



INFORMATION NEEDS ANALYSIS

ROMA PEOPLE IN GREECE & ZEFYRI

Municipality of Zefyri



1. Roma history in Greece

The Roma have a long history in Greece, having lived in the territory since at least 1384, the year in which shoemakers were recorded living at Modon, documenting the presence of Gypsies in Europe for the first time. The Romani language of the European Roma carries the traces of their long sojourn in Greece within its considerable Greek vocabulary¹.

In the late Byzantine period (1204-1453) superstition and prejudice coexist with deep religiousness. The Roma in Konstantinoupoli (Istanbul nowadays) practice the Arts of the animal trainer – the bear dance comes from this period – the acrobat, the juggler, the fortune teller and the fortune teller with cards (Soulis, 1961:151). The same author also informs us about the existence of Roma in some Venetian colonies in Peloponnesus. As far as it concerns their employment skills, metallurgy ranks among the most important but it isn't their exclusive occupation. There are constant changes these years in employment divisions, that are not strict and permanent and this situation stands both for dominant and subjugated groups. In Corfu they mostly work as farm workers. In Crete, that was occupied by Venetians, archive material as marriage contracts and law acts on marriage portions give evidence for the economical status of the Roma. Their relative prosperous situation surprises us nowadays. Some of them also knew reading and writing.

During the long last Ottoman Empire and due to the religious tolerance, we can remark the coexistence of both Christians and Muslims Roma. Relevant archives reveal that the Ottoman government used to impose taxes on Roma. The market place was playing an important role in the economy. The official market places were called "bezestenia", bazaars and "caravan serai". Yet we have to consider the not formal markets; the annual or season festivals. Roma used to come and give their services or sell their commodities there. Roma musicians used to visit these festivals also. Their role in preserving and disseminating Greek folk song is outstanding and beyond any doubt (Giannakopoulos, 1983)².

¹ See link, <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/journal/16/greece6.html>

² See, "Difficulties for Roma in accessing the labour market", *a research on the problems Roma face in their approach of the labour market*, Rom Network, Georgiou Ioannis, Athens 2005, p. 12

The New Greek nation didn't change the existed trends in cultural and economical field that had been formulated during the Ottoman Empire. The main characteristics of the Greek economy in the 19th century were the expanding of the marketability in farming and the growth of small industries that served as a supplementary income for most of the families which continued their agricultural activities. Most of the small industries of Greek countryside took the form of nomadic employment; wondering groups of craftsmen, owning elementary portable equipment, used to move certain times during the year, covering big distances sometimes, in order to practice their crafts in a wide network of built-up areas. That's also the framework for Roma's activities, as peddlers, hawkers and traders, blacksmiths and musicians. Seasonal occupations were a supplementary for the self-consuming farming and also a way out for landless and poor agricultural families towards absolute degradation³.

2. Roma and the labour market nowadays

It's widely accepted that Greek reality in the labour market is in relevance with the changes that happen both worldwide and inside the country as well.

The Globalization of economy, the crisis of the ford model, the European integration and the domination of the new liberalism in economy and politics has undermined the Welfare state and the social politics. The economical crisis, which is present in most of the European countries since 1973, has driven an increased number of people to marginalization. In the late 1980, the political changes in the countries of Eastern Europe and the fall of communism, gave rise to a powerful stream of economical and political refugees, heading mostly to the countries of West Europe. This situation made even worse social exclusion for some social groups. Greek Roma belong to the groups that suffer due to the destructing of economy and employment⁴.

Yet we ought to mention that Greek Roma's economic activity which is based on self employment, seasonal employment and employment without social insurance it isn't a precondition or a remainder of behaviours of the past. They used to do and they still do not formal working. In the light of the historical evolution of Greek economy though, we can conclude that they are placed in the broad framework of Greek economy structures.

