



**“Reaching the *Romanlar*”;  
a report on the feasibility studies “mapping” a  
number of *Roman* (Gypsy) communities in  
Istanbul  
international Romani Studies Network**

## **Acknowledgements**

This report presents the findings from a feasibility study conducted by the International Romani Studies Network (iRSN) during the period of September 2004 March 2005. The research has been coordinated by Adrian Marsh and Elin Strand. The research team consists of researchers from the iRSN (Stefan Bladh, Alev Hawes, Dirk Nieubower, Ana Oprisan, Mustafa Özunal), students from the Romani Studies programme at Istanbul Bilgi University (Başak Solmaz, Dilek Özkan), and Turcology scholars at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul (Cecilia Jansson, Martin Palm), and Kari Cağatay).

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## 1. General summary

- **Main sponsors for the research projects:**

- Swedish Consulate General in Istanbul
  - British Council in Turkey

- **Additional funding:**

- Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation in Turkey

- **Project Co-ordinator (Phase 2)**

- Prof. Dr Ayhan Kaya, Centre for Migration Research, Istanbul Bilgi University

- **Names and titles of the persons responsible for the project:**

- Adrian Marsh, MA, and Elin Strand, MA international Romani Studies Network (iRSN) and Istanbul Bilgi University

- **Title of the Project:**

- "Reaching the Romanlar"; feasibility study of mapping Roman communities in Istanbul

- **Start/finish dates of the projects:**

- September 13th 2004–31st March 2005

### **Research aims**

*"The feasibility study would seek to establish a 'baseline survey' for the three communities referred to, concerned with education, accommodation, employment and epidemiology. It would attempt to establish provenance of both kinship groups and individuals, the degree of mobility experienced by the community and the communal history through oral testimony. The primary material gathered through interviews and questionnaires would be analysed to produce evidence of school attendance, qualification, training, literacy and further education [...]. The overall objective would be to produce a report that both demonstrated the feasibility of further, major investigations into the Roman communities of Turkey, and to address any problems that arose at a preliminary stage of research, that may be refined and resolved in the design of a larger project.]"*

*iRSN Project proposal to the Swedish General Consulate in Istanbul and the Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation, 2004*

### **Project description**

The research was designed as a two-stage process, in order to better inform the overall results by testing a certain number of propositions in the initial phase. Access to communities, establishing communication and trust with certain individuals in those, and evaluation of our information before proceeding to the next stage, have been essential components of the process. In this sense, the research has proceeded along paths defined dynamically, by beginning with the question "How do we improve the knowledge about these communities?" The project therefore falls very much into the remit of what is described as "action research" (McNiff, 2002)

The feasibility study was divided in two phases allowing us (the research team) during the second stage, to focus on the area of education, and widen our interview groups by approaching non-Romani respondents, such as teachers, documentary film-makers and cultural workers. The report at hand is the result of both the dynamic investigation into the questions we have posed, and the constant evaluation of our own methods, as reflective practitioners. The research during Phase One and Two has been directed by Elin Strand and

Adrian Marsh of the iRSN, and conducted by members of the network, and students from Istanbul Bilgi University. The research team has conducted fieldwork (interviews) with members of the communities and families in the neighbourhoods, teachers, local community officials, education department officers, documentary filmmakers and others who work with Romani communities. The research has been further informed by the work the iRSN has carried out in local schools, with pupils and parents. Contact has been established with other NGO's working in Romani communities in Istanbul and elsewhere (Edçinkay Derneği in Edirne and SKY-GD in Izmit, for example).

## **Related activities**

During the lifetime of the research projects, the iRSN has delivered an undergraduate Romani Studies course at Istanbul Bilgi University, a short course for the Forced Migration and Refugee Studies programme at the American University in Cairo, presentations at a number of lectures, meetings and seminars to the Swedish Parliament's Foreign Ministry Committee, the Swedish Integration Board, the Consulate General of the United States of America's Political Office, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, the Cyprus Labour Institute in Nicosia, the Dom Research Centre in Larnaca, and the Friends of the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul and the Romani Cultural Centre in Stockholm. Numerous other representations to the press, other NGO's, film and television documentaries, together with promotion of the research and findings derived from it, have also taken place at various stages during the process, ensuring the widest possible dissemination of the information gathered by the project researchers. Further academic presentation of the research and findings will take place in April 2005, when Adrian Marsh and Elin Strand are invited to participate at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology's "Marginal Peoples" group, in May at the Second International Romani Studies Conference in Istanbul, and again in May 2005 at Umeå University's Roma Self-Writing Workshop.

The findings have already impacted upon the teaching of Romani Studies, during the AUC short course, and the final results will be drawn into the forthcoming short course at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul's Romani Studies summer course in June 2005. The active implementation of our outcomes continues with the developing schools' partnership programme, with Hüviyet Bekir İlköğretim Okulu, Dolapdere and Noel Park School in Wood Green, London, and Welbourne School in Tottenham, London (see chapter 7).

## **Project compliance**

The main objectives (specified in the original proposals) have been respected in so far as has been possible within the remits of the available resources. Some minor changes and approaches to the original proposal have been necessary due to obstacles encountered in accessing the community of Sulukule in particular, and administrative delays that inhibited the start of Phase Two. The adaptation of the research in the light of interim results from Phase One allowed the development of the "micro-education" projects that make up the school partnerships' programme, further extending the primary objectives. The underlying "action research" approach explicitly incorporates the notion of dynamic change to the research objectives. (McNiff, 1998; 2002)

## **Presentation of the final project report**

The final Phase One and Phase Two report will be published by June 2005, after the main results have been presented at the Second International Romani Studies Conference in Istanbul, 13th–15th May, at Istanbul Bilgi University.

## **Executive summary**

This report presents the initial findings from the feasibility studies "mapping" certain Roman communities in Istanbul. This report is limited as to the conclusions that may be drawn from it, and is primarily intended to demonstrate the need for more comprehensive research by a larger research team, over an extended period of time, in the future. We hope to be able to accomplish this task in the coming months. The findings of this report may be summarised as

- there is significant discrimination towards Romani people, exhibited through negative stereotypes constantly portrayed in the media, through the press and in the cultural milieu
- stereotypes about Romani peoples in Turkey are located in the common assumptions about "simplicity", "living for the moment", being people who are interested only in pleasure and hedonists at heart, conflictual, argumentative, violent and dangerous, thieves and petty criminals, serious criminals and drug-dealers, child-stealers, illiterate through choice, enmeshed in poverty through choice, limited in capabilities, having "natural rhythm" and being inherently musical, licentious, cunning, and avaricious
- there is little understanding about Romani or other Gypsy people in Turkey as ethnic or cultural groups, with a differing history than the majority population, although sharing a common past from the Ottoman period to the present
- there is little or no knowledge about the other Gypsy groups in Turkey, namely the Dom and Lom, their origins or relationship to the Romani groups and the wider populations of Rom
- there is a common assumption that the problems facing Romani people in Turkey are shared by many others, without distinction, and that there are no particular aspects of their conditions that are unique and specific to themselves
- this assumption effectively invalidates the need for addressing the particular issues that affect Romani people, and relegates them to be a component of the more general "disadvantaged" groups in Turkish society, thus doubly-discriminating against them, both as poor Turks and Gypsies
- Romani people in Turkey are more consistently under-educated, under-employed, suffer much higher levels of ill-health, have poorer housing, and higher incidences of discrimination on the basis of their ethnicity, than any other group in Turkey
- there are almost no examples of Romani intellectuals, film-makers, writers, journalists, teachers and lecturers, bankers, accountants, or many other occupations that members of all other groups in Turkish society are involved in
- the only accepted societal space for successful (and openly declared) Romani people is music, where they are heavily represented as musicians, but not as producers, studio directors and entrepreneurs

- Romani women are even further disadvantaged in a predominantly patriarchal culture, and are overly represented in menial and manual occupations (cleaning, flower-selling, etc.), or occasionally as singers or entertainers
- older Romani women, as is common elsewhere in Romani groups, are generally more influential than their younger counterparts
- conflict resolution is a complex mixture of "elder intervention" and communal censure, and varies between communities, making the establishment of a "taxonomy" of community self-regulation difficult to abstract across all groups
- substance abuse and drugs are particular problems in the Romani communities of Istanbul, and alcohol abuse quite common
- it is extremely difficult to establish any information about the extent that Romani people are engaged in the sex-trade, and it is unlikely to be prolific, as this has become controlled by other groups in Turkish society (mostly from the former Soviet Union); there are instances of female prostitution in particular communities
- there is strong differentiation between Romani communities, and identification is one of family/clan/community, and national identity/faith/ethnic identity
- the need for further and more detailed research in Istanbul and throughout Turkey is imperative
- the situation of the Gypsies of Turkey is likely to be less dramatically marginalised than elsewhere in Europe (Slovakia, for example), but equally as poor as it is in much of Europe (Italy, UK, Bulgaria, for example), and certainly much poorer than it is in some parts (Sweden, for instance); within Turkey, the situation in and around Istanbul is likely to be better in economic and social terms, than in other parts of Anatolia, where discrimination and exclusion are more rigidly enforced
- the Istanbul Romani communities represent a sizable percentage of the total Romani population in Turkey
- the overall Gypsy population of Turkey is likely to be about 1% of the total (600,000), as it has been for about 170 years; given the consistent under-counting during Ottoman and Republican periods of the population in general, and the likelihood of under-counting the Gypsy population in particular (as elsewhere in south-east European states), the figure is likely to be around 2 million people



## 2. Introduction

### The Gypsies (Roma and Sinti) in Europe; a historical overview

The history of the people we know as "Gypsies" begins in the north-western part of the Indian sub-continent, when the Arab commander of the Umayyad armies, Muhammad b. al-Kāsim al-Thakafī in 93 AH/711 CE, conquered *al-Sindh* under the direction of the Irāki governor, al-Hadjjād, during the Caliphate of al-Walīd I b. 'Abd al-Malik. The assault of the Arab forces upon the region saw the Indus valley up to Multān, conquered in fierce and bloody warfare over the three years of al-Thakafī's campaigns. Enormous numbers of Hindūs were killed and captured (including 6,000 at Rāwar and at Multān), and brought back to the central Arab lands, ruled by the Caliph. In this episode lies the origins of the group called the *Dom*, speakers of *Domari*. This group can be found in significant numbers throughout the Middle East, and in south-eastern Turkey, often described as *Ghagar*, *Nawar* and *Halebi*, terms that contain pejorative overtones.

