



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

*Identifying blind spots
in Roma inclusion policy*

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CYPROM	Cyprus Roma Association
DLEU	Drug Law Enforcement Unit
G/C	Greek Cypriots
GHS	General Health System
MGI	Minimum Guaranteed Income
MI	Ministry of Interior
MoEC	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRIS	National Roma Integration Strategy
RoC	Republic of Cyprus
SWS	Social Welfare Services
T/C	Turkish Cypriots

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In spite of the small number of Roma or *Gurbet*¹ people living in the Republic of Cyprus,² their situation is as difficult as in several other European countries with large and deeply marginalised Roma populations. The Council of Europe estimates that the number of Roma living in the Republic of Cyprus (RoC) is about 1,250 or 0.11 per cent of the overall population (data from 2012); the National Roma Integration Strategy for Cyprus (NRIS) estimates that in the areas controlled by the RoC, there are 650-700 Cypriot Roma now living.³

The general government policy for the promotion of Cypriot Roma social inclusion follows a horizontal policy that targets all vulnerable groups within a broader policy and its social integration structures (e.g., general social inclusion policies and the National Reform Program). Since Cyprus is promoting the integration of Roma through mainstream policy measures in the context of existing structures, there are no separate monitoring mechanisms in place for members of this group.⁴

The topics analysed in this report focus on the challenges faced by Romani women, intermobility within Cyprus, and on the prevention of drug use among Roma. The reason why the authors selected these specific themes for the third monitoring report is because until now there have not been any reports or research related to the domestic migration and mobility of Cypriot Roma, or research about Roma women in Cyprus, or about the impact of the distribution and use of drugs in the Roma community in Cyprus. Topics such as education, housing, health and employment were mentioned and analysed in the previous Roma Civil Monitor reports.

For this reason, it was important to examine and investigate the themes mentioned above. These topics provide a more complete picture of the situation of Cypriot Roma and other issues faced in their community. As emerged from the interviews conducted with Roma (10 Roma) and non-Roma (two non-Roma), the lack of concrete political or social Roma integration measures creates problems not only among Romani communities (for both men and women) but also problems for those around them.

Situation of Roma women

Despite the intense activity of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth (MoEC), of other governmental or non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and of institutions around the issue of Roma, smooth integration into the Greek Cypriot (G/C) community around the issue of education remains difficult for Roma and as a consequence, their illiteracy level remains high. Our interviews revealed that Roma women face intolerance, lack of respect, daily racism and discrimination, and are marginalised - not just outside the home but also the home, especially by their husbands. The position of Roma woman is a degraded one and they are considered inferior. Women's participation in the Cyprus Roma Association-CYPROM is a movement that aims to help Roma women express themselves and fight for their rights.

¹ Roma in Cyprus are known as *Gurbets*; but, in this report the term "Roma" will be used.

² In this report, "Cyprus" refers to the areas controlled by the government of the Republic of Cyprus (EU Member State since 2004), which is also referred to as "the South". Areas that are not under the control of the government of the Republic of Cyprus are referred to as "the North".

³ Policy Measures of Cyprus for the Social Inclusion of Roma, 06 June 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/roma_cyprus_strategy_en.pdf (Retrieved on January 21, 2019)

⁴ Pelekani, C. & Symeou, L. (2019), *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Cyprus: Assessing the progress in four key policy areas of the strategy*. European Commission & Central European University.

Roma's mobility and internal migration

The RoC have stated that the frequent movement of Roma from one to the other side of the line that divides Cyprus as a consequence of Turkey's invasion in 1974 makes any concrete action with this community difficult to organize and sustain.⁵ Our interviews found that this movement is for purely economic reasons because of the cut to the Minimum Guaranteed Income (MGI), because of a lack of housing, etc. Difficulty in finding formal employment and difficult living conditions lead Cypriot Roma to move either to the occupied areas or abroad. In the RoC, there are some cases in which the Turkish Cypriot Properties Management authority has not provided Roma, who fall into the category of Turkish Cypriots for legal purposes, with housing because they failed to meet the eligibility criteria to be assigned this housing.⁶ There has never been any official action undertaken to improve the situation. In the period around 2012, many Cypriot Roma left the RoC because of the economic crisis.

Impact of drug distribution and use

Despite there being a national mainstream policy on the prevention of drug use, there is no specific policy on preventing the distribution and use of drugs by Roma specifically. The National Strategy on Illicit Substances Dependence and the Harmful Use of Alcohol for 2013-20 has set priorities to support vulnerable groups in adopting a healthy lifestyle and enhancing their access to supportive services, implement early interventions for specific groups at risk and promote environmental actions to prevent and/or delay addictions in the family, army and school environments, on the internet and in the community. The Cyprus National Addictions Authority (NAAC) is responsible for monitoring the implementation of prevention and intervention programmes through its accreditation and evaluation procedures. The results of our research here demonstrate that there are drug users in the Roma community but there is no targeted action or Roma media campaign about the scourge of drugs. Two young Roma have also lost their lives recently, not due to drug use, but to the corollary effects of the criminal activity that drug use generates. More actions should be taken by local authorities, municipalities, NGOs, bicomunal multipurpose centres, clubs, associations, etc., to work together to prevent more loss of life as a consequence of proximity to the drug trade and drug use.

