



Civil society monitoring report  
on implementation  
of the national Roma integration strategy  
in Cyprus

*Assessing the progress  
in four key policy areas  
of the strategy*

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# CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	5
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	7
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	9
<b>EMPLOYMENT</b> .....	10
Improving access to labour market and effectiveness of employment services .....	10
Fight against discrimination in employment and antigypsyism at workplace.....	11
Addressing barriers and disincentives of employment .....	11
<b>HOUSING AND ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES</b> .....	13
Addressing Roma’s needs in spatial planning and access to basic amenities.....	13
Improving access to secure and affordable housing .....	14
Effectiveness of housing benefits and social assistance to access and maintain housing .....	15
Fight against discrimination, residential segregation and other forms of antigypsyism in housing .....	15
<b>IMPACT OF HEALTH CARE POLICIES ON ROMA</b> .....	17
Ensuring equal access to public health care services.....	17
Fight against discrimination and antigypsyism in health care .....	18
Addressing needs of the most vulnerable groups among Roma .....	18
<b>EDUCATION</b> .....	19
Improving access to quality preschool education and care.....	19
Improving quality of education until the end of compulsory schooling .....	19
Support of secondary and higher education particularly for professions with high labour market demand.....	22
Fight against discrimination, segregation and other forms of antigypsyism in education .....	23
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	24
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	26

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CYPROM	Cyprus Roma Association
DR.A.S.E	Actions for Social and School Inclusion
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
EC	European Commission
GMI	Guaranteed Minimum Income
MoEC	Ministry of Education and Culture
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoH	Ministry of Health
MPHS	Medical and Public Health Services (MPHS)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PES	Public Employment Service
RoC	Republic of Cyprus
SWS	Social Welfare Services
T/C	Turkish Cypriot
ZEP	Zones of Educational Priority



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2012, the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) submitted through the Social Welfare Services (SWS) to the EC the national policy measures for the social integration of the Cypriot Roma. These measures are part of the mainstream policies and target all vulnerable groups of the population; the only targeted policy measures specifically for Cypriot Roma were on housing and education, adopted in 2012.

Mainstream measures targeting all vulnerable groups including Cypriot Roma seem, however, not to resolve every day and ongoing difficulties of Cypriot Roma broader social inclusion. The inefficiency of the official system creates a vicious circle which maintains poor living conditions. Thus, Cypriot Roma still face social exclusion, high unemployment, unequal education progress, poor housing and poor health and hygiene.

This report explores the policies and actions of the Cypriote government regarding Roma and reflects on the barriers that Cypriot Roma communities' encounter in four areas: employment, housing and essential public services, health and education.

### Employment

A serious problem that Cypriot Roma face is the unemployment, which is related to low level of knowledge of Greek language, low educational level or disincentives to accept formal employment (such as long distance to places with employment opportunities or social income). Roma work mostly during the summer periods in recycling programs of the local municipality (e.g. the Municipality of Limassol), but young Roma appear to work also as hairdressers, engineers and builders.

Currently, there are no specific policies and actions for job inclusion for Roma; the measures in place target all socially vulnerable groups and all unemployed Cypriots. Such mainstream measures include recent engagement by the work councillors at all local provincial labour offices (yet, this measure is only temporary). It also appears that even though public employment services provide some support and assistance, including vocational guidance, counselling and training programmes, Cypriot Roma do not participate in these schemes either because they are not informed about these programmes or they are reluctant to participate in training programmes generally.

### Housing and essential public services

Cypriot Roma still face major difficulties in housing; some of them live in the old Turkish-Cypriot houses, while others in prefabricated houses in specially designated settlements in rural and segregated areas.

Recently, the government has established a specific strategy aiming at an on-going repairing of Cypriot Roma houses when these are in bad and poor conditions and need substantial repairs. However, the implementation of the programme seems problematic due to heavy administrative burden or its slow pace. Additionally, there have been two programmes of building new pre-fab housing in Roma settlements, which will contribute at strengthening the existing residential segregation of Roma.

### Impact of health care policies on Roma

There are no specific policies and actions for Cypriot Roma, but in some schools, translation into Turkish, the language spoken by Roma, is provided to facilitate vaccination of children (the translator in schools was originally introduced to support the communication between teachers, students and parents).

During the fieldwork conducted for this report in areas where Cypriot Roma reside, interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with saturation of their living conditions, in particular with access to basic amenities such as water and electricity (especially, Cypriot

Roma living in prefabricated houses), with negative impact on hygiene and health condition.

## Education

Despite a problematic situation in education of Roma in Cyprus, there is a recent positive trend in increasing enrolment rate of Roma at the pre-school and elementary school levels, and in consequence of decreasing school drop-outs. But, completion of secondary education among Roma remains very low (and in university education practically none).

Schools with higher number of Roma children are included in the actions for social and school inclusion (DR.A.S.E) programme, that is considered a high added-value intervention as it uses resources from cohesion policies to support education. From the school year 2017/2018, the programme is implemented in 96 schools and covers about 14.5 per cent of the student population. Through DR.A.S.E, other teachers, besides class teachers, offer in-school support to students.

Additionally, some Roma families, after consultation with school principals, leave their children in the all-day school programmes that provide Roma children with opportunity to eat their lunch and do their lessons at the school.

## INTRODUCTION

Roma arrived on the Cypriot island in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Their precise number today is not known; the Council of Europe estimates the number of Roma living in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) approximately 1,250, i.e. 0.11 per cent of the population (data from 2012) whereas the Roma National Integration Strategy (NRIS) for Cyprus estimates that in the areas controlled by RoC there are approximately 650-700 Cypriot Roma.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, there are some Roma from other countries (mainly Eastern European) living in Cyprus, although their number is not officially known.

