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Homeless Romanians on the streets of Scandinavia come from conditions of extreme poverty

The Romanian immigrants who travel to Scandinavia to collect bottles for recycling, beg, sell street papers and live rough are among the poorest of all people in Europe. The living conditions in the desperately poor rural areas of Romania from which they originate are truly miserable.

This is one of the findings from the first major international survey of Romanian street workers in the Scandinavian capitals. The survey was carried out by the Norwegian Fafo research institute with support from the Rockwool Foundation.

The survey involved asking 1,269 migrants about their lives in Romania and their current living conditions in Copenhagen, Oslo or Stockholm, where they were temporarily living and working.

This large number of migrants answered questions about subjects such as their education, work experience, residence conditions in their home country, financial situation, patterns of movement (between Romania and the north) and current situation on the streets of the Scandinavian capitals.

The general picture that appears is one of a group of people who are highly marginalised, have unfavourable future prospects, and who put up with terrible conditions in Scandinavia in order to earn money.

At the same time, it transpires that they actually succeed in scraping together what they consider to be acceptable income – particularly in Copenhagen and Oslo.

The weakest make their way to Stockholm

The homeless street workers from Romania who arrive in Stockholm differ in several ways from those who travel to Copenhagen and Oslo.

The survey reveals a clear differentiation among migrants from Romania between Roma and non-Roma. Generally speaking, the Roma are among those whose circumstances are poorest of all. A great many of them make their way to Stockholm. The homeless street workers from Romania who travel to that city have to make do with what is a pitiful level of income in relation to that possible in the other Scandinavian capitals.

The people who travel to the Swedish capital are often marginalised from many different perspectives. Most of them have no schooling whatsoever, they have little or no work experience, and they are deeply influenced by a set of conservative values that are widespread among Roma.

While Stockholm attracts those with the weakest resources, Copenhagen appears to draw in those with the strongest. The most likely explanation for this disparity is that Copenhagen is the Scandinavian capital where it is toughest to live on the streets, but which simultaneously offers the best earning opportunities.

Oslo appears to be positioned midway between the two other capitals with regard to the type of Romanian street workers it attracts.

The Scandinavian capitals attract different types of homeless street worker from Romania

The homeless street workers from Romania who come to the Scandinavian capitals share many traits, but there are still differences between the types of people who choose to travel to Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm.

The reason why different migrants choose different destinations is clearly determined by the opportunities that exist for earning money in the different cities. For example, begging is prohibited in Copenhagen, but a legal activity in both Stockholm and Oslo. In addition, while it is not permitted to sleep rough in the very centre of Copenhagen and Oslo, this practice is allowed in Stockholm.

The migrants who travel to Scandinavia to live on the streets share a number of traits. They typically come from rural areas, live in conditions of extreme poverty and are poorly educated; they started travelling to Scandinavia subsequent to the accession of Romania into the EU.

However, comparisons among the different groups of homeless Romanians in Oslo, Copenhagen and Stockholm reveal a number of differences.

The survey differentiates the homeless street workers from Romania according to ethnic background, i.e. into the categories of 'Roma', 'non-Roma' and what are known as 'Romanianised Roma'.

Each group has its own ethnicity, culture and language, but there are areas of overlap and variation within the groups.

The first group – the non-Roma – encompasses the majority of Romanians. They speak Romanian and are distinguished by traditional Romanian culture. The second group – the Roma – is a population who live in Romania but whose ethnic origin is different to that of other Romanians. The third group comprises the Roma who term themselves 'non-Roma', but who actually come from an ethnic Roma background. The survey primarily differentiates the first group – the non-Roma – from the other two groups, which it views jointly as Roma.

The biggest difference with regard to ethnicity is found between the Romanian streetworkers in Stockholm and those in Copenhagen.

Of the Romanians in the Swedish capital, only 14 per cent are non-Roma. In contrast, this group – the non-Roma – accounts for 48 per cent of the Romanians in Copenhagen.

Conversely, there is a much larger proportion of Roma among street workers from Romania in Stockholm than there is in Copenhagen. Oslo presents the most even distribution between the three groups of Romanian migrants, with 36 per cent non-Roma, 36 per cent Roma, and 25 per cent Romanianised Roma.

Different cultures

The Romanians who come to Scandinavia to live on the

When poverty meets affluence. Migrants from Romania on the streets of the Scandinavian capitals.

By Anne Britt Djuve, Jon Horgen Friberg, Guri Tyldum, and Huafeng Zhang.

The book is available for download free of charge from www.rockwoolfoundation.org. Hard copies can be ordered – while stocks last – by email to ggr@rff.dk

Contents

streets also divide into groups according to cultural values – which are not necessarily closely linked to their ethnicity. There seems to be a tendency for certain values to be more prevalent among the Roma in Stockholm than in Copenhagen or Oslo. This applies, for example, to attitudes to women and mixed marriages.

