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***The making of a ‘risk population’: categorisations of Roma and ethnic boundary-making among Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants in Glasgow***

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This paper critically examines the processes of categorisation of Roma migrants in Glasgow and some of the mechanisms that (re)produce their marginalisation in the city. It contributes to debates on the (unsuccessful) attempts of the EU and individual European states to tackle the social exclusion of various Roma populations living in Europe. Hitherto little attention has been paid to how measures aimed at improving the lives of Roma actually ‘work’ in practice, especially in the context of more recent Roma migration within Europe. Moreover, the role that ethnicity plays ‘on the ground’ has often been overlooked or taken for granted in the relevant literature. Based on 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork with Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants, including Roma, in Glasgow in 2012, this paper aims to address this gap in the current literature. Adopting a boundary-making perspective on ethnicity to analyse interactions in institutionalised settings, it traces and discusses various practices through which ‘the Roma’ were constructed as ‘a risk population’ in the city.

**Keywords:** Roma; migration; categorisations; ethnic boundary-making; formalised settings; Glasgow

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## **Introduction**

In 2011, the EU published the *Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020* amid concerns that existing measures and approaches had made little progress in improving the socio-economic situation of the majority of Roma populations across Europe (European Commission 2011). More concentrated efforts, additional funding and coordinated policies on national, regional and local levels were thus deemed necessary to bring about measurable and positive change for Roma and foster their inclusion into European societies. Notable in these renewed efforts was the adoption of an ‘explicit but not exclusive’ approach to counter the social exclusion and marginalisation of Roma, by targeting these issues more directly, but doing so without discriminating against other vulnerable groups. This policy change followed discussions within the EU institutions which called for an approach that concentrated not ‘on the ethnicity of a person but on the socio-economic reality in which this person lives’ (European Commission 2010, 29). Although the publication of the 2011 Framework was part of a longer and ongoing involvement of the EU in policy-making towards Roma populations, its role grew and gained political prominence particularly since 2004, following the accession to the EU of eight Central and East European countries (Popova 2014, 6). The post-2004 period saw the migration of a large number of citizens, including Roma, from these accession countries to the existing EU member states. This marked a shift in EU policy regarding Roma populations: the emphasis moved away from minority rights towards issues around social inclusion and integration of Roma populations throughout Europe (Popova 2014).

The role of the EU, its policy-making and programmes towards Roma, however, have been met with considerable criticism in recent years. Several scholars have critiqued the extensive definition of the term Roma adopted in EU policy documents where Roma is used ‘as an umbrella term which includes groups of people who have more or less similar cultural characteristics, such as Sinti, Travellers, Kalé, Gens du voyage, etc. whether sedentary or not’ (European Commission 2011, 2). This is seen as a problematic attempt to (re)classify heterogeneous groups as a European transnational minority (Vermeersch 2012; Marushiakova and Popov 2015). At the same time, many academics have pointed out that despite the EU

and individual European countries investing significant political and financial resources, the lives of Roma living in Europe have hardly improved (Nicolae 2011; McGarry 2012; Sigona and Vermeersch 2012; Stewart 2012; Curcic *et al.* 2014), and that ‘many Roma still belong to the poorest, most segregated, most discriminated against and least “integrated” populations in Europe’ (Sigona and Vermeersch 2012, 1189).

Yet, such scholarly critique has tended to focus on discourses as manifest in policy papers and documents of the EU and its institutions (Vermeersch 2012; McGarry 2012; Agarin 2014; Marushiakova and Popov 2015). Relatively little attention has been paid to how measures aiming at improving the lives of Roma actually ‘work’ in practice, especially in the context of more recent Roma migration within Europe. This article attends to this gap in the existing literature. It traces ethnographically a shift in resources and support services towards Roma migrants living in Glasgow in 2012 amid the EU policy changes mentioned above, showing how Roma migrants were constructed as a particularly vulnerable group not only in the form of specific discourses and narratives but also in practice in and through migrants’ everyday experiences and encounters with support organisations and other actors in the city.

The paper further contributes to the current and growing body of literature on Roma migration to Glasgow (Blake Stevenson 2007; Poole and Adamson 2008; Paterson *et al.* 2011; Grill 2012; Sime *et al.* 2014; Clark 2014; Kailemia 2016). The presence of a large number of Roma migrants in the city has attracted a great deal of interest from scholars, activists as well as policy makers, and Glasgow has become a focal point where the above questions and debates around Roma categorisation and their social exclusion have come to the fore in recent years. Especially since 2004, the city has seen the arrival of a considerable number of Roma migrants mainly from Slovakia and the Czech Republic and later from Romania (Sime *et al.* 2014) as part of the large post-accession migration to Scotland/UK (McCollum *et al.* 2012, 15). Glasgow is also the only UK member city of ROMA-Net, a pan-European network of cities in which statutory and voluntary organisations coordinate projects and services to improve the situation of Roma, an affiliation which has further consolidated its status as a city with a significant Roma population. In this context, there has been a great deal of largely policy-orientated research documenting ‘the situation of the Roma community’ living in the city, which has highlighted various issues faced by this population, including a prevalence of poverty, unstable employment, poor health, lack of English language skills, and low levels of educational attainment (Blake Stevenson 2007; Poole and Adamson 2008; Paterson *et al.*

2011, Sime *et al.* 2014; Clark 2014). These studies have also shed light on various factors underpinning these issues such as Roma migrants' cultural background, specific history of persecution, discrimination and racism, lack of information, mistrust of state authorities.