Unlike the other minority communities in Cyprus (Maronites, Latins, and Armenians), the Cypriot Roma are not recognised by the 1960 country's constitution as a religious minority group, but they are considered members of the Turkish Cypriot community. Most Cypriot Roma identify themselves as *Gurbetties* and their language as *Gurbetcha*. The Greek Orthodox Roma, called *Mandi*, have always been fewer in numbers, and seem that today they have assimilated to the Greek-Cypriot majority of the island.<sup>2</sup>

As Cypriot citizens, Cypriot Roma can at least in theory benefit from all public policies and services, such as the universal health system, social protection system, education or public employment services. However, in reality, Roma's access to public services and their impact on Roma's inclusion remains low. Among reasons are persistent poverty, segregation, discrimination and prejudice against Roma, as discussed in [previous Roma Civil Monitor report on Cyprus](#) focusing on the topics of governance, anti-discrimination and fighting against antigypsyism.<sup>3</sup>

The current report focuses on country's public policies the fields of employment, housing, healthcare and education and their impact on Roma. It was prepared on the basis of an analysis of several information sources, including legal acts, reports, statements produced over the last years by the civil society, relevant published studies, previous official reports, newspapers, reports, and published case studies. Moreover, interviews were conducted with public authorities, service providers and Cypriot Roma representatives (members of the Cyprus Roma Association CYPROM). In addition, the report takes into consideration the personal experience of the authors during their communication with Roma people in the local Roma settlements.

<sup>1</sup> *National Roma integration strategy*, 6 June 2017, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/roma\\_cyprus\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/roma_cyprus_strategy_en.pdf) (accessed 21 January 2019)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Pelekani, C. & Symeou, L. (2018), *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Cyprus; Focusing on structural and horizontal preconditions for successful implementation of the strategy*. European Commission, DG Justice and Consumers.

## EMPLOYMENT

### Improving access to labour market and effectiveness of employment services

The majority of the Cypriot Roma population is below the poverty line. Unemployment among Roma remains a serious problem; it is related to the low level of knowledge of Greek language (mostly in case of the older generation), low educational level or disincentives to accept formal employment (such as long distance to places with employment opportunities or social income). To a large extent, their income is derived from the social benefits.

The Public Employment Service (PES) of the Department of Labour<sup>4</sup> offers job seekers, including for Roma, assistance in finding employment, through registration and placement services, as well as through vocational guidance, counselling and referrals to training programmes.<sup>5</sup>

Also, policy sets out the promotion of language programs for Cypriot Roma, including adults who do not speak Greek as a precondition for developing professional skills. Language courses provided in multi-purpose, multi-cultural centres are run by the municipalities of Limassol and Nicosia.

The problem of knowledge of Greek language, however, concerns mostly older generation. According to our observations and interviews with Cypriot Roma, young Roma work for example as hairdressers, car mechanic, builders and only recently as delivery drivers. Despite that these jobs may provide somehow different incomes and working conditions and require different education and skills, all these jobs are low earning jobs in the local job industry and demonstrate the typical positioning of Cypriot Roma in the labour market.

Beyond the language courses, there are no other specific governmental measures to promote Roma employment and their access to the labour market.

Despite the fact that public employment services provide assistance, including vocational guidance, counselling and training programmes, Cypriot Roma do not seem to take advantage of these schemes either because they are not well-informed about them or they are reluctant to be in these specific programmes, possibly because they are not convinced that such programmes are relevant or useful. As the following interviewee said:

*"I don't think that this kind of programmes will help me build my knowledge. Also, I have my family; I cannot be absent every day, so many hours from my family. I must find a job now, because I have rent to pay and lots of other expenses. My priority is my family." (Interviewee 3).*

Also, they are not aware of the trainings' formats; they think that it will be like in school with rules and special conditions. It became obvious through interviews how important it is for officials to disseminate information in a more efficient way in order to make the programmes more attractive to Roma and to increase their participation.

<sup>4</sup> There is also an Online System of the Department of Labour, Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance which provides services to job seekers and employers who are registered or not at the Labour Offices. "Cypriot and European Citizens residing in Cyprus have access to the job vacancies published in this website, as well as persons of other nationalities lawfully residing in Cyprus that have the right to freely access the Cyprus Labour Market." See: <https://www.pescps.dl.mlsi.gov.cy/CPSWeb/f001w.jsp> (accessed 9 November 2018)

<sup>5</sup> Policy Measures of Cyprus for the Social Inclusion of Roma, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/roma\\_cyprus\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/roma_cyprus_strategy_en.pdf) (accessed 9 November 2018)

However, there has been one important action implemented by the Limassol municipality, which was utilised by young Roma, even though it was not addressed only to Roma people. The Limassol Municipality is currently participating in the project “Increasing the participation of citizens in recycling procedures through the implementation of compensation systems”, “Benefit as You Save – BAS” under *INTERREG – BalkanMed (2014-2020)*. Some 5-10 Roma youngsters, mainly boys, are employed in the programme during summer time (work period December 2017-2019). A few of them reported they wish to maintain this as their full-time job.

## Fight against discrimination in employment and antigypsyism at workplace

Antigypsyism is about the way that the non-Roma community and society as a whole relate to the Roma community.<sup>6</sup> Cypriot Roma appear to be “invisible”<sup>7</sup> in the RoC. Most of the Greek-Cypriots are not aware of the existence of Cypriot Roma in the RoC or might know very little about them. In addition, they maintain prejudices against Roma (e.g. that they are dirty, they do not go to school, they cause problems all the time, they steal, etc.) (Interviewee 1).

In spite of the measures taken by the RoC to improve the situation of Roma (especially in education), Roma continue to face prejudice and particular difficulties in various sectors<sup>8</sup>, especially in employment, due to the fact that Roma are considered Turkish-Cypriots and some employers prefer to employ Greek-Cypriots or other ethnicities apart from Turkish (interviewee 3). Cypriot Roma seem overall to face discrimination at the workplace, and it appears that the official state cannot take any action related to this (interviewee 2).

