

**Cyprus**

FRANET National Focal Point

Social Thematic Study

The situation of Roma

2012

First Elements Euroconsultants

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. ROMA POPULATION.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. EDUCATION.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. EMPLOYMENT.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>4. HOUSING/ NEIGHBOURHOOD .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>5. HEALTH .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>6. POVERTY/ ECONOMIC SITUATION .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>7. ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP/ RIGHTS AWARENESS .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>ANNEXES .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1. Bibliography .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>2. Statistical tables.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>3. Table of complaints (if available) .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4. Table of sources (reports and studies on Roma).....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>5. Roma networks.....</b>	<b>14</b>

## Executive summary

The last official count of the Roma population in Cyprus was carried out through the “Census of Population and Agriculture of 1960”, which recorded 502 Roma. Estimates from the Administration of District Officers show that there are around 650 to 700 Roma living in areas where the Republic of Cyprus exercises effective control. Moreover, there are Romanian and other Balkan Roma living in Cyprus, although their number is not officially known. Allegedly, frequent movements of Roma between the south of the island and the areas not under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus also occur.

The Roma living in Cyprus have automatically been considered citizens of the Republic and members of the Turkish community by the 1960 Constitution. Some Roma became sedentary in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, adopting either Greek or Turkish as their mother tongue (with the later predominating), but others are still described as nomadic.

Cyprus was criticized by the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities for its reluctance to recognise the Roma as a distinct minority group; instead, they are recognised as belonging to the Turkish-Cypriot community, which has been the state of affairs as of 1960. However, in its third periodic report submitted to the Framework Convention in 2009, Cyprus recognised for the first time that under the Framework Convention it has the responsibility to extend of its protection to the Cypriot Roma. This recognition, according to the public authorities, “constitutes a departure from previous policy”.

With regard to the area of **education**, a disproportionately high concentration of Turkish Cypriot (including Roma) children in certain schools was reported by ECRI. Authorities attribute this to the concentration of these communities in certain residential areas as the school enrolment criteria stipulate that pupils should enrol at the school nearest to their place of residence. However, ECRI noted that the facts are pointing to the existence of segregation and that the educational needs of the Roma are not met—effectively, this amounts to a denial of their right to education.

Although some improvement with regard to attendance in primary school was reported in 2009, enrolment and attendance among secondary school children remains a serious concern. Moreover, there is “no overall language plan or any national strategy plan at the promotion of regional or minority languages in Cyprus”.

The situation of the Roma in Cyprus in **employment** cannot be properly assessed due to a lack of data.

The main information concerning the **housing** situation of the Roma in Cyprus stems from the fourth monitoring cycle report released by ECRI in 2009 and the RAXEN study from 2011. According to

these, there are no Roma living in regulated or unregulated encampments. Most of the Roma settled in Limassol and in the vicinity of Polis (Paphos District).

Obtaining housing in the private sector is reportedly almost unattainable for the members of the Roma community. Therefore, Roma live either in abandoned Turkish Cypriot properties administered by the Government or in prefabricated houses in specially designated Roma settlements which are equipped with basic amenities such as water, electricity, sewage systems and solar heaters.

Roma were relocated to remote areas primarily to satisfy the local communities, who treated them with hostility and did not wish to live close to them. The Roma arriving from the Turkish-controlled north of Cyprus now reside in government-designated concentrations such as the old Turkish quarter of Limassol and special Roma settlements made of temporary structures and usually located in isolated areas. A plan for the relocation of Roma and dispersing them away from the old Turkish quarter in Limassol was compiled by the Interior Minister in 2002 but was met with resistance by local communities and Roma alike; consequently, it was never implemented.

Only very limited data on Roma and **health** are available. In general, Roma, as part of the Turkish Cypriot community, are eligible for free healthcare whether they reside in the Government-controlled area or in the northern part of the island.

The risk of **poverty** and the economic situation of the Roma in Cyprus cannot be properly assessed due to the lack of data.

The Roma continue to face prejudice and specific difficulties in various sectors. The implementation of the principle of free self-identification in respect to the Roma remains a source of concern.

