



Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national strategic framework for Roma equality, inclusion, and participation in Cyprus

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CERD	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
CEU	Central European University
CIS	Cyprus Intelligence Services
CM	Communicative Methodology
CPI	Cyprus Pedagogical Institute
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
CYPROM	Association of Roma and Friends in Cyprus
DRA.SE	School and Social Integration Actions
EAC	Cyprus Electricity Authority
EC	European Commission
ECRI	European Commission against Racism and Intolerance
ERRC	European Roma Rights Centre
EU	European Union
EURSF	EU Roma Strategic Framework
FCNM	Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
GESY	General Health System
GMI	Guaranteed Minimum Income
MoECSY	Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport and Youth
MoI	Ministry of Interior
NHRIs	National Human Rights Institutions
NRCP	National Roma Contact Point
NRIS	National Strategy for the Integration of Cypriot Roma 2017-2020
NRSF	National Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma 2021-2030
NSPPHR	National Strategy for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights
OEPPS	Organisation of European Programmes and Cultural Relations
PES	Public Employment Service
PMS	Property Management Service
PUBLIC	Public Services
RCM	Roma Civil Monitor
RoC	Republic of Cyprus
SPR	School Progress Report
SRSP	Structural Reform Support Programme
SRSS	Structural Reform Support Service
SWS	Social Welfare Services
TC	Turkish Cypriot
UN	United Nations
MoH	Ministry of Health

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cyprus's Roma population, officially estimated at 650-1,250 people concentrated mainly in Limassol and Paphos, represents just 0.1% of the total population. Yet this small community remains among the most marginalised, lacking formal recognition under the 1960 Constitution, which subsumed Roma into the Turkish Cypriot community rather than recognising them as a distinct ethnic minority. Official figures also ignore non-Cypriot Roma, particularly from Greece and the Balkans, who live or circulate in the country for extended periods but remain invisible in statistics and are outside the scope of national policies.

Cyprus adopted its National Roma Strategic Framework (NRSF) 2021-2030 in December 2021. It follows a mainstreaming approach, aggregating Roma-relevant measures under broader national policies without a dedicated action plan, budget, or Roma-specific indicators.

Implementation of the NRSF

While more robust than its 2017-2020 predecessor, the NRSF implementation remains lacking a Roma-specific action plan, budget, or measurable targets; most initiatives rely on mainstream programmes. Only the area of education shows visible progress – attendance has improved through inclusion measures and support schemes – while housing, employment, and health remain largely unchanged, and are inadequately targeted. Participation is minimal, monitoring is fragmented, and data collection is inadequate.

Monitoring structures remain weak. The Committee on the Progress of the NRSF exists but has not published reports or data, and Roma representation is unclear. The absence of disaggregated statistics prevents evidence-based assessment. The National Roma Contact Point lacks the resources and authority for cross-sector coordination, limiting the framework's evaluative capacity.

Roma participation in NRSF implementation and monitoring is minimal. The framework was developed without Roma consultation, and no functional National Roma Platform has operated since 2017. The sole Roma CSO, CYPROM, has only a consultative role in the monitoring committee, leaving the community largely excluded from policy design and decision-making.

Review of country situation by area

Antigypsyism remains under-recognised in policy and practice. Roma face persistent **discrimination** in housing, education, and access to services, compounded by linguistic and administrative barriers. Complaint mechanisms lack Roma-specific categories, and enforcement is weak. Roma experience multiple forms of discrimination, including being stigmatised as Turkish speakers. Some families relocate to the Turkish-occupied areas due to exclusion and hostility. The NRSF mentions antigypsyism but does not translate it into targeted actions.

Education is the most developed pillar, with targeted measures such as DRASE-type programmes, language support, and material aid improving participation in focal schools. However, early school leaving remains high, transitions to secondary education are weak, and no Roma-specific dropout targets exist. Initiatives are concentrated in Limassol and remain project-dependent. The absence of system-wide monitoring and permanent mediators limits sustainability. Preschool enrolment has improved in Agios Antonios, but gains are fragile without institutional safeguards.

The **employment** pillar lacks Roma-specific objectives, outreach, and indicators. Public Employment Services do not collect ethnicity-disaggregated data, and Roma participation in activation measures is minimal. Structural barriers – low literacy, language barriers, and discrimination – remain unaddressed. No tailored pathways combining remedial education, vocational training, and employer mediation have been implemented. The NRSF relies solely on generic schemes, which have not produced measurable outcomes.

Universal **health** coverage (GeSY) exists in principle, but language and navigation barriers hinder access. Many Roma remain unregistered, and health mediation is not institutionalised. Preventive care and continuity indicators are absent. Outreach is ad hoc, and reliance on informal interpreters persists. Roma families often turn to services in the occupied areas due to mistrust and communication gaps in public hospitals.

Housing is the most critical deficit. Roma predominantly occupy deteriorated Turkish Cypriot properties, characterised by overcrowding and intermittent utilities. A residual prefabricated enclave remains in Kato Polemidia. The NRSF has set no funded, time-bound housing or desegregation targets. Reliance on general schemes has not reduced segregation. Outmigration from Roma neighbourhoods is reported, but causes remain underexplored. The absence of a Roma-specific housing strategy constitutes managed segregation and risks breaching EU anti-discrimination law.

Access to **social protection** schemes (e.g., general minimum income) is, in principle, universal, but outreach and mediation are limited. Roma experience administrative barriers and unwarranted benefit cancellations. No Roma-specific monitoring of uptake or outcomes exists. The NRSF does not mandate Roma mediators or set targets for social services. Local initiatives, such as MiHub centres, offer partial support but are not scaled or embedded in Roma communities.

Roma children face gendered vulnerabilities, with early marriages and school dropout affecting girls disproportionately. School is a key protective space, but mobility and lack of documentation render children invisible to services. No targeted prevention or monitoring mechanisms exist. Parenting support is sporadic and not systematically extended to Roma families.

Roma cultural visibility depends on ad hoc school and municipal initiatives, such as International Roma Day events. No national programme embeds Roma history or language in curricula. Kurbetcha activities exist locally but lack institutional support. Systematic documentation and cultural showcases are needed to counter stigma and strengthen identity.

Focus on key issues affecting Roma

Roma housing in Cyprus remains structurally segregated. The continued reliance on Turkish Cypriot properties and prefabricated units sustains exclusion. No new allocations or systematic repairs are made, and tenure insecurity persists. The NRSF lacks a housing objective, indicators, or financing. EU and CoE bodies repeatedly call for desegregation and targeted investment. Without a Roma-specific housing strategy, Cyprus risks non-compliance with EU law. Participation in housing decisions is minimal, and relocation efforts have failed due to a lack of co-design. A structured, needs-based rehousing plan is urgently required.

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Cyprus estimates the Roma population at just 650 to 1,250 people, barely 0.1% of the total population, concentrated mainly in the districts of Limassol and Paphos. Yet this small community bears a heavy burden. Under the 1960 Constitution, Roma were subsumed into the Turkish Cypriot community rather than recognised as a distinct ethnic minority. That legal choice has, for decades, denied the formal recognition of Roma-specific needs and rights. In practice, Cypriot Roma remain among the most marginalised, experiencing high levels of poverty, low educational attainment, inadequate housing, and persistent discrimination.

Even this estimate is misleadingly narrow. In reality, Cyprus hosts a substantial number of non-Cypriot Roma (particularly from Greece and the Balkans) who live or circulate in the country for extended periods. Their presence is significant, yet they are invisible in official statistics and fall outside the scope of the NRSF. If the community is indeed so small, it is difficult to explain why reliable data remain absent; with numbers on this scale, it should be entirely feasible to collect comprehensive data and design tailored inclusion, equality, and participation plans down to the level of each family, even each individual.

Cyprus adopted its National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030 (NRSF) in December 2021, replacing the previous 2017-2020 integration strategy.¹ It was prepared by the Social Welfare Services, as the National Roma Contact Point, in collaboration with line ministries and approved by the Council of Ministers. This strategy set out to cover five pillars – education, employment, housing, health, and social support – under the cross-cutting principles of equality, inclusion, and participation. The chosen approach was mainstreaming: instead of building dedicated Roma-specific structures, the strategy aimed to include Roma through existing social inclusion policies.

Even though the new NRSF is founded on mainstream policies, it is more robust in its design and proposed measures than its predecessor.² It emphasises a mainstreaming approach, meaning Roma inclusion is pursued through broader social inclusion programmes targeting all vulnerable groups, rather than through Roma-specific projects. This approach links Roma-related actions to existing national strategies (e.g. the National Social Policy Strategy 2021-2027) and mainstream services. Notably, the NRSF introduced a provision to allow reviews and updates before the standard five-year interval if new issues arise,³ but at the time of drafting this report, no revision had occurred.

Despite these improvements in strategy formulation, key gaps remain. The NRSF was adopted without a dedicated Action Plan or separate budget earmarked exclusively for Roma inclusion measures.⁴ Targets and indicators tailored to Roma outcomes are largely absent; no parallel monitoring mechanisms were established; implementation rests on the assumption that general programmes will reach Roma.

The present report also underlines a deeper truth: Cypriot Roma endure double discrimination. They are stigmatised for being Roma, and again for being Turkish speakers. Some are driven to seek refuge in the Turkish-occupied areas, only to remain outsiders there as well, compelled to hide their Roma identity to avoid new layers of prejudice. They do not belong fully in the Republic, nor in the Turkish-occupied zone.

¹ Republic of Cyprus. (2021). *Cyprus National Roma Strategic Framework 2021-2030*. Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu-country/cyprus_en

² Roma Civil Monitor. (2022). *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic framework in Cyprus*. Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RCM2-2022-C4-Cyprus-CATALOGUE.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). (2023). *ECRI report on Cyprus (sixth cycle)*. Available at: <https://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/eng#%7B%22sort%22:%5B%22ecripublicationdate%20descending%22%5D,%22ecriidentifier%22:%5B%22CYP-CbC-VI-2023-01-ENG%22%5D%7D>

About this report

This report offers an independent assessment of that promise. It reviews implementation from 2021 to 2025 across the NRSF's sectoral pillars and cross-cutting themes such as anti-discrimination, participation, data, and gender. It evaluates governance and coordination – particularly the role of the National Roma Contact Point and inter-ministerial cooperation – the mobilisation of financial resources, and the alignment of Cyprus's approach with EU, Council of Europe, and UN standards. Wherever possible, it grounds the analysis in data, evaluations, and field visits – for example, to Roma neighbourhoods like Agios Antonios in Limassol. The report concludes by identifying the main gaps and making concrete, actionable recommendations for the Cypriot authorities, European institutions, Roma civil society, and international partners.

