

## **The institutionalization of Roma social participation in Southern European Societies – preliminary data from an ongoing research<sup>!</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

According to *The Social Situation in the European Union* (2004), Portugal is amongst the Southern European countries with low levels of social participation of its citizens. Moreover and related to this aspect, the new Member States came to join the Southern group. Nevertheless, regarding Roma, Portugal seems to differ from those countries. The institutionalization of Roma social participation differs from its neighbour Spain (Rothéa, 2008) and it gets closer to the Albanian case (Auzias, 2009). This paper discusses the concept of the Southern Europe applied to the Roma social participation. We present preliminary results of an ongoing research that aims to contribute to the knowledge of the role of Roma voluntary associations in their social integration (Bastos, 2009). Using exploratory interviews with key actors and a survey on Portuguese gypsy associations, we highlight not only organisational changes, but also enabling and obstructing factors of Roma associations' development.

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## **Introduction**

Portugal belongs to the low civic participation pattern in which we find also other Southern European countries and some of the new Member States. This pattern is characterized by a low rate of associative engagement from national citizens.

What about Roma people<sup>1</sup>? There is an important gap between countries regarding the number of their Roma citizens. Is this gap reflecting on their social participation? What explains the low civic participation of Portuguese also explains the low civic participation of Portuguese gypsy?

This communication is part of an ongoing research which intends to characterize all Portuguese voluntary gypsy associations, to analyse how they are contributing to the group's social integration and to understand their power position in the European context.

This paper has five main parts: first we present the concept of social participation and sustain that despite statistic proximity, reveals hidden significant differences between countries; second, we introduce the emergence of Roma participation and the current institutional framework in Portugal; third, we highlight cases in some European countries questioning the extension of the Southern Europe concept; fourth, we introduce the methodology used in our research; and finally we analyse some preliminary data on the Portuguese case, focusing on the Portuguese Roma associations support network and the stage of their life cycle.

### **1. The low social participation of Southern European countries**

Participation can be analysed from a political point of view, traditionally through the vote in elections; and from a social or civic point of view, which is frequently analysed taking into account the engagement in voluntary associations. Obviously, this is an

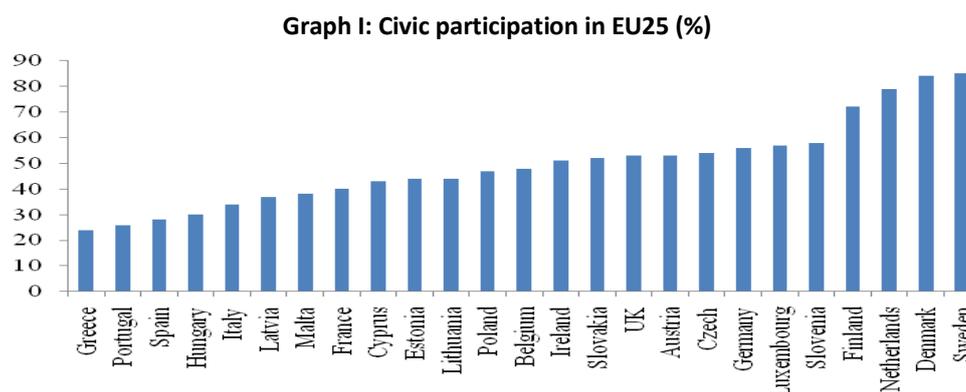
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<sup>1</sup> Roma people is reported here as an ethnic group, this is a group without state. There is no institutionalized definition of ethnic minority in Portugal but the minority has been enumerated.

analytical separation because in practice associations' participation can assume a political nature when, for instance, they interact with the political power.

In any case, data seems to reveal a correlation between the vitality of civil society and economic growth, as well as a negative correlation between participation and income inequality (Eurostat, 2004). This discussion comprises citizens' trust in institutions but is apparently inconclusive since trust may be both a cause and an effect of participation.

Therefore, considering the participation in associations (in a charity, religious, cultural, trade union, sport association...), Portugal presents results close to those of other Southern Europe countries like Spain, Greece, and is not far from France and Italy. Several researches point in this direction. According to *The Social Situation in the European Union* (Eurostat, 2004), more than half of the population of these countries has no engagement and Portugal is the second, with the lowest participation rate. The mentioned data is shown in Graph I.



