**“Boosting Female Social Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Creation for inclusion groups - PAL Women”**

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**Literature review: Roma Women in Greece**

**The Country’s Profile**

The presence of Roma or “Gypsies” – as there are still often called including by the community itself - can be traced back to the 14th century, though their Greek nationality was effectively given to them as late as in 1979.

The Roma are the largest minority in Greece, even though they are not recognized as a national minority. Even the concept of a ‘national minority’ is not accepted by the state. Due to high rates of illiteracy, heavily bureaucratic and costly procedures, and the state’s indifference, many do not have official documents. As a result, the exact number of Roma in Greece is difficult to estimate since many of them are not registered, and thus officially do not exist, and no details on ethnic affiliation, language or religion have been given at censuses carried through in Greece since 1951. According to the “Minority Rights Group Greece” however, it is more likely that the Roma number up to 350,000 people, about half of who are tent-dwelling Roma.

Many of the assimilated Roma, who have integrated into Greek society, consider themselves primarily Greek, and Roma only in the second place, and are therefore called “Greek Roma”, distinguishing them from the marginalized “Roma of Greece”. Some others though identify themselves as Muslims, particularly in Thrace province (northern Greece). There is also a sizeable community of immigrant Roma from Albania, who have been legally living in Greece for over a decade, although few have obtained citizenship. Foreign Roma are outside of the scope of state programmes. There is a substantial difference of opinion between various groups of Roma as to their needs and representation. Some representatives of assimilated Roma reject the very notion of an ethnic minority. Poorer (tent-dwelling) Roma communities think differently and feel that their opinions are often not taken into consideration.

This sad phenomena of rejecting the Roma identity is one of the results of the assimilative Greek policy on all minorities which does not encourage different culture, language and identity, and according to Panayote Dimitras, is based on the idea that Greek identity and being a minority exclude each other: "If you are a minority you are not a Greek." The only minority that has become officially accepted and granted according special rights, is the Muslim minority, whereas the Roma, neither being officially granted the status of a minority, nor respected as Greek citizens with full rights and duties, most of them remain on the fringe of society in every aspect, creating a world separate from that of their Greek surroundings.

Roma population in Greece is not an entirely homogeneous group, but it consists of different “tribes” of Roma people. **The main categories of Roma in Greece are as follows:**

* domestic nomadic Roma (albeit an extremely limited number);
* long-term settled distinct Roma communities,
* recent Roma migrants from new EU Member States (mainly Bulgarian and Romanian Roma);
* completely integrated/assimilated Roma who may never even identify themselves as Romani;
* Roma Muslims in Thrace, who benefit from the minority protections available under the peace treaties between Greece and Turkey following the Treaty of Lausanne;.

In addition, there are recent **Roma migrants who are not EU nationals** (especially from Albania, but also from Kosovo\* and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”) and fall within the responsibility of the migration policy.

The Roma are scattered all over the country, with greater density in the **regions of northern Greece, northwest and west Peloponnesus, Epirus and Etoloakarnania, in several areas of the region of Thessaly (Larissa, Farsala, Sofades etc.) and in the greater area of Athens and west Attica (St. Barbara, Petralona, Chalandri, Rentis, Moschato, Menidi, Ano Liosia, Eleusis, Megara, Drapetsona, Spata, etc.)**. The greatest concentration of established Roma populations is found in regions of major urban centres, as well as rural regions that present the most employment opportunities. Most surveys carried out in recent years, show that Roma continue to live in more or less the same localities that they lived in 1999, which implies that the vast majority of Roma in Greece are sedentary. It has been estimated that they are settled to approximately 370 locations most of which are found in the periphery of the big cities all over Greece.

It is generally noticed that there is a spatial concentration of Roma in specific areas, neighborhoods, suburbs or villages. This implies that **Roma live, in most cases, in isolation**, separately from the rest of the population and they do not mix with non-Roma. This consequently leads to their social disintegration and reinforce their social exclusion. It is worth mentioning that a number, although small, of localities where Roma reside, e.g. St Barbara, Aigaleo and Ilion in Attica, Saint Athanasius and other areas in the city of Serres in Central Macedonia are more successfully mixed with the non-Roma population. Greek Roma community faces persistent inequalities in all aspects of life, including access to education of Roma children, the right to housing and to other basic social goods, let alone the excessive exercise of police violence.