⁵ Pelekani, C. & Symeou, L. (2019), *Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Cyprus: Assessing the progress in four key policy areas of the strategy*. European Commission & Central European University.

⁶ Turkish Cypriot properties Management, http://www.moi.gov.cy/moi/moi.nsf/page60_en/page60_en?OpenDocument

INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in the [first](#) and [second](#) RCM reports on Cyprus,⁷ there is no accurate number of Roma living in the country.⁸ According to the Council of Europe estimates from 2012, the number of Roma is about 1,250, i.e., 0.11 % of the overall population.⁹ The National Integration Strategy (NRIS) estimates that some 650-700 Cypriot Roma currently live in areas controlled by the Republic of Cyprus (RoC).¹⁰ There are also Roma from other countries living in Cyprus, mainly from Eastern Europe, but their number is not officially known either. According to the 1960 Constitution of Cyprus, Cypriot Roma are recognised as members of the Turkish Cypriot (T/C) community, unlike the other minority groups living in Cyprus (Maronites, Latins, and Armenians) who are recognised as religious minorities. The Cypriot Roma are therefore not recognised or granted their own minority status as Roma.

The Turkish invasion of 1974 had a devastating impact on Cyprus's demographic situation. In that year, approximately 142,000 Greek Cypriots – nearly one-third of the then-total Greek Cypriot population of the island – were forcibly expelled from the northern part of the island where they constituted some 80 per cent of the population. Turkish Cypriots as well as Roma were then forcibly expelled to the occupied area in the north, although a few hundred Turkish Cypriots and Roma remained in the south.¹¹

There are no official records about the arrival of Roma in Cyprus. It is believed that they arrived after the conquest of the island by the Ottomans in 1551. The term *Gurbet*, used as autoethnonym, has its origin in Arabic and reached the Romani language through the Turkish language. It means "foreigners" or "foreign work". These people today are Muslims and speak both the Cypriot Turkish dialect and *Gurbetcha* (a language variety). Most Cypriot Roma in the RoC live in Limassol and Paphos. In the occupied areas they live mainly in Famagusta and Morphou.

In the current report, three different topics are analysed that have not been discussed in any of the previous reports. This report focuses first on gender equality, on the position of Roma women in the wider society, and on actions by Roma women aiming at achieving their empowerment; second, on the domestic migration of the Cypriot Roma in Cyprus and their emigration abroad; and third, on drug distribution and use by the Cypriot Roma community.

The report was prepared by analysing several sources of information, including legal documents, reports, published studies, journals, previous official reports, and published case studies. In addition, 12 interviews were conducted with public authorities and representatives of Cypriot Roma (the CYPROM organisation). Furthermore, the report

⁷ The first annual cycle of the Roma Civil Monitor (RCM) was focused on the horizontal precondition of the Roma inclusion – governance, fight against antigypsyism and anti-discrimination. The second cycle concerned the four key policy fields – education, employment, healthcare and housing. All reports are available at: <https://cps.ceu.edu/roma-civil-monitor-reports>

⁸ In this report, any reference to "Cyprus" applies to the Republic of Cyprus and all information and data contained in this report concern the Republic of Cyprus and areas controlled by its government.

⁹ *Roma Integration 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 (Retrieved on 21 April 2020)

¹⁰ *Policy Measures of Cyprus for the Social Inclusion of Roma*, 6 June 2017, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/roma_cyprus_strategy_en.pdf (Retrieved on 21 January 2019)

¹¹ *EURYDICE Population: Demographic Situation, Languages and Religions*, https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions-15_en (Retrieved on 20 April 2020)

takes into account the personal experience of the authors in their communication with Cypriot Roma in their settlements.

SITUATION OF ROMA WOMEN

Definition of the problem

Roma women across Europe face racism, discrimination and marginalisation.¹² The low levels of education completed by Roma women, their high rates of school dropout, non-completion of compulsory education, high unemployment rates, and the poor available employment opportunities deprive Roma women and girls of opportunities to participate fully in society. These phenomena are observed among Cypriot Roma women as well. Among the very few targeted policy measures specifically for Cypriot Roma, which apply only to housing and education, none target Roma women specifically.