## Addressing barriers and disincentives of employment

Some Cypriot Roma adults, during their interview confessed that they could not work because they receive the guaranteed minimum income (GMI). The guaranteed minimum income is set at 480 EUR, plus 240 EUR if the beneficiary’s partner is not in the labour market; additionally, for each child aged over 14 the household receives another 240 EUR, while for a child under 14, 144 EUR is provided.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the minimum monthly wage upon recruitment in the RoC is currently 870 EUR,<sup>10</sup> and in case of employees, who have completed a six-month period of employment at the same employer, 924 EUR. Not all the Cypriot Roma are informed that they can work and in case the amount of their salary is lower than the GMI, then they receive the difference between the actual income from work and the GMI. Others do not accept to register in this working scheme, given that they prefer not to work and to receive the full amount of GMI.

As regards the informal employment, it appears that man, youth, unemployed, self-employed and rural dwellers are more likely than other social groups to engage in informal self-employment.<sup>11</sup> As one of the representatives of the Cypriot Roma pointed out, he

<sup>6</sup> *Mirrors – Manual on combating antigypsyism through human rights education*. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680494094> (accessed 9 November 2018)

<sup>7</sup> *ECRI Report on Cyprus 2016*, p. 21

<sup>8</sup> Trimikliniotis, N. (2012). *Discrimination on the ground of religion belief – Cyprus report*. Utrecht: Human European Consultancy, p. 8.

<sup>9</sup> Ioakim Sokratis, *€480 minimum guaranteed income. Beneficiaries, criteria and other provisions*, in: Ant.com.cy, 19 June 2014, available at: <https://www.ant1.com.cy/news/oikonomia/article/83789/480-to-elaxisto-eggyhmeno-eisodhma-oi-di/> (accessed 10 May 2019).

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.mlsi.gov.cy/mlsi/dlr/dlr.nsf/All/F039CE17CA09933AC2257A9300246936> (accessed 24 January 2019)

<sup>11</sup> *Policy Brief on Informal Entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial Activities in Europe*, available at: [https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/Policy%20Brief%20on%20Informal%20Entrepreneurship\\_%20Entrepreneurial%20Activities%20in%20Europe.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/Policy%20Brief%20on%20Informal%20Entrepreneurship_%20Entrepreneurial%20Activities%20in%20Europe.pdf) (Accessed 20 January 2019)

prefers to work in informal entrepreneurs, because he does not have to pay so much tax and can also benefit from more flexible work arrangements. Flexibility in work appears to be a significant factor of their job investigations given that it seems to suit more Cypriot Roma and especially women who need to combine work and family.

*"I prefer to have a more flexible job and receive money on cash; in that way I can pay everyone I owe in my time. I will not get a bourgeoisie from the bakery, grocery, etc."* (Interviewee 4)

As for the young Roma, some live with their parents and they make a living with their parents' money, others borrow, and others work occasionally. Most adult Roma women on their part did not finish even primary school and thus are not trained in writing and reading. Moreover, among the Cypriot Roma communities, still the prevailing view is that the position of the woman is at home and that the master of the house is the man. "The man is responsible for bringing home food", as Interviewee 4 stressed. Another issue that concerns Roma women is that they have to look after their children, and they do not have anybody to leave their children with as day-care.

Cypriot Roma like other Cypriot citizens can register their child in state kindergartens from the age of 3 years old. Although they have this opportunity they do not feel confident to do so, and thus they do not register their child at the kindergarten at the age of 3 (interviewee 3) but at the age of 5 when this is compulsory. Fewer register their children directly at the primary school (interviewee 3), thus skipping one year of compulsory education and without facing any legal actions.

## HOUSING AND ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES

### Addressing Roma's needs in spatial planning and access to basic amenities

The majority of Cypriot Roma reside in Agios Antonios area in Limassol, in Turkish-Cypriot houses and in the villages of Makounta, Stavrokonnou and Polis-Chrysochou in Paphos. Very few Cypriot Roma live in other areas of the RoC controlled areas and these are integrated in the Greek-Cypriot communities. Some houses still lack basic necessities (especially at the Polemidia area), such as electricity and water supply as well as basic hygiene. Moreover, a large number of Cypriot Roma are crammed under the same roof and there is a lack of adequate space and children most of the time share their room with their parents or all the children (boys and girls of different ages).

Most Cypriot Roma who live in the centre of towns have access to electricity. On the contrary, Roma living in settlements do not<sup>12</sup> and sometimes they need to "borrow" from their neighbours and relatives. In some cases, electrification of the settlement is achieved through power generators.<sup>13</sup>

Sewage system and waste disposal in settlements do exist and they are largely satisfactory. Absorbent pits are used widespread. The observation of the authors during the fieldwork in the area at Polemidia indicates that there are bins on the outskirts of the area for waste collection, but they are insufficient. The garbage collection is done by the municipal cleaning service. Cleanliness within the settlements, especially in the settlement of Polemidia, is not at all satisfactory.

Regarding the water and electricity supply, Cypriot Roma who have long-term residential status in the RoC and who have been living in houses that have been granted to them by the Ministry of the Interior are being supplied with water and electricity. In some houses in areas with prefabricated houses, there is no water supply. Either because they don't have permission (contract) from the MoI to live there or because the previous Roma didn't pay the bills, thus the Electricity Authority of Cyprus (EAC) and the Waterboard cannot give access to electricity and water if they will not pay the previous bills. But, due to the fact that the bills are too high, the other Cypriot Roma cannot afford to pay and they live without electricity and water. It appears that in order to solve this problem, Cypriot Roma who live in the settlements, especially in Polemidia, "rent" from their neighbours.