The second and largest group Gypsies derive their ancestry from another episode in the history of Muslim conquest in India, during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. The ancestors of the people we now call Romani Gypsies did leave India, as a result of forced migration and enslavement, between 387 AH (al-Hijra)/977 and 421 AH/1030 CE (Common Era). They were captured by the Amīr Mahmūd of Ghaznā, in some seventeen or eighteen *ghazawāt* or *razzias* made into the north-western and central northern regions of India, known then as "al-Sind" and "al-Hind" respectively. Mahmūd organised a highly centralised, militarised state, with a professional (and enormously expensive) standing army, made up of many differing ethnic and cultural groups including large numbers of *Hindis*, i.e. Indians. Indians were present in Ghaznā not just as soldiers (where they had their own *mahalle*, or area of the city, policed by them), but were domestic slaves, artists, craftspeople, dancers, musicians, metal-workers, armourers, fletchers (arrow-makers), sword-bearers, grooms and tent-makers. The ancestors of the Gypsies came from a wide variety of different social and economic backgrounds, were mostly Hindū and some heterodox Muslims from Multān and Sindh, and spoke a variety of related languages that are the root of the Romani language.

After the defeat of the Ghaznāvids, and the loss of their western empire, the remaining Hindūs, their families and other refugees from this calamity were forced to move westwards by pressure of the incoming Türkmen and Saldjūk tribes people, in the early stages of the demographic and cultural changes in Anatolia that continue to the present day. By the end of the eleventh century the mixed group that we now describe as *proto-Romani*, speaking an emerging language that would evolve into modern Romani, had arrived in Byzantium. In the capital, Constantinople, they are recorded as *Aiguptissa*, or "Egyptians", dealers in magic charms and fortune-tellers, dancers and entertainers, metal-workers and horse-traders. The earliest settlements of "Egyptians" were on the edges of the city, outside the city walls at the Gate of Charisius, now the Edirne Kapı, close to the Sulukule (water tower) quarter. The movement over the following centuries into the Balkans and thence western Europe is intimately linked with the historical rise of the Ottoman Turks. In the context of the Gypsies of Turkey, the communities in Istanbul represent the longest continuous presence of Romani Gypsies anywhere in the world.

The history of the Gypsies in western Europe is better-known, and need not be re-examined here (see Kenrick, 2004; Marushiakova and Popov, 2000, and others).

The Gypsies (Roma<sup>1</sup> and Sinti) constitute the largest minority ethnic group in Europe. Hostility and institutionalised racism towards the Gypsies by the majority population has at frequently resulted in active persecution, harassment and assaults. Legal institutionalisation of this discrimination has taken the form of punitive measures against movement (United Kingdom, Turkey, France, Germany, etc.), expulsion (Slovakia, Czech Republic), denial of citizenship (Turkey, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Serbia, Kosovo, etc.), incarceration in work camps and "colonies" (Norway, Sweden), all in the modern period. These measures have culminated in the attempted genocide of Roma and Sinti in Europe, with the Nazi's attempt to eradicate them in the period of the "racial state" (Kenrick & Puxon, 1972; Hancock, 2002). This episode, reflecting as it does the sixteenth century European-wide assault upon the Romani people, has never received the recognition nor attention it deserves, nor have Gypsies who suffered been granted compensation to any significant degree. Indeed, violation of their human rights continues to occur - and frequently so - throughout Europe (see <http://www.errc.org/> for details). Public awareness of their situation remains disturbingly low, especially in Turkey and the Arab lands, which is why awareness-raising is often one of the most central objectives for Romani and other Gypsy organisations. The conditions of the Roma in Europe were traditionally an area of interest for ethnographers and social anthropologists. The nineteenth century Gypsy-ologists were largely concerned with describing cultural expressions of Romani identity and Romani linguistics.

In Europe, the focus on the plight of the Gypsies did not really begin to receive serious attention until Eastern Europe experienced the collapse of communism in the late 1980s. In the resulting transition period and deteriorating economy, the Roma were the first to lose their jobs and in Slovakia for example, the Roma even lost their citizenship (see Guy, 2001). In an increasingly nationalistic environment in eastern and south-eastern Europe, the Roma have been made scapegoats and targeted by neo-Nazi groups with little or no redress from the law. A number of initiatives to improve the conditions of the Roma have been taken in the last decade. NGO's, governments and institutions have supported the establishment of Romani self-help organisations. The Open Society Institute in particular, has supported hundreds of Romani NGO's in Central and Eastern Europe. However, there are problems regarding monitoring and evaluation procedures in many instances, that has meant little impact upon social and economic conditions, in Bulgaria for example, despite the large number of NGO's dedicated to working in this group (see Marsh and Strand, 2003). Critics have suggested that it is against this background of overall failure to address the most pressing issues that the OSI and the World Bank have taken the initiative of launching a "Decade for Roma Inclusion" (see [http://www.dzeno.cz/?c\\_id=5570](http://www.dzeno.cz/?c_id=5570) ; [http://www.dzeno.cz/?c\\_id=6172](http://www.dzeno.cz/?c_id=6172) ). The Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) was launched in Sofia, Bulgaria on February the 2nd 2005, an initiative

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<sup>1</sup> In this report we only use the *ethnonym* Roma when we refer to the Romani communities of Central and Eastern Europe. The term Gypsy (with a capital G), re-claimed by Romani activists in the UK, Australia, Canada and the U.S., is a more inclusive term, embraces Dom, Lom, Rom, Sinti and Traveller communities. The Gypsies in Turkey are often misdefined by European and Turkish scholars as Roma. Only a few Roma live in Turkey, and a majority of them live in European Thrace. Most Gypsies in Turkey, and in Istanbul in particular, define themselves as Romanlar (sing. Roman). However, Gypsy remains a contested designation, and we acknowledge this by always italicising the word.

aiming to break the isolation and discrimination faced by a large percentage of Roma in Europe. The governments of the countries that have signed up for the Decade have an obligation to take measures to abolish the existing inequalities between Romani and non-Romani citizens (see [www.romadecade.org](http://www.romadecade.org) ). Turkey is not one of the signatories to the "Decade...", nor has made any official comment upon it, to date.

The Roma of Europe remain the most significant minority across Europe. It is clear that European Roma scholarship and activism, by and large, assumes Turkey's Gypsies to be in a similar position to that found elsewhere in eastern and south-eastern Europe. Little research has been carried out into the Gypsies of Turkey by experienced investigators, the extent of Turkish scholarship is almost entirely unacknowledged, and almost no contact exists between the majority of Romani communities in Turkey and those elsewhere in the region, outside of the occasional economic relationship (see below). The efforts of the Edirne Romani community organisation, to engage with the wider field of activists and researchers received significant support recently from the Dutch Consulate General, in organising an international symposium (in partnership with UYD – Accessible Life Association, <http://www.uyd.org.tr>). This trend increases the connections and communication between Romani groups in the region, as representatives from Albanian, Bulgarian, Rumanian, Czech and Hungarian Roma organisations attended, and with the international NGO network. Common ground, in facing similar issues of political representation and human rights was identified for example, by the communiqué from the Trans-European Roma Federation (see Appendix 1), and the solidarity expressed with English Gypsies facing evictions, by the Edirne symposium.

Scholarship in Romani Studies generally has only recently become concerned with the situation of Gypsy communities in Turkey, largely as a result of the work of the iRSN. After the appearance of two papers dealing with Turkish Gypsies at the Gypsy Lore Society's Annual Meeting of 2002, the first international Romani Studies Conference in Istanbul, in April 2003, promoted strong contacts between Turkish scholarship and experience, and challenged the predominantly Western European focus in the discipline until that point. Presentations from Turkish researchers indicated the extent of research already being undertaken, and the extensive possibilities for future collaboration and research. As a result of the conference and the general publicity it received, the Turkish media produced a number of articles, reports and television interviews of the organisers, bringing the attention of the public to the issues faced by Gypsies in Turkey, and the extent of the problems faced by them. The wider Romani Studies field was profoundly influenced by the conference, and increasing numbers of Turkish scholars have subsequently appeared at major gatherings and conferences since, such as the Gypsy Lore Society conference in Liverpool of September 2003.

The importance of mapping Gypsy/Romani communities in Istanbul (and Turkey) is therefore clear. In order to address the many issues of deprivation and discrimination that affect the Gypsy communities of Turkey, we need a knowledge base about the conditions and situation across the country. The lack of reliable data about the situation of Gypsies in Turkey, and the need to carry out research into the Turkish Gypsy communities has been identified by, among many others, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. In its third report on Turkey, the ECRI strongly recommends the Turkish authorities to take measures ensuring that

this *lacunae* is addressed (ECRI, 2005:23). This report is in some small part, an attempt to begin this process.