The lack of any policy or measures to assist Roma is attributed by the authorities specifically to the fact that the Roma, as part of the Turkish Cypriot community, may benefit from all the measures put in place to assist and support that community. With regard to **active citizenship and rights awareness**, the dissemination of information as a part of the integration process is very limited, since no actions were taken either by the state or other actors to inform the Roma community of their rights, or the complaints procedures available to them. There are no NGOs promoting the rights of Roma, neither are there trade unions having any activities with them.

# 1 Roma population

The last official count of the Roma population in Cyprus was carried out in 1960 through the 'Census of Population and Agriculture of 1960' which revealed a number of 502 Roma. Although no other statistics are available, more recent estimations point to a population that could count anything between 500 and 2,500 Roma, with most estimates suggesting over 1,000.<sup>1</sup> According to estimates from the Administration of District Officers, there are between 650 and 700 Roma who live in areas where the Republic of Cyprus exercises effective control.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, there are Romanian and other Balkan Roma living in Cyprus, although their number is not officially known.<sup>3</sup>

The Roma living in Cyprus have automatically been deemed citizens of the Republic and members of the Turkish community by article 2 of the 1960 Constitution.<sup>4</sup> During the course of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, they became sedentary<sup>5</sup> and have adopted either Greek or Turkish as their mother tongue, with the latter predominating. Nomadism has characterized their lives, although some have become sedentary during the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As the majority spoke Turkish, most chose to move to the occupied areas of the island after the Turkish invasion of 1974, although in recent years they have regularly crossed the border in both directions. They remain outsiders, with lower educational qualifications than the rest of the population and consequently, lower living standards, partly dictated by a desire to maintain traditional nomadic lifestyles but also as a result of discrimination.<sup>6</sup>

The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities criticized Cyprus' reluctance to recognize the Roma as a distinct minority group, instead of regarding it as belonging to the Turkish-Cypriot community, which has been the state of affairs as of 1960. According to the information made available to the Advisory Committee, no dialogue has been opened with the representatives of the Roma on this issue and Roma have not been offered the possibility of freely express their ethnic affiliation.<sup>7</sup> However, in its third periodic report submitted to the Framework Convention in 2009, Cyprus recognised for the first time the extension of protection

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<sup>1</sup> Office of the Law Commissioner (2009 ), "Cyprus: Third Periodic Report on the Application of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities".

<sup>2</sup> European Commission, "Policy Measures of Cyprus for the Social Inclusion of Roma", National Strategies, European Commission. [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma\\_cyprus\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_cyprus_strategy_en.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou (2009), "Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers", Cyprus RAXEN National Focal Point Thematic Study.

<sup>4</sup> "For the purposes of this Constitution: 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".

<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Coureas and Marina Elia, (2009), "The Minorities of Cyprus: Development Patterns and the Identity of the Internal-Exclusion", edited by Andrekos Varnava, Nicholas Coureas and Marina Elia, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Council of Europe (2008), "Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities", Second opinion on Cyprus adopted on 7 June 2007, Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

under the Framework Convention to the Cypriot Roma. “This constitutes a departure from previous policy, which did not recognise the Roma as a separate community but considered them as an inseparable part of the Turkish Cypriot community, due to their common language (Turkish) and religion (Muslims)”.<sup>8</sup>

## 2 Education

In its report fourth monitoring report from May 2011, ECRI noted that there is a disproportionately high concentration of Turkish Cypriot (including Roma) children in particular schools.<sup>9</sup> The authorities attribute this to the concentration of these communities in certain residential areas as the school enrolment criteria stipulate that pupils should enrol at the school nearest to the place where they live. ECRI further noted that the facts are suggesting the existence of segregation and that the educational needs of the Roma are not met, effectively amounting to a denial of their right to education. Moreover, the lack of access to education for some Roma children residing in rural settlements such as the Polemidia housing settlement established by the authorities outside Limassol is also pointed out by the same report.

In 2009, a social report pointed towards some improvement with regard to attendance to primary school as a result of certain measures adopted, such as school meals and a small subsidy paid to the parents to support them in buying school uniforms and materials.<sup>10</sup> However, the enrolment and attendance for secondary school children is particularly worrying, as out of at least fifteen Roma school children who are obliged to attend secondary school, only two pupils have enrolled. The same report has also noted that there is “no overall language plan or any national strategy plan at the promotion of regional or minority languages in Cyprus”.