However, researchers have often either taken the 'Roma' category for granted or uncritically adopted existing definitions of this population, e.g., as 'the most deprived ethnic group within Europe' (Poole and Adamson 2008, 2) and/or as a category of diverse people with a shared culture (Sime *et al.* 2014). By contrast, this paper offers a critical perspective regarding processes of categorisation of Roma migrants in Glasgow and some of the mechanisms that (re)produced their marginalisation in the city. Here, rather than taking 'the Roma' for granted or trying to define 'who the Roma are', following Wimmer's (2008) approach on ethnicity I try to critically examine the various processes and practices through which the boundaries of the ethnic category of Roma were made and unmade in Glasgow.

### **Understanding processes of Roma categorisation**

Within the literature on the population of Roma in Glasgow, a small number of studies have taken a more critical view of the categorisation processes and ongoing exclusion of these migrants in the city (Grill 2012; Clark 2014; Kailemia 2016). Based on ethnographic research conducted in an inner-city area of Glasgow where most Roma migrants are reported to live, these studies have highlighted a range of negative and racialised discourses about this migrant population in the city, drawing attention to different groups of non-Roma actors as main contributors to the construction of these images. In his research with Slovak Roma migrants conducted between 2006 and 2007, Grill (2012), for example, highlights different ways in which non-Roma migrants identified and described Roma individuals in Glasgow, *inter alia*, by distinguishing between 'white' and 'dark-skinned Slovaks', associating Roma with Gypsiness, expressing a sense of superiority over Roma and avoiding interaction with them. He notes how 'white' non-Roma Czech and Slovak migrants who worked as support workers and/or interpreters drew on their common knowledge and prejudices about Roma that they had acquired back home to distinguish themselves from the latter. Drawing on Hage's work on racism, Grill refers to these categorisation discourses and practices as a 'form of racialisation' that is rooted in the history of difficult relations between Roma and non-Roma back in Slovakia which were then playing out in Glasgow. He also points out how once individuals 'were identified as Roma/Gypsies and their ethno-cultural distinctiveness

foregrounded, Roma found themselves troubled by the possible danger of being lumped together (once again)' (Grill 2012, 52).

Clark (2014), on the other hand, focuses on Scottish residents as significant actors who contributed to the production of various negative stereotypes and images about Roma migrants living in the south of Glasgow. This included narratives about Roma engaging in 'anti-social' and 'criminal' behaviour, causing 'public nuisance' and generally being a menace to the local area. Clark borrows from Goffman's notion of 'stigma' to describe these discourses and encounters between Scottish residents and migrants on the ground as processes of stigmatisation, highlighting the asymmetric power relations between non-Roma Scottish residents ('the stigmatiser') and Roma ('the stigmatised'). Another group of actors is at the centre of Kailemia's (2016) ethnographic study: local policy makers. His research traces the image of Roma as a 'self-isolating' group hindering integration within the local community back to discourses of local policy actors (community safety wardens, housing managers, etc.) as well as the media. According to Kailemia, the negative impact that Roma were thought to have on the local area was largely attributed to their 'uniqueness', i.e. Roma were portrayed either as a historically marginalised population fearful of authorities or a problematic group involved in crimes and antisocial behaviour.

In this paper, I approach the processes of categorisation and marginalisation regarding the Roma population in Glasgow by adopting a boundary-making perspective on ethnicity. This perspective emerged as a critique of the conventional understanding of ethnicity or what Wimmer (2007) has called the 'Herderian commonsense'. The Herderian approach – which has become commonsensical as it continues to dominate the way we see human society – has, as Barth (1969, 11) put it, 'historically produced a world of separate peoples, each with their culture and each organised in a society which can legitimately be isolated for description as an island to itself'. From such perspective, ethnic groups are seen as 'natural', as culturally coherent and bounded units. This long-held view, however, has been widely challenged, with Barth (1969) being the first to seriously question the idea of ethnicity as a fixed category and a primordial aspect of human social organisation. Instead of studying ethnic groups as separate entities, Barth turned his attention to the boundaries that marked them. In a series of empirical case studies, he found that in many cases ethnic distinctions persisted despite individuals crossing boundaries and that social relations and interactions (rather than isolation) played an important role in maintaining these distinctions.