## The Gypsy communities in Turkey – an overview

The starting point of this feasibility study is thus the importance of establishing the different situation of the Romanlar of Turkey, in contradistinction to the Roma of Europe, and the historical and social reasons behind this. The division of Romani and other Gypsy groups into occupationally defined identities echoes the organisation of taxable communities imposed initially by the Byzantines, and latterly by the Ottomans. These occupational designations (also common in much of the quondam Ottoman territories), form the basis for common boundary markers, even when the occupation or function itself has ceased. Thus the *Serpeçides* groups who migrated to Turkey from Greece in the wake of the 1923 Lausanne Treaty, no longer make baskets, but are to be found in other occupational niches (see Ceche, 2004: <http://romani.unigraz.at/romani/ling/sep.en.shtml>). Another major difference is the lack of any specific data according to ethnicity. Outside of the enquiry and research carried out by non-Turkish scholars (see Alford-Andrews, 1989; Bakker, 1995; Heinschink, 1989), there is little information regarding numbers of Romani or other groups, produced in Turkey (see Duy-Ulu, 1994 for some estimates of population). The most effective overview of the Gypsies of Turkey has been produced by a Romani scholar, working closely with the Roman communities themselves, and a member of the iRSN (see Oprisan, 2002).

On the whole, the Romanlar of Turkey do not respond affirmatively to the suggestion that they constitute an ethnic group, as this is clearly seen to be outside of the identity matrix Turkish/Muslim/Roman and family/clan/*mahalle* (community). This is not surprising in the wider context of Turkish society, where the emphasis has been on the creation of a majority Turkish identity in the modern period. An emphasis upon an ethnic identity per se is perceived to be clearly undesirable, both by the Romans and the wider society. Whilst Roma in Europe see this as a reversal of the identity matrix, they have also experienced a consistent pattern of exclusion from societies that have sought to define Gypsies as the most significant Other. Historically, the degree of integration experienced by Turkish Romans has been greater, until relatively modern times. However, there are a number of legal impediments to integration that remain on the statutes currently, despite attempts to have them repealed, notably during the early 1990's by the parliamentary representative for Edirne.

### Ethnic identity and religious affiliation

"The Gypsies will never be acknowledged as a minority in Turkey" [...] [they] "can only be considered a minority in other parts of the world" (Telegram by a Turkish member of Parliament read at the International Gypsy Symposium in Edirne, May 7th-9th, 2005)

The most striking difference between Turkey and the rest of Europe is the perception of its Gypsy population. In Turkey, the notion of regarding the Gypsies as a separate ethnic minority is largely rejected, even by Gypsies themselves, as it is seen as divisive and therefore discriminatory. This contrasts with the European context, in which ethnic minority status is seen as a measure towards integration and the ensuring of equal access, opportunities and rights. Whilst the trans-national elements of Gypsy identity is a cornerstone of the international Romani movement, in Turkey, little recognition of Gypsies exists outside the "disadvantaged group", or "brilliant musicians" categories.

Deciding to be Gypsy is clearly linked to social mobility. We have spoken with several families where members define themselves differently according to generation and profession. In one family the grandmother in her sixties was rather assertive about her Romani identity and roots, having been a child of a migrant family from Selanik. She - as so many other Romanlar in the city - spoke warmly about her family's close connections with Atatürk. Her father was Kurdish and her mother Greek Rom, but she said that she rejected her Kurdish family ties, that she had chosen to "go with the Gypsies", and was proud to be Turkish and Romani. Her nephew, who had moved out from the *mahalle* to a more prosperous part of the city, said that his mother might be Romani, but that he definitively was not. The grandchild, ten years old, answered that he was an *Istanbullu*. This preferred Turkish identity sometimes manifests itself through contra-identification with the Kurdish population. In a number of interviews, we have listened to our *Roman* respondents in Istanbul haranguing "the Kurds" by assigning them a whole range of negative attributes; The Kurds, according to several of our respondents, are largely separatist, traditional, mean, violent and a "closed" group [*sic*] In the same sentence a young man said how he hated "all forms of discrimination and prejudices, and the Kurds". Tensions do exist between the Kurds and the Gypsies in the city, and conflicts have occurred, especially around Ramazan, when the Kurds see themselves as more religiously observant than the Gypsies. It is also important to appreciate that many Gypsies in Turkey feel proud of their Turkish identity. The notion of a separate ethnic identity and a separate - albeit additional and non-territorial - nation is alien to them. The rights that they feel they are - or ought to be - entitled to as Turkish citizens are often expressed. A European minority mind-set and framework might be neither transferable nor desirable., and we would suggest that there perhaps might be an alternative model for dealing with the discrimination that does exist here.

Neither passive, nor particularly (in comparative terms) "assertive" about their Gypsy identities, their preferred and primary identification is Turkish. *Roman* ethnic identities seem also to be constructed within the local community (*mahalle*) based upon knowledge of family origins usually stretching one or two generations back. In fact, their identities are only partly defined in contradistinction to non-Gypsies (and then most often vis-à-vis the Kurds as mentioned earlier), and more often in ways to differentiate themselves from Gypsy groups who define themselves as Abdal, or who are known to pursue "unclean" occupations (such as the Gypsy community in Sulukule). The phenomena of the role of locality in identity construction may be termed the formation of *mahalle identities* (Mischek, 2003). The emphasis on a so called ethnic boundary marker separating Gypsies from *gadje*, a notion seminal in much ethnological work on Gypsies, does not seem to be of such relevance here, though further research must clarify and corroborate this (Barth, 1969). However, we encountered a number of mixed marriages, which suggests that the ethnic boundaries are comparatively permeable. In all but one instance, it was the wife who was from a non-Romani background. It appears that exogamy is less common for Romani women.

It is important to bear in mind that our research has not been conducted amongst Turkish Gypsy individuals who have succeeded in making their way in non-Romani society. We know - and know of - some, but it is unfortunate that there are so few positive Gypsy role models. Those who are successful in non-Romani terms often feel the need to "hide" their ethnicity.

This makes it difficult to change the un-nuanced image of the Gypsy population as a largely marginalised and poor segment of Turkish society.

## **Religious affiliation**

The notion that "Gypsies do not have a religion of their own" is almost axiomatic, and appears in encyclopaedias and other ethnographic materials written about Gypsies throughout the world. This idea has been criticised by Romani studies scholars who argue that such a perception is based on an ethnocentric understanding (Hancock, 2005). The above perspective also reflects a series of value judgements that places monotheism in a superior position to that of religious syncretism, with the latter being seen as a deviation from a normative religious model (Marushiakova and Popov, 1999). Most Gypsies in Turkey are Sunni Muslims, but many still celebrate festivals such as Hidrellez during the first week in May.

The Romanlar generally emphasize that they are Turkish and (Sunni) Muslim, thereby matching the Turkish ethno-religious norm. However, there are some who claim to be Alevi (Marsh & Strand, 2005). In Kustepe there are also a group of Alevi Romanlar. This group is particularly marginalised as they are rejected by Romanlar and Alevis alike. The Swedish photojournalist Stefan Bladh, a member of the iRSN, has drawn attention to the peripatetic Teber-Abdal families coming from Gaziantep who during parts of the year live under a bridge in Sulukule. The notion of Alevi and Romani identities, operational concurrently within the same environment was a topic that received a lot of attention during the First International Romani Studies Conference in Istanbul at the Swedish Research Institute in 2003. Much debate, at times heated, took place between scholars and researchers who argued that such a phenomenon was not possible, as Alevis are a closed group and resistant to admittance except by birth. Others refuted this, and claimed that this was a historical situation dating from Ottoman times. The debate is likely to go on. This complex subject deserves more attention in its own right. The Roma in Trackya are usually Orthodox Christian, although there are a growing number of evangelical and Philadelphia Pentecostal Christians amongst them. We have had reports of Yezidi Gypsies in north-east Anatolia, but have not been able to corroborate that. It is interesting to note that one of our Roman respondents in Kustepe is a leading member of Jehovahs Witnesses congregation in the city. In Europe, both the Jehovahs Witnesses and the Pentecostal Church have been successful in recruiting amongst Romani people, but in Turkey these alternative religious associations have not yet started to make their inroads to the same degree. The number of Romani Jehovahs Witnesses adherents are insignificant, but it is interesting to note that the conversions took place during our respondent's stay with relatives in Germany. An important distinction between the Jehovahs Witnesses and the Pentecostal movement is that while the former puts little emphasis on ethnic identity as "the end of days is near", the latter offers an ethnic-based place of worship in which ethnic identities can be expressed. It remains to be seen whether strands of Christianity will have a similar impact on Turkish Gypsy communities in the future as they have exercised amongst Gypsy communities in the West (Strand, 2001).

## **Prejudices and perceptions**

"Official census figures in Turkey do not include the ethnic composition of the population and the estimates of the Gypsy population by various commentators are not consistent with one another. Moreover, as all Gypsies

in Turkey do not live in segregated quarters, even population estimates on the basis of neighbourhoods would not be reliable" (Incirlioglu, 2004).