Other water related problems include excessive bills and unpaid bills, resulting in a water supply disruption. Stopping water in a household means at the same time water deprivation in more houses that are supplied with the same supply.<sup>14</sup>

The residents who live in formerly Turkish-Cypriot houses, maintained by the state Turkish-Cypriot property management service,<sup>15</sup> until their initial owners, currently living in the Turkish occupied areas of the country, return to claim them back, pay a very small amount for rent every month to the government. The rent has been increased in 2017 as

<sup>12</sup> Observation; the authors visited the settlements at Polemidia and talked with Roma respondents 8.11.2018.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Roma respondent 8.11.2018

<sup>14</sup> Observation; the authors visited the settlements at Polemidia and talked with Roma respondents 8.11.2018.

<sup>15</sup> Turkish Cypriot Property Management system, see: [http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/tcp/tcp.nsf/home\\_en/home\\_en?openform](http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/tcp/tcp.nsf/home_en/home_en?openform) (accessed 20 January 2019)

part of a plan by the Ministry of Interior to amend outdated procedures and introduce a fairer distribution of Turkish-Cypriot property to beneficiaries.<sup>16</sup>

In order to improve the housing conditions of Cypriot Roma and their integration into the communities in which they reside, as well as to the wider community, the housing plans of all Cypriot Roma have been drafted by the state and have been approved by relevant decisions of the Council of Ministers.<sup>17</sup> The plan was to accommodate the Cypriot Roma in the Turkish Cypriot (T/C) properties. In 2005, the cost to repair 20 T/C houses was 80,000 CYP (46,822 EUR). Also, due to the fact that the T/C houses were not enough to accommodate all Cypriot Roma, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) proceeded to create a small settlement of 16 prefabricated houses at Polemдия area. The cost of erecting this settlement reached 320,675 CYP (187,683 EUR). In Paphos, the majority of Cypriot Roma live in the communities of Makoundas, Stavrokonou and Chrysochous. The MoI has repaired and improved the existing T/C houses. In addition, 20 Cypriot Roma families were settled in 20 prefabricated units, with all the comfort and facilities (continuous supply of drinking water, electrical and telephone installations, sewers, etc.) in Makunta. Other three Cypriot Roma families reside in three similar units in the Community of Chrysochous. The erection of that settlement as well as the repair of three T/C housing units, in 2003 amounted to 270,000 CYP (158,024 EUR). Also in 2004, they spent 80,000 CYP (46,822 EUR) to repair 10 T/C housing.<sup>18</sup>

Recently, some Cypriot Roma's houses were approved for repair and they were going to be repaired soon (interviewee 5). However, not all Cypriot Roma received response to their requests and as a result, they have arguments with the work officers (Interviewee 3).<sup>19</sup> The MoI have repaired 20 Turkish-Cypriot houses<sup>20</sup> in Limassol and 25 Turkish-Cypriot houses in Paphos.<sup>21</sup>

### Improving access to secure and affordable housing

During our interviews with Cypriot Roma, we were informed by some of them that they rent, or they want to rent a house near their parents' house because they want to feel secured. They seem to prefer to have their parents next to them to take care of the children and pick up the children from the school (interviewee 5). Some families, especially young Roma, have applied to the Turkish Cypriot property management service at the MoI to receive a Turkish-Cypriot house for a long time and they have been waiting for a long time to receive a response back (interviewee 3).<sup>22</sup> Some other Cypriot Roma who live in

<sup>16</sup> Psyllides, G., *Probe into Turkish Cypriot property fraud*, in: Cyprus Mail, 23 August, 2017, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2017/08/23/probe-turkish-cypriot-property-fraud/> (accessed 20 January 2019)

<sup>17</sup> ECRI (2005) *Government comments on the Third report on Cyprus*, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/government-comments-on-the-third-report-on-cyprus/16808b563e> (accessed 9 November 2018)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Cypriot Roma respondent 6 November 2018.

<sup>20</sup> Following the 1974 Turkish invasion, properties abandoned by Turkish Cypriots in the south were, by law, put under the protection of the interior ministry, or the guardian of Turkish Cypriot properties. Psyllides, G., *Probe into Turkish Cypriot property fraud*, in: Cyprus Mail, 23 August 2017, available at: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2017/08/23/probe-turkish-cypriot-property-fraud/> (accessed 20 January 2019)

<sup>21</sup> European Commission, *Roma Integration in Cyprus, Funding, strategy, facts and figures and contact details for national Roma contact points in Cyprus*, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-and-eu/roma-integration-eu-country/roma-integration-cyprus\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-and-eu/roma-integration-eu-country/roma-integration-cyprus_en) (accessed 9 November 2018).

<sup>22</sup> Due to the fact that the Ministry of Interior did not respond to our request for information, we cannot provide any information on the number of Cypriot Roma who applied for a house at the Turkish-Cypriot Property Management Service.

Limassol tried to rent a house in the private market (either with the help of a translator or with the help of the social worker of the Bi-communal Community Centre in Limassol), but the prices were too high. Hence, they still live with their parents or with relatives.

A problem that arises is that Roma families are numerous, and the houses provided by the Turkish-Cypriot Property Management Service are not enough to accommodate them all.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, based on our interviews with Cypriot Roma representatives, some houses are not appropriate for some Cypriot Roma families, namely they are too small to accommodate an entire large family. (Interviewee 4). This makes the situation for Roma families very difficult.

There are large families, most of them of 6 or 7 members, who live in two-bedroom houses (interviewee 3). In most cases, the houses are not appropriate for the size of the family living in each house. Another possible immediate measure is the more regular control of the house situation by the work officers of the Turkish-Cypriot Property Management Agency, especially the houses in Polemidia area. In that way they can keep records on the house situation, the residence of the houses and their needs.

