



Civil society monitoring report  
on implementation  
of the national Roma integration strategies  
in Greece

*Focusing on structural and horizontal preconditions  
for successful implementation of the strategy*

**Prepared by:**  
Centre for Policy Studies, Central European University  
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Although the Roma Civil Monitor pilot project, as part of which the report was prepared, is coordinated by CEU, the report represents the findings of the author and it does not necessarily reflect the views of CEU. CEU cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ASEP	Greek Supreme Council for Civil Personnel Selection
CoE	Council of Europe
ESF	European Social Fund
ESIF	European Structural and Investment Funds
EU MIDIS	EU Minorities and Discrimination Survey
FRA	EU Fundamental Rights Agency
GCSP	Governmental Council of Social Politics
JUSTROM	Access of Roma and Traveller Women to Justice (project)
MEP	Member of European Parliament
MP	Member of Parliament
NCHR	National Committee of Human Rights
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRCP	National Roma Contact Point
NCSS	National Centre of Social Solidarity
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRIS	National Roma Integration Strategy
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
POSER	Pan-Hellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations
ROM NETWORK	Pan-Hellenic Inter-Municipal Network for the Support of Greek Roma
ROP	Regional Operational Programme
RVRN	Racist Violence Recording Network

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite the positive developments of the period between 1995-2005, Roma inclusion in Greece has now returned to the bleak situation of the 1980s. Currently, most Greek Roma suffer from inequalities in the fields of housing, education, health care and employment due to their ethnic background, and they face discriminatory behaviour from state officials and the public.

### Governance and overall policy framework

Formally, Roma, as equal citizens, have rights and obligations as defined by the Greek Constitution and laws. However, this does not go beyond formal equality. The majority of Greek Roma live in higher degrees of poverty and of social exclusion than non-Roma. Therefore, following the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 (EUFW), the Greek State adopted its National Roma Integration Strategy 2011-2020 (NRIS) to tackle the social exclusion of Roma. The main pillars of Greece's NRIS are: housing, employment, health and education as well as antigypsyism. Established in 2016 and then abolished in 2019, the Special Secretariat for the Social Inclusion of Roma has been the most significant evolution for the situation of Roma, as it is also the National Roma Contact Point responsible for thorough implementation of the NRIS. However, towards the end of the implementation period of the NRIS, the social exclusion of Roma in the main pillars has not changed for the better at all. The explanatory reasons include, but are not limited to, the lack of mainstreaming of Roma inclusion policies at the national level, the lack of allocation of the state budget to these policies, the lack of political will to take action, the lack of consultation with Roma civil society, and the lack of overall participation by Roma.

There are also other public institutions and bodies responsible for the implementation of international human rights agreements and relevant domestic law. The local authorities are expected to combat discrimination and to support socially vulnerable groups, social solidarity and social cohesion. So far, there is not enough financial support, political will, and staff in order for local authorities to carry out their tasks. In addition, they do not always make the best prioritization of needs and tasks. Therefore, the living conditions and participation of Roma in local settings depend on the political decisions of the local authorities rather than on national policy.

There are several regional and municipal projects and actions underway to promote the social inclusion of Greek Roma. They are mostly funded by the EU, as the monetary contribution of the Greek state is decreasing to the level of non-existence.

### Anti-discrimination

Discrimination against Roma is prevalent in Greece and yet, the Greek state has not ratified Protocol No. 12 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The laws currently in place are not implemented satisfactorily and police and judges frequently fail to take racist motivation into consideration when investigating hate crimes. Discrimination also manifests itself through the educational and residential segregation of Greek Roma as well as through the increased rates of racist attacks against them. Although the extreme fascist party Golden Dawn lost all its seats in Parliament after the 2019 Greek election and was dissolved following its defeat in the election, the party still has substantial support on the streets. Also, socially vulnerable groups such as Roma have been targeted and scapegoated in a climate of heightened public tension over unemployment and austerity.

### Addressing antigypsyism

The Greek state refrains from recognising antigypsyism as a specific form of racism against Roma. Most Greek Roma are exposed to institutional, everyday racism, but tend not to

report racist crimes due to lack of trust in the authorities. Notwithstanding any other positive initiatives, the Greek state is still required to invoke anti-racism provisions and to raise awareness of anti-discrimination through trainings among the judiciary and police.

## INTRODUCTION

Greece only recognises the Muslim minority residing in Western Thrace, which consists of small numbers of Roma alongside other ethnicities. Religion being the common ground, in other words, non-Muslim Roma groups are not recognised in Greece.<sup>1</sup> As an outcome of this non-recognition on an ethnic basis, the number of Greek Roma is reported in contradictory ways. While the European Commission estimates that the number of Roma in Greece is approximately 265,000,<sup>2</sup> the previous Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras stated in 2019 that there are 371 communities of 110,000 Roma in Greece.<sup>3</sup> The population of Roma in Greece is scattered and consists of heterogeneous, mostly contrasting groups with different levels of integration.<sup>4</sup> Among the Roma communities in Greece, there are Roma who participate in the political, economic and social development of local communities. On the other hand, most of the rest of the Roma are excluded, concentrated in substandard settlements, and rarely participate in the political system.

Politically active Greek Roma, based on a Pan-Hellenic, unanimous decision made in the spring of 2001 in Thessaloniki, have self-identified as "just Greeks".<sup>5</sup> This unanimous voting decision on self-identification was done in response to the self-identification decision of Roma representatives from many different countries at a conference in Prague in 2000 where they self-identified as an ethnic minority. Essentially, these Greek Roma rejected "minority" status, which is something that has repeatedly been stated in the documents of several international organisations.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> No ethnic or linguistic minorities are recognised in Greece. The population of the Muslim minority in Western Thrace amounts to 100,000 persons that comprises three different ethnic groups: those of Turkish origin constitute 50% of the minority population; Pomaks, who speak a Slavic dialect and constitute 35% of the population; and Roma, who represent the remaining 15%. In accordance with the Treaty of Lausanne, the Greek state does not recognise the Western Thrace minority based on ethnicity but religion. Available at: <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/greece-minorities/greece.php> (Accessed 16 October 2019)

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-and-eu/roma-integration-eu-country/roma-integration-greece\\_en#factsandfigures](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-and-eu/roma-integration-eu-country/roma-integration-greece_en#factsandfigures) (Accessed 16 October 2019)

<sup>3</sup> <https://greece.greekreporter.com/2019/04/09/premier-tsipras-hosts-roma-delegation-for-international-romani-day/> (Accessed 17 October 2019)

<sup>4</sup> A small population of domestic nomadic Roma; long-term settled excluded Roma who live in extreme poverty; other long-term settled Roma; Roma migrants from non-EU countries; Roma migrants from other EU countries; completely assimilated Roma; and Roma Muslims who live in Thrace. See *Promoting the Social Inclusion of Roma: A Study of National Policies-Greece* (D. Ziomas, N. Bouzas and N. Spyropoulou 2011). ((Accessed 16 October 2019)

<sup>5</sup> The decision of Greek Roma Conference in Spring 2001 in Thessaloniki was as follows:

*"We, the Greek Gypsies, definitely declare to every 'direction' that we constitute an unbreakable connected piece of the whole Hellenism. Any other view, by anywhere could be expressed and/or emanated; it will not only find us in a total disagreement, but also in a strongly opposite and clearly inimical position.*

*We also state that even if there is ever a question of choosing only one of the two 'constituents' of our identity for which we feel proud, namely: a) 'Greeks' and b) 'Gypsies', we are consciously and unanimously voting to keep the term 'Greeks' and the elimination of the term 'Gypsies'."*

<sup>6</sup> See: Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2002, Legal Situation of the Roma in Europe, Report Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights. Available at: <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=9676&lang=EN>. The Appendix I mention that "Roma do not form an ethnic or national minority; they have equal status with Greek citizens". ((Accessed 19 October 2019)

Also see UN, 2014, Human Rights Committee Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 40 of the Covenant. Second periodic reports of States parties due in 2009 Greece (CCPR/C/GRC/2, 26 February 2014), p. 2-6, where is noted that "Greek Roma constitute an integral part of the Greek population; they are Greek citizens and enjoy full citizenship rights, as well as all civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights. Through their most representative organizations, they have unequivocally expressed the wish to be treated firstly and primarily as only Greek citizens, and secondary as persons of Roma origin".

Official recognition of Roma as equal citizens, however, does not go beyond formal equality as most Roma in Greece suffer from higher degrees of poverty, inequalities within the fields of employment, housing, education and health care, and discrimination due to their ethnic origin.

The extreme social exclusion of Greek Roma has never been perceived as an urgent problem that needs social and political intervention. Essentially, the Greek State planned its Policy for the Integration of Greek Gypsies during the decade of the 1990s, mainly after pressure from local authorities through the operation of the "Pan-Hellenic Intermunicipal Network for the Support of Greek Gypsies" ("ROM NETWORK") that was founded on 20 September 1995. Following that, the National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS) in 2011-2020 that was planned upon the request of the European Commission did not improve the situation of Roma in Greece. Indeed, during that period, the Greek Roma, among other minority groups, bore the brunt of the severe economic crisis in Greece due to recession, austerity measures, and cuts in welfare services and social security provisions.<sup>7</sup> The catastrophic economic crisis also led to an increase in scapegoating minorities living in Greece as an economic problem and hence to racist attacks on them.<sup>8</sup>

This report was developed by Ms. Gamze Bulbul, with support of Ilkin Cankurt, based on their desk-research conducted in 2019, consultations with experts and partially using draft report developed in late 2017 by an NGO coalition participating in the Roma Civil Monitor project.

<sup>7</sup> See *Austerity, Gender Inequality and Feminism After the Crisis -The gendered aspects of the austerity regime in Greece: 2010 – 2017* (Aiki Kosyfologou 2018). Available at: [https://de.rosalux.eu/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Publications/2018/AusterityandFeminismaftertheCrisis\\_Greece.pdf](https://de.rosalux.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/2018/AusterityandFeminismaftertheCrisis_Greece.pdf) (Accessed 21 October 2019)

<sup>8</sup> See *Racist Crime in Europe. Shadow Report 2013-2014* (European Network Against Racism 2014). Available at: [https://www.cms.hr/system/article\\_document/doc/189/ENAR\\_Shadow\\_report\\_Racist\\_crime\\_in\\_Europe.pdf](https://www.cms.hr/system/article_document/doc/189/ENAR_Shadow_report_Racist_crime_in_Europe.pdf). (Accessed 21 October 2019)

## GOVERNANCE AND OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK

### Representing the interests of Roma in the parliament

As equal Greek citizens, Roma can exercise their right to vote in all elections as well as to run for office in elections for all the administrative authorities in Greece. Nevertheless, there are Roma who cannot exercise these rights, either because they are not registered or because they face difficulties in registration. The number of those not registered has dropped significantly since 2004,<sup>9</sup> and a definitive solution to the problem has been planned in the National Policy for Social Inclusion for Greek Gypsies, implemented by the Government. Accordingly, the Supreme Prosecutor sent a recommendation to all prosecutor offices in Greece in 2017 requesting that they cover the cost for the registration of Roma who cannot pay the fee for the relevant procedure.<sup>10</sup> Following that, a Joint Ministerial Decision has established a Working Group on Roma Civil and Municipal Registration<sup>11</sup> in order to eliminate the barriers Roma face during civil and municipal registration, which is a prerequisite to enjoying civil rights. However, according to a recent report by the OSCE,<sup>12</sup> Roma still encountered significant obstacles and discrimination while updating their registered residence to vote in the run-up to the parliamentary elections in Greece in 2019.

