



Republic of Turkey
Ministry of Family and Social Policy
The Strategy Paper on Roma People
2016 – 2021

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General Directorate of Family and Community Services



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Ankara, April 2016

CONTENT

INTRODUCTION	1
A. FUNDAMENTAL POLICY FIELDS AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES	3
1. EDUCATION	3
2. EMPLOYMENT	4
3. HOUSING	5
4. HEALTH	6
5. SOCIAL SERVICES and SOCIAL ASSISTANCE	7
B. FUNDAMENTAL IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLES	8
C. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND METHOD	9

INTRODUCTION

Roma people living in Turkey have been residents of this territory by contributing the formation of customs and values which constitute the cultural structure of Turkey and adopting those customs and values in both Anatolia and Thrace for centuries. However, generally they live in the most disadvantaged regions and the poorest districts of the cities even though Roma people living in different areas of Turkey and Europe have different cultures and life styles. For that reason, especially since 1990s, several steps have been taken in both Europe and Turkey for improving the statue of them. Within this scope, Roma civil society started to be organised in Europe, European Roma Rights Centre has been established and “The Decade of Roma Inclusion” including the period of 2005–2015 has been launched. In 2009, European Platform for Roma Inclusion was established and fundamental principles for social inclusion were identified. Additionally, European Union has published several advisory jurisdiction and declarations regarding the inclusion strategies. Council of Europe of which Turkey is a founder member has announced the Strasbourg Declaration on Roma consisting of anti-discrimination, social inclusion and international cooperation bases.

In Turkey, Roma people started to conduct activities (seminars, workshops etc.) in order to defend their communities’ rights and improve their welfare in 2000s through being organized as civil society with the positive effects of increasing consciousness and gradually improving social dialogue. Within this context, Research, Development, Mutual-aid and Mutual-Relief Association of Edirne Roma Culture (EDROM) was established in 2004.

Challenges experienced by Roma people were officially expressed in 2009 upon the instructions of the President Recep Tayyip ERDOĞAN who was the Prime Minister at that time. From that time, problems of Roma people have been handled by the related public institutions. After the interviews, a decision for providing common solutions to Roma people’s problems by carrying out common activities especially on the issues of education, health, employment, anti-discrimination and combating poverty has been taken in 2012. As an inception of this cooperation, within the scope of Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), many social inclusion projects whose final beneficiaries include Roma people were carried out and “Increasing the Social Inclusion in Densely Roma Populated Areas” project was launched. Besides, during the IPA II period, within the scope of Fundamental Rights

Sub-Domain Action Plan and Employment, Education and Social Policies Sectoral Operational Program, opportunities are present for carrying out projects for Roma people.

Right of education and training, freedom of employment and contract, right to access to health services, housing facilities, and social security are guaranteed in the Constitution of Republic of Turkey and principles of equality and equity were adopted regarding access to fundamental public services. However, it is observed that Roma people face some obstacles in terms of access to education, health, employment and housing in practice. For that reason, expression of “previously taken steps regarding the solution of the problems of Roma people will be evaluated and new studies will be launched” was included under the title of “Fundamental Rights and Liberties” of the 2016 Action Plan of the 64th Government which was announced on 10 December 2016.

This strategy document hereby and attached action plan have been prepared considering the abovementioned progresses and issues defined in the Government Action Plan, with the coordination of the Ministry of Family and Social Policy and the contributions of the related public institutions and organisations and civil society organisations with a purpose of improving the living conditions of Roma people. Basic public services such as education, health, housing, employment and social services come into focus regarding the improvement of the socio-economic status of Roma people both in short and long term. Within this framework, the strategy document and action plan includes objectives, goals and actions regarding those titles. With the step taken by the Government, a new and outstanding period will be launched.

A. FUNDAMENTAL POLICY FIELDS AND STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

1. EDUCATION

Visits carried out to the Roma neighbourhoods and investigations conducted by the representatives of civil society organisations and public institutions reveal that Roma children are not able to benefit from the education opportunities sufficiently, their access to education opportunities is relatively low, early leave and absenteeism ratios are relatively high. Roma children, who are not interested in educational activities and couldn't be bound up with school life, face significant challenges when they are grown up in terms of orientating to social life and having the chance of entering the labour force. This situation is considered as a crucial mechanism triggering the cycle of poverty.

One of the most significant reasons of the early leaves of Roma children and their poor educational conditions is socio-economic challenges faced by their parents. Roma families do not believe in future, they consider their children's educational process as a relatively long and ambiguous investment.

School enrollment procedure in Turkey is conducted due to the Central Civil Registration System (MERNİS) in a way based on the residence and automatically. Student distribution among the classes is carried out mostly according to academic success level generally within the framework of school management decisions. Segregation regarding student distribution is not possible but it is observed in the past that Roma children have education in different classrooms or environments or they form isolated groups among themselves. Besides, one of the problems about education which restrain Roma children from attending schools is the perception of segregation observed in practice and complaints related to this perception.