Barth's pioneering work has prompted and inspired a rich and growing body of empirical and theoretical work on ethnicity and inter-ethnic relations in recent decades (e.g. Jenkins 1994; Brubaker 2004; Wimmer 2008). Here, however, I draw specifically on Wimmer's advancement of Barth's approach, as it offers a more comprehensive analysis for understanding processes of ethnic differentiation. Wimmer emphasises that ethnic classifications are multiple, vary across situations and contexts, and, unlike other forms of social categorisation, are of 'a multilevel character that comprise several nested segments of differentiations' (2008, 976). Which level of differentiation is emphasised, what kind of categorisations receive prominence, depends on the political significance attributed to ethnicity at a given time and space. Here, differently from Barth, Wimmer places ethnicity within a broader historical-political framework, bringing into play institutions and structures (and not just ethnic groups themselves) that operate beyond specific situations. According to Wimmer, institutions 'provide incentives for actors to draw certain types of boundaries – ethnic rather than class or gender, for example – and to emphasize certain levels of ethnic differentiation rather than others' (2008, 986). Moreover, processes of ethnic categorisation are not just shaped top-down by policy discourses but also in and through interactions on the ground, which includes encounters in institutional or formal settings. Wimmer cautions against the tendency to automatically equate 'strategies of classification by powerful actors with the formation of groups in everyday life' (2008, 995), as boundaries imposed by powerful actors may be embraced or challenged by subordinate actors.

While existing studies of Roma categorisation in Glasgow highlighted above have often included accounts of institutional and state actors, e.g., NGO workers, social workers, police officers, policy makers, housing officers, etc., the analysis has largely remained on the discursive level, offering little insight into bureaucratic practices on the ground as well as interactions between Roma and non-Roma actors as they actually unfold in institutional settings, an aspect I focus on here. Drawing on Wimmer's approach to ethnicity as 'the outcome of classificatory struggles and negotiations between actors situated in the field' (Wimmer 2008, 970), in the following paragraphs I will shed new light on the complex and multi-level processes of ethnic boundary-making that occurred during my fieldwork among Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants living in Glasgow in 2012.

## ***Methodology***

This paper is based on 12 months of intensive ethnographic research among Czech- and Slovak-speaking post-accession migrants living in Glasgow in 2012, which explored insecurities and risks experienced by these migrants and the ways in which they negotiated these issues in their everyday lives in the city. However, instead of treating Roma as an *a priori* distinct group, in my research I focused on a broad language-based category of Slovak- and Czech-speaking migrants that included, among them, Roma. The decision to choose language as the main criterion for selecting the research population aimed at overcoming ‘methodological nationalism’ and the ‘ethnic lens’ which are prevalent in much of the mainstream migration scholarship (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). This entails perspectives which homogenise ‘migrant communities’ as essentially different from the ‘host society’ and promote essentialised notions of migrant group characteristics. Defining Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants as the research group was also informed by the field; prior to the research, I conducted two small pilot studies in 2010 in Glasgow which pointed to an array of relationships and interactions between these migrants on different levels, e.g., services that catered specifically for (Roma and non-Roma) Czech and Slovak nationals and informal networks that included both Slovak and Czech speakers. Focusing on a language-based group across ethnic, national, and cultural boundaries also offered a useful methodological strategy to explore the role played by ethnicity in the field, rather than taking it for granted.

The ethnographic fieldwork involved participant observation at different sites in Glasgow which were frequented by Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants such as advice centres, job centres and drop-ins as well as migrants’ informal gatherings and events. Over the course of 12 months, I came in contact with over 100 migrants who frequented various sites in the city. Among them, 28 individuals became key informants whom I met repeatedly in varying settings throughout the fieldwork period, enabling me to be part of their everyday lives and activities. This paper thus draws on ethnographic data produced throughout 2012 which involved field notes, ethnographic interviews with service users (in Slovak/Czech and English) as well as semi-structured interviews with migrants, support workers and other relevant stakeholders in the field.



## ‘Are you Roma?’

Jan Búrik<sup>1</sup> had made a routine appointment with the support worker to get help with completing his tax credits application form. He handed the form over to the support worker who began to fill it in. Once they reached the end of the form, the support worker showed him where to sign and handed it back to Mr Búrik who thanked her repeatedly. Mr Búrik then stood up and just as he was about to leave the room, the support worker suddenly asked him in Slovak: ‘Sorry, Mr Búrik, before you leave, one last question? You are Rom, right?’ (*Vy ste Róm, však?*) He hesitated for a few seconds and blushed before responding slowly: ‘Half-, why?’ (*Na pol-, prečo?*) ‘Well, hm,’ said the support worker, ‘we tick the Roma box as we don’t have “half” here’, also blushing, quickly glancing from me back to Mr Búrik and pointing at a form in front of her. With what seemed like an apologetic smile she then explained that it was now a ‘service requirement’ to keep a record on Roma and that, in any case, it was good to put down ‘Roma’ on his new client sheet, so that he would be able to continue using the service in the future.