With respect to being elected to the national legislature, it seems challenging for Roma to become candidates due to their low level of education, their lack of political awareness or limited political awareness, the solid stereotypes and prejudices established against them in the wider society and within Roma communities themselves, and, of course, the exclusion and marginalization they are undergoing. It is not clear whether there are any Roma in the Parliament (unless they themselves declare their origin, as Anna Vagena did).<sup>13</sup> In the past elections there were candidates who revealed that they were Roma but none succeeded to be elected to the Parliament. Concomitant to the non-recognition of ethnic or linguistic minorities, the OSCE<sup>14</sup> has also noted that the political parties of Greece do not specifically advocate for those communities. Although Roma in Greece live in far worse conditions than do the rest of Greek citizens, and although they are discriminated against due to their ethnic origin, the Government does not systematically formulate policies solely for Roma, but just does so for socially vulnerable groups in general, of which Greek Roma are a part.

Political actors' lack of willingness to improve the conditions Roma are living in becomes resistance when it comes to adopting an antigypsyist agenda. Until their recent loss of all their seats in Parliament after the 2019 election, Golden Dawn officials targeted Roma with racial slurs, stating that they would not treat Roma as equal citizens because Roma

<sup>9</sup> Due to the extended implementation of a wide allowance policy in the country, the vast majority of Roma took care to sort out the various pending issues regarding their registration, in order to become beneficiaries and receive the several welfare benefits or other benefits in kind which are offered by the Greek State to all Greeks who meet specific economic and social criteria.

<sup>10</sup> Joint Ministerial Decree No 43420 /19.12.2017 Government gazette vol. 4603/b/28.12 PROJECT MANAGMENT TEAM Roma registration with the municipalities.

<sup>11</sup> The Working Group on Roma Civil and Municipal Registration aims at eliminating difficulties Roma face while settling civil status issues that enable them to access to social goods and that ensure legality.

<sup>12</sup> "Some Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)-Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) interlocutors noted significant barriers and discrimination faced by Roma citizens seeking to update their registered residence, which impacts their exercise of voting rights." Available at: <https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/greece/420839?download=true> (Accessed 24 October 2019)

<sup>13</sup> In the 2016 April meeting of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs MP Anna Vagena stated that one of her grandmothers was of Romani origin.

<sup>14</sup> Same OSCE report as in the Footnote 12.

allegedly have delinquency “in their DNA”.<sup>15</sup> Besides the Golden Dawn, MP Thanasis Davakis of the New Democracy (hereafter “ND”) majority party in the current Government and Parliament stated in a speech that he forbids “any Roma, gypsy, and whatever to vote for” him.<sup>16</sup> Although Davakis perfunctorily apologized for his racist rant after encountering public outrage, another ND candidate, Konstantinos Kyranakis, revealed that the Government plans to distribute child benefits to “Greek” children only. Upon asked by a commentator about giving benefits to families of Roma origin, he reiterated that they are intended for Greek children only.<sup>17</sup>

## Mainstreaming Roma inclusion across ministries and other national level public authorities

Following the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (NRIS), the Greek Ministry of Labour and Social Security developed the Greek NRIS, the latest<sup>18</sup> Roma inclusion initiative, with the main pillars being housing, employment, health and education.<sup>19</sup> The most important evolution in recent years on the situation of Roma was the establishment of the Special Secretariat for the Social Inclusion of Roma in October 2016 under the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity.<sup>20</sup> The Special Secretariat also performed the role of the National Roma Contact Point (NRCP) responsible for the implementation of the NRIS and for taking actions<sup>21</sup> regarding the social inclusion

<sup>15</sup> <https://greece.greekreporter.com/2013/04/09/roma-golden-dawn-conflict-at-kalamata-hospital/> (Accessed 27 October 2019)

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.migrant.gr/cgi-bin/pages/index.pl?arlang=English&argenkat=PRESS%20ROOM&rcode=180307170546&type=article> (Accessed 27 October 2019)

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.keeptalkinggreece.com/2019/06/25/nd-kyranakis-benefits-greek-children/> (Accessed 27 October 2019)

<sup>18</sup> Actions for the Roma Integration started in the 1980s, through the subsidized EU programmes, but the social inclusion became an objective of the government policy in the middle of 1990s, after the establishment of “Pan-Hellenic Intermunicipal Network for the Support of Greek Gypsies” (ROM NETWORK) and the “Pan-Hellenic Federation of Greek Gypsies’ Associations” (POSER). These contributed to the launch of the National Policy Framework for Greek Gypsies that adopted a holistic approach to the social exclusion of Roma focusing on the categories of education, vocational training, housing, healthcare, counselling (Greek Helsinki Monitor 2010). Following the failure of that framework to deliver impact on issues mentioned, The Integrated Action Plan for the Social Inclusion of Greek Gypsies (2001-2008) was launched under the Minister of the Interior along the two axes of infrastructure and services which encompassed housing and education, employment, healthcare respectively only to fail once again. That was the outcome of a collaboration started in the early 1996 between 146 bodies and more than 500 persons (governmental institutions, local government, Greek and European universities, trade unions, Greek and foreign civil society and Roma organizations, and legally entitled elected representatives of all Roma) from all over Greece. The representatives were elected directly by Local Roma Associations, after the renewal or new establishment of local Associations of Greek Gypsies. Traveling to all over Greece, they aimed to persuade Greek Gypsies either to establish new Local Associations, or to renew the existing one. As a result, it was founded the first Pan-Hellenic Greek Gypsies’ Organ (POSER Federation in the summer of 1998. It is very important to mention that among the Local Roma Associations members of POSER, there were 4 Roma local Associations from Thrace, which, even if they were Muslims in Religion, they decided not only to join to the Pan-Hellenic Federation of Greek Gypsies in 1998, but also, in 2001, they voted and signed the known declaration – self-identification of Greek Gypsies. At the same time, an Inter-Ministerial Committee was established for the planning, coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the National Policy for the Social Integration of Greek Gypsies.<sup>16</sup> Very important evolution of this whole effort was the emergence of Greek Roma as equal interlocutors with the highest governmental personnel, such as the Prime Minister’s Office. Unfortunately, all this lasted just for few years, since the changes in the public administration, and the devaluation of the importance of the Roma integration agenda compared to other agendas such as the economic one after 2004 and the internal problems of POSER (since 2003; later it has fully corrupted), the huge Greek financial crisis (2009 and after) and last but not least the gradual decline of the operation of the “ROM NETWORK” (early 2012), and finally the huge Greek government-debt crisis in 2015.

<sup>19</sup> Available at: [www.esfhellas.gr/elibrary/roma\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](http://www.esfhellas.gr/elibrary/roma_strategy_en.pdf) (Accessed 27 October 2019)

<sup>20</sup> Law 4430/2016, Government Gazette A 205, 31/10/2016.

<sup>21</sup> These include; 1) A new spatial mapping and typological analysis of Roma living in settlements with the technical support of the Management Organisation Unit of Development Programmes in Greece. Specifically,

of Roma in cooperation with several other ministries, public authorities and civil society until its abolition in 2019. The reason the Special Secretariat was closed is assumed to be the change of Government, as there has been no public, official communication released about the abolition of the office. Following that, the responsibility for dealing with the issues of the NRIS was transferred to the General Secretariat for Solidarity and Combating Poverty, which replaced the Special Secretariat as the new National Roma Contact Point (NRCP). This also meant that there are no visible interventions to be evaluated, since the Special Secretariat was closed just before the start of the planned actions of the NRIS, which were focused mainly on housing (relocations of camps, settlement improvement, etc.). The plans and objectives of the new Government as to the implementation of the NRIS and the overall operation of the new NRCP have not been communicated yet.

When the Special Secretariat was open it cooperated with all the relevant ministries, agencies and organisations; specified policies in each NRIS pillar; and developed specific proposals for housing, employment, education, healthcare and social care,<sup>22</sup> which already had been approved by the Greek Government and had been included in the mainstream national policy for the entire "Greek population." In relation to that, taking into consideration the specific needs of Roma, the Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity designed the National Strategy for Social Inclusion in 2014, which aimed at coordinating, monitoring and evaluating policies to alleviate social exclusion at the national, regional and local levels. However, mainstreaming Roma inclusion through the EU framework remains challenging for Greece, as policies related to the main pillars of the NRIS are mostly intended for vulnerable social groups of which Roma are a part without referring to Roma explicitly and exclusively.<sup>23</sup>

According to the assessment report by the EC<sup>24</sup> on these structural measures, the Greek NRCP is not as efficient as it is required to be in terms of ensuring coordination and dialogue between stakeholders - civic and local actors, equality bodies, line ministries and Roma representatives. In relation to this issue, Greece was awarded a grant by the EC in 2017 within the scope of the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme for the initiative of Development of the National Roma Platform for consultation and dialogue exchange at the Greek NRCP,<sup>25</sup> which intends to bring together the Roma and non-Roma communities

the municipalities prepare proposals for Greek Gypsies' inclusion based on the principles of NRIS, in the form of which they can request technical support from the Special Secretariat. These local action plans are approved by the Special Secretariat which officially represents the Government. The sum of the proposals and the horizontal actions of the ministries are the National Action Plan for the Integration of Roma. Regarding the approval of the local action plans, a committee has been set in the Special Secretariat that consists of representatives of the Ministries of Labour and of Economy, Coordination and Monitoring Authority for ESF Actions, Ombudsman and some other bodies' representatives, with whom an Expert Council has been set up, including representatives of ministries, the Central Union of Hellenic Municipalities, the Association of Greek Regions and the representatives of the Roma organisations. The municipalities are provided with funding for the implementation of their proposals from the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) and the State Budget 2) National Action Plan for the Inclusion of Greek Gypsies, which will be formed following proposals from the municipalities, based on identified needs (bottom-up approach) and implemented by them, based on the final Guidelines of the Special Secretariat (top down approach).

<sup>22</sup> A detailed description of policies and measures for housing employment, education, healthcare and social care will be presented in the Roma Civil Monitor's second monitoring cycle.

