The Romani are a group of people who travel around and lead a **nomadic** life. Although most of them live in Central and Eastern Europe they can be found on every continent. About 12 million Romani live in our world today.

The Romani **originally** lived in India. They left their homeland about a thousand years ago because Muslims **invaded** India and **forced** them to move away. After wandering across Persia and Turkey, the Romani **reached** Europe by about 1300. By 1500 they **settled** in the Balkans and from there **spread** to Western Europe.

Romani people are often called gypsies because people thought they came from Egypt. Most of them, however, think that this term is **discriminating** and don’t like being called that way.

Romani families are usually very big. More children mean a high **status** among Romani. Young and old often live and work together in the same family. Romani men and women marry at a very young age. After that they stay with their family.

The Romani traditionally travelled in **caravans**. Wherever they stopped they set up **tents** and stayed there for some time. Although Europeans, at first, **greeted** the Romani in a friendly way they later became **suspicious** because they thought that the Romani were thieves who stole things and did not work. They were **considered outsiders** and many **governments** did not care about them. Some countries even **passed laws** that **forbade** them to stop.

Romani people made a living by doing things they were good at. They were **horse dealers**, repaired **household items** and **carved** objects out of wood. Many Romani were good singers, played instruments and **acted** well. Women were **fortune tellers** and **cared for** the animals they took with them.

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**Words**

- **act** = perform
- **although** = while
- **caravan** = group of people who travel together for safety
- **care for** = take care of
- **carve** = cut
- **consider** = think, believe
- **discriminating** = here: to make something bad
- **forbid-forbade** = stop someone from doing something
- **force** = make someone do something
- **fortune teller** = person who can tell you what is going to happen in the future
- **government** = the people who rule a country
- **greet** = welcome, meet
- **horse dealer** = a person who buys and sells horses
- **household items** = things you use at home every day
- **invade** = to enter a country in an army and take control of it
- **nomadic** = to travel from one place to another; you do not stay in one place for long
- **originally** = at first
- **outsider** = someone who is not accepted by other people
- **pass laws** = here: make rules
- **settle** = to start living in a place for a longer time
- **spread** = move to
- **status** = position
- **suspicious** = to think that someone might do something wrong
- **tent** = place to sleep; made up of poles and sheets of cloth
SLAVERY

The Romani became slaves in some countries. They were not allowed to follow their traditions and speak their language. Spain and Portugal sent many Romani to the New World as slaves. In the 19th century governments in Europe freed the Romani and allowed them to speak their own language again.

After being freed from slavery some Romani emigrated to America. Some governments granted Romani people freedom as long as they didn’t wander around and settled down.

In World War II the Nazis regarded the Romani as an inferior race that had to be destroyed. They were sent to concentration camps, tortured and killed in gas chambers.

THE ROMANI TODAY

Today about 7 to 10 million Romani live in Europe. Although they are represented in some parliaments they are discriminated against in most parts of the world. Because their work is not needed in modern society they are often unemployed. Some still lead a nomadic life but others have settled down in towns and become a part of society.

Although most Romani have kept up their traditions, they have become more modern. Cars have replaced carts or wagons. Many Romani men work as car mechanics or in other trades. Some have even reached high positions in society or become doctors and lawyers.

Since the second half of the 20th century many organizations have tried to help the Romani fight for more rights.