

Romani, Balkan of Hungary (From Joshua Project)

The Balkan Gypsies are also known as the Balkan Romani. They are located in parts of Eastern Europe including Macedonia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Yugoslavia, and the Ukraine. There is even a significant community in China. Gypsies are the largest stateless people group that exist. Many times, the population count of Gypsies are inaccurate due to their nomadic lifestyle. Others do not possess identity cards because they fear discrimination or persecution.



Gypsies call themselves Rom, which in their language means "men." Rom is derived from the Indian word Dom, meaning "a man of low caste who gains his livelihood by singing and dancing." The Romani language, therefore, comes from the name the Gypsies call themselves.

Gypsies have their roots in India. They began spreading westward in the tenth century. By the fourteenth century, large Gypsy groups were established in the Balkan Mountains of Bulgaria. Some continued to live as nomads; others settled in permanent dwellings. Regardless of where they lived, though, to non-gypsies, they remained mysterious and distinct. Curiosity about them eventually led to hatred and discrimination. In the twentieth century, many Gypsies were killed by Nazis. Today, they are still discriminated against.

What Are Their Lives Like?

People often assume that all Gypsies have dark hair, complexion, and eyes; however, Balkan Gypsies sometimes have lighter skin and even blond hair and blue eyes. This is probably because their ancestors mixed with Europeans. Unlike the Gypsies who have remained in India, many of the Balkan Gypsies have become settled. They often live in villages or near towns and cities. Some still travel, though, by caravans of cars, trucks, and trailers.

In the past, Gypsies were not allowed to own land, so they began developing unique occupations which they still do today. These included such things as fortune-telling, horse trading, market vending, entertaining, acrobatics, and metal and wood working. They are especially known for their musical abilities and dancing. Many sing and play instruments at weddings, baptisms, and festivals. Unfortunately, they are also known as beggars and thieves. Petty theft (usually by children), begging, and black market peddling sometimes provide families with income. This reputation has caused much discrimination against them. In many countries, they are last in line for jobs. Some of the women work as domestic helpers, but are paid very low wages and given no health benefits. Many have insufficient housing and unsatisfactory medical attention.

Values such as justice, fidelity, and morality are included in the Gypsy code of ethics. The chief loyalty of a Gypsy is to his family members, who are extremely important to him. Extended family members usually live together, and those who live in separate homes often telephone or make daily visits to each other.

Marriages are sometimes arranged by the parents, and young couples usually marry while in their mid to late teens. Often, they prefer to elope rather than to have a wedding ceremony. Purity before marriage is something of great value to them.

Their uniqueness of lifestyle clearly separates them from non-gypsies. For instance, it is the fascinating manner in which a Gypsy wears his clothes: as a costume or as a statement; the unusual ways he uses his automobile: as a home, a shop, or a shrine; the unique method in which he works: with great skill or eccentric style, that sets him apart. All of these things make Gypsies interesting, mystical, and sometimes misunderstood.

What Are Their Beliefs?

Many Gypsies have maintained their religious traditions and beliefs. They believe that ghosts, lizards, and snakes are capable of harming humans. They believe that men have the power to curse others by giving them the "evil eye." They also believe that some men have the power to heal the sick.

What Are Their Needs?

Some of the Balkan Gypsy groups have portions of the Bible in their language. Although they may be more sanitary, more educated, and have more opportunities than Gypsies in the Middle East and India, they all have one thing in common: the need for Jesus. Prayer and evangelism efforts are needed in order to win them to Christ.

Prayer Points

Pray that the people who have been rejected and discriminated against will find love and acceptance through Christ.

Pray against the spiritual principalities and powers that are keeping the Balkan Gypsy bound.

Ask the Lord to raise up people who are willing to share Christ with they Gypsies.

Ask the Holy Spirit to soften the hearts of the Gypsies towards Christians so that they will be receptive to the Gospel.

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Pray that the people who have been rejected and discriminated against will find love and acceptance through Christ.

Ask God to strengthen, encourage, and protect the small number of Gypsies who have become Christians.

Ask the Holy Spirit to soften the hearts of the Gypsies towards Christians so that they will be receptive to the Gospel.

Pray that God will give the missions agencies strategies for reaching the Gypsies.

Ask the Lord to raise up strong local churches among the Balkan Gypsies.