the services of non-profit organizations whose services they can use, much of which is available to clients free

18 For the intermediaries themselves, paying for someone's trip was a well-calculated investment to make a profit.

19 This fact is reflected by case No. 7.

20 This fact is also reflected by case No. 10.

of charge[20]. Roma from the study group are also discouraged from illegal practices by examples of several individuals whose criminal activity was punished by penalties that the Roma consider high. Among the Roma, stories of cruel conditions in British prisons are spreading rapidly. According to these stories, the Roma are often imprisoned among dangerous ethnic minority criminals or, on the contrary, among racist white Englishmen. Many Roma have also had to return their unjustly made money (see case No. 15) and perform public works.

PART FIVE: THE WORLD OF WORK

„Akanak amenge mišto andi Anglija-j, keras búča... Kana o manuš kerel búči, mišto-j leske andi Anglija, de te na keres, inke maj násul-i sar khére!" (**"We are doing fine in England now, we are working... If one works, he can do fine in England but if you don't work, it is even worse than home."**)

When I arrived in 2015 to visit Roma from Prešov whom I had been in touch with only through social networks during their stay in England, I was very surprised by the demanding everyday physical work behind their flamboyant Facebook statuses where they were showing off photos of their brand-name clothes at tables over-filled with food and drinks, or in front of typical red-brick semi-detached houses, and in cars which they could only dream about in Slovakia. When I last met my Romany acquaintances in Slovakia, they had depended on social benefits for many years. However, in Britain they were all commuting to work on a daily basis, coming back home to have an early night and going back to work again the next morning.

My respondents were employed around Leicester in sandwich and baguette shops, at the post office, and at a mobile phone production line, to name a few examples. As I mentioned, relatives typically work together, sometimes even dozens of Vlax Roma from Eastern Slovakia worked in the same job for one particular company. The reason for this was the disappearing language barrier and also the fact that at the very beginning the Roma were getting their jobs through the same agency. All my respondents initially found work through Ahmed (see case No. 8), an intermediary of Pakistani origin, who arranged work for the Roma for a fee for contract work through a job agency. In most cases the Roma stayed in the same positions for several years with their aim being to get a job as the company's senior employees.

Regarding the language barrier, a generally successful migration strategy and in particular in employment, has proven to be staying close to Polish immigrants. The Poles in Leicester are a very large community that settled in the city in the post-war period and multiplied after the fall of communism, and especially after the enlargement of the EU. In 2007, there were more than 20 Polish restaurants and shops in Leicester as well as a number of consulting and job-finding offices (Vershinina, Barrett, Meyer, 2009). Due to the linguistic and cultural proximity, the Roma used Polish immigrant networks for various reasons. Numerous Polish shops sold *amáro chábe* (our food, i.e. the same food as in Slovakia), which, according to the respondents, made life in England more acceptable for many Roma.

As many communication partners describe, before they discovered the so-called Polish shops in their neighbourhood, it was very difficult for them to cook their favourite dishes such as *halušky* (Slovak gnocchi) without the necessary coarse flour,

sour cabbage and Slovak cottage cheese which differs from the English one, or their popular chicken soup without *Magi* and *Vegeta* (soup seasoning products). In terms of food, my respondents' families stayed very conservative and every day kept cooking the same meals which they normally ate in Slovakia with only minimal variations. Polish shops offering products that are not normally available in Britain were therefore essential. Not to mention the under the table sale of Polish cigarettes for a much more acceptable price than those with a British stamp offered in standard shops. As far as employment is concerned, to date many Roma continue to work beside Polish colleagues or under their leadership[21].

Roma from Eastern Slovakia who had been long-term unemployed in Slovakia (some of them since the early 1990s) succeeded in joining the workforce in England despite their language barrier as well as minimal practice and absent work habits resulting from their previous long-term unemployment. Moreover, they work in positions which they would never have had a chance to get in Slovakia. This fact also affects the change in the value of work in the eyes of the Roma, as will be shown below.

Value of work

In his article on the economic strategies of Roma people from the East Slovakian commune of Tarkovce, Jan Grill describes the work of his respondents in Great Britain as hard (*phári buťi*), involving a great deal of suffering in order to get money. He also describes other circumstances of their life rhythm as difficult including the complicated maintenance of social relations. The Roma cannot spend as much time with their children as they would like, and their mutual contacts with extended family are weakened (Grill, 2015: 99–100). According to Grill, the economic activities of Roma from Tarkovce in Great Britain are a combination of unskilled wage labour (*phári buťi*) and other practices (*vibavimen love* / fixing up money) through which Roma try to improve their financial position. According to Grill, this successful combination helped them to cope with changing socioeconomic conditions.