## 3 Employment

There is no data available on Roma in Cyprus with regard to employment.

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<sup>8</sup> Office of the Law Commissioner (2009), “Cyprus: Third Periodic Report on the Application of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities”.

<sup>9</sup> ECRI (2011), ECRI Report on Cyprus (fourth monitoring cycle), available at <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/cyprus/CYP-CbC-IV-2011-020-ENG.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Nicholas Coureas and Andrekos Varnava (eds.) (2009), “The Cypriot Roma and the Failure of Education: Anti-Discrimination and Multiculturalism as a Post-accession Challenge” by Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou. Chapter in Nicholas Coureas and Andrekos Varnava (eds.) *The Minorities of Cyprus: Development Patterns and the Identity of the Internal-Exclusion*, Cambridge Scholars, Publishing, forthcoming.

## 4 Housing/ Neighbourhood

There are no Roma living in regulated or unregulated encampments.<sup>11</sup> After crossing from the occupied areas to the areas under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus, Roma have settled in the city of Limassol and in the vicinity of the city of Polis in the Paphos District, while there were also observed frequent alleged movements of Roma between the south of the island and the areas not under the effective control of the Republic of Cyprus. The Social Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance are the responsible government body for the coordination of the Roma issues in Cyprus.<sup>12</sup>

According to the ECRI report, 160 Roma currently reside in the Paphos District and 700 in the Limassol District. Obtaining housing in the private sector is reportedly next to impossible for them. The accommodation provided to the Roma is leased by the Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, who rent it either from the private sector or from the Administration of Turkish Cypriot Properties of the Ministry of Interior.<sup>13</sup> According to the RAXEN study, the conditions of rental could not be ascertained and it is likely that a flexible system applies without fixed contractual terms.

Therefore, the Roma live either in abandoned Turkish Cypriot properties administered by the Government or in prefabricated houses in specially designated Roma settlements. One such settlement is located in Limassol and the other in Paphos, consisting in total of 40 prefabricated housing units. These are equipped with basic amenities such as water, electricity, sewage systems and solar heaters. Accommodation is free of charge. According to some sources, the Roma were relocated to remote areas primarily to satisfy the local communities, who treated them with hostility and did not wish to live close to them.<sup>14</sup> Also, in 1999 to 2001 many Roma crossed from the Turkish-controlled north of Cyprus to the Greek-Cypriot-controlled south and now reside in government-designated concentrations such as the old Turkish quarter of Limassol, and special Roma settlements.<sup>15</sup> These are made of temporary structures and are usually located in isolated areas.

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<sup>11</sup> Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou (2009), "Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers", Cyprus RAXEN National Focal Point Thematic Study.

<sup>12</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. Marina Efthimiadou, social welfare officer of the Welfare Services, where no information was provided with regard to the welfare officer(s) responsible for Roma until the day of the submission of the report or relevant reports.

<sup>13</sup> Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou (2009), "Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers", Cyprus RAXEN National Focal Point Thematic Study.

<sup>14</sup> Telephone interview with Ms. Marina Efthimiadou, social welfare officer of the Welfare Services, where no information was provided with regard to the welfare officer(s) responsible for Roma until the day of the submission of the report or relevant reports.

<sup>15</sup> Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou (2009), "Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers", Cyprus RAXEN National Focal Point Thematic Study.

A plan for the relocation of Roma and dispersing them away from the urban centre of Limassol was compiled by the Interior Minister in 2002. It was intended to address the demands of the local communities who were opposing the settlement of the Roma in their area, rather than address the housing problem of the Roma. In August 2002 the plan was approved by the Council of Ministers, who also approved an expenditure of CYP 255,000 (approximately EUR 440,000) for its implementation. The plan was never implemented, as it was met with resistance from the local communities inhabiting areas where the Roma were to be relocated. It was also resisted by Roma themselves, who wanted to be close to urban centres in order to be near their places of work and also near the areas they originated from. As a result, the Roma families were left to reside in the old Turkish quarter of Limassol, where many houses (up until the first quarter of 2009) continued to be in a bad state of repair.<sup>16</sup>

## **5 Health**

The ECRI report concludes that Roma, as part of the Turkish Cypriot community, are eligible to free healthcare whether they reside in the Government-controlled area or in the northern part of the island.