This is an edited extract from field notes I took during one-to-one advice sessions at Groundworks,<sup>2</sup> a local charity organisation where I conducted fieldwork in 2012. The sessions formed part of an information and advice service run by Groundworks, offering support and assistance on a wide range of issues to EU migrants living in the city. The service employed Slovak and Czech speakers as support workers, and although it was open to all European migrants, it was attended predominantly by Slovak and Czech nationals. The above exchange, which happened at the end of the advice session when Mr Búrik was asked about his ethnicity, created an awkward moment that seemed to interrupt the otherwise smooth running of the session. Jan Búrik looked surprised by the support worker’s sudden request to declare his ethnicity; he might have been reluctant to reveal his ethnic belonging; he might have anticipated the difficulty of ‘being half-Roma’ for the support worker’s purposes; or he might have been surprised to find that she was assuming him to be Roma. In any event, Mr Búrik seemed uncertain about the support worker’s intention, hence his hesitation and blushing. The Slovak-speaking support worker, on the other hand, looked surprised by his reaction to her question. She might have just simply felt sorry for causing him embarrassment, or felt embarrassed about her initial assumption that he was Roma, or that she had been anticipating a straightforward yes- or no-answer and was unsure how to handle his response.

In any case, this exchange and the awkwardness it created drew my attention to the ways in which ethnicity, and particularly the categorisation of Roma, was becoming

increasingly relevant in the provision of support by various organisations to Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants in Glasgow. Just as the support worker had indicated, I subsequently noticed during my fieldwork that the internal collection of data increasingly focused on this specific category of ‘Roma’. While no data were collected, for example, on the nationality of service users, all new service users, like Mr Búrik, were supposed to fill out a form, declaring themselves as Roma - where applicable. This was not an ethnic monitoring procedure, but ‘being Roma’ was a precondition for having access to certain services; the form included a box ‘Roma client’ with no other ethnic categories offered.

The ‘service requirement’ of ‘tick[ing] the Roma box’ that the support worker mentioned had been introduced around March 2012 when Groundworks began a collaboration with another organisation. The form was introduced by the latter organisation which was running an EU-funded service to promote employment among the Roma population in Glasgow and, as part of the collaborative arrangement, it required Groundworks to collect data specifically on ‘Roma clients’. This growing attention towards ‘the Roma’ was not only restricted to Groundworks and its partner organisation; rather, it was part of a recent shift in services and resources aimed at Roma throughout Glasgow and more widely in Scotland.<sup>3</sup> Starting from the end of 2011 and especially the following year over ten major non-governmental as well as statutory organisations ran new or reconfigured services specifically aimed at Roma in Glasgow (Glasgow ROMA-Net 2013). As a Slovakian key informant who worked in a third sector organisation in the city once told me, ‘there are plenty of Roma projects at the moment – I could get a job anywhere.’<sup>4</sup>

Further, the growing attention towards ‘the Roma’ in Glasgow was strongly connected to wider changes on the European level mentioned above. The EU, in fact, co-funded some of the local initiatives like the Roma employment project as part of multilevel efforts to foster Roma inclusion in cities throughout Europe. The period between 2011 and 2012 also marked an intensification and stronger integration of support and resources aimed at ‘the Roma population’ not only in Glasgow but throughout Scotland. On the policy level, the Glasgow Local Support Group, a body responsible for developing the Roma Local Action Plan, explicitly aligned its objectives with the 2011 EU Framework for Roma Integration by, e.g., adopting the latter’s four ‘Roma integration goals’ (access to education, employment, healthcare, and housing). As noted earlier, organisations in Glasgow seemed particularly attentive to EU policy changes through its participation in ROMA-Net.

With various services and projects, either newly launched or reconfigured, focusing on Roma, some local organisations in Glasgow set out to identify and collect data on ‘the Roma population’ living in the city and beyond. In instances like that reported in the above field note when the support worker asked Mr Búrik to confirm his ethnic identity, the identification process was bureaucratically administered as a ‘tick-box’ exercise, i.e. a ‘Roma-box’ on a self-declaration form. As I observed during my fieldwork, however, quite regularly (Czech or Slovak) support workers filling the forms would ‘tick the Roma box’ or make a note about someone being ‘Roma’ without asking the respective service user. This was especially the case when a support worker had known the service user well and had obtained that information previously. Another practice of identifying Roma without asking individuals directly involved so-called ‘mapping’. Keen to record the number of Roma living in Scotland, in 2012 ROMA-Net commissioned a ‘mapping study’ in collaboration with the Scottish Government and other Scottish local authorities (The Social Marketing Gateway 2013). In this study, which was completed a year later, the identification process was carried out primarily through a consultation survey whereby various organisations and individuals working with Roma were asked to ‘locate’ the latter and provide ‘estimates’ about the number of Roma living in different areas throughout Scotland.

