

# Policy Measures of Cyprus for the Social Inclusion of Roma

## History of Roma in Cyprus and Current Situation

The term Roma has not traditionally been used in Cyprus. Various terms are used to characterise Cypriot Gypsies, who fall within the definition of Roma presented in the Commission's Communication<sup>1</sup>. These terms include "Athingani" and "Tsingani".

The Gypsies traditionally present on the Island are believed to have been brought to Cyprus during or shortly after the conquest of the Island by the Ottomans from the Venetians in 1571. They are Turkish speaking Muslim Gypsies. They differ from Sinti and Gypsies of other neighbouring Middle Eastern countries known as *Dom*.

Within the framework of the 1960 Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus, the Athingani / Tsingani living in Cyprus were automatically deemed to be citizens of the Republic, members of the Turkish Community, as they fell within the definition of Article 2 paragraph (2) thereof, which reads:

"For the purposes of this Constitution-

- (1) .....
- (2) the Turkish Community comprises all citizens of the Republic who are of Turkish origin and whose mother tongue is Turkish or who share the Turkish cultural traditions or who are Moslems;"

In 1960 the number of Athingani / Tsingani living in Cyprus was 502<sup>2</sup>. After the events of 1974, they moved to the occupied areas of the Island.

In recent years, Cypriot Gypsies, accompanied by their families have crossed to the Government controlled areas in search of better living conditions, job opportunities, and, as asserted, to escape discrimination to which they are subjected in the occupied part of the Island. At present, the number of Cypriot Gypsies in the Government controlled areas is estimated between 650 and 700<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> COM(2011) 173 final

<sup>2</sup> Source: Statistical Service of the Republic. Census of population, 11.12.1960

<sup>3</sup> Estimate of Administration District Officers

## **Cypriot approach for the Social Inclusion of Roma**

The EPSCO Council Conclusions on “An EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020” stresses that: “the size and the social and economic situation of the Roma population are different in each Member State; therefore national approaches to Roma inclusion should be tailored to the specific circumstances and needs on the ground, including by adopting or continuing to pursue policies that address marginalised and disadvantaged groups, such as Roma, in a broader context;”

In view of the small Roma population in Cyprus, the Cypriot approach is to promote their integration through policy measures targeting vulnerable groups of society within existing structures (e.g. general social inclusion policies and the National Reform Programme). We believe that the Europe 2020 Strategy presents real opportunities for the improvement of the situation of Roma and vulnerable groups in general. The targets for increasing employment and reducing poverty and social exclusion are particularly relevant, as are the flagship initiatives under the Inclusive Growth strand of the Strategy, especially the Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Since Cyprus will promote Roma inclusion through integrated policy measures within existing structures, separate monitoring mechanisms will not be set up.

### **Overarching Principle**

The Constitution and national legislation uphold and effectively safeguard the principle of equality and non-discrimination, regardless of community, race, religion, language, sex, political or other convictions, national or social descent, birth, colour, wealth, social class or any other ground.

Cyprus has also enacted important primary anti-discrimination legislation in the context of its harmonisation with the European Union acquis: **The Equal Treatment (Racial or Ethnic Origin) Law, 2004 – Law 59(I)/2004** as amended in 2006 in order to comply with the European Commission’s recommendations as regards proper transposition into national legislation of the Racial Equality Directive (par.1 of article 8 of Directive No.2000/43/EC), **The Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation Law, 2004 – Law 58(I)/2004** for harmonising with Council Directive 2000/78, **the Combating of Racism and Other Discrimination (Commissioner) Law, 2004 (Law 42(I)/2004)**, which vests the Commissioner for Administration, (“Ombudsman”) – an independent Officer - with special competences, duties, and powers for combating and eliminating discrimination in both public and private sectors.

## **Policies**

Policies in the four areas highlighted in the Commission's Communication are outlined below:

### **1. Access to Education**

Article 20 of the Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus safeguards the right to education. The Ministry of Education and Culture offers free and accessible education to all students at all educational levels (Primary, Secondary General, Secondary Technical and Vocational Education and Training) without prejudice based on gender, abilities, language, colour, religion, political beliefs or ethnic backgrounds<sup>4</sup>. Primary and secondary education is compulsory<sup>5</sup> and is provided free of charge by the Government of Cyprus to all, irrespective of the residential status of the students' parents.