Methodology. The analysis is based on a combination of desk research, fieldwork, and stakeholder consultations. Data collection took place between spring and summer 2025. One in-depth interview was carried out with the National Roma Contact Point (Social Welfare Services). Other ministries provided written replies to a set of structured questions circulated in advance. Testimonies were collected from long-term residents of Agios Antonios in Limassol (a segregated neighbourhood), some of whom have relatives in Kato Polemidia (a segregated settlement with prefabricated housing) and are familiar with the living conditions there. Additional perspectives were collected from educators working with Roma pupils. There is no official information about the current population of Roma residing in these localities.

Document review covered the National Roma Strategic Framework 2021–2030, the Sixth State Report of Cyprus under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (2024), the Ombudsman's Special Report on the Roma Community (2020), European Commission assessments of Member States' NRSFs (COM(2023) 7 final; COM(2024) 422 final), ECRI's sixth report on Cyprus (2023), and other relevant evaluations published in the last three years. Draft sections of the report were shared with selected Roma representatives and experts for comments and validation.

The data were analysed through the qualitative assessment of interviews, cross-comparison with official documents, and triangulation with European and international monitoring findings.

Authorship. The report was authored by Georgios Tsiakalos with significant contributions from Chryso Pelekani.

Conflict of interest statement. No conflict exists in the drafting or implementation of the NRSF, and the work was carried out exclusively in the framework of independent monitoring.

Acknowledgements. The contribution of Roma residents in Limassol, the educators and experts who shared insights, and the ministries that provided written replies is acknowledged with appreciation. Appreciation is also extended to the National Roma Contact Point for its facilitation in circulating the questionnaire, securing ministerial responses, and providing clarifications on key issues.

1. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NRSF

1.1. Key developments and effectiveness of implementation

The NRSF's implementation to date is aptly summarised by an expert who was interviewed for this report. Although his remarks specifically addressed education, they reflect issues common to all policy areas. Two main challenges emerged. The first is the persistent under-identification of Roma due to stigma, which limits participation and weakens the targeting of measures. The second concerns fragmented monitoring and inter-agency coordination, which shifts excessive responsibility onto individual schools and local actors. In consequence, where the NRSF's effect is visible, it is confined to isolated local practices (specific classrooms, in the case of education) rather than forming part of a coherent, nationwide framework.⁵

Due to a lack of monitoring, ethnically desegregated data collection, and the fact that the NRSF is founded on mainstream policies, it is almost impossible to keep track of the developments in implementation in all other fields. The mainstream policy design of the NRSF does not appear to effectively reach the Roma communities.

1.1.1. Changes in NRSF

This lack of a detailed action plan and clear budgeting has been highlighted as a weakness by monitoring bodies. For instance, the Council of Europe's ECRI noted that while Cyprus outlined broad goals in the NRSF, it did not accompany these with a concrete action plan or specific funding to drive implementation.⁶ The EC's initial assessment similarly observed that Cyprus could strengthen its framework by defining explicit targets, baselines, and funding allocations for Roma-focused actions, rather than relying solely on mainstream programmes.⁷ In response to these critiques, the ECRI in 2023 recommended that Cypriot authorities develop a Roma-specific action plan linked to the NRSF, in close consultation with Roma representatives, and secure a dedicated budget for its measures.⁸ As of August 2025, however, no standalone NRSF action plan has been published, indicating that these structural gaps identified at adoption persist.

1.1.2. Progress in implementation

Implementation since 2021 has been modest because the NRSF integrates Roma inclusion into general social policies; many initiatives for Roma are extensions of existing programmes. In education, some positive steps have been reported. The school enrolment and attendance of Roma children have improved over the past decade, and authorities have extended measures such as the 'School and Social Inclusion Actions' programme in a primary school with a relatively high Roma presence.⁹ This programme provides additional teaching support (e.g., teaching assistants and extra language and math classes) and offers incentives such as free meals, which have encouraged Roma children's participation.¹⁰ During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government notably supplied tablets and internet access to all Roma pupils to facilitate online learning, a practice commended as

⁵ Interview, Limassol, 6 August 2025.

⁶ Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). (2023). *ECRI report on Cyprus (sixth cycle)*. Available at: <https://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/eng#%7B%22sort%22:%5B%22ecripublicationdate%20descending%22%5D,%22ecriidentifier%22:%5B%22CYP-CbC-VI-2023-01-ENG%22%5D%7D>

⁷ Roma Civil Monitor. (2022). *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic framework in Cyprus*. Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RCM2-2022-C4-Cyprus-CATALOGUE.pdf>

⁸ Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). (2023). *ECRI report on Cyprus (sixth cycle)*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at: <https://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/eng#%7B%22sort%22:%5B%22ecripublicationdate%20descending%22%5D,%22ecriidentifier%22:%5B%22CYP-CbC-VI-2023-01-ENG%22%5D%7D>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

a means to prevent further educational gaps.¹¹ Such measures indicate that the NRSF's education goals (to improve inclusive access to quality education) have undergone initial implementation.

However, overall progress toward the NRSF's objectives has been limited, and many challenges identified in prior years remain. For example, early school leaving among Roma is still high – very few Roma students attend secondary school and virtually none reach university.¹² In housing, there have been minimal improvements: many Roma continue to live in substandard conditions, such as isolated rural settlements with prefabricated units or in deteriorating Turkish-Cypriot houses provided “for humanitarian reasons” by the Interior Ministry.¹³ Some of these dwellings lack a reliable electricity or water supply, reflecting ongoing infrastructural neglect. Similarly, in employment, Roma face persistently high unemployment due to low education levels, language barriers, and disincentives (e.g. remote job locations associated with poor pay). Mainstream public employment services exist, but Roma participation in these schemes is very low, suggesting that outreach under the NRSF has not fully materialised or is not yet effective.¹⁴ A more detailed account of the situation in diverse policy fields is provided in the next chapter of this report.

The EC's 2023 implementation report noted that while Cyprus has started putting in place structures and programmes under the new framework, the level of ambition and detail is still insufficient to ensure the 2030 EU Roma targets will be met without additional effort.¹⁵

1.1.3. Effectiveness of monitoring

Upon adopting the NRSF, Cyprus established a Committee on the Progress of the NRSF to monitor and evaluate its implementation.¹⁶ However, publicly available documentation does not confirm the existence of a well-defined committee comprising both governmental departments and CSO representatives, nor the publication of monitoring reports, baseline metrics or meeting schedules. Furthermore, no public reports from this committee's monitoring have been released as of 2025, and it is unclear how frequently it meets or whether Roma community representatives are directly involved in its deliberations.¹⁷

Historically, Cyprus did not have a separate Roma strategy monitoring system because Roma inclusion was handled within broader social inclusion structures. The new committee is thus the first dedicated attempt to track Roma-specific outcomes. While this is a positive development on paper, its practical impact appears limited so far. Independent observers point out that the lack of disaggregated data on Roma (see 1.1.4 below) hampers meaningful monitoring. It is difficult for the committee to measure progress in education, employment, health or housing for Roma when official statistics do not separately track Roma as a category. Additionally, the monitoring committee has no dedicated budget or staff; it relies on the National Roma Contact Point (NRCP) within the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare for coordination. The EC's 2023 stocktaking highlighted that many NRCPs, including Cyprus's, were not yet sufficiently empowered or resourced for effective cross-sector coordination and the monitoring of Roma inclusion policies. In Cyprus, the NRCP is a unit within the Social Welfare Services, and while it participates in EU fund monitoring committees, it has limited capacity to singlehandedly drive NRSF monitoring and inter-ministerial coordination. However, it should be noted that the experience of drafting this report was positive in terms of the coordination role played by the NRCP, particularly in disseminating the questionnaire to the line ministries, even if not all of them ultimately provided responses.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ European Commission. (2023). *Assessment report of the Member States' national Roma strategic frameworks*. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52023DC0007>

¹⁶ Roma Civil Monitor. (2022). *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic framework in Cyprus*. Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RCM2-2022-C4-Cyprus-CATALOGUE.pdf>

¹⁷ Ibid.

According to one of our interviewees,²³ reliable data requires trust-building and door-to-door mapping with municipalities and mediators; earlier community lists have been absorbed into broader registries, and repeated

²³ Interview with Inspector of Primary Education, Dr. Konstantinos Konstantinou, Limassol, 6 August 2025.

²⁹ The *Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation Law* of 2004 (available at: http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/enop/non-ind/2004_1_59/full.html) addresses discrimination on the grounds of race and ethnicity in the fields of *social protection, medical care, education, and access to services*. The *Equal Treatment in*

provides for alignment and complementarity with other national strategies in areas like combating poverty, promoting gender equality, and upholding human rights, often citing the relevant EU-level documents (e.g. the EU Anti-Racism Action Plan 2020–2025, or the EU Gender Equality Strategy) as a guiding framework. However, the EC also noted that the NRSF did not clearly illustrate how it aligns with these other national strategies in concrete terms.³⁰ In other words, while the intent to be complementary is stated, the specific mechanisms of coordination are vague.

1.2.2. Alignment with EU actions

The implementation of the National Roma Strategic Framework in Cyprus shows moderate alignment with broader EU instruments such as the European Semester and the Recovery and Resilience Plan (RRP). Given the relatively small size of the Roma population in Cyprus, it is understandable that Roma inclusion has not been a distinct focus within these high-level coordination mechanisms. The European Semester has not identified Roma inclusion as a specific reform area, nor has Cyprus received country-specific recommendations for directly addressing Roma rights or social inclusion.

The Cypriot RRP concentrates primarily on energy transition, digitalisation, and horizontal social protection reforms, which can indirectly benefit Roma communities through improving access to mainstream services. While the RRP does not contain Roma-targeted components or explicit links to NRSF objectives, several measures – particularly those promoting social cohesion and inclusive education – are potentially relevant.

The EC's stocktaking of NRSF implementation has similarly underlined the insufficient progress toward the 2030 targets and did not highlight Cyprus as an example of effective integration of the NRSF into EU-wide governance tools.³¹ In practice, Roma in Cyprus may benefit indirectly from horizontal funds, but the absence of targeted, explicitly connected measures means that policy alignment remains weak.

1.2.3. Addressing concerns of previous assessments

The key concerns identified in the first RCM cycle and echoed in other evaluations, such as the US State Department Cyprus 2023 Human Rights Report and the '2025 Country Report: Non-discrimination – Cyprus' for the European Commission Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers^{32,33} – such as the lack of Roma participation in policymaking, the absence of disaggregated data, insufficiently clear indicators and budgets, and the persistence of segregated housing and poor living conditions – remain largely unaddressed by the current NRSF.^{34, 35}

For instance – as mentioned above – no systematic collection or publication of disaggregated data has been carried out, limiting the capacity for explicit but not exclusive targeting. Roma inclusion continues to be embedded into general “vulnerable group” policies, with only some limited targeted efforts in education. Housing and health challenges reported in 2022 persist, with segregated settlements such as Polemidia continuing to exemplify the absence of effective measures. The NRSF's provisions for monitoring and mid-term

Employment and Work Law (available at: http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/enop/non-ind/2004_1_58/index.html) is also applicable. The *Law Fighting Racial and Other Discriminations* (available at: http://www.cylaw.org/nomoi/enop/non-ind/2004_1_42/full.html) applies to all types of discrimination related to racial or ethnic origin.