### **Who are ‘the Roma’?**

With various data being created locally ‘about the Roma’ as detailed above, what formed the basis of this kind of ‘knowledge’ which allowed their identification? During my fieldwork I recorded different ways in which Roma were categorised by a wide range of non-Roma actors in Glasgow, especially in formalised settings where Roma were seen as a major client base. I found that the most openly negative depictions of Roma came from Slovak and Czech migrants working as (freelance/agency) interpreters who would be assigned to facilitate interactions between Roma clients and, for example, health services, the police, and welfare authorities. One Slovak interpreter, for example, was convinced that most ‘Roma are criminals’, while another talked about how she ‘knew that Roma were lying’ and ‘cheated the system’ in their attempts to access welfare benefits, and even admitted that she was sometimes reminded by case workers ‘to just translate what was being said and not give her own views or comments about clients’. Such narratives were linked to well documented

prejudices based on the Gypsy/Roma association, considering ‘Gypsies’ as ‘liars’ or ‘born criminals’, as well as ‘workshy’ or ‘lazy’ and unwilling to work or to integrate (Bogdal 2012).

Among the Czech- and Slovak-speaking front-line workers at various organisations that supported migrants, including Roma, I did not come across such a criminalizing discourse which ascribed particular negative traits to the ‘nature’ of Roma people. However, they often asserted in various conversations that to them it was ‘obvious who the Roma are’; their ‘knowledge’ seemed mainly based on racialized and stereotypical imaginations of the other (Grill 2012) such as that Roma tended to be ‘dark-skinned’, ‘poor’, ‘uneducated’ or ‘speaking with a thick accent’. At Groundworks, for example, support workers seemed to automatically assume a person to be a ‘normal Slovak/Czech’, meaning non-Roma, when this person was light-skinned or had no discernable accent. In the field note extract I provided above, the Slovak support worker was unsure about Mr Búrik being Roma or not, as he was light-skinned and did not ‘look’ or ‘sound Roma’ to her. Generally, individuals not fitting particular stereotypical assumptions would by default not be ‘identified’ as Roma, thus resulting in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy of Roma as dark-skinned, poor, uneducated, etc.

It is important to note that the distinction between ‘normal/unnormal’ Slovaks/Czechs was regularly made by non-migrant actors as well. For example, at a drop-in service for Roma migrants, another field site where I conducted participant observation, one Scottish volunteer once asked whether there were ‘any normal Slovaks or Czechs’ among the users, unconsciously implying that Roma were not normal. Such centering of non-Roma as ‘normal’ was usually underpinned by a narrative of Roma as poor and vulnerable, as a Scottish senior member of a third-sector organisation working with Roma in Glasgow pessimistically remarked: ‘These people, the Roma, will never get out of poverty.’ Such comments were usually made in the context of accounting, from the organisation’s point of view, for the difficulties in bringing about a measurable change in their clients’ lives. In fact, this narrative of Roma being stuck in a cycle of poverty and exclusion and thus having greater needs was widespread across the various groups of people working with Roma migrants in Glasgow and seemed particularly emboldened by people’s awareness of the painful past and experiences of continuous ‘discrimination and racism’ that Roma had encountered. Interestingly, such allusions to injustices suffered by Roma were mostly made with reference to Slovakia or the Czech Republic (or more generally to Eastern Europe), and less often discussed with regard to problems faced by such individuals in Glasgow or Scotland. These past negative

experiences that effectively rendered Roma as victims were also thought to explain why they were generally ‘fearful and mistrustful’ of state officials and authorities, making them a ‘hard-to-reach’ population for service providers and researchers alike.

It is necessary to consider that these various stereotypical and negative representations were rarely made in the presence of Roma individuals themselves. People were ostensibly careful about directly labelling individuals as Roma (or uneducated, poor, etc.) in their presence. The exception were ascriptions that drew on romanticised ideas about Roma, for example, in positive and sometimes admiring comments about the ‘wonderful Roma culture and languages transmitted over centuries’, their ‘strong focus on family values’, their ‘artistic and specifically musical talents’ or simply ‘being happy folk’. While these seemingly positive ideas appeared to counter the more unfavourable or outright dehumanizing narratives about Roma, they were equally essentialising forms of boundary-making in that they perpetuated the idea of Roma people as separate, distinct ‘others’. In any case, during my fieldwork in 2012, more enthusiastic imaginations about ‘the Roma’ were given less weight in the field among those providing formalised support, for example, when it came to applying for/granting funding and determining the focus and scope of projects.

### **Ethnic boundary-making in Glasgow**

How were these ideas and narratives about Roma reinforced and/or challenged in interactions and encounters between Roma and non-Roma actors? Earlier I described the moment when Jan Búrik was asked about his ethnicity, a question to which he hesitantly replied that he was ‘half’ Roma. I also noted that his case was rather uncommon, as often Slovak and Czech support workers would make a note about someone being ‘Roma’ without asking the respective service user about their ethnicity. One interpretation of what happened here could draw on a cultural-relativist perspective and describe the approach taken by support workers as ‘misguided’ when it came to registering Roma clients as service users – i.e., when staff ticked the ‘Roma box’ (literally on a form or mentally in encounters or conversations) without explicitly asking the service user. From this perspective, the support workers who were themselves migrants from Slovakia would appear to apply an approach towards Roma that was used in their country of origin; rather than letting service users self-identify as Roma by, for example, handing them the form, they attributed Roma-ness to certain people based

on their ‘knowledge’ of Roma, informed by their long experience of living and working with Roma in Slovakia. As noted earlier, such an explanation is provided by Grill (2012) in his study of (Slovak) Roma migrants living in Glasgow. In Grill’s argument, the ‘socio-cultural baggage’ that ‘white’ Slovak and Czech migrants who worked as interpreters/support workers brought with them played a key role in the identification and categorisation of Roma in the city.