Although licenses have been issued for certain Turkish-Cypriot properties, and prefabricated houses have been built to Cypriot Roma families living in the RoC, there are some families that have not been licensed for a house or have not managed to find any house to rent and thus they stay with relatives. In order to be eligible for a house and apply for a house, Roma should submit a certification by the local authority(s) for permanent residence in the RoC controlled areas for the past 5 years.

### Effectiveness of housing benefits and social assistance to access and maintain housing

Very few Roma families rent houses, usually not far away from the local Roma neighbourhood, because the rent in other areas is very high. Part of the rent is covered by the Social Welfare Services (Interviewee 3).<sup>24</sup>

If the rent paid by the beneficiary is less than the amount calculated on the basis of the GMI, then the actual amount of the rent is paid. If the rent paid by the beneficiary is greater than the amount paid calculated on the basis of the GMI, then the amount calculated on the GMI is paid. The amount corresponding to the rent is paid directly to the homeowner.<sup>25</sup>

### Fight against discrimination, residential segregation and other forms of antigypsyism in housing

As discussed in the previous Roma Civil Monitor report, Roma in Cyprus live in segregated settings.<sup>26</sup> To address Cypriot Roma's housing needs the Ministry of Interior has created two housing projects for the Cypriot Roma, one in Limassol and one in Paphos consisting of 16 prefabricated residential units outside Limassol and 24 outside of Paphos. These

<sup>23</sup> We could not collect more data regarding the number of houses given to Cypriot Roma because the Ministry of Interior did not reply to our request for information.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Roma respondent 6 November 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Questions and answers regarding the GMI scheme available at: <https://bit.ly/2KMtHUm> (accessed 20 January 2019)

<sup>26</sup> Pelekani, C. & Symeou, L. (2018) *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Cyprus; Focusing on structural and horizontal preconditions for successful implementation of the strategy*. European Commission, DG Justice and Consumers. Available at: <https://cps.ceu.edu/sites/cps.ceu.edu/files/attachment/basicpage/3034/rcm-civil-society-monitoring-report-1-cyprus-2017-eprint-fin.pdf>

housing units are equipped with all basic amenities such as drinking water and electricity supply, solar water heaters, telephone line installation, sewage system, etc.<sup>27</sup>

This policy of building prefabricated housing units for Roma in isolated areas with limited access to public services promotes a practice of de facto segregation.<sup>28</sup> As a result, Cypriot Roma live in a ghetto and continue to be marginalised from the rest of the society.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> ECRI (2016) *Fifth report on Cyprus*, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-cyprus/16808b563b> (accessed 9 November 2018)

## IMPACT OF HEALTH CARE POLICIES ON ROMA

### Ensuring equal access to public health care services

Public healthcare in Cyprus is administered by the Ministry of Health (MoH). The Ministry places patients into three categories based on income, chronic illnesses and number of children, consisting of people who receive treatment free of charge, those who pay reduced fees and those who pay fully.<sup>29</sup>

Medical cards are issued to Cypriots and EU citizens who reside permanently in Cyprus.<sup>30</sup> New regulations on public hospital services, income criteria for card issuance, new charges for pharmaceuticals and laboratory tests, etc. were introduced in August 2013.<sup>31</sup> Since then, all insured patients pay 3 EUR for a visit to a general practitioner and 6 EUR for a visit to a specialist. In addition, they pay a fee 0.5 EUR for each prescribed pharmaceutical product and 0.5 EUR for each laboratory test with a maximum charge of 10 EUR per medicine prescription or per laboratory test prescription respectively.<sup>32</sup>

Most of the Cypriot Roma living in the RoC have medical cards and visit the Public Hospital. However, when it comes to serious health issues, due to difficulty in communicating with doctors and staff, many Cypriot Roma choose the hospitals and clinics in the occupied areas of the RoC (Interviewee 1).<sup>33</sup>

The representative of the MoH, who is also the contact person for the MoH on matters concerning the rights of the Roma in health care benefits informed us that the Ministry of Health is making efforts to ensure access to vulnerable population groups for care services. Various actions are being carried out to target vulnerable groups including Cypriot Roma, taking into consideration the protection of minors, combating exploitation and protecting maternity (interviewee 12).

As with all citizens, the MoH provides the basic vaccination scheme free of charge. Mothers belonging to vulnerable population groups are encouraged to visit maternity centres where they receive information and counselling from healthcare professionals for both their personal health and their children's health. Roma children of school age attending state schools in the RoC are monitored through the school health service, while other Cypriot Roma are usually holders of a medical identity card and are monitored in the public hospital.

In communication with the health visitor of the primary school in Limassol (Interviewee 8), it was indicated that most of the Cypriot Roma go to the old city hospital to vaccinate and to vaccinate their children.

<sup>29</sup> Health care of Cyprus, see: <http://www.expattarrivals.com/europe/cyprus/healthcare-cyprus> (accessed 23 January 2019)

<sup>30</sup> Ministry of Health, see: <https://www.moh.gov.cy/moh/moh.nsf/All/FD0134CDED1D026243257A37002C2C47?OpenDocument> (accessed 23 January 2019)

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Roma respondent 6 November 2018.

## Fight against discrimination and antigypsyism in health care

There is no evidence to show forms of racism and antigypsyism in health care. As an interviewee indicated, no specific measures for Roma have been taken (Interviewee 12).

However, the health of marginalised Roma living in poverty is threatened by unhygienic conditions in settlements mainly because of the lack of access to water.<sup>34</sup> This leads to lack of cleanliness and hygiene.