Background of the problem

As mentioned in previous reports, Roma who live in the settlements of Cyprus are isolated from the rest of society and have problems accessing education, health care, employment and other related services.¹³ The main reason for the isolation of the Cypriot Roma is the antigypsyism they have experienced since their first arriving to Cyprus after travel restrictions across the demarcation line were eased in 2003. At that time, the Greek Cypriots (G/C) reacted negatively to their arrival because the Roma were meant to take up residence in empty Turkish Cypriot (T/C) houses. Due to these reactions, Cyprus offered prefabricated houses for the Roma, built far away from the G/Cs in order to avoid confrontations. This policy of building prefabricated housing units for Roma in remote areas with limited access to public services promotes the practice of *de facto* segregation.¹⁴ As a result, Cypriot Roma live in ghettos and are still alienated from mainstream society today.

Increasing antigypsyism in Cyprus is associated with the mobility of Roma families. This negatively impacts the safety of Roma women and girls, making them increasingly vulnerable to social exclusion, exploitation, trafficking and violence.

As mentioned in the introduction, the estimated number of Cypriot Roma is about 1,250. Due to the division of the country after the Turkish military invasion of Cyprus and the lack of control by the RoC over the northern areas of the country, as well as the frequent movement of a significant number of Cypriot Roma from one side of the demarcation line to the other, it is very hard to estimate Roma population numbers in Cyprus. Therefore, demographic data about them, including gender distribution, age distribution, and socio-economic status cannot be provided at the moment. According to Pelekani's observations (April 2020), in Limassol there are about 12 Roma families (50 people) in the Polemidia area, and 50 families (around 200 people) in the Agios Andonios area, while in Paphos there are about 30 families (120-150 people).

According to the authors' field research, regardless of the availability of social assistance and the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI), the average number of children per family amongst the Roma population in Cyprus has seen a decrease compared to its historical size. The maximum number of children in a Roma family today is four, compared to previous generations where Roma families had as many as eight children. For economic reasons, Roma families today prefer to have no more than two or three children. There are also some Roma families who do not benefit from the GMI even though they are long-term unemployed and poor. This is due to the fact that not all the Cypriot Roma are

¹² *Strategy on the advancement of Romani women and girls (2014-2020)*. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/16806f32ff> (Retrieved on 2 December 2019)

¹³ *Ibid.* Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/16806f32ff> (Retrieved on 2 December 2019)

¹⁴ ECRI report on Cyprus, available on the website: <https://rm.coe.int/fifth-report-on-cyprus-greek-translation-/16808b563d> (Retrieved on 9 November 2018).

informed that if they work and their salary is lower than the GMI, then they are able to receive the difference between their actual income from work and the GMI. In addition, others do not register for this scheme because they prefer not to work and to receive the full amount of GMI.

Based on field work in the Roma settlements and interviews with Cypriot Roma women, it has been revealed that all interviewed Roma women expressed the feeling of being marginalised, and very often facing racism from the broader Cypriot society, while at the same time they stated having experience of being treated in violent ways by their husbands.

Roma women's position in their communities

The traditional family roles of many Roma women, which highly differ from the roles undertaken by the majority of Greek-Cypriot women, create additional exclusion mechanisms for them compared to those experienced by Roma men. Practices of early marriage and early motherhood are still prevalent in traditional Roma families. After marriage, the restrictions affecting girls/women and their obligations only grow. A Roma girl is likely to be responsible for contributing to the maintenance of her mother-in-law's household, where she should help with cooking, cleaning, childcare and other chores. Men are the ones who earn money for the traditional family:

"I would like to marry [...]. My wife will stay at home to look after the children. I will work and look after them." (Interviewee 1, male)

And, one Roma woman interviewee said:

"I am doing everything. I am the father and the mother of my family. Unfortunately, my husband is an alcoholic and he cannot work. I am the master of the house. I wash, I clean, I look after my children and my grandchildren. Thank God the government helps and thus I am able to look after my family." (Interviewee 2)

Although there has been a slight improvement in the relations between Roma men and women, especially among the younger generations, Roma women do not appear to feel independent, to feel able to stand on their own feet, or to feel that they can make their own choices without being financially dependent on their husbands.

Another Roma woman interviewee described that her husband had left her some years ago and she lives alone with her children in very difficult conditions:

"My husband didn't respect me at all, he found another Gurbeti woman and abandoned us. He left me alone with my two children. We don't have a place to live. Sometimes we sleep in my mother's house, [but] sometimes we argue and sometimes we sleep in the car. We take a bath at my neighbour's house. Recently my 17-year-old son had serious trouble (bad friends, drugs), came home drunk, beat me. Last week he set our car on fire and now we don't have anywhere to stay. We are living on the public benches. We asked for help, but the government cannot help us! They gave us shelter in a hostel for some weeks, but now we should find a house to rent, but the rent here is expensive, and I cannot pay rent because I don't have enough money. I am desperate." (Interviewee 3)