³⁰ European Commission. (2023). *Assessment report of the Member States' national Roma strategic frameworks*. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52023DC0007>

³¹ Ibid.

³² Migration Policy Group. (2025). *Country report: Non-discrimination – Cyprus*. European Commission Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers. <https://www.migpolgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2025-CY-Country-report-ND-final-for-web.pdf>

³³ U.S. Department of State. (2024). *2023 country reports on human rights practices: Cyprus*. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/cyprus>

³⁴ Roma Civil Monitor. (2022). *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic framework in Cyprus*. Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RCM2-2022-C4-Cyprus-CATALOGUE.pdf>

³⁵ European Commission. (2023). *Assessment report of the Member States' national Roma strategic frameworks*. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52023DC0007>

review have not yet translated into a public evaluation. While education is the only area that has attracted some incremental attention, the broader concerns raised in the first monitoring cycle, in Commission assessments, and by civil society remain substantially unresolved.

1.3. Roma participation in implementation and monitoring

1.3.1. Involvement of Roma CSOs in implementation

The NRSF was prepared and adopted with minimal Roma participation, and there is no evidence of sustained mechanisms supporting the Roma co-ownership of implementation.³⁶

According to one of our interviewees,³⁷ stigma drives many Roma to self-identify as Turkish Cypriot and not as Roma, curbing formal participation and skewing data. Where engagement is strongest, it is anchored in municipal cooperation, small practical projects and culturally affirming activities that build pride and trust before policy dialogue.

Civil society has had minimal involvement in the implementation of the NRSF so far. During the design phase of the strategy, Cypriot authorities did not include Roma community representatives or the Association of Roma and Friends in Cyprus (CYPROM), the only Pro-Roma CSO in Cyprus – the consultations were limited to government ministries and agencies. This set the tone for a top-down implementation approach.³⁸ The NRSF document itself does not outline any specific roles for community members in carrying out the measures; it largely assigns responsibilities to government bodies and mainstream service providers. In practice, since 2021, there have been few opportunities for Roma to interact with the NRCF, and these are mainly focused on culture, such as the celebration of the International Roma Day.³⁹ Cyprus has so far kept implementation mostly within state services rather than investing in partnering with CSOs and Roma representatives to run community projects (e.g. mediators in schools or health outreach programmes).

The CSO CYPROM⁴⁰ has provided feedback and monitoring on the NRSF. However, when it comes to actual implementation, such as executing education or employment projects under the NRSF, this organisation is not formally empowered or funded by the state to execute such activity.

One forum for involvement has been the Committee on the Progress of the NRSF (the monitoring committee mentioned in 1.1.3). Reportedly (based on the discussions with experts), the government invited some CSOs to sit on this committee, but more information is not available, nor is there information about the names of the invited entities. CYPROM is part of the committee with a rather consultative than operational role, which, at least indirectly, gives Roma a voice in monitoring discussions.

Furthermore, since 2017, Cypriot Roma have lacked any dedicated platform or consultative body to influence policy implementation. The earlier National Platform for Roma Inclusion (which briefly convened in 2016–2017 with Roma participants and mediators) has ceased to function, leaving a gap in structured dialogue. Without such a platform, Roma CSOs have had to rely on ad-hoc lobbying or participation in broader forums (like anti-

³⁶ Roma Civil Monitor. (2022). *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic framework in Cyprus*. Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RCM2-2022-C4-Cyprus-CATALOGUE.pdf>

³⁷ Interview with Inspector Dr. Konstantinos Konstantinou, Agios Antonios Primary School (18th Primary), Limassol, 6 August 2025.

³⁸ Roma Civil Monitor. (2022). *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic framework in Cyprus*. Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RCM2-2022-C4-Cyprus-CATALOGUE.pdf>

³⁹ See: <https://www.facebook.com/profile/100064799976910/search/?q=april%208>

⁴⁰ Which also includes Roma members and is led by Chryso Pelekani, who made valuable contributions to this report.

discrimination committee meetings) to push for the implementation of NRSF measures that truly address community needs.⁴¹

The absence of a formal mechanism for Roma to help implement local projects – for example, input on culturally appropriate teaching methods, or mediating between officials and Roma families – is seen as a weakness of Cyprus’s approach. As the 2022 RCM report noted, the Roma community’s “ownership” of integration measures is minimal to none, which may undermine their success.⁴²

1.3.2. Roma in public institutions implementing the NRSF

At the bureaucratic level, the National Roma Contact Point (NRCP) is housed in the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare and staffed only by non-Roma professionals (typically social workers or policy officers). No Roma staff are publicly identified within the NRCP team. Likewise, the various line ministries (education, health, labour, interior) that are responsible for NRSF measures do not appear to have Roma employees specifically assigned to those initiatives.

In the education sector, for example, while the Ministry of Education has hired Turkish-speaking Roma cultural mediators or teacher aides on a limited basis in certain schools, these are usually short-term contractual roles rather than permanent positions in the ministry (and often funded by EU projects rather than national funds). An example was a pilot project during the pre-COVID era where a Roma mediator assisted at a primary school in Limassol; this was positively noted by observers, but such roles have not been institutionalised or scaled up.

1.3.3. Roma participation in monitoring and evaluation

As earlier sections have indicated, Roma participation in monitoring and evaluating the NRSF has been very limited. The monitoring committee that was set up for the NRSF does include some CSO representatives,⁴³ but there is no evidence that it includes a broad representation of Roma community members, if any, beyond CYPROM. This latter was not officially designated as a monitoring partner, nor were there any community advisory councils created under the NRSF to feed community feedback into the evaluation process.

The consequence is that monitoring has so far been an exercise led by government officials, with little direct input from those the policy is meant to serve. The absence of a National Roma Platform since 2017 (mentioned above and discussed in detail below in 1.3.4) means there is no regular forum where Roma can voice concerns or provide on-the-ground reports about how NRSF measures are working. According to the 2022 RCM report, since the one-off consultations in 2016–2017, on the basis of the Roma Platform that was still operational at that time, the Roma population “has not had any other platform of representation or policy dialogue and input” in Cyprus.⁴⁴

It is worth noting that the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for National Minorities (FCNM) monitoring in Cyprus has urged greater minority involvement in evaluating minority policies. In its 2019 Opinion, the FCNM Advisory Committee regretted that Cyprus had not set up robust channels for minority (including Roma) input in policy evaluation.⁴⁵ Similarly, the ECRI’s 2023 report recommended that authorities ensure that Roma civil society is engaged in monitoring processes for Roma inclusion efforts.⁴⁶ These international endorsements strengthen the case for Cyprus to create a more participatory monitoring system.

⁴¹ Roma Civil Monitor. (2022). *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic framework in Cyprus*. Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RCM2-2022-C4-Cyprus-CATALOGUE.pdf>

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ The exact name of the invited organisations cannot be verified.

⁴⁴ Roma Civil Monitor. (2022). *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic framework in Cyprus*. Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RCM2-2022-C4-Cyprus-CATALOGUE.pdf>

⁴⁵ Council of Europe, Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. (2019). *Fifth Opinion on Cyprus*. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/5th-op-cyprus-en/16809f932e>

⁴⁶ Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). (2023). *ECRI report on Cyprus (sixth cycle)*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at:

1.3.4. Contribution of the National Roma Platform to the NRSF implementation

As already pointed out, the National Roma Platform in Cyprus remained inactive after 2017 when initial EU pilot funding ended.⁴⁷

Originally launched in 2016 with EC support, the platform held several meetings with Roma representatives and government officials, enabling concerns to be voiced through interpreters and mediators. However, without continued funding or institutional commitment, it ceased its operation, meaning key NRSF measures were developed without its input.⁴⁸

<https://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/eng#%7B%22sort%22:%5B%22ecripublicationdate%20descending%22%5D,%22ecriidentifier%22:%5B%22CYP-CbC-VI-2023-01-ENG%22%5D%7D>

⁴⁷ Roma Civil Monitor. (2022). *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic framework in Cyprus*. Publications Office of the European Union, pp 18-19. Available at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RCM2-2022-C4-Cyprus-CATALOGUE.pdf>

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 19.

2. REVIEW BY THEMATIC AREA

2.1. Fighting antigypsyism and discrimination

Roma in Cyprus face discrimination and stigmatisation and are frequently subjected to racist stereotypes, hate speech, and racist attacks.^{49, 50} Roma are stereotyped as uneducated or associated with crime and welfare abuse. Even high-level recognition of this widespread discrimination, for example, by the Equality Commissioner on International Roma Day 2022,⁵¹ has not been translated into sustained policy action. Roma continue to face discrimination in employment, health, and housing, often living in isolated or inadequate conditions. Roma report being refused services, followed by shopkeepers, or being subject to extra police checks. In education, pressures for de facto segregation continue, with non-Roma parents withdrawing children from 'Roma schools.' Housing discrimination is also routine, with landlords refusing to rent to Roma families. These practices fall under anti-discrimination law but remain largely unchallenged in practice.

Across the period 2021-2025, antigypsyism in Cyprus remained largely under-acknowledged in day-to-day policy, and enforcement against discrimination remained weak. ECRI's 6th report still describes persistent prejudice and limited accountability, and calls for a Roma-focused action plan and better equality enforcement, underscoring that the Ombudsman/equality body cannot litigate cases, which blunts its impact.⁵²

Residents in Agios Antonios, a neighbourhood primarily occupied by Roma, described during our interviews a climate of bullying, indifference and insecurity in and around the settlement that has contributed to families leaving the area. A telling example was testimony that an official, while asking for house repairs, shouted at them, "Go to Erdogan!", a manifestation of the multiple discrimination involved in being both Roma and Turkish Cypriots. They also point to administrative barriers – particularly for families with a Turkish parent – leading to children being left without identity documents and, by extension, access to services. These experiences reflect both interpersonal hostility and structural discrimination.

Experts and residents alike during the field visit described that there is now a visible massive relocation to the occupied sector, where Roma are offered favourable housing conditions and financial support. The weight of this issue is indeed substantial; however, there is no official data available on this matter. Additionally, verifying this issue is problematic, which largely limits the opportunity to further elaborate about this phenomenon.

According to one interviewee, the need to conceal Roma identity is rooted in history. Roma have been unfairly stereotyped as scrap-metal traders, petty thieves, or habitual offenders, and widely perceived as a 'problem group.' In this climate, it has been considered 'safer' to identify as Turkish Cypriot rather than Roma – a self-protection strategy against prejudice and discrimination.⁵³

One woman, an interviewee for this report, recounted the obstacles she faced when trying to enrol children without identity documents, exposing a clear pattern of discrimination. Despite expert confirmation that schools must accept undocumented pupils, in practice, Roma children are turned away, revealing a gap between law and reality. The problem is particularly acute for children of parents of Turkish origin, who are often denied IDs. This is a form of double exclusion due to being both Roma and Turkish-speaking.

