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Life Satisfaction and Happiness Among the Roma in Central and Southeastern Europe

Ermira Kamberi · Borja Martinovic · Maykel Verkuyten

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Abstract This study examines general life satisfaction and happiness as two indicators of subjective well-being among Roma and non-Roma populations in Central and Southeastern Europe. Using a sample of 11,997 participants (Roma $N = 8{,}399$, non-Roma $N = 3{,}598$) from the Regional Roma Survey in 2011 we test a structural equation model which considers self-rated health, income, education, quality of housing, perceived (ethnic) discrimination, and ethnic group identification as mediators of the relationship between Roma/non-Roma group membership and subjective well-being. Well-being was found to be lower among Roma compared to non-Roma and this was fully due to Roma's lower health status, lower income, lower education, lower quality of housing, lower ethnic identification, and higher perceived discrimination. The findings confirm that Roma have fewer resources for the attainment of need-gratification which negatively affects their happiness and life satisfaction, thereby, refuting the romanticized image of the Roma as 'poor but happy people'.

Keywords Subjective well-being · Roma · Health · Income · Education · Ethnic identification · Perceived discrimination

1 Introduction

The Roma of Central and Southeastern Europe have lived as a minority group in the countries of this region for the past 1,000 years. They are subject to stereotypes and prejudices often expressed in films focused on Romani themes. Inspired by the poverty of Roma and the belief that 'Roma enjoy life more because they have nothing to lose', these films foster the powerful myth of the 'poor but happy Gypsy' (see Pasqualino 2008). The reality, however, may be different. International organizations, like Amnesty International

E. Kamberi · B. Martinovic (✉) · M. Verkuyten
ERCOMER, Utrecht University, Padualaan 14, 3584 CH Utrecht, The Netherlands
e-mail: b.martinovic@uu.nl

(2010), consistently report that Roma are among the most deprived communities in Europe living predominantly on the margins of society. In this sense, it is likely that they have lower life satisfaction than the titular populations that belong to the majority. Yet, there is hardly any systematic large-scale research on the subjective well-being of the Roma.

Some studies have examined life satisfaction of immigrant-origin groups in Europe. These studies show that immigrants consistently score lower on measures of life satisfaction and happiness compared to members of titular majorities due to their fewer material resources, less social and human capital, and more perceived discrimination (De Vroome and De Hooghe 2014; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2006; Neto 1995; Safi 2010; Verkuyten 2008; Verkuyten and Nekuee 1999). These studies tend to deal with one specific country (but see Krimanoğlu and Başlevent 2014) and the situation of immigrant-origin groups is not fully comparable to that of a historically established minority group such as the Roma.

Using data from twelve Central and Southeastern European countries, we examine whether Roma have lower subjective well-being (general life satisfaction and happiness) than non-Roma titular majorities. Differences in subjective well-being are further examined in relation to group differences in health status, income, education, quality of housing, perceived (ethnic) discrimination, and ethnic group identification. Our aim is to test whether the expected lower subjective well-being of the Roma can be explained by these factors that have been found to be associated with general life satisfaction and happiness.

1.1 Determinants of Subjective Well-Being

1.1.1 Health Status

Research consistently shows a strong relationship between subjective well-being (SWB) and both physical and psychological health (Dolan et al. 2008; Hooker and Siegler 1993; Okun et al. 1984). According to Lelkes (2006), poor health tends to have the strongest negative impact on SWB, reducing the probability of being satisfied with one's life by around 30 %. In addition, health is found to be both a cause and an effect of SWB (Diener 2009). Even when the impact of SWB on physical health is accounted for, health continues to affect SWB (Dolan et al. 2008). In the current study, we are concerned with individuals' general health status and how this is associated with their SWB. Available data consistently show higher rates of physical illness and mortality among Roma compared to titular groups in Central and Southeastern Europe (Open Society Foundation 2007). One of the main reasons for this is the limited access to public health care and health insurance for Roma without proper identification and citizenship status (Open Society Foundation 2013). The fact that the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015'[1] indicated health as one of its top priorities shows how serious the situation is. Evidently, Roma attain less need-gratification than titular groups in the health domain. Therefore, we expect that compared to non-Roma, Roma experience lower SWB due to their lower health status (H1).

[1] The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 is an international initiative working towards the improvement of the socio-economic status and social inclusion of Roma across Central and Southeastern Europe. It operates in the countries included in our study, with the exception of Moldova, and commits the governments in these countries to take action toward improving the status of Roma in four priority areas: education, employment, health, and housing.

1.1.2 Income

One of the more prominent explanations of SWB is the access to economic resources (Diener 2009; Triandis 2000). This is particularly important for ethnic minorities because they are more often found in the lower income segments of the population (Gokdemir and Dumludag 2012). Previous research shows that increase in income positively affects levels of SWB (Diener et al. 1993) and that people with higher income levels have higher levels of life satisfaction (e.g., Gokdemir and Dumludag 2012). The economic prosperity of Roma is an issue of particular societal importance. A World Bank report from 2003 emphasizes that due to high unemployment, Roma are 'poorer than other groups, more likely to fall into poverty, and more likely to remain poor' (Renzi 2010, p. 40). Therefore, we expect that compared to non-Roma, Roma experience lower SWB due to their lower levels of income (H2).

1.1.3 Education

As a form of human capital, the level of education influences the sense of personal agency and control (i.e. achieving desired outcomes on one's own behalf) and greater feelings of agency yield higher life satisfaction (Welzel and Inglehart 2010). There are studies that show that each additional level of education positively affects the level of life satisfaction, independently of income (Blanchflower and Oswald 2004; Dolan et al. 2008), and this may be related to an increased sense of personal control and development. The education of Roma has been historically low across Europe with millions severely disadvantaged by low levels of literacy (Renzi 2010). Therefore, we expect that compared to non-Roma, Roma experience lower SWB due to their lower levels of education (H3).

1.1.4 Quality of Housing

As a distinct aspect of quality of life, the ability to live in decent housing is regarded as a basic human need. Research shows that housing conditions significantly influence people's SWB, also after controlling for income (Dolan et al. 2008; Lelkes 2006). The poor living conditions afflicting much of the Roma populations in Central and Southeastern Europe can be expected to affect their SWB negatively. Reports indicate that a high number of Roma live in dwellings of poor quality in unauthorized and segregated settlements, close to dumps or toxic disposal sites, and lacking basic infrastructure and access to basic services (Open Society Foundation 2013). According to a report published by the 'European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions' (2012), the quality of the housing of Roma is well below that of the rest of the population in Central and Southeastern Europe. Considering this situation we expect that compared to non-Roma, Roma experience lower SWB due to their lower quality of housing (H4).

1.1.5 Perceived (Ethnic) Discrimination

Discrimination experiences and perceptions provide an important explanation for the relatively low SWB of immigrant-origin and ethnic minority groups in different European countries (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2006; Krimanoğlu and Başlevent 2014; Safi 2010; Verkuyten 2008). Discrimination implies social rejection and exclusion on the basis of particular characteristics such as one's ethnic background. Although ethnicity is a main reason for ethnic minorities to be discriminated, there are additional characteristics on the basis of

which people can face discrimination, such as gender, age, and physical appearance (Garstka et al. 2004; Schmitt et al. 2002; Ueda and Okawa 2003). Furthermore, discrimination of ethnic minority groups may reflect socio-economic disparities in the domain of work, education, housing and overall standard of living (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2006). According to Renzi (2010), Roma experience ethnic discrimination in various domains of life and these experiences impede their access to basic goods and services and their effort to secure equal rights to health care, work, education, and housing. It is therefore likely that Roma, as members of an ethnic minority group, perceive more discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity than non-Roma titular groups. However, we have no indication that a similar difference exists with respect to discrimination based on other characteristics, such as gender, age or disability. Although all types of perceived discrimination should negatively affect individuals' SWB, we expect that compared to non-Roma, Roma experience lower SWB due to higher perceived ethnic discrimination but not necessarily other types of discrimination (H5).

1.1.6 Ethnic Group Identification

Apart from factors that are expected to negatively affect the SWB of Roma, there are also factors that might have a buffering effect on their SWB, such as ethnic group identification. According to the rejection-identification model (Branscombe et al. 1999), group identification is an important means by which disadvantaged minority groups cope with the pain of social rejection and exclusion. Identification with one's group tends to offer psychological benefits that counter the harm of group-based disadvantages. People can turn towards their own community where they feel accepted and valued, and where they find emotional and practical support. There is increasing support for the proposition that groups and group identification provide people with a sense of place, purpose, and belonging (see Haslam et al. 2009). These feelings and perceptions can help people cope with the negative consequences of being a member of a devalued or disadvantaged group. Furthermore, research has shown that ethnic identity is often more salient and important for ethnic minority than ethnic majority group members and that the former identify more strongly with their ethnic group (Verkuyten 2005). Thus, we expect that compared to non-Roma, Roma will identify more strongly with their ethnic group and that stronger ethnic group identification contributes to higher SWB (H6).

2 Data

We used data from a survey carried out by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), World Bank (WB), and the European Commission (EC) in the period May–July 2011 on a random sample of Roma and non-Roma households (UNDP 2014). The survey was conducted in areas with concentrations of Roma populations in 12 countries in Central and Southeastern Europe: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Macedonia. Focusing on social and economic developmental aspects, approximately 750 Roma and 350 non-Roma households per country were interviewed.

2.1 Sampling Method

The sampling design targeted two groups:

1. *Roma sample,* consisting of a cluster of households in settlements or areas of dense Roma populations, where more than 50 % of the total population of that settlement self-identified as Roma in the most recent census.[2] This cluster of households is labeled as 'Roma settlement'.
2. *Non-Roma sample,* consisting of non-Roma households located in a range of 300 meters from the Roma settlement. A non-Roma household represents a household in which the inhabitants self-identified in the census as members of the titular group (e.g. Macedonians in Macedonia) or as members of a minority group other than the Roma (e.g. Albanians in Macedonia).

In order to determine the sampling frame, the survey compiled a list of Roma settlements based on census data available in the countries of interest. Using this sampling frame, a random sample of municipalities with a minimum size of 30 households per sampling unit was selected in each country. The country distribution of municipalities is: Albania (19), Bosnia and Herzegovina (40), Bulgaria (25), Croatia (30), Czech Republic (60), Hungary (18), Moldova (37), Montenegro (8), Romania (39), Serbia (61), Slovakia (42), and Macedonia (19). In each sampling unit, 7 Roma and 3 or 4 non-Roma households were randomly selected to participate in the survey. In cases where there were no non-Roma households in close proximity to the Roma or when the difference in socio-economic status between Roma and non-Roma was high and visible (i.e. in cases where the Roma settlement was surrounded only by large new buildings occupied by non-Roma residents), interviews with non-Roma were not conducted in this sampling unit. Instead, a double number of non-Roma interviews were conducted in the next sampling unit (see Ivanov et al. 2012). From each household, only one person (usually the household head but sometimes another member) completed the questionnaire. This means that participants are not nested within households.

3 Method

3.1 Participants

We used two criteria for the selection of participants for the present study: respondents who gave a valid response to the dependent variables (general life satisfaction and happiness) and respondents who, on an ethnic affiliation question, self-identified as Roma[3] or as a member of the corresponding titular group in each of the 12 countries in the survey. Members of other ethnic minorities were excluded from the analyses ($N = 644$). The final sample size totals 11,997 respondents with the following country distribution: Albania (1094), Bosnia and Herzegovina (999), Bulgaria (999), Croatia (1020), Czech Republic (962), Hungary (1050), Moldova (897), Montenegro (893), Romania (1030), Serbia (1078), Slovakia (961), and Macedonia (1014). 70 % of the participants are Roma, 58 % female, and the mean age is 40.5 ($SD = 16.43$).

[2] Based on the information obtained on the methodology of the survey, we cannot determine whether this classification from the census covered members of all the different Romani subgroups, such as Ashkali or Egyptians.

[3] The participants who identified themselves as Ashkalis or Egyptians were also included in the 'Roma' category.