In his classic work *The Time of the Gypsies,* which describes (not only) the economic activities of Hungarian Vlax Roma at the end of communism, Michael Stewart pointed out the distinction between wage labour (the classic working relationship) in the non-Roma environment which has a very low value for Roma, and "Romany work" (*romani butji*) which is money obtained by non-production, i.e. in a way different from usual work (involving ways of getting money or goods which are different from *the ways of the gadjo*)[22]. According to Stewart, *Romani butji*, whose aim is to take advantage of the non-Roma and to show the craftiness and intelligence of the Roma (by showing they can conjure wealth up out of nothing) reinforces the Roma identity and their feeling of superiority over the non-Roma (Stewart, 1997)[23]. However, according to Grill, Stewart's concept of *romani butji* does not correspond with the discourse and the local use in Tarkovce. Even though the Roma in Tarkovce combine

21 Working in the same company with non-Roma from Slovakia, or under their leadership, is also not uncommon.

22 Stewart describes a community of Hungarian Vlax Roma who work in socialist factories during the week, but aside from that, the Roma are also involved in a number of informal practises that allow them to keep their Romany identity. Among these he lists a number of practises ranging from collecting metal and other waste and reselling it to Gadjos for profit, to begging and horse-trading (Stewart, 1997).

23 Money earned through work (Gadjo money) must be cleaned (by playing cards, horse-trading) (Stewart, 1997). A similar distinction of economic activities is also used by other authors in the field.

different ways of making money, no relationship between idiosyncratic independent Romany work and identity formation can be observed, according to Grill (2016: 91).

What is the case in my studied community? Can we observe economic activities corresponding to Stewart's concept of *romani butji* in this group, especially given its members' Vlax Romany identity? As I have shown in the previous text, Grill's conclusions about combining employment with different ways of making money corresponding with Grill's concept of *vibavimen love* are fully applicable for the studied community. The transformation of the social services system in England as well as the criminalization of a number of intermediaries and other persons involved in various kinds of fraudulent abuse of the system have in recent years turned extra money coming from social benefits into an irreversible past. Most Roma from the studied group who were previously involved in a number of illegal activities – mostly through the intermediaries, and involving in particular various social-welfare tricks – are currently working only a full time jobs. Grey economy practices and other small scams are avoided, mostly out of fear.

> *(15) „Akanak aba maj prísnones, sa kontrolujin. Vaj ko love astarel, vaj phíren le šavora ande školi. Vaj khate le. Naj kodolenge le lóve ašaven haj papale mangen peske lóve. Inke duvar kadžiki. Sa so den, vi pa tax kredit, vi po kher so den lóve, vi pa semeto, sa. Akanak khate náštik chochaves. Maj feder kana keres khate i búči, počis le daňe sar patrij pe. De ko či kerel búči, naj les šanca. Pháres. Varekana háj, delas pe, de akanak na."* ("Nowadays it's stricter. They control everything whether it's who gets the money, if the kids go to school or if they are here. And to those, they stop the money and ask for everything to be returned. Even twice as much. Everything that they get on credit, for housing, for garbage, everything. Now you can't lie anymore. The best is if you work here and pay taxes the way you are supposed to but those who don't work, they have no chance. Hardly. Before they did, before it was possible, but not anymore").

Vlax Roma from Eastern Slovakia are now massively involved in the labour process. This is all the more interesting since Vlax Roma have been traditionally said to consider physical work inferior and unclean and have traditionally avoided it (e.g. Pavelčíková, 2015: 308). While this claim can be rejected as a stereotype, it is interesting to see if the avoidance of physical work is also the case in this group. My own field findings in this community over the last seventeen years do not entirely confirm their perception of work as shameful (*lažavo*)[24], however, it testifies to their valuation of individuals who have somehow managed to outflank the system. This claim can be evidenced in particular by an analysis of the discourse used by some Vlax Roma when talking about economic activities.