"Türkiyede altmışaltı büyük millet var..." According to the Turkish proverb, there are sixty-six and a half nationalities in Turkey. The Swedish ethnographer Ingvar Svanberg suggests that it is hardly surprising that the "half" nationality referred to are the Gypsies (Svanberg, 1988). This illustrates the "as if" situation the Romani communities find themselves in; they are expected to operate in Turkish society "as if" they were equal citizens of the Republic, whilst being treated as "half" citizenry. In the case of researchers, Gypsy communities all over the world seem to evade ethnographic desires for clear-cut categorisations, often with resultant confusion as ethnographers attempt to impose arbitrary divisions upon them. The diversity of the Gypsy peoples remains a challenge to the discourse of ethnicity and nationalism. Often compared with other *diaspora* populations, Gypsies have been described as something of a "special case" (Malcomson, 1994)

## Work, research and initiatives

On a national scale, Romani self-organisation is growing, with the *Çingene Kiltirini Araştırma, Geliştirme, Yardımlaşma ve Dayanışma Derneği* (Association for Research, Development, Mutual Assistance and the Solidarity of Gypsy Culture). Mustafa Aksu, has for some time been attempting to develop a national federated organisation concerned with improving the situation of Romani people in Turkey. Equally, the organisation of a group of Romani people in Edirne, the Edçinkay Derneği, led by Erdinç Çekiç, demonstrates the extent to which the Romani communities themselves are engaged in self-improvement, especially in the light of European accession. Other organisations are coming into being extremely frequently (Oprisan, 2005: pc) The impact of the body of European legislation that is primarily concerned with Romani has yet to be evaluated, and it is likely that this will encourage a plethora of Romani NGO's to spring up over the next ten years, particularly as the influence of the "Decade of Roma Inclusion. 2005–2015" makes itself felt. Increasing awareness of the situation of Gypsies in Turkey (international scholars attending iRSN conferences and seminars, iRSN lectures and seminars in other European countries, visits from other European Romani NGO's to the iRSN, press, television and documentary film-makers and widespread interest in our work from interested individuals), will further impact upon this.

Initiatives by Turkish NGO's, such as Sky-GD, continue to develop amongst impoverished Romani communities in Istanbul and elsewhere, and are directed at improving levels of literacy amongst all ages. Particular attention has recently been given to the condition of the primarily Romani garbage-collectors, although without any actual programmes being put in place as yet. The primary source of writings about Turkish Romani peoples has been journalism, with the work of Sinan Şanlıer (1999), and Nazım Alpman (1997; 2005). Other reportage has featured Gypsies to varying extents, as a recurrent theme in the national press, with some writers (Tekin Sonmez, for example) more sympathetic than others. Romani Studies as an academic discipline is entirely new in Turkey. The first and hitherto only course in the subject was delivered by the iRSN at Istanbul Bilgi University during the autumn semester of 2004/5. Previous work on Gypsy communities has been done, but the information available is scattered and disjointed, with very little reference to other Turkish scholarship, aside from



encyclopaedia articles (see Duy-Ulu, 1994; Gökbilgin, 1945). In comparison with scholarship elsewhere in Europe, there is still very little accurate information (see Tong, 1995). Recently, there have been an increasing number of foreign titles on Gypsies available in Istanbul book stores (probably as a result of the Romani Studies course at Bilgi), and books on Gypsies are being translated into Turkish (see for example Asséo, 2003). Halliday's 1922 article for the *Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society* should also be mentioned, as an early reference to Gypsies in the Republic. Heinschink's well-known work on the basket-weavers of Izmir records dialectical and linguistic material, otherwise rarely published (Heinschink, 1986). In addition to Heinschink's work, Bakker (1995), Cech (2004), Friedman (1986), and Oprisan (2003-2004), have also conducted short studies. Mischek's contribution to the proceedings of the 2002 Gypsy Lore Society Conference, about ethnicity and occupation amongst Romanlar in Istanbul again illustrates the deepening interest in Turkish Gypsies, as does Kyuchukov's comparative Bulgarian studies (2003). More comparative research has been carried out by IRSN amongst the Ghurbeti communities of northern and southern Cyprus (Marsh and Strand, 2003; 2004). Marushiakova and Popov have conducted a great deal of research into the Turkish Gypsies in the Balkans and the countries of former Soviet Union (Marushiakova and Popov, 2003). Much has also been published looking at Gypsy music, in both populist press and ethno-musicology. In its more academic form, Seeman's (as yet unpublished) 2002 thesis about music and Roman identity is one especially good example. In Turkish academic research, the work of Incirlioğlu, in the Çin Çin district of Ankara and the in-depth research of Gypsy organisation in Turkey, is most prominent. Under the auspices of the historical faculty at Istanbul University, Altinöz is currently completing a PhD thesis on Osmanlı Toplumunda Çingeneler (Gypsies in the Ottoman Society). Kolukirik's study of Abdallar groups (2003), and another of the social life of Romani people in Izmir has recently been published as part of a Gypsy Lore Society collection (2003). Ceyhan, has been conducting her research amongst Gypsies in Edirne, and was invited to present some early findings at the most recent GLS conference in Liverpool (2004). A number of student research projects and studies that involve Romanlar living in the Kus-tepe neighbourhood, have been carried out under the auspices of Istanbul Bilgi University (see for example Kazgan, 1999; 2002; Sayhat & Bozan, 2004).

In terms of visual representation, the iRSN photographers Özunal and Bladh (2003) have both contributed with photographic documentaries of Turkish Gypsies, and in the latter's case, a longitudinal study of an Abdallar group (2005). Other Turkish photographers who have documented Gypsies in Turkey are again Şanlıer, and Kulaksız. Hazar (Troya Medya) presented his documentary film featuring Romanlar living in Kuştepe, at a gala as part of the events related to the inauguration of Romani Studies at Bilgi. Currently independent film-makers (Kurumlu and associates), are working on a documentary film about Gypsy communities in different part of Turkey. Kacan's "modern classic", Ağır Roman has inspired a film adaptation and long-running drama productions, and continues to attract the Turkish public's attention to Gypsies, in Turkish society. In terms of foreign documentary film-making, the recent Swedish television series, "Latjjo Drom" featured footage shot in Istanbul in two episodes, with Adrian Marsh, local Romanlar, and the students of the Romani Studies course at Istanbul Bilgi University.

### **3. Theoretical foundation**

Our work has relied upon a theoretical framework that has been built through previous research and scholarship in Romani Studies. In practice this means that we approach the problem of definition ("who is a Gypsy?"), by trying to understand the boundaries that exist between one group and another, and what is beyond these. A primarily biological definition relies upon theories of "race", now largely discredited (see Kohn, 1996), and frequently subsumed under the term "ethnic". Both these are used, often interchangeably in the discourse of identity, in relation to Gypsies in Turkey. This particular set of notions reflects the wider societal emphasis upon fixed characteristics that can be ascribed to particular groups, in order to explain behaviours, and attributes defined as aberrant, or deviant (see Heinke, 2004). For us, the prevalent discourse is one that highlights the "Gypsy-ness" of certain behaviours, in contradistinction to the majority group, using this as a cultural boundary marker. Thus, many non-Romani people have been, and continue to be defined as "Gypsy", with no other reference point than this.

One of our points of departure is the work of Barth (Barth, 1997: 75-82). Rather than regarding culture as a 'pelagic island', he argued that a culture is largely created as the result of boundary maintenance. Different ethnic groups actively 'construct' their ethnic identities in contradistinction to other ethnic groups. Ethnicity then, is about conflict and negotiation and ethnic boundaries serve to divide the world into 'us' and 'them'. Barth's analytical construct constitutes a paradigm shift in social anthropology and has been seminal to Romani Studies. It has been widely used by scholars in the field (Acton, 1985; Arnstberg, 1998; de Leon, 1999; Gustafsson, 1971; Okely, 1981; Stewart, 1997; Sutherland, 1975). This insight has provided an alternative prism for understanding different ethnic groups by its focus on the dynamics of exclusion, rather than on the cultural content encompassed by boundaries.

#### **Material and research methods**

The methodological process is based upon the fundamental principle that Romani involvement in this research (as with any research about Romani and other Gypsy communities), is fundamental. The investigation of Romani communities relies upon a high degree of trust and credibility, that can be developed and maintained only by "insiders", or researchers from the communities themselves. This level of credibility must also be maintained vis-à-vis the wider society, and the demands of rigorous, critical scholarship. Professional Romani researchers with the necessary skills and experience, engaged in scholarly research are an essential pre-requisite to any programme engaged with Gypsy peoples, at any level. Our own process of definition has relied upon self-ascription, meaning that those who choose to identify themselves as Romani, we have accepted that definition. This has been frequently corroborated through the use of language (sharing words common across all dialects of Romani), "narratives of journey", cultural practices, and a notion of shared origins. On occasions, we have taken advice from teachers, social-workers and communities themselves (referring to other communities), as our prime indicators of the presence of Romani people, or concerning individuals. However, this has been tempered by the information garnered from interviews, and the complex picture of identity that emerges can sometimes challenge these ascribed definitions. On one occasion at least, we have challenged

the self-definition of a particular group as not Gypsy, as linguistically and culturally this group exhibited strong indications to the contrary. Denial and "passing" as non-Gypsies, is of course, a common protection strategy (by defining other groups as Gypsy, whilst refuting the suggestion), an avoidance technique to reduce discriminatory experiences.

"Interviewing gives us access to the observations of others. Through interviewing we can learn about places we have not been and could not go and about settings in which we have not lived. If we have the right informants, we can learn about the quality of neighbourhoods or what happens in families... Interviewing can inform us about the nature of social life. We can learn about the work of occupations and how people fashion careers, about cultures and the values they sponsor, and about the challenges people confront as they lead their lives... foreign societies... and the private lives of couples and families."