Consequently, some Roma children leave education because their families cannot afford the expenses or they are obliged to work so as to support their families. On the other hand, some Roma children, who continue to study, leave education just because they think that they are exposed to social exclusion.

Strategic Objective

The objective is to ensure all Roma children to access to equal opportunities for education and qualified educational services and have them complete at least the compulsory education successfully.

Strategic Goals

1. Leaving education by means of early leaves and absenteeism during all stages of the compulsory education will be prevented and the people especially youngsters who dropped out the school because of several reasons in the past will be ensured to continue their education.
2. Knowledge level of Roma families related to socio-economic benefits of education and social assistance regarding education will be increased.
3. Social bond between Roma parents, students, school, teachers and peers will be strengthened.

2. EMPLOYMENT

There is no adequate data about the status of Roma citizens in the labour market. However, in the light of general opinions and observations, it can be said that Roma citizens generally work in unsecured, unqualified and low-status jobs. The main reasons of this situation are low education level and lack of attendance in vocational training. Because of this type of the employment, the income of the family is not stabile, and far from the level of satisfying the family's needs.

Furthermore, traditional occupations of Roma people such as musician, blacksmith, tinsmith, basket maker, coppersmith, caner, florist and peddler lack the attribute of creating a market and income today. In this aspect, in order to both having Roma people continue their employments in traditional occupations and create new fields of employment, it is crucial to develop new occupational training programs and having them attend to those programs.

Strategic Objective

The objective is to facilitate Roma people's entering into labour force and to increase the employment of them in qualified and secured jobs.

Strategic Goals

1. Enabling Roma people to reach the professional quality that the labor market has demanded.
2. Developing the collaboration among employers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and all the related sectors in order to improve the professional quality and provide equal opportunities in labor-market.
3. In order to encourage entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship training programs and financial means such as promoting micro-credits as well as more employment opportunities will be provided.
4. Necessary precautions will be taken to prevent child labor and to support children continue with their education and channel children's and/or youth's talents into the activities that they can improve themselves in different fields.

3. HOUSING

Throughout history, Roma people have developed their own unique housing styles depending on their culture and traditions. Nonetheless, physical capacity of their housing is not enough for Roma people. In fact, Roma people live in squatter settlements that could be built by them either on public or private areas.

To solve that problem, Roma people's living areas were included in urbanization process and settled in social housing places. Locating the housing settlements of Roma people in peripheral areas, however, has not only intensified their integration problem with local people but also their employment dilemma. On top of that, surviving in the housing settlements has been challenging for Roma people. According to the research results on the field and the statements of NGO representatives for Roma people indicate that generally one store apartment buildings have been the first choice of Roma people to live, socialize, and shape their professional tendencies, namely creating their communal solidarity and social life in neighborhoods with one store apartments.

Strategic Objective

The objective is promoting adequate housing opportunities in disadvantaged areas with an access to public transportation, healthy, livable milieu, and functioning infrastructure by taking the beneficiaries' demands and social lives into consideration,.

Strategic Goals

1. The conditions of the housing settlements in ameliorative situation will be improved.

2. For the groups living in unhealthy environment and inadequate or temporary housings, social housing and livable environment will be delivered.

3. Putting beneficiaries' concerns under the microscope and enacting executive and legislative regulations to deliver side services will be the path for the effective application of social housing or urbanization projects, which range from the beneficiaries' financial situations and their conditions for making ends, to their children's educational situation, public transportation problem and beneficiaries' other potential problems.

4. HEALTH

Since 2010, Ministry of Health has been delivering geographically balanced first-step health services. Like socially inclusive health services, these services diagnose illnesses, as they protect and rehabilitate communities where they work and live. However, awareness of Roma people in terms of knowing the health services that they can benefit fluctuates among regions. This awareness portion is also few among Roma people in general. Besides the awareness of existing health services, health-literacy rate is low among Roma people that prevents them from taking advantage of the health services and puts their health at great risk.

Strategic Objective

The objective is having Roma people benefit health services more effectively as well as efficiently.

Strategic Goals

1. Roma people's awareness of the existing health services will be increased.

2. Roma people will be more informed on the subjects of having an access to maternal and infant health care services; fighting with infectious and contagious diseases; being protected from non-infectious diseases i.e. chronic diseases; early diagnosis and health-conscious consumption of medicines/drugs; hazardous effects of smoking and drug addiction on health.

3. Roma people will be more health-literate on general health issues.

5. SOCIAL SERVICES and SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

Poverty risk becomes inevitable for Roma people since their employment rate is low and they are temporarily/insecurely employed. Roma people are not able to pay premium, therefore, they are not in the system of social insurance and are supported through social services and social assistance. The other reasons why the poverty risk has been forwarding among Roma people as follows: low interest in Roma people's traditional professions and decreasing social solidarity among Roma groups because of migration and urbanization process. Additionally, while Roma people are in need of having an adequate access to public services such as education and health, they are also in need of receiving consultancy and training services on elderly and disadvantaged people.