Government's interventions and policies for Roma women

Because many Cypriot Roma parents do not speak Greek, they are unable to participate in the parents' associations in the schools or in school celebrations. This is why since the mid 2000s, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth (MoEC) has initiated the offer of free Greek lessons for Roma and other vulnerable groups including immigrants. Learning the official language is considered part of removing the language and literacy barriers faced by Roma children and their families, as well as providing Roma people with more opportunities in the employment arena. Greek language and cooking classes were

held in the St. Antonios area in Limassol under the services of the Adult Education Centres and the Bicomunal Multipurpose Centre in Limassol.¹⁵ Also, under the initiative and proposal of the Heraclitus Centre, two courses were offered to Cypriot Roma, one in Greek language and one in cooking. The courses were offered for two years at the settlement of Polemidia.¹⁶ However, in recent years there has been less interest from Roma women to continue attending the above programmes, for reasons described below, and there has been a lack of guidance, motivation and support for Roma from the MoEC and other governmental and non-governmental organisations.

According to an interviewee (#5):

"We have many issues to solve. There are some children who are not attending school, some young Roma cannot find work, our state [the national government] cut the social benefits, some have no electricity and water in their house, they don't have hospital documents, they don't know the General Health System (GHS). I myself learned about it by chance from a language teacher who works at my children's school. Most of the Cypriot Roma don't know what the GHS is. The state should help us. The forms should be translated into Turkish in order to enable us to understand the process, because we know some Greek, but not enough to understand what they are asking us to provide them with [when applying]."

The fight against extreme poverty and to ensure adequate housing and basic infrastructure seems crucial for enhancing Roma women's access to the labour market and economic independence. To achieve this would require the cooperation of all agencies, ministries and (local) departments.

Empowering Roma women

The empowerment of Roma women and girls is of crucial importance for achieving gender equality and strengthening democratic society. The process of the integration of Roma women into society will promote their equality and combat discrimination in all areas of their lives.

Parents' associations

Although Cypriot Roma women live at the margins and their marriages often do not allow them to move on with their life (e.g., to invest in their education so that they will be able to find a decent job), some of them (who speak Greek) participate actively in parents' associations at their children's schools. They hold positions such as secretary, treasurer, etc. Through participation at school events and in the parents' association meetings, they are empowered and enhance their capacities as citizens. These activities serve as platforms for dialogue as well: Cypriot women/mothers and especially Roma girls/women/mothers have grown up in different environments, so they seem to have different beliefs and perceptions, but working on the common tasks of the parents' association promotes their sharing of their perspectives.

Role of the civil society

It is also worth noting that some Roma women actively participate in the Cyprus Roma Association (CYPROM). There is a need for coordination of interventions and measures related to Roma, especially with Roma women who face both racism and sexism. Therefore, Roma women need a new channel for expressing themselves and communicating with the wider community, which they are trying to find through this

¹⁶ 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 & Central European University (CEU CPS).

association. During the last elections of the committee, three of the seven members elected were Roma, two of whom were women. When asked about the importance of their participation in the association and about their role, one responded:

"I am pleased that I am a member of the committee. It is the first time for me to participate in this, but I believe in myself and I will do everything to help the association and of course our community." (Interviewee 4)

Roma women's participation is, therefore, important and necessary for the association because these women are taking initiative, they are empowered, and they act as mentors in their own community. Their presence in various meetings, such as with the mayor and with reporters, etc., is important. As one Roma woman informant said, *"We are Gurbeti and our voices should be heard."* (Interviewee 3)

The Roma women's work in the association facilitates their involvement at the local level, improving their ability to participate in the local society and in civil society. It is guided by an effort to reduce the discrimination and social exclusion of Roma and achieve full enjoyment of their rights. Through this association, Roma women have the opportunity to organise and promote their rights as Roma women and to fight against various forms of discrimination, either within or outside their community.

ROMA'S MOBILITY AND INTERNAL MIGRATION

Historical framework

With the outbreak of intercommunal clashes in 1963 between ethnic Greek Cypriots (G/C) and ethnic Turkish Cypriots (T/C),¹⁷ some Cypriot Roma chose to become part of the T/C community. According to the 1960 Constitution of the RoC, the Cypriot Roma are recognised as members of the T/C community, with all the legal ramifications that recognition imparts.

After the country of Turkey invaded the North of Cyprus in 1974, many Cypriot Roma were forcibly expelled into the occupied territory; some settled near the village of Dikomo (Greek: Δίκωμο; Turkish: Dikmen), while others settled in other occupied provinces such as Nicosia, Morphou and Famagusta.¹⁸ However, once freedom of movement was reinstated in 2003, ethnic T/C and Roma chose to move away from the North *en masse*.¹⁹

Due to the changing social conditions in the 1990s, the T/C authorities, particularly local authorities, had demolished many Romani settlements in the occupied areas, and after 1994 the Roma experienced a very severe economic crisis there.²⁰ Because of the adverse conditions and the practices of discrimination experienced by many Roma, they moved south. In October 1997, about 20 Roma families moved from the northern occupied territory to the RoC in the south, while others emigrated to England seeking political asylum.²¹ Their emigrations continued for years afterward, and as a result of their growing demand for asylum in other countries, the T/C authorities began preventing their emigration abroad.²² Those who crossed the Green Line and moved to the RoC settled in houses that had previously been owned by ethnic T/C, mainly in Limassol and Paphos. Even though many Roma also moved to other towns and villages, they remain isolated and marginalised nowadays from the rest of the community.