In the following, I will suggest another interpretation of what happened here. Being attentive to boundary-making processes I argue that – even though the above interpretation might be also relevant – the situation should not be reduced to one unfolding between non-Roma Slovak or Czech support workers and Roma service users whose shared history of difficult relations between ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ plays out here, somewhat imported from ‘back home’ to this setting in Glasgow. As I found during my fieldwork, many Groundworks service users I spoke to valued the service highly, in particular for the fact that the service was provided in their native language and by fellow Slovak or Czech migrants who could understand many issues they faced as newcomers in Scotland. What seems crucial here, however, is the fact that many of those who self-identified as Roma in our conversations had experienced Glasgow as a place where the Roma/non-Roma divide was not (or at least far less) socially relevant. This was apparent in my interviews with various research participants. Petr Krasko, a 49-year old key informant from Slovakia, for example, spoke about the ‘completely different system’ operating in Glasgow in comparison to Slovakia, pointing to examples of Roma individuals being able to work or study in Scotland/UK without being discriminated. He contrasted this ‘different system’ with his inability to find paid work, e.g., in a construction company in Slovakia:

There are cases when a Roma person goes there [to ask for work], [or] makes a phone call ... it happened to me many times...I call, [the employer replies] ‘Are you Roma?’ Yes, I say... ‘You know what, we will call you later.’ And that’s it.

Similarly, Mr Búrik also talked about a ‘different approach’ in Glasgow: ‘It is another approach to people here and to us as Roma - the approach is quite different. They take us normally.’ He also highlighted this difference by giving an example of an incident in his hometown back in Slovakia when his wife was refused a phone contract by a major telecommunications company for being Roma. Other research informants mentioned that

they felt positive about being ‘less visible’ in Glasgow due to the presence of a diverse population in the city, and how they would often be seen as ‘Asians’ due to their looks, or that people would not be able to easily ‘place’ them or their origin (see also Grill [2012]). Others talked about having no questions asked or getting no ‘suspicious looks’ from strangers in Glasgow when introducing themselves as Slovak or Czech or as coming from Eastern Europe.

Firstly, what this hints at is the fact that the EU accession of Slovakia and the Czech Republic in 2004 not only opened up the possibility for these informants to leave their home cities and villages and come to the UK, but to come to and live in Glasgow as EU citizens, as Slovaks or Czechs on a par with other (non-Roma) Slovaks and Czechs. Many individual migrants who were referred to me as Roma by (non-Roma) support workers often described themselves as ‘Czechs or Slovaks’ in conversations and interviews I conducted with them. This is not to say that they now all identified primarily as Slovak, Czech, or EU citizens (which would be a rather individual question). There were some who self-identified as Roma, for example, when mentioning or explaining anti-Roma discrimination and injustices experienced in the Czech Republic or Slovakia. Or there were those Roma participants who distinguished specific aspects of ‘Roma culture’. For instance, Milan Lačný, a 33-year-old informant from the Czech Republic, pointed out during an exchange about his musical hobbies that ‘whites, *gádžovia* have an ear for their music, we [Roma] have an ear for our own music’. Rather, what I am trying to emphasise here is that there were different identifications which were now available to my research informants alongside that as Roma, man or woman, villager, city person, Slovak-speaking, Romany-speaking. Importantly, certain entitlements and rights that they were granted as EU citizens just like any other Slovak or Czech migrant, too, represent one aspect of what these research informants called a ‘different system/approach’, of being treated ‘normally’ in Glasgow.

With this in mind, it is important to note that in the specific advice session that I have described above both the support worker and Mr Búrik had been communicating in their native language Slovak and as fellow Slovak migrants in Glasgow. I argue that the moment the support worker asked Mr Búrik to ‘confirm’ his Roma ethnicity, a boundary was drawn between them, that of Roma and non-Roma. From this perspective, the emerging awkwardness then seems an effect of, firstly, the fact that the question presupposed Roma to be a strict either/or category which Mr Búrik’s reply of ‘half’ called into question. Secondly,

the classificatory practice of ticking the ‘Roma box’ immediately created a social distance between Mr Búrik and the support worker which did not exist in previous meetings and, from the perspective of Mr Búrik and others, felt like a setback.