*Housing*

Housing is the Roma population’s main problem, with the majority **living in makeshift accommodation**. Housing conditions (with 50% of the population living in prefabricated homes, shacks, shanty dwellings and, in general, accommodation of a makeshift nature, in overcrowded conditions and without the basic technical and social infrastructure) are a serious obstacle to providing the Roma a decent standard of living.

Substandard housing conditions affect the health status of all the members of family but

in particular of women, children and the elderly. Roma women are the main caregivers of

the family; therefore they spend most of their life in the house. Improvements in the

location of Roma settlements may increase opportunities for social inclusion and

reduce barriers in accessing public services and the labour market.

*Occupation*

For the majority of the Roma, **the main source of income is dependent on occupation**, which is usually of a seasonal nature, often not covered by the safeguards of the formal labour market or of the informal market. For Roma living in urban settlements around Greece, the main occupation is collecting and selling scrap metal and other wares in markets. Roma in rural settlements occasionally earn a living by seasonal agricultural work. This work is usually informal as mentioned previously, which means they do not have any health or social insurance. In addition, many claim it is difficult and expensive to obtain the necessary permits, which may lead to problems with the authorities. Many households depend on the seasonal labour of just one member, and on the welfare benefits they may be entitled to as large families or without means of leaving. In general, the **Roma incomes are low**, meaning that most households live below the poverty threshold.

*Education*

The majority of the Roma population (especially the older age groups) continues to be illiterate, and although school attendance is more common among the younger Roma compared to their older counterparts, **their involvement in the educational process is still characterized as insufficient** to strengthen and improve their vocational status and mobility. A standard accusation of the Roma on the part of the average Greek is that "they do not want to go to School," which in its basic idea reflects the fundamental sentiments towards the Roma.

*Health conditions*

The health problems of the Roma population are directly linked to their low socio-economic profile, poor living and working conditions and low level of education. All these factors lead to **morbidity and ill health**, a lower life expectation and high rates of child mortality.

Many people seem to believe that the situation of the Roma is chosen out of free will, and conclude that the "refusal" of education, work and way of life were some kind of expression for "not wanting to participate" in Greek society, and thus experience it as a deep humiliation of Greek values. (A woman claimed that Greeks feel offended when they see a Romani woman begging in the street with her child on the arm as a Greek mother would never put her child in this situation). There is a complete non-understanding for the circumstances that Roma live in, and a commonly unquestioned disrespect for their rights. The idea that the Roma are excluded from society, and that Greek authorities are willingly keeping them in these conditions, is foreign to Greeks in general. Most Roma children aged 12 and above leave school in order to find work to supplement the family income.

You can find some more information about descriptive characteristics of the study population on Table 1 \*

**Current Situation of Roma Women**

Notwithstanding their identification and degree of assimilation, all Roma face pervasive discrimination and intolerance. Although disaggregated data on Roma poverty is virtually non-existent, estimates provide a bleak picture. According to the Greek National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR), due to low levels of education and illiteracy, only an estimated 40% have a job from which they can make a living. The survey on the situation of Roma highlights that only 15% of young Roma adults have completed upper secondary general or vocational education.

Gender disaggregated data on Eastern European countries show that Romani women’s educational level is lower than those of Romani men and than that of non-Romani-women. Roma women usually care for young children and do the household chores. Children are particularly affected by the poverty of their communities, and many girls work to help to earn a living for their families.

In addition to these external structural and cultural barriers, Roma women have to deal with that strongly limits their opportunities for paid employment outside of their community as well as for economic independence. In the patriarchal family system women are accountable for house and family care, even if Roma women frequently take part in small family-run economic activities such as working in markets, rural trade and seasonal agricultural work. Women’s low educational level precludes them any occupation in production or services. Roma women’s integration into the labour market was aggravated by the socio-economic transformations which took place in the 1990s in former Eastern European countries.

Except for single mothers, who often have to work on a par with men, Roma women’s family responsibilities and the lack of adequate public services to support childcare strongly affect women’s participation to the labour market. Roma women usually care for young children and do the household chores. Children are particularly affected by the poverty of their communities, and many girls work to help to earn a living for their families.

Romani women are subordinated to men within the Roma patriarchal family system.

Nonetheless, relations between men and women differ according to groups and nationalities. In most of the Roma communities, young women’s choices are overdependent

from family and communities’ rules and interests. The young woman is expected to be a good and caring mother, housewife, wife and daughter-in-law and simultaneously to prove constantly her fertility. Usually this is proved by giving birth to second and third child within short periods of time.