For example, I have repeatedly noticed admiration for a Vlax Roma who was employed for two months as a labourer at a construction site but went to work in a white tracksuit which he never got dirty. The man was walking around and advising other workers (*Rumungri* or *Gadjo*) how to do their job. These workers mistakenly considered him to be a supervisor. Another Roma boasted of being given a job as a spokesman who monitored other workers and advised them what to do. Both examples

24 Of course some types of work are perceived as *lažavo*. For example typically female work for men, or dirty work, e.g. with faeces. I will come back to this below and subject it to a critical perspective.

point to the values of Vlax Roma: the biggest appreciation is for those who manage to outflank others – *Rumungri* and *Gadjo* – without "getting dirty" by working themselves.

In this respect, it may seem at first sight that the values of the Vlax Roma have changed. Roma seem to have adapted to the values of the surrounding society and are fully engaged in working life. The Roma nonetheless do not see this as a loss or forced adaptation to "hard work" (see Grill, 2016) or "work for Gadjo" (see Stewart, 1997). Even in the studied group we can confirm the conclusions of Zdeněk Uherek, according to whom Roma perceive work in England as a social satisfaction. It is a confirmation of their own value and is perceived as a confirmation of Romany skills: Roma in England perform work that they would not be able to do in Slovakia (Uherek, 2007: 768). The Roma in Leicester speak about work in England as light and clean. For them this work represents social upward movement, 'going up', which Jan Grill describes in his study *'Going up to England': Exploring Mobilities among Roma from Eastern Slovakia* (Grill, 2012). This work allows them to lead a better life than they could ever have in Slovakia; it promises a possibility to make good money (*láše lóve*) and to live in one's own house and to buy a good car, nice clothes and (once in a while) golden jewellery. Thanks to the income from work, the quality of life of Vlax Roma from the studied group increased and status symbols became more accessible. In this respect, work itself is therefore perceived as forming one's status.

This change correlates with the change in various areas of socio-cultural life of the Roma. The rhythm of life has changed and become determined by work and children attending pre-school from the age of two or three. Individual families are gradually becoming more nuclear and individualized which is also due to difficulties associated with maintaining social ties with their loved ones. Mutual contact with their extended family is weakening and becoming limited to celebrations which are difficult to organize in rented flats for a lot of people (which leads to invitations being limited to the closest family). In comparison with Slovakia, Roma cannot spend as much time with their children as they would like as they spend a much bigger part of their day at school[25]. This also affects their language behaviour: children begin to speak English among themselves which is also a big change; so far, no non-Romany language (*gažikani šib*) has been used in inter-Roma communication.

While Vlax Roma from Eastern Slovakia living in Leicester now consider work to be an unproblematic way of livelihood, other Vlax Roma coming to England from a different part of Slovakia, according to the Vlax in Leicester, do not undergo such transformations. In the following example, the respondent describes a value conflict in the different perception of the social status of work in different groups of Vlax Roma:

(16) *„Si khate vi le Rom anda Nitra, haj me inke či dikhlem mejg jekhes te kerel búči. Rumungri, pe amen! No! Von-i igen zurále. Von phenena tuke, „Vlašiko šávo sal" atunči, kana le lóve khére phiraves. Vaj kodi šej. Kana trajis búčatar, kado trajo sar trobuj, von phenena tuke Rumungro sal. „Aj sar trajis? Sar Rumungro!" Hačares? Von búča či keren, von čoren haj keren le šefti. Žan tar avri le motorenca, milaj žan avri haj jivende aven khere, te chan te pen, fere. Fere chan haj pen. Von búča kadal či kamen, čáčes.*" ("There are also Roma from Nitra here and so far I have not seen any of them work. They call us Rumungri! Well! They are real Vlax.

25 Jan Grill comes to similar conclusions (Grill, 2016: 99–100).

They will tell you: 'You are Vlax Roma' when you bring money home or your girlfriend. But if you live from work, the way life is supposed to be, they will say that you are Rumungro. How do you live? Like a Rumungro! You understand? They don't work, they steal and traffic. They go away in the summer and in the winter they come back, they eat and drink, nothing else. Just eat and drink. They don't want work, seriously.")

The example shows that while the studied group approaches employment as a normal life strategy, another group, specifically Vlax Roma from southwestern Slovakia, perceives making a living through employment as incompatible with the status of Vlax Roma. According to the respondent, these Roma do not perceive a person who works as a Vlax, to them it is a *Rumungro*. At the same time, as we can see, the respondent looks up to these values even if he also distances himself from them. He refers to these Roma as *zurále*, i.e. strong and powerful, meaning Vlax *as they should be*. We can also take this as an example of confirming one's own group identity and distancing from another group on the basis of different cultural preferences and performed economic activities.

