

Human Rights of Roma Population in Republic of Cyprus Controlled Areas

Roma communities have been living in the whole of Cyprus for hundreds of years but their precise numbers remain unknown as many of them prefer to remain invisible and to assimilate in fear of being stigmatised.¹ However, it is estimated that their numbers are around 1000. Unlike the other minority communities in Cyprus (Maronites, Latins and Armenians), the Roma are not recognised as being entitled to religious minority rights but are deemed part of the Turkish Cypriot community with no special rights at all.²

Since early 90ies Roma communities have begun to cross to areas under the control of Republic of Cyprus (RoC). During that time mass media had a racist approach to Roma population. According to European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Third Report on Cyprus, Members of the Roma community are reported to face widespread prejudice, disadvantage and discrimination in different areas. Hostility and rejection by the local non-Roma population is reported to be high and to have in some cases resulted in physical violence.³ There also have been allegations of Police harassment.⁴ There is strong evidence that, their living conditions in the southern part of the island are those of poverty, unemployment or semi employment, facing wide spread prejudice, racial discrimination and social exclusion.⁵ However, The authorities do not acknowledge the seriousness of the problem: the recent governmental Report on Social Exclusion does not even refer to Roma and the Turkish Cypriots as a group at risk of social exclusion.⁶

When Roma population cross to RoC controlled areas they have taken place in international human rights reports and UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights deeply concerned that de facto discrimination persists against Romas in its concluding observations when RoC monitored in the Committee's 43rd Session in April 2009. Despite the fact that human rights violations against Roma population have taken part in international human rights reports very little research has been conducted regarding Roma population.

Right to Education

Roma children face discrimination in the field of education by rejection and prejudice from the local community, for instance from parents of school children, have reportedly also resulted in discrimination of Roma children in access to education.⁷ RoC education system still consist chauvenistic elements and there is no mention to Roma in the school curriculum and education in school can not meet the needs of a diverse society in a better understanding of the contribution of Cypriot's communities and minorities to the State party's history.

¹ Anthoula Papadopoulou – Andriana Kossiva – Oncel Polili, ENAR Shadow Report, Racism in Cyprus, page 11

² Anthoula Papadopoulou – Andriana Kossiva – Oncel Polili, ENAR Shadow Report, Racism in Cyprus, page 11

³ Third ECRI report on Cyprus, paragraph 83

⁴ See chapter, 'Voices of the subaltern in Cyprus: A Study of Racial Exclusion' in Trimikliniotis, N. (2009) A European Dilemma: Racism, Discrimination and the Politics of Hatred in an Enlarged EU

⁵ Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, The Cypriot Roma and the Failure of Education: Anti Discrimination and Multiculturalism as a Post-accession Challenge (2009), page 8

⁶ Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, The Cypriot Roma and the Failure of Education: Anti Discrimination and Multiculturalism as a Post-accession Challenge (2009), page 8

⁷ Third ECRI report on Cyprus, paragraph 83

Education in Mother Tongue

Although, Turkish is one of the official languages of the RoC, Roma children have no right to have education in their mother tongue. After complaining repeatedly about the lack of a Turkish-language school in Limassol RoC authorities refused to provide education in mother tongue and the Turkish Cypriot Teachers' Union applied to the court.⁸

School Attendance

Poverty and social exclusion of Roma children are the main factors of low school attendance. 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 who are obliged to attend secondary school, only pupils have enrolled.⁹

Right to Housing

When a number of Roma population crossed to the south of the island settled into properties abandoned by Turkish Cypriots which in a poor state of repair. There they faced extreme poverty, exclusion and hostility from the host population and were treated with suspicion and intolerance by the authorities. A plan to relocate them in order to appease the local communities was partly implemented with the setting up of special settlements of prefabricated houses in remote rural areas. Over the years, the houses inhabited by the Roma have been maintained and repaired by the government, but the pace of repairs is slow and the condition of the houses remains substandard and often unfit for human habitation.¹⁰

According to European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Third Report on Cyprus, The RoC authorities have provided funds for improvement of Roma housing and created two housing projects for Roma. However, there are still Roma families without access to basic facilities such as water and electricity.¹¹ On the other hand, many Roma work in the towns but they are settled by the government in 2 villages where they can not integrate with the local population.

Also United Nations Development Project funded research shows that some Roma houses lack basic necessities such as electricity and water as well as basic hygiene. Large numbers of individuals are reported to be crammed under the same roof and children very often share their

⁸ Öncel Polili, Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) Regarding the Report of Cyprus concerning the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, page 13 (<http://www.ktihv.org/Eng/content/view/55/13/>)

⁹ Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, *The Cypriot Roma and the Failure of Education: Anti Discrimination and Multiculturalism as a Post-accession Challenge* (2009), page 11

¹⁰ Nicos Trimikliniotis and Corina Demetriou, *The Housing Conditions of Roma in Cyprus*, (2009), page 1

¹¹ Third ECRI report on Cyprus, paragraph 83

sleeping space with their parents.¹² It was reported by the media poor hygienic conditions in the settlement of Roma population attributed to the serious health problems.¹³

Human Rights Mechanisms

Although the government of RoC enacted necessary laws in order to prevent discrimination, human rights mechanisms remain ineffective for Roma Population. The Ombudsman Office has no Turkish Speaking staff and no information is given in the Turkish Language. Even the web page of Ombudsman is in the Greek language only and no useful information is given either in Turkish language that Roma population can understand.¹⁴

Recommendations

- Encourage research and studies regarding Roma and the particular problems they face.
- Respond to the real problems, needs and priorities of Roma population including them into the decision making process concern their rights
- Be comprehensive and introduce a balanced and sustainable approach to combining human rights goals with social policies
- The particular situation of Roma women should be taken into account in the design and implementation of all policies and programmes.
- Provide education in mother tongue and take special measures to increase school attendance
- Develop and implement anti-racist curricula for schools, and anti-racism campaigns for the media.
- Ensure that housing projects do not foster ethnic and/or racial segregation.
- Compliant mechanisms should be more accessible for the Roma population

¹² Spyrou, S. (2004), Educational Needs of Turkish-speaking Children in Limassol, UNOPS, February-March 2004, Nicosia. Research conducted in 2003 shows that the Roma themselves consider housing to be their most serious concern

¹³ Öncel Polili, Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) Regarding the Report of Cyprus concerning the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, page 21 (<http://www.ktihv.org/Eng/content/view/55/13/>)

¹⁴ www.ombudsman.gov.cy