3.2 Measures

3.2.1 Subjective Well-Being (SWB)

The survey contains two self-reported single scale items to measure SWB. The items are valid and reliable brief measures of global subjective well-being (Andrews and Withey 1976; Diener 2009). *Happiness* was measured on a 4-point scale from 1 (not at all happy) to 4 (very happy), and *life satisfaction* was measured on a 10-point scale from 1 (completely dissatisfied) to 10 (completely satisfied). The Pearson correlation between these items is .704 indicating that they are highly correlated measures of subjective well-being. Because we did not have separate predictions for each of the two aspects of SWB we used a single outcome variable as a latent construct consisting of the two items. However, to test for the robustness of this latent construct we performed sensitivity analyses by running the model separately with each of these items as the dependent variable.

3.2.2 Health Status

According to previous studies, self-rated health is considered a robust measure of general health status (Cramm 2012; Wen et al. 2003). The item measuring general *health status* was asked in Module 1 of the UNDP/WB/EC survey. This particular module collected information from the head of the household for all members in the household; yet, other household members were allowed to be present and participate. This was the only module in which respondents were asked about health. Thus, the head of the household assessed his or her personal general health status and that of other members in the household. In cases where the respondent who completed the rest of the questionnaire (including the questions on SWB) was not the head of the household, we used the information from the head of the household on the health of this respondent as the measure of his or her general health status. It is likely that the response to this item for members other than the head of the household was either provided by the member himself or herself, who often was also present during the interview, or provided with the agreement of more than one household member, thereby increasing the reliability of the assessment. The original question was phrased 'How is his/her health in general?' and measured on a 5-point scale from 1 (very bad) to 5 (very good). A similar item with a similar response scale was used, for example, in a study by Cramm (2012).

3.2.3 Income

As an indicator of income we used the overall monthly *household income* of the participants. For the purpose of comparability across countries we converted all local currencies into Euros using the exchange rate for each country on July 1, 2011 to match the period in which the UNDP/WB/EC survey was conducted. In addition, we took into account that the total expenditures of the household increase with each additional member, but not in a proportional way. For example, the electricity bill for a household with three members is not three times as high as that of a household with a single person. Thus, we accounted for the family composition and size using the equivalence scale developed by Hagenaars et al. (1996). This scale assigns values in proportion to the household needs based on the size of the household and the age of its members (i.e. adults vs. children). A value of one is assigned to the head of the household, a value of .5 to each additional household member, and a value of .3 to each child, as follows:

$$\text{Effective household size} = 1.0 + 0.5(A - 1) + 0.3C$$

'A' indicates the total number of adults in the household and 'C' the total number of children. In our sample, respondents younger than 16 years old are categorized as children. Using this modified equivalence scale for effective household size we computed a reliable index for the household income per capita in units of hundred Euros ($M = 1.59$, $SD = 1.88$). The total percentage of missing values was 12.7 %.

3.2.4 Education

As with the measure for *health status*, Module 1 of the UNDP/WB/EC provided an item measuring the level of attainment in *education* for all household members. This item asked 'What is his/her highest attained education level?' We distinguish between the following levels: (0) 'none', (1) 'completed primary education or lower', (2) 'completed secondary education or lower' and (3) 'some or completed tertiary education or higher', and we treat education as an ordinal scale. A similar item with a similar response scale was used, for example, in a study by Diener et al. (1993). In the new measure, 19.6 % of the respondents had no formal education, 50.6 % completed primary education, 26.4 % completed secondary school education, and 3.3 % had followed and/or completed tertiary education or a higher level (e.g. master or PhD degree). The percentage of missing values for this item was .4 %.

3.2.5 Quality of Housing

To measure the *quality of housing* we used an indicator which described the external conditions of the dwelling in which the household lived. Based on the available categories within the survey (i.e. types of dwellings) and how habitable they are, we computed an ordinal measure on a 6-point scale with the following categories: (1) 'ruined house or slums', (2) 'asylum/accommodation for refugees', (3) 'illegal building/garage', (4) 'apartment in block-of-flats', (5) 'older house in a good condition', and (6) 'new house in a good condition/new house under construction'. In the new measure 21.9 % of the respondents live in a ruined house or slums, 1.5 % in an asylum/accommodation for refugees, .3 % in an illegal building/garage, 8.9 % in an apartment, 49.5 % in an old house in good condition, and 18 % live in a new house in good condition/new house under construction.

3.2.6 Perceived Discrimination

Perceived ethnic discrimination and *other types of discrimination* (i.e. age, gender and disability) were measured with a set of five questions phrased as: 'During the last 5 years have you ever been discriminated against in (country)?', followed by five social domains: 'on the labor market', 'on the job', 'on the housing market', 'in public and private health services', and 'in education'. The respondents received the same sequence of questions once for *ethnic discrimination* and once for *other types of discrimination*. The response categories for each question were yes (1) and no (0). Before they received these questions, respondents were asked to confirm if they were involved in each of these domains. Only the respondents who confirmed being involved in a domain received the question measuring *ethnic* and/or *other types of discrimination*. Those who did not get these questions

were treated as missing. All other invalid responses (i.e. 'refused to answer' and 'don't know/no opinion') and responses missing at random were also treated as missing.

For our analyses, we computed *ethnic discrimination* as the sum of domains where the respondent reported to have perceived this type of discrimination ranging from 0 ('did not perceive ethnic discrimination in any domain') to 5 ('perceived ethnic discrimination in all domains'). The sample statistics for this item show a mean value of .48 ($SD = .91$) and the total percentage of missing values was 22.2 %. The same steps were used to compute *other types of discrimination* and the mean value was .17 ($SD = .56$) with the total percentage of missing values being 29.3 %. In order to disentangle *ethnic discrimination* from *other types of discrimination* we tested their association with SWB separately.

3.2.7 Ethnic Identification

Ethnic identification was measured on a 3-point scale from 1 (not proud) to 3 (very proud) using a single scale item which asked the respondent how proud they were to be Roma or a corresponding member of the titular group ($M = 2.32$, $SD = .61$). Pride is a defining characteristic of group identification (Rosenberg 1979) and one-item measures for group identification have been shown to be reliable and valid (Postmes et al. 2013). For this measure, 6 % of the values were missing.