## **6 Poverty/ Economic situation**

No data is available with regard to the economic situation or impoverishment of the Roma in Cyprus.<sup>17</sup>

## **7 Active citizenship/ Rights awareness**

Despite efforts made in recent years, Roma continue to face prejudice and particular difficulties in various sectors. The implementation of the principle of free self-identification in respect of the Roma remains a source of concern.<sup>18</sup> The lack of any policy or measures to assist Roma specifically is attributed by the authorities to the fact that the Roma, as part of the Turkish Cypriot community, may benefit from all the measures put in place to assist and support that community. In addition, the frequent movement of the Roma between the areas where the Republic of Cyprus exercises effective control and the occupied areas of the island makes any concrete action difficult to organise and sustain.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou (2009), "Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers", Cyprus RAXEN National Focal Point Thematic Study.

<sup>17</sup> ECRI (2011), ECRI Report on Cyprus (fourth monitoring cycle), available at <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/cyprus/CYP-CbC-IV-2011-020-ENG.pdf> .

<sup>18</sup> Council of Europe (2008), "Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities", Second opinion on Cyprus adopted on 7 June 2007, Council of Europe, Strasbourg.

<sup>19</sup> ECRI (2011), ECRI Report on Cyprus (fourth monitoring cycle), available at <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/cyprus/CYP-CbC-IV-2011-020-ENG.pdf> .



The dissemination of information as part of the integration process is very limited, since no actions were taken either by the state or other actors to inform the Roma community of their rights, or the complaints procedures available to them. There are no NGOs promoting the rights of the Roma, and trade unions have no activity with the community of Roma, who are almost exclusively unemployed.<sup>20</sup>

It has been pointed out that the perceptions and perspective of the Cypriot Roma will only become evident when the new generation of Roma, currently attending mainstream schools will attain the requisite age and status in order to voice the aspirations of their community.<sup>21</sup> However, given their strong historic affiliations to the country and to one of its two large communities, the Turkish-Cypriot, the Roma are unlikely to be content with mere toleration.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> "Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou (2009), "Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers", Cyprus RAXEN National Focal Point Thematic Study.

<sup>21</sup> Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, "Tolerance and Culture Diversity Discourses in Cyprus", *Accept Pluralism*, Working Paper 1/2011, Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, SYMFILIOSI, Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies, European University Institute

<sup>22</sup> Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, "Tolerance and Culture Diversity Discourses in Cyprus", *Accept Pluralism*, Working Paper 1/2011, Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, SYMFILIOSI, Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies, European University Institute

# Annexes

## 1. Bibliography

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- Resolution CM/ResCMN(2011)16 on the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities by Cyprus, (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 21 September 2011 at the 1121st meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies)

## 2. Statistical tables

No data available.

## 3. Table of complaints

No data available.

## 4. Table of sources (reports and studies on Roma)

	<b>Title, author, source</b>	<b>“Tolerance and Culture Diversity Discourses in Cyprus” Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou,</b>
	<b>Source and type</b>	“Tolerance and Culture Diversity Discourses in Cyprus”, Accept Pluralism, Working Paper 1/2011, Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, SYMFILIOSI, Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies, European University Institute Non-governmental report
<b>Thematic area</b>	<i>Education</i>	
	<i>Housing</i>	
	<i>Employment</i>	
	<i>Health</i>	
	<i>Poverty</i>	
	<i>Migration</i>	✓
	<i>Active citizenship</i>	✓
	<b>Sample</b>	-
	<b>Location</b>	-
	<b>Target population</b>	-
	<b>Key findings</b>	Hostile regime faced by the Roma whose exclusion and extreme poverty has pushed them to the margins.  The perceptions and perspective of the Cypriot Roma will only become evident when the new generation of Roma, currently attending mainstream schools will attain the requisite age and status in order to voice the aspirations of their community. However, given their strong historic affiliations to the country and to one of its two large communities, the Turkish-Cypriot, the Roma are unlikely to be content with mere toleration.
	<b>Methodology</b>	-
	<b>Representativeness, transferability of findings</b>	
	<b>Title, author, source</b>	<b>“The Cypriot Roma and the Failure of Education: Anti-Discrimination and Multiculturalism as a Post-accession Challenge”</b>

