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# ROMA COMMUNITIES IN TURKEY DURING THE RECOVERY FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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*This report was written on January 31, 2023*





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# ROMA COMMUNITIES IN TURKEY DURING THE RECOVERY FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



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**Roma Memory Studies Association**  
Roman Hafıza Çalışmaları Derneği (Romani Godi)

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## Acronyms

<b>ERGO</b>	European Roma Grassroots Organization
<b>İPA</b>	İstanbul Planning Agency
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>MEB</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>SODEV</b>	Social Democracy Foundation
<b>TÜİK</b>	Turkish Statistical Institute
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations International Children's Emergency Found

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# INTRODUCTION

Roma Memory Studies Association (also known as Romani Godi) is a Roma civil society organization that works and advocates in the fields of Roma social memory, Roma language, culture, and history, as well as rights violations, inequalities, and discrimination experienced by Roma in Türkiye. Romani Godi is a member of the Roma Rights Network and a partner of the European Roma Rights Center (ERRC) in Türkiye.

This opinion contribution is about the promotion and protection of economic, social and cultural rights in the context of addressing inequalities in our field of study, Roma in Turkey during the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Türkiye is located in a part of the world where regional instability has turned into a structural problem.

There is a distinct disproportion in income distribution: According to the World Inequality Report, the country's 50% own only 4% of the wealth.[1] There are many indicators that environmental

justice is not equally distributed in Türkiye, one of the countries vulnerable to climate change. Different groups in Türkiye are affected by such inequalities to different degrees. Türkiye is a country inhabited by various ethnic, religious, and linguistic minority groups. A global crisis, the Covid-19 pandemic, has also affected different groups in the country to a certain extent. Since there is no disaggregated data available in Türkiye, there is a lack of official data on this matter.

Roma, who are not officially recognized as a minority in Türkiye, are an ethnic minority that is heavily exposed to numerous

inequalities such as climate injustice, deep poverty, environmental discrimination, and spatial stigmatization.

Rising poverty has exacerbated and deepened such problems, which were already serious for Roma before the pandemic.

The existence of stigmatized "Roma neighbourhoods-ghettoes" and segregated areas such as "Roma-Gypsy" parks in city centers are well known.[2]

According to researchers and Roma NGOs, there are estimated to be between 3 million and 6 million Roma in Türkiye.[3] Roma was already one of the communities facing serious obstacles in accessing economic, social, and cultural

[1] [https://wir2022.wid.world/www-site/uploads/2022/03/0098\\_21\\_WIL\\_RIM\\_RAPPORT\\_A4.pdf](https://wir2022.wid.world/www-site/uploads/2022/03/0098_21_WIL_RIM_RAPPORT_A4.pdf)  
[2] <https://www.siyasalkitap.com/doc/197>

[2] <https://www.siyasalkitap.com/doc/197>  
[3] According to ECRI, the estimate in 2011 was around 2,750,000 people. See ECRI, 4. Report on Türkiye, 2011, para. 83  
[4] [http://www.sp.gov.tr/tr/temelbelge/s/167/Roman+Vatandaslara+Yonelik+Strateji+Belgesi+\\_2016-2021](http://www.sp.gov.tr/tr/temelbelge/s/167/Roman+Vatandaslara+Yonelik+Strateji+Belgesi+_2016-2021)

rights before the pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has been a significant factor in revealing the extreme exposure of excluded and marginalized Roma communities to adverse health and socioeconomic impacts. The Ministry of Labour and Social Security's Strategy Action Document for Roma Citizens [4] implemented for the period 2016-2021 was insufficient to eliminate the inequalities reinforced by the pandemic. The document, which centers on health, housing, employment, education, and social services, has not achieved its expected results for a variety of reasons, including the lack of a budget and indicators, the lack of relevant public regulations, and the lack of data on Roma.

*“ Without assistance, it is impossible for Roma to repair the damage of the pandemic.”*

Roma communities residing in Türkiye have faced problems in sheltering, health, education, employment, and social services/assistance during the pandemic. Rising poverty has exacerbated and deepened such problems, which were already serious for Roma before the pandemic. Roma, one of the most disadvantaged groups in the country, have struggled to defend themselves against the economic, social,

and health-related problems arising from the pandemic. It is imperative that Roma communities are empowered through public measures to ensure that the problems outlined in the remarks text are not chronicized and that existing widespread inequalities are not perpetuated. Without assistance, it is impossible for Roma to repair the damage of the pandemic. Furthermore, there are also more vulnerable subgroups within the Roma community, including women, LGBTI+ individuals, youth, the elderly, and children, who have been more severely affected by the economic and social problems posed by the pandemic.

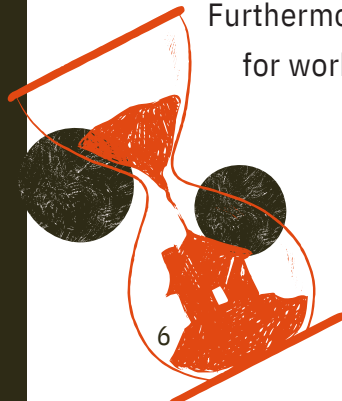
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[4] [http://www.sp.gov.tr/tr/temelbelge/s/167/Roman+Vatandaslara+Yonelik+Strateji+Belgesi+\\_2016-2021](http://www.sp.gov.tr/tr/temelbelge/s/167/Roman+Vatandaslara+Yonelik+Strateji+Belgesi+_2016-2021)