3.2.8 Control Variables

The current study includes *gender* and *age* as control variables because these variables have been found to be associated with subjective well-being (e.g., Carstensen 1995; Diener and Suh 1997; Nolen-Hoeksema and Rusting 1999; Wilson 1967). For *age* we used four dummy variables ranging between: 16–30, 31–45, 46–60, and ≥61 years. The respondents in the '16–30' range are the reference group, and for *gender*, males are the reference group. Because of the cross-national nature of our data and the possibility for country differences, we also included dummy variables for the twelve countries, with Serbia as the reference country.

3.3 Statistical Analyses

To test our model, we performed structural equation modeling (SEM) in Mplus seven using one predictor (i.e. *Roma/non-Roma*), seven mediators (*health status*, *household income*, *education*, *quality of housing, ethnic discrimination*, *other types of discrimination*, and *ethnic identification*), and one latent outcome variable (i.e. *SWB*) while controlling for *gender*, *age*, and *country* as dummy variables. Although some of our mediating variables had missing values the outcome measure did not have any missing values. Missing values on mediating variables do not interfere with the estimation of SEM in Mplus using full information maximum likelihood (FIML).

We also conducted a robustness check analysis for the latent construct. For this purpose, we fitted three additional SEM path models where: (1) the outcome variable was only the *happiness* item; (2) the outcome variable was only the *life satisfaction* item; and (3) the outcome variable was a continuous indicator of well-being computed by standardizing the two items on a 0–1 scale and then averaging the answers. All four path models produced similar model results with respect to the sign and size of coefficients. This confirms that the *happiness* and *life satisfaction* items can be treated as one underlying construct of subjective well-being.

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive Results

Descriptive statistics of all measures for the entire sample and separately for Roma and non-Roma respondents are reported in Table 1. Independent sample t-tests indicated significant differences between the sample of Roma and non-Roma respondents for all measures ($p < .001$) except for ethnic identification. Some of the most notable and expected differences between the two groups are that Roma respondents on average report lower level of education, have twice as low household income per capita (122 vs. 250 Euros) and perceive more ethnic discrimination. Furthermore, mean scores for happiness and life satisfaction show that the Roma score significantly lower than their non-Roma counterparts. This was found in all twelve countries and descriptive information for each country can be found in Table 3 in the 'Appendix'.

4.2 Explaining Subjective Well-Being

The fit of the hypothesized structural model was poor, $\chi^2 = 3{,}010.548$, $df = 43$, $p < .001$; CFI = .881; TLI = .500; RMSEA = .076; SRMR = .029. Yet, after allowing for error variances to correlate between ethnic discrimination and other types of discrimination; education and household income per capita, quality of housing, and health; and between quality of housing and household income per capita we obtained a reasonable model fit: $\chi^2 = 913.798$, $df = 38$, $p < .001$; CFI = .965; TLI = .833; RMSEA = .044; SRMR = .013. The results are presented in Table 2 and Fig. 1.

In general, Roma experience lower SWB than the non-Roma. Path coefficients from ethnic group membership to the mediators indicate significant group differences that are in line with most of the expectations. Compared to non-Roma, Roma experience lower health status and lower education, they earn less, and they live in lower quality housing. Furthermore, Roma reported higher levels of perceived ethnic discrimination as well as other types of discrimination. Unexpectedly, Roma identified less strongly with their ethnic community than non-Roma.

All path coefficients from the mediators to SWB are significant and in line with our hypotheses (Fig. 1). People who are healthier, have more income, are more educated, live in better housing, and identify more strongly with their ethnic group are happier and more satisfied with their lives. Furthermore, people who perceive ethnic and other types of discrimination are less happy and satisfied with their lives.

In relation to the mediation paths, the findings confirm our hypotheses that compared to non-Roma, Roma experience lower SWB due to lower health status (H1), lower income (H2), lower level of education (H3), and lower quality of housing (H4). The results also confirm that compared to non-Roma, Roma experience lower SWB due to higher perceived ethnic discrimination (H5) but unexpectedly also other types of discrimination, although the latter indirect effect is rather small. Contrary to our hypothesis, the findings indicate that compared to non-Roma, Roma identify less with their ethnic group, and consequently, they have lower SWB than non-Roma (H6).

Looking at the effect sizes of the indirect effects (which can be obtained by multiplying the standardized paths on the left and right hand side of Fig. 1 for each mediator), differences in education, quality of housing, income, and health account largely for the differences in SWB between Roma and non-Roma. While ethnic discrimination and ethnic pride also play a role, the difference in SWB between the groups is somewhat less

Table 1 Descriptive statistics

	N	Range	Sample 11,997 Mean (SD)	Roma 8,399 Mean (SD)	Non-Roma 3,598 Mean (SD)
Subjective well-being					
Happiness	11,997	1–4	2.63 (.81)	2.55 (.83)	2.80 (.73)
Life satisfaction	11,997	1–10	5.64 (2.46)	5.33 (2.47)	6.37 (2.28)
Health status	11,954	1–5	3.52 (1.23)	3.47 (1.25)	3.64 (1.16)
Household income[100E]	10,475	0–44.15	1.59 (1.88)	1.22 (1.54)	2.50 (2.28)
Education	11,955	0–3	1.13 (.76)	.89 (.65)	1.71 (.68)
Quality of housing	11,901	1–6	4.17 (1.79)	3.86 (1.92)	4.87 (1.20)
Ethnic discrimination	9,333	0–5	.48 (.91)	.60 (.97)	.16 (.62)
Other type of discrimination	8,476	0–5	.17 (.56)	.19 (.59)	.13 (.48)
Ethnic identification	11,277	1–3	2.32 (.61)	2.30 (.62)	2.38 (.60)
Control variables					
Female	11,997	0/1	.58	.57	.60
Age					
Young age (16–30)	11,997	0/1	.34	.38	.24
Lower mid-age (31–45)	11,997	0/1	.30	.32	.27
Higher mid-age (46–60)	11,997	0/1	.22	.21	.26
Old age (>60)	11,997	0/1	.14	.09	.24

[100E] Household income (per capita/in 100E/month)

attributable to these factors. Importantly, after the inclusion of the seven mediation paths in the model, the direct relationship between ethnic group membership and SWB is no longer significant. Thus, the mediating variables fully explain why compared to non-Roma titulars, Roma are less satisfied with their life and feel less happy.