As for the Cypriot Roma who are native to the South, before Turkish invasion in 1974, they had been accustomed to living nomadically. From October 1999, and especially during and after 2001, approximately 570 Roma also relocated to Limassol and Paphos and settled in socioeconomically deprived urban areas (Spyrou, 2004). Because the Interior Ministry could not host all the Roma families in the empty formerly T/C-owned properties, and because they needed to address the housing situation of the Roma, the government financed the building of a small village of 16 prefabricated houses in Limassol and 20 in Paphos. They also refurbished the existing ethnic T/C-owned residences in both of those towns.

¹⁷ <https://cyprus-mail.com/2013/12/22/1963-is-still-a-historical-minefield/>

¹⁸ Dayioğlu, A. (2014) *Kuzey Kıbrıs'ın ötekileri; Rumlar, Maruniler, Romanlar, Aleviler, Kürtler*. Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, Istanbul.

¹⁹ Trimikliniotis, N. & Demetriou, C. (2009) "The Cypriot Roma and the Failure of Education: Anti-Discrimination and Multiculturalism as a Post-accession Challenge", in: N. Coureas & C. Demetriou (eds.) *The Minorities of Cyprus: Development Patterns and the Identity of the Internal-Exclusion*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge.

²⁰ Dayioğlu, A. (2014) *Kuzey Kıbrıs'ın ötekileri; Rumlar, Maruniler, Romanlar, Aleviler, Kürtler*. Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, Istanbul.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 108. & Williams, A. (2000) *The Gypsies of Cyprus, Kuri*, Available at: <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/journal/12/cyprus.html> (Retrieved on 2 December 2019)

²² For example, Turkish Airlines and Istanbul Airlines since 1997 would not accept Roma to travel with their company in order to relocation abroad seeking political asylum. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

Cypriot Roma's internal migration today

Today, Roma in Cyprus appear to prefer not to disclose their Roma identity, no matter what part of the country they live in. Roma informants told us that they endure many stereotypes and derogatory comments from ethnic T/C and from Turkish nationals who have also immigrated to RoC,²³ such as being referred to as "gypsies" or "thieves". Such comments create a negative image of the Roma (Interviewees 4 and 5), due to which they are treated with suspicion.

Due to discrimination in access to education, many Cypriot Roma are illiterate and without work. Some have continued traditional livelihoods such as blacksmithing, collecting old objects for resale or scrap, farming, performing music or repairing things, but none of these jobs make it possible to earn a good living. Many Cypriot Roma therefore have a low standard of living.²⁴ Several live in substandard housing and do not have access to good-quality health care or to quality education for their children.²⁵

In the RoC, Roma usually just attend primary school. While some Roma children may make it to secondary school, in general their mastery of Greek is poor, which makes it difficult for them to keep up, so they tend to drop out. Some Roma families will not allow girls to attend school, claiming that they do not trust the people managing the schools and fear harm will come to their girl children. Most of the Roma children who attend compulsory education at the secondary level (up until age 15) are boys.

In one interview with a Cypriot Roma youth, the informant stated that despite their difficulties (language barriers, unemployment, etc.) the Roma still prefer living in the RoC because they have grown up there and are used to the environment. They only visit the occupied territories on weekends to see their relatives. (Interviewee 7) Another Cypriot Roma informant confirmed that assessment, stating that the Roma only visit the occupied area "if we have a funeral, a wedding or other obligations". (Interviewee 5)

When asked whether they would prefer to return to the occupied territories, one Roma respondent said: "*We prefer to live in RoC because the state helps us, gave us a home, helps us with the child benefit and with the GMI, while in the north they did not help us at all. Also, in the occupied area we face racism.*" (Interviewee 8). A female informant expressed disappointment and regret towards the ethnic Turkish Cypriot citizens and authorities, saying: "*The Turkish Cypriots do not want us because they say that our lifestyle is an insult to their community. We offend their community. For them we are gypsies, kouloufoi, killitziroi.*"²⁶ (Interviewee 4).

Some Roma respondents from the settlements expressed their disappointment with politicians and their lack of interest: "They remember us only during the elections..." (Interviewee 6).

The Cypriot Roma faced negative stereotypes and experienced discrimination in the RoC when they first arrived there. Studies have shown that the ethnic Greek Cypriots did not

²³ Turkish citizens who moved to the occupied territories after Turkey invaded in 1974 and settled there, some intermarrying with ethnic Turkish Cypriots.