The main challenges arising in Cyprus with regard to safeguarding the right to education of Roma students in particular, include dealing with non-Greek speaking students, persuading Roma families to enrol their children in school and creating an environment of cooperation, mutual understanding and respect between students and parents of different ethnic origins. Integrating Turkish Cypriot students (the Roma population in Cyprus belongs to the Turkish-Cypriot Community, speaks the Turkish Language and is mostly composed of practicing Muslims) and other students at risk of exclusion into the school's society are also equally important.

The following are among the Educational and Preventive Programmes implemented at national level:

- Zones of Educational Priority

The majority of schools with high registration and attendance of foreign and Roma students operate as "Zones of Educational Priority". The policy of the Zones of Educational Priority is derived from the strategy of positive discrimination (UNESCO), which is the unequal treatment of inequalities.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Ministry of Education and Culture adopts UNESCO's views on inclusion to embrace all students, such as children from disadvantaged backgrounds, children in rural and remote areas, children from ethnic/ linguistic and other minorities, children affected by conflict and natural disasters, children with HIV and AIDS, children of migrants and children with additional and/or special educational needs.

<sup>5</sup> Failure to enrol a student belonging in the abovementioned age group at an educational institution (public or private) will result in the prosecution of the legal guardian.

The Ministry of Education and Culture provides additional resources to the vulnerable groups of schools which are included in the Zones of Educational Priority.

Empirical and theoretical research related to minority education and specific educational initiatives have guided the Ministry of Education and Culture in developing and implementing programmes for the education of Roma students, such as:

1. Provision of bilingual teachers who facilitate communication between teachers, students and parents.
  2. Provision of breakfast to all Roma students.
  3. Provision of meals for Roma students who attend whole-day schools.
  4. Provision of special support to Roma students from the Service of Educational Psychology and the Social Welfare Services.
  5. Organisation of intercultural activities and events.
  6. Organisation of educational seminars for parents and legal guardians on subject matters of their interest, based on the distinctive characteristics of each local community in which they reside.
- Multicultural Education

The Ministry of Education and Culture has recently designed, developed and implemented an upgraded educational curriculum pertaining to Multicultural Education, aiming at the smooth integration of students from diverse ethnic backgrounds into the educational system of Cyprus and not their assimilation. Particular emphasis is placed on democratisation, by cultivating respect for the dignity and uniqueness of each individual; respect for the opinion of the majority; creating opportunities for active participation in the decision-making process; providing equal opportunities in all aspects of school life; encouraging cooperation and responsibility.

The specific objectives of the Multicultural Education curriculum include:

1. The development and implementation of coordinated actions and interventions that promote the smooth interaction of non-Greek speaking students (including migrants, refugees, Roma and asylum seekers) in the Cypriot educational system.

2. The establishment of rules and regulations for the accountability and quality control of educational provisions for non-Greek speaking students.
3. The in-service training of all educators (primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and secondary technical education) on empirical and theoretical multidisciplinary teaching methods and tools, based on the philosophy of multicultural education.
4. The development of special educational materials and the application of new teaching approaches in order to promote the objectives of multicultural education.
5. The development and use of special measures, actions and processes, such as the unequal treatment of inequalities, for non-Greek speaking students.

In order to further promote the above objectives, the Ministry's policy for the integration of non-Greek speaking students will be based on the following 4 priority pillars:

- Developing and promoting programmes and actions that target the special needs of newly arrived students.
- Developing educational programmes for non-Greek speaking adults for teaching Greek as a second language.
- Designing, developing and implementing in-service programmes for all educators at all levels in the subject area of Multicultural Education.
- Introducing and implementing a system for collecting and analyzing data and information regarding the educational and other needs of non-Greek speaking students.

#### Involvement of Roma in designing and monitoring relevant policies

Close cooperation is encouraged between school personnel and the parents of Roma children in designing actions to address the specific needs of the children.

Additionally, in an effort to achieve the overall objective of social inclusion, the Ministry of Education and Culture aims to ensure compatibility of programmes run by local authorities and voluntary organisations with specific social inclusion objectives and policies.

## **2. Access to Employment**

The Roma residing in Cyprus are Cypriot and EU citizens and, thus, have free access to the labour market, equal to that of all Cypriot citizens. The Public Employment Services (PES) of the Department of Labour offer job seekers (including Roma) assistance in finding employment, through registration and placement services, as well as through vocational guidance, counseling and referrals to training programmes.

A major drawback in trying to place the Roma in job positions is that the majority speak neither Greek nor English. Learning the Greek language is, therefore, an important prerequisite for developing professional skills. To this end, the Ministry of Education and Culture is promoting the development of educational language programmes for non-Greek speaking adults as one of its four priority pillars (described above, under Access to Education).