## Addressing needs of the most vulnerable groups among Roma

The Medical and Public Health Services (MPHS) offers general programmes for the detection and treatment of infectious diseases, services vaccinations, trunk tomography, medical examinations, anti-smoking and information programmes on reproductive health and psychological support. There are no however specific measures for the Roma.<sup>35</sup>

The fact that no specific measures and programmes are being provided for Cypriot Roma enlarges the gap in access to healthcare between the Cypriot Roma and the majority population, which indeed requires further in-depth investigation.

<sup>34</sup> The authors visited the area of Polemidia and talked to Cypriot Roma who lives there regarding their living and their situation.

<sup>35</sup> ECRI (2016) *Fifth report on Cyprus*, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-cyprus/16808b563b> (accessed 9 November 2018)

## EDUCATION

The MoEC offers free education to all children at all levels of education (primary, secondary general, secondary technical, and vocational education and training). Primary and secondary education up to the age of 15 is compulsory.<sup>36</sup> Cypriot Roma children enrol in Greek-Cypriot schools, like any other child at school age. In the more recent years, it is noted an increase in the pre-school and elementary school enrolment. And, while the school drop-out rate in these two levels of education seems to be reducing, the progress to the secondary education is still very limited as only few Cypriot Roma make it, resulting in very few completing the “gymnasium” (lower secondary school) and even fewer the upper secondary school level. University education is not achieved yet by Cypriot Roma.

### Improving access to quality preschool education and care

The most common factors that lead Cypriot Roma not to send their children to preschool education is mainly the lack of trust (interviewee 6). They also consider that their children are still too young to go to school and they should look after them until they will become 5 or 6.<sup>37</sup> Some Cypriot Roma although are informed in advance when to enrol their children they do not register their children at the age of three years old. They register on the last class or they do not enrol at all at these ages until they will become on the age to go to the primary school (interviewee 7).

Thus, Cypriot Roma children face visible difficulty in staying in school and in class, especially at the beginning of the school year. It takes time and a lot of effort from the school head teacher and teachers to help Cypriot Roma children to accept the student role and identity. Immediate measures are important in order to identify main problems and barriers in registering Cypriot Roma children. Early intervention mechanisms could contribute in school adjustment before Cypriot Roma children move to primary school. Moreover, closer and systemic cooperation among class teachers, parents, and school head teachers of the two school levels need to be enhanced.

### Improving quality of education until the end of compulsory schooling

The MoEC demonstrates achievements in addressing Cypriot Roma school inclusion and has thus initiated in the recent years targeted actions aiming to improve the situation of Cypriot Roma in particular. More specifically, the MoEC has developed two main vertical initiatives. The first one is the implementation of the extra-curricular courses for Cypriot Roma named “*The language, culture and tradition of Roma*”. The courses are taught since 2013 and last 90 minutes per week for 24 weeks. The aim of the course is to increase students’ awareness about their mother tongue, as well as to promote Cypriot Roma culture, history and language (*Kurbetcha/Gurbetcha*). Students are expected to read, speak and understand their language, to improve their critical thinking, and reflect on their cultural and linguistic identity. Thus, Cypriot Roma children can be empowered and may strength their capacity to defend their basic human rights regarding their identity, culture and tradition.<sup>38</sup> The programme starts every year in November and finishes in May. Every year around 10 Cypriot Roma students register. The teacher separates the students according to their level. Due to the fact that most of the Roma cannot write and read neither in Greek nor in Turkish the teacher finds different ways to make the course more attractive and effective. For the students who are registered at lower level the teacher

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Interview with representatives of Roma on the 12 November 2018.

<sup>38</sup> Pelekani, C. (2018) *Gurbetties and their language Gurbetcha*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus.

works more with pictures and technology. She created online games<sup>39</sup> and helps the students learn about their culture, their history and their language.

The second initiative relates to the notion that learning the official school language, i.e. Greek in this case, will be significant for Cypriot Roma to face literacy barriers. The MoEC suggested the implementation of the Greek lessons to Roma and all the vulnerable groups and immigrants free of charge.

Cypriot Roma can benefit from mainstream/horizontal policy measures and initiatives of the MoEC targeting all marginalised and vulnerable groups school inclusion and success.<sup>40</sup> The most prominent one used to be the Zones of Educational Priority (ZEP) initiative. Schools with a comparatively large number of Roma students have been included initially under this initiative from 2007-2014. In 2015, a new ESF-funded follow-up project called "Actions for Social and School Inclusion" (DRA.S.E)<sup>41</sup> was launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture.<sup>42</sup> The DRA.S.E program includes both the St. Antonios Primary School and St. Antonios High School, the two schools with the larger number of Cypriot Roma students in the RoC controlled areas. The DRA.S.E. program is a co-funded program: 85 per cent from the European Social Fund and 15 per from national resources and targeting vulnerable population groups. As the MoEC interviewee informed us, *"the objectives of DRA.S.E. are to support the economically weaker population groups, strengthen social cohesion, reduce the risk of social marginalization and exclusion, improve learning outcomes, and reduce school failure and delinquency and early school dropout. Also, through the DRA.S.E. program there is direct support for students and their families and there is also the aim of enhancing high-risk students who may remain functionally illiterate."*

In addition, *"DRASE offers free creative work programs and booster lessons in the morning and afternoon. It is also possible to offer psychosocial support services. At the same time, all children who meet the socio-economic criteria are part of the Ministry's feeding program for a free breakfast"*. (Interviewee 13).

Of particular importance was the contribution of the Sofia Foundation for the feeding of the children of the St. Antonios Primary school in Limassol. Also, specific measures are being taken to support all Turkish-Cypriot students and new educational programmes have been developed in the educational reform with indicators of success and competence for all subjects. Particular emphasis is placed on the differentiation of teaching in mixed preparedness classes. Also, a key policy of the MoEC is the anti-racist policy aimed at respecting diversity, combating all forms of discrimination, and creating a culture of acceptance and solidarity among all students in schools.

Despite the measures taken by MOEC, the transition from primary to secondary education presents some difficulties to Cypriot Roma. Some Roma parents do not want to register their children to secondary education mainly because they are afraid that their children will not make it due to a limited knowledge of the Greek language, and also because there

<sup>39</sup> Example of an online activities during the lesson: For the A1.1 level available at: <https://www.cram.com/flashcards/games/stellar-speller/gurbetcha2-4649984> and for the A1.2 level available at: <https://www.cram.com/flashcards/games/jewel/gurbetcha2-4649984>

<sup>40</sup> Republic of Cyprus (2014) *Fourth Periodic Report of Cyprus on the Application of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, available at: <https://bit.ly/2XPDE72> (accessed 10 June 2019)

<sup>41</sup> MOEC, Newsletter 11 March 2016, available at: <http://enimerosi.moec.gov.cy/archeia/1/ypp3831a> (accessed 15 July 2018)

<sup>42</sup> EACEA National Policies Platform, *4.4 Inclusive programmes for young people*, available at: <https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/en/content/youthwiki/44-inclusive-programmes-young-people-cyprus> (accessed 15 July 2018)

is no security at school. (Interviewee 1). Some Cypriot Roma find it difficult to adapt to the new system of high school and drop out of school.

A number of studies were conducted in primary school and a few in lower secondary school education when compulsory education ends as regards the education of Cypriot Roma. All these studies point out that Roma parents appear as not seeing a reason to send their children to school and are worried that their children are getting into fights and feel excluded<sup>43</sup> and thus maintain negative attitudes towards education<sup>44</sup>. In addition, Cypriot Roma seem to face racial prejudice in school settings. Their segregation in schools with high concentration of migrants, minorities, and Greek-Cypriots from poorer backgrounds, despite the official policy of non-segregation enhances Cypriot Roma marginalisation. The inadequacy of the school curricula, the absence of relevant teacher training, language barriers of Cypriot Roma children, and the overall failure of the educational system to recognise Roma culture and its contribution to society have also been reported as factors predetermining Cypriot Roma poor performance in schools<sup>45</sup>.

Primary education schooling of Cypriot Roma children received the most attention not only in empirical studies as the cited ones above but also intervention projects and studies, which received funding from external institutions, mainly the EU. These programmes were funded in different periods starting from 2009 and finishing in 2016 and were implemented by different institutions and centres aiming at the social inclusion not only of Cypriot Roma but in some cases other marginalised groups as well. Moreover, some of the projects collaborated with a specific school in Limassol (Agios Antonios Primary school), given that this is the school with the larger Cyprus Roma pupil population. The first project *In-Service Training for Roma Inclusion (INSETRom)*,<sup>46</sup> aimed mainly at training of teachers who work with Cypriot Roma children. Due to the fact that teachers do not have permanent stay in a school (maximum 7 years), new teachers come to the school and they do not know what the previous teachers applied and what worked with the education of children from vulnerable groups. This project proposed a Roma sensitive curriculum and indicated that more training of teachers should be made in order to continue similar initiatives. The project suggested that training which is responsive to the concerns of both teachers and Roma families can have a positive impact on the effectiveness and success of training as such.

Another relevant EU-funded project was the two-year (2012-2014) *School Education for Roma Integration (SEDRIN)* project and its application in Cyprus included investigation of

<sup>43</sup> Trimikliniotis, N. (2007) *Report on measures to combat discrimination. Directives 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC: Country Report*, available at: [file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/doc1\\_7179\\_697391720.pdf](file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/doc1_7179_697391720.pdf)

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<sup>44</sup> Symeou, L. (2015). "The educational and school inclusion of Roma in Cyprus and the SEDRIN partners' country consortium". In E. Friedman & V. A. Friedman (Eds.) *Romani Worlds: Academia, Policy and Modern Media*. European Academic Network on Romani Studies (pp. 48-70). Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Institute for Research on National Minorities & Council of Europe, available at: <http://romanistudies.eu/news/ebook-romani-worlds/>

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<sup>45</sup> Symeou et al (2009). Symeou & Karagiorgi (2018).

<sup>46</sup> *INSETRom project*. For more information and details about the, please, see: <http://www.iaie.org/insetrom/>

Roma children's school exclusion from the perspective of their families and what were the needs of Roma women to be able to support their children to enrol and successfully empower them in school when at the age of early childhood.

The project *Schools as Learning Communities in Europe: Successful Educational Actions for all* (SEAS4ALL) and a project initiated by the Counselling Centre for the Support of the Families and the Youth "Irakleitos" with the Municipality of Kato Polemidia (at the outskirts of Limassol), went beyond school. They investigated the Greek-Cypriots' opinions and attitudes towards Roma and Cypriot Roma and investigated issues regarding Roma's school attendance and their needs. Both projects seemed to be useful as they provided opportunities to Cypriot Roma (especially women) to express themselves and refer to their life, lifestyle and issues concerning the school system, health, unemployment, etc. Despite that the programme has finished, the Counselling Centre for the Support of the Families and the Youth "Irakleitos" keeps visiting the settlements at Polemidia and offers them support.

### Support of secondary and higher education particularly for professions with high labour market demand

Very few Cypriot Roma attend higher secondary education which is not compulsory in the RoC and only a few Cypriot Roma currently pursue higher education. Some Cypriot Roma students attending the secondary education this year attend classes offered by the Bi-communal Multipurpose Centre. The Bi-communal Multipurpose Centre since 2006 offers a variety of services to all citizens, provide counselling and support services to families, young people, children and elder people, and tries to solve various problems faced by Cypriot Roma in the area of Agios Antonios. It also acts as a supportive service seeking to become a link between the various services and residents of the area. The Centre performs a number of activities which are offered free of charge to interested parties<sup>47</sup>.