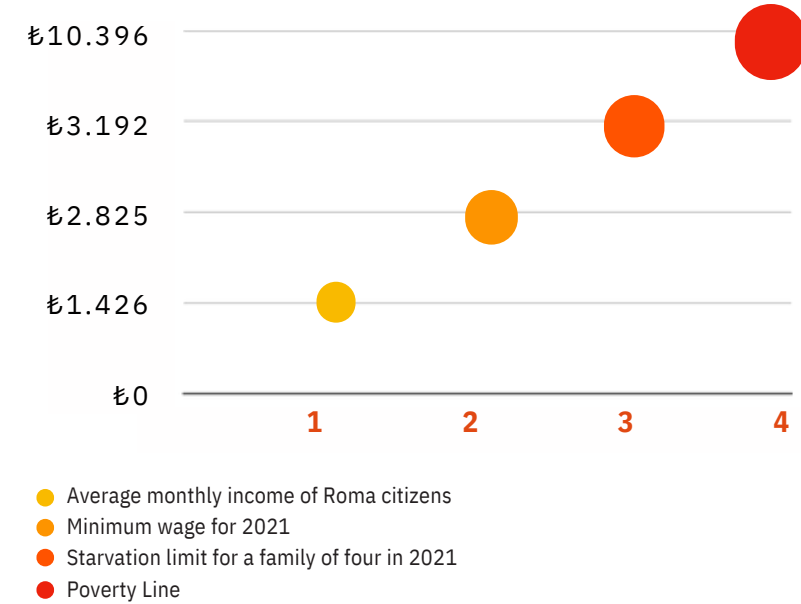
# 1. DEEPENING POVERTY

Roma communities, who traditionally work in informal sectors, unregistered and in daily wage jobs, also lack social security. During the pandemic, Roma have been unable to continue working as wastepaper and recycling collectors, day laborers, florists, peddlers, waiters, musicians, textile workers, construction workers, and cleaning workers, all of which are not possible to work remotely/online. The lockdown that accompanied the pandemic further limited the already irregular incomes of Roma families. The pandemic has affected Roma working in daily, precarious jobs, particularly on the streets. Workers in the service sector and cleaning jobs, particularly paper and scrap collectors, florists, and hawkers, have suffered prolonged periods of income loss during the pandemic.

Furthermore, the economic crisis has led to unpaid leave for workers in establishments such as restaurants and textile workshops, which has pushed the income of Roma households down to the starvation line.



Roma Communities and Poverty Research in Turkey

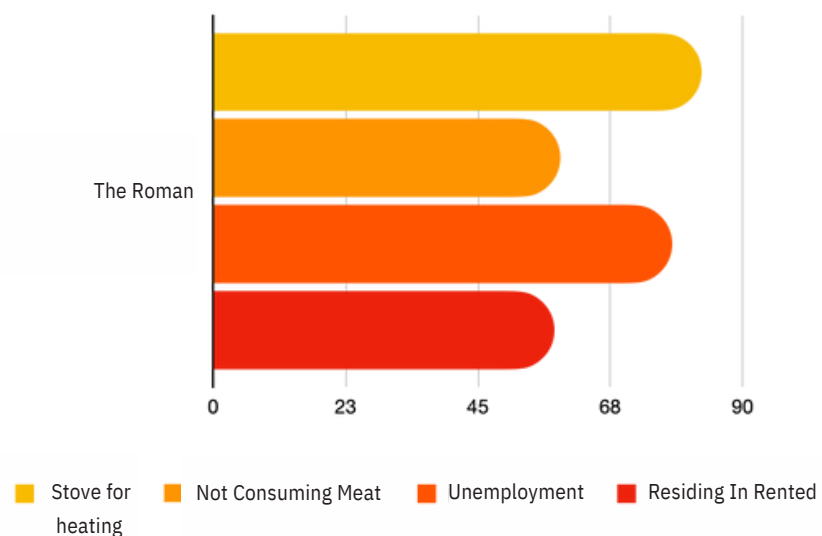


The pandemic and the economic crisis in the post-pandemic period have further worsened the poverty of Roma communities in Türkiye. According to the data from the [5] "Research on Roma Communities and Poverty in Türkiye," dated November 2021, conducted jointly by the Social Democracy Foundation (Sosyal Demokrasi Vakfı - SODEV), (İstanbulPlanlama Ajansı - IPA), and Zero Discrimination Association (Sıfır Ayrımcılık Derneği), the average monthly income of Roma citizens is TRY 1,426. (The minimum wage was TRY 2,825 at the time of the research.) During the same period, the starvation line for a family of four was TRY 3,192 and the poverty line was TRY 10,396 [6]).

[5] <https://sodev.org.tr/sodev-turkiyede-roman-topluluklari-ve-yoksulluk-arastirmasi/>

[6] <https://www.turkis.org.tr/kasim-2021-aclik-ve-yoksulluk-siniri/>

Roma Communities and Poverty Research in Turkey



Among the Roma surveyed, 77.5% reported unemployment, 57.5% reported residing in rented accommodation, 83.2% reported using stoves for heating, and 59% reported not consuming meat even once a year. Whereas 62% of Roma facing employment and nutrition problems stated that they did not receive any social aid, the majority of those who received assistance used the district governorships and municipalities as their address. Coal ranked first with 18% of the social aid received. Among Roma, 79.8% have debts and 71.5% believe that they will never be able to retire. A large number of Roma, usually musicians or hawkers, lost their jobs during the pandemic. According to the same research, 55.7% of the participants

Among the 600 Roma citizens interviewed as part of the research, 65.9% stated that they had been unemployed at least once during the pandemic. The total rate of people who stated that their personal income decreased or was zeroed during the pandemic is 88.9%.

Roma has also not benefited sufficiently from measures to minimize the damage resulting from the pandemic. Between April 17, 2020, and June 30, 2021, the "Dismissal Ban" applied to formal (insured) employment and excluded informal workers, such as Roma. Similarly, Roma was not eligible for the "Short-Term Working Allowance" and "Cash Wage Support" between March 2020 and June 2021.

Roma children are at higher risk of being affected by the consequences of poverty compared to adults. Poverty hampers the social, physical, and mental development of Roma children, and their ability to withstand the effects of poverty is weaker than that of adults. Growing up in poverty also makes it difficult for

Childhood poverty is often a harbinger of an adult life that will also be spent in poverty.

Roma children to access basic rights and services such as education, health, sheltering, and adequate nutrition. Childhood poverty is often a harbinger of an adult life that will also be spent in poverty. Growing up in an unhealthy home without adequate nutrition or access to education, Roma children face impoverished adulthood as their parents did.

“...at least one in every three children, are living in poverty.”