The discrepancy between the world the school represents and the life of the Roma is an obstacle, but for some Roma even represent a threat to the Romani culture. *Cia Rinne* mentioned a great example in her review on The Situation of the Roma in Greece in 2002. A girl in Veria had attended school when she was little but had been forbidden to continue by her parents when she started to become a young woman at the age of eleven. She was so devoted to school that she continued secretly though and left for school through a window in the morning before the family woke up. When her parents found out that she had been to school, they would hit her, and later, when she started going out to see friends and wore "Greek" clothing instead of a long skirt, this for her traditional Roma family was unsuitable behavior and was blamed on the school. Her mother, having been born into a travelling and horse-dealing family, had an entirely different view on life than her daughter, and her son (who wanted to follow his father's footsteps, and apart from that had liberties his sister could only dream of, and thus had no greater conflicts with his family). For her, the Greek way of life was incompatible with Romani values, and she was afraid to lose her daughter to a world that would not offer a young Roma woman any future. She wanted her children to learn to read and write, but was afraid of the consequences. Her younger son attends to school though, which causes no problems in the family.

**\*Table 1**

Descriptive characteristics of the study population.

| **Variables** | **N** | **%** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Sex** |  |  |
| Men | 519 | 48.6 |
| Women | 549 | 51.4 |
| **Age** |  |  |
| 18–24 | 242 | 22.7 |
| 25–34 | 347 | 32.5 |
| 35–44 | 201 | 18.8 |
| 45–54 | 146 | 13.7 |
| 55–64 | 97 | 9.1 |
| 65+ | 35 | 3.3 |
| **Marital status** |  |  |
| Single | 100 | 9.4 |
| Married | 876 | 82.0 |
| Divorced/Window | 92 | 8.6 |
| Number of Children |  |  |
| None | 91 | 8.5 |
| 1 | 87 | 8.1 |
| 2 | 125 | 11.7 |
| 3 | 194 | 18.2 |
| 4 | 264 | 24.7 |
| 5+ | 307 | 28.7 |
| **Education** |  |  |
| No school | 631 | 59.1 |
| Primary | 362 | 33.9 |
| Secondary | 75 | 7.0 |
| **Monthly income (Euro)** |  |  |
| 0–200 | 190 | 18.0 |
| 201–500 | 296 | 28.0 |
| 501–800 | 288 | 27.3 |
| 801–1000 | 150 | 14.2 |
| 1001+ | 132 | 12.5 |
| **Stable housing** |  |  |
| Yes | 968 | 90.6 |
| No | 100 | 9.4 |
| Number of roommates |  |  |
| 1 | 21 | 2.0 |
| 2 | 67 | 6.3 |
| 3 | 82 | 7.7 |
| 4 | 138 | 12.9 |
| 5+ | 760 | 71.2 |
| **Electricity** |  |  |
| Yes | 832 | 78.0 |
| No | 235 | 22.0 |
| **Water** |  |  |
| Yes | 895 | 80.4 |
| No | 209 | 19.6 |
| **Bathroom/Drainage** |  |  |
| Yes | 651 | 61.1 |
| No | 415 | 38.9 |
| **Chronic diseases** |  |  |
| Yes | 580 | 54.3 |
| No | 387 | 36.2 |
| Missing | 101 | 9.5 |

References:

1]National Strategic Framework for Roma (NSFR), December 2011, available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_greece_strategy_en.pdf>

[2] NSFR 2011

[3] Written contribution on the situation of Roma community in Xanthi, Greece, Working Session 6: Tolerance and non-discrimination I, Human Dimension Implementation Meeting Warsaw, 29 September - 10 October 2008, available at: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/33900?download=true>

[4] CAHROM thematic report on addressing and combating human trafficking within Roma communities, with a focus on prostitution and street children (adopted in November 2016)

[5] <https://minorityrights.org/wp-content/uploads/old-site-downloads/download-79-Roma-Poverty-and-the-Roma-National-Strategies-The-Cases-of-Albania-Greece-and-Serbia.pdf>

[6] <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/journal/16/greece6.html>

[7] Empowerment of Roma Women within the European Framework of National Roma Inclusion Strategies - study , 2013 available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/493019/IPOL-FEMM\_ET(2013)493019\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2013/493019/IPOL-FEMM_ET%282013%29493019_EN.pdf) )

[8] <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4483723/>