This ‘hardening’ of a Roma/non-Roma divide in the city manifested itself in other interactions and with different consequences. During my fieldwork at Groundworks on a number of occasions I heard variations of the following remark: ‘Don’t forget, you work here because of us!’ It was a ‘reminder’ that some (Roma) service users directed at (non-Roma) Slovak/Czech speaking support workers. Such remarks were often made in frustration, when people were unable to get an appointment and be seen by support workers. The Groundworks service attracted a large number of migrants from all parts of the city and often struggled to cope with the demand. Nevertheless, these ‘incidents’, which showed that Roma migrants were aware of the wider policy changes, including the mobilisation of resources in the city aimed at them, put support workers under a great deal of pressure and created tension between the two groups. As a support worker once said to me anxiously, ‘I feel emotionally blackmailed by these [remarks].’

The context in which these boundary-making practices took place in Glasgow needs further explicating here. Many (non-Roma) Czech and Slovak speakers who worked with Roma migrants in the city were employed as support workers or interpreters. Although their roles required various skills and knowledges and often involved great responsibilities, English- and Slovak/Czech-language proficiency appeared to be the most relevant aspect of their recruitment, and their jobs were not necessarily highly-paid or secure positions. Thus, while their language skills and employment in frontline services placed these migrants at the center of the above-mentioned drive to identify Roma in the city, they often had little or no say in policy-making or designing of projects aimed at Roma, including the ‘box-ticking’ exercise or ‘mapping’ study mentioned above. By contrast, higher positions and managerial roles in the field, ranging from policy-makers, project managers to network coordinators, from team leaders, teachers to social workers, were mostly occupied by Scottish/British individuals working with Roma in the city. Thus, although it was (non-Roma) Slovak/Czech migrants working in frontline services who often enacted various classificatory practices vis-à-vis the Roma population, these practices were significantly enabled, delegated and reinforced by non-migrant actors and policy-makers. For example, the above-mentioned ‘mapping study’, commissioned by Glasgow ROMA-Net and local authorities aligning



themselves with the EU Framework, used an indirect method to identify Roma migrants drawing on stereotypical ideas about this population such as having ‘large families’ and ‘numerous children’ (The Social Marketing Gateway 2013, 14). By pointing out the different positions occupied by non-Roma actors in the field, my analysis thus extends beyond existing studies which have overlooked this dynamic as they have focused on the role played by either local policy makers (Kailemia 2016) or non-Roma migrants in Glasgow (Grill 2012).

### ***Boundary-blurring and counter-narratives***

One of the consequences of the reorientation in resources towards ‘the Roma’ in Glasgow was the sudden loss of support provided for those Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants who did not ‘qualify’ as Roma. Some migrant individuals reacted to this by performing acts of ‘boundary crossing’, i.e., by ‘ticking the Roma box’ in order to access the new projects and services that opened up for Roma migrants, even though these individuals thought of themselves as non-Roma. This was the case, for example, in a project that supported Roma migrants in Glasgow with accessing employment opportunities in the city. A non-Roma research participant who attended the service explained to me that its users included not only Roma but also non-Roma individuals from the Czech Republic or Slovakia as well as from other East European countries. The research informant did not seem too concerned about ‘ticking the Roma box’ despite not considering himself Roma and using the service, as he felt he was merely registering ‘as a client’, adding ‘it [the Roma declaration form] is just a piece of paper, how can you prove who is Roma or not’. In fact, he noted, Roma themselves ‘didn’t like very much the idea of ticking the Roma box.’ Such acts of ‘passing as Roma’ clearly laid bare the arbitrariness and practical ineffectiveness of the box-ticking exercise, thus undermining the very aim of introducing this kind of eligibility criteria, e.g., when organisations relied on such data to evidence their impact on the target population.

Albeit in different contexts, there were other interactions among these migrants which countered the ‘hardening’ of Roma/non-Roma boundary in Glasgow. This included interactions as part of a collaborative and multicultural music project in the city which involved non-Roma and Roma Slovak and Czech speakers, as well as other migrants and non-migrant residents living in the city. For both Roma and non-Roma migrants who participated in this project, meeting on a regular basis for rehearsals, producing music

together and performing at different venues in Glasgow and beyond, provided new opportunities to share their interests and passion and socialise in the city as equals, i.e., as fellow musicians. Another activity which saw the two groups join together beyond the workplace/institutional environment involved the celebration of Roma International Day, an annual event held in April to celebrate Romani culture and raise awareness about issues faced by Roma populations across Europe. In conversation with some of those non-Roma individuals who helped organise or participated in the event, it became apparent how these involvements were underpinned by a strong interest in social justice issues, leading some to reflect critically about the ways in which society both in Scotland/UK and in Slovakia/Czech Republic treated Roma and other marginalised groups such as certain categories of migrants. In some cases, this led to a change in perceptions about Roma; as one of my research informants who was involved in these activities once reflected, ‘I could marry a Roma now, I don’t care what my parents [back in Slovakia] think’.