Strategic Objective

The objective is ensuring Roma people to benefit from social services and social assistance efficiently in order to combat poverty and increase welfare.

Strategic Goals

1. Developing and disseminating consultancy services in order to ensure Roma people to benefit from public services.
2. The awareness raising activities on the rights of disadvantaged groups needing social service among Roma people such as the elderly and the disabled will be conducted. These activities will also include issues such as gender equality, prevention of all sorts of violence against women and girls and preventing child-marriages

B. FUNDAMENTAL IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLES

As it is stated before, it is crucial to define principles that intersect all the sectors in order to coordinate and facilitate sectorial objectives and goals as well as general policies. This strategy will be run according to the principles under the framework mentioned below.

- **Policy-Making and Implementation Based on Data:** Choosing policies depending on hypotheses and prejudices over facts and existing situations will fail efficient implementation of policies. For this reason, it is necessary to periodically gather data and decide on political priorities that relate with activities of strategic goals, and last but not least to monitor and evaluate.
- **Regional Political Approach with a Definite Goal that Does Not Lead to Social Exclusion:** This strategy principally addresses to all people living in Roma neighborhoods and being exposed to social exclusion. For public sectors, a community has to be socially and economically excluded and to be disadvantaged in terms of accessing public services instead of being from the Roma culture, which is a policy justification. The policy objective is providing equal opportunities.
- **Anti-Discrimination:** Location-based and cultural prejudices and discrimination against Roma people who could face discrimination in having equal access to the public services such as joining the labor market, getting education and using health and housing services in labor market should be eliminated.
- **Improving Social Participation and Civil Society:** Roma people's and relevant civil society organizations' participation to policy and decision making processes will be amplified. Furthermore, policies will be made in a way to ensure Roma people's social cohesion and integration.
- **Inter-institutional Coordination and Holistic Political Approach:** Policies defined in different fields will be facilitated holistically and they will be run in coordination with each other. For that matter, inter-institutional coordination will be provided. Moreover, improving the status of disadvantaged groups and preventing discrimination will be in the agenda of the other related political documents.
- **Improving the Access to the General Public Services:** All the Roma people will obtain national identification to augment their access to public services. Roma people

will also have more information and awareness with regards to how to apply to public institutions.

- **Creating Policies and their Activities Based on Local Needs:** It is necessary to make and implement policies that will be created solely for the Roma groups addressing to the local needs and necessities and also design policies and side services. It is also crucial that related local organizations and service providers be more active and have initiative, as well as showing full attendance to the decision-making process.
- **Empowering Social and Cultural Communication:** Prejudices against Roma people will be eliminated and inter-cultural relations will be organized. During that process, social mediation mechanism will be used actively.
- **Effective Monitoring System and Re-Designing:** Multi-disciplinary nature of social inclusion policies and their goal to improve socio-economic status of disadvantaged groups require them not only to engender coordination and collaboration among public institutions, service providers, and local authorities but also to monitor and evaluate that coordination and partnership.
- **Giving Priority to the Disadvantaged Groups:** Extra importance will be given to the policies regarding disadvantaged groups including women, children, youth, and disabled people.
- **Paying Attention to the European Experiences and European Union Policies:** The policies and experiences related to Roma people generated by the European Union, International Organizations operating in Europe and NGOs representing Roma community in Europe will be taken into account in a maximum capacity.
- **Promoting Transparency, Accountability, and Participation:** All the policies that will be implemented have to rely on concrete facts and public opinion should be constantly informed on those facts. Additionally, representatives of Roma society shall be included to the decision making process of the policy-making and policy implementation procedure.
- **Establishing Respect and Dialogue for Basic Human Rights and Differences:** Respecting basic human rights and differences should be the policy objective and method.

C. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND METHOD

The Ministry of Family and Social Policy is responsible for the implementation of the National Strategy Document hereby and the coordination of social inclusion policies for Roma people.

Goals in this strategic plan will be implemented through three-year-period action plans (covering the period of 2016-2018 and 2019-2021). Relevant public institutions will foresee preparatory activities for 2016 and for 2017, activities without significant budget increase will be determined. In this process, data will be collected on the social integration of Roma people in order to create a basis for relevant policies. In this way, a healthier way of designing and implementing activities will be ensured starting from 2017.

Monitoring and Evaluation Board will be established in order to monitor the implementation of the policies in this National Strategy Document hereby; this committee will meet in February each year so as to assess the activities implemented in the previous year. Results and evaluations will be reported until the end of the following May. Half of the members of the Monitoring and Evaluation Board will be composed of relevant Ministries and other public institutions and agencies. The other half will be composed of stakeholders not included in the public sector such as relevant CSOs, academics and professional organisations.

Upon the call of the Ministry of Family and Social Policy; all related Ministries and public institutions and organisations particularly the Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Environment and Urbanization and Ministry of Youth and Sports will come together in the beginning of the second half of each year and review the activities to be carried out next year within the framework of the opinions of the Monitoring and Evaluation Board.