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# A deeper perspective on problems

**The expulsion of Roma from Italy and France is bringing Roma issues in from the margins of European studies, writes Ian Mundell**

**E**xpulsions from Italy in 2006-07 and from France in 2010 turned the Roma into headline news and brought this marginalised community onto the European policy agenda. This higher profile has also been reflected within European studies. Academics dealing with the Roma are pooling their expertise, while those in other areas are turning to the Roma for case studies in subjects such as migration, social inclusion and citizenship.

Much of the impetus to build an EU strategy on the Roma came mainly from the European Parliament, and it was a Parliamentary research grant that brought Claire Gordon of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) to the issue in 2009. Her specialisation is the post-communist area, in particular the role of the EU in bringing about change in countries applying for membership. "Up until about two years ago I'd done no work on the Roma, except for noting that they were one of the minorities that the European Commission regularly highlighted as an area that needed attention," she says.

The Parliamentary project involved looking at the situation of Roma citizens in six 'old' and six 'new' EU states, with a particular focus on employment, education, health and housing. As well as Gordon, the project involved Will Bartlett, a colleague at

LSE's European Institute, and Roberta Benini of the Nomisma Institute of Economic Research in Bologna.

It proved to be a fertile field of inquiry. "The Roma represent a really interesting area of study for comparative political science and

comparative political economy, not necessarily coming at it because the Roma is your focal point of interest but as a way to get into a lot of other issues," Gordon says.

For example, she and Bartlett have used the Roma issue as a means of examining the Parliament's powers in the wake of the Lisbon treaty. "We looked at attempts by the Parliament to push through a much more active strategy on Roma inclusion, the possibilities for Europeanisation and the intra-institutional relations between the Council [of Ministers], the [European] Commission and the Parliament."

"We concluded that the Commission and the Council retained the upper hand," she says.

## Shaping European identity

Owen Parker, a research fellow in the University of Warwick's department of politics and international studies, also came to the Roma through studying the EU, in particular how European governance seeks to shape European identity and ideas of citizenship. The French expulsions were his way in. "What was particularly interesting to

me was this conflict between France and the EU, the Commission and Commissioner [Viviane] Reding's outspoken statements on the issue and the invocation of EU citizenship in relation to the Roma," he says.

Parker recently received a grant from the Leverhulme Trust, a UK-based

research charity, for a two-year project examining the plight of the Roma as a case study in European citizenship, security and identity. "The Roma are a group who have constantly sat at the



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