Robert Weiss (1994) *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*.

Our research is based on interviews conducted with Romani respondents, and in the second phase of the research, we also interviewed teachers working with Romani pupils, and others. On one occasion (with an English-teacher), the interview was conducted in English. All the other interviews have been conducted in the Turkish, and in two instances in Romani, whilst in three cases Romani and Turkish were mixed. Interpreters were used (from the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul), when the Turkish or Turkish-speaking members of the network were not present.

During the research project we have also carried out observations in the community, and been engaged in informal discussions with large numbers of Romani and non-Romani people about the issues and our questions. The research team has all in all conducted approximately sixty interviews during Phase 1 and Phase 2, with Romani interviewees. We have met with people in their homes, in cafés, at meetings, schools and at Istanbul Bilgi University. We have asked questions about their homes, their families, their jobs and occupations, their schooling, their hopes, fears and aspirations. The interviewees from the Roman communities were:

- Tophane: four families, two cleaning women, three taxi drivers, one tea-house owner, two shoe-cleaners, one garbage-collector, one unemployed man, three housewives, and one female *keseci* (Turkish bath attendant).
- Sulukule: an Abdal family with father, mother and their seven children and their partners (2), and one shop-keeper at Edirnekapı
- Kuştepe: three families, two flower-sellers, four musicians, one tea-house owner, two taxi drivers, and pupils at Abdurrahman Köksaloğlu İlköğretim Okulu.
- Dolapdere: five families, six parents and pupils at Hüvîyet Bekir İlköğretim Okulu, five musicians, one Internet café owner, one football player, one car mechanic, one music-shop owner, one kuaför (hair dresser), one security guard and two factory workers.
- Gaziosmanpaşa: three peripatetic *sepetçi* families (basket-makers) who move in fixed patterns of migration between Istanbul, Izmir and the Greek islands
- Gültepe: three families: three garbage and recycling workers, two housewives, and two carpenters

The research team also conducted interviews with three teachers, the head teacher, and other staff of Abdurrahman Köksaloğlu İlköğretim Okulu, and the head teacher, five teachers and support staff at Hüvîyet Bekir İlköğretim Okulu. We made comparative field visits and interviews in Izmit and Edirne, and spoke with community members in the Yirmisekiz Haziran

mahallesi (Izmit) and at the Edçinkay Derneđi (Edirne), teachers at Istiklal İlköđretim Okulu in Hacıhusrev, Istanbul, with school inspection officials in Istanbul and NGO workers from Sky-GD (Sosyal Kültürel Yaşamı Geliştirme Derneđi).

## 4. Overview of findings

### Education

- most parents did not feel that there was a high level of discrimination directed at their children in schools in Istanbul
- those from rural areas suggested that this was not the case where they had come from, and part of the reasons why they had moved
- however, they recognise that there is very little in the national curriculum that reflects their experience as Romani people, that is not stereotyped, and prejudicial
- many Romani children cannot attend school full-time because of economic reasons, and the need for generating family income
- many of our respondents suggested that girls are less likely to attend school consistently, because parents do not send them; they remain at home involved in child-care, domestic work and other occupations (flower-selling, selling small goods and toiletries)
- some of our respondents suggested that they didn't send their daughters to school for "traditional" reasons
- many respondents noted the generally earlier marriage age in Romani communities, and its impact upon education for both young men and women
- Romani boys tend to leave school at a younger age than average, because they are needed to work with fathers, uncles and other male members of the family, or generate their own family income
- some teenage Romani boys are not attending school, nor engaged in work, and become disaffected, joining "gangs" and at risk of becoming involved in crime, narcotics and substance abuse
- most Romani children have little or no formal qualifications when they leave school, but feel the lack of this themselves
- Romani school children wish to become teachers, lawyers, footballers, dentists, and police officers
- despite many coming from elsewhere in Turkey, almost no children asked wanted to return to their place of origin
- some Romani children do go on to university, especially from the families of musicians; these young people generally "hide" their Romani identity from this point
- few of our respondents have attended any formal vocational training or adult education, after leaving school, primarily because of economic reasons
- access to training and adult education was perceived to be very limited, by our interviewees
- at one community education project in Izmit, Romani people did engage in family learning, literacy programmes, but no such programmes are currently accessed in Istanbul by our respondents
- there is a very old communal education system in place amongst Romani communities, concerned with "passing on" skill from parents to children, that begins at a very early age
- it is most highly developed amongst the communities of musicians; however, there is no connection between this and the public education system

- in Hüviyet Bekir school the percentage of Romani pupils is 30%, from a total of 1,600 pupils indicating that the overall Romani population of 378 (using a multiplier of 7) in the immediate catchment area of the school
- in another locality, almost 80% of the school pupils at Abdurrahman Köksaloglu school are of Romani origins, from a total of 1,450 or 1,160 pupils, suggesting an overall Romani population of 8,120 in the school catchment area
- at Istiklal school there are 150 Romani pupils registered from a total of 490; these do not attend irregularly, as compared to the other schools, where the attendance rate is higher (the overall attendance rate is much lower for all pupils at this school)
- teachers in two schools felt that the motivation for learning was higher amongst some Romani groups than others; for example, Romans from Edirne, Bursa and Balıkesir were regarded as better "integrated and educated" than others from Kayseri
- one school found that differing teaching approaches, using more visual materials and incorporating more of the local Romani culture (music and dance, for example), brought good results, despite what teachers described as Romani pupils being "slower starters", making up the difference in one school year
- Romani children felt that the external pressures of responsibility meant that it was harder to focus on school as a learning environment, and that school was a place to play

Our empirical material from the education research mainly consist of narratives collected from informal discussions, interviews, meetings, workshops and seminars. Our research subjects were pupils, parents and education professionals from three primary schools in Istanbul in which we conducted participant observation and interviews; Abdurrahman Köksaloglu İlköğretim Okulu in Kustepe, Istiklal İlköğretim Okulu in Beyoglu and Hüviyet Bekir İlköğretim Okulu in Dolapdere. In the latter we are engaged in action research while developing a partnership project with a school in Haringey, London.

The research into education for Romani children has shown that they are liable to drop-out at a earlier age, attend less frequently and under-achieve significantly, in comparison with any other group. Romani girls are likely to attend school less than Romani boys, however, economic and cultural circumstances mean that this is unlikely to continue beyond primary education. There are almost no opportunities for young Romani people to effectively engage with the curriculum as it is taught, there being no recognition of them as a cultural group in their own right. Romani history and social studies are almost entirely absent from the classroom. Some teachers and parents would like to see a change in the curriculum, one that reflects Turkey's multicultural heritage more. The Turkish Education Ministry is reportedly working on it. The Hüviyet Bekir school is a good example of good practice, as they have encouraged their Romani pupils to share and write some Romani words in the class room for example. Otherwise, the only appearance of Romani people in the curriculum is occasionally in the form of stereotypical representations in course literature, and in the prejudices propounded by other pupils and educators themselves. The value of education is assumed to be meaningless to Romani children, and little attempt is made to address the problems of high non-attendance, or early drop-out by the school authorities (Abdurrahman Köksaloglu' s research into the problem is one of exception). The question of segregated education arises in respect of the degree to which non-Romani parents remove their children from one school

and enrol them in another. This practice has a number of implications in that, the proportion of Romani children effectively means these schools become "Gypsy" schools to all intents and purposes; they are allocated less resources and training opportunities, the quality of teaching is not high; the local education authority apparently colludes with this migration of non-Romani pupils and effective creation of "Gypsy" schools.

### Employment

- most employment in Romani communities was low-paid, generally low or unskilled manual labour often of a temporary nature
- those that had more prestigious work as performers and musicians had other trades in addition, and that music was easy to work with being more familiar
- most employment is unregulated and without security, or social insurance
- apprenticeships are still prevalent in the Romani communities
- occupational patterns have changed radically, with consequent loss of "traditional" employment for communities
- shifts in occupational patterns have resulted in lower incomes generally across Romani communities
- the majority of those involved in re-cycling previously did other trades, as smiths for example
- Romani women in the majority of communities are not involved in performance or music, although some families are still carrying out the "traditional" entertainment in Sulukule, this is much reduced
- changes in legislation have and continues to effect Romani communities in terms of employment; the review of garbage collection in the city will do so shortly, and past measures have seen the demise of bear-leaders, for example
- flower-selling, and the economic organisation of the flower-sellers is particularly strong in Istanbul, as the trade is almost entirely in the hands of Romani people
- the organisation of Romani musicians has been attempted in the past without success, but future attempts will be made; it is not clear why the venture failed
- nomadic employment practices are still part of the economic picture, with peripatetic groups such as the *sepetçi* basket-makers following well-established patterns over the year
- international trading networks exist in the re-cycling industry, with Romani businessmen having previously established routes

### Housing

- housing is one of the most difficult problems for Romani families, many share small, cramped accommodation with few rooms and inadequate bathrooms
- much of the housing is temporary such as that in parts of Sulukule
- some families are reduced to living in tents, huts and makeshift dwellings
- the extreme of living in the open, under motorways, bridges and ruins is common
- little housing is owned by Romani people, except in a few instances (Bulubul, for example), with tenancy agreements being almost absent and tenure very insecure
- housing is difficult to obtain outside of those areas "known" to be Romani, as landlords are unwilling to let to Gypsies

- heating is particular problem, and many families rely upon combustible fuels with a high health and environmental risk
- frequently there is over-crowding and lack of space, especially for growing families; privacy is a major issue
- homes are poor and ill-equipped, with little amenities or household goods, in many cases
- some families have basic accommodation that is an improvement upon the majority, but space remains an issue
- relocation, whether through economic pressure or by forcible movement has happened frequently to our respondents