4.3 Possible Country Differences

Since our sample included respondents from 12 countries, we examined whether the findings generalize to the different countries. As a first step, we ran the model for each country separately in order to understand better how similar or different the paths are in each country. The results showed that, with a few exceptions for non-significant coefficients, the core associations are mostly in the same direction (negative or positive) across countries. Yet, some of the associations differ in strength (see Table 4 in the 'Appendix').

As a second step, we conducted a multiple group analysis to test whether the findings presented in Fig. 1 are similar across countries. We constrained each direct path on the left hand side and the right hand side of the path model, one at a time. The Wald test results for the constrained paths on the left hand side of the path model were all significant ($ps < .001$) with the exception of the effect of Roma on health. The Wald test results for the constrained paths on the right hand side of the path model were all significant at $ps < .05$ or less. This indicates that although the paths are in the same direction, they are not equally strong across the countries. Therefore, we can conclude that the pattern of associations is similar across the 12 countries but that the importance of the different variables for SWB varies between countries.

Table 2 Unstandardized parameter estimates obtained with SEM with mediation effects

	Estimate	SE	*p* value
Direct effects			
Roma → SWB	−.013	.017	.453
Roma → health status	−.454	.020	.000
Roma → household income	−1.138	.040	.000
Roma → education	−.858	.013	.000
Roma → quality of housing	−1.012	.030	.000
Roma → ethnic discrimination	.452	.017	.000
Roma → other types of discrimination	.060	.013	.000
Roma → ethnic identification	−.123	.012	.000
Health status → SWB	.126	.006	.000
Household income → SWB	.053	.007	.000
Education → SWB	.110	.010	.000
Quality of housing → SWB	.068	.004	.000
Ethnic discrimination → SWB	−.061	.009	.000
Other types of discrimination → SWB	−.052	.016	.001
Ethnic identification → SWB	.173	.011	.000
Female → SWB	.001	.012	.929
Lower mid-age → SWB	−.030	.015	.046
Higher mid-age → SWB	−.043	.018	.018
Old age → SWB	−.037	.023	.103
Total effects Roma → SWB	−.345	.014	.000
Indirect effects			
Roma → SWB via health status	−.057	.004	.000
Roma → SWB via household income	−.060	.008	.000
Roma → SWB via education	−.094	.009	.000
Roma → SWB via quality of housing	−.069	.004	.000
Roma → SWB via ethnic discrimination	−.027	.004	.000
Roma → SWB via other types of discrimination	−.003	.001	.005
Roma → SWB via ethnic identification	−.021	.003	.000
Total indirect effects Roma → SWB	−.332	.012	.000

Model fit $\chi^2 = 913.798$, $df = 38$, $p < .001$; CFI = .965; TLI = .833; RMSEA = .044; SRMR = .013

5 Discussion and Conclusion

This study investigated general subjective well-being (SWB) among Roma minority and titular groups in Central and Southeastern Europe. We tested a model that examined the mediating role of health status, household income, education, quality of housing, perceived (ethnic) discrimination, and ethnic identification in the relationship between Roma/non-Roma group membership and SWB. The findings confirm that compared to non-Roma titular majorities, Roma experience lower SWB due to their poorer health status, lower household income, lower education, poorer quality of living conditions, and higher perceived (ethnic) discrimination. The lower SWB of Roma is explained most strongly by

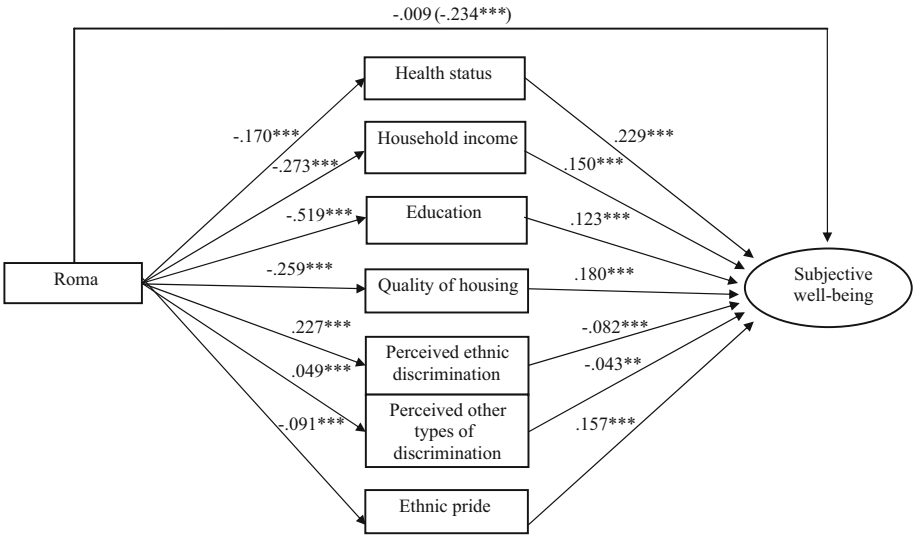

Fig. 1 Path diagram with standardized parameter estimates; ***$p < .001$ **$p < .01$

their relatively low education status, followed by quality of housing, household income, and health. In addition, the results show that Roma tend to perceive more ethnic as well as other types of discrimination, and perceptions of discrimination have a negative impact on SWB. Furthermore, the results indicate that stronger ethnic identification contributes to higher SWB, but the Roma feel less proud of their ethnicity than their non-Roma counterparts. Together, these factors account fully for the lower SWB of the Roma compared to non-Roma.

The findings of this study have clear practical implications. We have shown that a lack of resources, particularly with regards to education, income, quality of housing and health, plays a critical role in Roma's low SWB relative to that of titular majority populations in Central and Southeastern Europe. Therefore, it is important to implement policies that are aimed at improving access to these resources for the Roma. There have already been some international initiatives in this direction, such as the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015, whose focus is primarily on enhancing the status of Roma in these four areas of life. These and similar policies should then also be useful for improving the SWB of Roma.