	<b>Source and type</b>	“The Cypriot Roma and the Failure of Education: Anti-Discrimination and Multiculturalism as a Post-accession Challenge” by Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou. Chapter in Nicholas Coureas and Andrekos Varnava (eds.) <i>The Minorities of Cyprus: Development Patterns and the Identity of the Internal-Exclusion</i> , Cambridge Scholars, Publishing, forthcoming, 2009 Social Report
<b>Thematic area</b>	<i>Education</i>	✓
	<i>Housing</i>	
	<i>Employment</i>	
	<i>Health</i>	
	<i>Poverty</i>	
	<i>Migration</i>	
	<i>Active citizenship</i>	
<b>Thematic area</b>	<b>Sample</b>	-
	<b>Location</b>	areas where the Republic of Cyprus has effective control
	<b>Target population</b>	-
	<b>Key findings</b>	There is “no overall language plan or any national strategy plan at the promotion of regional or minority languages in Cyprus”.  There is some Improvement with regard to attendance to the primary school as a result of certain measures adopted, such as school meals and a small subsidy paid to the parents to allow them to buy school uniforms and material. However, the enrolment and attendance for secondary school children is particularly bad, as out of at least fifteen Roma school children who are obliged to attend secondary school, only two pupils have enrolled.
	<b>Methodology</b>	Literature review
	<b>Representativeness, transferability of findings</b>	

	<b>Title, author, source</b>	<b>ECRI Report on Cyprus</b>
	<b>Source and type</b>	ECRI Report on Cyprus (fourth monitoring cycle), May 2011 Council of Europe report
<b>Thematic area</b>	<i>Education</i>	✓
	<i>Housing</i>	
	<i>Employment</i>	
	<i>Health</i>	✓
	<i>Poverty</i>	
	<i>Migration</i>	✓
	<i>Active citizenship</i>	

	<b>Sample</b>	-
	<b>Location</b>	areas where the Republic of Cyprus has effective control
	<b>Target population</b>	
	<b>Key findings</b>	<p>There is a disproportionately high concentration of Roma pupils in particular schools. Failure to meet the educational needs of Roma children.</p> <p>Roma (as they are considered part of the Turkish Cypriot community) are eligible to free healthcare whether they reside in the Government-controlled area or in the northern part of the island.</p>
	<b>Methodology</b>	-
	<b>Representativeness, transferability of findings</b>	-

	<b>Title, author, source</b>	<b>“Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers”, Cyprus RAXEN National Focal Point Thematic Study</b>
	<b>Source and type</b>	<p>“Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers”, Cyprus RAXEN National Focal Point Thematic Study, Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, March 2009.</p> <p>Study commissioned by the European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights.</p>
<b>Thematic area</b>	<i>Education</i>	
	<i>Housing</i>	✓
	<i>Employment</i>	
	<i>Health</i>	
	<i>Poverty</i>	
	<i>Migration</i>	
	<i>Active citizenship</i>	
	<b>Sample</b>	
	<b>Location</b>	areas where the Republic of Cyprus has effective control
	<b>Target population</b>	
	<b>Key findings</b>	<p>The accommodation provided to the Roma is leased to them by the Welfare Services of the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, who rent the accommodation either from the private sector or from the Administration of Turkish Cypriot Properties of the Ministry of Interior. The conditions of rental could not be ascertained and it is likely that a flexible system applies without fixed contractual terms.</p> <p>No Roma are living in regulated or unregulated encampments. Available data indicate that the Cypriot Roma reside in government-administrated homes, such as Turkish-Cypriot-owned properties administered by the government allocated to them, or in pre-fabricated houses in specially designated Roma</p>

		settlements
	<b>Methodology</b>	
	<b>Representativeness, transferability of findings</b>	

## 5. Roma networks

There are no Roma NGOs or any other organisations specifically representing or assisting the Roma in Cyprus.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> ECRI (2011), ECRI Report on Cyprus (fourth monitoring cycle), available at <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/country-by-country/cyprus/CYP-CbC-IV-2011-020-ENG.pdf>