## Health

- the social security system is not accessible to some of our respondents, as without a "fixed abode" they are ineligible
- the incidence of respiratory illnesses is high amongst Romani interviewees, with tobacco use from an early age the primary cause
- mental health problems are widespread, but unacknowledged
- problems resulting from narcotics abuse are high in certain communities, with younger people particularly at risk; children are often left to grand-parents to be raised, as parents are affected many ailments are untreated as medicines are expensive, and the once-widespread use of "folk-remedies" is declining with the deaths of older people and the consequent loss of knowledge
- occupational hazards are very prevalent, with disease and illness associated with garbage-collectors and their families, injury from labouring and foundry work, and other problems arising from unprotected work practices



## 5. Education Workshop, Istanbul Bilgi University, 17<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> February 2005

### General context – Gypsies and education

In the second phase of the feasibility study we focused on the issues of Gypsies and their access to education. Education is key to social inclusion and it has been of central importance in the field of Romani studies and Romani activism in Europe since the 1960's (see Plowden Report "Children and their Primary Schools" Part 3, chap 5, para. 155-157; Appendix 12, 1967). School's failure to introduce any strategies for including these children was highlighted by Plowden's comments that

they are probably the most severely deprived children in the country. Most of them do not even go to school, and the potential abilities of those who do are stunted. They tend to be excluded by their way of life and their lack of education from entering normal occupations and confined to others... Thus, unless action is taken to arrest the cycle, their children will in turn suffer educational deprivations which will become increasingly severe in their effects as general standards of education rise.

The concern from government with education of Gypsy and Traveller children has remained high ever since (see the DfES [Department for Education and Skills] Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups, "Education for All", The Swann Report, 1985; "The Education of Travelling Children", Office for Standards in Education [OFSTED], London, 1996; "Raising the Attainment of Ethnic Minority Pupils, OFSTED, London, 1999; Bhopal, K. with Gundara, J., Jones, C. and Owen, C. "Working Towards Inclusive Education for Gypsy Traveller Pupils (RR 238)" DfEE, London, 2000; "Aiming High; raising the achievement of Gypsy Traveller pupils", DfES, London, 2003). Other studies, such as Donald Kenrick and Sian Bakewell's *On the Verge; the Gypsies of England*, (1990), identified exclusion and discrimination as the most significant factors in preventing access to education for Gypsy children, as did the governments' reports. Betty Jordan's study of Scottish Gypsy-Travellers in secondary (12–16 years) schools, demonstrated that conflicts arising from discrimination by teachers, led to non-attendance of these children and labelling as disruptive, uninterested, poor, undisciplined students (Lloyd, G. Stead, J. Jordan, E. and Norris, C. "Teachers and Gypsy Travellers", *Scottish Educational Review*. 31, 1999, 48-65).

The picture in other parts of Europe has been equally bleak, as regards the education of Gypsy children. The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers noted, on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2000 that...

...the disadvantaged position of Roma/Gypsies in European societies cannot be overcome unless equality of opportunity in the field of education is guaranteed for Roma/Gypsy children" and that "the education of Roma/Gypsy children should be a priority in national policies in favour of Roma/Gypsies... (Recommendation No.R[2000]4)

thereby acknowledging the *de facto* discrimination and inequality that exists in national education systems throughout the continent. The notorious practice of segregated education for Romani children was highlighted by the Human Rights Watch, Helsinki report "Rights Denied; the Roma of Hungary"

Roma suffer discrimination in schools and in the general community. Only a handful of Roma graduate from, or even attend, academic high schools. Barely half of all Roma finish primary school; a large percentage of those

have received most of their education in "remedial" classes and schools in which very few Hungarian children are placed. (1996)

This situation is comparable with other eastern European states experiencing the transition from central command-economies to free-market economies; the Roma suffered the first wave of cuts in employment levels and social security payments, the longest periods of unemployment and most profound dislocation resulting from these enormous societal changes. The benefits of the expanding European Union may be a very mixed blessing to Roma in the newly-admitted countries, as legislation regarding privatisation of state monopolies and closed sectors are removed, in favour of competition within the economic zone. The promise of the free movement of labour has not, and is unlikely to be realised for most Roma people, as restrictions are specifically directed against them in most member states such as Denmark and the UK, whilst the sheer cost of travel prohibits all but the most affluent in the Romani communities from doing so. The lack of sufficient education is likely to result in exactly the situation predicted by Lady Plowden almost forty years ago.

The initiatives developed to address these issues, in the UK as in the wider European community, have focussed upon the primary notion of socially inclusive education. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe stated that

...policies aimed at addressing the problems faced by Roma/Gypsies in the field of education should be comprehensive, based on an acknowledgement that the issue of schooling for Roma/Gypsy children is linked with a wide range of other factors and pre-conditions, namely the economic, social and cultural aspects, and the fight against racism and discrimination... (Recommendation No.R[2000]4)

Other policy initiatives have developed from the experience of teaching Gypsies, undertaken by many educators with the intention of eroding the inequalities and disparities in Romani access, achievement and attainment. The Traveller Education Service in the UK has consistently worked to bring Gypsies into schools across Britain and support them and their families once there. As Judy Bohan, Manager of Haringey TES in north London, remarks

Travelling (Gypsy) pupils' response to school is crucially influenced by their awareness of the level of their acceptance by teachers and other pupils...

Emphasising the importance of social inclusion, over what might be described as the alternative, or separate schooling model, has been one of the areas where education of Romani children has been most contested by those involved in educational provision at the point of delivery. From the "caravan classrooms" and summer schools operating on Gypsy sites in Britain in the 1970's, to the additional schooling in many parts of eastern Europe in the 1990's, the benefits of supplementing what were (and still are) seen as the deficits of the national education system have had to compete with the strongly-voiced demands that Gypsy education must be part-and-parcel of the national curriculum of any European state, that Romani children are recognised as citizens (or subjects, as in the UK), with the same rights to equality of education as other members of society. Making the curriculum relevant to the needs of Gypsy children, rather than developing a specific model for Gypsies, has been at the core of educational initiatives and "good practice" in education, sometimes against the wishes of the Romani communities themselves. The debate is likely to continue, as communities themselves argue for their right to determine the education of their children in the way they deem most appropriate, but the struggle for inclusiveness, rather than separateness, is likely

to be the predominant strand of theory and praxis in the attempts to address this age-old problem through national, and supra-national policy and government. However it is unlikely that the demand for, and need to respond to communities with supplementary education, flexibly delivered, and deriving from local initiatives, will demise, as the pace of change in many European systems remains impossibly slow in the face of Romani demands for change.

### **Education of Romani children in Turkey**

Under the Turkish Constitution, the rights of children to receive education, provided by the state, have been guaranteed since the Republic's inception in the 1920's. It is beyond the remit of this report to provide all but the most superficial of pictures of the education for Romani children in Turkey, but a brief examination of the legislative framework for the delivery of education in the Republic may provide some important context for the particular observations drawn from our experience in a small number of schools in Istanbul.

The legislative framework that is relevant to the education of Turkish children is embodied in the following

- The Constitution of the Turkish Republic
- A variety of laws regulating educational provision and instruction, including most importantly "The Basic Law of National Education, no.1739"
- Turkish government programmes and development plans for educational provision
- The National Education Councils

The principles derived from these legislative structures are broadly

- Education is defined as "national" and Republican
- Education is prescribed as "secular", and to have a scientific foundation
- Education is intended to promote generality and equality amongst Turkish citizens
- Education is described as "modern" in its delivery, application and philosophy

The education system of Turkey is intended to be coeducational and democratic in character ([http://www.meb.gov.tr/Stats/apk2002ing/apage29\\_48.htm](http://www.meb.gov.tr/Stats/apk2002ing/apage29_48.htm)). The aspirations of the Turkish educational system to improve knowledge in the scientific, economic and cultural spheres are those that other systems share. The practical application of knowledge to bring about national prosperity, facilitate social development and "make the ...nation a constructive, creative and distinguished partner in modern civilisation" are widely shared amongst other countries in Europe ([http://www.meb.gov.tr/Stats/apk2002ing/apage29\\_48.htm](http://www.meb.gov.tr/Stats/apk2002ing/apage29_48.htm)).

From the perspective of the education of Romani children, the concern with equality of opportunity is the most relevant here, and the principle of equality is clearly guaranteed in the Constitution in Articles 10, 42 and 130 (with regard to higher education). Additional caveats outline the duties of government to support the education of disadvantaged groups, through the use of scholarships, and provide for those with special educational needs (Article 42).

A concern in other European states with instruction in "mother-tongue" classes, is addressed further in Article 42 which states "No language other than Turkish may be taught as mother tongue to Turkish citizens in education and instruction institutions", and in this instance, there

may be seen to be a significant difference between the Turkish system and some others (Sweden, UK and Germany, for example). Foreign language teaching, as defined by further legislation, is to be undertaken in both specific classes, and in those instances where the foreign language is the primary means of instruction (French and English, for example). International agreements regarding this aspect are, in the Turkish Republic, "reserved". This is an issue that has been at the heart of many initiatives regarding the education of Romani children elsewhere in Europe, and has been brought up by educators working with Gypsies in Bulgaria, Rumania and the Czech Republics, at the recent international Romani Studies Conference in Istanbul, 2005. The question of Romani language classes is, however, not uncomplicated, as the notion of which particular dialect of Romani is the one to be taught has led to much debate about standardisation, or consolidation around a set of dialects that are spoken amongst the communities attending the classes. In Turkey, the question is further complicated by the fact that the three major linguistic variations spoken by Gypsies (*Romani*, *Domari* and *Lomavren*), may all be present in the Republic, but more research regarding the linguistic picture must take place before any certainty can be expressed regarding this. The appropriateness of Romani language teaching must be weighed against the legislative framework (there would need to be a change before this could be possible), the knowledge of which variants and dialects are currently in use amongst Gypsy populations in Turkey, and the demand for such from the wider Gypsy community, which may be very limited indeed.