In authentic Roma culture, it is traditionally unacceptable for women to wear trousers in public, and marriages across ethnic boundaries are similarly considered taboo.

However, these cultural traditions seem to have permeated the groups of Roma in Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm to different degrees. For example, 87 per cent of the Roma in Stockholm do not think it is right for women to wear trousers, while this is true of only 30 per cent of the Roma in Copenhagen and 56 per cent of those in Oslo.

A similar pattern emerges with regard to mixed marriages, which 81 per cent of the Roma in Stockholm oppose. This position is shared by only 46 per cent of the Roma in Oslo and a mere 24 per cent of those in Copenhagen.

In other words, the figures indicate that the Roma with the most conservative values travel to Stockholm, while those least affected by traditional Roma values tend to choose Copenhagen as their destination.

It also transpires that the non-Roma who live on the street are far more conservative than their Roma counterparts on the issue of mixed marriages.

Around half of the homeless street workers from Romania in Stockholm are in the city with their partners. The corresponding figures for Oslo and Copenhagen are much lower, at 28 and 15 per cent, respectively.

Two different groups of Romanian street migrants

Romania is composite country that is home to a variety of population groups with their own cultures and languages.

The majority of Romanian people are not members of the Roma population. They speak Romanian (a Latin language) and have a Romanian cultural heritage.

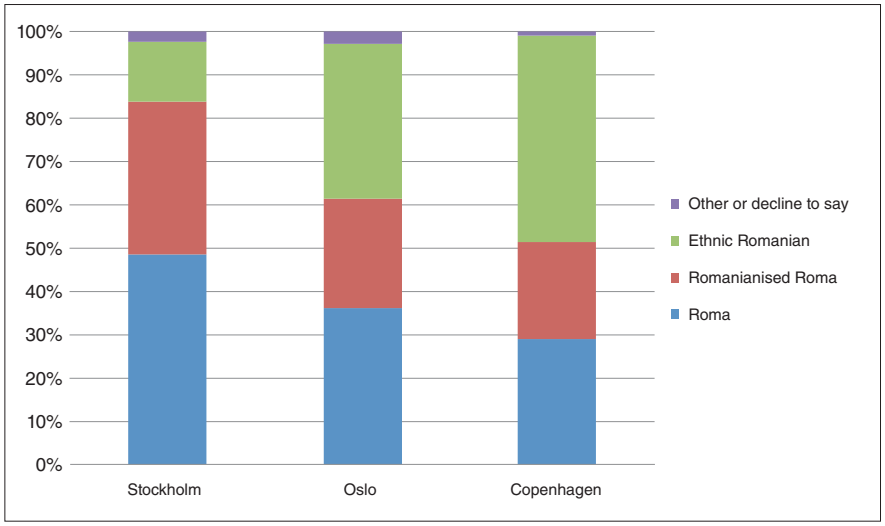
The Roma constitute a large minority in Romania. The people who make up this section of the population have their own language, cultural traditions and customs.

The present study focuses exclusively on the Romanian migrants who live and work on the streets of Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm. In consequence, it does not cover Romanian students, tourists, craftsmen or other Romanian immigrants or visitors.

In order to be sure of the correct categorisation – to ensure that Romanians with full-time employment were excluded, for example – respondents had to fulfil three criteria for inclusion in the survey: they had to come from Romania, to have no fixed abode, and to be without regular full-time employment.

In the study, the members of the target group are referred to collectively as 'homeless street migrants'. It is important to emphasise that the designation 'homeless' refers to respondents' residential situation in Scandinavia. Very few of the Romanians who participated in the survey were homeless in Romania.

Figure 1: Romanian street workers in Scandinavia, by ethnicity, 2014



The study differentiates between non-Roma and Roma. The Roma can be further divided into the Roma and 'Romanised' Roma, who are partly or completely assimilated into the Romanian culture.

SOURCE: 'WHEN POVERTY MEETS AFFLUENCE. MIGRANTS FROM ROMANIA ON THE STREETS OF THE SCANDINAVIAN CAPITALS', FAFO OG ROCKWOOL FOUNDATION, 2015

The data: responses from 1,269 Romanians

The study of street migrants from Romania is based on three separate questionnaire surveys carried out in Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm. A total of 1,269 persons of Romanian origin answered the questionnaire.

The participants were identified through networks of homeless Romanians. Specifically, a small group of respondents were interviewed and paid a small sum for participating. The members of this small group were then given coupons to distribute to other members of their networks. The coupons were invitations to take part in the survey. Whenever another homeless person agreed to answer questions, both this person and the person who passed on the coupon received a payment.

This method is known as 'Respondent Driven Sampling' (RDS), and provides access to groups that are otherwise hard to reach. It is particularly difficult to get in touch with Romanian street migrants, given that they tend not to trust institutions – including those running research projects.

Another benefit of RDS is anonymity. There is naturally always a risk that survey respondents may not give truthful answers. However, the survey is designed to check for dishonest answers. The respondents were asked to answer questions about a range of serious circumstances such as 'my children go hungry', 'I am in very poor health', and 'I sleep outdoors without a blanket'. If a great many respondents answer in the affirmative to most of these statements, there is reason to believe that some of the answers are dishonest. However, this did not happen. The answers – from all three capitals – were normally distributed. Only one of the 1,269 respondents answered 'yes' to all the questions – typically, the respondents confirmed 2–3 statements as applying to them. This finding, together with an assessment of the data quality in terms of logical consistency, correspondence between individual resources and living conditions, and comparison with other surveys of living conditions in Romania, give grounds to believe that the responses are largely honest and accurate.

The researchers behind the survey also attempted to estimate the number of Romanian street migrants in the three cities, but on account of the inadequate or non-existent registration of users by the institutions that interact with the migrants, it was unfortunately impossible to arrive at a reliable estimate of their numbers.

The homeless Romanian street workers in Stockholm are extremely poorly educated – and they have little work experience

Most migrants from Romania who make the long trip north to earn a living on the streets are poorly educated and have little formal work experience. However, of the three Scandinavian cities studied – Copenhagen, Oslo and Stockholm – the Swedish capital stands out in attracting extremely poorly educated Romanian migrants with little, if any, work experience.

As Figure 2 indicates, the Romanian street workers in Oslo and Copenhagen have, on average, completed seven or eight years of schooling. In and of itself, this does not confer a particularly high level of education, but it is far above that of the Romanians living on the streets of Stockholm, whose average length of schooling is around 2.5 years in total.

The level of education falls even lower if the comparison is focused exclusively on the homeless Roma from Romania in the three cities. The Roma in Copenhagen and Oslo have completed approximately five years of schooling on average. The same cannot be said of the Roma in Stockholm, where the vast majority have never so much as set foot inside a school. The average length of schooling of the Stockholm Roma is just 1.5 years.

In contrast to the Roma, the non-Roma homeless street workers from Romania have completed a minimum of eight years of schooling, which is the length of compulsory schooling in Romania. In this context, too, Stockholm stands out. While the non-Roma in Copenhagen and Oslo have, on average, completed around ten years of schooling, those in Stockholm have finished only the obligatory eight years.

Hardly surprisingly, there are many more illiterate people among the homeless street workers from Romania in Stockholm, as these are the people with the least schooling. In fact, only 28 per cent of them state that they can read and write. These skills are more common among the homeless street workers from Romania in Copenhagen and Oslo, where 70 and 61 per cent, respectively, state that they can read and write.

As mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, Stockholm attracts more homeless Romanian women than the other capitals. This contributes to reducing the average level of education, as illiteracy is much more widespread among these women.

Many have no work experience

At the same time, many of the Roma in Stockholm have very little formal work experience. So here, too, the homeless street workers from Romania in Stockholm stand out from those in the other cities. Among the Stockholm Roma, fewer than two out of ten have experience of regular employment. The figures for Copenhagen and Oslo are hardly impressive either, with only a little more than two out of ten respondents indicating that they have had a 'proper job' at some point in their lives.

While they may have no experience of formal employment, most have worked in one or more 'unofficial' jobs.

However, a relatively large minority of Roma in both Stockholm and Oslo state that they have never had any kind of employment – formal or informal. In Stockholm, this is true of three out of ten people, while the figure for Oslo is two out of ten.

Transfer incomes at home

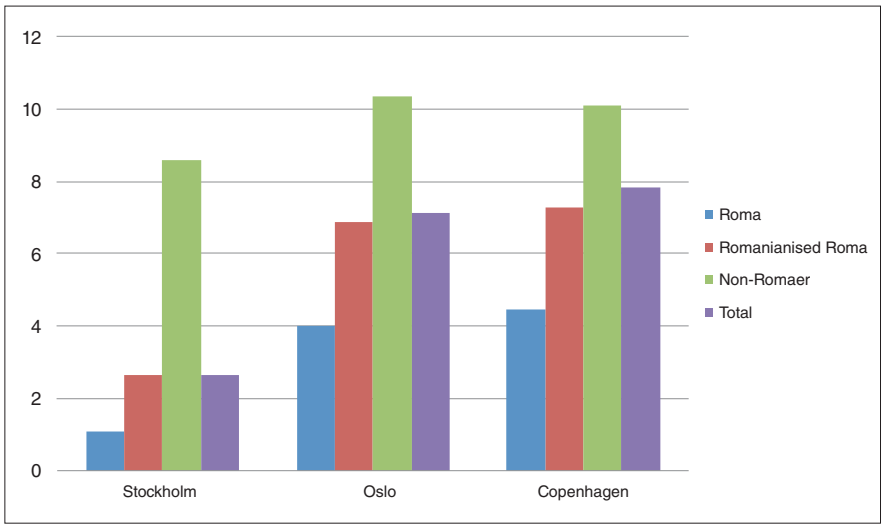
As the Roma bring so little work experience with them, the question must be asked: what do they live on back home in Romania? The answer is: transfer incomes and money from family members.