According to the latest OECD data, as of 2019, Türkiye has the third highest child poverty rate among 41 countries after South Africa and Costa Rica (22.4%) [7]. According to the 'Children in Statistics 2021' data published by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT) on April 20, 2022, there are approximately 23 million children in Türkiye. Among these children, 7 million 378 thousand, or at least one in every three children, are living in poverty. [8]

[7] <https://data.oecd.org/inequality/poverty-rate.htm>

[8] <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Istatistiklerle-Cocuk-2021-45633&dil=1>

## 2. EDUCATION

Poverty, deepened by the economic crisis that followed the pandemic, has hampered Roma children's access to education.

The average income of the parents of Roma children attending public schools is below the poverty line, and families are unable to meet their children's school needs. Moreover, those children cannot be fed at school as they cannot be fed at home, cannot shop at the school canteen, and cannot even access healthy drinking water free of charge. This leads to school dropouts, and families taking their children away from school and sending them to work.

According to the "Child Labour Force Research" conducted by Turkish Statistical Institute in late 2019, the number of children in the 5-17 age group working in economic activity in Türkiye is 720 thousand, i.e., 4.4% of children of compulsory education age are working.

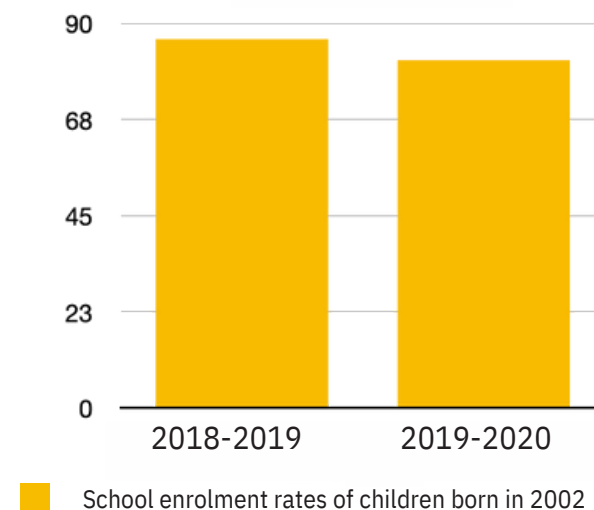


As stated in the Deep Poverty Network's "Child Poverty in Türkiye" research [9], during the pandemic, children who were not working previously started to work in daily jobs such as paper-scrap collecting, hawking, and textile labour under harsh conditions and long working hours due to the decrease in household income to the extent that they could not afford to buy food for the household on a regular basis.

According to the Ministry of National Education's (MoNE) formal education statistics for 2021-2022, the number of students who dropped out of formal education increased by 157 thousand to 1 million 738 thousand 198.

The changing form of education during the pandemic has significantly affected Roma students. During this period, the majority of Roma students had little or no access to online education. According to the results of the Deep Poverty Network's fieldwork, children in 57.8% of households living under poverty conditions could not attend remote education during the pandemic. At least half of the children living in poor households did not have access to technological devices or the internet to attend remote education. Some children could not attend the televised courses because their families did not have TVs or electricity in their homes. Additionally, they were also not supported by their families in the use of online devices in order to continue their studies.

Education Monitoring Report 2020: Students and Access to Education



According to the Education Reform Initiative's (Eğitim Reformu Girişimi) report [10], while the school enrolment rate of children born in 2002 was 86.3% in the 2018-2019 school year, this rate dropped to 81.3% in the 2019 - 2020 school year.



This decline indicates that at least 5% of children born in 2002 dropped out of school during the pandemic. As early school dropout is more common among Roma children, it is plausible that more Roma students dropped out of school after the pandemic.

[9] <https://derinyoksullukagi.org/raporlar/turkiyede-cocuk-yoksullugu/>

[10] <https://www.egitimreformugirisimi.org/egitim-izleme-raporu-2020-ogrenciler-ve-egitime-erisim>

The report [11] by the Deep Poverty Network indicates that 11.3% of the students interviewed will not return to school after the pandemic. ILO and UNICEF reports on the issue reveal that deep poverty stemming from the pandemic will increase the number of child laborers. This implies that children from communities living in precarious conditions, including Roma, have dropped out of school and started/will start working as a direct consequence of the pandemic.



Dom students, one of the Roma communities in Türkiye, are the group with the highest number of school dropouts during the pandemic. According to the report [12] prepared by Civil Rights Defenders titled "Roma in Türkiye: and Deprivation", Dom students lost two years of education during the pandemic. The children of Dom families could not attend remote education, as their families became poorer during this period, they dropped out of school and started to work, and when the schools were opened, they did not attend school due to discrimination.



“ ...that 11.3% of the students interviewed will not return to school after the pandemic.... ”

Another obstacle preventing children from poor families from continuing their education is malnutrition. Inadequate and unhealthy nutrition has a negative effect on children's school success and school attendance. The Deep Poverty Network's study titled "Child Poverty in Türkiye" [13] revealed that families living under conditions of poverty, such as Roma, have been unable to access healthy and sufficient food due to the pandemic. In the field survey, 85% of the families interviewed do not have access to adequate food, and 38.7% of households skip meals almost every day. Whereas 39% of the families interviewed stated that they did not have access to clean drinking water before the pandemic, 49% did not have access to drinking water during the pandemic. Moreover, unhealthy, and starvation-like malnutrition results in learning difficulties in children.

[11] <https://derinyoksullukagi.org/raporlar/pandemi-doneminde-derin-yoksulluk-ve-haklara-erisim-arastirmasi-yerel-yonetimlere-kriz-donemi-sosyal-destek-programlari-icin-oneriler/>

[12]. <https://crd.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/ROMAN-RAPORU-EN.pdf>



“Roma children attend school so that they do not inherit a life of poverty from their families ”

Child poverty, which has deepened with the pandemic, is gravely serious. Unless public measures are implemented, the deep poverty in which children live will burden future generations. It is crucial that Roma children attend school so that they do not inherit a life of poverty from their families. One such public measure, free and healthy meals in schools, has been introduced by some municipalities.