The question of culture, including history, is an aspect of the education of Romani children that may be seen to be part-and-parcel of the wider educational provision, as it adapts to the standards of other European states. The efforts to match the period of compulsory education elsewhere in Europe, for example, have begun to ensure that Turkish compulsory education is seen as equivalent (from 8 as defined in Education Law 4306, to 9-12), whilst the higher education structural changes necessary to achieve parity, have begun to be undertaken by the Higher Education Council of Turkey, in line with the Bologna Declaration. In all these adaptations, the teaching of history and culture is intended to reflect the European model, with an emphasis upon the diversity and multi-cultural nature of societies. It must be emphasised that this is an aspiration not yet fully realised in many European educational systems generally, not merely an aspect of Turkish education in particular.

In summary then, the education of Gypsy children has been a highly contested arena in the UK and other parts of Europe, resulting in various government initiatives and policies to address the problems, at national and trans-national levels. Community involvement has taken the form of separate or supplementary provision, acting as a "lever" on further development from the statutory sector. The emphasis has shifted away from such "additional" measures, and the arguments for "special support" to the model of socially inclusive educational practice and delivery. In many instances this remains an aspiration, as the reality of dismantling decades of exclusionary practices, especially but not exclusively in the eastern European states with large Gypsy populations, has been "patchy" at best. The engagement of NGO's in the education of Gypsy children, either directly through additional provision, or through supporting the delivery of a more inclusive curriculum, has had a major impact in achieving recognition, and promoting the legislative framework for change. That now constitutes a European-wide effort to address the inequalities and failings of educational provision for Romani people.

In Turkey, the legislative framework exists to promote the values of equality, and the right to access education for all. The existence of particular avenues of support for disadvantaged groups, as described in law, demonstrates the potential for ensuring this. The lack of particular measures directed at Romani children suggests that these have not been identified as particularly in need, other than in the overall context of disadvantaged children, and that there has been, as yet, no recognition of exclusionary aspects of the education system overall, or that such may even exist. In adapting to the wider European context for the delivery of education, no particular emphasis has been paid to the raft of policy initiatives concerning Gypsies and education, and there are apparently no plans to evaluate the impact of such vis-à-vis the Turkish educational system. The appropriateness of implementing any of the particular measures adopted in principle elsewhere in Europe, as regards the education of Gypsy children, is not yet under discussion.

An opportunity to evaluate some of the prevalent concerns regarding the education of Gypsy children was provided by the education workshops held in February, at Istanbul Bilgi University. How to best address these issues was discussed at a meeting at the Swedish General Consulate organized by the iRSN on November the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004. The British Council, the Consulate General of Sweden in Istanbul, and the iRSN met to discuss the second phase of the feasibility study, and measures to be taken as regards awareness-raising vis-à-vis education and the Gypsy communities. The iRSN suggested a specific seminar devoted to education. The justification for the British Council was the idea of sharing UK expertise in this field with Turkey. We further appreciated the need for Turkish education professionals to share their own experiences amongst themselves, and with UK experts. The aim of such a workshop was to develop ideas of "good practice" informed by the outcomes of the workshop itself. The idea was subsequently (in a meeting directly following) brought to the Centre for Migration Research at Istanbul Bilgi University who offered to host and organise the event. The CMR invited teachers and headmasters from primary schools in the areas of Kustepe and Dolapdere. The workshop, entitled Risk Altındaki Çocuklar Eğitim Atölyesi (Children At Risk Education Workshop), took place at Kustepe Campus. Whilst focus for the workshop was children at risk in general, the Gypsy community was deployed as a case study.

## **Methodology**

We gathered data during the education workshop by recording the presentations that were being delivered, and the reactions and discussions to these. We are aware that much of what was being said was filtered and might have been delivered differently in a different context, or to a different audience. It is likely that the presence of UK experts, education officials from the Education Ministry in Ankara, and the Education Board in Istanbul, played an important role in shaping what was being communicated (and what was not communicated). However, the presence of invited Romani representatives in the audience seems not to have exercised such an influence considering the nature of some statements uttered about Gypsy children and Gypsy culture. Bearing these filters in mind, we have nevertheless examined our data using a critical discourse analysis. Our approach was to analyse what was being said, examine the assumptions that were behind the arguments, and incorporate the narratives within an analytical framework, i.e. by recognising that the schools have the authoritative power to construct a normative discourse, and define what counts as "knowledge", and what does not.

The conclusions that we derive from this method are inevitably informed by our theoretical perspective (see above, 3.).

### Central themes of the workshop

By focussing on one particular cultural or ethnic group, the education workshop was a unique initiative in the Turkish context. There still exists a widespread caution in defining ethnic identities. That this is the case was illustrated by the number of times discussants would stress that Gypsies were just like other disadvantaged groups, suggesting that there was nothing particular with the situation faced by the Gypsy communities. This was frequently contradicted through frequent descriptions of what the education professionals perceived to be inherently "Gypsy problems".

Central themes of the workshop were:

- Immigration
- Poverty, child labour and criminality
- Cultural, "traditional " and "hereditary" factors
- Scarce resources for the schools
- The need for central government involvement

The perspective from the Romani communities, expressed through their representatives attending the workshop, demonstrated that, comparable to the situation in the rest of Europe, Gypsies in Turkey face societal discrimination, marginalization and deprivation. Many Gypsies experience problems with property rights, under-achievement in school, and little or no access to health care. Regular employment is rare amongst the Gypsy communities, most often as a result of poor educational achievement. There exists a huge dissonance between the widely accepted acknowledgement of the Gypsies in Turkey as part of the mosaic of the indivisible unity of the Turkish Republic, and the attitudes and popular portrayal of them as "different" from the majority population. This dissonance also makes itself manifest between the continuous emphasis upon an alleged lack of anti-Gypsyism in Turkish society and in Turkish schools, and the evidence of the opposite, namely the negative stereotypes of the *çingene* and the attribution of certain inherent *a priori* attachments, such as being "hereditarily in-educable", and of being "friendly, colourful but wild and undisciplined by nature" (*sic*). The popular and widespread insistence upon the lack of discrimination in Turkish society is often expressed in contradistinction to the European context with its experience of racial biology, Nazi terror, and genocide.

A lot of these contradictions were evident in the presentations and comments made, during the education workshop. With few exceptions, teachers suggested that there was no discrimination directed at Gypsies in their schools and that the problems were entirely due to the families, and to the "undeniable fact that Gypsies are in-educable". It is clear that there was a broad consensus amongst many of the teachers that::

- There is a problem
- The problem is the Gypsies and their attitudes to education
- The Gypsies (they) are "different", and indifferent to politics and education, and have hereditary difficulties in abiding by rules (*sic*). "Anything associated with education is useless to them".

Despite attempts from some teachers to reflect on these prejudices, and on the importance of being self-critical, the education workshop did not really address the question of whether the culture of the schools themselves might be exclusionary towards Romani children. Discussions about reviewing and adapting the national curriculum were discussed and the officials from the Education Ministry in Ankara and Education Board in Istanbul did respond. Whilst the teachers advocated for a state co-ordinated approach, the officials argued that it would be unrealistic with one model for such a large and diverse country as Turkey. They placed the responsibility upon the teachers, who in their view should "shape up new methodologies".

One of the most positive aspects of the workshop discussion was the comparative perspective offered by the experts from the UK, Ms Judy Bohan and Mr Arthur Ivatts. The opportunity to examine the policies and practices adopted as regards Gypsy education in the UK, promoted debate amongst the Turkish teachers attending of how their own initiatives had been developed in working with these children and what possibilities might exist for further initiatives, informed by the examples from the UK. The counter influence also had a beneficial aspect, as it allowed the UK experts some insights into the challenges faced by teachers here in Turkey. These primarily revolve around the need for resources in the delivery of education.

To briefly recapitulate, the issues were defined as there is no discrimination, the problems are either exaggerated, imagined or self-imposed. There was also a widespread conviction that to the extent that there are any problems, the Gypsies have to do something about these themselves. This is concomitant with the European approach of the past, one that has sought to identify the deficit in a particular group, without analysing the responsibilities and norms of the majority society.

### **Outcomes**

*In the morning session, we heard about the Traveller Education Service in the UK. This could be important for Turkey: we have a similar situation with seasonal migrants, agricultural workers and Gypsy communities. (Teacher, Education Workshop, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2005)*

One of the objectives that came out of the workshop was to offer training and support to teachers working in deprived schools. By the teachers' own reckoning, one way of stimulating the education professionals in Turkey would be to encourage contacts with schools in the UK. This has already partly been implemented through the developing of a joint partnership between a school in Dolapdere (Hüvviyet Bekir İlköğretim Okulu) and a school in Haringey, London (Noel Park). Both schools have a large proportion of Gypsy children as well as a number of pupils from a wide variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The school partnership is currently coordinated by the iRSN on a voluntary basis. The aim is to bring a group of Turkish teachers to their partnership school in London.