Working with an employment contract turns out to be the most important strategy. Nevertheless, Roma are often also involved in other activities in the sense of Stewart's *romani butji*[26]. These include, for example, the buying and selling of cars[27], which is a hobby that some Roma do to such an extent that it might be more apt to talk about car trading (some of them are even referred to by the Romany term *kerel šefti le motorenca:* he is trading cars). Another activity, also described by Stewart, is gambling. Already in Slovakia several of my respondents were indulging in slot machines and betting. In England, these activities have been replaced by going to casinos and playing roulette. If it was not for work and the associated lack of time, some of them would spend a lot more money in this way. A common activity is gold buying, which on one hand represents one of the highest status symbols, and on the other hand the best commodity which one can invest saved money in.

CONCLUSION

The Vlax Roma, who lived in the 1990s for generations in Eastern Slovakia, moved to Leicester in Great Britain shortly after joining the European Union. In Leicester they formed a large community living in different parts of the city. The rapid movement was enabled by functional family networks which allowed newcomers to leave Slovakia and find housing and work in England. Aside from their own relatives, the process was also driven by Romani mediators who used the British social system which was generous and insufficiently protected from abuse, the disorientation of Roma in the

26 At this point, however, I agree with Grill who points out that this term has a different connotation in the Slovak environment. The Slovak equivalent of the term *cigánská robota (*gypsy labour) refers to poor quality work traditionally associated with Roma (Grill, 2015: 92). Even Roma from the studied group do not refer to these activities as *romani búťi*.

27 Cars are either purchased on the internet through which good bargains in nearby localities can be identified or they look for them right in the street (often they have a price tag). In both cases they haggle with the owners and often manage to beat the price down. In an ideal case when selling a car to an interested person, they usually sell it for a higher price despite its previous use (even a relatively long one).

British system and in the overall environment, and their inability to speak English. This group of Romani immigrants employed illegal practices which were later learned by other Roma in order to help themselves and their relatives when they arrived in England.

For most of the Vlax Roma living in the studied community in Britain, the practises of the grey economy are over. They represented temporary strategies that helped them to succeed in a new country which they employed since they represented the fastest way to a better life. From the perspective of macrosociology, the vast majority of the Roma from this community are nowadays becoming part of the British labour force and live a life between *my work* and *my house* in England. However, stories about the use of illegal economic strategies still have a strong place in the narratives of the Vlax Roma in Leicester. Stories about intermediaries and their victims as well as about accumulated wealth and ways of spending it, and about the possibilities of fraud offered by the British system in the last decade, are a frequent topic among the Vlax Roma. This fact can be illustrated by the above-mentioned conclusions: although the value of work for the Roma has seemingly changed (in the sense that going to work is not perceived as something disgraceful), work is perceived mainly as a means of status upward mobility rather than as a value in and of itself that would be worthy of a special valuation. Other paths including various ways of "fixing up money", which lead to a better life continue (at least at the declarative level) to be valued, despite the fact that most of the Vlax Roma living in Leicester currently avoid them. The stories about the wit of Vlax Roma who with their current better lives outwitted the poor position of the Roma in Slovakia strengthen the self-representation of this group and help them to cope with the fact that the economic practises they perform (i.e. wage employment) do not correspond to Stewart's notions of *romani butji*.

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Used narrative quotes - with quote examples

AM, male, born 1945, recorded 2016, Leicester, UK, 2016-07-23-001. Archive of recordings of Seminar on Romani studies, Charles university, Prague, example 3.

BM, female, born 1948, recorded in Sweden 2009, Archive of recordings of the author. Example 2.

EB, female, born 1971, recorded 2016, Leicester, UK, 2016-07-15-002 Archive of recordings of Seminar on Romani studies, Charles university, Prague, example 10 and 15.

GT, female, born 1969, recorded 2016, Leicester, UK, 2016-07-16-001 Archive of recordings of Seminar on Romani studies, Charles university, Prague, example 5, 11, 12 and 16.

LT, male, born 1965, recorded 2016, Leicester, UK, 2016-07-16-002. Archive of recordings of Seminar on Romani studies, Charles university, Prague, example 7, 9, 12, 15 and 17.

RM, male, born 1962, recorded 2015, Prešov, Slovakia. 2015-10-31-001. Archive of recordings of Seminar on Romani studies, Charles university, Prague, example 1 and 4.

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