⁴⁹ UN CERD. (2017). *Concluding Observations on the Combined Twenty-Third and Twenty-Fourth Periodic Reports of Cyprus*, CERD/C/CYP/CO/23-4, 2 June 2017, paragraphs 16, 18. Available at: <https://docs.un.org/en/CERD/C/CYP/CO/23-24>

⁵⁰ UN CESCR. (2016). *Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of Cyprus*, E/C.12/CY/CO/6, 28 October 2016, paragraph 13. Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/856845?v=pdf>

⁵¹ Speech of Equality Commissioner of Cyprus (Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights Maria Stylianou Lottides. Available at: <https://cyprus-mail.com/2022/04/08/collective-stigma-and-discrimination-against-roma-persists>

⁵² Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). (2023). *ECRI report on Cyprus (sixth cycle)*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at: <https://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/eng#%7B%22sort%22:%5B%22ecripublicationdate%20descending%22%5D,%22ecriidentifier%22:%5B%22CYP-CbC-VI-2023-01-ENG%22%5D%7D>

⁵³ Ibid.

Another example of discrimination is that an educator reported that a colleague disparaged her assignment at Agios Antonios Primary, asking why she was “working at the Turkish school.” The slur simultaneously othered the pupils as ‘Turkish Cypriots’ and erased their Roma identity – an emblematic example of the layered, normalised racism they face. According to one interviewee, Roma experience multiple discrimination and exclusion from both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities.⁵⁴

The government’s ‘colour-blind’ approach fails to confront anti-gypsyism directly, undermining progress in all other areas of the NRSF. The term itself is rarely used in public discourse, and the government has only recently acknowledged anti-Roma racism. The NRSF 2021–2030 mentions combating discrimination and antigypsyism as a horizontal concern, but without specific actions, indicators, or dedicated funding. The European Commission and ECRI have noted this as a gap compared with other Member States.

The NRSF does not specifically address anti-gypsyism; it only mentions Roma as a target group in the National Strategy for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (2021). The definition of antigypsyism is also included in the 2014 Code of Conduct of the Ministry of Education.

A telling example is that a complaints mechanism for reporting incidents of racism in Cyprus is in place, but it does not include a specific category for cases concerning Roma, as attested by the NRCP.⁵⁵ This confirms the lack of a targeted approach (as do the lack of measures or targets in the NRSF, since the matter was intended to be solved through a mainstream approach).

The Ministry of Education has developed a guide for managing and recording racist incidents in schools. In the educational system, Cyprus adopted a Code of Conduct against Racism in 2015⁵⁶ and a protocol for recording incidents. Although the Code of Conduct acknowledges antigypsyism, there is no information on complaints involving Roma children.

Cyprus has transposed EU anti-discrimination directives into national law, prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin. The Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman) acts as the Equality Authority but can only issue recommendations and cannot litigate cases. This limits enforcement. Few, if any, cases of discrimination against Roma have reached Cypriot courts, despite community reports of unequal treatment.

Beyond the strategy, no enduring national drive specifically against antigypsyism has emerged; the ECRI continues to recommend the stronger prosecution of hate speech/crime, enhanced equality-body powers, and systematic monitoring – areas where only limited movement is visible so far.⁵⁷

Anti-racism initiatives are piecemeal. Schools mark Anti-Racism Week, and some celebrate International Roma Day, but these efforts are local and uncoordinated. For example, on 8 April 2025, the 18th Primary School of Agios Antonios in Limassol hosted the event ‘Amen Biz – Stories and Songs of Roma in Cyprus and the World’ to mark International Roma Day. The celebration, held under the auspices of the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare and organised by the CYPROM, highlighted Roma culture and inclusion through music, dance, and storytelling.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Interview with Inspector of Primary Education, Dr. Konstantinos Konstantinou, Limassol, 6 August 2025.

⁵⁵ Interview with NRCP (Online).

⁵⁶ See: <https://help.unhcr.org/cyprus/integration-support/anti-discrimination/?utm>

⁵⁷ Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). (2023). *ECRI report on Cyprus (sixth cycle)*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at: [https://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/eng#f{%22sort%22:\[%22ecripublicationdate%20descending%22\],%22ecriidentifier%22:\[%22CYP-CbC-VI-2023-01-ENG%22\]}](https://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/eng#f{%22sort%22:[%22ecripublicationdate%20descending%22],%22ecriidentifier%22:[%22CYP-CbC-VI-2023-01-ENG%22]})

⁵⁸ See: <https://paideia-news.com/organomena-synola/2025/04/14/ekdilosi-sto-ii%E2%80%99dimotiko-agioy-antonioy-lemesoy-qia-tin-pagkosmia-imeri-roma/>

Despite this range of measures aimed at supporting the educational inclusion of Cypriot Roma children, dropout and absenteeism, especially in secondary education, but gradually also in primary education, remain problematic.⁶⁵ Distance and transport remain structural barriers (e.g., Polemidia, on Limassol's outskirts, had no dedicated school transport until recently). Moreover, there are anecdotal reports of de facto segregation pressures arising when non-Roma parents move children away from schools with higher levels of Roma enrolment. Cyprus officially maintains that there are no 'Roma-only' classes or schools, but the dynamics in

⁶⁵ Ibid.

practice suggest subtle segregation. The lack of teachers who are trained and sensitised to the educational needs of minority children has long-term negative consequences for the inclusion dynamics of the student community.

The EC's most recent implementation also flags the general lack of baselines/targets as a barrier to demonstrating progress,⁶⁶ which matches the information from on-the-ground interviews of only partial improvements in attendance and transition to secondary.

On the one hand, concentrated efforts at specific schools (like Agios Antonios) have yielded some success: those schools have reported improved attendance and engagement among Roma students, and cultural inclusion activities (e.g., celebrating International Roma Day with dances, songs, and multicultural events) have fostered a better school climate. On the other hand, the absence of system-wide monitoring means there is no formal evaluation of how many Roma children actually finish year 9 (lower secondary education) or continue to high school. The NRSF did not establish any numeric target for reducing Roma dropout by 2030, nor interim milestones. Moreover, no measures exist to re-integrate Roma who have already left school early (e.g. second-chance education or adult basic education tailored to Roma). This is a significant gap, as a number of Roma in their late teens or twenties could benefit from literacy and skills programmes (the State Institutes for Further Education have started offering free Greek literacy classes to Roma adults since 2020, which is a good step in this direction).

Agios Antonios Kindergarten (Limassol, Cyprus)

This case demonstrates that targeted, school-centred measures can transform Roma early childhood outcomes, yet the gains are fragile when they are not underpinned by stable policy and funding.

According to an interviewee, the former director, Agios Antonios Kindergarten was on the brink of closure with only seven pupils – below the legal operating threshold. Through a package of purposeful interventions, enrolment expanded to 81 children by 2022–2023, with the school operating two morning and two full-day classes, and it was designated Limassol's fourth summer school. The turnaround was driven by early enrolment from age three; structured support through DRASI (Greek as a second language and remedial teaching); the systematic use of Roma/Turkish-speaking mediators to build trust with parents; substantial facility upgrades (classrooms, toilets, interactive boards, playgrounds); community events and meal provision that eliminated practical barriers and stigma; and cooperation with neighbouring schools to ensure continuity into primary education. None of this was accidental; it was deliberate policy applied with consistency.

More recently, however, enrolments have begun to decline. Whether this stems from funding interruptions, leadership changes, or other factors is unclear; what is clear is the direction of travel and the risk it signals. When the very measures that produced progress are treated as temporary 'extras', progress unravels. This case, therefore, underlines the inherent fragility of inclusion gains when systemic support is not safeguarded.

The remedy is straightforward and institutional in nature: guarantee early-age intake and sufficient full-day places; preserve meal provision and summer-school operation as standard features; and embed mediators as permanent posts rather than through short-term projects. Regular monitoring using disaggregated indicators – attendance, language acquisition, transition to primary, and retention – should inform timely adjustments and provide evidence of impact. Without this continuity, the advances of the past decade will erode, and Roma children will again face avoidable barriers to preschool participation and successful progression in education.

Residents' testimonies point to a persistent implementation gap between policy and practice in school enrolment. Although Ministry rules require schools to enrol children even when identity documents are missing, families report refusals 'at the door', with parents told they cannot register their child without papers. This undermines continuity of learning and erodes trust in institutions.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ European Commission. (2024). *Report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic frameworks in light of the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation and the Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation*. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2024:422:FIN>

⁶⁷ Interview with Agios Antonios residents, 6 August 2025.

Another concern is funding. According to one interviewee, at the 18th Primary School of Agios Antonios, targeted language support was first introduced under the ZEP (Educational Priority Zone) programme – the precursor to today's DRASI ('Action for School and Social Inclusion'). At the outset, ZEP was financed mainly from national resources with about 20% EU co-funding, starting with just two pilot schools before gradually expanding. Today, the scheme is sustained largely through EU contributions (around 80%, with the remaining 20% national). There is, however, concern that future shifts in EU funding priorities could jeopardise this balance and reduce the resources available.⁶⁸

To address non-attendance and disengagement, a few (but important) initiatives were mentioned during the interviews, such as parent outreach (seminars, home visits) that officials say have yielded positive behaviour changes; these, however, are concentrated in Agios Antonios primary and secondary schools. A particularly noteworthy measure⁶⁹ was the provision of free breakfast at Agios Antonios Secondary School to eliminate hunger as a barrier to learning; during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Education also supplied students with digital devices and internet access to sustain participation in remote learning.

Primary School of Agios Antonios

One interviewee reflects on the extraordinary role of educators at the 18th Primary School of Agios Antonios in Limassol. Teachers' responsibilities extend well beyond the classroom: they are often the first to identify health issues such as dental pain and to refer children to dentists, a scheme possibly funded by the Ministry of Health.⁷⁰ Even the availability of air-conditioning during summer school, the interviewee noted, proved a major incentive for attendance. In practice, an improvised primary care network emerged, with local doctors volunteering free services and families responding positively. The contrast was stark – the school served a community living in conditions likened to life in 'favelas', marked by extreme poverty, directly adjacent to Limassol's luxury marina. To bridge urgent gaps, staff and community partners informally mobilised local businesses to donate medical supplies and other essentials. Support also extended to providing shoes, clothing, and similar basics – small but critical interventions that made it possible for Roma children to attend school with dignity.⁷¹

Also worth noting is that Cyprus launched a DG REFORM/TSI project to craft comprehensive strategies against dropout (December 2022–March 2024). The 'Improve implementation of policies to address school dropout – Phase II' project (DG REFORM/TSI, 2022–2024) helps Cyprus design and implement comprehensive strategies to reduce early school leaving and student disengagement. It maps barriers through school visits and interviews, develops a national governance framework and implementation roadmap, and delivers training and peer learning among educators. The project strengthens coordination between ministries, schools, counsellors, and social services to make the prevention of dropout a permanent, data-driven policy priority.⁷²

2.3. Employment

The ECRI⁷³ continues to report very high Roma unemployment, driven by low educational attainment, limited Greek language proficiency, distance to workplaces, and direct discrimination. The Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance recognises Roma employment as a core inclusion priority but confirms that no Roma-specific data exist on employment rates or participation in activation measures, as the Labour Force Survey and the Public

⁶⁸ Interview with Inspector of Primary Education, Dr. Konstantinos Konstantinou, Limassol, 6 August 2025.