Nevertheless, measures to ensure that Roma children living in poverty have access to free education of equal quality with their peers have fallen far short of the actual needs. The MoNE budget has increased in numerical terms, as every year, but its share in the general budget has decreased. While in 2022, the ratio of the MoNE budget to the Central Government Budget was 10.79%, it decreased to 9.64% in the 2023 budget.

“ The children could not attend the lectures broadcast on television because some families did not have television or electricity in their homes. ”





## 3. HEALTH

“ ...often segregated from the general population and under-served by public infrastructure and sanitation services...”

Although Türkiye is a party to all human rights treaties guaranteeing equal access to the right to health for all citizens and reiterates similar guarantees in domestic law through the constitution and laws, in reality, legal gaps and problems in the implementation of the legislation mean that many Roma do not have access to adequate health care.

minority  
rights  
group  
international

The structural problems described in the Minority Rights Group and Zero Discrimination Association's report "Ignored Inequality: Roma Access to Housing and Education in Türkiye"[14] report by the Minority Rights Group and Zero Discrimination Association, the structural problems faced by Roma communities in healthcare have increased incrementally under pandemic conditions.

Poverty, precariousness, and, in some cases, lack of identity has exacerbated obstacles to accessing adequate health care, particularly for Roma, causing them to experience higher rates of health problems than other communities, or to be more affected than people in residential areas with very

limited public health services. Such structural problems have largely prevented access to minimum hygiene measures against Covid-19 for people living in Roma neighbourhoods, which are often segregated from the general population and under-served by public infrastructure and sanitation services, still lack access to clean drinking and municipal water, and are located in areas where garbage accumulation sites and recycling areas are established.

The report [15] released by the Social Democracy Foundation ( Sosyal Demokrasi Vakfı ) in November 2021 reveals the unhealthy conditions in which Roma communities live and their adverse consequences. Even the disparity

**SODEV**  
SOSYAL DEMOKRASI VAKFI

between the life expectancy figures in the report is a stark reminder of the conditions in which Roma live throughout their lives: Roma's life expectancy is far below the national average. The average life expectancy in Türkiye is 78.6 years, while for Roma it is 68.5 years. Lack of access to nutritious food and harsh living conditions result in a relatively shorter life expectancy for Roma citizens.

[14] <https://www.stgm.org.tr/sites/default/files/2020-09/gormezlikten-gelinen-esitsizlik-turkiyede-romanlarin-barinma-ve-egitim-hakkina-erisimi-raporu.pdf>

[15] <https://sodev.org.tr/sodev-turkiyede-roman-topluluklari-ve-yoksulluk-arastirmasi/>

According to the same report, 10 to 15% of Roma communities have no access to health services at all, while 20 to 30% have partial access. While it is a matter of debate to what extent this access rate has even been achieved for all communities in Türkiye during the pandemic, it can be argued that the right of Roma to access this guarantee remains at a much lower level.

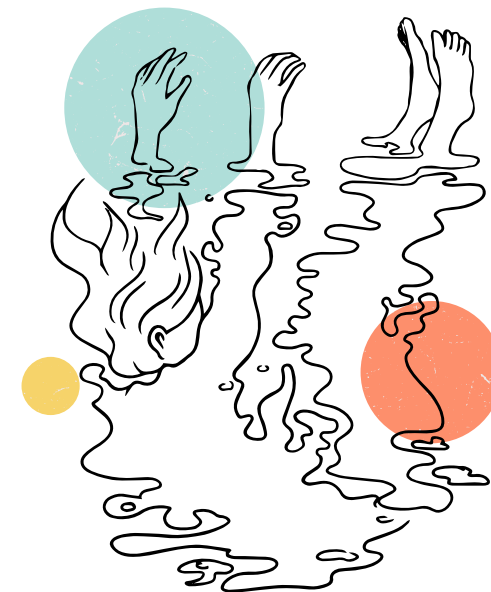
The government's Strategy Paper on Roma Citizens (2016-2021), published in 2016, provides partial rights and relief for Roma communities, but no major changes in structural problems can be observed. In spite of some progress in social security, education, health, and political participation, Roma have not achieved the status and rights of equal and free citizens.

The observations on health in the "Local Advocacy Guide for Non-Governmental Organizations Active in the Roma Rights Sphere" published by Yereliz in 2020 [16] are crucial in terms of illustrating the disparity between the Strategy Paper and practices implemented in the field: Although social aid programs such as the Green Card and the family medicine system seem to have ensured the right to access to healthcare for Roma in comparison to the past, field research suggests that nomadic



[16] [https://ifade.org.tr/reports/EngelliWeb\\_2020.pdf](https://ifade.org.tr/reports/EngelliWeb_2020.pdf), 16.08.2022

- The average life expectancy in Türkiye is 78.6 years, while for Roma it is 68.5 years.
- 10 to 15% of Roma communities have no access to health services at all, while 20 to 30% have partial access.



groups, those without permanent residency and those who do not have the necessary documents are excluded from the Green Card program. The cost of registration to the family medicine system and the cost of medicines not covered by the Green Card are often cited as obstacles to accessing medicines for Roma.

Roma, who mostly work in low-income, unskilled, and precarious jobs, are also exposed to harsh working conditions

The structural problems faced by Roma have led to a decrease in health security under pandemic conditions.

that can lead to chronic diseases. Occupational accidents and related injuries are also common among Roma working in unsafe and unhealthy conditions. Furthermore,

it is also revealed that there are problems in women's health in terms of pregnancy, childbirth, sexual health, and general health issues, and that substance abuse threatens the health of children and young people as well as women.

According to the "Covid-19 Socioeconomic Impact Study on Roma Communities in Türkiye" published by the Zero Discrimination Association in February 2022, although there is no cross-sectional problem in terms of access to health services for Roma, the structural problems faced by Roma have led to a decrease in health security under pandemic conditions.

“ Interrupted education, unemployment, and economic difficulties have further increased substance use during the pandemic. ”

According to the same report, it is also indicated that there are some health concerns and issues due to unfavorable housing conditions. Due to the unfavorable conditions in the houses, it is apparent that measures such as isolation and quarantine cannot be implemented at an adequate level. Another health issue that has surfaced during the pandemic is related to the psychological and mental health status of people. It is often stated that restrictions such as lockdowns and economic difficulties experienced during the pandemic cause people to feel uncomfortable and experience psychological problems. Another problem that may be related to health is the prevalence of substance use, which was frequently mentioned in the interviews. Interrupted education, unemployment, and economic difficulties have further increased substance use during the pandemic.

