

Universal Periodic Review (UPR) – Roma Rights in Turkey
Presented by: Sergen Gul, On Behalf of Romani Godi – Roma Memory Studies Association

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Good morning/afternoon,

Distinguished delegates, my name is Sergen, and I am speaking on behalf of Romani Godi - Roma Memory Studies Association. Romani Godi is a rights-based organization advocating for Roma rights in Turkey by combating discrimination and ensuring equitable access to education, housing, and employment. It engages in social memory and identity studies to address inequalities and conducts advocacy at national and international levels to promote social justice and policy reforms. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to Turkey's fourth Universal Periodic Review.

Issue 1: Hate Crimes (Rec. 45.268)

Turkey has failed to adequately investigate and prosecute hate speech and hate crimes directed at Roma. While Armenia previously recommended legal action against such crimes, justice remains elusive.

For example, in 2023, the case of the 2012 Selendi lynching was dismissed due to the statute of limitations, allowing the perpetrators to evade accountability. Following the devastating earthquake on February 6, 2023, hate speech against Dom, Abdal, and Roma communities escalated. They were falsely labeled as “thieves” and “looters” in mainstream and social media, yet no legal action was taken against those responsible for these harmful statements.

Recommendations:

- Enact a comprehensive anti-discrimination law that explicitly recognizes anti-Gypsyism.
- Strengthen legal mechanisms for prosecuting hate crimes against Roma, ensuring the effective enforcement of **Article 122 and Article 216** of the Turkish Penal Code.
- Impose sanctions on public officials and media outlets engaging in hate speech against Roma.

Issue 2: Equal Access to Public Services (Rec. 45.275)

Roma communities continue to face significant barriers in education and healthcare. Peru previously recommended ensuring equal access to public services for Roma, Kurdish, and Armenian communities. However, the situation remains dire:

- Roma boys attend school **four years less** than their non-Roma peers, while Roma girls receive an average of only **two years** of education.
- High school attendance is alarmingly low: **8% for boys, 15% for girls.**
- **42% of Roma children** aged 15-17 are engaged in child labour.
- Life expectancy for Roma people is **10 years shorter** than the national average, and infant mortality is **2.2 times higher.**
- Access to essential services worsened during the 2023 earthquake, with Roma, Dom, and Abdal communities facing increased discrimination and exclusion.

Recommendations:

- Provide **free school transportation and nutrition support** for all Roma children.
- Integrate **Roma identity, history, and contributions** into school curricula to combat cultural erasure.
- Implement **independent monitoring** to prevent Roma children from being wrongfully placed in special education programs.
- Incorporate **anti-discrimination measures** into the Roma Strategy Action Plan to ensure protection during crises.

Issue 3: Housing and Forced Evictions (Rec. 45.270, 45.275, 45.265)

Roma neighborhoods in cities such as **Tekirdağ, Istanbul, Balıkesir, and Adana** are subject to **systematic demolitions and forced evictions**, violating their housing rights and reinforcing spatial segregation.

Despite previous recommendations from **China, Peru, and Thailand**, the Turkish government has not taken concrete measures to safeguard the housing rights of Roma communities. Unfair urban transformation projects predominantly target Roma neighborhoods, leading to their displacement and social and spatial exclusion.

Recommendations:

- Implement **inclusive social housing projects** to prevent forced evictions.
- Ensure **urban transformation projects do not displace Roma** without alternative housing options.
- Establish **environmental regulations** to prevent Roma neighborhoods from being placed near hazardous waste sites and polluted industrial zones.

Conclusion

The Turkish government must take **immediate and concrete** action to combat systemic discrimination against Roma communities. Without effective legal protections, inclusive policies, and strict enforcement mechanisms, Roma people remain at risk of further marginalization.

We strongly urge the Turkish authorities to implement these recommendations in full, ensuring that Roma rights are upheld in accordance with **national and international human rights frameworks**.

Thank you.