⁶⁹ Republic of Cyprus. (2024). *Sixth Periodic Report on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (ACFC/SR/VI(2024)003). Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/6th-sr-cyprus-en/1680ae60b9>

⁷⁰ Source: https://www.gov.cy/en/service/school-health?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² European Commission, Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support. (2022). *Improve implementation of policies to address school dropout – Phase II (Cyprus): Project public brief*. Available at: https://reform-support.ec.europa.eu/document/download/4f243c6b-cdca-485b-8765-de74de3f9b18_en?filename=Project%20public%20brief-1.pdf

⁷³ Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). (2023). *ECRI report on Cyprus (sixth cycle)*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at: <https://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/eng#%7B%22sort%22:%5B%22ecripublicationdate%20descending%22%5D,%22ecriidentifier%22:%5B%22CYP-CbC-VI-2023-01-ENG%22%5D%7D>

Employment Service (PES) classify by nationality rather than ethnicity. Community interviews from Agios Antonios indicate reliance on informal, unstable, low-paid work, with little evidence of government-facilitated placements or access to structured training pathways.

The employment pillar of the NRSF is largely unimplemented in any targeted sense. Government efforts default to generic social-inclusion actions, with scant evidence that Roma have benefited at scale from mainstream employment initiatives.

The NRSF relies exclusively on generic activation and training schemes (e.g., via the Public Employment Service and Guaranteed Minimum Income ‘activation’) without a Roma-specific objective, outreach mechanism, or indicator set. EU monitoring repeatedly highlights Cyprus’s need to strengthen its employment commitments and to track Roma participation in active labour market measures.⁷⁴ The Ministry’s admission that no Roma-specific data exist reinforces the finding that the NRSF has not delivered measurable improvements in this area. Therefore, neither the level of Roma uptake nor the outcomes can be verified, and it is impossible to assess whether referrals are effective or sanctions are disproportionately applied.⁷⁵ In practice, this creates a systemic blind spot: Roma labour-market exclusion persists, yet official evidence to measure or address it remains absent. EU monitoring has repeatedly urged Cyprus to strengthen employment commitments and to track Roma participation in active labour measures.

Field evidence⁷⁶ shows limited Roma registration with PES and low take-up of general programmes, driven by literacy gaps, low awareness and trust, and entry requirements that many cannot meet. Without targeted measures – remedial adult education, culturally competent employment mediation, employer incentives, and the strategic use of social enterprises – the employment gap will persist. Cyprus has also missed opportunities to design public-employment schemes that directly create Roma jobs (e.g., recruiting Roma as community mediators or support staff), which could both generate employment and improve service access.

Outside the NRSF, only small-scale or ad hoc efforts exist, such as occasional short-term municipal jobs. Civil society notes that no scaled, tailored pathways combining remedial literacy, vocational training, and employer incentives have been mainstreamed.⁷⁷ CYPROM has previously called for the introduction of Roma community mediators to facilitate access to employment and other services, though this has not yet been adopted. The 2018 RCM report also stressed the need for on-the-job training projects specifically targeting Roma, but no such initiatives have been implemented under the current strategy.

2.4. Healthcare

There is limited quantitative data on Roma health outcomes in Cyprus, but testimonies suggest that Roma experience poor health. Factors such as poverty, overcrowded housing, inadequate sanitation, and lower health literacy contribute to this disparity.⁷⁸ Common issues that are reported include a higher incidence of respiratory problems (exacerbated by substandard housing conditions), skin infections (linked to hygiene challenges in settlements), and chronic conditions going untreated due to a lack of consistent medical care.

⁷⁴ European Commission. (2024). *Report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic frameworks in light of the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation and the Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation*. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2024:422:FIN>

⁷⁵ Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, Responses to Questionnaire, 9 August 2025.

⁷⁶ Interview, Agios Antonios residents, 6 August 2025.

⁷⁷ Roma Civil Monitor. (2022). *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic framework in Cyprus*. Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RCM2-2022-C4-Cyprus-CATALOGUE.pdf>

⁷⁸ Ibid.

Universal health coverage (GeSY) in principle gives Roma formal access to primary and paediatric care, and general welfare (e.g., GMI) includes Roma in principle, but practical barriers – language, navigating services and continuity – still limit effective access.^{79, 80}

Many Roma, especially older people and women who primarily speak Romani or Turkish, struggle to navigate the GeSY system, which requires selecting a personal doctor and booking appointments. As a result, many remain unregistered with a general practitioner and miss out on benefits to which they are entitled. Language barriers exacerbate these difficulties, also on the side of the doctors as they communicate in Greek or English, and there are no dedicated interpretation or mediation services for Turkish-speaking Roma in healthcare settings. In practice, people rely on informal interpreters – friends and relatives – or on civil society support. CYPROM has assisted families with GeSY registration, leading to a significant number of new registrations during the last school year.

When confronted with serious health needs requiring treatment or surgery, interviews confirmed once again that many Roma turn to medical services in the occupied territories. This tendency reflects two major obstacles within the public health system: inadequate communication channels and a prevailing lack of trust in public hospital doctors.

The NRSF reiterates inclusion in health but has defined no Roma-specific baselines or targets (e.g., immunisation or chronic-care continuity), making it hard to demonstrate progress; this mirrors EC's broader critique of targets/monitoring.⁸¹ During this period, authorities emphasised cross-sector measures (school-based counselling/psychology for disadvantaged pupils; welfare facilitation) that can indirectly support Roma health utilisation, but systematic health mediation or translation for Turkish/Kurbetcha speakers has not been institutionalised.⁸²

2.5. Housing, essential services, and environmental justice

Roma households in government-controlled areas predominantly occupy Turkish-Cypriot properties administered by the Ministry of Interior's TCPS. Allocation is generally dispersed within mixed neighbourhoods, yet maintenance is uneven, and overcrowding remains acute. Constraints arise both from degraded infrastructure (intermittent water, unsafe or absent electrical installations) and from affordability barriers where services exist but bills cannot be consistently paid. A small, declining number of families remain living in prefabricated/container units (e.g., Polemidia); whereas the Paphos prefabricated housing scheme has been discontinued since 2024.⁸³ Field interviews in Agios Antonios document the multi-family occupancy of one-

⁷⁹ Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). (2023). *ECRI report on Cyprus (sixth cycle)*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at:

<https://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/eng#f%22sort%22:%22ecripublicationdate%20descending%22,%22ecriidentifier%22:%22CYP-CbC-VI-2023-01-ENG%22%7D>

⁸⁰ Ombudsman of the Republic of Cyprus. (2020). *Special Report on the Living Conditions of the Roma Community*. Available at: https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EX-OFFICIO-REPORT-ROMA.pdf?cf_chl_tk=XjS3HmBGBQzFBriGUUIXU5ES3TIB1c4V.WxQYUAlD8-1761741821-1.0.1.1-lv3CYOAGceJBEzd6rSLQMBkw2hquEncCdQdR6j9ZnSk

⁸¹ European Commission. (2024). *Report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic frameworks in light of the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation and the Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation*. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2024:422:FIN>

⁸² Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). (2023). *ECRI report on Cyprus (sixth cycle)*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at: <https://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/eng#f%22sort%22:%22ecripublicationdate%20descending%22,%22ecriidentifier%22:%22CYP-CbC-VI-2023-01-ENG%22%7D>

⁸³ Republic of Cyprus. (2024). *Sixth Periodic Report on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (ACFC/SR/VI(2024)003). Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/6th-sr-cyprus-en/1680ae60b9>

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86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmb.2017.07.009>

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The NRSF emphasises inclusion through mainstream systems and recognises local structures like the Bicommunal Multipurpose Centre in Limassol. The Social Welfare Services provide financial support to non-governmental organisations and local authorities for the development and implementation of programmes through the Grants-in-Aid Scheme. Under this scheme, an allocation of 6,000 EUR was granted in 2023 to the bi-communal Multiservice Centre in Limassol.⁹¹ However, it does not mandate or fund Roma mediators across sectors, sets no Roma-specific targets for social services, and lacks ring-fenced resources – limiting effectiveness.

Interviews on the ground demonstrate that there is a lack of awareness of social protection schemes and no active outreach to the communities from the competent authorities.

Health and social welfare support for Roma often requires close coordination between different sectors – health, welfare, education, and local government. A notable example is the operation of multi-purpose community centres (MiHubs), originally established to serve migrants but also accessible to Roma, particularly Turkish-speaking families who feel more comfortable in a diverse environment. These centres, operating in five offices and managed by CSOs with state support, provide advice on accessing services and basic guidance on healthcare. The ECRI welcomed initiatives such as MiHub and recommended that the authorities ensure sustainable funding for CSOs that deliver essential services, including those that reach Roma.

In Limassol, however, the demand for a similar centre in Agios Antonios has been systematically rejected by the municipality. The only concession to date has been the ad hoc allocation of a single room, and even that only with special permission, to cover emergency needs such as hosting meetings of CYPROM. This falls far short of what is required: Roma communities in Agios Antonios continue to lack a dedicated, stable, and welcoming hub through which they could access the services and support that are vital to their inclusion.

2.7. Child protection

Reliable data on reported cases of sexual abuse, trafficking, early marriages, and juvenile justice involving Roma children are largely absent. Field observations in Roma settlements, supported by interviews with Roma representatives, indicate that girls are disproportionately affected. Many do not complete compulsory schooling (up to the age of 15) due to pregnancy, overprotective parental attitudes, or adherence to traditional practices that withdraw girls from education to ‘preserve their virginity’. Roma women’s representatives confirm that early marriages occur, exposing girls to early pregnancy and childbirth and heightening their vulnerability to domestic violence. In other families, girls are kept at home to undertake household responsibilities, or their schooling is interrupted because of experiences of discrimination, harassment, or bullying.⁹²

According to one of our interviewees, school is an important protective space. COVID-related lockdowns increased domestic violence risks, and mobility produces ‘invisible’ children who disappear from oversight for months.⁹³

2.8. Promoting (awareness of) Roma arts, culture, and history

According to the government, schools implement broader intercultural activities that include all students and promote respect for diversity, such as video recordings of poems, songs, and cultural expressions; food festivals representing children’s different backgrounds; and celebrations of International Roma Day through presentations, dances, and songs.⁹⁴

Cultural visibility actions exist but are not embedded as nationwide deliverables with budgets/targets under the NRSF; they depend on motivated schools. Examples of Roma cultural-visibility initiatives in Cyprus (2020–2025) include International Roma Day events organised by CypRom in Limassol on 8 April 2022 and 5 April

⁹¹ Republic of Cyprus. (2024). *Sixth Periodic Report on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (ACFC/SR/VI(2024)003), §32. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/6th-sr-cyprus-en/1680ae60b9>

⁹² Roma Civil Monitor. (2022). *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic framework in Cyprus*. Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RCM2-2022-C4-Cyprus-CATALOGUE.pdf>

⁹³ Interview with experts, Limassol, 6 August 2025.