<sup>23</sup> Among the four pillars of NRIS, Roma benefitted significantly from a mainstream national policy that provided healthcare for those uninsured groups of people as number of uninsured Roma outweighs the rest. In terms of employment, opportunities for Roma population were aligned with the Framework explicitly but not exclusively. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017DC0458&from=EN> (Accessed 27 October 2019)

<sup>24</sup> Assessing the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies and the Council Recommendation on Effective Roma integration measures in the Member States 2016 Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. Available at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/roma\\_report\\_2016\\_web\\_ok\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/roma_report_2016_web_ok_en.pdf) (Accessed October 30, 2019)

<sup>25</sup> [http://www.roma-ekka.gr/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/final\\_review\\_newsletter\\_eng.pdf](http://www.roma-ekka.gr/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/final_review_newsletter_eng.pdf)

with national-level stakeholders, e.g., ministries, the NRCP, municipalities, civil society organisations, etc. Alongside workshops and conferences, an online consultation platform<sup>26</sup> was launched in order for municipalities to provide data about the Greek Roma population, their living conditions, the planning and implementation of projects or interventions related to them and, in general, to update NRIS-related data and know-how. Greek Roma also have the opportunity (either as individuals or through organisations), to file proposals with public authorities (municipalities, regions, the Government) and to see the current proposals from others about the issues they are interested in. The data on the online platform is updated and enriched by including the results of the meetings organised at central, regional and local level. However, the promotion of this initiative by the NRCP is insufficient and the initiative is not supportive of the development of Roma inclusion at national level, meaning that the platform does not feed into the national policy-making process.

In 2016 a National Mechanism for the Monitoring and Evaluation of Social Inclusion and Social Cohesion Policies, Social Solidarity, Administration and Application Provisions was established by law and includes both the central Government (ministries, the National Centre for Social Solidarity, the Workforce Organisation, the National Social Protection Committee, National Contact Points and others) and local governments. The mechanism is coordinated by the Governmental Council on Social Policies (GCSP).<sup>27</sup> Its purpose is to find out what the social needs are, to monitor and evaluate the policies on social inclusion, and to promote the transparency and efficiency of the social protection system. So far, the authors of this report have not become aware of any evaluation reports or other outputs relevant for Roma inclusion produced by the National Mechanism.

### Mainstreaming Roma inclusion across local authorities

Local governments in Greece have several specific tools available to them to promote the social inclusion of Roma:

- Community Centres with Roma Departments that provide information, counselling, social support, empowerment, employment promotion and primary health care services, that develop cooperation networks with public sector services and other actors active in the field of the inclusion of Roma, and which are the structures to link together all the interventions implemented for this purpose with co-financing from the European Social Fund (ESF). Currently there are 53 such Community Centres, according to information provided by the mediators' association, and the discussions between the state and some of the local governments reveal that an increase in the number of centres, up to 60, is expected by the end of 2020. The objective is to support Roma access to mainstream social inclusion measures by helping them apply for and benefit from the available support measures. The law requires that trained Roma mediators must be engaged by all Roma Departments; if there is no such person available, at least a non-Roma person speaking Romanes must be engaged.
- Diverse tools developed by the Special Secretariat, in particular, the model of a Local Action Plan for the social integration of Roma with respect to the relocation of Roma from camp settlements to organised settlements. This model includes guidelines for housing, technical infrastructure and services and its details are regulated by a joint ministerial decision of the Interior Ministry and the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity. It

<sup>26</sup> <http://hello.crowdapps.net/participation-egroma/>

<sup>27</sup> See also the section "Guarantees of the effectiveness of the programmes with the largest budgets".

is expected soon to be voted into law.<sup>28</sup> The Special Secretariat also advised municipalities on the possibilities of financing projects and actions that exist for the social integration of Roma. So far 35 Local Action Plan proposals have been submitted by municipalities to the Special Secretariat.<sup>29</sup>

- The Roma Mediators trained within the ROMED programme initiated by the Council of Europe (CoE). The usefulness of mediators in Roma inclusion had been demonstrated in previous years, not just through the official internal and external evaluations of the ROMED I and ROMED II programmes, but also by the personal experience of those dealing with the exclusion of Roma. In Greece the evaluation of the mediation process had been undertaken almost 15 years ago, since the first mediators in Greece were trained in 1997 as part of the “Access to Life” project. In the Roma Departments within the Community Centres, recruitment of Roma mediators is compulsory.

However, although the Greek state has attempted to decentralize administration and granted greater responsibilities to local governments through the *Kallikratis* reform in 2010, Greece is still one of the most centralized countries in the OECD. In relation to that, subnational government spending is a small part of GDP, and public spending and the share of spending on the staff of public entities is quite low.<sup>30</sup> In addition, there is no mechanism to guarantee local authorities comply with their tasks and duties, such as monitoring the quality of the provided services in comparison with local needs in all fields, but especially in the sector of social work. The local authorities can present their actions and claim provided services fulfil the needs of the local society, and the only “voice” that could be expressed against this view is that of the opposition parties in the municipal council. Combined with insufficient money, lack of data, no monitoring, no political will and no targeted policies, Roma inclusion at the national level relies on short-term interventions and local-level policy measures mostly supported by EU funds.

Within the scope of the CoE awareness-raising campaign *Dosta!* (“Enough!”), the municipality of *Volos* received prizes in 2009 and 2017 for its progressive municipal policies towards the education of Roma, as a result of which drop-out rates of Roma have decreased significantly.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, FRA conducted projects in the localities of *Aghia Varvara*<sup>32</sup> and *Megara*<sup>33</sup> (the Roma there live isolated in the *Vlycho* settlement) that brought together Roma inhabitants and local authorities. The projects addressed the problem of lack of engagement among all local stakeholders and intended to enable Roma inclusion and to assess what types of actions work and do not work and why in 2013. The research highlighted that systemic efforts to raise awareness and deliver mediation would be essential components of Roma inclusion in Greece. Additionally, local-level social integration policies should be mainstreamed at national level for sustainable Roma inclusion through further empowerment.

The involvement and participation levels of Roma are affected by the inequalities that exist within the Roma communities themselves. While the advanced living conditions of Roma

<sup>28</sup> The bill is available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B7iawnqtI0zIMDctWTdnbEdsXzFIWHZxUkRzcWlkV3dxZGJz/view?usp=sharing> (Accessed 12 June 2019)

<sup>29</sup> Information provided by the Special Secretariat for Roma issues.

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/regional/regional-policy/profile-Greece.pdf> (Accessed 5 November 2019)

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.roma-alliance.org/fr/page/221-the-6th-dosta--congress-prize-for-municipalities-and-its-10th-anniversary.html> (Accessed 5 November 2019)

<sup>32</sup> For details, see [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/local-engagement-roma-greece-aghia-varvara\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/local-engagement-roma-greece-aghia-varvara_en.pdf) (Accessed 5 November 2019)

<sup>33</sup> For details, see [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/local-engagement-roma-greece-megara\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/local-engagement-roma-greece-megara_en.pdf) (Accessed 5 November 2019)

in some specific locations (e.g., *Agia Varvara, Ilion, Chalandri, Drapetsona, Menemeni, Serres, Alexandria, Heraklia, Trikala, Karditsa, Larisa, Sofades, Volos, Amaliada, Kato Achaia*, etc.) have resulted in participation of Roma in local administrations, police forces, civil society organisations and trade unions, the rest of the Roma community is excluded and resides in camps under inhumane conditions. The above-mentioned localities' success exemplifies the importance of systemic actions to tackle Roma social exclusion. For example, in *Agia Varvara*, Roma have elected to the municipal council since 1975 and have more than five associations (about culture, sports, youth, women's issues, trading, etc.), the oldest of which was established in 1939. The municipal office of *Agia Varvara* currently has three Roma employees, while during the last 20 years more than 20 Roma have worked with the local government in different positions. Notwithstanding its being a model of Roma social integration, the drop-out rates of Roma are still higher compared to non-Roma, employment opportunities are limited for Roma there, and segregated behaviours within the schools are prevalent in *Agia Varvara*.<sup>34</sup>

### Promoting empowerment and participation of Roma

The empowerment and participation of Roma was one objective of the actions of the Special Secretariat for Roma Social Inclusion. Meetings of the National Roma Platform organised at the central, regional and local level are a basic means of promoting the participation of Roma people. Within the framework of a holistic approach, which implies collaboration among stakeholders, including different levels of government, civil society, individual citizens, etc., to form policies, while at the same time acknowledging that various factors are responsible for the exclusion of social groups, the Special Secretariat created a mixed (Roma and non-Roma) "Task Force" aiming to train Roma communities through specific thematic courses aimed at the larger involvement of Roma in the whole policy procedure (planning, implementation, monitoring, coordination, evaluation) and in interventions concerning their social integration.

Moreover, Roma are represented in several public bodies engaged in the protection of human rights. For example, in the National Committee on Equality, Youth and Human Rights,<sup>35</sup> which is an advisory body of the State on the protection of human rights, a permanent Roma member (*Eleftherios Dimitriou*) represents the "POSER" Federation of Greek Gypsies. Moreover, other Roma NGOs like the Local Association of Greek Gypsies from *Agia Varvara*, the Local Association of Greek Gypsies from *Halandri*, the Local Association of Greek Gypsy Women from *Dendropotamos Thessaloniki* or other Roma as individuals have been invited to the Committee's meetings on more than one occasion.

In addition, public authorities and NGOs implement EU programmes at local, regional or national levels aimed at strengthening Roma participation that are funded either by the ESIF or directly by the EC. For example, the following projects have been implemented at the national level to support Roma participation and empowerment:

- *PROACTIVE project* implemented by the Centre for Security Studies<sup>36</sup> and funded by the EC/DG JUST aims at preventing discrimination against Roma by developing the mediation skills of police officers and supporting cooperation with Roma mediators. It is about to train 360 police officers from 21 municipalities on issues such as prevention through social mediation and fighting stereotypes against Roma. Police officers as well as Roma mediators have attended a special training for trainers. It is worth mentioning that the "PROACTIVE" project has led the

<sup>34</sup> [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/local-engagement-roma-greece-aghia-varvara\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/local-engagement-roma-greece-aghia-varvara_en.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.nchr.gr> (Accessed 5 November 2019)

<sup>36</sup> [www.kemea.gr](http://www.kemea.gr) (Accessed 17 July 2019)

Citizens' Protection Ministry to decide to integrate the project methodology and basic findings into the training offered by Greek Police Academies.