³ Ibid, p. 18-21

⁴ Ibid, p. 23-24

In chapter 4, we will see some parameters about the difficulties they face in accessing the labour market. In advance we can say that the social/economical situation for Roma is that of poverty which in combination with illiteracy drives to their exclusion.⁵

3. Population

The Roma are the largest minority in Greece, the official number of which varies according to source and purpose. According to the Greek government they number 150.000 to 200.000. According to the Rom Network⁶ they number 250.000. The National Commission for Human Rights gives a number of 250.000 and according to the Greek Helsinki Watch they number 300.000 to 350.000⁷. The exact number of Roma in Greece is difficult to estimate since many of them are not registered, and thus officially do not exist, and no details on ethnic affiliation, language or religion have been given at censuses carried through in Greece since 1951. According to the Minority Rights Group Greece however, it is more likely that the Roma number up to 350,000 people, about half of who are tent-dwelling Roma. Many of the assimilated Roma, who have integrated into Greek society, consider themselves primarily Greek, and Roma only in the second place, and are therefore called "Greek Roma," distinguishing them from the marginalized "Roma of Greece."⁸

The common names Greek people use for the Roma are "tsigani" (from the ancient athiganoi, a sect that the Gypsies were either confused or co-notated with), or, pejoratively, "yifti" (from egiftos "Egyptian" also a misunderstanding that developed when the Roma who came to Europe were wrongly believed to have come from Egypt). In literature on the Roma in Greece, one will also encounter the older form "athiganoi" which is believed to be less humiliating. For Greek people, "tsigani" refers to the travelling Roma who make a living by trading things in markets, and

⁵ Ibid, p. 26-27

⁶ Pan Hellenic network of Municipalities for the supporting Greek Roma

⁷ See, "Research on distinctions and inequalities on the target group of Greek Roma in the labour market", project: Races Union, community initiative, Equal, 2006

⁸ See link, <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/journal/16/greece6.html>

generally are more respected, “yifti” comprises the worst prejudices towards Gypsies; they are the dirty ones who steal, cheat and beg.⁹

We have to point out though, that the distinction above doesn’t mean to be scientific at all, and in reality, there are many different tribes with different names, depending on their descent, their occupation in the past or the place they live. On the other hand Roma residents tend to adopt this distinction and phenomena of internal racism and prejudice between Roma arise.

In general Roma people of Greece constitute a social group marginalized due to the special economical, social and educational background, the prejudice and the stigmatizing against them from the rest of the society and their anomy and law-breaking behaviour on the other hand. Of course there are areas which differ in the inclusion rate of the Roma groups. In Zefyri region for instance, there are Roma residents who live in houses own some kind of occupation (not formal/seasonal in most of the cases) and seem to live in harmony with the rest of the community. However, there are a significant number of Roma people (tend dwelling Roma), who lack completely these properties and need to be well supported to succeed a proper quality of life.

4. Objective and Subjective conditions of Roma’s exclusion

a) Lack of National Policy concerning Roma communities

Measures that have been implemented so far tend to be fragmentary. Further more, national policies focus on social care field, thus failing to succeed radical and permanent changes to the quality of life for Roma people.

b) Economical - Employment factors

Among the most important reasons for Roma’s economical degradation is their employment habits. In contemporary society most of the occupations they used to do were disregarded and abolished. A European Union research¹⁰ suggests that 40% of the Roma population in Greece own some kind of job and unemployment rises to

⁹ See link, <http://www.domresearchcenter.com/journal/16/greece6.html>

¹⁰ See, EQUAL – S.W.O.T. Analysis of Equal Employment Access – State of the Art in Greece, Hungary, Italy, Portugal and Slovenia, May 2006 p. 30-39

11%. In the same research, 60% of the working Roma seem to work as peddlers and 78% of them is not enrolled in official economic services and do not own a license as an open market sellers or peddlers. They find work through not formal networks and 77% have no insurance. We also have 28% for housekeeping. There are also high percentages of children employment and high unemployment in Roma women. These parameters enhance dialling with illegal activities like drug trading¹¹. Finally, 19,5% of Roma seem to live under the limits of poverty¹². Further analyzing of the research above, proved that Roma women are almost totally excluded from the labour market.

Essential disadvantages in this field are the following:

- Lack of vocational skills and low educational level
- Lack of permanent occupation and in general occupation in low paid jobs
- Children employment
- Not formal employment without social insurance.
- Dealing with black economy (street market, selling goods at retail) has a consequence of no social insurance and sanitary services etc.
- Unemployment for the grate majority of Roma women
- Unemployment in general and constant removal for finding an occupation. (Peddlers searching for metals or season workers in agricultural sector etc.)

The status that is described above, confirms a sample pan-Hellenic research of Rom Network concerning employment of Greek Roma, which was held in 2000.¹³ In the table below - that gives to Roma who participated in the research the right to have two choices – one can see their choices in employment last year. (We mention most important choices)

Question: what kind of jobs have you done last year?

3 choices (no remark on choice 3)

1st choice	%	2nd choice	%
Musicians	3	Musicians	9,1
Peddlers and open air dealers	59,6	Dealers (clerks)	5,1
Scrap dealers	5,7	Peddlers and open air dealers	14,1
Farm workers (unqualified)	13	Scrap dealers	16,2

¹¹ See link, www.nchr.gr/category.php?category_id=61 p. 10

¹² Report of National Committee on People Rights, June 2002

¹³ See, “Difficulties for Roma in accessing the labour market”, *a research on the problems Roma face in their approach of the labour market*, Rom Network, Georgiou Ioannis, Athens 2005, p.36

Unqualified workers in constructions	2,2	Farmers etc.	16,2
Occasional day's work	2,4	Unqualified workers in constructions	9,1
Longshoremen	1,5	Occasional day's work	10,1
other	12,6	Other	20,1
total	100	total	100

c) Education

Formal education system fails to correspond to the needs of Roma. Aspects of Roma cultural life do not constitute part of the didactic curriculum in Public Educational System; bilingualism of Roma is also ignored. Roma on the other hand do not own a written language and tend to move several times during a year. These factors increase difficulties in accessing educational system for Roma youngsters as well. In brief the most important problems for Roma in the education sector are the following:

- Exclusion of Roma pupils from schools due to parents' other pupils' and teachers' actions.
- Marginalization of Roma pupils in the classrooms.
- Illiteracy of Roma parents.
- Difficulties for the tend-dwelling Roma to access the places schools are located.
- Difficulties in constant attending school due to their constant movement
- Difficulties due to their bilingualism.
- Failing to keep some hygiene rules (especially for the tend dwelling)

In order to confront this situation an intercultural programme was designed in 1997. The main objective was to motivate Roma children to attend primary school. Though this programme has been contested for its efficiency, Greek Ministry of Education, suggests that there was an increase of 50% in participation of Roma children in primary school¹⁴.

d) The housing sector

Among the most important problems in this sector are the following:

- The quality of life in their settlements (especially for the tend dwelling Roma)
- Their expulsion from these settlements without efficient potentials

¹⁴ See link, http://www.dimitra.gr/dream/data/paradotea_files/roma.pdf

- Unauthorized houses without proper infrastructure.
- The land grabbing of public or private land from Roma for establishing their settlements
- The spatial segregation of Roma's settlements, forming ghettos this way.

In 2001, "The Integration Action Plan for the Social Inclusion of Greek Roma" was introduced with two main axes. The first one was referred in substructure issues and the necessity of building houses, settlements and camping and the second one was referred in services like educational, vocational and health programmes.

e) The health sector

Health problems tend to be overwhelming for the majority of the tent dwelling Roma.

- Hepatitis percentages are extremely high for them. 99% of the tent dwelling Roma suffer from hepatitis A and 50 % from hepatitis B. The death rate for children arises to 60%.¹⁵
- Lack of proper infrastructure. There is no sufficient sewage disposal system and drain water system
- Lack of electricity and water supply for those who have built unauthorized houses.
- Lack of health insurance
- Unhealthy habits like bad food, smoking and use of drugs

f) Enrolment problems

It's really impressive that many Roma do not own identity cards, failing this way to make use of the rights but also follow the obligations that Greek citizens are subject to. Illiteracy of Roma and negative attitude from public officers explain partially this situation. For confronting this problem special centres for Roma's services were founded¹⁶. A research of 2000 suggests that 5,5% of Roma aren't registered in the registry office, 10% don't own an identity card or a relevant document, 25% don't own a voting card and 50% are not registered in municipal rolls¹⁷.

¹⁵ See link, www.greekheslinki.gr/greek/pressrelease/drom8-4-98.html

¹⁶ See link, http://www.dimitra.gr/dream/data/paradotea_files/roma.pdf

¹⁷ See, Greek Nation census research, European initiative employment, INTEGRA, Operational Programme MULTI ROMA ACTION HELLAS, December 2000.

g) Negative stereotypes – racist behaviour against Roma

Prejudice against Roma is a long lasting attitude from the majority of the society. In many cases this leads to violent incidents and racist behaviour against them. Negative behaviour against Roma comes also from the police and the public authorities in general. Reports from the International Amnesty and the Committee for People Rights confirm relative accusations. On the other hand, it's a reality that anomie incidents are common among Roma communities. This situation feeds a vicious circle which undermines the foundations of local communities with Roma residents. A lot of work has to be done in this field and all stakeholders should equally participate. This aspect highlights another crucial issue which has to do with Roma's participation in public dialogue and in public sector in general. This condition, if fulfilled, may raise awareness to their special cultural elements and that's a key point as we ought to bring out cultural diversity.

European Union through its programmes and policies wishes the demolishing of segregations and the assimilation of Roma in Greek and European society. We just mention the direction 200/43/EC of the European Council, for equality in treatment people beyond their racial or ethnic origin and the programme "Decade for the Inclusion of Roma". The Greek government also makes certain steps in this direction. The truth is that a lot of effort has still to be done by all stakeholders to succeed efficient inclusion of Roma people.

5. Roma residents in Zefyri

Municipality of Zefyri numbers 9.130 people according with the census of 2001 and occupies an area of 1.500 s.m. Nowadays population is estimated to 11.000 or 12.000 people. It is centred in the northwest part of Attica and 10 kilometres away from Athens. It borders with the larger municipalities of Aharnes, Kamatero and Ano Liosia. The majority of the population belongs to the lower classes. There are high percentages of unqualified workers and unemployment and limited employability in the area.

There is a significant population of Roma residents in Municipality of Zefyri which numbers 2.000 – 2.500 people. There are also some emigrants from Albany and the

democracies of ex Soviet Union. The coexistence of Roma and non Roma residents has a history of 35 years. After the earthquake of 1999 there was an increase of Roma residents in Zefyri. To often moving Roma populations accommodate in Zefyri. They settle temporary in huts and tents. The majority of Roma in Zefyri live in houses. Yet there aren't sufficient substructures in the Municipality area. There is inadequate sewage disposal and many houses have been unauthorized constructed and therefore do not enjoy electricity and water supply¹⁸. In general Roma in Zefyri have the main problems that were mentioned above. They are not assimilated in local community and there is an underground tension between them and the rest of the community. We have also to mention that in the area are settled different tribes of Roma. So the Roma – “rountarides” or “roumanovlahoi” or “roumanophonoi” seem to be the first Roma who came in Zefyri; they are assimilated somehow, most of them live in houses and own some kind of occupation. There are also tent dwelling Roma; they live in the area of Limni and they face all typical Roma problems. Their poverty has driven them to illegal trade and there have been vigorous accusations in the past that gypsies sell drugs and even weapons.

Municipality of Zefyri is trying to confront this situation and has given a big effort last years. Infrastructure has been remarkably improved; a building loan procedure for the sake of Greek Roma headed by the Greek Ministry of Interior has taken place last years. Municipality of Zefyri informed Roma applicants about the procedure and assisted them in application filling. Also two new structures for enhancing quality of life for disadvantaged groups have been established. a) A BUREAU of SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES, 3rd C.S.F., Operational Program Health & Welfare 2000-2006. Measure 3.1 and b) A MEDICAL & SOCIAL SUPPORT CENTRE. 3rd C.S.F., Regional Operational Program Attica, Partnership: Municipality of Zefyri – Municipal Enterprise of Saint Barbara.

Though there has not been a kind of a census research about Roma in Zefyri last years, these two structures share a grate experience in supporting services and have ejected some interesting remarks about the target group. The B.S.S.S.¹⁹, keeps an experience of five years. In its archives are registered almost 1000 Roma residents which represent 40% to 45% of the whole Roma population in Zefyri. Roma's records

¹⁸ See, “Research on distinctions and inequalities on the target group of Greek Roma in the labour market”, project: Races Union, community initiative, Equal, 2006, p. 21-22

¹⁹ BUREAU of SOCIAL SUPPORT SERVICES

confirm their downgrading in the main categories that were mentioned above. In relevance with the issue of our project we only mention the following parameters:

- Illiteracy rates are too high among Roma children. Though last years percentages of pupils in primary school have been increased, hardly few of them graduate each year. Only few Roma children attend high school. The percentages of graduates are really disappointing for Roma girls.
- Women unemployment rises to 90%. It's interesting though that they tend to attend vocational training programmes.

These facts give evidence for the social exclusion of Roma and the structure of their communities as well. Patriarchal structure of their communities excludes women from education and the labour market as well. Women contribution is restricted in not formal employment. Roma give an every day struggle for their survival. Women's grate interest in vocational training has to be interpreted as a mean to supplement their scanty income. Percentages of employability after succeeding a vocational training programme are really disappointing for them. Yet they declare their satisfaction about the indirect benefits of such educational/vocational programmes. That's the reimbursement after the end of training, the knowledge they gain, the socialization in a different field, and their free time from family grate obligations. Yet training main objectives are not succeeded for most of them. We have to wonder about the methods and the content of vocational training projects in order to adjust to the needs of the target group.

6. Roma women in Zefyri and traditional clothing

Roma woman suffers from sex degradation inside Roma family. She only has a supplementary and secondary role to play. She has to stay at home and take care of children or the disposed members of the family. She has to get married in the age of 12-15 years old. She has to follow her husband, if necessary, and in many cases to accompany him in seasonal and opportunity occupations. There are no choices for her as Roma cultural rules restrict women's free will. Her participation in vocational training projects gives evidence, in some cases, for her inner desire for emancipation.

Designing and producing traditional Roma dresses in a household or communal unit corresponds to the cultural characteristics of the target group. It is an occupation they can handle in the framework of extended family and not formal employment. Furthermore though there is a demand for Romani dresses there is no corresponding offer. This situation stands for the Greek trade market in general.

Finally we complete this analysis with some crucial remarks:

- The designing/sewing/producing of distinguished Roma dresses requires specific skills and fantasy that most of the Roma women share as part of their culture.
- The new project, training in traditional fashion, brings closer employability, gender, and cultural characteristics of the target group
- Roma dresses are not supplied in the market. One can only find poor imitations in open markets. These copies correspond to Roma's economic situation but do not compromise with their emotional needs,
- There are really few sewing workshops in Greece specialized in Roma dresses.
- Far from fruitless reproducing of traditional dresses, Roma women should be driven to use tradition as a base to create their pieces. Youngsters' habits in clothing differ somewhat from those of past generations.

In the ages of economical crisis, training in Roma dresses may sound as a paradox, yet we have to explore possibilities for the target group and consider potentials of further education and training in this or relative fields.

For the Municipality of Zefyri

Grigoris Serbis

Sociologist

Coordinator of the project Romfashion