⁹⁴ Republic of Cyprus. (2024). *Sixth Periodic Report on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (ACFC/SR/VI(2024)003), §69. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/6th-sr-cyprus-en/1680ae60b9>

Interviews point to strong demand and impact for music/dance and portrait projects, and to a major research gap regarding the Roma in Cyprus, especially during the 1967–1974 period and their relations with other Roma communities. Systematic documentation would strengthen identity and public recognition. Partnering with municipalities to host regular cultural showcases and to commission oral-history/visual-identity projects would both counter stigma and fill the research vacuum.⁹⁶

As mentioned, the promotion and awareness of Roma arts, culture, and history largely depend on initiatives at the municipal and school levels – such as cultural celebrations and language activities. These remain effective entry points for engaging Roma parents and pupils, and their expansion would further the anti-stigma goals highlighted by ECRI.⁹⁷

International Roma Day – Limassol, 5 April 2023 (CypRom),
<https://www.facebook.com/cyprusromaassociation/posts/pfbid0pWGb7sSq4sXf4Xh6yE9YhbdmECQhjUMnq9wMZKZUn2sE5qXxJvgkMqakJjZQKil;>

⁹⁶ Interview with Inspector of Primary Education, Dr. Konstantinos Konstantinou, Limassol, 6 August 2025.

⁹⁷ Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). (2023). *ECRI report on Cyprus (sixth cycle)*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at:
<https://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/eng?f=%7B%22sort%22:%5B%22ecripublicationdate%20descending%22%5D%22%22%7D%2F%7B%22CYP-CbC-VI-2023-01-ENG%22%7D>

3. FOCUS ON KEY PROBLEMS AFFECTING ROMA

3.1. Roma Housing in Cyprus: Enduring Segregation and Structural Dependence on Turkish Cypriot Property

Turkish Cypriot Property housing in Agios Antonios

The housing of Roma in Cyprus is characterised by structural stagnation. The allocation of former Turkish-Cypriot (TC) dwellings on “humanitarian” grounds began in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and Roma were among the beneficiaries; however, no new allocations are effectively made today, repairs are minimal and ad hoc, carried out only when budgets permit.⁹⁸ The result is a closed, deteriorating housing stock that entrenches segregation and undermines basic living standards.

Most Roma in government-controlled areas live in TC dwellings administered by the Ministry of Interior’s Property Management Service. The houses provide shelter, but they are typically dilapidated, unsafe, and overcrowded. Maintenance is inconsistent and insufficient, producing cumulative deterioration and exposing families to structural risks, damp, mould, and poor sanitation.⁹⁹

Field research conducted two decades ago recorded serious deficiencies in Roma housing, including cracked walls and roofs, unsafe electrical wiring, dampness, and intermittent or absent utilities.¹⁰⁰ Testimonies gathered in the neighbourhood of Agios Antonios, Limassol, during the August 2025 field visit confirm that these conditions have not improved. On the contrary, living conditions have worsened, as overcrowding is the norm, with large extended families sharing two-room units.^{101,102} Roma families stress that younger generations forming new households have no access to new allocations, forcing multi-generational crowding into already congested dwellings.¹⁰³

⁹⁸ Ombudsman of the Republic of Cyprus. (2020). *Special Report on the Living Conditions of the Roma Community*, pp. 59–66. Available at: https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EX-OFFICIO-REPORT-ROMA.pdf?_cf_chl_tk=XjS3HmBGBQzFBriGUUIXU5ES3TIB1c4V.WxQYUAlD8-1761741821-1.0.1.1-lv3CYOAGceJBEzd6rSLQMBkw2hquEncCdQdR6j9ZnSk

Republic of Cyprus. (2024). *Sixth Periodic Report on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (ACFC/SR/VI(2024)003), §§2, 54. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/6th-sr-cyprus-en/1680ae60b9>.

Answers to the Questionnaire addressed to NRCP, 2025; Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, Responses to Questionnaire, 9 August 2025.

Roma Civil Monitor. (2022). *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic framework in Cyprus*. Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/RCM2-2022-C4-Cyprus-CATALOGUE.pdf>

⁹⁹ Ombudsman of the Republic of Cyprus. (2020). *Special Report on the Living Conditions of the Roma Community*, pp. 59–66. Available at: https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EX-OFFICIO-REPORT-ROMA.pdf?_cf_chl_tk=XjS3HmBGBQzFBriGUUIXU5ES3TIB1c4V.WxQYUAlD8-1761741821-1.0.1.1-lv3CYOAGceJBEzd6rSLQMBkw2hquEncCdQdR6j9ZnSk

¹⁰⁰ Trimikliniotis, N. & Demetriou, C. (2009). *Housing conditions of Roma and Travellers: Cyprus (RAXEN Thematic Study)*. European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), National Focal Point for Cyprus. https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/666-RAXEN-Roma%20Housing-Cyprus_en.pdf

¹⁰¹ Roma Civil Monitor. (2022). *Civil society monitoring report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic framework in Cyprus*. Publications Office of the European Union, pp. 18–19

¹⁰² Author’s field interviews, Agios Antonios, Limassol, 6 August 2025; Interview – Agios Antonios residents, 6 August 2025.

¹⁰³ Ombudsman of the Republic of Cyprus. (2020). *Special Report on the Living Conditions of the Roma Community*, pp. 126–134. Available at: https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EX-OFFICIO-REPORT-ROMA.pdf?_cf_chl_tk=XjS3HmBGBQzFBriGUUIXU5ES3TIB1c4V.WxQYUAlD8-1761741821-1.0.1.1-lv3CYOAGceJBEzd6rSLQMBkw2hquEncCdQdR6j9ZnSk

Also, residents described bureaucratic dead-ends when seeking rehousing and even reported being told to “seek solutions in the north, or go to Erdoğan”, statements that deepened feelings of exclusion and prompted some families to relocate to the Turkish-Cypriot-administered areas.¹⁰⁴

Tenure insecurity is another defining feature. Families are afraid to leave their homes unattended for fear they will be taken over by others who are in need during their absence. In response, some have installed improvised barriers to deter entry.¹⁰⁵ Residents also highlighted gentrification pressures: Turkish Cypriot housing blocks in Agios Antonios now border the Limassol Marina, and Polemidia is adjacent to new private schools. These developments fuel fears of future displacement under the guise of “urban upgrading”.¹⁰⁶

Discussions with experts revealed that a significant number of Roma beneficiaries were effectively pressured to migrate to the Occupied Territories after the Turkish Cypriot Property Administration refused to respond to their initial requests for housing allocations. In some cases, Roma families faced unfounded and unjust evictions – one striking example involved a woman who was nine months pregnant. Following urgent letters from CYPROM, the family was temporarily placed in a dwelling, but one without electricity or water. Years later, they continue to live in these miserable and degrading conditions, emblematic of the systemic neglect that leaves Roma with no secure path to adequate housing.

To illustrate the neighbourhood and its inhabitants’ economic activities in Agios Antonios, Limassol, the following pictures were taken during the field visit.



Photos by Georgios Tsiakalos

¹⁰⁴ Author’s field interviews, Agios Antonios, Limassol, 6 August 2025; Interview – Agios Antonios residents, 6 August 2025; Interview with Inspector of Primary Education, Dr. Konstantinos Konstantinou, Limassol, 6 August 2025.

¹⁰⁵ Author’s field interviews, Agios Antonios, Limassol, Aug 2025

¹⁰⁶ Ombudsman of the Republic of Cyprus. (2020). *Special Report on the Living Conditions of the Roma Community*, pp. 17-18, 72-76. Available at: https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EX-OFFICIO-REPORT-ROMA.pdf?_cf_chl_tk=XjS3HmBGBQzFBriGUUIXU5ES3TIB1c4V.WxQYUAlD8-1761741821-1.0.1.1-lv3CYOAGceJBEzd6rSLQMBkw2hquEncCdQdR6j9ZnSk

Remaining prefabricated housing units

Council of Europe bodies have repeatedly recommended the closure of the camp and the rehousing of its residents in formal housing. As of 2025, Polemidia remains open, but reports suggest the population has declined. Yet this reduction seems driven less by structured policy efforts and more by indifference and the camp's deteriorating conditions. There is, however, a positive development: the abandonment of the prefabricated camp in Paphos, which at least reflects an acknowledgement of the negative consequences of policies that generate further segregation.¹⁰⁷



Photo by Chryso Pelekani

A residual prefabricated housing strip remains at Kato Polemidia (Limassol), where container-type units were provided for itinerant or informally housed families. Numbers are estimated to be small by the interviewees – roughly a dozen families. However, the decrease in the number of residents in these prefabricated houses is not the outcome of social inclusion efforts. According to both experts and residents, it stems from the need to relocate to the occupied areas in search of better living conditions and opportunities.

3.1.1. Effectiveness of the NRSF in addressing the problem

As mentioned under Section 2.5, the Cypriot government has no dedicated Roma housing strategy beyond the arrangements described here. The NRSF does not include a specific housing objective or target for Roma. Instead, it references the inclusion of Roma in general housing and welfare policies. For instance, Cyprus's Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) scheme provides a monthly housing allowance for low-income renters, and this is available to Roma on an equal footing. Yet such cases remain rare due to landlord discrimination, which the policy does not address. In addition, unwarranted cancellations of benefits in recent years, as have been noted by experts and residents during the interviews, have further undermined families' ability to meet basic financial obligations.

Additionally, there are mainstream programmes to assist vulnerable families with home repairs or to subsidise housing for displaced persons (mostly aimed at Greek Cypriot refugees, but sometimes accessible by others). The NRSF mentions "inclusive housing policies taking into account the needs of Roma and aiming to support access to housing for disadvantaged groups." However, it does not spell out any concrete new measures specifically for improving Roma housing. The EC pointed out that housing was a glaring omission in Cyprus's strategy and urged that the post-2023 iteration address housing with clear objectives based on needs assessment and data.