- *I DO project*, implemented by the Centre for Security Studies and funded by the EC/DG JUST, aims to empower and support the active participation of young Roma and non-Roma citizens in local development. It is rather unique that public authorities (Interior Ministry, Citizens' Protection Ministry, Regional Authorities, municipalities, and the Roma Mediators Union, with the support of the Special Secretariat for Roma Integration) participate in this project, which will include training almost 50 young Roma with high-school educations to be better prepared to participate in politics at all levels. The project will be implemented in five regions (Attica, Central Macedonia, Thessaly, Peloponnese and Western Greece) and can include up to 20 municipalities.
- *ROMED* is a joint programme of the EC and the Council of Europe that started in 2010. Since 2011, 137 Roma Mediators from all over Greece have been trained within ROMED.<sup>37</sup> The current, second phase of project implementation (ROMED II) is aimed at empowering Roma communities, creating Community Action Groups (CAGs) in Roma communities who are trained in how to deal with their local issues. In parallel, the project prepares the administration and staff of municipal governments for the participation of Roma in the local consultation process in order to influence the decisions made by the municipalities related to their life. Currently, ROMED is implemented in five municipalities.<sup>38</sup> Roma groups are trained to acquire the skills to consult local authorities and develop similar actions especially in the areas where ROMED is being implemented.
- *JUSTROM – Access of Roma and Traveller Women to Justice* is another joint initiative of the EC and the CoE aimed at facilitating the access of Roma (mainly Roma women) to justice. The implementation in Greece began in 2017, establishing three "legal clinics" (offices).<sup>39</sup> Despite the very short time of its operation, JUSTROM has already revealed some very important issues, such as the extensive rate of unreported domestic violence against women in these communities and the big difficulties (due to bureaucracy or cost) in acquiring ID and other official documents experienced by some Roma people.

Concerning local consultation procedures, the law regulating the operation of the Greek local authorities requires compulsory consultation of municipal council decisions with local organisations, including civil society and individual citizens, through "Consultation Committees".

Roma have created a lot of civil society organisations – associations focused on culture, social welfare and political representation of their interests – to help marginalised Roma communities. Without having exact data, we can estimate on the basis of our personal knowledge and experience that there are probably more than 500 Roma civil society organisations but, in reality, the vast majority of them just exist on paper.

<sup>37</sup> 79 mediators from 43 localities in the ROMED I and 58 mediators from 27 localities in the ROMED II.

<sup>38</sup> Chalandri (Attica Region), Ampelokipi – Menemeni Thessaloniki (Central Macedonia Region), Karditsa (Thessaly Region), Ilida and Mesolonghi (W. Greece Region).

<sup>39</sup> Elefsina city in Attica, Menemeni- Dedropotamos in Thessaloniki and in Xanthi. In project it's also used the offices' space of HEROMACT, because it is located in the very centre of Athens, so it's very easy accessible from every area in Attica.

The most well-known NGOs dealing with Roma in Greece include the Hellenic League for Human Rights,<sup>40</sup> the Greek Helsinki Monitor,<sup>41</sup> Doctors of the World Greece,<sup>42</sup> Scale,<sup>43</sup> Praksis,<sup>44</sup> and of course many NGOs set up by Roma at different levels (local associations, federations, the POSER); many are specifically women's associations. However, there is no aggregated data on the actions that they have developed, their sources of funding, or the amount allocated for Roma.

Roma civil society organisations are allocated funds from the state budget through the Public Investment Programme, which aims at funding efforts and projects that strengthen the economy, support modernisation, and promote the social cohesion of the country in the long term.<sup>45</sup> Another important source of funding is EEA/Norway Grants.<sup>46</sup> In fact, while the financing of NGOs from national resources has been reduced to zero in recent years<sup>47</sup> and there is no funding available at the central Government level for Roma integration strategies, EEA/Norway Grants are difficult for Roma NGOs due to their hard-to-meet preconditions (for example, the number of years of operation, documenting the applicants' budgets for the past two years, difficult application forms, almost compulsory language requirements, etc.). Therefore, the main source of funding for NGOs appear to be international and European Funds as well as private sector initiatives. In this direction, Roma NGOs turn to international private foundations operating in Greece such as the OSF or foundations established by very rich Greeks like *Onassis*, *Niarchos*, *Latsis*, *Bodossakis* and others. Although they are relatively easy to access, their approach is based mainly on charity and much less on political objectives. In other words, their support rather covers very specific, urgent, short-term needs, not solutions to the complex problem of Roma social inclusion and empowerment.

Apart from Roma NGOs, mainstream antiracist civil society initiatives also promote the empowerment and participation of Roma. Despite being mainly concerned about refugees, there are many examples of antiracist actions that support Roma – for example, through demonstrations (*Menidi*), cultural events (film projections followed by public discussion of Roma issues, antiracist festivals in *Ilioupoli* city, *Chalkida* and other places), solidarity actions, events organised by bishops where several Roma and non-Roma are invited as experts to speak on Roma issues (the Metropolitan of *Demetrias*), lectures in universities organised by professors of pedagogy, sociology, or political science where Roma scientists, experts or mediators participate (National and *Kapodistrian* University, *Thessaly* University, Aristotle University, *Panteion* University, etc).

In addition to these points, although the Greek Constitution entitles civil society organisations to operate, the Greek Government is not legally obliged to consult with civil society or other interest groups.

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.hlhr.gr/en/> (Accessed 18 August 2019)

<sup>41</sup> <https://greekhelsinki.wordpress.com> (Accessed 17 July 2019)

<sup>42</sup> <https://mdmgreece.gr> (Accessed 17 July 2019)

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.klimaka.org.gr/home/> (Accessed 17 July 2019)

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.praksis.gr/el> (Accessed 17 July 2019)

<sup>45</sup>

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/cswd\\_roma\\_inclusion\\_measures\\_reported\\_under\\_the\\_eu\\_framework\\_for\\_nris\\_pt2\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/cswd_roma_inclusion_measures_reported_under_the_eu_framework_for_nris_pt2_en.pdf) (Accessed 7 November 2019)

<sup>46</sup> Under the EEA Grants 2014-2021, Greece has been allocated 5 million EUR for Roma Inclusion and Empowerment. See at: <https://eeagrants.org/countries/greece> (Accessed 7 November 2019)

<sup>47</sup> [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/greece-civil-space\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/greece-civil-space_en.pdf) (Accessed November 7, 2019)

## Guarantees for the effectiveness of programmes with the largest budgets

The planning, supervision, implementation, monitoring and ongoing evaluation of social inclusion policy – including Roma-targeted policies – has been entrusted to an inter-ministerial organ, the Governmental Council on Social Policy (GCSP), since 2015.<sup>48</sup> This intersectoral coordination aims at increasing the effectiveness of social inclusion policy and guarantees its connection to Roma inclusion. The Council meets twice a month and such frequent meetings enable effective control over ongoing measures and their adaptation to the needs of society.

According to official data on the commitments of the approved ESIF for the 2014-2020 programming period as concerns projects and beneficiaries at the national level, by the end of March 2018 the total budget allocated to the regions to promote social inclusion and combat discrimination was 852,309,268 EUR (the actually-paid money by this date was 359,689,408 EUR). These amounts include projects targeting Roma, but there are no numbers about amounts specifically committed to or spent for Roma as a target group or to NGOs as beneficiaries.<sup>49</sup> Through the co-financed programmes from the European Social Fund (ESF) interventions, the regions have available financial resources for establishment of the Roma Departments of Community Centres (total allocation 4.5 million EUR), for hiring management personnel to prepare areas to which Roma are meant to be relocated from camps and settlements (4.9 million EUR), for improving the natural, urban and anthropogenic environment where Roma live (11 million EUR), for redistribution through rent subsidies (10 million EUR) and finally, for supporting the employment of Roma (22 million EUR).

There are mainstream policies targeting persons in specific life situations (unemployed or impoverished persons, those in early childhood or those who are elderly), marginalised regions (remote, isolated places, islands or mountains) and also specific groups (such as women, LGBTIQI persons, prisoners or drug users). Roma are targeted by these mainstream policies if they meet the criteria of their target groups and can prove their eligibility. In recent years, the Greek Government tried to support the poorest and the lowest social strata of Greek society by strengthening these measures and benefits, both in cash and in-kind. Roma largely participate in these measures.<sup>50</sup> An added value of Roma participation in mainstream measures is that they must follow the administrative procedures (gathering, filling in and submitting the relevant documents), which brings them closer to the public administration and to understanding its formal rules of operation.

As an example of these mainstream measures, we can mention the programme called “Free transportation of elementary and secondary school pupils of public schools who reside over a certain distance from their school unit”; such transportation is organised by municipal services. The total cost of this action for the school year 2015-2016 was approximately 145 million EUR and Roma have largely benefited from it. The NGOs participating in the preparation of this report are aware of Roma students benefiting from this measure, including Roma students from regions outside Attica, where schools are less accessible, as they are not located in every inhabited area, but rather just in the bigger centres. Therefore, thanks to the above-mentioned program, students including Roma

<sup>48</sup> This Council is led by a Deputy Prime Minister and includes four ministers, the Minister of Labour, of Social Security and Social Solidarity, of Education, of Health, and of Culture as regular members with voting rights; and the Deputy Minister of Finance responsible for the State’s General Accounting Office, and the Deputy Minister of National Economy responsible for the ESIF, without voting rights. Moreover, other authorities, representatives and experts are invited to the Council depending on its agenda. See: <https://drive.google.com/open?id=1F5c46-h8cUCFH0kgRkXUC3fMakpwmxGc> (Accessed 17 May 2019)

<sup>49</sup> <http://anaptyxi.gov.gr/> (Accessed 17 May 2019)

<sup>50</sup> Presentation of the Deputy Minister of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity, Mrs Theano Fotiou at the 15th CAHROM Meeting in Athens on 22 May 2018.

living on the mainland have free, safer, much easier transportation, contributing to their regular attendance at school.<sup>51</sup>

One factor that is negatively influencing the whole outcome of the NRIS, as a consequence of centralized governance, is the lack of a guarantee of the sustainability of these mainstreamed national policies. Indeed, this was manifested through the abolition of the Special Secretariat and its replacement by the "General Secretariat for Social Solidarity and Combating Poverty" as the new NRCP. Being the sole Government organ that was responsible for the entire operation of the NRIS and implementation of Greek Roma integration policies, the closing of the Special Secretariat emerged as an impediment to the whole outcome of the strategy. Another major problem also highlighted by the latest ECRI report is the disconnection between national strategies, regional action plans, and local implementation.<sup>52</sup>

The largest Roma-targeted programmes mainly concern the fields of housing, education and social help:

- The relocation of Roma settlements (camps) with poor living conditions. Preparation of the implementation of this measure has already begun and the plan is to relocate 70 settlements in total.<sup>53</sup>
- Support for improvement of the housing conditions and infrastructure in Roma settlements (construction of water pipelines, sanitation, electricity, improvement of public spaces). The Special Secretariat for Roma Inclusion provided 120 municipalities throughout the country with the necessary technical assistance, which includes ready-made codified guidelines (standard technical reports, models for explanatory and implementation guides, and health reports) to speed up the implementation of these improvement actions.<sup>54</sup>
- Piloting of a holistic approach (i.e., addressing problems that Roma face in different fields through integrated interventions) in *Katerini*.
- A programme for integration of Roma children in education that started in 1997 and is currently implemented by a consortium of several Greek universities under the leadership of the Athens *Kapodistrian* University. However, throughout the programme, there have been gaps, some of which have lasted more than two years. Despite all its problems, the evaluations of this initiative have demonstrated positive results concerning the integration of Roma children in the educational milieu.<sup>55</sup>

Although the Greek state claims to allocate funding for Roma inclusion projects, almost all measures in the areas of education, employment, housing, health and anti-discrimination (excluding those aimed at combating poverty) are EU co-funded projects, the implementation of which would be difficult if these funds were not available, especially

<sup>51</sup> Information provided by local Roma Associations of Thessaloniki, Mesolonghi, Etoliko, Drama, Patras, Amaliada, Kalamata, Crete.

<sup>52</sup> Council of Europe, 2015, ECRI Report on Greece (fifth monitoring cycle). Paragraph 103. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-greece/16808b5796> (Accessed 6 November 2019)

<sup>53</sup> <https://www.protagon.gr/epikairota/fwtiou-ksekina-to-programma-metegkatastasis-katavlistmwn-roma-stis-poleis-44341608154> (Accessed 14 April 2019)

<sup>54</sup> Written statement of deputy Minister Th. Fotiou, published in Mass Media at 12.6.2018. Available at: <https://www.newsbeast.gr/politiki/arthro/3697676/fotiou-epitachinonte-i-drasis-gia-ti-veltiosi-ton-sinthikon-diaviosis-ton-roma> (Accessed 6 November 2019)

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.keda.uoa.gr/epam/> (Accessed 6 November 2019)

during a period of economic crisis and structural and financial adjustments.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, most of the measures tackling Roma exclusion remain at the planning stage due to the fact that the Roma integration agenda has lost its importance since 2015.<sup>57</sup>

### Availability of reliable data about Roma

There are no official statistics about Roma, and the census does not collect data about Roma ethnicity. The NRIS, however, includes an “inventory of Gypsy settlements” comparing the situation in 1998 and 2008.<sup>58</sup> This inventory was provided by the Special Secretariat for the Social Inclusion of Roma and was based on data collected from local authorities and regions about the “main sites where Roma were living [...] in distinct and identifiable locations,” and counted some 50,000 individuals or 12,000 permanently settled families. According to the document, the number of individuals living in such settings increased by 8 to 10 per cent between 1998 and 2008. The major concentrations of Roma (over 1,000 families) were found in four regions (Eastern Macedonia-Thrace, Thessaly, Western Greece and Central Macedonia).<sup>59</sup>

The CoE estimates that the total Roma population living in Greece is as high as approximately 265,000 (2.47 per cent of the population). More specific data are available from the Ombudsman’s webpage,<sup>60</sup> or the diverse research by universities, individual scholars, or other organisations. For example, the ROM NETWORK conducted the most recent Pan-Hellenic Research for the identification of Roma needs in different sectors (housing, education, employment and others) in a very early phase of the first decade of the millennium (the project “Multi Action Roma Hellas”, funded by the EC in 1999-2001).

### Policies and measures addressing specific needs of Roma women, children and youth

The national policy on youth is mainly planned and implemented by the General Secretariat for Lifelong Learning and Adult Education (GSAE) under the Education Ministry. After two and a half years of work and consultations including all youth organisations and associations in Greece, the Secretariat formulated a strategy that includes special key objectives to be accomplished for youth empowerment under the name “Youth 2017-2027”. Those objectives are mainstreamed, with Roma being explicitly referred to in some objectives, e.g., reinforcing the participation of young people in democratic life, supporting accommodation rental for students, etc.<sup>61</sup>

Two areas where young Roma face the most challenges are education and employment. In these fields, the gender gap among young Roma is the biggest in Greece. While 81 per cent of Roma women are neither in work or in education, just 38 per cent of Roma men

<sup>56</sup> See *Mid-term evaluation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020-Final report* (European Commission July 2018). Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/ds-04-19-005-en-n.pdf> (Accessed October 30, 2019)

<sup>57</sup> See ‘Roma inclusion measures reported under the EU Framework for NRIS’ (European Commission September 2019) (Accessed Accessed 6 November 2019)

<sup>58</sup> Greek NRIS, Annex I. Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/greece\\_national\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/greece_national_strategy_en.pdf) (Accessed Accessed 6 November 2019)

<sup>59</sup> *Idem*, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.synigoros.gr/maps?i=maps.el.maps> (Accessed 6 November 2019)

<sup>61</sup> Objectives include: Promoting Autonomy and Independence of Young People and Facilitating their Advent in Adulthood, Affordable and Qualitative Education-Training-Apprenticeship, Decent Work and Development of Youth Entrepreneurship, Health, Welfare and Well-being, Strengthening the Participation of Young People in Democratic Life, Reduction of inequalities among young people. The full strategy is available at [https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/50359073/Neolaia\\_Entipo\\_ENG\\_dig.pdf/6ee8b162-57df-a302-e394-9f58850f9fbf](https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/50359073/Neolaia_Entipo_ENG_dig.pdf/6ee8b162-57df-a302-e394-9f58850f9fbf) (Accessed 30 October 2019)

are not working or receiving education.<sup>62</sup> Whereas there has been a positive change in Roma early childhood education participation and compulsory school attendance because of one targeted measure and three mainstream ones, Roma youth employment is showing signs of stagnation despite the three mainstream measures.<sup>63</sup>

Roma have at least a formal opportunity to participate in all initiatives funded by the state. In fact, participation of Roma is visible in areas where Roma are an active part of local societies. Nevertheless, the rest of the Roma communities have many difficulties fully enjoying all these benefits. Therefore, the specific needs of Roma women, children and youth are addressed mostly through short-term EU-funded projects or by NGOs, such as JUSTROM (Access to Justice of Roma and Traveller Women between 2016-2018), I DO (aimed at empowering and supporting the active participation of young Roma and non-Roma citizens in local development) and the Roma Women`s Association of *Drosero*, called *Elpida*,<sup>64</sup> where teaching and activities for various age groups take place. This last association also serves as a meeting place where residents can express themselves freely, particularly the women and children of *Drosero*.

<sup>62</sup> Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma – Selected findings. Available at: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings_en.pdf) (Accessed 6 November 2019)

<sup>63</sup> Example of measure taken in the field of education: Improving access to preschool education; interventions for improving participation in schooling for Roma children; sensitization and further training of teachers. Example of measure taken in the field of employment: Promoting employment through community service and providing vocational training. See at: <https://ec.europa.eu/greece/sites/greece/files/greece.pdf> (Accessed 15 November 2019)

<sup>64</sup> See details at: <http://projectpal.eu/3507-2/> (Accessed 17 September 2019)

# ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

## Implementing the Racial Equality Directive

Discrimination against Roma continues to prevail in Greece in many sectors; despite formal incorporation of the EU anti-discrimination directives into Greek national law, positive shifts in societal attitudes and in the practices of public authorities have been limited. In theory, Greek legislation is a well-equipped legal system and provides a satisfactory level of human rights protection and tools to protect against discrimination. Yet, Greece is one of the 27 Council of Europe Member States that has not yet ratified Protocol No. 12 to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms,<sup>65</sup> even though Greece is one of the 25 countries to become a signatory since its formation date (4 November 2000).<sup>66</sup> The problem lies in a lack of satisfactory implementation of the already-existing and enforced laws. Mostly, prosecutors face difficulties in relating bias motivation as an aggravating circumstance to such cases. On the other hand, the Supreme Vice-Prosecutor has stated that judges do not always take racist motivation into consideration due to a lack of evidence provided by police or a lack of attention paid during investigations to factors that would suggest or prove racist motivation.<sup>67</sup>

In addition to the problem of the law not being applied, the FRA survey<sup>68</sup> from 2016 has shown that 88 per cent of Roma surveyed in Greece were not aware of support organisations, equality bodies, laws or campaigns addressing discrimination, although the vast majority of them (61 per cent) indicated that they had experienced discrimination because of their Roma ethnicity in the past five years.

On top of that, although the neo-Nazi political party of the Golden Dawn<sup>69</sup> lost all 18 of its seats in the 2019 elections, its polling percentage plummeted to 2.93 per cent support, and it was dissolved in 2019, racist violence in Greece has shown no signs of abating. Racist violence is actually increasing, with 117 incidents reported in 2018, according to a Racist Violence Recording Network report.<sup>70</sup> In its 2015 report on Greece, ECRI stated the following: "There has been a strong increase in the levels of incitement to racial hatred, in particular in the context of public discourse, including from representatives of political parties. Hatred is usually directed against immigrants, but also against Roma, Jews and Muslims. This situation is not adequately addressed and there is widespread impunity for acts of hate speech and insufficient official condemnation."<sup>71</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Greece has still not ratified Protocol No. 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights and the authorities have not indicated any intention to prepare ratification. Although the Greek authorities acknowledge the need to fight racism, there is no comprehensive and multisectoral strategy in place to address its root causes and to involve civil society partners in the fight against racism.

<sup>66</sup> [https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/177/signatures?p\\_auth=jWTxcJYP](https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/treaty/177/signatures?p_auth=jWTxcJYP) (Accessed 27 November 2019)

<sup>67</sup> Racism, discrimination, intolerance and extremism: learning from experiences in Greece and Hungary. Available at: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2013-thematic-situation-report-3\\_en\\_1.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2013-thematic-situation-report-3_en_1.pdf) (Accessed 3 December 2019)

<sup>68</sup> *Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey Roma – Selected findings*. Available at: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings_en.pdf) (Accessed 3 December 2019)

<sup>69</sup> The Golden Dawn party's success in both national and European election showed steady increase in last twenty years. In the national elections from 0.07% in 1996, through 0.29% in 2009, 6.92% in 2012 up to 6.99% in the last ones in 2015. As for the European elections, the support has raised from 0.11% in 1994, through 0.17% in 2004 up to 9.39% in 2014. Source: <http://www.ypes.gr/en/Elections/> (Accessed 3 December 2019)

<sup>70</sup> Racist Violence Recording Network Annual Report 2018. Available at: [https://www.unhcr.org/gr/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2019/04/RVRN\\_report\\_2018en.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/gr/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2019/04/RVRN_report_2018en.pdf) (Accessed November 29, 2019)

<sup>71</sup> ECRI Report on Greece 2015. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-greece/16808b5796> (Accessed 27 November 2019)

It is also important to point out that the Greek state does not recognize Roma as a minority community, which makes it more difficult to identify and remedy widespread discrimination against them. In this respect, even specialized agencies such as the General Secretariat for Gender Equality or the Greek Ombudsman, face difficulties in adequately substantiating a case of discrimination against Roma persons. A representative of the Greek Ombudsman's Office revealed in an interview that there were not more than four or five cases brought to them in the last seven years from all over Greece (the details of these cases are not made public on the grounds of personal data protection). The contradiction between the recent increase in racist violence in Greece as reported by non-state bodies and the very few officially recorded cases of such violence attests to the problem of underreporting racist crimes.

In conclusion, it is clear that despite EU directives and anti-discrimination provisions having been fully incorporated into Greek legislation, they have not yet had a tangible, positive impact on the situation of Roma in Greece. This situation lends further weight to the FRA opinion expressed in its most recent report on antigypsyism, which stated: "The existing evidence of widespread discrimination against Roma suggests that the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EU) is not effective – at least with respect to that particular group. A critical assessment by both the EU and the Member States is needed to understand why this is the case and what measures are required to remedy the existing situation."<sup>72</sup>

### Educational and residential segregation

The educational and residential segregation of Roma in Greece is both a symptom and a cause of their social exclusion. Inequalities among the Greek Roma communities manifest in their living conditions. While Roma live in relatively good conditions in specific areas such as *Agia, Varvara, Ilion* and *Drapetsona* in *Attica*; *Kato Achaia Serres*; *Amaliada*; or *Dendropotamos*, they are still excluded in camps with inhumane conditions in some other localities such as *Aspropyrgos Spata, Menidi, Ano Liosia* and *Zefyri* in *Attica*; *Birbita* in *Messinia*; *Mavrika* in *Karditsa*; *Chalastra* in *Salonica*; *Glykia* in *Argolida*; *Kamilovrisi* in *Fthiotida*; and the sea shore area in *Kato Achaia*.

Settlements that lack basic infrastructure outnumber other relatively improved neighbourhoods. Many Roma settlements have long been located on the outskirts or outside cities in areas where public utilities (water, electricity, sewage) and connection to the residential and social fabric are absent. The most recent information from the Special Secretariat for the Inclusion of Roma refers to 74 settlements where it is estimated that between approximately 16,000 and 17,000 Roma live.<sup>73</sup> To address the problem, the Special Secretariat for the Inclusion of Roma planned actions to be taken by the NRIS in 2011 to improve the housing conditions of Roma, which included several measures such as providing rent subsidies to a small number of Roma families, relocating a large number of Roma families living in very poor camp conditions to locations with improved infrastructure, etc. However, the 2015 ECRI report on Greece highlighted that some 80 per cent of Roma makeshift settlements and 20 per cent of settlements consisting of a combination of houses and makeshift dwellings were not connected to the national power grid. Thirty-one out of 37 makeshift settlements were not connected to the water supply system and 26 had no sewage facilities.<sup>74</sup> Also, the Roma integration indicators revealed that the housing conditions of Greek Roma for the period between 2011-2016 did not improve, but stagnated, with many Greek Roma still living in deprived areas without access to basic infrastructure.<sup>75</sup> To tackle the problem, the Special Secretariat prepared a Local

<sup>72</sup> FRA, 2018, *A persisting concern: anti-Gypsyism as a barrier to Roma inclusion*, p. 10. Available at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2018/roma-inclusion> (Accessed 27 November 2019)

<sup>73</sup> <http://e-dytikiachai.gr/η-ακτιβογραφια-των-ρομα-και-στη-δουτι/> (Accessed 27 November 2019)

<sup>74</sup> ECRI. Country monitoring in Greece: Fifth report. February 2015. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-greece/16808b5796> (Accessed 27 November 2019)

<sup>75</sup> Communication to the European Parliament and the Council Midterm review of the EU framework for national Roma integration strategies Roma integration indicators scoreboard (2011-2016). 2017. Available at:

Action Plan as well as guidelines to help municipalities collect and process data while providing housing and infrastructure.<sup>76</sup> Within the scope of this plan, Greece is recording data on Roma settlements in real time, considering them a socially vulnerable group, not a minority, through local authorities able to access and upload data to an online platform. This helps assess the current situation of Greek Roma in terms of the main pillars of the EU Framework for NRISs. As a short-term solution to the housing problem, Roma families have been relocated to ISO box container dwellings<sup>77</sup> – steel containers used for shipping – that meet minimum-security standards and feature minimal facilities. The Special Secretariat indicated in its annual report that, with the agreement of the Roma concerned, they will then be relocated to new settlements that will replace the containers in the long run with a view to the gradual, full inclusion of the Roma population into the wider urban and social fabric. That said, if the area where the settlement is situated is inadequate, a new part of the “residential fabric” may be developed in direct connection with the wider “urban fabric”. Yet for the time being it is uncertain how the elimination of residential segregation will unfold, as the planned actions on the housing of Roma have been disrupted as a result of the recent abolition of the Special Secretariat and the handover of the NRCP to the “General Secretariat for Social Solidarity and Combating Poverty” instead.

Residential segregation also induces the exclusion of Greek Roma from education, as residency determines which schools children attend. Although the National Education Policy for the Roma aims at fostering mixed schools and abolishing educational segregation, there are hidden methods for establishing segregation in education. Discrimination against Greek Roma operates under the practice of Roma-only schools. The justifications used for creating this segregation through Roma-only schools include: the long distance between Roma settlements and mixed school buildings; non-vaccinated Roma children; Roma students’ low level of knowledge; and Roma children’s unhygienic living conditions compared to non-Roma. Since these justifications are not publicly stated anywhere, filing a complaint with evidence of them is difficult. Indeed, Greece has been sentenced by the European Court for Human Rights (ECtHR) twice<sup>78</sup> due to restricting Roma students to Roma-only schools. The most important fact is that all this is happening “under the nose” of all the competent bodies (the ministry, municipalities, the justice system, administrators of primary education, etc.).

Co-funded by the EU Structural Funds, the Greek state launched its Programme for the Integration and Education of Roma in 2016 as part of the Operational Programme of Human Resources Development, Education and Lifelong Learning 2014-2020 in order to address the challenges the Roma population faces in education. Positive initiatives notwithstanding, the enrolment rate of Roma remains low in Greece, with seven out of 10 Roma enrolled in compulsory education. Although this denotes a slight increase in numbers, the gap between the early childhood education enrolment of Greek Roma and the general population is wide.

[https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017SC0286R\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52017SC0286R(01)&from=EN) (Accessed 27 November 2019)

<sup>76</sup> So far, 35 municipalities have submitted a Local Action Plan for Roma Social Inclusion.

<sup>77</sup> The pictures of the containers are available in the annual Report of Affairs of the Special Secretariat in 2017. See at: <https://diavgeia.gov.gr/doc/%CE%A8128465%CE%981%CE%A9-0%CE%A5%CE%9C?inline=true> (Accessed 27 November 2019)

<sup>78</sup> The two cases were:

The “Sabanis case”, concerning the operation of 12th primary school of Aspropyrgos in Attica Region; judgement issued in 2012 – see: <http://www.aedh.eu/en/the-echr-condemns-roma-school-segregation-in-greece-11-december-2012/> (Accessed 15 December 2019)

The “Lavida case”, concerning the operation of 4th primary school of Sofades in Thessaly Region; judgement issued in 2013 – see: <http://www.aedh.eu/en/case-lavida-and-others-v-greece-the-european-court-of-human-rights-condemns-roma-school-segregation-in-greece-may-28th-2013/> (Accessed 15 December 2019)

In both cases, the schools were operating as ghetto (only Roma pupils) schools and the ECtHR condemned the segregation of Roma.

While 28 per cent of Roma surveyed attended early childhood education, the rate was 80 per cent for non-Roma in 2016.<sup>79</sup>

## Forced evictions

The problem of forced evictions is not relevant to the current situation in Greece; there have been no more than one or two attempts at forced evictions of Roma permanently residing in settlements. The most well-known is the case of the *Nomismatokopio* settlement in the municipality of *Chalandri (Attica)* from 2013. Following a court decision to demolish the settlement, police attempted to evict Roma from there and to relocate them to a remote, segregated area on Mount *Pateras*, more than 50 km away. The eviction attempt ended in violent street fights between police and members of the local Roma community. The most recent incident related to the case happened in 2014. Under the *Simos Roussos* Government, since 2014 the possibility of another forced eviction of a Roma settlement in the municipality of *Chalandri* was solved in favour of the Roma people, since the new mayor of the region is an ally of the Roma community and refused to approve the demolition of the Roma settlement.

## Discriminatory behaviour by police, misconduct by prosecutors or courts

The credibility of the Greek police force was undermined by serious allegations in 2012 that Golden Dawn had infiltrated the force and authorities had turned a blind eye to “pockets of fascism”.<sup>80</sup> At the 2018 trial of 69 members of Golden Dawn, evidence submitted revealed extensive ties and coordination between Golden Dawn members and the counterterrorism and riot control police units.<sup>81</sup> ECRI reported that the police were accused of “being a neutral observer of the attacks by right-wing groups at best. At worst, they actually perpetrated racist violence. Furthermore, the police often refused to investigate, even when there was ample evidence.”<sup>82</sup>

To address the problem, the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) concluded in a special report on tackling racist violence in Greece by the police and the justice system in May 2011 that the “racist violence could not be dealt [with] effectively without a complete change in the way that the police handled such cases”.<sup>83</sup> Additionally, seminars organised by the Hellenic Police and the National Security School were introduced that contribute to intensified training of police at all levels through courses on human rights protection and racial discrimination. Since 2015 these seminars have increasingly included lectures on hate speech and hate crime. Close cooperation with the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has been established for the training of police officers. During the past two years the Greek Ombudsman’s office has also delivered a series of lectures at the Police Academy on human rights and police action with special reference to racism.

One of the most recent episodes of police brutality against Roma took place in 2016. Three young Roma complained they had been tortured by the Western Attica Hellenic Police Division. Although the plaintiffs asked that police officers be interrogated, asked prosecutors for a forensic investigation, and filed a complaint together with the Athens

<sup>79</sup> [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2018-frr-chapter-5-roma\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-frr-chapter-5-roma_en.pdf) (Accessed 15 December 2019)

<sup>80</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/oct/26/golden-dawn-infiltrated-greek-police-claims> (Accessed December 20, 2019)

<sup>81</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/04/tapped-phone-calls-reveal-golden-dawns-police-ties-180419212215599.html> (Accessed December 20, 2019)

<sup>82</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-greece/16808b5796> (Accessed 20 December 2019)

<sup>83</sup> [http://www.nchr.gr/images/English\\_Site/Ektheseis/eng2011.pdf](http://www.nchr.gr/images/English_Site/Ektheseis/eng2011.pdf) (Accessed 20 December 2019)

Special Prosecutor on Racist Violence and with the Greek Ombudsman, they were totally ignored.<sup>84</sup> Greek Roma are also frequently subject to racial profiling by the police.<sup>85</sup>

In 2013, the police carried out raids in the Roma settlements of *Zephyros* and *Avlizas* in *Acharnes*, and *Drosero* in *Xanthi* on the pretext of alleged criminal activity. Mrs. *Kalliopi Lykovardi*, the Officer of the Equality Circle section of the Greek Ombudsman's Office, stated during the discussion that they repeatedly contacted and submitted complaints to the Justice Ministry and the Citizens' Protection Ministry about these mass police operations in Roma settlements.

Successful implementation of projects such as "PROACTIVE" (described in previous chapters of the report), which attempts to bring together the police and Roma, is promising in terms of better understanding and consequently overcoming the problems Greek Roma face on a daily basis.