## 4. HOUSING

### GENERAL VIEW OF HOUSING CONDITION OF ROMA IN TURKEY

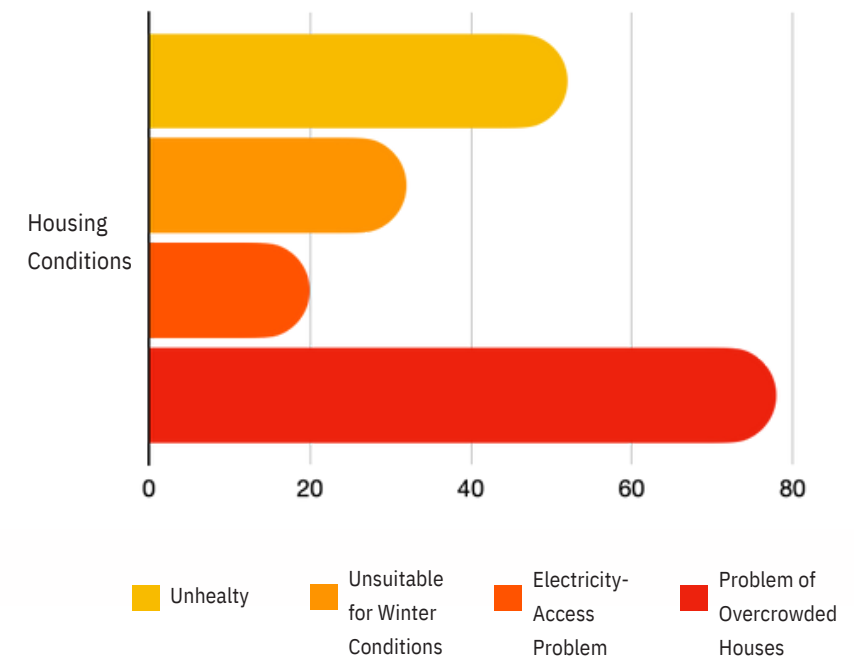
The greatest cause of the spread of infectious diseases is not an unavoidable natural disaster, but social and spatial inequalities in access to housing, health, education, and economic resources [17]. Social-spatial inequalities are addressed in the research conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights on Roma. According to this research, it is known that one out of every two Roma (52%) live in unsanitary sheds, tents, and house-like dwellings, one out of every three Roma (32%) live in structures that are not suitable for winter conditions, have leaking roofs and dampness, one out of every five Roma (20%) face problems in accessing electricity, [18] and 78% have to live with crowded households that do not allow social isolation during the pandemic. [19]

[17] Acuto, M., Larcom, S., Keil, R., Ghojeh, M., Lindsay, T., Camponeschi, C. Ve Parnell, S. (2020). Seeing covid-19 through an urban lens. Nature Sustainability. V:3, 977-978. Erişim Adresi: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-020-00620-3>

[18] European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey - Roma, 2017: [https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings_en.pdf) (hereinafter EU FRA 2017)

[19] European Commission, Report on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies – 2019 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/swd2019-320\\_final\\_report\\_on\\_the\\_implementation\\_of\\_national\\_roma\\_integration\\_strategies\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/swd2019-320_final_report_on_the_implementation_of_national_roma_integration_strategies_en.pdf) (hereinafter EC NRIS 2019)

European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights on Roma.

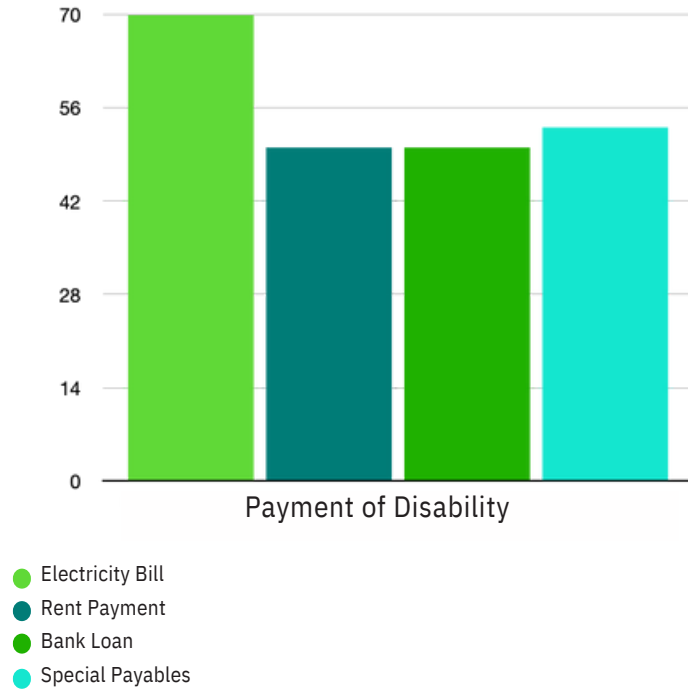


ERGO's 2020 study in Türkiye emphasizes that 35% of Roma living in Türkiye have more than five people living in the same household and that households consist of rooms for two (53%) or three (41%) people, making Roma vulnerable to the pandemic.[20]

[20] Network, ERGO (2020). The Impact of COVID-19 on Roma Communities in the European Union and the Western Balkans. Survey December.



The Impact of COVID-19 on Roma Communities in the European Union and the Western Balkans. Survey December



The closures and quarantines in Roma neighbourhoods have pushed Roma into deep poverty, who already face problems in accessing quality employment, and Roma face problems in meeting their basic needs. According to a survey of Roma in Türkiye during the pandemic, 70% of Roma had difficulty paying their electricity bills, 53% had difficulty paying their rent, 50% had difficulty paying their bank loans and 50% had difficulty paying their personal debts. [21]

[21] Network, ERGO (2020). The Impact of COVID-19 on Roma Communities in the European Union and the Western Balkans. Survey December.

“ Although Roma in Türkiye do not have official minority status, they are one of the largest minority groups in the country in terms of population. ”

It is accepted that at least 3 million houses are needed in Turkey, and according to data published by the Ministry of Environment, Urbanization, and Climate Change in 2022, 6.8 million of the existing houses are at risk. Vulnerable, minority groups are thought to reside in these buildings.[22]

Although Roma in Türkiye do not have official minority status, they are one of the largest minority groups in the country in terms of population. According to researchers and Roma NGOs, there are estimated to be between 3 and 6 million Roma and Roma groups in Türkiye, [23] with 97% of the population living a settled lifestyle [24]. With the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an increase in the need for housing and rents have increased in urban areas. According to a survey conducted by Knight Frank, a post-pandemic research company, in 150 cities around the world, the largest increases

[22] <https://www.indyturk.com/node/543031/siyaset/bakan-kurum-tyuzde-C3yuzde-BCm-tyuzde-C3yuzde-BCrkiyede-68-milyon-riskli-konut-syuzde-C3yuzde-B6z-konusu>

[23] ECRI'ye göre yaklaşık 2.750.000 kişidir. Bkz. ECRI, 4. Türkiye Raporu, 2011, para. 83.

[24] Türkiye'de Romanların tarihi için bkz. Adrian Marsh, "Türkiye Çingenelerinin Tarihi Hakkında", Biz Buradayız! Türkiye'de Romanlar, Ayrımcı Uygulamalar ve Hak Mücadelesi, Ebru Uzpeder, Savelina Danova/Roussinova, Sevgi Özçelik, Sinan Gökçen (yay. haz.), EDROM, ERRC, HYD Yayını, İstanbul, 2008, s. 5 vd

in house prices were realized in three cities in Türkiye: Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. [25] In these densely Roma-populated cities, the deep poverty caused by the pandemic has left Roma at risk of homelessness and deprived of their most fundamental right to housing. The biggest shortcoming in tracking socio-economic and spatial inequalities and reporting on rights violations specific to Roma is the obstacles to the sharing of disaggregated data in Türkiye. In other words, there is no official data on the Roma population in Türkiye. The first step should be to collect such data in order to formulate the right policies to improve the housing conditions of Roma groups and reduce the current homeless rate.

Türkiye is a party to international human rights conventions that guarantee equal access to the right to housing for all citizens and has constitutional provisions in its domestic law to monitor violations and protect rights [26]: Article 36 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye states that "Everyone has the right to housing and accommodation in a manner that meets basic human needs and is worthy of human dignity".

Although the necessary, legal provisions are guaranteed by national and international conventions, many Roma in Türkiye live in informal settlements (ghettos) and segregated neighbourhoods, in inadequate and overcrowded housing, and in unsanitary conditions without access to infrastructure and clean water. Furthermore, emergency expropriation

The socio-economic and spatial inequalities deepened by the pandemic are the legacy of inadequate pre-pandemic social policies.

decisions displacement policies called "urban transformation" have rendered Roma's property rights precarious, and spatial inequalities created by environmental segregation have left Roma vulnerable to the pandemic. The socio-economic and spatial inequalities deepened by the pandemic are the legacy of inadequate social policies before the pandemic.

The housing conditions of Roma during the pandemic, as well as their vulnerability to the negative effects of environmental degradation (for example, a 10-year life expectancy gap between Roma and non-Roma in Europe and the Balkans due to environmental factors), have gone unnoticed. During the pandemic, protective measures and planning for Roma, the most vulnerable group against the pandemic, were not developed.[27]

[25] <https://finans.mynet.com/haber/detay/emlak/turkiye-150-ulkeyi-geride-birakti-konut-fiyat-artistinda-istanbul-zirvede/450994/>

[26] ESKHK, 4 No'lu Genel Yorum

[27] Heidegger, P., & Wiese, K. (2020). Pushed to the wastelands: Environmental racism against Roma communities in Central and Eastern Europe. Brussels: European Environmental Bureau.



## LIVING ON WASTELANDS DURING THE PANDEMIC

According to the literature, environmental benefits and harms are not equally distributed, and ethnicity and class are determining factors in exposure to environmental health risks. Many Roma neighbourhoods in Türkiye are located in active or abandoned industrial zones, in the most desolate corners of the city, on the banks of streams where flood risk is high, and in areas where waste recycling facilities are located. Roma are also more exposed than non-Roma to environmental degradation and pollution from polluting industry and inadequate municipal infrastructure services.

Below are some of the field visits and case studies we conducted on housing and environmental inequalities between March-September 2022 during the pandemic recovery process.



**Roma live near Turkey's most polluted stream and face serious health threats!**



**Çorlu - Koro (Hıdırağa) Neighbourhood - Çorlu Stream**

**SAKARYA-KARASU:** Roma settlement is located in the center of organized industry, port, and solid waste treatment plant. Around 400 Roma live in 100 sheds, tents, and unsound structures. There is limited access to piped water and clean drinking water in the region. There are puddles of dirty water and non-domestic garbage waste around the tents. Environmental pollution threatens the health and safety of children in the region. Winter diseases such as asthma and bronchitis are common.

**URLA-SIRA NEIGHBOURHOOD:** In the neighbourhood, which is located very close to the touristic centres of Urla, 150 Roma have problems accessing electricity. Many of the old, small containers and shacks have inadequate sewerage infrastructure. Due to energy poverty, houses and containers are cold in winter. *(Although containers have been placed instead of tents in 2022, it cannot be said that the standard of living in this area is humane. In addition, exposed electrical wires increase the risk of fire.)*



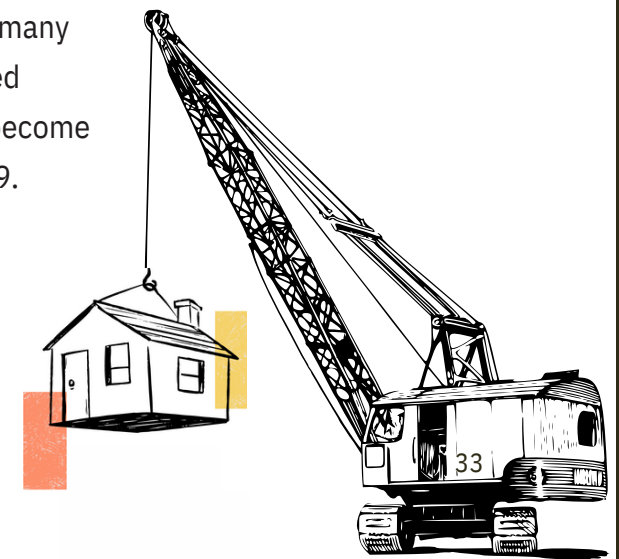


**KOCAELİ-KANDIRA NEIGHBOURHOOD:** The Roma neighbourhood of 100-120 houses and 80-100 tents does not have proper public sewage system and does not benefit from municipal services. In addition to soil pollution, ground and surface water pollution, there are also risks such as erosion in the region.



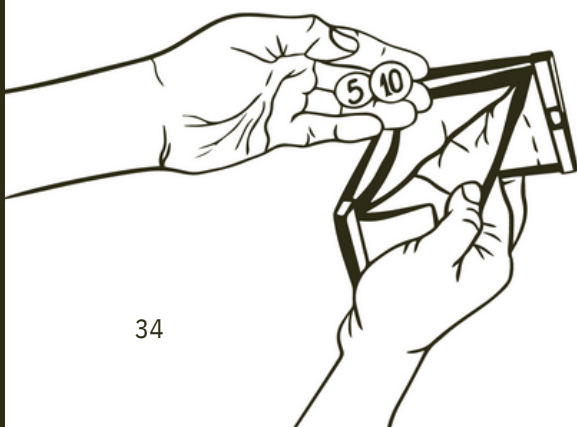
## BECOMING VULNERABLE TO PANDEMIC DUE TO UNFAIR URBAN TRANSFORMATION POLICY

"Urban transformation" practices have resulted in violations of the right to housing for Roma in Türkiye. Urban transformation has destroyed Roma "memory spaces" in many places and Roma have been forced to evacuate. Many displaced people have not been provided with new housing, and temporary financial assistance has been rendered obsolete due to rising rental prices after the pandemic. Many Roma have been at risk of homelessness and have been forced to migrate to remote parts of the city to live in sheds and tents made of improvised materials that are unsafe against floods, storms, and many health risks. Roma displaced before the pandemic have become more vulnerable to Covid-19.



The "urban transformation" sites in Türkiye that have led to violations of Roma's right to housing include Sulukule, Kâğıthane, Küçükbakkalköy, Dolapdere, Galata, Kasımpaşa, Kuştepe and Gaziosmanpaşa in İstanbul; Kamberler in Bursa; Ereğli in Zonguldak; Erenler and Yenimahalle in Sakarya; Çiğir Bağı in Ankara; Yeniköy in Diyarbakır; Turgutreis in Mersin; Kınalıçam in Yusufeli; 28 Haziran in İzmit; Çarşı and Taksim in Erzincan; and Gündoğan in Balıkesir.

*“Urban transformation has destroyed Roma "memory spaces" in many places and Roma have been forced to evacuate.”*



## 5. SOCIAL SERVICES AND AIDS

At least 32% of the population in Türkiye depend on social assistance for earning their keep.[28] Among the expectations of Roma groups struggling with widespread poverty in Türkiye from provincial municipalities, social assistance ranks first with 40.8%. The top expectation of Roma from politicians/the state is aid, with 39.8%.[29] In 2021, the average annual income of the highest-earning 10% of the population in Türkiye is 23 times higher than that of the lowest-earning 50%.[30] The Covid- 19 pandemic has further impoverished groups with lower incomes. Although a number of aid programs have been implemented by the public and private sectors during the pandemic, such as short time working allowances, support for tradesmen, and normalization support, Roma have not benefited equally from many of them. This is because many support programs

[28] <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/ekonomi/turkiye-nufusunun-yaklasik-yuzde-32si-yardimlarla-ayakta-durabiliyor-1917847>

[29] Sosyal Demokrasi Vakfı, İstanbul Planlama Ajansı ve Sıfır Ayrımcılık Derneği. (2021, Kasım). Türkiye'de Roman Toplulukları ve Yoksulluk Araştırması

[30] [https://wir2022.wid.world/www-site/uploads/2022/03/0098-21\\_WIL\\_RIM\\_RAPPORT\\_A4.pdf](https://wir2022.wid.world/www-site/uploads/2022/03/0098-21_WIL_RIM_RAPPORT_A4.pdf)

There is no disaggregated data on ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities in Türkiye, making their specific needs invisible during crises

are not designed to include Roma who are not in formal employment. Lack of social security and low rates of employment in regular income-generating jobs have made Roma more vulnerable to inequalities in times of crisis. Roma working as musicians, in the entertainment sector, in the service sector, as peddlers, paper collectors, scrap dealers, and in day laborers have long been prevented from earning an income due to Covid-19 measures, which has significantly increased the need for social assistance. This need is not sufficiently visible to the public administration because there is no disaggregated data on ethnic, religious, or linguistic minorities in Türkiye, making their specific needs invisible during crises.

According to the Research on Roma Communities and Poverty in Türkiye, only 37.8% of Roma received assistance from public or private institutions during the pandemic, and 83.7% of this assistance was only in-kind. The amount of aid is as important as the inequalities in access to aid. Although Roma working in informal jobs have been unemployed for extended durations and their only means of livelihood during this period is social assistance, many Roma families stated that they only had access to

TRY 1000 of assistance from the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services once and that they did not receive any assistance within the framework of the "Biz Bize Yeteriz Türkiyem" (We Are Enough for Us, Türkiye) campaign.[31] The one-time assistance of TRY 1000 was not enough for many people who had no other income.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, social assistance was distributed through public institutions and municipalities. According to the findings of the "Research on Roma Communities and Poverty in Türkiye", Roma reported being discriminated against or victimized by inequalities in the evaluation criteria when accessing assistance. They claimed to have been fired by public officials during their applications for assistance and stated that they were subjected to psychological and/or physical violence and social exclusion.

The fact that the vehicles used by Roma scrap dealers to transport scrap or the televisions in their homes were obstacles to qualifying for aid resulted in unequal distribution of assistance during the pandemic. Evaluation criteria for social assistance that do not take into account the unique circumstances of different groups lead to discrimination.

[31] Sosyal Demokrasi Vakfı, İstanbul Planlama Ajansı ve Sıfır Ayrımcılık Derneği. (2021, Kasım). Türkiye'de Roman Toplulukları ve Yoksulluk Araştırması

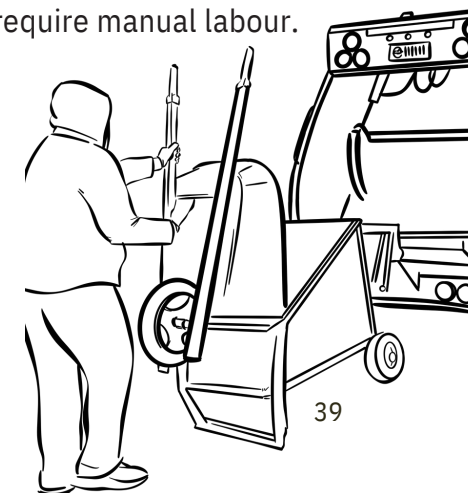
In order to address the inequalities experienced during an important crisis such as Covid-19, it is of great importance to identify the problems and to show political management towards the identification of the problems. On 25.02.2021, a Roma MP from the main opposition party's "motion for a parliamentary inquiry to investigate the economic problems of Roma citizens during the pandemic and to determine the measures to be taken" was rejected by the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye. [32]

*“ Evaluation criteria for social assistance that do not take into account the unique circumstances of different groups lead to discrimination. ”*

[32] <https://www.tbmm.gov.tr/Tutanaklar/Tutanak?BirlesimSiraNo=23720&BaslangicSayfa=20&BitisSayfa=20&Tur=H>

## 6. EMPLOYMENT

The majority of Roma communities work in precarious, unqualified, and low-income jobs. A large proportion of Roma are permanently or temporarily unemployed, and the majority of their work is temporary and daily work. Roma in Türkiye often work in daily jobs that are not preferred by other segments of society, such as garbage collection, paper recycling, peddling, floristry, cleaning, seasonal agricultural labour, and playing music in restaurants or at weddings. Some still pursue traditional occupations such as basket weaving, tinsmithing and metalworking. However, with the disappearance of traditional professions such as tinsmithing, many Roma are forced to rely on low- paid jobs that require manual labour.



*“Roma have not benefited sufficiently from the public measures taken during the pandemic due to their work in unregistered fields.”*

According to the results of the "Research on Roma Communities and Poverty in Türkiye"<sup>33</sup> conducted jointly by the Social Democracy Foundation (SODEV), Istanbul Planning Agency (IPA), and Zero Discrimination Association, the average monthly income of Roma citizens is TRY 1,426. According to the research, 77.5% of the participants



are unemployed, 12.3% work as laborers and 8.5% are mobile workers. Among the 600 Roma citizens surveyed in this research, 65.9% stated that they had been unemployed at least once during the pandemic. Furthermore, in the same research, the total rate of people who stated that their personal income decreased or was zeroed during the pandemic is 88.9%.

Research on Roma Communities and Poverty in Türkiye



A significant number of Roma, who usually work in informal jobs such as musicians, peddlers, florists, and cleaners, have been unable to work due to restrictions and lockdowns during the pandemic. According to the research, 55.7% of the participants stated that their entire income was zeroed out during the pandemic, while those whose income decreased reached a rate of 33.2%. In addition to all these conditions and the discrimination policies and prejudices against the Roma, it is possible to say that the Roma have been the leading group of people who have lost income during the pandemic.

[33] Sosyal Demokrasi Vakfı, İstanbul Planlama Ajansı ve Sıfır Ayrımcılık Derneği. (2021, Kasım). Türkiye’de Roman Toplulukları ve Yoksulluk Araştırması, <https://sodev.org.tr/sodev-turkiyede-roman-topluluklari-ve-yoksulluk-arastirmasi/>

Discriminatory and prejudiced attitudes towards Roma lead to violations of fundamental rights in professional life. Ethnic discrimination based on skin colour and residential neighbourhood is frequently encountered in job applications. In addition to the lack of equal pay for equal work, especially in seasonal work, mobbing in the workplace, and lack of awareness on how to claim rights, there is also a lack of psycho-social support to protect the well-being of victims of discrimination. Discriminatory attitudes in the workplace prevent Roma employed in different lines of work from advancing in their professions.

It is a well-known fact that the employment rate of Roma in qualified jobs in the public and private sectors is very low. No data is available on the number of Roma in employment, both formal and informal. Informal workers do not have the relevant certificates for their current jobs. Most of the unregistered professions are those that provide periodic earnings and cannot be sustained in old age.

As stated in the "Socio-economic Impact Study of Covid-19 on Roma Communities in Türkiye"[34] published by the Zero Discrimination Association in February 2022, Roma have not benefited sufficiently from the public measures

taken during the pandemic due to their work in unregistered fields. Since April 2020, the government has introduced a



series of economic measures and social policies for those affected by the pandemic and the measures taken against it. The most important of these are the ban on dismissals, short time working allowance,

support for those on unpaid leave, and money transfers to the poor. The results of field research have shown that Roma in general have experienced additional challenges during the pandemic in terms of employment, access to social assistance, education, housing, health, and gender inequalities. The long-standing impossibilities and injustices related to these issues have been deepened and widened by the pandemic.

#### PROBLEMS OF ROMA PEOPLE DURING THE PANDEMIC

- Employment
- Social Services and Aids
- Education
- Housing
- Healty
- Gender Inequality

[34] <https://www.sivilsayfalar.org/raporlar/sifir-ayrimcilik-dernege-covid-19un-turkiyedeki-roman-topluluklari-uzerindeki-sosyo-ekonomik-etki-arastirmasi/>





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