However, policies also need to be directed at reducing the occurrence and perceptions of discrimination, which we also found to contribute to Roma's lower well-being, independently of the socio-economic explanations. Furthermore, previous studies suggest that ethnic discrimination may also restrict minorities' access to socio-economic resources (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2006). This means that ethnic discrimination might be an add-on factor that impedes the Roma from fulfilling their needs in various domains of life, consequently, leading to their lower levels of SWB. Curiously, the results show that Roma also perceive other types of discrimination (not based on ethnicity) more often than their non-Roma counterparts, although the explanatory role of this factor is rather modest. Since Roma are aware of the prejudice other people hold against them, it might be the case that they also anticipate to be discriminated more readily based on age, gender and other characteristics. Considering the negative impact of discrimination on life satisfaction and

happiness (Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. 2006; Krimanoğlu and Başlevent 2014; Safi 2010; Verkuyten 2008) it is important that international and national organizations recognize the Roma as citizens with equal freedoms and rights. Moreover, advocacy groups and activists in the civil society sector, particularly those of Roma descent, should stress the need to enforce anti-discrimination laws in their respective countries. These laws are often overlooked in cases where Roma are directly or indirectly discriminated, which in turn restricts them from exercising their freedoms and rights.

Another area for policy consideration relates to ethnic identification. Based on previous research, we expected ethnic identification to be a source of positive well-being among the Roma (Haslam et al. 2009), and that as a minority they would identify more strongly with their ethnic group than the majorities do (Verkuyten 2005). Higher ethnic group identification was indeed associated with higher SWB but the Roma indicated to be less proud of their ethnic group membership than members of titular groups. This latter finding is interesting and needs further investigation. A possible explanation is that the term 'Roma' often serves as a generic name for quite a heterogeneous conglomerate of ethnic subgroups (Vermeersch 2003). This is especially likely in our study as it includes multiple Roma groups from 12 different countries. For example, although they may be known as *Roma* to those outside of their community, Roma may identify more closely with their specific ethnic sub-group (e.g. Ashkali in Albania). Moreover, due to fear of prejudice and discrimination in the labor market it is not uncommon for many Roma to hide their ethnicity or try to pass as a member of another ethnic group. This is possible for those who speak fluently the titular language or who are influenced by the culture of another minority group which does not face as many disadvantages as the Roma (e.g. Turkish and Albanians in Macedonia). Given that ethnic pride is a source of well-being (Haslam et al. 2009), policies should target the inclusion of Roma in the public sphere in order to improve the knowledge about the Roma and their culture in mainstream societies. Ultimately, these policies should emphasize the positive sides of the Roma culture, thereby increasing ethnic pride among the Roma and consequently, improving their SWB.

There are some limitations to our study that should be taken into consideration and that provide suggestions for further studies. One is the non-representative sample and the cross-sectional design of this study. Based on the sampling method, it is evident that the selection of Roma participants in the survey was based on the location of clusters of Roma communities that are also likely to be the most deprived. Ivanov and colleagues (2012) confirm that the data are 'as representative as possible of those Roma who face social exclusion and risk marginalization' (p. 11). Furthermore, the survey targeted non-Roma participants who lived in the vicinity of the Roma settlements and who did not markedly differ from the Roma in terms of socio-economic status. Therefore, a relevant conclusion from our study is that Roma have lower SWB than non-Roma majority members of a relatively low socio-economic status. This suggests that the difference in levels of SWB would probably be even larger, and that the role of education, income and other explanatory factors would be even more prominent, if nationally representative samples of titular groups were used for comparison. Nevertheless, we were able to analyze an exceptional and large dataset including 12 countries from Central and Southeastern Europe. The pattern of findings indicates that the proposed path model is appropriate for all 12 countries, meaning that the same factors and conditions appear to be relevant for the SWB of the Roma in the different countries. However, the relative importance of the factors (the strength of the associations) differed between the countries, and these differences need to be investigated further in future studies that take into account characteristics of the national context.

The cross-sectional design of the study means that we cannot derive causal conclusions, especially with regard to the associations between the mediator variables and SWB. Previous research, for example, shows that health is both a cause and a consequence of SWB (Diener 2009), but also that happy people tend to have better job performance and higher economic prosperity (Diener 2009). Although cross-sectional, the UNDP/WB/EC 2011 survey was conducted half-way through the realization of the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015', and the findings show that the Roma still fare considerably worse than the non-Roma in areas requiring governmental action. A longitudinal study is needed to track possible improvements in the levels of SWB among the Roma, and to investigate whether the policies put in place have had any positive effects.

Future studies should also examine factors that may have a positive impact on the SWB of Roma, such as community cohesion. A study conducted among the Kenyan Maasai, the United States Amish, and the Greenlandic Inughuit found that they all report levels of life satisfaction that are not significantly different from those of the richest Americans (Biswas-Diener et al. 2005). Instead of material luxury, their well-being was derived from their strong social relationships and this may also be the case among some of the Roma communities.

Despite these limitations, it should be emphasized that this study is among the very few to analyze quantitative data collected among a large and cross-national sample of Roma respondents. It is also one of the first that has examined general life satisfaction and happiness among this historically disadvantaged minority group that has been living for hundreds of years in different European countries. We have shown that across Central and Southeastern Europe Roma are less happy and satisfied with their lives than the respective titular majorities. More importantly, we have identified the core reasons for this difference in subjective well-being, thereby refuting the romanticized image of the Roma as 'poor but happy people'.