During the interview conducted with the work officer of the Bi-communal Multipurpose Centre (interviewee 9), lessons are delivered once a week for 1.5 hr. A number of 10 Cypriot Roma children and youth participate in hairdressing and theatre lessons. The aim of these courses is to train them, to employ quality time and counselling.

Another program currently running, which is approved by the MoEC, is called an alternative program of homework '*Programma enalaktikis katoikou*'. This program started in the school year 2016-2017 and continues to date. Children who cannot attend high school because they cannot comply with the new school environment (the transition from primary school to high school) after the approval of the MoEC they participate in this program. So far, four children have attended.

The Bi-communal Multipurpose Centre also offers summer programs that involve neighbourhood children, including the Roma children. The Centre collaborates with the community and the Roma local community and provides them with assistance and support. More detailed information regarding this program was not available during the time of the writing of this report.

Finally, a recent project aiming at Cypriot Roma youth called PEER: Participation, Experiences and Empowerment for Roma Youth implemented in 2015-2016 aimed at enabling Roma young people to co-lead and take part in activities that involve learning about participatory action research together and identifying issues that concern them, getting a better understanding about the issues by learning from others, analysing the

<sup>47</sup> Pelekani, C. (2013) Teaching Greek Language as a Second Language (L2). Case study in teaching Greek to Roma women at Polemidia area, Limassol. Conference proceedings "Breaking classroom silences: Addressing difficult issues in education" p. 243.

issues and planning for change, carrying out their plan to achieve change, and reflecting on and sharing lessons about what has been achieved. The changes aimed were for Roma youth to apply changes of their own understanding, taking into consideration the views and actions of their peers, their own and their wider communities, or the actions and decisions of professionals and politicians.

### Fight against discrimination, segregation and other forms of antigypsyism in education

There have been some improvements in dealing not only with issues of discrimination against immigrants but also against Cypriot Roma and other minorities. Nonetheless, except from the extra-curriculum/not compulsory course "The language, culture and tradition of Roma" implemented in Saint Antonios Primary School for the Cypriot Roma, there are no other concrete policies targeting Cypriot Roma specifically. In practice, reform is slow and contradictory, and little has been implemented in terms of the content of combating of discrimination and achieving a genuine multicultural education.<sup>48</sup> At the local level, some elements of multicultural education and teacher training for primary and secondary education have been introduced to cope with an increasingly multicultural setting, but this is at an embryonic or at least at a very infantile, stage.<sup>49</sup>

The interview conducted with the representative of MoEC indicated that the prominent anti-racism policy of the MoEC is also an important reference. Specifically, there is a Code of Conduct against Racism and Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents. At the legislative level, the new regulations (governing) regarding the operation of public secondary schools explicitly refer to the prohibition of any form of discrimination and the respect of diversity and for the dignity (of the diversity) of each child individually. In addition, the new regulations state that one of the aims of the system is to prepare the child for a responsible life in a free society (interview 13).

<sup>48</sup> Trimikliniotis (2012).

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Employment

- 1) The Department of Labour needs to develop a systemic practice and instruments to assess skills of Roma jobseekers (as they usually do not possess diploma or other formal proof of their work skills) and at the same time define which technical/professional, cognitive, technical/occupational/professional or other skills for the local large service sector economy should employees maintain.
- 2) The Department of Labour should support self-employment and entrepreneurship among disadvantaged jobseekers, including Roma, through, for example, microcredits, training in how to organise small business, training for different entrepreneurial skills, etc. depending on the assessed needs and the ongoing local employment markets trends and needs.
- 3) The Department of Labour needs to re-evaluate its GMI policy and link it with employment and employability. These two should be intercorrelated in a way to enhance and motivate unemployed to join the labour market, for example by enabling receiving the social income and income from work at the same time.

### Housing and essential public services

- 4) The Ministry should review the status of the Roma houses more often and the houses in poor conditions should be repaired on time.
- 5) The MoI should prioritise resolving the issues in Polemidia area where the current situation of the houses and the living conditions of Cypriot Roma are of the worse standard across all areas that Cypriot Roma currently live in.
- 6) A survey should be organised in order to identify the needs of Roma regarding housing.
- 7) New housing for Roma should not be provided in segregated localities, but instead in areas with the mainstream population, which will enable social and ethnic mix and interactions, as well as access to public services and jobs.

### Impact of health care policies on Roma

- 8) The MoH should take effective measures to ensure equal treatment of Roma in access to universally available healthcare services. For instance, to provide translators to facilitate the communication between Roma patients and doctors and nurses of the state public health sector services; or translate all documentation of the newly established national health system (ΓΕΣΥ), from Greek in Turkish language, given that Turkish is the second official language in Cyprus and that many Cypriot Roma speak Turkish;
- 9) A targeted information campaign among the female Cyprus Roma population on issues of pregnancy, labour and contraception in the Romani language.
- 10) The MoH needs to improve access to free vaccination programmes targeting all vulnerable groups including Cypriot Roma who live in marginalised/remote areas.
- 11) The MoH should promote overall awareness on health and healthcare issues among the Cyprus Roma population.

### Education

- 12) MoEC should take more effective measures to ensure that all Roma students (girls and boys) complete at least compulsory education. Classes use textbooks in Greek and the content of those textbooks are not appropriate for the level of the students. Obtaining appropriate textbooks centred to Cypriot Roma needs

will increase the interest of the student to stay in the class and finish at least the compulsory education. Also, a teacher training can ensure the development of multicultural and intercultural education specifically related to Roma.

- 13) MoEC should encourage greater parental involvement and the improvement of ongoing relevant teacher professional development.
- 14) MoEC should develop more measures to help in the transition between educational levels and support the acquisition of skills that are adapted to the needs of the labour market.

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