Source: Based on European Commission, 2004 (Eurobarometer: 2002 for NMS, 1998 for EU15).

Although data comprises different years, we may also see that there is a north/south division which is often assigned to the period of authoritarian regimes lived by Southern countries in the recent past (Eurostat, 2004).

The new Member-States (Hungary in particular) join this Southern low participation pattern with a slightly lower expression. In fact the social participation rate of the 10 Eastern and Central European Member-States<sup>2</sup> is 55,4% in average, while the average

<sup>2</sup> Please notice that this data reports to EU25. Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU only in 2007 giving origin to the current EU27.

of the Southern European countries is 69,8%. These countries have also lived an authoritarian experience with communist regimes which could have led to more mistrust feelings about institutions and to an increased retreat from the public sphere.

Despite the fact that these quantitative data allows an easy comparison between countries, where we can for example perceive that in almost all of them sport associations are the most mobilising type (20 countries in a total of 25 show it), it does not provide any evidence on the reasons that explain similarities and differences.

In fact, in Graph I there is a convergence of Nordic countries, i.e., Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and also Netherlands. The high level of civic participation in these countries and in particular in Scandinavia is due, mainly, to trade union and political parties' affiliation. Therefore, if we look at their industrial relations system, we understand that the high affiliation is explained in part by the fact that some employees' services are managed by trade unions. Workers are led to affiliation in these organisations in order to profit from those services, like the unemployment fund.

Graph I doesn't reveal differences between countries with close results like Portugal, Spain or France. In fact to create an association in Portugal one needs about 9 founders, instead of 3 in Spain<sup>3</sup> or just 2 allowed by the centenary French law of associations<sup>4</sup>.

In Portugal, about six months after the democratic regime implementation in Portugal, the right to free association was implemented also by a very generalist law<sup>5</sup>. The Portuguese civic code determines however that an association must be composed by two bodies: a collegiate board with an odd number of members and a fiscal body, each one having a president (Mendes and Ferreira, 2000). Nevertheless, in practice associations are created with three permanent bodies: board, fiscal body and a permanent meeting body, each one with at least three members.

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<sup>3</sup> Article 5, from chapter II, of *Lei Orgánica* 1/2002, from the 22<sup>nd</sup> March.

<sup>4</sup> Law 1901, published on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1901 in the *Journal Officiel*, is known by the year of its creation. In its first article it settles that an association is a permanent convention between two or more individuals who share their knowledge or activity with a goal that is not to share profit.

<sup>5</sup> Decreto-lei n.º 594/74, from the 7<sup>th</sup> November 1974.

At the same time, other specific legal framework came out, namely for women, students, youth, migrants, consumers, families, handicapped people, sport, professional associations, besides trade unions and associations composed by collective members.

Today to create an association it is neither an obvious nor a cheap task<sup>6</sup>, even if, since a few years now, the country has a much easier procedure, the ‘association on the spot’ (*associação na hora*) due to the Government program to simplify bureaucracy, known as Simplex<sup>7</sup>.

Nevertheless, this program has not provided (yet) reliable data on associations and membership. The official statistics institution (*Instituto Nacional de Estatística*) does not collect this data systematically. It provides limited data based on census and on employees statistics. It is also possible to get data on the registration of paying associations, or through some international studies like the International Social Survey Program or the Johns Hopkins Nonprofit Sector Project, both limited by sporadic collection of data (Rego, 2007).

In sum, Portugal has been included in the Southern European pattern when considering its citizens’ social participation, but an in depth approach shows several differences between these countries, like disparate opportunities to participate, besides national data limitations.

## **2. The emergence of Roma civic participation**

Roma civic participation dates from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Romania, and the first attempts to unite the representative bodies of one country were identified in Russia in 1925. But in Western Europe these activities are known only after World War II, promoted by the need to help survivors of Nazi persecution (Council of Europe, 2008). All these organisations always had difficulties in overcome rivalries and claims of leadership, so the first attempt to create an international association was made only

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<sup>6</sup> One need about 170€ to create an association in Portugal, which represents more than a third of the minimum national wage.

<sup>7</sup> In Internet: <http://www.associacaonahora.pt/index.htm> (accessed on the 30.08.2010).

in 1960, in France. The *Communauté Mondiale Gitane* evolved and in 1971, the first world congress was promoted by the *Comité International Rom*, putting together organisations from twenty one countries. This congress is considered the breakthrough of a new political movement (Liégeois, 1976).

