

**Cultural and Educational Women Association of Drosero Xanthi “ELPIDA”
 (“THE HOPE”)**



R/N: 909

1st April, Friday 2022

TO:

- 1) President of the European Council,
Mr. Charles Michel
- 2) President of the European Parliament,
Mrs. Metsola Roberta
- 3) President of the European Commission,
Mrs. Ursula von der Leyen
- 4) European Commission against Racism and Intolerance,
Mrs. Maria Daniela Marouda
Mr. Lindberg Mats
- 5) Policy Officer of European Commission,
Mrs. Banu Lavinia

The Greek National Strategy and Action Plan for the social inclusion of Roma, 2021-2030 has recently been published.

The four pillars of the strategy are:

1. Prevention of and fight against poverty and social exclusion of Roma
2. Enhancing equal access of Roma to basic services and goods (education, employment, health, social care and housing)
3. Preventing and combating stereotypes and discrimination against Roma"
4. Promoting the active participation of Roma in social, economic and political life

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From our perspective as Greek Roma who seek full integration and a dignified life as Greek citizens, we welcome this initiative of the government. Government policies have the potential to break down the barriers that currently prevent the Roma from participating fully in Greek society. Correct policy sends a strong message to both local authorities and society more generally, and has the power to change practices and attitudes that exclude the Roma from access to fundamental services like public education, health care, and justice.

The most pressing issues of our community relate primarily to the second pillar of the National Strategy: Enhancing equal access of Roma to basic services and goods (education, employment, health, social care and housing). We have decades of experience dealing with these issues, in our communities and at the administrative level. With this letter, we seek to make this experience available through specific suggestions to policy makers tasked with implementing the National Strategy.

1. Education
2. Employment
3. Health & Social Services
4. Housing

1. Education

Our priority is inclusive, mixed education for all students, in particular the dispersal of Roma children in public schools outside their settlements, and supporting students to remain in school and succeed.

Education is a fundamental prerequisite for integration and future employment. In order for the children to be integrated into the wider society, they need to be in schools with a mixed school population. Several cases at the European Court of Human Rights have established that school segregation, whether de facto or by design, of Roma children constitutes illegal discrimination.

The challenges of the Roma community, among them widespread illiteracy and poverty, act as barriers to school success for the children. Therefore, successful school

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programs need to mitigate these factors, by providing mediators (from the Roma community) in classrooms, as the public schools of Halandri are already doing, and after-school tutoring, homework help, and mentoring.

2. Employment

Under Greek law, it is illegal to peddle. Peddling is one of the main sources of income for the Roma, but when plying their trade, they often face large fines. We therefore propose a peddler's card, which would allow the Roma to register as peddlers and practice their trade freely and legally. We have previously submitted this proposal to successive Greek governments.

More generally, we call on the government to implement programs offering adult literacy classes, job preparation classes & mentoring, and vocational training to Roma communities in Greece. Where practical, it would be advantageous to offer these programs in the local public schools. It would reinforce that the public school is a place with valuable resources and foster trust among the parents, while giving them essential skills.

We also call on both the local administrations and the national government to develop partnerships with large businesses for programs offering subsidized jobs for Roma in the area.

3. Health & Social Services

Under Greek law, all Greek citizens have free access to health care, even if they are not insured through the state insurance system. This provision has done much to improve health care access for the Roma, many of whom are uninsured. It has also added a significant incentive for Roma citizens to complete their registration for identity papers and an AMKA number, which is a necessary step for integration. The provision does not, however, allow for the issuance of a pan-EU health card. Many Roma migrate temporarily to other EU countries for work, and find themselves uninsured there. We suggest a change to allow the issuance of an EU health card even for the uninsured.

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Access to health and social services is particularly important for the women and children of our community. When setting up programs for integrating Roma children in public schools, it would be advantageous to make health and social support services available both to the children and to their mothers. This would make access to services easier, and would, again, improve trust in the public system.

4. Housing

Many Greek Roma live in what are essentially shanty towns in legal limbo. A simple step to improving living conditions, as well as integration, would be to legalize such settlements by including them in the city plans. This would give the settlements access to proper services like sewage and electricity, but also public transportation and social services. Furthermore, homeowners in these communities would have the incentive and ability to register their homes, apply for loans and improve their housing conditions.

Sincerely,

Roma Representatives from five regions across Greece

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