### Access to identity papers

Formally, all the necessary identification documents to which every Greek citizen is entitled can also be issued for Greek Roma. However, there are still Roma who do not have identity papers, as a result of which interventions within the scope of Roma inclusion are undermined.<sup>86</sup> To address this issue, there are special departments in several services of the Justice Ministry and State Attorney offices that offer free legal assistance. Mainly during the last years of the economic crisis in Greece, Roma have benefitted from this service, which provides free advocacy to all poor Greek citizens. In this context, Roma are taking advantage of this measure, especially when it comes to having their debts adjusted or even completely forgiven and also covering other needs, including the process of obtaining legal registration documents.

### Access to clean water and sanitation

The majority of Roma in Greece live in settlements located far from basic facilities and infrastructure that lack the essential services necessary to maintain basic health and safety standards. These conditions prove that in Greece, Roma integration exists only in theory. Many Roma communities in Greece are still requesting clean water, sanitation services or garbage collection in vain. Their situation greatly contradicts their formal equality as Greek citizens who, in theory, should all have access to such basic services. Such severe living conditions have a direct, damaging impact on the health of Greek Roma, including a high risk of infectious diseases, namely several types of hepatitis.<sup>87</sup> More than simple misconduct, we consider these living conditions to be stark evidence of discrimination against Roma. They put inhabitants at great health risk, especially the most vulnerable, the elderly, the very young and those with disabilities. Despite this fact, it is worth mentioning that there has never been any litigation related to these problems initiated by any Roma or non-Roma NGO.

<sup>84</sup> For details, see [https://www.omct.org/files/2019/07/25442/submission\\_greece.pdf](https://www.omct.org/files/2019/07/25442/submission_greece.pdf) (Accessed 20 December 2019)

<sup>85</sup> Roma inclusion measures reported under the EU Framework for NRIS. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council Report on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies – 2019

<sup>86</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/cswd\\_roma\\_inclusion\\_measures\\_reported\\_under\\_the\\_eu\\_framework\\_or\\_nris\\_pt2\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/cswd_roma_inclusion_measures_reported_under_the_eu_framework_or_nris_pt2_en.pdf) (Accessed 19 December 2019)

<sup>87</sup> <http://pacific.jour.auth.gr/emmeis/?p=8010>; <https://left.gr/news/eyalotoi-se-hiv-kai-ipatitides-oi-roma-logo-empodion-stin-prosvasi-sto-systima-ygeias>; [https://static.livemedia.gr/livemedia/documents/al19613\\_us80\\_20170128154910\\_toyloymi.pdf](https://static.livemedia.gr/livemedia/documents/al19613_us80_20170128154910_toyloymi.pdf) (Accessed 19 December 2019)

## ADDRESSING ANTIGYPSYISM

In Greece, the term “antigypsyism” was previously all but unknown both to the general public and to individuals or institutions dealing with Roma issues or the defence of human rights generally. It has become a known phenomenon just in the last decade. Roma tend not to report acts of antigypsyism in Greece, even though episodes of reported racist violence are indeed increasing<sup>88</sup> and Roma are exposed to institutional and everyday discrimination in employment, education,<sup>89</sup> housing, and health care services.<sup>90</sup> Several sources also indicate the underestimation of racist violence by the Greek authorities,<sup>91</sup> as well as the indifference of police towards racially-motivated crimes.<sup>92</sup>

### Institutional settings for fighting discrimination and addressing antigypsyism

The Greek state refrains from recognizing antigypsyism as a specific form of racism against Roma, and a main reason for that is the non-recognition of Greek Roma as a national minority. The antagonism with racist underpinnings that Roma in Greece face, therefore, is considered an example of discrimination against socially vulnerable groups, which indicates the elision of the racist characteristic of this discrimination. The distinctly higher degrees of social exclusion and of poverty among Greek Roma denote manifestations of antigypsyism and are indicators of a lack of substantive equality between Roma and the majority. Higher degrees of poverty and social exclusion are then explained as the reasons for antigypsyist attitudes towards Roma,<sup>93</sup> (instead of as the causes of poverty and social exclusion), thereby portraying Roma as responsible for the poor conditions they have to live in and hence, for antigypsyism itself.

Yet, there are several specialised structures and services in place aimed at addressing the problems of racism and racially motivated violence that are also relevant to the fight against antigypsyism. These services, however, do not focus just on Roma, but also include foreigners, immigrants, and refugees among their possible target groups. Sanctioned by the Constitution in 1998 to address violations of rights, discriminatory practices, and the unequal treatment of men and women, the independent authority of the Greek Ombudsman is one of the structures that acts as a mediator between the state and citizens. The limited administrative powers of the Ombudsman, however, prevent that authority from filing motions and intervening in cases to represent plaintiffs in the courts, and also prevent the Ombudsman from investigating complaints related to racial discrimination within the private sphere.<sup>94</sup>

In 2011, the Racist Violence Recording Network (RVRN) was launched at the initiative of the Greek National Commission for Human Rights (GNCHR) and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in Greece (UNHCR) to tackle the issues of lack of official data on racially-motivated incidents and to address the need to coordinate dispersed

<sup>88</sup> [https://www.unhcr.org/gr/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2019/04/RVRN\\_report\\_2018en.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/gr/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2019/04/RVRN_report_2018en.pdf) (Accessed 19 December 2019)

<sup>89</sup> <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/GREECE-2018-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf> (Accessed 19 December 2019)

<sup>90</sup> [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2018-anti-gypsyism-barrier-roma-inclusion\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-anti-gypsyism-barrier-roma-inclusion_en.pdf) (Accessed 19 December 2019)

<sup>91</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=20341&LangID=E> (Accessed 19 December 2019)

<sup>92</sup> [https://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/shadowreport2018\\_final.pdf](https://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/shadowreport2018_final.pdf) (Accessed 22 December 2019)

<sup>93</sup> European Social Charter, Comments by the on the 2nd National Report on the implementation of the European Social Charter submitted by THE GOVERNMENT OF GREECE. Report registered by the Secretariat on 14 May 2019. Page 59. (Accessed 22 December 2019)

<sup>94</sup> ECRI REPORT ON GREECE (fifth monitoring cycle) Adopted on 10 December 2014 Published on 24 February 2015 page 17. (Accessed 22 December 2019)

organisations dealing with complaints about racist violence.<sup>95</sup> In its most recent annual report in 2018, the RVRN found that six Greek Roma had been victims of racist attacks.<sup>96</sup> The relatively low numbers of reported cases might be indicative of the RVRN's dependence on victims to initiate these cases.<sup>97</sup> To the contrary, the FRA survey calls attention to unreported yet prevalent discriminative actions against Greek Roma in the fields of the labour market, health services, housing and education,<sup>98</sup> which are the main pillars of the NRIS. This phenomenon epitomises how antigypsyism impedes Roma social inclusion.

In addition to the RVRN, the National Council against Racism and Intolerance was established in 2015 with the participation of the RVRN, the National Commission of Human Rights, the UNHCR and the Greek Ombudsman, as an advisory body on the planning of policies against racism and the coordination of the bodies and services involved in the harmonisation of national anti-racism legislation with international and European rules and best practices, and more generally, the development of initiatives to protect victims of racist behaviour.

The General Secretariat for Transparency and Human Rights, operating under the Justice Ministry, is engaged in the activities of the High-Level Group of the EC on the Fight against Racism, Xenophobia and Other Forms of Intolerance. In addition, it deals with the Working Group of the EC on the elaboration of a common methodology for recording and collecting data on hate crime under the auspices of FRA.

There is also a special Prosecutor of Racist Violence responsible for the investigation of cases of racially motivated violence, and two special police departments (in Athens and Thessaloniki) and 68 police offices for investigating acts of racist violence. The Ministry of Justice has a special mechanism for the reporting of racist incidents and the protection of victims. This mechanism collects data from all police services.

Notwithstanding these positive initiatives, the Greek state is still required to invoke anti-racism provisions and to raise awareness of anti-discrimination through trainings among the judiciary and police.<sup>99</sup>

### Countering hate crime and hate speech against Roma, and antigypsyist rhetoric of politicians, public figures and media

Incidents of hate speech are widespread in Greece. In 2017, the Greek Helsinki Monitor (GHM) reported 31 allegedly racist incidents (out of 315 total) that targeted Roma.<sup>100</sup> Although the Prosecutor for Racist Crimes opened files for each case, the handling process is so slow that it yields no satisfactory results. Despite the prevalence of hate speech and racist attacks against Roma, they are underreported due to various causes; the victims usually do not denounce these incidents officially, either because of a lack of trust in or

<sup>95</sup> [http://rvrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Report\\_2017eng.pdf](http://rvrn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Report_2017eng.pdf). The Greek Ombudsman as well as 42 NGO...are members. They are providing medical, social and legal assistance to victims of racist attacks. (Accessed 22 December 2019)

<sup>96</sup> [https://www.unhcr.org/gr/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2019/04/RVRN\\_report\\_2018en.pdf](https://www.unhcr.org/gr/wp-content/uploads/sites/10/2019/04/RVRN_report_2018en.pdf) (Accessed 22 December 2019)

<sup>97</sup> ECRI REPORT ON GREECE (fifth monitoring cycle) Adopted on 10 December 2014 Published on 24 February 2015. (Accessed 5 March 2019)

<sup>98</sup> [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2018-anti-gypsyism-barrier-roma-inclusion\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2018-anti-gypsyism-barrier-roma-inclusion_en.pdf) (Accessed 21 December 2019)

<sup>99</sup> International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, Geneva, 4 August 2016 Initial Statement by Kostis Papaioannou SG for Human Rights

<sup>100</sup> <https://racistcrimeswatch.wordpress.com/2018/05/14/1-579/> (Accessed 21 December 2019)

fear of the authorities, because the complaints mechanism is insufficient,<sup>101</sup> or because of the threat of possible retaliation from the perpetrators.

After having turned a blind eye to racist crimes for a long time, in 2014 the Greek state passed an antiracist law that aims to reinforce existing antiracism legislation and pledges severe penalties for racist perpetrators. However, the legislation failed to preserve Article 2 of the previous antiracism law, which had criminalised hate speech *ex officio*. Instead, it is now expected that hate crime victims will file a complaint, which means undertaking bureaucratic procedures as well as paying fees, which are the main points of the criticism that the new law received from many organisations and activists.<sup>102</sup> Even in cases of initial complaints to police, ECRI reports that some victims faced the police's own lack of interest and refusal to help.<sup>103</sup>

In Greece, one explicit source of racism from which pure hate speech flows against any vulnerable group (i.e., refugees, immigrants, Roma, disabled people, etc.) is the fascist, ultra-right Golden Dawn party. During the last five years, after widespread exposure of the party's role in the murder of artist *Pavlos Fyssas* in 2013, the activity of Golden Dawn has become an object of ongoing monitoring by the police and juridical authorities as well as by national and European organizations defending human rights and antiracism. Although the party has been dissolved racist violence is still on the rise in Greece (see the Anti-Discrimination chapter).