In part due to the comparatively small number of Roma in most Western European countries, the promotion of social and political participation was not a priority, leaving space for the development of what has been called the “gypsy industry”, this is NGOs of non-Roma concerned with human rights or education (Council of Europe, 2008).

In Portugal, the first association was created in the 1970s but in the 1990s there was an exponential growth. Due to a general European political position that does not stand for the collection of ethnic statistic indicators, it is harder than for the rest of the population to know how many of these citizens participate in associations.

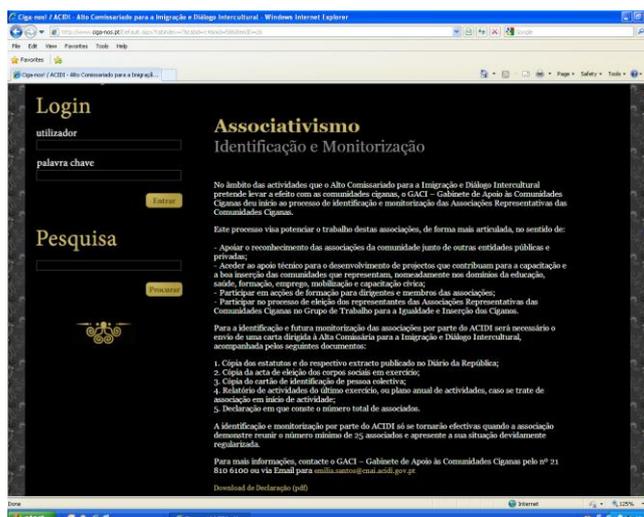
However, a recent institutional framework was entailed by the governmental agency for the inclusion of migrants and ethnic minorities, the *Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Diálogo Intercultural* (ACIDI). This agency and in particular its service focused on Roma, the *Gabinete de Apoio às Comunidades Ciganas* (GACI), has, amongst other functions, the mission to identify and follow up Roma representative associations. It intends to enable their participation in projects and training courses providing support for applications. But in order to be helped, Roma associations must already be capable of sending a letter, copies of their status, identification card, last election minute, activities report and to inform on the their membership size. Picture 1 sheds light on this particular aspect. Besides, GACI will only support associations with 25 members at least<sup>8</sup>. Taking into account the low education level of some Roma (Reis, 1996, 1999; Bastos, 2007)<sup>9</sup>, it is expected that Roma find special difficulties providing all these documents without help.

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<sup>8</sup> In Internet: <http://www.ciga-nos.pt/Default.aspx?tabindex=7&tabid=14&mid=58&ItemID=26> (accessed on the 08.09.2010).

<sup>9</sup> In fact the education level of Roma is not known. Studies about the subject are scarce and mostly partial and outdated. We believe that new studies are needed in order to include for instance Roma in

Picture I: GACI-ACIDI framework for Roma associations' support



In sum, as we focus on ethnic minorities, we realize that data on Roma people, the only ethnic minority in Portugal, is missing. Despite the political intention to contribute to Roma inclusion, as it is clear in the 10 shared principles promoted by the European Union and in particular through the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights,<sup>10</sup> support resources are scarce.

### 3. The heterogeneity of Roma social participation in Southern Europe

Roma are a group originated from Indian continent that moved around year 1000, according to linguistic data, moving to the west, and arriving to the Byzantine Empire around the 11<sup>th</sup> century. They continued their diaspora all along the middle age and reached Portugal at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Fraser, 1994). As much as they could, they always preferred to settle and remain in a place, if they were not hunted away by the authorities of the time. They are considered to be today between 35000 and 50000 Portuguese citizens (Liégeois, 2007).

Although Portuguese Roma share with the Spanish Roma their sub-culture of the Iberia peninsula, where all of them are *kale* and at the beginning all spoke a language called *kalo* (or in Portugal *calao*). There are many differences today between Portuguese Roma and

mix marriages and middle class Roma citizens, who seem to be more integrated and, therefore, may follow closer the national educational rates.

<sup>10</sup> In Internet: [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/eu-midis/index\\_en.htm](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/eu-midis/index_en.htm)

Spanish Roma. These differences are present in some public and private customs. Portuguese Roma people are considered to be much straighter in following the supposed tradition than Spanish Roma generally is (Lopes, 2008).