¹⁰⁷ Republic of Cyprus. (2024). *Sixth Periodic Report on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (ACFC/SR/VI(2024)003), §54. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/6th-sr-cyprus-en/1680ae60b9>

The present model – continued reliance on ageing TC houses and a residual prefab enclave, with no new allocations and negligible repairs – constitutes a system of managed segregation. It offers no pathway to equal, mixed-tenure housing, a deficit repeatedly flagged by Council of Europe monitoring and EU stock-taking.¹⁰⁸

The State's own FCNM report¹⁰⁹ documents the continued reliance on TC housing and the survival of the Kato Polemidia prefab site (with the Paphos prefab project discontinued), but sets out no structured pathway to remedy structural overcrowding, replace unfit stock, or phase out segregated arrangements. The EC's 2024 assessment stresses that, across the EU, targets, indicators and robust monitoring remain insufficient – Cyprus included – making it difficult to demonstrate progress toward the 2030 headline objective of ending segregation and reducing housing deprivation.¹¹⁰

Treating Roma housing through 'mainstream' schemes alone – without a Roma-specific objective, targets, and dedicated instruments – is not neutral; it predictably perpetuates segregation and amounts to indirect discrimination under the Racial Equality Directive (2000/43/EC) because it places an ethnic group at a particular disadvantage. Further, the State has not demonstrated that any legitimate aim is being pursued by proportionate means when targeted tools (rehousing, desegregation targets, stock rehabilitation, rent guarantees, mediation) are available yet unused.¹¹¹ The EC has repeatedly required a twin-track approach – mainstream inclusion plus targeted measures – and has explicitly flagged housing as the glaring gap in Cyprus's NRSF, pressing for Roma-specific housing and making clear that a universalist, untargeted posture falls short of EU standards.¹¹² With that baseline, Cyprus's continued confinement of Roma within a closed, deteriorating TC stock – with negligible repairs and no new allocations – and its failure to adopt proportionate targeted measures to dismantle segregation is not simply poor policy; it is a foreseeable breach of EU anti-discrimination law, reinforced by the EC's recent infringement proceedings against Slovakia for Roma school segregation. These factors confirm that persistent ethnic segregation in essential services – whether education or housing – triggers enforcement; the only compliance-proof route is the one Brussels has already set out: a Roma-specific housing objective, desegregation targets, ring-fenced ERDF/ESF+ investment, and 'hard' monitoring.¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ Council of Europe, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). (2023). *ECRI report on Cyprus (sixth cycle)*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Available at: <https://hudoc.ecri.coe.int/eng#f%22sort%22:%22ecripublicationdate%20descending%22%22ecriidentifier%22:%22CYP-CbC-VI-2023-01-ENG%22%22%22>

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¹⁰⁹ Republic of Cyprus. (2024). *Sixth Periodic Report on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (ACFC/SR/VI(2024)003), §32. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/6th-sr-cyprus-en/1680ae60b9>

¹¹⁰ European Commission. (2024). *Report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic frameworks in light of the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation and the Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation*. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2024:422:FIN>

¹¹¹ Ombudsman of the Republic of Cyprus. (2020). *Special Report on the Living Conditions of the Roma Community*. Available at: https://equineteurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/EX-OFFICIO-REPORT-ROMA.pdf?cf_chl_tk=XjS3HmBGBQzFBriGUUIXU5ES3TIB1c4V.WxQYUAlD8-1761741821-1.0.1.1-lv3CYOAGceJBEzd6rSLQMBkw2hquEncCdQdR6j9ZnSk

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¹¹² European Commission. (2023). *Assessment report of the Member States' national Roma strategic frameworks*. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52023DC0007>

¹¹³ Ibid.

3.1.2. Synergy with other actions

There are already local instruments in place which, if combined with a municipal-led, ERDF-supported programme – for example, involving phased rehousing into standard housing stock or in-situ infrastructure upgrades where appropriate, and tenancy support – could deliver tangible results. These existing instruments include DRASI/ESF+ school support (extended day, Greek-as-L2, parental outreach) serving Roma pupils from Agios Antonios and Kato Polemidia, and Guaranteed Minimum Income (GMI) rent subsidies that could underwrite moves into private rental where feasible. EU-level guidance and the 2023 Council Conclusions on Roma housing explicitly call on Member States to mobilise cohesion policy funds to combat segregated housing and to prioritise integrated neighbourhood approaches – precisely the mix needed regarding Agios Antonios.

Cyprus operates several rental-support schemes aimed at expanding affordable housing. The Renovate-Rent Scheme¹¹⁴ offers grants to owners who refurbish vacant homes and rent them below market rates. The Cyprus Land Development Corporation's Affordable Rental Units initiative builds state-funded housing for rent at reduced prices, while the government's broader affordable rent policy provides incentives and tax relief to landlords who lease at capped rents. Together, these schemes aim to increase affordable housing supply and prevent the exclusion of low-income tenants. Unfortunately, there are no available data on Roma accessing these schemes, and expert discussions indicate that Roma communities have not benefited from them.

3.1.3. Roma participation

Past relocation attempts in Limassol show that when communities are moved away from their networks and services, rehousing efforts collapse (e.g., the return from Polemidia to Agios Antonios, as noted by local educators and residents). What has been missing is genuine participation: Roma residents were not systematically involved in mapping needs, defining rehousing criteria, identifying locations, or shaping support packages. Without such co-design, relocation risks amount to displacement rather than inclusion.

The field visit for the purposes of this report, involving speaking directly with residents and listening to their needs and aspirations, was particularly fruitful and proves that if conducted systematically, especially given the relatively small size of the Roma population, it could yield tangible results, a need also highlighted by the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights of Cyprus.¹¹⁵ The active participation of Roma families – and the genuine consideration of their views and needs throughout the entire relocation process – has been identified as a key factor in successful housing desegregation.¹¹⁶

European Commission (2024). *Report on the implementation of the national Roma strategic frameworks in light of the EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation and the Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation*. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2024:422:FIN>

¹¹⁴ More information about the Scheme available at: <https://www.gov.cy/moi/en/documents/housing-scheme-renovate-rent/>

¹¹⁵ *Position as the National Human Rights Institution (NHRI) regarding the living conditions of the Roma community in Cyprus* (AUT 3/2020). Office of the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights.

¹¹⁶ Roma Civil Monitor (2024) Examples of successful housing desegregation as a precondition of Roma integration. Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Edited by Marek Hojsik, p. 18. Available at: https://romacivilmonitoring.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/RCM_2023_Thematic-report-desegregation_FINAL-ISBN.pdf

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The experience from Cyprus's NRSF implementation shows that progress is possible – schools that organise DRASI support, assistant teachers, and language help can make a difference on an everyday basis. But delivery is uneven and overly project-dependent. The decisive weakness remains housing: a closed, ageing stock of TC dwellings, almost no repairs and no new allocations, plus a residual prefabricated enclave. That arrangement sustains segregation and drags down the results in education, health, and employment. A mainstream-only approach, despite the known structural barriers, does not level the field; it preserves the gap.

The NRSF's choice to rely almost entirely on 'mainstream' instruments without targeted measures, although structural barriers have been documented, is not neutral; it is a policy omission with foreseeable effects. When a population is concentrated in substandard, segregated housing, when language, documentation, and mobility patterns are known barriers, and when mediation posts, rent guarantees, and rehousing models exist but are not adopted, perpetuating a mainstream-only approach reproduces disadvantages. In EU law, this suggests the contours of indirect discrimination: a seemingly neutral policy that places an ethnic group at a particular disadvantage, without proportionate justification.¹¹⁷

Belonging is a core determinant of outcomes: overcrowding, unreliable utilities, language and transport barriers, and stigmatising service interfaces signal conditional – not equal – access. These are structural deficits in upholding equal dignity and effective equality before the law. Remedies already exist in pilot form, including scattered-site rehousing, urgent habitability works, institutionalised mediation, measurable targets associated with public dashboards, and Roma co-design. What is missing is a single delivery plan that includes a named senior responsible owner, a multi-year budget, quarterly public reporting, and automatic corrective actions when targets are missed – so that inclusion becomes standard practice rather than a temporary project.

There is, however, a clear opportunity that Cyprus can seize immediately. If the Roma population is as small as officially claimed, then the policy ambition should be simple and concrete: for every Roma family and every Roma individual to escape poverty and exclusion. This can be achieved, *inter alia*, through facilitating access to mainstream schemes (such as rent subsidies discussed in 3.1.2), by supporting the repair of existing Turkish-Cypriot houses and gradually eliminating segregated prefabricated housing, while allowing for tailor-made interventions based on a mapping of individual and household needs – thus avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach in favour of a targeted, needs-responsive method.

Recommendations to national authorities

1) Make housing the entry point.

- Adopt an Action Plan (2025–2030) for the NRSF with a particular focus on housing for: (a) rehousing Roma out of prefabricated and unfit Turkish Cypriot units (or repairs on the latter when possible); (b) reducing overcrowding; and (c) mapping individual and family needs.
- Guarantee access to mainstream rental support schemes: enable Roma families to rent houses/apartments with the state as guarantor to prevent landlord discrimination and remove administrative barriers.
- Make homes habitable: introduce a habitability checklist (wiring/roofs/damp/water) and a funded repair programme for TC houses; issue a tenure assurance pack (written temporary occupancy, fair allocation rules, complaint/appeal channels). Fund this through ring-fenced ERDF/ESF+ and national lines; apply anti-segregation conditionalities to all public housing spend.

2) Use tailored household plans.

- Guarantee housing and employment coverage for Roma households.
- For every school-age child, apply a Child Learning Plan (increase attendance, provide transport if needed, language support, remedial tutoring, and facilitate transition to lower/upper secondary).

¹¹⁷ Council Directive 2000/43/EC (the "Racial Equality Directive"), Article 2(2)(b).

- For every adult, apply an Employability Plan (literacy/Greek-as-L2, skills training, paid traineeship/apprenticeship, job mediation), with outcomes tracked regularly.
- Embed health steps: GeSY registration, named GP, vaccination/screening catch-up, interpreter/mediator if Turkish/Gurbetcha is needed.

3) Institutionalise Roma mediation (state-funded).

- Create a Roma mediator service across education/health/welfare/housing with standard role profiles, bilingual capacity, and clear referral/closure protocols.
- Finance posts from the state budget (use ESF+ for innovation, not core staffing).

4) Effective monitoring and data collection

- Build a hard monitoring spine: lawful equality-data collection with consent; municipal door-to-door baseline mapping;
- Reinforce the national census methodology to ensure accurate Roma enumeration, including the systematic counting of non-Cypriot Roma residing in Cyprus.
- Publish annual scorecards: families rehoused; overcrowding reduced; critical repairs completed; school attendance and completion; primary-care registration; traineeship/job placement.