Although such practices and interactions among Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants highlighted here did not result in changing the overall emphasis on Roma ethnicity in service provision in Glasgow, they exposed its limitations and disrupted some of the prevailing narratives regarding Roma in the city, e.g., as ‘isolated’, ‘unwilling to integrate’, etc. These interactions also point to more dynamic and changing relationships between non-Roma and Roma migrants that existed in the city during the time of my fieldwork in 2012, a finding which contrasts with the rather more antagonistic relationship previously documented between these two groups in Glasgow (cf. Grill 2012).

### **Conclusion: The making of a ‘risk population’**

At the beginning of this paper I briefly outlined the EU’s new ‘targeted approach’ for Roma integration in cities and localities throughout Europe, which called for more concerted efforts by various actors and stakeholders in the field to tackle issues faced by Roma populations in a way that does not target them as an ethnic group but as a socio-economic category. Against this background, the paper looked at what actually happened ‘on the ground’ in Glasgow based on Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants’ everyday experiences and interactions with support organisations and service providers in the city, noting how Roma ethnicity became highly relevant in the field. Wimmer’s approach to ethnicity was fruitful here to shed light on

the complex ways in which measures and support aimed at Roma populations in the city amounted to boundary-making practices with various, even contradictory implications.

The shift in services and resources from the more general category of EU nationals or Slovak and Czech migrants to the more restrictive target group of ‘the Roma population’ or ‘Roma clients’ gave salience to the divide Roma/non-Roma as the socially relevant boundary. This, in turn, required and at the same time reinforced essentialising and racialised ideas about ‘the Roma’ as a clear-cut and homogeneous group, making invisible the heterogeneity I came across during my fieldwork, e.g., Slovak-speaking, Romany-speaking, people of darker and lighter skin colour, singles, families, city-dwellers, villagers, persons with varying educational backgrounds and skill sets (which could be more significant in people’s lived experiences and their trajectories). Furthermore, the notion of ‘the Roma’ as a specifically vulnerable group with greater needs constructed a population ‘laden with problems’, or in other words, a ‘risk population’. This is not to deny that many who would either identify themselves or were categorised by others as Roma faced significant barriers; but turning an issue into a ‘Roma issue’ neglected other potentially relevant factors that gave rise to an increased vulnerability, such as the specific migration process interacting with a person’s educational background, language skills, age, gender, etc. as well as factors pertaining to wider societal developments such as social welfare reforms (Paterson *et al.* 2011), the neoliberal restructuring of work, and globalisation processes as they played out in and around Glasgow in 2012 (Guma 2015). Overall, this emphasis on Roma ethnicity resulted in the paradox that while support services in Glasgow were targeted at ‘the Roma’ in order to tackle what was understood as their long-standing discrimination and marginalisation, this very mobilisation of resources again essentialised Roma as particularly needy, thus reinforcing their stigmatisation.

Importantly, I documented a ‘hardening’ of the Roma/non-Roma divide among Czech- and Slovak-speaking migrants as it was enacted in practice within formalised settings, showing how boundaries were drawn and divisions were created in face-to-face interactions. This goes beyond boundary-making in the form of policies and discourses, as its effects are felt immediately between co-present participants (thus, the ‘embarrassment’, ‘awkwardness’, etc.) and become acutely personal. At the same time, my analysis did not limit itself to the specific interactions between support workers and clients; as I have shown, what happened in these everyday negotiations did not occur in a void but was embedded in a particular

institutional set-up in Glasgow, in which routine bureaucratic practices (such as a ‘Roma tick box’) and specific forms of knowledge production (such as ‘indirect mapping’) drew on and emboldened particular ideas and prejudices about ‘the Roma other’, held by a variety of players in the field, such as third sector organisations, their (non-migrant and migrant) staff members, volunteers, other service users, local authorities, inter-city collaborations (ROMA-Net), policy-makers, EU institutions.

Finally, this paper has thus demonstrated that while organisations and authorities in Glasgow explicitly referred to the EU Framework, such realignment remained largely on the discursive level; in practice, from the everyday perspective of affected migrants, institutional talk of subscribing to the ‘explicit but not exclusive’ approach promoted by the EU emerged here as a rather ‘essentialising and exclusive’ approach. As I have shown, at times nominally excluded migrants would subvert this approach in order to continue having access to services, while those exclusively targeted as Roma would at times construe this as the basis for a claim to support and services. With regard to service providers, the paper has demonstrated that their ‘good intentions’ in practice were hardly a guarantee for positive outcomes for the target group. In this sense, the findings also hint at the complexities involved for organisations and individuals who wanted to bring about a positive change for disadvantaged Roma in the city amid increasing financial constraints and a climate of austerity. While further research is required to explore how these challenges can be addressed to achieve more equitable outcomes on the ground, this paper, through its critical analysis, hopefully provides a first basis for such exploration.

#### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> All research participants’ names mentioned in this paper have been anonymised; pseudonyms are used instead.

<sup>2</sup> A pseudonym.

<sup>3</sup> Some projects and services aimed at Roma had been in place prior to 2012; however, these were mainly based in one particular area in the south of Glasgow.

<sup>4</sup> A wide range of related activities also took place during this time in the city including surveys, trainings, meetings and conferences.

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