²⁴ See *The Minorities of Cyprus in the History of Cyprus*, available at https://www.academia.edu/389182/The_Minorities_of_Cyprus_in_the_History_of_Cyprus_Textbook_for_Lyceum_Students_A_Critique?email_work_card=view-paper

²⁵ See *The Minorities of Cyprus in the History of Cyprus*, available at https://www.academia.edu/389182/The_Minorities_of_Cyprus_in_the_History_of_Cyprus_Textbook_for_Lyceum_Students_A_Critique?email_work_card=view-paper

²⁵ See *The Minorities of Cyprus in the History of Cyprus*, available at https://www.academia.edu/389182/The_Minorities_of_Cyprus_in_the_History_of_Cyprus_Textbook_for_Lyceum_Students_A_Critique?email_work_card=view-paper

²⁶ These are pejorative terms with the meaning 'untidy, not settled'

want Cypriot Roma in their neighbourhoods and alleged the Roma were continually causing problems. The ethnic Turkish Cypriot residents of RoC also preferred to keep their distance from the Roma.²⁷

Nowadays the situation is slowly changing, as Cypriot Roma are more settled and do not travel so often. There are also more mixed marriages today between Roma and Greek Cypriots, and thus a certain level of assimilation within the wider society has happened.

After the 2008 economic crisis, the state began to eliminate welfare benefits as part of austerity. This has directly affected Cypriot Roma families to such a negative extent that they have begun to migrate again. Many Cypriot Roma have left the houses in the RoC given to them temporarily by the Turkish Cypriot Properties Management Service, and some have returned to the northern occupied territory, while others have migrated to England for better living conditions. (Interviewee 5)

It is accepted that many Cypriot Roma still live under difficult conditions and face poverty, extreme social exclusion and discrimination. Today the best solution for them is usually to emigrate abroad or relocate within the country for better living conditions, easy access to quality (affordable) education, and access to jobs and various services.

The measures the RoC takes for Roma integration are horizontal and aimed at all vulnerable groups in the context of the broader existing political and social integration structures. These measures are related to education, employment, housing, and health, which includes social support. In regard to Cypriot Roma mobility and migration, there is not any specific policy.

It is important that the authorities clarify what the main reasons actually are for Roma emigrating or relocating within Cyprus. It is important to have a genuine dialogue with the Roma to identify the cause of their constant mobility and emigration.

There is a general impression among the authorities that poverty is the main push factor for emigration and relocation, and that in many cases the aim of Roma emigrating or relocating domestically is to commit crime (see the next section). The fact that Roma are considered "parasites" on society who just live in RoC to benefit from the GMI generates a negative attitude towards them. Campaigns need to be carried out by various organisations and institutions to raise awareness about Roma not involved in criminal activity and to promote a more positive image of them.

²⁷ "Education: Anti-Discrimination and Multiculturalism as a Post-accession Challenge", in: N. Coureas & C. Demetriou (eds.) *The Minorities of Cyprus: Development Patterns and the Identity of the Internal-Exclusion*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge.

IMPACT OF DRUG DISTRIBUTION AND USE

Definition of the problem

Cyprus has had a national strategy against drug dependence since 2004.²⁸ The main axes of the strategy are reducing demand and supply, and providing programmes for the rehabilitation and social reintegration of drug users, particularly among members of vulnerable groups.

In recent years, the non-implementation of this strategy has created serious problems and shortfalls in addressing the public health problems caused by drug dissemination and use.²⁹ An investigation has found that in Cyprus the drug most in demand is cannabis, with 4.3 per cent of the population declaring themselves to be users, while cocaine, amphetamines, and MDMA (Ecstasy) all had declared rates of below one per cent.³⁰ In recent years, early intervention programmes have aimed to develop recovery among young users.

A responsible officer of the RoC Drug Law Enforcement Unit (DLEU) said to the authors of this report: *"In terms of vulnerable groups, these cases are recorded by the Cyprus National Addiction Authority.³¹ They are children from single-parent families, children from families where either the mother or the father is in prison, children who are not privileged in society and whose families receive aid from social services, etc."* (Interviewee 9).

In Cyprus, drugs are classified as A, B or C according to their level of harm, with Class A drugs causing the most harm. Penalties for drug use in Cyprus extend to life imprisonment for all classes of drugs, but a life term has never been imposed. Possession for personal use is regarded as a serious criminal offence, punishable by up to 12 years in prison for Class A drugs, eight years for Class B and four years for Class C. However, first-time offenders under 25 are not given sentences of more than a year.