The only known case of a complaint about antigypsyism in Greece is against a politician. The complaint was filed on 20 October 2017 by the Greek Helsinki Monitor against Mr *Adonis Georgiadis*, vice-chair of the *Nea Dimokratia* party in Greece, for his racist, slanderous assault against the Roma community in *Nomismatokopio* in the municipal department of Athens-*Chalandri*.<sup>104</sup> Unfortunately, either because Mr. *Georgiadis* is an MP or because justice in Greece works slowly, it is very likely that this case will never come to trial.

It is also very strange that as of this writing there still has been no complaint or proceedings filed against another MP, Mr. Thanassis Davakis, who on 2 March 2018 made the public statement that he 'forbids' Roma to vote for him in the next elections. "*I do not want the Gypsies to vote for me. [...] I regret the children who are born to these people*" said the MP at a meeting on 'Roma crime' organized at a school in Sparta.<sup>105</sup>

This incident is related to a common practice of the media, which reference the ethnicity of suspected crime perpetrators in their news reporting if the suspects are Roma but do not do so in cases of non-Roma suspects.<sup>106</sup> This practice has often been criticised not just by Roma representatives, but also by other civil society organisations, but unfortunately, the media not only do not comply with calls to cease this practice, but over time their behaviour in this regard has become more intense and widespread.

<sup>101</sup> GREEK HELSINKI MONITOR (GHM) MINORITY RIGHTS GROUP - GREECE (MRG-G) HUMANIST UNION OF GREECE (HUG) COORDINATED ORGANIZATIONS AND COMMUNITIES FOR ROMA HUMAN RIGHTS IN GREECE (SOKADRE). 2015

<sup>102</sup> [https://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/shadowreport\\_2013-14\\_en\\_final\\_lowres-2.pdf](https://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/shadowreport_2013-14_en_final_lowres-2.pdf) (Accessed 21 December 2019)

<sup>103</sup> ECRI REPORT ON GREECE (fifth monitoring cycle) Adopted on 10 December 2014 Published on 24 February 2015. (Accessed 21 December 2019)

<sup>104</sup> <https://racistcrimeswatch.wordpress.com/2017/10/>. <http://www.efsyn.gr/arthro/minysi-kata-toy-adoni-gia-ratsistiki-kai-sykofantiki-epithesi> (Accessed 21 December 2019)

<sup>105</sup> <http://www.ert.gr/eidiseis/ellada/politiki/protofanis-epithesi-tou-voylefti-tis-nd-th-davaki-stous-roma/> (21 December 2019)

<sup>106</sup> <http://www.thetoc.gr/koinwnia/article/o-krummenos-thisauros-tis-summorias-twn-roma--agloupa;> <http://www.news247.gr/koinonia/eglima/roma-eixan-rhmakseis-stis-diarrhkseis-ta-spitia-se-nea-iwnia-nea-filadelfeia-kai-hrakleio.6522214.html> (21 December 2019)

<https://tvstar.gr/voiotia-articles/94509-syllipseis-roma-gia-diarrhkseis-kai-klopes-eixan-rimaksei-pano-apo-50-spitia-se-orxomeno-kai-aliarto> (21 December 2019)

It is also very negative that the relevant state institutions designated for the protection of personal data and the objective presentation of the news (such as the national Council for Radio and Television, or the Journalist's Union) have not taken any position or action to condemn or sanction this phenomenon.

### Analysing and forming narratives and attitudes towards Roma

There are no studies or research about Greek society's views on Roma that are known to the authors of this report. Antigypsyism could be faced if the positive contribution of Roma in recent Greek history could be revealed, as it could present Roma heroes of Greek resistance groups from World War II,<sup>107</sup> or other stories describing the positive role and image of Roma in society – for example, a case of Roma from the Katerini settlement who found 17,000 EUR in cash and turned it in to the police,<sup>108</sup> or the success of Roma girls from a high school in Thessaloniki (*Dendropotamos*) who won first prize in an international competition called "First Lego League 2015" for their project in robotic science.<sup>109</sup>

It is very important to positively change the image of Roma, and not just the image held by the wider, non-Roma society, but also the image of Roma held within Roma communities, where to a great extent Roma have stopped believing in themselves, which is the most dangerous outcome.

An unofficial political education program began to take place about four decades ago (1979) in areas such as *Agia Varvara* and *Serres* in the Macedonia Region at the initiative of the local Greek Gypsy Associations, the results of which are now very visible, both in local living standards and in the level of the social acceptance of Roma. It is indicative that in the wider area of *Serres* there is a called *Pontismeno* with a total population of 970 people, of whom 630 are Roma, 69 of them are university-educated graduates. Huts, tents, and similar living situations are completely absent there. A similar situation exists in *Agia Varvara*, which is the political centre of the Roma community in Greece. The oldest Association of Gypsies in Greece operates there, which is also among the oldest in Europe (established 1939). Roma have been participating for 43 consecutive years in local government (since 1975), while many have been politicians and candidates for MP, MEP, etc.

These two cases are mentioned because, in both areas, the programmes implemented by Roma have addressed not just how to deal with the negative behaviours and views expressed towards them, but have also addressed what the Roma have to do in order to attain higher positions in the economic, political and social life of the place where they live. These programmes did not have mere participation as their aim, but were about Roma making it to the highest positions.

<sup>107</sup> There are several cases of Greek Roma who were famous in the fights of the Greek nation, since the struggle for freedom from the Ottoman Empire and after. Also, during the WW II, there were Roma persons which were members of the Greek resistance against the Axon's forces. The most famous of them are the cases of the hero Vasilis Mitrou from Evia Island which is one of the persons having statue in their remembrance, a group of about 20 Greek Roma from the community of Agia Varvara, who were executed by the Germans and on their remembrance, there is a monument with their names in Athens. See: <https://xyzcontagion.wordpress.com/2011/01/23/ελληνες-τογγάνοι-στην-εθνική-αντίστα> (Accessed 4 March 2019)

<sup>108</sup> <http://olympiobima.gr/katerini-roma-vrikan-17000-eyro-kai-ta-paredosan-stin-astynomia> (Accessed 4 March 2019)

<sup>109</sup> <http://www.kathimerini.gr/830589/article/epikairothta/ellada/vraveio-apespase-h-prwth-gynaikeia-omada-roma-rompotikhs> (Accessed 4 March 2019); <http://www.ert.gr/ert3/eidiseis-ert3/575921-2/> (Accessed 4 March 2019)

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Governance and overall policy framework

1. The role of Roma mediators in promoting Roma social inclusion is very important. They must be recognised as professionals by the Greek Supreme Council for Civil Personnel Selection and they should be recruited into all public services, particularly in health services (hospitals and health centres), education (schools and schools of second chance), employment services, justice (courts, prisons), administrative and social services of local authorities, and bodies charged with tasks in the field of anti-discrimination (the Ombudsman) to join the professions that are recognised and featured in the relevant recruitment announcements of the public bodies. The employment of Roma mediators in specialised agencies will be effective if they receive the necessary training and guidance from a suitable public authority, such as the new NRCP of General Secretariat for Solidarity and Combating Poverty.
2. An Information Bank of the funded projects aimed at supporting the Roma in Greece should be established. It can be established by General Secretariat for Solidarity and Combating Poverty with the cooperation of the ESIF Managing Authorities, the EC and the Council of Europe. The database should include details of all such publicly-funded initiatives, including their purposes and the locations where they are intended to be implemented as well as complementary details. In this way, institutions interested in developing programmes for the Roma will be able to avoid duplication of efforts, to carry out programmes that complement those that have been implemented before, and to deal with actors with the relevant know-how and experience. In addition, the Government (General Secretariat for Solidarity and Combating Poverty) will be able to identify regions/places that lack programmes/projects aimed at Roma inclusion and to balance this inequality by initiating them. The Information Bank could also offer information about Roma mediators who can be employed in the regions.
3. The participation of socially-excluded groups (such as the Roma) in political decision-making should become considered part of the public interest, because it has been proven that where Roma are involved in local administrations, their integration proceeds with success compared to those areas where Roma stay out of public life. For this reason, a special education programme could be developed that would be open to the general public but also focused on and tailored to the needs of Roma. Through this process, trainees would acquire knowledge and skills that will increase the possibility of the equal participation of young Roma men and women in the municipal and regional administration of the country. Once elected, the Roma should be supported with exercising the powers of their offices.

### Anti-discrimination

4. The main problem concerning equal treatment lies in the ignorance of existing regulations, to say nothing of their incomplete implementation by the police and judges. Also, this report has revealed that Greek Roma are not aware of existing laws that protect them against discrimination. Therefore, awareness-raising programmes about existing anti-discrimination law and how to be protected against unequal treatment are necessary for both Roma and state officials. These programmes should have easy-to-understand lectures and use audio-visual

materials. General Secretariat for Solidarity and Combating Poverty should engage in this effort as part of the coordination of the NRIS, but other specialised bodies can also participate in these awareness-raising activities, for example, the Justice Ministry, the Ombudsman, universities, regional lawyers' associations, Roma mediators or NGOs.

5. We recommend General Secretariat for Solidarity and Combating Poverty plan a campaign for awareness-raising among and training of school-aged non-Roma children, mainly in areas where high levels of negative opinions about the Roma are recorded. The campaign can include different activities and take different forms, for example, writing an essay on "What do you know about Greek Roma"? Such essays could lead to discussions with invited experts, Roma scholars, and students from areas where Roma do complete compulsory education in order to undermine the stereotypical image of the Roma that non-Roma children have in their minds.

### Addressing antigypsyism

6. The unbiased, non-stereotypical portrayal of Roma should be reinforced by the Ministry for the Press and Media as well as by regulatory and professional bodies concerning the media. Journalists should be educated on how to write about Roma; in public schools for journalists, at least, the topic should be included in the curriculum. Moreover, employment opportunities should be created for Roma professionals in mainstream media outlets and for volunteers/interns from Roma graduates of high schools. The Government can support educated Roma in establishing and operating their own media (printed, electronic or online).
7. The narrative about the Roma should be changed on both the regional and national levels. This can be achieved by emphasizing what mainstream society and Roma communities have in common in terms of their interests and needs. All the important common elements that intimately connect Roma with the wider society should be identified, highlighted, and properly promoted. History, homelands, customs, traditions and culture are very easily detectable pillars that could support the discovery of a common past, present and future. The whole process will, in principle, raise the awareness of entire local communities (Roma and non-Roma), changing the existing image and narrative about Roma while revealing their positive participation in society. The main objective of this effort is to conduct systematic research in order to collect and record data that shed light on the significant, positive presence of Roma in Greek society throughout history and eventually incorporate that information in textbooks, showing to future generations those previously-unknown pages of the country's history that are also being written by Roma.
8. The Ombudsman and General Secretariat for Solidarity and Combating Poverty Inclusion should address the problem of the underreporting of hate speech and hate crime as well as improve the responses of institutions when an act of antigypsyism is reported. Also, the Greek state is required to invoke anti-racism provisions and to raise awareness of anti-discrimination through trainings among the judiciary and police.

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General Secretariat for Gender Equality: [www.isotita.gr](http://www.isotita.gr)

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