At the same time, language lessons to non-Greek speaking citizens, including Roma, are provided in Multi-Functional, Multi-Cultural Centres operated by the Municipalities of Limassol and Nicosia, in cooperation with the Government.

## **3. Access to Healthcare**

According to the Cyprus legislation, access to governmental medical institutions is provided to everyone, regardless of residence or other status. Free of charge or reduced fees healthcare is provided to certain groups of the population, based on criteria such as family income, employment status and residential status. The healthcare rights of European citizens are based on European Regulations, while asylum seekers and recognized refugees are treated as Cypriots and, therefore, are entitled to healthcare benefits. Third country nationals employed in Cyprus are covered by private health insurance contracts.

In exceptional cases, the Minister of Health authorises the provision of medical treatment services free of charge to persons illegally residing in Cyprus, based on the specific conditions of each case, especially when pregnant women or children are involved.

Among the preventive programmes implemented by the Ministry of Health are the following:

- Programmes for the detection and treatment of infectious diseases.

- Vaccination services, body scanning, medical examinations, examination of visual acuity etc. by the school medical services.
- Antismoking and information programmes on reproductive health.
- Programmes of psychological support.

Social support is provided by the Social Welfare Services.

Legislation ensures a socially acceptable minimum standard of living for all persons legally residing in the Republic of Cyprus, subject to eligibility criteria. The legislation makes no discrimination on the basis of nationality, race, religion, gender, age, etc. Any person legally residing in Cyprus, including Roma, whose income and other economic resources are insufficient to meet his/her basic and special needs, as defined in the legislation, may apply for public assistance, which may be provided in the form of monetary support and/or services.

Preventive, supportive and remedial social welfare services are provided free of charge and aim at:

- protecting children and promoting their welfare and best interests,
- ensuring a decent standard of living, both economically and socially, for all persons legally residing in Cyprus, encouraging activation and preventing social exclusion,
- strengthening and supporting families in order to enable their members to effectively exercise their roles and responsibilities,
- helping individuals, families and communities to cope with the social problems of changing conditions and facilitating individual and group adjustment,
- preventing and treating social problems such as delinquent behaviour, family violence, substance abuse, etc.,
- providing support and care to elderly persons and people with disabilities.

#### **4. Access to Housing and Essential Services**

The majority of Cypriot Gypsies reside in deserted Turkish-Cypriot houses in the Limassol district and in the villages of Makounta, Stavrokonnou and Chrysochou villages in the Paphos district. Measures taken by the Cyprus Government, aiming to close the gap between Cypriot Gypsies and the rest of society may be summarised as follows:

- Repairs/improvements to 20 Turkish-Cypriot houses inhabited by Cypriot Gypsies in the Limassol district and to 25 Turkish-Cypriot houses in the Paphos district.
- The creation of two housing projects for Cypriot Gypsies, one in Limassol and the other in Paphos, consisting of 16 and 24 prefabricated housing units respectively. These housing units are equipped with all basic amenities such as water (drinking water incl.) and electricity supply, solar water heaters, telephone line installation, sewage system, etc.

The Bi-communal Multi-Functional Centre operated by the Municipality of Limassol (mentioned above, under Access to Employment) is located on the premises of the old Turkish-Cypriot Elementary School, which is situated in the old Turkish-Cypriot quarter. The Centre provides mostly social and supportive services to both Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, including Cypriot Gypsies, who are living in Limassol.

Furthermore, the Limassol District Administration Office has recruited a Turkish-Cypriot translator for the assistance of Turkish-Cypriots, including Cypriot Gypsies, who visit the Office to apply for various documents, such as Identity Cards, Passports etc. The District Administration Office is in direct contact on a daily base with the Cypriot Gypsies to solve problems in housing, education and any other difficulties they face in the government controlled area of the Republic.

## **Conclusion**

Important policy measures for improving the situation of Roma and other vulnerable groups pertain to access to education, employment, health care, social support and housing and to the elimination of discrimination. Most priority issues, such as employment creation and the reduction of poverty are cross-cutting in nature and call for a comprehensive approach and the promotion of mutual interaction between policy measures.

To ensure coherence between policy measures aiming at improving the situation of Roma and other vulnerable groups, it is important to underline the interdependence between employment, economic and social policies. To this end, reviews of the social implications of economic and employment policies are necessary, especially within the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy.