

**Cyprus
National Roma Strategic Framework**

**2021-2030**

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# Introduction

Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework refers to the social priorities of the Republic of Cyprus for the period 2021-2030, outlining the programmes developed by the competent authorities of the Republic of Cyprus and setting the national goals and measures for enhancing equality, inclusion and participation of Cyprus Roma living in areas under the effective control of the Government of the Republic of Cyprus and in accordance to Cyprus specific circumstances.

The Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework will be updated every 5 years to accommodate any new issues that will emerge or sooner if necessary.

# Consultation Process

The Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework was drawn up in collaboration and consultation with competent government Ministries and Departments / Services. More specifically, the Social Welfare Services, of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare, as the National Contact Point for Roma, worked closely with representatives of various Ministries and Departments/ Services. The entire consultation process for drawing up the Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework began in June 2021, after a roadmap was developed in accordance with the EU framework[[1]](#footnote-1).

The response of the stakeholders was very large and a series of positions / suggestions / proposals were submitted, which formed the basis for the Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework. Subsequently, a first draft was prepared with the contributions and positions of the responding stakeholders, and set the basis of another round of consultation with relevant Ministries which led to the development of the Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework.

The Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework was submitted to the Council of Ministers and it was approved on the 13th of December, 2021.

It must be mentioned that the Social Policy Strategy, 2021-2027, of the Republic of Cyprus, must be read in conjunction with the Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework, as it provides for the horizontal social policy of the Republic of Cyprus.

# Chapter 1: Cyprus Roma and Current Situation

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 - (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.

At present, there is no formal data on the size of the Cyprus Roma population, however according to the previous report “Policy Measures of Cyprus for the Social Inclusion of Roma” it was estimated that the number of Cypriot Gypsies, living in the Government controlled areas, is between 650 and 700.

In the 2021 Census of Population, a provision has been made for the inclusion of the Cyprus Roma population group as categories of response to the question on the ethnic / religious group. The specific question however, will be optional, in accordance with the recommendations of the experts of the Advisory Committee on Framework Convention on the protection of National Minorities.

More precisely, in the said question the choices “Roma / Courbetti” and “Roma (Christian / or Orthodox)” have been included, after consultation with Council of Europe experts who had visited Cyprus in July 2019.

The 2021 Census is expected to further contribute to the understanding of the situation of Cyprus Roma and as such respond more effectively to any issues and challenges that may arise regarding the Cyprus Roma population.

# Chapter 2. Horizontal Objectives: Safeguarding Equality, Inclusion and Participation

## 2.1 Protection from Discrimination and Racism

***Regarding discrimination and racism Cyprus main goal is to construe all the necessary procedures to effectively fight direct and indirect discrimination as well as to implement measures to promote multi-cultural awareness-raising activities and campaigns***.

The Ministry of Justice and Public Order, after consultation with the state authorities, has prepared the National Strategy for the protection and promotion of Human Rights, which has been approved by a decision of the Council of Ministers, dated June 2, 2021. The aim of the National Strategy is to create and strengthen a framework in which all bodies will implement actions for the effective protection and promotion of human rights in compliance with the obligations arising from European and international commitments of the Republic of Cyprus.

In particular, with regards to Roma, the National Strategy includes the Roma living in Cyprus in the target groups, based on the recommendations of international bodies and seeks to combat discrimination and eliminate any obstacles they encounter in the enjoyment of human rights.

Moreover, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth (MoECSY’s) antiracist policy «Code of Conduct against Racism & Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents» is being implemented with the support of the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (CPI) since the school year 2014-2015. The policy conceptualizes racism in a broad manner, including all sorts of discrimination. It includes definitions of basic concepts which form the theoretical background (e.g. racism, racist incident, discrimination, stereotypes, diversity, etc.), outlines the responsibilities and commitments, expected by each member of the school community, and provides the steps to be followed by schools for dealing with racist incidents in a practical rubric. It provides schools and teachers with a detailed plan on how to deal with and prevent racist incidents.

The anti-racist policy includes specific reference to anti-gypsyism as a form of racism as: "… a distinct type of racist ideology which at the same time is linked to different types of racism. Anti-gypsyism is a complex social phenomenon which in its more overt form, is expressed through violence, hatred, exploitation and discrimination against the Roma people. However, it is often expressed through deeper, more hidden and unconscious discrimination against the Roma people. Anti-Gypsyism is used as a way to justify and reproduce the exclusion or Roma people as well as a way to rationalize their supposed inferiority, based the historical prosecution and negative stereotypes attributed to them".

Schools implementing the anti-racist policy are expected to record and manage racist incidents, if any, including towards Cyprus Roma pupils. The Cyprus Pedagogical Institute supports schools in various ways for the implementation of the antiracist policy.

The creation of the school network appears to be the most effective support strategy for schools implementing the policy. The school teams created in the various districts have the opportunity to exchange experiences and views on policy implementation processes and reflect on their role and ways of managing the behaviours of colleagues, children and parents.

Furthermore, towards the measures to promote awareness about Roma cultures, language and history that includes the memory of the Roma Holocaust and reconciliation processes in society, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth is pursuing awareness raising to students concerning the Roma Holocaust through the history curriculum as well as through organising activities in Cyprus to celebrate the International Roma Day.

## 2.2 Inclusion and Participation

***Towards safeguarding Inclusion and Participation, Cyprus undertakes to improve the status of the Cyprus Roma people by establishing/enhancing the necessary conditions for their socio-economic inclusion in all aspects and segments in the society.***

An important horizontal investment undertaken by the Republic of Cyprus, through which all vulnerable people will benefit, including Cyprus Roma, is the establishment of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare, which was established by a relevant legislation in May 2021 and entered into force in July 2021. The aim of the establishment of the Deputy Ministry is to strengthen social welfare services and to address the social problems faced by the citizens in Cyprus, as well as to upgrade social services provided to citizens in order to effectively and to the maximum possible extent, horizontally address the evolving needs of society.

According to the relevant legislation, the responsibilities of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare include:

* The submission of proposals for the development of national policies and strategies and appropriate institutional framework,
* The implementation of the national policies and strategies in order to ensure conditions of social cohesion and social solidarity, providing social protection, achieving social integration, promoting equal opportunities, combating poverty and social exclusion and promoting the interests of individuals, families and communities,
* The submission of proposals for national strategies to ensure a decent standard of living, and their coordination and implementation in particular, through
	+ taking measures to strengthen the family, so that it can respond to its complex role,
	+ support for people and families with serious social problems,
	+ ensuring the protection and care of children and other vulnerable groups of the population,
	+ mobilization and empowerment of civil society of providing high quality social services at local level,
	+ Upgrading of services provided by state institutions and foster families to vulnerable groups of the population,
* The upgrading and modernization of the structure and procedures of the Deputy Ministry and the continuous upgrading of the quality of the services provided,
* The submission of proposals for national policies and strategies and their implementation, as well as the formation of an appropriate institutional framework for the prevention of social problems of citizens.

Furthermore, as regards investing in children, the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare, undertook the preparation of the National Child Guarantee Action Plan which should be submitted to the EU by March 2022.

Also, an important pillar in the context of upgrading social services provided to citizens, is the Project "Restructuring of Social Welfare Services" (implemented by the Social Welfare Services, of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare), which aims at the modernization, improvement, upgrading and development of processes and services provided.

The Project through specific actions and measures aims at the improvement of accessibility, enhancing individualized and holistic / multidisciplinary support to people and families, with the involvement of all relevant governmental and non-governmental services through a person centered approach and practices so that the services provided are effective, the rights of vulnerable people and their well-being are safeguarded. This project is co-funded by the European Social Fund.

Within this framework and among the main actions promoted through the Restructuring of Social Welfare Services, an essential programme promoted by the Social Welfare Services of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare, which is expected to be co-funded by the European Social Fund and which contributes to the social investment of the Republic of Cyprus towards improving access to social services in the community is the “Programme for the provision of Social Workers in communities or community complexes and in Local Authorities”.

Through this Programme, the Social Welfare Services, recognising the experience of local authorities in matters relating to their community and given that they are the closest to the citizen and can more directly identify the needs, problems, shortcomings, sensitivities of their community, promote synergies with local actors in the implementation of social work programmes in their community.

Towards this, the Social Welfare Services provide technical / expertise and financial support to local authorities / communities with the aim of setting up the necessary teams of professional social workers for the development of Social Work in the Community. This synergy between Social Welfare Services and local authorities will help to increase vulnerable groups accessibility to services based on their individual needs and which are operated either in the community or by other government authorities or other bodies.

Furthermore, the programme will substantially contribute to the development of a local assistance network, which will directly identify and decisively assist individuals and families who are in need of psychosocial support, as well as to contribute to the identification and design of necessary social and other programmes in order to better address any social problems in their community.

Furthermore, through the Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan (the “RRP” or the “Plan”) and based on the strategic objective “to strengthen the economy’s resilience and the country’s potential for economically, socially and environmentally sustainable long-term growth and welfare”, the Republic of Cyprus promotes several investments and reforms.

The Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan is a key tool to repair, restart, and reconfigure Cyprus’ economic and social composition to positively impact the citizens’ well-being, the quality of human capital and the labour force, the efficiency of its institutions and the Country’s effective green and digital transition. The reforms outlined in the Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan recognise the need for resilience against unprecedented shocks and to deliver a cultural shift addressing the whole spectrum of the economy and society: public administration, private sector as well as all citizens. As mentioned in the Plan, cultural resilience can act catalytically towards the development and success of a country’s economic initiatives since it can bring about effective changes in society, which in turn have a positive impact on economic development. Through the measures of the Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan, the aim is to promote Cyprus as:

1. A country with high levels of resilience, productivity and competitiveness through a sustainable model of long-term growth;

 2. A country where the education system and workforce development are aligned with the skills needed for the future;

3. A country that is among the pioneers in Green and Digital transition;

4. A country with a resilient health system that follows best practices from top health systems around the world;

5. A welfare state with a strong protection network for those in need of state assistance;

6. A state of law, transparency and accountability, with strong anti-corruption mechanisms.

Within this framework the Social Welfare Services of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare, are responsible for the implementation of two Investments:

1. The establishment of Multifunctional Centres and Childcare Centres includes:

(a) Conduction of a Study under the Technical Assistance Instrument (TSI). Specifically, Technical Support will be requested to analyse the state of provision of early childhood education and care services for young children in Cyprus, and to develop recommendations for investment in the sector, and specifically in child centres, with a view to expanding the offer of affordable, accessible, high quality and inclusive services. The analysis will inform the joint development of a framework for the provision of integrated quality services and the monitoring of their quality, involving authorities and stakeholders from the social, education and care sectors. The framework will be piloted in selected early childhood education and care settings.

(b) The development of a national strategy on Early Childhood Education and Care and an accompanying action plan considering the recommendations of the completed TSI project.

(c) The provision of state aid to local authorities/ NGOs for the construction or /and purchase of the necessary structures, including renovation of existing structures and purchase of equipment for the Establishment of Multifunctional Centres for Children. The objective of the investment is mainly to enhance the availability of quality care infrastructure for children aged 0 - 3 8/12 and school aged children to serve mainly working parents with children.

2. The establishment of home structures for children, adolescent with conduct disorders and people in need of Long-Term Care (LTC) includes:

 (a) The provision of state aid to local authorities/NGOs for the establishment of Small Hosting Units for children under the care of the Director of Social Welfare Services, particularly unaccompanied minors.

(b) The acquisition through tender procedure for the establishment of state structures for hosting children under the care of the Director of Social Welfare Services.

(c) The provision of state aid to local authorities/ NGOs for the Establishment of infrastructure for the development of Hostels and Day-Care Programmes’ for minors with conduct disorder issues (young people aged 12-18 years). The hostels will accommodate minors with conduct disorders such as delinquent behaviour, use of addictive substances etc who live in an inappropriate family environment or who are under the care of the Director of Social Welfare Services. The infrastructure will also support the day-care programme for providing support, education and treatment services to both the occupants of the hostel and to minors with conduct disorders who live with their guardians.

(d) The provision of state aid to local authorities/NGOs for the establishment of role model community-based care centres for specific groups of people who are in need for Long Term Care (LTC).

# Chapter 3. Sectoral objectives

Under this Chapter Cyprus sets its strategic objectives and measures in order to address the main challenges faced by Cyprus Roma in education, housing, health care, social support and employment.

## 3.1 Education

***A long-term priority and an investment with long-term benefits is in the area of education. Beyond personal development education is a prerequisite for the success of Cyprus Roma in the labour market, their economic independence and social advancement.***

***Within this framework, Cyprus main goal is to ensure that all Cyprus Roma have effective and equal access to education and are able to participate in all forms and stages of education, with the necessary measures in place that will promote their personal development.***

Towards this objective the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth (MoECSY) has set two goals and targets:

1. Τhe majority of Cyprus Roma Children complete compulsory education until the age of fifteen or complete lower Secondary Education Cycle (Gymnasium) or whatever comes first.

2. To reduce the gap in upper secondary education or vocational/ technical secondary education.

In order to achieve these targets the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth is considering the introduction of a core programme beginning from lower secondary education to address the problem of disengaged students and students at risk of dropping out including Roma students. The programme is funded by the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS).

Also, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth, promotes measures to cater for the particular needs of Cyprus Roma pupils enrolled in public schools include:

1. The employment of Turkish Cypriot teachers to teach Turkish language 6 periods per week, History and Muslim religion and other social issues,
2. The employment of a bilingual teacher in order to overcome the linguistic barrier arising from the low proficiency of Roma Students in the Greek language,
3. Children are fully integrated into the classroom and school programme.
4. The providence of teacher training for teaching Greek as a Second Language.
5. The active participation of Turkish Cypriot/Roma pupils in various school events.
6. The organisation of a course titled "History-language-culture", especially designed for Roma children.
7. The school unit provides free meals on a daily basis to all children that attend the voluntary all-day school.
8. Children are fully integrated into the classroom and school programme

Additionally, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth, towards encouraging participation of Cyprus Roma parents to education provides teaching of Greek as a second Language, free of charge, in State Institute for further Education to Parents and Guardians of Roma Children.

Also, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth in an attempt to combat bullying and school violence, has designed and developed the National Strategy for Preventing and addressing School Violence, which has a four-year timeframe of implementation (2018 - 2022). According to its role and responsibilities, and based on the aforementioned Strategy, the Cyprus Observatory on School Violence (COSV) of the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute (CPI) has developed and implemented actions that aim to prevent and address bullying and violence in schools. Cyprus Observatory on School Violence provides support to school units for the implementation of actions and programs aimed at improving the school climate, with the ultimate aim of reducing violence in schools. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth, through the creation of these mechanisms, seeks to monitor the phenomenon of violence at school, identify needs and evaluate the effectiveness of existing interventions / programs in order to make research-based decisions and, in general, to formulate effective policy.

***For monitoring purposes the*** ***Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth follows up on the number of recorded incidents of school violence and the number of schools participating in COSV programmes***.

Moreover, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth targets at supporting Turkish-Cypriot Roma students to have access to personal equipment (computer/ tablet) and internet connection at home. The MoECSY monitors this through an equivalent indicator on the number of Cyprus Roma students given personal equipment (computer/ tablet) and internet connection at home.

***Cyprus also acknowledges that in according to the situation in Cyprus, is significant for Cyprus Roma to face literacy barriers, and towards this goal relates learning the official school language, Greek in this case.***

Thus, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth suggested the implementation of the Greek lessons to Roma and all the vulnerable groups and immigrants free of charge. Learning Greek will give them more opportunities in the future to find job as well.

Additionally, a special initiative towards the integration of Cyprus Roma Children is the implementation of the programme "School and Social Inclusion Actions" by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport. The programme includes the following measures:

(a) Extra support provided to pupils in language and mathematics,

(b) Teacher assistants in all classes,

(c) Additional extra-curricular activities (such as sports and dancing) during school hours as well as after school hours,

(d) Parents and Guardians Counseling and empowerment.

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth allocates vacant places to younger children, of non-compulsory education, based on specific criteria. According to the criteria, priority is given to children at risk and socioeconomic deprivation. For example, some of the criteria include children under the protection/supervision of the Social Welfare Services or orphans or poor children whose parents are unemployed, children of a family with many children or families with three children or a single parent family, as well as Cyprus Roma children. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth monitors enrolment *by measuring the number of pupils of non-compulsory education who are enrolled in public kindergarten.*

Acknowledging that investment in education starts in early childhood, the Social Welfare Services, of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare, in order to enhance the availability but also affordability of social care programmes for children, especially under the age of 3 8/12, subsidise NGO’s/ local authorities for the running of such Programmes. The measures under the Cyprus Recovery and Resilience Plan mentioned in Chapter 2.2 above are also relevant. As regards to the quality of social care programmes the Social Welfare Services are also responsible for their inspection and safeguard the enforcement of relevant legislative conditions.

Furthermore, in order to safeguard ease transition between the different levels of education the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth provides psychological help through Psychological assessments and counseling interviews to Turkish-Cypriot Roma students enrolled in secondary education and based on the MoECSY’s Action Plan to ease the transition between primary and lower-secondary education for all students and Turkish- Cypriot Roma. As to the monitoring of this measure *this will be done through the number of Cyprus Roma students provided Psychological assessments and counseling interviews but also through the number of students that face difficulties in the first class of lower-secondary Education.*

In addition, the Social Welfare Services as the responsible authority for the protection and well-being of children are in close co-operation with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth for any issues that may arise and involve the well-being of children including issues on school attendance.

Furthermore, in order to facilitate access to education the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Work safeguards the transfer to schools of students including Cyprus Roma students, who are members of families that are beneficiaries of Guaranteed Minimum Income. Specifically, based on specific criteria, categories of persons are entitled to a free ticket for their travel to and from the school with the internal road transport services, provided that they are transferred to a school within the educational district where they reside.

According to a Decision of the Council of Ministers dated 27/05/1999, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth sends in a yearly basis to the Ministry of Transport, Communication and Work a list of the number of tickets to be delivered to schools in Cyprus for the free transfer of students.

According to the above Decision of the Council of Ministers, in addition to public buses, taxi cars can be used to transport up to 4 or 8 middle School students and up to 6 or 12 primary school students. The needs are constantly monitored and in the event that there is no bus route for their transportation, the Ministry of Transport is willing to further study the issue and may include a specific route.

## 3.2 Housing

***The goal of Cyprus regarding housing is to improve the housing conditions of the Cyprus Roma population, activating all the necessary processes available in order to accommodate individual’s needs and services depending on their specific circumstances.*** Also relevant is the Section 3.4 ‘Social Support’.

## 3.3 Access to Healthcare

***The goal of Cyprus is to improve the health of the Cyprus Roma as well as the quality and availability of health-care***.

Towards this aim to improve the quality of health care system, the government of Cyprus introduced the National Health Scheme (Gesy) and the restructuring of the public hospitals into autonomous establishments. The pandemic showed the multiple benefits and the usefulness of the scheme which serves people universally and equally including the Cyprus Roma. The scheme introduced the institution of a personal physician for each individual.

In the context of the general reform in the field of the provision of medical care services, the concept of the personal physician as well as the right of the citizen to freely choose the doctor is promoted. Especially with regard to children, their registration with a pediatrician of their choice is promoted who will be able to monitor the development of children and provide advice and guidance. Personal physician’s services are provided free of charge. The new design favors the creation of a personal relationship between physician – patient and facilitates the personalized promotion of best practices for Health Protection. The personal physician can guide the patient when claiming benefits from the health system. However, further arrangements should be made for the immediate information of Roma in relation with the above mentioned rights in connection with receiving medical care, and, to guide them for the purpose of enrollment in the GESY.

## 3.4 Social Support

***Towards safeguarding measures in order to combat poverty, as well as measures to ensure access to adequate social protection schemes, including both income support and in kind benefits and service provision, Cyprus commits to the introduction and implementation of specific schemes.***

The Republic of Cyprus introduced in July 2014 the Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) (No. L-109(I)/2014) which provides benefits such as housing, care and emergency needs, and disability. The GMI can be provided to people in need, including Cypriot Citizenship Roma people.

The general conditions under which the GMI is provided includes the total gross monthly income of the family unit, total deposits, total financial assets (i.e bonds, stocks) and immovable property of the family unit, which are required to be lower than a certain amount. There is no fixed duration of the GMI provision. The benefit is granted for as long as the beneficiary needs assistance and as long as the beneficiaries and members of the household comply with the obligations referred to in law No. L-109(I)/2014, as it is amended or superseded.

Also, the Cypriot government provides the child benefit which is granted to a family for the number of unmarried and dependent children who live under the same roof. Eligibility criteria for child benefit include the family’s gross annual income for the previous year not to exceed €49.000 for families with one dependent child and €59.000 for families with two dependent children. For families with more than two dependent children, the threshold increases by €5.000 per child, that is, for three children it is €64.000 for four children it is €69.000, etc. Also, the family must have its legal and continuous residence for at least five (5) consecutive years prior to the submission of the application, in the areas under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus, and in addition the family does not own assets (including real estate, deposits, etc.) exceeding 1.2 million euros in current prices. The value of any possible alienation of assets that occurred within 24 months prior to the application submission date is also included in the calculation of the total value.

Additionally, the single-parent allowance which is provided to a single-parent family in relation to its dependent children. A single parent family is a family in which a single parent, without a spouse companion, lives with at least one dependent child, either by marriage or out of wedlock, and lives alone because he/she is single, widowed, divorced or because one of the parents is declared missing by the court, or a married parent is serving a prison sentence of more than six months. Eligibility criteria for single parent allowance include that the family does not own assets (including immovable and movable property, deposits, etc.) over 1.2 million euros in current prices. The value of any possible alienation of assets that occurred within 24 months prior to application submission date, is also included in the calculation of the total value. Also, the gross annual income of the family for the previous year has to not exceed €49.000 and the family must have legal and continuous residence in the Republic of Cyprus for at least five (5) years before applying for the single parent benefit.

Furthermore, there is a scheme that supports households of low-income pensioners. This allowance is provided to pensioners’ households whose total annual income is below the poverty line and it concerns households with individuals receiving: a pension from the Social Insurance Fund, a social pension or a pension from any occupational pension scheme implemented in Cyprus. There are no citizenship requirements but each pensioner and their dependents must legally reside in the Republic of Cyprus for at least one year before applying for the scheme and they should not be away from Cyprus for a continuous period of more than three months within the same year. The total deposits of a person or a household should not exceed €100.000. The value of any possible alienation of deposits that occurred within 24 months prior to the reference year that income and deposits are taken under consideration, is also included in the calculation of the total value, unless the alienations are justified as necessary and imperative.

The Social Welfare Services within their competencies they provide preventive, supportive and remedial social services to all people in need, which include services for the protection of children and the promotion of their welfare and best interests, as well as strengthening and supporting families in order to enable their members to effectively exercise their roles and responsibilities. Additionally, Social Welfare Services support individuals, families and communities to cope with the social problems of changing conditions and facilitate individual and group adjustment. Finally, Social Welfare Services promote synergies with local authorities and non-governmental organisations for the designing and development of programmes to address the needs of the community.

Also, measures taken by the Republic of Cyprus, aiming to address the specific situation in certain areas in Cyprus, includes the provision of support to the Bi-communal Multi-Functional Centre operated by the Municipality of Limassol. The Centre provides mostly social and supportive services to both Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots, including Cyprus Roma, who are living in Limassol. The center receives funding for its operational costs through the Grants in Aid Scheme of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare.

Furthermore, recent decisions on supporting specific vulnerable groups have been designed by the Republic of Cyprus which among other includes the following:

1. Plan of financial support and support to released prisoners (approved by decision of the Council of Ministers of the day. 3/6/2020). The aim of the plan is to provide financial support and aid to the persons who will be released, with the purpose of ensuring the minimum standard of living and facilitating their social reintegration. Based on the plan, the released persons have the right to apply for Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI). Applicants, in the period till GMI provision, have the right to apply to the Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance for the purpose of granting extraordinary allowance, in accordance with the provisions of Article 11 of the Minimum Guaranteed Income and in General the Social Benefits Law.

2. Scheme to financially support former children under the care of the director of Social Welfare Services after 18 years of age for rehabilitation purposes. Financial support for former children under care is a high priority and obligation of the state, since these individuals usually remain in the child protection system for a long time and in order to address the vulnerability they are facing, a financial support is provided in order to contribute to the smooth socio-professional integration and rehabilitation. Through this Scheme covers costs for studying, vocational training/education and the purchase of Home/professional equipment.

3. The project "Baby Dowry" is implemented from 1/1/2018 with retroactive effect from 9/2017 and is valid until 31/12/2023. The project has been included in the proposed projects to be promoted for co-financing by the EU Cohesion Policy funds during the new programming period 2021 -2027.The aim of the project is to reduce material deprivation and reduce the risk of social exclusion of the beneficiary families, as well as the well-being of children, through the provision of defined basic consumer goods free of charge and by pursuing accompanying measures that mainly concern the guidance and networking with important services, the activation and empowerment of their parental skills. Beneficiaries of the project are families who receive minimum guaranteed income or public assistance, as well as families who face serious problems of material deprivation. The package includes basic consumer goods, such as equipment, linens, baby diapers and personal hygiene and baby care items.

## 3.5 Employment

***Improving employment situation of Cyprus Roma is one of the main pillars towards ensuring their socio-economic inclusion.***

All job seekers including Cyprus Roma can register as unemployed at the district and local offices of the Public Employment Service (PES) where employment services are offered. PES officers assist them in finding work, through job search and placement services, which include professional guidance, counselling and referrals to training programmes and vacancies. Functionaries seek suitable employment for each person, always taking into account their family/ personal situation and any health problems, as well as their skills and abilities.

In the case of persons belonging to vulnerable groups of unemployed, specialized services of individualized approach and guidance are provided through the implementation of an individual action plan.

Acknowledging that finding a quality job is the safest way out of poverty for people who are capable and available for work, the actions and policies that have been put on track in the coming period aim at the training and retraining of unemployed and low-paid workers, with particular emphasis on beneficiaries of social benefits. Also, the current successful plans for subsidizing the recruitment of unemployed, people with disabilities, chronic patients and young people up to 29 years have been renewed by decision of the Council of Ministers.

The Welfare Benefit Management Service applies mechanisms of activation of the beneficiaries of the (GMI) for those who are able to work. Beneficiaries are informed about their obligation to participate in special training and community service programmes and to accept any work offered to them. The Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance gives particular importance to the design of training plans for the purpose of gaining work experience and new skills. The aim is to facilitate the activation of beneficiaries and avoid entrapment in benefit.

In cases where it is found that there are conditions that may limit the chances of being placed in a job, it is requested by the Welfare Benefit Management Service to include the beneficiary in a personalized approach programme where the PES reviews the desired professions, contributed to optimizing the CV of the candidates and/or refers them to training programs. In cases where the beneficiary may be faced with other particular circumstances, he/she is referred for social intervention to the Social Welfare Services for further support through the social welfare services programmes.

It should be stressed that in cases of beneficiaries of GMI who are not able to work such as disabled persons or pensioners, the allowance provided is particularly increased as these persons do not have the opportunity to increase their incomes through taking up work. Particularly for people with disabilities, the benefits provided through the (GMI) are up to 80% increase compared to basic benefits.

# Conclusion and Governance

The Cyprus Roma Strategic Framework sets horizontal goals through which the Cyprus Roma can benefit as well as targeted goals specifically designed for Cyprus Roma through investments, addressing the socio-economic status and living conditions of the Cyprus Roma. Through its goals and objectives, the Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework aims to ensure a comprehensive approach founded on the interaction of measures and interventions in different areas. Such an approach requires appropriate co-ordination across various bodies and authorities. This goal is promoted by the Social Welfare Services acting on their role as the Cyprus Roma Contact Point.

The Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework sets important policy measures for improving the situation of Cyprus Roma pertaining to access to education, housing, health care, and social support and access to services and employment and to the elimination of discrimination.

Furthermore, close cooperation between employment and social inclusion policies, (health, cultural, educational and housing policy) is a major priority for the Government. As such, the participation of all relevant stakeholders in the governance of social policies is very active and among of the government's priorities.

Cyprus demonstrates a strong culture of social dialogue, between the social partners, civil society and local authorities, and their participation in the dialogue is common practice prior to the adoption of any legislative or non-legislative action. The role of local authorities and civil society is very important in protecting and promoting the well-being of citizens through the operation of social programmes such as are structures for childcare, Home Care Services, Centers for the Care of Children after the school hours, counseling centers etc. The Government in its effort to support these partners aims to maintain the dialogue and consultation with them and to find methods to strengthen their role and respond better and more effectively to the needs of the individual and the wider society.

Additionally, in the context of better monitoring and governance of the objectives contained in the Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework, the establishment of a Committee to monitor the implementation of the Strategic Framework is promoted. The Committee will consist of representatives of the relevant Government Ministries / Departments / services and non-governmental organisations and will have as its terms of reference the monitoring of the implementation of the Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework.

1. COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION of 12 March 2021 on Roma equality, inclusion and participation (2021/C 93/01) and the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council COM(2020) 620 final. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)