In 2016, a law was introduced allowing those accused of drug-related offences other than supply and serious felonies to apply for a treatment alternative to imprisonment.³² In recent years there has been a tendency towards the use of this alternative punishment. A judge, following the advice of the Advisory Committee established by law, has the option of either ordering a defendant to undergo treatment in a rehabilitation centre or serve a penalty.³³ In the pre-trial phase there is an alternative to prosecution for juvenile drug offenders arrested for the first time and a protocol for referring them to mental health services. Our informant explained that *"young drug users who meet certain criteria, they*

²⁸ The first National Drugs Strategy 2004-2008 was the first project in Cyprus aiming in developing a holistic policy for drug dependence. Available at: <https://www.naac.org.cy/uploads/epaggelmaties-sinergates/bc3e3f845c.pdf> (Retrieved on 5 December 2019)

²⁹ Ministry of Health, *Archived Speeches, Implementation of Government Policy to prevent the use and dissemination of drugs*. Available at: <https://www.moh.gov.cy/Moh/MOH.nsf/All/EBE34BF10A67085EC2257869002E336F?OpenDocument> (Retrieved on 5 December 2019)

³⁰ Πολυδώρου, Μ. (2018) infographic: Ο χάρτης των ναρκωτικών στην Κύπρο και τα φορτία θανάτου. (infographic: The drugs in Cyprus map and death loads.) Available at: http://www.reporter.com.cy/fakelos_narkotika/article/387599/ (Retrieved on December 5, 2019)

³¹ The Cyprus Anti-Drugs Council renamed as Cyprus National Addiction Authority. The Authority that coordinates and controls all the measures and interventions aimed at addressing dependencies. Available at: http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/enop/non-ind/2017_1_164/full.html
http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/arith/2018_1_067.pdf

³² *Cyprus, Country Drug Report 2019*, available at: http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/countries/drug-reports/2019/cyprus/drug-laws-and-drug-law-offences_en (Retrieved on 5 December 2019)

³³ More information can be found on the Cyprus National Addictions Authority website. Available at: <https://www.naac.org.cy/el/katigoroumenon-xriston-ousioeksartimenon>

don't come to the Court. They have the option of alternative therapy in treatment centres". (Interviewee 9) The interviewee referred to a policy of the referral of young users for treatment, started on a pilot basis in January 2007, with the creation of the Department of Social Intervention Officers in DLEU Prevention Office.³⁴

According to the authors' interview with the responsible officer of the DLEU, the Unit goes beyond policing the drug trade and focuses its efforts on prevention. (Interviewee 9) This informant also said that a large percentage of people arrested meet the alternative punishment criteria and respond to the treatment monitoring protocol of the rehabilitation centre. (Interviewee 9) Around 1,300 clients were treated in Cyprus in 2017, of whom almost 850 entered the treatment system that year. Most clients starting treatment initiated it in outpatient settings, and the majority sought treatment for cannabis use. There are six centres, four in Nicosia and two in Limassol.³⁵

There has not yet been any specific research to analyse substance users disaggregated by their ethnic or religious origin. The investigations to date have focused on the general population of Cyprus, including the Roma and other vulnerable groups. (Interviewee 9) Among Roma, drug usage has not been studied well yet.

Based on the observations of the authors, Cypriot Roma, especially young boys, not only use drugs, but also distribute and sell them in order to earn money. They risk their lives to make money this way, as the following case study describes.

Field experience

There were two recent cases that have upset the Cypriot Roma community, one involving a Roma victim of a crime committed by a non-Roma drug user and another involving a Roma drug distributor who died after being imprisoned. The information collected for this report came through interviews with Roma (mainly men). A member of the NGO CYPROM described to us that Roma community members are involved with drugs "purely for economic reasons, not because they need it. Unfortunately, two young [Roma] children have been victims of drugs and their distribution." (Interviewee 11)

The two incidents have upset the Roma community because they involved two boys tragically dying because of drug dealing and drug use. Both incidents occurred in Limassol. Two interviewees (#10 and 11) reported that the first incident occurred in the Marina of Limassol, where a drug addict (of Greek Cypriot origin) who had just come out of prison stabbed an 11-year-old Roma child, allegedly because he was in withdrawal. It is not known how the police handled the case.

The second incident involved a Roma youth who had been arrested for drug use and distribution. This particular young man died in prison, either by committing suicide because he could not resist the pressure, or by being killed by those to whom he owed money. Unfortunately, details about his death never came out in the press.