Once again, the homeless Roma from Romania in Stockholm differ from those in the other capitals. Of the Stockholm group, an overwhelming majority – 83 per cent – responded that their income in Romania consists in part of child support from the Romanian state.

It is worth noting, however, that hardly any of the homeless Romanian immigrants who participated in the survey had received income support from the Danish, Swedish or Norwegian state.

Very few had even applied, and none stated that they had ever received any payment.

FIGURE 2: **Number of years of schooling among Romanian street workers, by ethnicity, in Stockholm, Oslo and Copenhagen, 2014**



There are large differences in levels of education among the ethnic groups – and, to a great extent, between the different cities. The most poorly educated group comprises the Roma who travel to Stockholm. The members of this group have completed only 1.5 years of schooling on average.

SOURCE: 'WHEN POVERTY MEETS AFFLUENCE. MIGRANTS FROM ROMANIA ON THE STREETS OF THE SCANDINAVIAN CAPITALS', FAFO OG ROCKWOOL FOUNDATION, 2015

The homeless street workers from Romania come to Scandinavia from conditions of extreme poverty

Almost without exception, the homeless street workers from Romania who travel to Scandinavia come from conditions of extreme poverty. Both living conditions and earning opportunities are significantly worse in Romania than in the rest of Europe, and those who migrate are among the poorest of all.

The vast majority of the homeless street workers from Romania who travel to Scandinavia are Roma from rural regions. These people are among the poorest Romanian citizens, as is evidenced by the living conditions they leave behind. Their dwellings are much more primitive than those in other European countries. In particular, the homeless street workers from Romania who make the journey to Stockholm come from extremely miserable conditions in their home country.

Of the homeless street workers from Romania who travel to Stockholm, only 9 per cent come from a residence with a toilet. Only 11 per cent have a bathroom in their homes, and just 8 per cent have gas or electric heating. In round figures, nine out of ten Romanians in Stockholm do not have a toilet, bathroom or heating in their homes in their country of origin.

The homeless street workers from Romania in Copenhagen and Oslo are a little better off in their home country. The Romanians in Copenhagen are those who come from the best – although still poor – conditions. The number who say they come from residences with a toilet, bathroom and heating in their home country is 3–4 times higher than among the Romanians in Stockholm. Of the Romanian street workers in Copenhagen, 38 per cent come from a home with a toilet, 42 per cent from one with a bathroom, and 28 per cent from one with heating.

The homeless street workers from Romania in Oslo generally come from conditions that are slightly better than those of their compatriots in Sweden, but slightly worse than those who travel to Denmark.

Even though their residences still lack basic sanitary installations, many of them come from homes with both electricity and running water. Among those who travel to Stockholm, 62 per cent have electricity and 77 per cent have water – either indoors our outside their homes. Similarly, an overwhelming majority of the migrants in Copenhagen and Oslo have access to electricity and running water at home.

Many people in the same room

The homeless street workers from Romania were also asked about how many people live in each room of their abodes back home.

Hardly surprisingly, it is among the poorest people that the highest concentrations of residents per room are to be found. The poorest group – Roma from Stockholm – come from homes that house almost four people per room. Those in Copenhagen and Oslo have more space to themselves in their home country, with a little more than three people to a room on average.

The general picutre regarding the non-Roma is that they come from homes that house two people per room.

TABLE 1: **Proportions who have electricity and sanitary installations in their homes in Romania, 2014**

	Indoor toilet	Indoor kitchen	Indoor shower or bathroom	Connected to mains sewerage network	Indoor electricity	Electricity or gas heating	Access to piped water – indoors or out
Romanians in Stockholm	9%	37%	11%	22%	62%	8%	77%
Romanians in Oslo	27%	62%	31%	36%	91%	21%	83%
Romanians in Copenhagen	38%	73%	42%	41%	91%	28%	86%

The vast majority of the Romanians who travel to Scandinavia come from extremely poor conditions. Hardly any of them have a toilet, bathroom or heating in their homes.

SOURCE: 'WHEN POVERTY MEETS AFFLUENCE. MIGRANTS FROM ROMANIA ON THE STREETS OF THE SCANDINAVIAN CAPITALS', FAFO OG ROCKWOOL FOUNDATION, 2015

The extreme poverty revealed by this survey does not come as a surprise, taking into account the knowledge that already exists about Romania. Around half the population live in rural areas, and the financial gap between town and country is immense. An OECD survey found that the average wage in Romania was around 12 per cent of the average wage in Western Europe in 2007. Many of the jobs that do exist in rural areas of Romania are unofficial and unregistered, and unemployment rates are very high.

Begging and collecting bottles for recycling are main sources of income

Their sources of income are best described as 'alternative', given that only a very few of the homeless street workers have – or have ever held – formal employment. They earn their money by begging on the streets, collecting bottles for recycling and selling street papers. A small number volunteered the information that they dabble in petty crime.

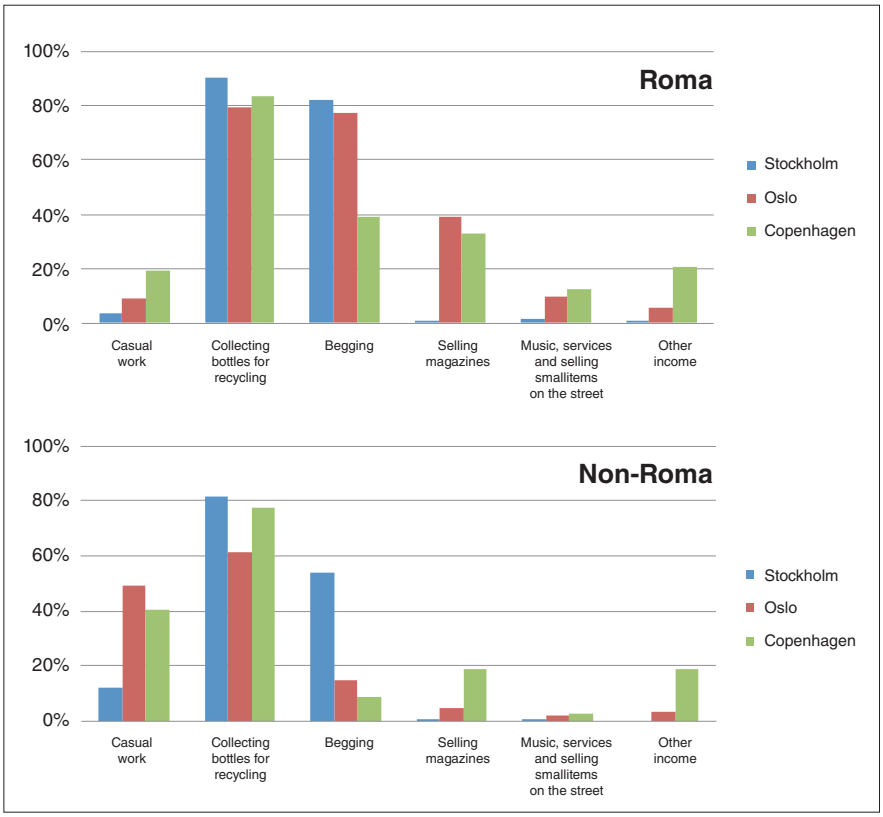
For the vast majority of the homeless street workers from Romania in Scandinavia, collecting bottles for recycling constitutes a key source of income. In particular, Romanians of Roma origin tend to base their income on collecting the deposit on bottles that other people leave behind or throw away. Of the Roma in Stockholm, fully 90 per cent collect bottles, while the corresponding figure among Romanians of Roma origin in Copenhagen and Oslo is 80 per cent.

Fewer of the non-Roma homeless street workers from Romania collect bottles in the three Nordic capitals. Nevertheless, empty beer bottles and soft drink cans still constitute an important source of income for them.

Begging

Alongside collecting bottles for recycling, begging is a key source of income. The homeless Roma street workers from Romania in Stockholm and Oslo have a particular

FIGURE 3: **Sources of income for Roma and ethnic Romanians living on the streets in Scandinavia, 2014**



Begging and collecting bottles for recycling are the most common sources of income for the homeless Roma street workers from Romania in Scandinavia. The ethnic Romanians also collect bottles, but are better at finding 'real' work – even though this usually takes the form of day labour or involves a very casual relationship with a workplace.

SOURCE: 'WHEN POVERTY MEETS AFFLUENCE. MIGRANTS FROM ROMANIA ON THE STREETS OF THE SCANDINAVIAN CAPITALS', FAFO OG ROCKWOOL FOUNDATION, 2015

tendency to earn a living through begging. Eight out of ten of them state that they ask passers-by for spare change as a source of income.

The practice is not as widespread in Copenhagen, where only 40 per cent of homeless Roma street workers from Romania say that they are begging. Although this is a much lower percentage than in the other capitals, it is still a high number, considering that begging is illegal in Denmark – but not in Norway and Sweden.

Many of the people who beg – Roma and ethnic Romanians alike – would, in principle, rather work. And many of them think that it is humiliating for a person to beg. But they do so nevertheless. Even so, a substantial minority of those who beg state that they think begging is as good as 'real' work, because the most important thing for them is to obtain money.

Non-Roma do odd jobs

In contrast to the homeless Roma, some of the homeless non-Roma succeed in finding odd jobs – particularly in Copenhagen and Oslo. In fact, 40–50 per cent of them find work in one form or another. It is rarely regular, full-time work, however, and usually takes the form of substitution or day labour.

The non-Roma in Stockholm stand out clearly in this regard, as the members of this group display a much larger tendency to rely on begging than the non-Roma in the other cities, and are much less likely to look for 'proper' work. Only around one in ten of them finds paid employment.

The homeless Roma street workers from Romania who travel to Copenhagen are better than their non-Roma compatriots in Stockholm at finding work. Fully 20 per cent of this group does so, while the same can be said of only one in ten of the ethnic Romanians in Stockholm.

Otherwise, collecting scrap appears to be relatively popular among both Roma and non-Roma in Copenhagen, while the same cannot by any means be said to apply in Oslo or Stockholm.

Around 20 per cent of both groups in Copenhagen make a living by collecting and selling scrap, with scrap metal – including copper – being a favoured source of income.

Crime

It is almost impossible to access reliable knowledge by asking people directly about their own criminal behaviour. However, a combination of interviews and observations paints the following picture of crime among homeless Romanian migrants.

Of the three Nordic capitals, Stockholm appears to experience least crime from the homeless Romanians, while Copenhagen is the city that suffers the highest level of crime attributable to homeless street workers from Romania. A small number of homeless Romanians are substance abusers and congregate around Istedgade in the Danish capital, while a somewhat larger group are pickpockets or sell drugs and steal metal.

Most homeless street workers from Romania live and sleep outdoors

Most Romanian street migrants in Scandinavia spend their nights sleeping rough under the stars. While some may have a tarpaulin or a tent for shelter, many sleep fully exposed to the wind and rain. Only a tiny minority have access to rooms, apartments or other forms of 'normal' accommodation while in Scandinavia.

The street migrants interviewed for this survey were asked about their accommodation arrangements, and their responses show that particularly in Stockholm, having a bed to sleep in is a luxury. Fully 79 per cent responded that they spent the night before they were interviewed outdoors, while 9 per cent said they slept in a public or abandoned building, and 6 per cent bedded down in a car or caravan. Only one per cent reported sleeping in a shelter or an apartment.

Shelters and apartments play a much greater role in Copenhagen and Oslo, where more than one Romanian street worker in four spends the night in such accommodation.

One significant explanation for this difference is without a doubt that in contrast to Copenhagen and Oslo, Stockholm does not offer places in shelters for migrants. Private providers are also unwilling to make beds available to this section of the population in Stockholm.

Difficult to sleep in peace publicly

It will hardly come as a surprise to learn that there are a number of drawbacks to living and sleeping in public places. One of them is being regularly roused and told to move along.

In the survey, the Romanian street migrants were asked whether they had been woken up and asked to move at any time during the previous week.

In Oslo, 37 per cent of the people who sleep outdoors reported that this had happened to them. The figure is slightly lower in Copenhagen, at 31 per cent. Therefore, the people who sleep rough in these cities spend a lot of time seeking out places to sleep where police and security guards will not find them and wake them during the night.

The situation is slightly different in Stockholm, even though 25 per cent of people who sleep outdoors there said they had been woken up and told to move on during the previous week. Most had also been shooed away from public places during the day, although in contrast to Oslo and Copenhagen, the migrants found that in Stockholm they were able to sleep almost undisturbed in the city centre at night.

Over and above the problem of having to wake up and move, these people also encounter another disadvantage of not having a fixed address: namely that their worldly possessions are on display to others, and may even inconvenience them. Of the people who live on the street and who had concealed their personal possessions somewhere, between 33 and 50 per cent have had them stolen or removed at some point.

Most discrimination and harassment in Oslo

Generally speaking, the street workers from Romania – both Roma and other Romanians – are met with friendliness in the Scandinavian countries. Nevertheless, many of them relate incidents of discrimination and harassment.

Oslo is the city where incidents of this kind are most common.

Such episodes include being refused entry to shops and cafés, and being prevented from claiming deposits back in bottle deposit machines.

The Roma street workers are those who report most incidents of discrimination. In Oslo, for example, 38 per cent of Roma say they have been prevented from redeeming deposits on bottles. This is over five times more than in Stockholm, and over twice as many as in Copenhagen.

By way of comparison, 22 per cent of other Romanian street workers in Oslo have experienced being turned away from a bottle deposit machine. The corresponding figures for Stockholm and Copenhagen are 8 and 14 per cent, respectively.

In addition to being denied access to certain public areas, some respondents reported incidents of harassment including being shouted at, spat on or sprayed with beer or other liquids.

Such incidents are again most common in Oslo. Some of the harassment in all three cities stems from 'ordinary people', but in Oslo in particular, much of it comes from substance abusers or others from the street milieu. Many of the people who harass Romanian immigrants make their living by begging or selling street papers themselves.

A larger proportion of the group in Oslo – 26 per cent – than those in the other two capitals have experienced violent incidents. The corresponding figures for Stockholm and Copenhagen are 11 and 17 per cent, respectively.

TABLE 2: **Where street migrants sleep in Oslo, Stockholm and Copenhagen**

	Oslo	Stockholm	Copenhagen
Shelter/apartment	26%	1%	28%
Car/ caravan	7%	6%	11%
Public/abandoned building	5%	9%	15%
Outdoors	62%	79%	43%
Other	1%	5%	2%
	100%	100%	100%

Many Romanian street workers in Scandinavia both work and sleep on the streets. This is especially common in Stockholm, where the police are not as concerned with removing homeless people from the city centres as they are in Copenhagen and Oslo.

KILDE: FRA RAPPORTEN 'WHEN POVERTY MEETS AFFLUENCE. MIGRANTS FROM ROMANIA ON THE STREETS OF THE SCANDINAVIAN CAPITALS', DER ER UDGIVET AF FAFO OG ROCKWOOL FONDEN 2015

Even a modest income is sufficient to make returning to Scandinavia an attractive proposition

The Romanian street workers face a pressing need to earn a living for themselves and their families, and given that the options open to them in their home country are severely limited, their primary objective in coming to Scandinavia is to make money. Many of the migrants who have learned how to look after themselves best – which includes earning the most money – are sure that they will return to Scandinavia again.

They state this directly when asked about their desire to return to Copenhagen, Oslo or Stockholm after having travelled back home to Romania.

As Figure 4 illustrates, Romanian street workers in Copenhagen and Oslo are particularly keen to return, as are those people who have succeeded in making the most money. Among the best earners in Oslo, fully 60 per cent state their desire to return, while this applies to 55 per cent of the corresponding group in Copenhagen.

The street workers in Stockholm seem far less keen to return, however. This may be linked to the fact that the level of earnings in Stockholm is substantially lower than in the other capitals.

It also transpires that those migrant street workers with the longest history of travelling to Scandinavia are those who have the greatest desire to return. The most likely explanation is that those who experience the least success on the streets tend to return more quickly to their home country – and stay there. Those who have learned how to get by and make some money, however, return to Scandinavia again.

Tough environment – good earnings

The Romanian street workers in Copenhagen earn the most money, from activities that include begging and collecting bottles for recycling. At the same time, Copenhagen is the Nordic capital with the toughest anti-begging legislation and the most police activity targeted against street workers.

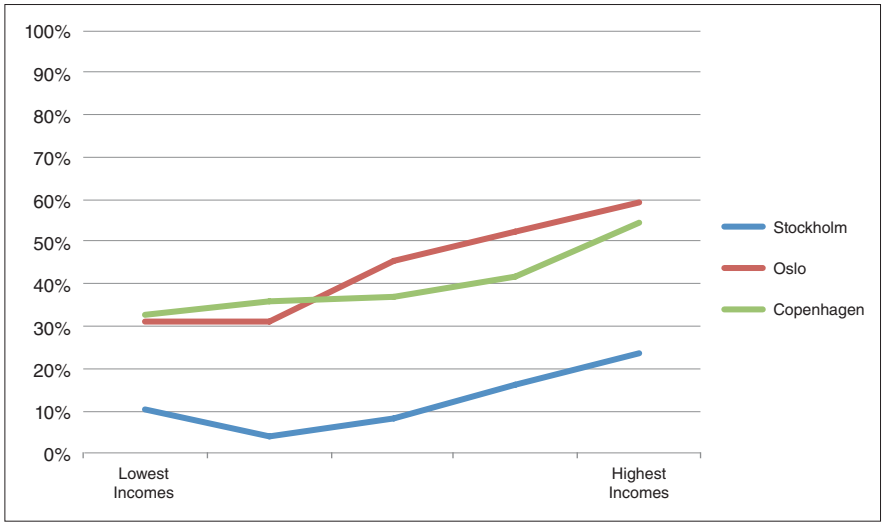
At first glance, the pairing of tough treatment with high income may seem to be a paradox. The explanation is quite simple, however: given that it is tough to get by on the streets of Copenhagen, it is very much a case of 'survival of the fittest', with the weaker members of the group preferring to avoid the environment.

In comparison with Copenhagen, conditions in Stockholm are relaxed, and begging is legal. This results in less income for the street migrants in this city than for those who have succeeded in tapping into sources of revenue in Copenhagen.

Return despite harassment

The survey also reveals no relationship between the de-

FIGURE 4: **Romanian street workers who wish to return to Scandinavia, by level of income, 2014**



Those migrants who earn most during their time in Scandinavia are also those who are most keen to return. Few of the Romanian street workers in Stockholm want to come back.

KILDE: FRA RAPPORTEN 'WHEN POVERTY MEETS AFFLUENCE. MIGRANTS FROM ROMANIA ON THE STREETS OF THE SCANDINAVIAN CAPITALS', DER ER UDGIVET AF FAFO OG ROCKWOOL FONDEN 2015

sire to return to Scandinavia and the treatment – good or bad – the migrants experience during their time there. The need to scrape together a living for themselves and their families is so great that even though they may have experienced rough treatment – such as being spat at or subjected to violence – many migrants plan to travel to one of the three capitals again.