## **6. Conclusions**

### **Research**

The four main areas of our enquiry have been education, employment, health and housing. In line with the Decade of Roma Inclusion, we identify those areas as a litmus test of the degree of social inclusion. However, as we kept our questions open-ended, our respondents would often prefer to talk about more general topics in the past or present, e.g. the family's history or about the political climate in Turkey. We learnt that even questions we perceived to be "non-sensitive" (e.g. how much the monthly rent was. etc), frequently were avoided. Upon reflection, the research team realised that the informants may have been unwilling to disclose such information for fear of revealing "unconventional" sources of income.

### **Education**

The research into education for Romani children has shown that they are liable to drop-out at a earlier age, attend less frequently and under-achieve significantly, in comparison with any other group. Romani girls are likely to attend school less than Romani boys, however, economic and cultural circumstances mean that this is unlikely to continue beyond primary education.

There are almost no opportunities for young Romani people to effectively engage with the curriculum as it is taught, there being no recognition of them as a cultural group in their own right. Romani history and social studies are almost entirely absent from the classroom. Some teachers and parents would like to see a change in the curriculum, one that reflects Turkey's multicultural heritage more. The Turkish Education Ministry is reportedly working on it. The Hüviet Bekir school is a good example of good practice, as they have encouraged their Romani pupils to share and write some Romani words in the class room for example.

Otherwise, the only appearance of Romani people in the curriculum is occasionally in the form of stereotypical representations in course literature, and in the prejudices propounded by other pupils and educators themselves. The value of education is assumed to be meaningless to Romani children, and little attempt is made to address the problems of high non-attendance, or early drop-out by the school authorities (Abdurrahman Köksaloğlu's research into the problem is one of exception).

The question of segregated education arises in respect of the degree to which non-Romani parents remove their children from one school and enrol them in another. This practice has a number of implications in that, the proportion of Romani children effectively means these schools become "Gypsy" schools to all intents and purposes; they are allocated less resources and training opportunities, the quality of teaching is not high; the local education authority apparently colludes with this migration of non-Romani pupils and effective creation of "Gypsy" schools.

### **Employment**



The "traditional" types of employment vary between different mahalles. The types and levels of employment, the extent to which occupation is synonymous with ethnicity, work in the unofficial economy), and the results analysed to establish in which sectors these groups predominate in the city. As expected the predominance of Romani people in low-paid, unskilled labour and occupations is very high. There is no access to social security and insurance in these jobs, accidents are frequent and ill health is a common occurrence from poor working conditions and a lack of even the most basic health and safety protection. The most prestigious occupations are those seen to be associated with music playing and production, and many young Romani men aspire to be musicians and recording artists. Young Romani women do not, on the whole seek to work in the entertainment business, as it has clear implications for their status in both Romani, and non-Romani society. Those communities that do "specialise" in still training dancers are much diminished, and deemed to be less "honourable" by other Romanlar.

Day labouring is the most common form of employment, especially as porters and carriers, whilst collecting and sorting garbage for recycling is also common. Shoe cleaners, with their distinctive boxers of polish and brushes, are frequent in tourist areas but more and more shifting from older to younger men and boys, as cleaners, and from the Romani community to other migrant communities, especially Kurds. This is the cause of some antagonism between these communities. An interesting variation in the Kustepe community is one of "car parking", as an occupation amongst Romanies. The advent of the University has meant that many of the wealthier students drive their cars to lectures and leave them with the Romani men to be "parked", for a small remuneration. The young men involved in this occupation enjoy the opportunity to drive expensive vehicles, but it is also clear that most of the people doing this do not have driving licences or motor insurance.

## **Housing**

The types of accommodation range from poor and inadequate, to appalling in some cases, being little more than shanty dwellings (e.g. Sulukule). Heating is a particular problem, and many families rely upon combustible fuels that carry a high environmental cost and significantly increase health risks. There are frequently many individuals per household, with resultant over-crowding, whilst the socio-economic changes in particular communities has resulted in a net out-migration as rents rise and districts (like Galata) become "gentrified". Those displaced by the lack of affordable accommodation generally move to areas further from the centre, with a resultant increase in travelling times to schools and employment, which leaves children especially vulnerable as they make their way home at the end of the day, or to abuse in the areas they are working in. The changes in the three communities are not concomitant, and Tophane is the most affected by this process. Relocation by the local authority (often forced), and the demolition of housing deemed "illegal" when required by development, has historically affected the other communities. Property rights are very limited for the Romani communities.

## Health

The epidemiology of illness that we have been able to ascertain (thanks to having a doctor as part of the research network), has shown that respiratory illnesses are very common, a result of large-scale tobacco use from an early age, bad housing and poor working conditions. Mental health problems are widespread but unacknowledged, and categorised as other ailments or being "djilo" or "djilli" (crazy). Problems resulting from narcotics abuse are also present in these communities, amongst the younger generation, and children are often left to grandparents or aunts to be raised by young Romani men and women with severe addiction problems. Many common ailments are untreated, because of the expense of medicines, and the once widespread use of "folk-medicine" is declining, as the knowledge about these is lost with the deaths of older people. There are still some examples of remedies practised amongst those Romanies still working with horses in Sulukule.

Several issues surrounding the Roman communities are a cause for concern:

- Child labour is endemic amongst the Roman communities, as economic necessity means that most families need the income generated by all family members able to contribute to the household finances.
- Bad housing, poor diet, and stress lead too many examples of undiagnosed or untreated conditions that would not be apparent amongst the wider population on this scale. Children's health is a particular cause for concern, especially amongst the garbage collectors who often suffer from hepatitis B. Additionally, the emphasis upon maintaining the income from male members of the household means that any medical care is focussed upon them, and women's health is consequently a much lower priority.
- The tensions and reported violence between the Kurdish and the Romanlar. Mutual prejudices are prevalent. A number of Roman individuals define themselves in contrast to the Alevi Kurds in particular, attributing the latter with characteristics of being separatist and "backwards". One of our female Roman respondents expressed this by saying: My son can marry whoever he wants as long as she is not an Alevi Kurd.

## 7. Recommendations

The feasibility studies we have carried out would suggest that the need for more research is paramount. The complex picture that emerges from our brief surveys would lead to a number of preliminary conclusions that can be summed up by the fundamental concern that not enough accurate and detailed information is available about these communities.

There are a number of other recommendations that we can make from the feasibility studies. There are also a range of issues that could usefully be followed up, both in the realm of our own research and with regards to the continued work of the IRSN. These could most usefully be characterised below:

- The importance of working in partnership with local NGOs, where they have an established presence, is especially high
- To draw the attention of international agencies such as Save the Children, Red Cross, International Blue Crescent, Caritas etc. to the situation of the Romanlar here in Istanbul

- The need for longer term research to provide better data is imperative; our feasibility study has indicated the absolute need for confidence-building measures to be undertaken prior to carrying out detailed surveys
- Any research team must have adequate numbers to cover all of the necessary areas of research
- A multi-disciplinary approach, involving a number of agencies (NGOs, schools, the police, hospitals, *muhtars*, and the *belediye*) is essential to begin to address the need for comprehensive data gathering across all of these criteria
- There are likely to be three times as many Romani people as the best estimates so far, in line with the experience in other states; we suggest a more comprehensive survey to establish accurate numbers
- Recruitment of Turkish Romanlar and other Romani researchers should be a prerequisite in any future research programme
- Education remains the key to improving the standards of living and social mobility
- Economic improvement remains the key to educational access at further and higher levels
- In order to increase the efficiency of the data gathering, and deal successfully with the multi-dimensional issues involved, future research into the communities ought to take place co-jointly with specific and concrete projects in partnerships with local agents (action research)
- Securing funding in order to enable a continuous presence of expertise in the area of Romani research in Turkey

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## Appendix 1

### TRANS-EUROPEAN ROMA FEDERATION

1 John Harper Street  
Colchester C01 1RP  
England

14 April 2005

To: Mr Erdinc Cekic, Edirne Roma Association,

Dear Mr Erdinc Cekic,

I first visited Edirne in 1960 and over the years have maintained links with Roma in Istanbul and Izmir.

As a resident for many years in both Greece and Macedonia, I am aware of the strong family and business ties between Roma in Turkey and neighbouring Greece and Bulgaria, as well as Macedonia.

While it has been difficult for Roma to maintain even cultural associations in Turkey in past decades, we hope that this situation is beginning to change. The attendance of Turkish Roma living in Germany at the 3rd World Romani Congress in Gottingen back in 1981 saw a small move in the direction of organisational ties between Roma in Turkey and Romani communities in other countries.

The formation of the Roma Association of Edirne is therefore of great significance and we would like you to accept our congratulations on what you have achieved so far.

As Turkey progresses towards membership of the European Union, we would expect that Roma in Turkey will be able to participate in all the wider European institutions. In particular we would urge that as soon as possible you will have your representatives in the European Roma Forum, which on Roma Nation Day (8 April) this year presented the Romani flag to the president of the European Parliament.

We are aware that the size of the Romani population in Turkey is very significant and that your role in the wider Romani

movement will have a great importance.  
Should you need our support here in London,  
through contact with the Turkish Embassy, please  
let us know. We are ready to give you our backing  
in the matter of human, cultural and political  
rights.

Sincerely

Grattan Puxon  
Secretary

*Funded by*  
The General Consulate of Sweden in Istanbul



The British Council in Turkey



The Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation in Turkey



*In partnership with*  
Centre for Migration Research, Istanbul Bilgi University



The Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul



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