But from the research point of view, the comparison between Portuguese Roma and Spanish Roma is significant: both countries have experienced the same policies for the Roma, decided by Vatican II in the mid 60s. Since that time, in catholic countries, Roma have been taken in charge by catholic volunteers in Portugal and Spain (as well as in Italy and France). But in Spain, some of the Roma that have gradually become involved in these policies have reached a greater level of freedom. The most famous of them is Sir Juan de Dios de Heredia, a Roma born in Andalusia, who made his career in Barcelona. He created the *Fundación Secretariado Gitano* and was elected as eurodeputy for the socialist party (Rothéa, 2008). Today hundreds of Roma associations exist in Spain, both with mixed genders and women's associations under the name of *mujeres gitanas*, in more than 20 cities of Spain (Giménez Adelantado, 2004).

If we consider the Southern Europe in geographical terms, we may include Albania. In Albania, as soon as the fall of the old communist system started, one could notice the beginning of Roma associations, at least two of them, where the most important one, was the *Romani Baxt Association*. Today we can register five or six Roma associations around the country, mostly in the capital Tirana, but with agencies in some other cities like Lusnia for the Romani School, which is also an association (Auzias, 2009).

Similarly to Portugal, Albania has been for many years a complete closed country, whose citizens were not able to travel beyond borders. Furthermore, both countries are at the extreme geographical end of Europe. There are about 95000 Roma citizens in Albania (Council of Europe, 2008) which represents the most important weight of Roma in these countries.

**Table I: Estimated Roma population in Six Southern European Countries**

	Portugal	Spain	France	Italy	Greece	Albania
<b>Roma freq</b>	45000	725000	350000	105000	200000	95000
<b>Roma %</b>	0,4	1,6	0,5	0,2	1,8	2,3
<b>Population</b>	10600000	46000000	65400000	60300000	11200000	4200000

Source: Our calculation, based in Liégeois, 2007: 31.

In sum, there is a diversity in Southern Europe countries related to the political history of each of these countries, the social development of the population and probably the tradition of participating in public matters (or the lack of it), plus there is also a unity around the religion and some private customs of the Roma in this European area.

#### 4. Methodology

As we have seen, there is no available data on Portuguese Roma civic participation; therefore our approach privileges the contact with the associations themselves.

In this sense, the aim of our research is to map all Portuguese Roma associations and to try to understand how their action is contributing to the inclusion and empowerment of Roma people. In this communication in particular we intend to contribute to underline organisational changes, and also enabling and obstructing factors of Roma associations' development.

What have we done so far?

Besides bibliographic and online research, we have made exploratory interviews with the main social actors in the field of Roma, that is, actors who work on social and economic integration of Roma people or related issues. These interviews helped us in several ways: to identify different positions *vis-à-vis* associations' role and practices, to collect data on current problems, and to get some contacts missing. With that in mind, we have talked in an informal way with:

a) Institutional representatives from the Government (*Gabinete de Apoio às Comunidades Ciganas – GACI - do Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Diálogo Intercultural - ACIDI*); the Church (*Obra Nacional da Pastoral dos Ciganos*); and NGOs (*SOS Racismo; Rede Europeia Anti-Pobreza/Portugal - REAPN*).

b) Academic specialists: three researchers in social sciences and humanities.

Afterwards, we have prepared a survey to apply through face-to-face interviews to all associations, considering their history, internal and external activities and financial system, as well as their president, collecting their socio-demographic attributes, co-directorships and social representations on associations' role.

GACI has a website which contains a list of Roma association as well as their postal address, which was an important starting point for our research. We have identified 14 associations and two national umbrella organisations.

We have already started the field work and done a few interviews with Roma associations. Since the majority of Roma associations do not have a website and sometimes not even a head office, the collection of data is being made exclusively through face-to-face interviews.

## **5. Preliminary data on Portuguese Roma voluntary associations**

Taking in account the few data gathered until now we present provisional findings.

### **a) The support network**

The correlation between qualifications and participation (Cabral *et al*, 2000) or economic situation and civic activity (Eurostat, 2004), seems to be recognised also in the Roma case. Roma associations were created with the support of some other institutions and individuals. These organisations are usually focused on the Roma issue. This is why we may call them *satellite* organisations since they are not composed by Roma but work with them, having special resources for that. In this sense the Catholic Church was identified as one of those actors.