Homeless street workers from Romania defy unpleasantness – and make a living

They endure trials that would scare off the vast majority of people. They defy all kinds of opposition and succeed with the project that is common to most of those who travel to the Scandinavian capitals: earning enough to make a living for themselves and their family.

At first, it may seem strange that year in, year out, they continue to head north – and that many of them return to Copenhagen, Oslo or Stockholm again and again. At least three factors make it seem unthinkable that anyone would choose to put themselves through what these people endure.

Firstly, they live in truly miserable conditions. Many of them live on the streets, most sleep in the open, and it is far from uncommon for them to be woken and moved along during the night.

Moreover, harassment in one form or another is relatively common. For example, many street migrants report being shouted at, spat at, stolen from, denied entry to shops and eateries, and prevented from redeeming deposits on bottles. What is more, their income-generating activities – begging, collecting bottles for recycling, or selling street newspapers – are located at the very bottom of the hierarchy of socially acceptable occupations.

Finally, what they actually earn on a daily basis would be viewed by most Scandinavians – and, indeed, most Europeans – as at best a paltry sum. The survey findings point to a daily profit, after covering basic living expenses, of between EUR 10 and 20.

Economic migrants

Nevertheless, they still choose to leave their country of origin to make the 2–3,000 km journey north. What is more, a significant proportion of them make the trip year after year for a protracted period.

Financial factors seem to be the primary driving force behind this migration. By travelling to Copenhagen, Oslo or Stockholm, they have the opportunity to improve their own situation and that of their families.

The alternative would quite simply have been even worse. According to the OECD, the average wage in Romania in 2007 was just 12 per cent of the average wage in Western Europe. Many of the Romanians who migrate northwards come from rural areas where wages are undoubtedly even lower – and where unemployment rates are high. And many of them are Roma, one of the poorest and most vulnerable groups in Romanian society.

Had they stayed in Romania, they would have faced the prospect of a level of income that simply cannot be compared to the income they have the opportunity to generate in one of the three Scandinavian capitals. In other words, they are so poor that even the most modest Scandinavian income appears large when compared to their alternative.

Migration is thus a life strategy for the homeless street workers from Romania – but it demands a significant degree of resilience in the people who choose to follow it.

Numerous myths about Romanians on the streets

There are all kinds of urban legends, anecdotes and myths about Romanian migrants – particularly about the Roma. Some of the most common are that the migrants are not really poor, that they do not want to work, that they are only interested in begging, and that the money they receive is passed on to criminal ringleaders.

None of these myths appears to have any grounding in reality, however. The survey of the lives and habits of the street migrants reveals no evidence that the people who make their way from Romania to Scandinavia are well-off, lazy, or in the pockets of criminal organisers.

The street migrants are, in fact, poor. Extremely poor. As measured by all socioeconomic parameters. They – especially the Roma – are poorly educated, have no work experience, are excluded from mainstream society, and live in extremely miserable conditions.

Nevertheless, it seems almost impossible to quash the myth that street migrants from Romania act as if they are poor even though they are not. The same applies to the misconception that when they return home, they live lives of luxury on the proceeds of their begging.

This survey did not reveal a single example of this. The myth may originally have arisen when, in the wake of the overthrow of the Romanian regime in 1989, some Roma succeeded in amassing considerable fortunes by selling scrap metal from abandoned factories. Some of these people went on to build huge villas, commonly known as 'Roma palaces'.

However, the comprehensive data collected during this survey refute any claim that people who live in such residences travel to the Scandinavian capitals to beg or sell street papers.

Begging out of necessity

Another oft-propagated myth is that the Roma actually enjoy begging. It is said that begging is a cultural trait for Roma all over the world.

Once again, there is absolutely no reason to give any credence to this myth. On the other hand, there is every reason to believe that marginalised and desperately poor people will use all means at their disposal to obtain money for themselves and their families. And this includes begging.

Moreover, this is in spite of the fact that the overwhelming majority of respondents to the survey – Roma and non-Roma alike – state that it is humiliating to have to beg.

Even though an examination of how the Romanians travel to Scandinavia reveals some incidence of crime, organised transport and shady loans, there is nothing to suggest the existence of an criminal organisation behind the migration of Romanians to Scandinavia. Even so, the experience of migration is – unsurprisingly – an extremely tough one.

In fact, it would be noteworthy if a group of such poor and desperate people did not attract the attention of people looking to benefit from their misery. The migrants are in a terribly vulnerable position, and there are indeed examples of people who have been cheated and exploited. These are only individual cases, however. Most of the migrants have full control of their own finances, and over and above paying for transport and daily necessities, the beggars spend the money they receive on themselves and their families back home in Romania.

The shady ringleaders often described in the media are almost entirely a figment of the imagination. The information gathered about the Romanian street migrants' earnings also indicates that they spend the money they earn in Scandinavia exclusively on themselves and their close relatives. There are thus no criminal organisers working behind the scenes and taking a percentage.