



PERMANENT MISSION OF GREECE  
GENEVA

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### NOTE VERBALE

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland presents its compliments to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and with reference to the latter's Note Verbale, dated 11 February 2015, has the honour to transmit the responses of the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity to the questionnaire of the Special Rapporteur on the minority issues, in relation to Human Rights Council Resolution 26/4 'Protection of Roma'.

The Permanent Mission of Greece to the United Nations Office at Geneva and other International Organizations in Switzerland avails itself of this opportunity to renew to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights the assurances of its highest consideration.



Geneva, 11 March 2015

To: **The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights**

Fax: +41 22 917 90 08  
minorityissues@ohchr.org

Att.: 3 pages

1. In Greece, Roma are Greek citizens having equal rights and access as all other Greek citizens. The majority of Roma are Christian Orthodox with the exception of Roma in Eastern Macedonia and Thrace (estimated at 20,000 in number) where they are predominately of the Muslim faith<sup>1</sup>. According to European Council, Roma population is estimated to 175.000 approximately<sup>2</sup>. They live dispersed in all 13 Regional Divisions of Greece. However based on the National Roma Integration Strategy<sup>3</sup>, the four regions that Roma live in higher concentrations are Eastern Macedonia-Thrace, Thessaly, Western Greece and Central Macedonia.
2. Greece, in compliance with the *EU Framework for the creation of National Strategies for Roma Integration*, develops plans and carries out programs for the implementation of the measures included in its National Strategy. The resources for the implementation of these plans derive from EU funds and national resources. Public social solidarity for Roma is implemented at regional and local level.

Steps that have been taken to promote the social, economic, political and cultured participation of Roma in the Greek society concern:

- **Social Support Centers for Roma and other vulnerable social groups** (former *Socio-Medical Centres*), focused on helping Roma and other unemployed people finding a job. They are Centres established at Roma's permanent housing in the province and are staffed by professionals such as doctors, health visitors, psychologists, social workers and Roma mediators. These Centres provide first degree health services, family planning, make referrals and also provide counseling services to the Roma. Moreover, they organize with the co-operation of public health services or non-governmental organizations vaccinations especially for Roma children. Also, Socio-medical Centres provide health information for Roma and counseling for family issues.

- Projects such as "**Local Employment Pacts**" and "**Local Integrated Interventions for vulnerable groups**" (the so called *TOPSA / TOP-EKO* at regional level), involving either actions exclusive for Roma or integrated actions between Roma and other vulnerable groups, include training activities, counseling for admission to jobs and growth in entrepreneurship either individually or in the form of Social Cooperatives.

-In the framework of the Project "**Education of Roma Children**", the enhancement of Roma children participation in activities outside the school is promoted via visits to theaters and student festivals. Additionally, the institution of "**Educational Priority Zones**" (ZEP) was introduced in 2010 in order to promote the equal inclusion of students in primary and

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<sup>1</sup> Roma Matrix Country Report: GREECE, available at: <https://romamatrix.eu/greece-country-report>

<sup>2</sup> The European Union and Roma – Factsheet, available at:  
[[http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma\\_country\\_factsheets\\_2014/greece\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_country_factsheets_2014/greece_en.pdf)]

<sup>3</sup> National Strategic Framework for Roma, available at:  
[[http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma\\_greece\\_strategy\\_el.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_greece_strategy_el.pdf)]

secondary education, from areas with low educational and socioeconomic indicators or school networks where the participation of the Roma, immigrants and minorities is remarkable.

-Participation of the Roma as elected town councilors in a limited number of Town Councils.

3. The national project under the title "Education of Roma children" has been running relevant policies, involving also adults. The education of Roma adults is fourfold: Roma women participate a) in groups for raising awareness on issues concerning family planning and economic counseling and vocational training, b) in courses of informal education (sewing, hair dressing etc), c) in courses of studying the Greek language, in order to participate in exams and obtain a diploma, d) in second chance schools in order to continue their education.

Further more, some Social Support Centres for Roma and other vulnerable social groups organize lessons for illiterate adult women and provide counseling for family, work and women issues and other educational initiatives focused especially on women. There are some local associations for social solidarity organized by Roma women.

Concerning *health care*, Roma women - as all Greek citizens - have free access to the public health care system.

4. There are no official data about violence particularly against Roma population.
5. National Roma Integration Strategy was introduced in December 2011 having the strategic goal for 2020 to end the social exclusion of the Roma and to create the necessary conditions for their social integration. It is in the process of being specified into 13 Regional Roma Integration Strategies focusing on the four key areas of housing, education, employment and health with the main objectives as follows:

- ✓ meet the needs of the Roma for acceptable living conditions (focusing mainly on infrastructures)
- ✓ increase the number of Roma children enrolled in and attending twelve years-compulsory education and acquiring the corresponding knowledge and skills
- ✓ increase access to the labour market, and entrepreneurship, particularly among young Roma via education and vocational training
- ✓ increase access to primary health services especially for children and women, support measures for improving public health and hygiene and further develop social centers for Roma and vulnerable groups providing health and social care

Regarding funds, it is estimated that approximately 36.700.000,00 Euros have been allocated to operational programs and various actions relating to national strategy since 2010.

6. It is to be noted that a robust monitoring system for the National Roma Integration Strategy is in the process of being developed in cooperation with FRA.

The great change in Government's social policy for the Roma issues is the inclusion of the Roma, as a special group in the national and regional policy along with other socially vulnerable groups so as to solve their problems. For the Greek State, the Roma group is considered as a "vulnerable social group".

Also an important museum of our country the "Byzantine and Christian Museum", made a special tribute to the life of the Roma.

In particular, on the occasion of the International Roma Day, the NRCP issued a press release with specific reference, and there were several posts from institutions or actors at various websites.

On the occasion of the International Roma Day on 8 April 2014 and under the Hellenic Presidency in the EU, the then Greek Minister of Justice, Transparency and Human Rights Mr. Charalampos Athanassiou underlined the EU's commitment to the protection of Roma rights, to prevent and combat discrimination against Roma in all its forms and to facilitate the inclusion of Roma in the European societies.

7. There are three active networks linking services and institutions on Roma issues in the Greek society.

- a) The Ombudsman network, which connects participants (regardless of their legal status) and collects information on human rights violation issues and legislation.

- b) The network of local authorities, involving 57 municipalities and Roma representatives

- c) National Contact Point meetings in the form of a network and with planning to involve Roma representatives in the future.

In addition there are two networks focusing on the promotion of Roma issues, as well as the interconnection between institutions:

- 1) The network of Socio-Medical Centres (counseling centres) (27), that is developed with 27 municipalities throughout Greece, having their own website and promoting actions for Roma, but without representation from the Roma.

- 2) The Roma Mediators' Network, consisting exclusively of members of the Roma group nationwide and promotes issues of their interest.