The vice-president of the NGO CYPROM told the authors that some young Roma try drugs just once, while others become habitual users. He also said some Cypriot Roma youth have illegally transported drugs from the occupied areas and discussed the reasons Roma become involved in drug distribution and use:

"Unfortunately, poverty leads to crime. [One can] explain and advise them about the risks of the use and spread of drugs, [but] young Roma do not listen to either us or to their parents. For them this is an easy way to receive money immediately. They are interested

³⁴ See: <http://www.philenews.com/koinonia/eidiseis/article/730566/i-yan-skiagafei-to-fainomeno-ton-narkotikon-stin-kypro> (Retrieved on 6 December 2019)

³⁵ Πολυδώρου, Μ. (2018) *Ο χάρτης των ναρκωτικών στην Κύπρο και τα φορτία θανάτου. [The drugs in Cyprus map and death loads]* – infographic. Available at: http://www.reporter.com.cy/fakelos_narkotika/article/387599/ (Retrieved on 5 December 2019)

in nice motorcycles, beautiful and expensive cars. Only through illegality can they buy this kind of thing.” (Interviewee 10)

Drug-related crime affects even vulnerable persons who are not involved in the drug trade, while involvement in the crime of illegal drug distribution includes risks that can be life-threatening. Last but not least, the health and well-being of drug users can also become severely impacted by drug use.

Policy on preventing drug distribution and use

There are no measures about the prevention of drug use that are currently targeting Roma communities. The RoC, municipalities, all local authorities, governmental and non-governmental organisations and bodies should undertake the necessary drug prevention measures for the good of the Roma community and the wider society. It is important and necessary to organise awareness campaigns on the dangers of drug use and the issue of preventing the distribution and use of addictive substances.

Prevention includes every effort to delay substance use or to reduce demand for substances. Since 1991, the DLEU has been active in the area of prevention. Recently, a basic DLEU operation has been developed to focus on early interventions among youth to help them stop using drugs. This is a different treatment from the one offered to addicted youth who, under certain criteria, are given the alternative of being treated in medical centres rather than being brought before a court and stigmatised. When these individuals successfully complete the treatment programme, the case is classified as “Alternatively Presented”, meaning that the action has the consent of the Attorney General. The treatment is also available to people who do not meet the alternative punishment criteria, meaning that their referral to treatment centres has no effect on the legal consequences of a criminal case pending against them.³⁶

In the past, drug users in Cyprus were also tried for drug trafficking, but the current measures focus on helping youth through educational sessions and facilitating their access to different opportunities, especially for those who have tried drugs for the first time and have no criminal record.³⁷ What seems to be achieving results today is targeted prevention for people from vulnerable groups, from groups that are likely to be at high risk, or from groups with multiple risk factors.

³⁶ Η ΥΚΑΝ σκιαγραφεί το φαινόμενο των ναρκωτικών στην Κύπρο [DLEU outlines the phenomenon of drugs in Cyprus] (2019), available at: <https://www.philenews.com/koinonia/eidiseis/article/730566/i-ykan-skiagafei-to-fainomeno-ton-narkotikon-stin-kypro>

³⁷ *Ibid.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

Situation of Roma women

1. Local authorities and all stakeholders should inform the Roma women about opportunities in participating in vocational education and training in Cyprus. If Roma women cannot meet the criteria to attend the existing programmes, they should be provided with specific training and lifelong learning programmes to improve their literacy, to develop their skills, and be provided with skills certification. Adapted teaching material (by qualified teachers with experience in teaching Roma adults) should be adapted.
2. Local authorities and all stakeholders should find resources and create special jobs for Roma women.
3. Conducting research by universities or other institutions to identify the problems faced by Roma women in Cyprus, focusing on their immediate needs. Based on the results findings, recommendations should be formulated to address the problems of Roma women.
4. The National Contact Point for Roma (Ministry of Labour), local authorities, non-governmental organisations working on human rights and social affairs should have an ongoing dialogue with the NGO CYPROM, and especially directly with the representatives of Cypriot Roma women, in order to be informed about Roma women's living conditions and problems, and to organise common actions and information campaigns to combat discrimination and racism affecting Roma women.

Roma's mobility and internal migration

5. Research institutes and universities should conduct research to verify the reasons for Roma emigration from Cyprus, mobility within Cyprus, and what immediate needs these relocations are attempting to meet. Based on the findings, suggestions should be made for improving local solutions to the basic problems of the Roma.
6. The Interior Ministry should come into direct dialogue with representatives of the Roma and try to find immediate solutions to the housing issue and to resolve the existing housing problems of the Roma.
7. The Turkish Cypriot Properties Management should increase and intensify its field inspections of T/C residences and prefabricated houses occupied by Roma in all provinces of the RoC.
8. Local communities who coexist with the Roma should be sensitised as to how to mitigate or prevent conflicts and stereotypes and should aim for social cohesion.
9. Common cultural events should be locally organised among the Roma and members of other groups to develop intercultural dialogue.

Impact of drug distribution and use

10. The government should design and reproduce audio-visual, digital and print materials in Greek and Turkish to inform Roma about the issue of preventing drug distribution and use.
11. Responsible authorities should organise seminars for Cypriot Roma to raise awareness about drug distribution and use, including interpreters and mediators from the Roma community.

12. Regional officials should design, organise, coordinate and implement initiatives and programs for the prevention of delinquency in their regions by setting up Local Crime Prevention Councils and involve Roma community members in them.

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