5) Education, health, employment

- Education: Scale DRASI functions (assistants, Greek-as-L2, all-day school, meals) and guarantee transport; enforce enrolment rights regardless of documentation hurdles; provide second-chance pathways.
- Health: Institutionalise health mediators/interpretation; define preventive-care and continuity indicators for Roma households and publish results.
- Employment: Fund activation bridges (literacy, skills, paid traineeships, employer mediation); track uptake, placement.

6) Governance and participation.

- Reactivate the National Roma Platform.
- Establish resident committees with a particular focus on facilitating the mapping of housing needs.
- Promote the creation of Roma CSOs, especially those focused on Roma women and youth. Involve CYPROM and mainstream CSOs to support that process.

Recommendations to European institutions

- Request an Action Plan from Cyprus with a particular emphasis on desegregated housing.
- Apply anti-segregation enabling conditions to ERDF/ESF+ programmes and link disbursements to measurable outputs (families rehoused; repairs made; prefabricated units decommissioned; overcrowding reduced).
- Assess the number of Roma living in segregated housing and, if segregation persists without corrective measures, assess enforcement options under the Race Equality Directive.

Recommendations to civil society

- Organise community navigators to help families map housing needs.
- Assist community monitoring of housing repairs, rehousing decisions, school attendance, and access to health; publish findings.

- Support the establishment of Roma-led Civil Society Organisations and provide technical backstopping for their operation.
- Build legal support for cases involving denial of services, evictions, or discrimination; cooperate with the equality body on pattern-or-practice cases.
- Develop peer mentoring (women and youth) for school retention, transitions, and early childhood participation.

Recommendations to other stakeholders

- Municipalities: Take the lead in mapping community and household needs in close coordination with the NRCP and working closely with residents throughout the process.
- Schools: Set up attendance-to-attainment teams with mediators; ensure each Roma pupil has adequate follow-up on their progress.
- Health providers: Assign a link nurse/mediator who speaks Turkish/Kurbetcha to assist Roma families to complete registrations, screenings, and follow-ups.
- Make rent-guarantee schemes available to Roma, ensuring that landlords rent out properties to Roma families.
- Local employers: offer placements and traineeships.
- Ombudsman/Equality Body: Conduct own-initiative inspections of habitability and access and issue recommendations for systemic remedies where patterns persist.

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- Ministry of Education, Sport and Youth, written response to questionnaire, August 2025.
- Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance, written response to questionnaire, August 2025.
- CYPSTAT, written response to questionnaire, August 2025.
- Inspector of Primary Education, Dr Konstantinos Konstantinou, Limassol, in-person interview, 6 August 2025.
- Roma residents, Agios Antonios settlement, Limassol, group interview, in person, 6 August 2025
- Local educators (anonymous), Limassol, in-person interviews, 2018.
- Former Principal of the 18th Kindergarten of Limassol, in-person interview, Limassol, 2018.
- NRCP representative, videoconference interview, July 2025.
- Experts, Limassol, in-person interviews, 6 August 2025.

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ANNEXE: LIST OF PROBLEMS AND CONDITIONS

Fighting antigypsyism and discrimination

Problems and conditions:	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:	Details of NRSF implementation relevant to the problem:
Antigypsyism is under-acknowledged in policy and practice	significant problem	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	absent	Ombudsman acts as Equality Body; police training modules exist. No Roma-specific hate monitoring; limited prosecutions; National Roma Platform largely inactive until 2023 restart attempt.
Hate speech/crime monitoring and prosecution	significant problem	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	absent	Ad-hoc awareness and police seminars; no comprehensive recording category for Roma; limited public reporting on outcomes; no baseline or indicators.
Discrimination in access to services (school enrolment, housing, rental market)	significant problem	understood with limitations	present but insufficient	absent	Guides for schools on racist incidents; general anti-discrimination laws in place; practice gaps persist (parents report refusals without papers; landlords' refusals). Data not disaggregated.
Limited recognition of Roma as a distinct minority in practice (affecting	significant problem	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	absent	absent	Roma considered under Turkish-Cypriot community for many administrative purposes, limiting visibility in monitoring and targeted enforcement.

visibility and redress)					
Antigypsyism under-acknowledged in policy and practice	significant problem	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	absent	Ombudsman acts as Equality Body; police training modules exist. No Roma-specific hate monitoring; limited prosecutions; National Roma Platform largely inactive until 2023 restart attempt.

Education

Problems and conditions:	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:	Details of NRSF implementation relevant to the problem:
Early school leaving and chronic absenteeism (primary and especially secondary)	critical problem	understood with limitations	adequate but with room for improvement	absent	DRASI+/ESF extra teaching, free meals, parental outreach; transport added from Polemidia; tablets/internet during COVID-19. Gains are local; transition to secondary remains weak; no Roma-specific targets/indicators.
Limited participation in early childhood education	significant problem	understood with limitations	present but insufficient	absent	Compulsory preschool expansion helps in principle; targeted outreach to Roma families uneven; distance/transport barriers persist in some localities.
Language barriers; lack of institutionalised	significant problem	understood with limitations	adequate but with room for improvement	absent	Turkish-speaking teacher and occasional mediator in Limassol; Kurbetcha activities; roles remain

mediators					project-based and not scaled nationally.
Digital divide affecting learning continuity	significant problem	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	absent	COVID-19 tablet support mitigated gaps short term; sustained digital-skills development and home connectivity not systematically ensured.
Early school leaving and chronic absenteeism (primary and especially secondary)	critical problem	understood with limitations	adequate but with room for improvement	absent	DRASI+/ESF extra teaching, free meals, parental outreach; transport added from Polemidia; tablets/internet during COVID-19. Gains are local; transition to secondary remains weak; no Roma-specific targets/indicators.

Employment

Problems and conditions:	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:	Details of NRSF implementation relevant to the problem:
Very low employment and participation in active labour measures	critical problem	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	absent	PES/GMI activation available to all, but no ethnicity-specific outreach/indicators; Ministry confirms lack of Roma data; few verified placements.
Poor access to tailored up/re-skilling	significant problem	understood with limitations	present but insufficient	absent	Generic training exists; no designed pathway combining remedial literacy, vocational modules, transport/childcare and employer incentives for Roma.

pathways					
Labour-market discrimination by employers	significant problem	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	absent	Anti-discrimination law in force; no dedicated testing/mediation; few cases pursued; community reports reliance on informal contacts for jobs.
Weak PES–social services coordination evidenced by lack of tracking	significant problem	understood with limitations	adequate but with room for improvement	absent	Case-by-case cooperation claimed; no systematic Roma tracking of individual action plans or outcomes, so effectiveness cannot be evidenced.

Healthcare

Problems and conditions:	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:	Details of NRSF implementation relevant to the problem:
Navigation and language barriers within universal GeSY	significant problem	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	absent	Universal coverage exists; no institutionalised translation/health mediation for Turkish/Kurbetcha speakers; reliance on ad-hoc community help.
Poor access to preventive care and continuity (vaccinations, chronic care)	significant problem	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	absent	School-linked outreach helps locally; mobile COVID units used; no Roma-specific indicators to provide evidence for gap-closure.
Health data not disaggregated	significant	mentioned but not analysed	absent	absent	No ethnicity field in administrative health data; census self-ID numbers too small for service

for Roma	problem	sufficiently			monitoring, prevents evaluation of progress.
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Housing, essential services, and environmental justice

Problems and conditions:	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:	Details of NRSF implementation relevant to the problem:
Segregated settlement (Kato Polemidia) persists; relocation strategy missing	critical problem	not mentioned	absent	absent	State acknowledges prefabs in Polemidia; Paphos site abandoned; no funded desegregation plan; out-migration to the north reported.
Poor physical condition/overcrowding in Turkish-Cypriot (TC) houses	significant problem	understood with limitations	adequate but with room for improvement	absent	TC Property Service undertakes repairs when budgets allow; maintenance uneven; multi-family overcrowding persists; no time-bound targets.
Gaps in access to water/sanitation/electricity and waste collection in some units	significant problem	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	absent	Residents report households without running water, difficulty with utility bills, inconsistent municipal services, and no systematic remediation.
Limited public transport from peripheral locations	significant problem	not mentioned	present but insufficient	absent	Targeted school transport from Polemidia helps, but is not a comprehensive mobility solution for work/health access.

affecting attendance and service access					
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Social services

Problems and conditions:	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:	Details of NRSF implementation relevant to the problem:
High poverty and material deprivation among Roma households	significant problem	understood with limitations	adequate but with room for improvement	absent	GMI and allowances available; mobile teams used in 2023 to help with applications; impact on exits from poverty not tracked for Roma.
Administrative/literacy barriers to accessing benefits; inconsistent continuity	minor problems	understood with limitations	present but insufficient	absent	Assistance exists, but families report unwarranted cancellations/delays; limited systematic rights-based navigation support.
Lack of Roma-specific monitoring of uptake and outcomes	significant problem	understood with limitations	absent	absent	No disaggregated dashboards for Roma beneficiaries; prevents evaluation and course-correction.
Limited proactive	significant	mentioned but not analysed	present but	absent	Schools act as de facto hubs (counsellors,

outreach and capacity for case-managed support across agencies	problem	sufficiently	insufficient		psychologists, referrals). System-wide Roma mediation model not institutionalised; coverage patchy.
Weak inter-service coordination (PES, welfare, health, education) documented by lack of shared indicators	minor problems	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	absent	Coordination occurs informally; absence of Roma-specific KPIs hinders joint accountability.

Child protection

Problems and conditions:	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:	Details of NRSF implementation relevant to the problem:
Specific vulnerability of Roma children to violence and neglect not sufficiently addressed	significant problem	irrelevant (not mentioned)	present but insufficient	absent	School is a protective space; lockdowns increased risk; no dedicated Roma child-protection indicators.
Activities to strengthen	significant	irrelevant (not mentioned)	absent	absent	Local parent seminars exist but not systematised;

parenting skills and responsibility do not consistently reach Roma parents	problem	mentioned)			transport and trust barriers limit participation.
Early marriages among Roma girls	significant problem	irrelevant (not mentioned)	absent	absent	No targeted prevention/mentorship; girls' school continuity affected at adolescence; no monitoring.

Promoting (awareness of) Roma arts, culture, and history

Problems and conditions:	Significance:	Identified by strategy:	Measures to address:	Targets defined:	Details of NRSF implementation relevant to the problem:
Poor public awareness of Roma contribution to national/European heritage	significant problem	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	absent	Schools and municipalities mark International Roma Day and run music/dance projects; actions depend on local initiative and ESF-type cycles.
Roma history and culture insufficiently embedded in curricula and textbooks	significant problem	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	absent	Occasional school events and museum partnerships; no nationwide deliverables with budgets/targets.

Romani/Kurbetcha language preservation and teaching not systematised	significant problem	mentioned but not analysed sufficiently	present but insufficient	absent	Kurbetcha activities/classes exist in Limassol primary; not scaled; materials limited; no national plan.
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