Appendix

See Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3 Country descriptive statistics with mean levels of *happiness* and *life satisfaction*

	N	% Roma	Happiness Roma/Non-Roma	Life satisfaction Roma/Non-Roma
Albania	1,094	68.2	1.94/2.33	4.31/5.73
Bosnia and Herzegovina	999	74.5	2.51/2.97	5.00/6.66
Bulgaria	999	68.5	2.35/2.66	4.39/5.52
Croatia	1,020	69.9	2.88/2.98	6.49/7.08
Czech Republic	962	65.7	2.77/2.98	6.16/7.17
Hungary	1,050	67.3	2.66/2.78	5.35/5.90
Moldova	897	77.5	2.47/2.72	5.15/6.36
Montenegro	893	81.7	2.85/3.24	5.89/7.43
Romania	1,030	69.8	2.45/2.66	5.47/6.24
Serbia	1,078	69.9	2.40/2.74	4.78/5.97
Slovakia	961	70.0	2.74/2.83	6.00/6.64
Macedonia	1,014	75.1	2.69/2.96	5.28/6.33

Table 4 Unstandardized parameter estimates obtained with SEM with mediation effects for each country

	Albania			Bosnia and Herzegovina			Bulgaria		
	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value
Direct effects									
Roma → SWB	−.038	.044	.388	−.111	.058	.056	.010	.061	.870
Roma → health status	−.378	.064	.000	−.513	.080	.000	−.404	.060	.000
Roma → household income	−.441	.063	.000	−1.319	.143	.000	−.674	.177	.000
Roma → education	−.882	.044	.000	−.961	.049	.000	−.906	.041	.000
Roma → quality of housing	−1.545	.101	.000	−1.495	.117	.000	−.596	.079	.000
Roma → ethnic discrimination	.567	.059	.000	.347	.045	.000	.693	.051	.000
Roma → other types of discrimination	.114	.048	.017	.119	.024	.000	.115	.039	.003
Roma → ethnic identification	−.196	.038	.000	−.135	.042	.001	−.241	.045	.000
Health status → SWB	.075	.016	.000	.113	.020	.000	.095	.027	.001
Household income → SWB	.151	.032	.000	.099	.026	.000	.018	.011	.106
Education → SWB	.120	.027	.000	.073	.036	.043	.178	.037	.000
Quality of housing → SWB	.071	.010	.000	.064	.012	.000	.073	.015	.000
Ethnic discrimination → SWB	.043	.021	.043	−.070	.036	.054	−.205	.031	.000
Other types of discrimination → SWB	−.060	.034	.077	−.116	.064	.072	−.097	.057	.087
Ethnic identification → SWB	.250	.030	.000	.204	.036	.000	.162	.040	.000
Female → SWB	.011	.035	.756	.089	.043	.038	−.029	.042	.481
Lower mid-age → SWB	.036	.040	.372	−.056	.053	.290	−.098	.061	.111
Higher mid-age → SWB	.106	.046	.022	−.011	.064	.863	−.179	.069	.009
Old age → SWB	.066	.062	.286	−.022	.079	.784	−.199	.084	.017
Total effects Roma → SWB	−.379	.044	.000	−.531	.053	.000	−.438	.051	.000
Indirect effects									
Roma → SWB via health status	−.028	.008	.000	−.058	.014	.000	−.038	.013	.002
Roma → SWB via household income	−.067	.017	.000	−.131	.030	.000	−.012	.009	.184

Table 4 continued

	Albania			Bosnia and Herzegovina			Bulgaria		
	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value
Roma → SWB via education	−.106	.025	.000	−.070	.035	.045	−.161	.035	.000
Roma → SWB via quality of housing	−.109	.017	.000	−.096	.019	.000	−.044	.011	.000
Roma → SWB via ethnic discrimination	.025	.013	.053	−.024	.013	.063	−.142	.023	.000
Roma → SWB via Other types of discrimination	−.007	.004	.114	−.014	.008	.085	−.011	.007	.102
Roma → SWB via Ethnic identification	−.049	.011	.000	−.027	.010	.006	−.039	.012	.001
Total indirect effects Roma → SWB	−.341	.037	.000	−.420	.046	.000	−.448	.043	.000

	Croatia			Czech Republic			Hungary		
	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value
Direct effects									
Roma → SWB	.016	.068	.815	.050	.045	.261	−.045	.056	.418
Roma → health status	−.560	.073	.000	−.444	.062	.000	−.405	.066	.000
Roma → household income	−1.873	.179	.000	−2.543	.218	.000	−.950	.095	.000
Roma → education	−1.046	.045	.000	−.596	.034	.000	−.609	.040	.000
Roma → quality of housing	−1.184	.114	.000	−.403	.071	.000	−1.032	.113	.000
Roma → ethnic discrimination	.440	.046	.000	1.048	.059	.000	.509	.049	.000
Roma → other types of discrimination	.043	.034	.213	.011	.048	.816	.124	.031	.000
Roma → ethnic identification	−.059	.042	.162	.036	.046	.442	−.271	.044	.000
Health status → SWB	.140	.023	.000	.135	.020	.000	.140	.021	.000
Household income → SWB	.036	.013	.007	.043	.011	.000	.058	.018	.001
Education → SWB	.022	.037	.545	.087	.034	.012	−.006	.039	.872
Quality of housing → SWB	.059	.014	.000	.025	.017	.140	.064	.012	.000
Ethnic discrimination → SWB	−.106	.036	.003	−.081	.017	.000	.015	.033	.643
Other types of discrimination → SWB	−.092	.070	.189	−.081	.035	.020	−.142	.054	.008

Table 4 continued

	Croatia			Czech Republic			Hungary		
	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value
Ethnic identification → SWB	.084	.038	.027	.090	.029	.002	.152	.035	.000
Female → SWB	−.068	.044	.122	−.033	.033	.312	.069	.039	.081
Lower mid-age → SWB	.018	.053	.734	−.020	.038	.593	−.051	.052	.320
Higher mid-age → SWB	−.145	.070	.038	.046	.056	.417	−.186	.072	.010
Old age → SWB	−.146	.082	.073	.081	.076	.287	−.205	.084	.014
Total effects Roma → SWB	−.279	.050	.000	−.263	.038	.000	−.271	.046	.000
Indirect effects									
Roma → SWB via health status	−.079	.016	.000	−.060	.012	.000	−.057	.012	.000
Roma → SWB via household income	−.067	.027	.013	−.109	.026	.000	−.055	.017	.002
Roma → SWB via education	−.023	.039	.545	−.052	.021	.013	.004	.024	.872
Roma → SWB via quality of housing	−.070	.018	.000	−.010	.007	.145	−.066	.014	.000
Roma → SWB via ethnic discrimination	−.047	.016	.004	−.085	.018	.000	.008	.017	.645
Roma → SWB via other types of discrimination	−.004	.004	.374	−.001	.004	.815	−.018	.008	.030
Roma → SWB via ethnic identification	−.005	.004	.248	.003	.004	.462	−.041	.011	.000
Total indirect effects Roma → SWB	−.295	.052	.000	−.313	.038	.000	−.225	.037	.000