Until now institutions located in Lisbon seem to have supported the creation of Roma associations in the region, like *Obra Nacional da Pastoral dos Ciganos* and ACIDI, the same being observed in the North with other diverse institutional support. Although the support network was different, it is based in strong and previous ties. There may be a kind of discretionary support of Roma empowerment through

associations. The creation of Roma voluntary associations can be a top-down initiative more than a bottom-up. But more empirical evidence is needed.

### **b) The associations' life cycle**

The first Roma association was created in the 1970s but the special increase period was the mid 1990s. This is a period of special public initiatives for immigrants and ethnic minorities integration, the most important being the creation of the *Alto-Comissário para a Imigração e Minorias Étnicas* in 1996<sup>11</sup>.

Amongst current 15 associations, three have a woman president and possibly all are family based.

Some associations have succeeded to be a social partner in European funded projects and they are also consulted by local state councils, like in the *Rede Social*<sup>12</sup>. But so far none has employees which would be a sign of their growing and professionalization.

We have identified at least a division amongst these associations, despite the interpersonal knowledge of their members and board in particular. This division seems to be correlated to a different network support and possibly different religious identities.

In sum, the importance of a support network still has to be proved through an exhaustive inquiry to associations, but apparently there are *satellite* organisations taking profit of policies addressed to ethnic minorities. This evidence would join the idea of the development of a “gypsy industry” also in Portugal. We may say that the dependence of this support network seems to be related to the low levels of education, amongst other factors. Therefore, education being an obstruction to the emancipation of Roma associations is probably related to their cultural position regarding school. We still are far from the development of Spanish Roma associations and leaders, despite international relations between them. The number of Portuguese and social problems seem to also be responsible for their lack of empowerment.

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<sup>11</sup> The ACIME, created by law through the *Decreto-Lei* n.º 3-A/96, from 26 January, was replaced by ACIDI in 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Created by law through the *Resolução de Conselho de Ministros* n.º 197/97, from 18 November, only regulated in 2006.

## Concluding remarks

In a period in which European institutions are promoting Roma people social and economic integration, by the settlement of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015<sup>13</sup> with the support of the World Bank, UNICEF, Council of Europe amongst others institutions; or that the European Platform for Roma Inclusion was established in 2008 at an EU27 level (European Commission, 2010; Lusa, 2010); Roma people are being expelled from several European countries (Le Monde, 2010) despising the Council Directive from 2000 which intends to implement the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin<sup>14</sup>. These actions have raised several critical reactions, amongst them, from the Union Romani Spain, a strong organisation which has promoted demonstrations in France and in all European countries on the 4<sup>th</sup> September, getting the support of many other national associations<sup>15</sup>, including Portuguese organisations.

We have initiated a research on Roma social participation in Portugal in the beginning of 2010, focusing on the characterisation and analysis of the role of Portuguese Roma associations. The social participation of Roma communities seems to be less developed than in some other Southern European countries, despite recent political measures like the National Action Plan for Inclusion 2008-2010 in which one of three priorities (fighting poverty, promoting education and training, and overcoming discrimination) has led to the creation of the NGO forum for social inclusion (*Forum Não Governamental para a Inclusão Social*) in 2006. In this forum all civic organisations can propose an application, but until now only one Roma association belongs to it as a simple member, the *União Romani Portugal*.

Apparently the reasons that explain low participation in Portuguese population are a little different from those that explain low participation of Portuguese Roma. As we have shown, there are important differences between Portugal and other Southern

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<sup>13</sup> This initiative does not count with the participation of Portugal.

<sup>14</sup> Council Directive 2000/43/EC.

<sup>15</sup> In Internet: <http://www.unionromani.org/>

European countries' reality, in particular with Spain, namely different weights of Roma in the total population, diverse institutional frameworks, and a distinct political awareness.

Preliminary data collected seems to show that in Portugal there are scarce support resources which probably explain the discretionary support given. Local support networks may explain the increase of associations since the 1990s. Today we count on 14 gypsy associations and two federations.

These associations are not yet professionalised and seem to be divided according to religious identity differences. But more empirical data is needed in order to confirm our hypothesis.

Roma people are present in Portugal for centuries. Of course, social participation is constrained, not only by Roma features, but also by contextual features, like the civic society traditions or the institutional framework of the country. We will pursue our research in order to understand also how important are these two different types of factors.

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