	Moldova			Montenegro			Romania		
	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value
Direct effects									
Roma → SWB	−.042	.058	.471	−.189	.067	.005	.014	.052	.792
Roma → health status	−.565	.073	.000	−.505	.079	.000	−.426	.069	.000
Roma → household income	−.346	.055	.000	−1.666	.198	.000	−.895	.081	.000
Roma → education	−1.290	.064	.000	−1.331	.052	.000	−.892	.043	.000
Roma → quality of housing	−.342	.099	.001	−1.298	.136	.000	−1.068	.105	.000

Table 4 continued

	Moldova			Montenegro			Romania		
	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value
Roma → ethnic discrimination	.418	.044	.000	.054	.046	.240	.243	.039	.000
Roma → other types of discrimination	.143	.034	.000	−.019	.043	.667	.029	.038	.455
Roma → ethnic identification	−.097	.046	.034	−.684	.039	.030	−.001	.042	.981
Health status → SWB	.094	.020	.000	.098	.020	.000	.100	.020	.000
Household income → SWB	.226	.039	.000	.045	.011	.000	.154	.025	.000
Education → SWB	.078	.030	.011	.053	.034	.125	.038	.031	.227
Quality of housing → SWB	.056	.013	.000	.036	.010	.000	.062	.012	.000
Ethnic discrimination → SWB	−.127	.032	.000	.043	.068	.530	−.023	.038	.553
Other types of discrimination → SWB	.071	.053	.182	−.132	.086	.126	−.135	.054	.012
Ethnic identification → SWB	.046	.040	.251	.218	.050	.000	.267	.038	.000
Female → SWB	.046	.040	.167	.020	.038	.596	−.059	.040	.137
Lower mid-age → SWB	−.056	.050	.260	.065	.045	.153	−.093	.053	.077
Higher mid-age → SWB	−.062	.057	.280	.127	.057	.024	−.140	.060	.020
Old age → SWB	−.105	.066	.111	.195	.085	.022	−.126	.069	.066
Total effects Roma → SWB	−.340	.049	.000	−.443	.049	.000	−.277	.048	.000
Indirect effects									
Roma → SWB via health status	−.053	.013	.000	−.050	.013	.000	−.043	.011	.000
Roma → SWB via household income	−.078	.023	.000	−.074	.022	.001	−.138	.028	.000
Roma → SWB via education	−.100	.040	.012	−.070	.046	.125	−.034	.028	.229
Roma → SWB via quality of housing	−.019	.007	.008	−.046	.014	.001	−.067	.015	.000
Roma → SWB via ethnic discrimination	−.053	.014	.000	.002	.004	.608	−.005	.009	.552
Roma → SWB via other types of discrimination	.010	.008	.211	.002	.006	.664	−.004	.005	.465
Roma → SWB via ethnic identification	−.004	.005	.328	−.018	.009	.050	.000	.011	.981
Total indirect effects Roma → SWB	−.298	.048	.000	−.254	.050	.000	−.295	.040	.000

Table 4 continued

	Serbia			Slovakia			Macedonia		
	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value
Direct effects									
Roma → SWB	.031	.057	.592	−.021	.052	.688	.123	.067	.066
Roma → health status	−.558	.069	.000	−.273	.058	.000	−.535	.070	.000
Roma → household income	−1.058	.080	.000	−1.643	.209	.000	−.971	.080	.000
Roma → education	−.865	.043	.000	−.435	.036	.000	−.906	.051	.000
Roma → quality of housing	−1.082	.120	.000	−1.138	.100	.000	−.836	.097	.000
Roma → ethnic discrimination	.268	.031	.000	.279	.123	.023	.380	.076	.000
Roma → other types of discrimination	−.009	.037	.816	−.072	.059	.225	.107	.070	.125
Roma → ethnic identification	−.013	.042	.762	−.218	.046	.000	−.175	.042	.000
Health status → SWB	.107	.021	.000	.070	.023	.003	.167	.026	.000
Household income → SWB	.119	.023	.000	.025	.009	.005	.177	.049	.000
Education → SWB	.166	.036	.000	.076	.050	.130	.067	.038	.080
Quality of housing → SWB	.086	.012	.000	.011	.015	.472	.122	.017	.000
Ethnic discrimination → SWB	−.092	.046	.046	−.080	.024	.001	−.061	.043	.157
Other types of discrimination → SWB	−.056	.076	.464	−.025	.064	.692	.100	.051	.050
Ethnic identification → SWB	.198	.039	.000	.058	.046	.207	.155	.041	.000
Female → SWB	.006	.044	.889	−.049	.038	.200	.006	.048	.893
Lower mid-age → SWB	−.072	.056	.203	−.093	.043	.032	−.072	.059	.221
Higher mid-age → SWB	−.110	.064	.088	−.158	.055	.004	.003	.066	.964
Old age → SWB	−.030	.083	.714	−.171	.113	.131	−.019	.079	.813
Total effects Roma → SWB	−.418	.051	.000	−.159	.038	.000	−.340	.056	.000

Table 4 continued

	Serbia			Slovakia			Macedonia		
	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value	Estimate	SE	*p* value
Indirect effects									
Roma → SWB via health status	−.060	.014	.000	−.019	.008	.013	−.089	.018	.000
Roma → SWB via household income	−.126	.025	.000	−.041	.015	.006	−.172	.044	.000
Roma → SWB via education	−.143	.031	.000	−.033	.022	.131	−.061	.035	.081
Roma → SWB via quality of housing	−.093	.017	.000	−.012	.017	.476	−.102	.019	.000
Roma → SWB via ethnic discrimination	−.025	.012	.048	−.022	.012	.059	−.023	.017	.178
Roma → SWB via other types of discrimination	.000	.002	.827	.002	.005	.694	.011	.009	.234
Roma → SWB via ethnic identification	−.002	.008	.763	−.013	.010	.221	−.027	.010	.006
Total indirect effects Roma → SWB	−.449	.043	.000	−.138	.033	.000	−.463	.052	.000

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