

Racism and Local Authorities

The case of Roma in Nea Kios

Case Study

ANTIGONE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Politicians and opinion leaders frequently argue in public debates that Greek society does not carry “the stigma of racism”. As evidence to this they point to the absence of active racist groups or physical racial violence directed against “foreigners”, either migrants or refugees. Furthermore, they also frequently cite examples of Greek “hospitality”, such as cases where “illegal migrants” were rescued from the sea and humanely treated by locals and public authorities alike. The Roma seem, however, to be conspicuously absent from such debates; there is never any mention of racism towards the Roma, as though discrimination against them is natural.

The Roma have been in Greece as part of the social landscape long before Greece became a state in the 19th century, although they were only granted citizenship status gradually during the 1950s. Traditionally the Roma have been the “untouchables” of Greek society. Excluded from full participation in social life they endured a largely nomadic existence until the early 1930s when they gradually started creating semi-permanent settlements on the outskirts of cities and, sometimes, even managed to integrate into the mainstream society, but only on condition that they abandoned their “Gypsiness”.

It is perhaps not surprising then that very few studies have been carried out on the Roma issue, which came to the limelight largely as a result of the post 1990s EU anti-discrimination campaigns. Neither is it surprising that there are no reliable statistical or other data on the social situation of the Roma making both the study of Roma issues as well as the formulation of policies more difficult and precarious.

In 1996, the Greek Government recognising that the Roma community faces serious problems of discrimination and exclusion announced an 8,8 million Euro Framework Programme that was to be planned and implemented by the inter-ministerial “Policy Council for Greek Roma” encompassing a number of measures on housing, education, vocational training, provision of counselling services, health/hygiene and culture stating categorically that the formulation of such a policy is imperative, in order to end their social exclusion and promote their integration into mainstream society while respecting their way of life, identity, language and customs. Most of the measures were of an essentially remedial character and aimed at addressing urgent needs. Even so in practice it failed to meet many of its aims completing very few of its targets within the designated time frame, while the “Policy Council for Greek Roma” was finally set up in 2000, but included only one Roma representative and no NGOs dealing with Roma issues.

In 2001 the government announced a new 300 million Euro “Integrated Action Plan for the Greek Roma” supervised by the Hellenic Agency for Local Development and Local

Government and funded from both the 3rd Community Support Framework and national funds addressing primarily housing and health problems and educational issues. The Plan recognises for the first time that the Greek Roma are part of the international Roma community and acknowledges their mother tongue as Romani. Among the founding principles of the programme are respect for the cultural characteristics of Roma and the implementation of measures of positive discrimination. Nevertheless, while the distinctive ethno/cultural characteristics of the Romani community are recognised, the minority status of the Roma community is not recognised remaining a hotly contested issue. The Action Plan relies heavily for its implementation on the co-operation of local authorities, even though past (and current) attitudes and behaviour of many local authorities towards the Roma gives rise to serious concerns as to its implementation potential.

Despite good intentions and several planned and implemented interventions by public authorities, however, the daily reality of the Roma community continues to be harsh, as several international organisations, national NGOs and public bodies report. Racist tension and conflicts with local communities and municipal authorities are common place.

In the summer of 2000, however, Greek society was faced for the first time with an incident of worrying proportions and consequences: Nea Kios a small municipality in the Peloponnese escalated existing friction into an open confrontation with the local Roma community challenging the government, public bodies, such as the Ombudsman, and the public opinion by deciding to “ostracise” the Roma from the life of the community.

The events were highlighted in the national media and sparked an open debate on the relationship between the Roma and mainstream Greek society. Many issues were raised including the definition of racism and social exclusion, the limits of acceptable social behaviour of both Roma and mainstream society, the rights and obligations of local authorities towards minorities, the role of the state and the impact of its legal instruments. The debate is continuing and, as these issues remain unresolved, the tension between the Roma and “mainstream society” in Nea Kios still prevails taking more the form of indirect and institutional discrimination.

The present case study elaborates on both the series of racist incidents in Nea Kios during the summer of 2000 and the present situation in an attempt to illuminate the ideological preconceptions, prejudices, stereotypes, social structures and relationships which lead to such behaviours that upset the life of a community and turn minorities into outcasts. We hope that our analysis will enrich the pool of existing knowledge for the benefit of researchers in the field. Finally, we also hope that our recommendations will provide policy makers with useful tools for improving the current situation.

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
1. Introduction: The case of Nea Kios	5
2. Theoretical and methodological framework	8
3. The social context: Roma in Greek society	16
4. Events in Nea Kios; key actors and consequences	31
5. Conclusions	38

1. Introduction: The case of Nea Kios

During June 2000 public opinion in Greece was shocked by the unprovoked and unprecedented persecution of the local Roma community by the municipal authorities of Nea Kios, a small Municipality of the Prefecture of Argolis in the Peloponnese Region of southern Greece. Since then, despite media attention and the general outcry against what was widely considered as a blatant form of direct racism, the Municipality and the Roma community continue to face each other with suspicion and mistrust.

A. Brief overview of the events

On May 20, 2000, following a dispute over an illegally parked vehicle owned by a local Roma man, the Municipal Council of Nea Kios, adopted a resolution declaring their intention to evict all Roma from the Municipality, warning shopkeepers not to sell any goods to Roma, condemning those who had sold land to Roma, and warning the Roma to sell their land back to the original owners. The municipality asked the police to assist in implementing their decision to evict all the Roma within 48 hours. Furthermore, the Municipality established "vigilante groups" armed with batons and organised a series of demonstrations by local residents against Roma presence in the town. Roma were repeatedly prevented from entering the town or forcefully driven out and Roma children were prevented from attending school.

On May 31, 2000, following the resolution of Nea Kios, the neighbouring Municipality of Nea Tirynta issued a similar resolution banning Roma presence and requiring all Roma to leave the region by August 30, 2000.

The legal basis for both resolutions was a rarely used 1983 Ministerial decision on "Sanitary Administrative Regulation"¹ according to which the presence of Roma could be considered as a "health hazard", precluding the setting up of any settlements close to aqueducts, wells and irrigation points, which of course abound in the countryside. The regulation also stipulates that any Roma settlements should be set up at a "good distance" from the nearest dwellings.

Both Municipal Council resolutions sparked off a series of violent incidents in the region of Nea Kios. On June 9, 2000, in Nea Kios, a shack owned by Roma was burned to the ground during the night by unknown perpetrators. On June 15, a seventeen-year-old Romani youth was shot and wounded by two non-Romani youth in Nea Kios. The two unknown attackers lay in wait for the Romani youth, verbally abused him, and shot him with a

¹ Joint Ministerial Decision by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Health and Welfare "Sanitary Provision for the organized relocation of wandering nomads," (A5/696/25.4-11.5.83 - Government Gazette B'24319/83): Article 3.1.: "The lands for the organised encampments of wandering nomads (Gypsies, etc.) which are to be designated, in accordance with Article 2 of the present decision, must be outside the inhabited areas and in good distance from the approved urban plan or the last consecutive houses." Article 3.3.: "The encampment is prohibited near archaeological sites, beaches, landscapes of natural beauty, points visible from main highways or **areas which could affect the public health** (springs supplying drinking water, etc.)."

revolver in the arm. The police arrested the victim and his mother and charged both with perjury.

During the week of June 12-16, the Ombudsman issued a report on the events in Nea Kios describing the resolution and actions of the Municipal Councils as illegal. On June 16, 2000, Justice Minister M. Stathopoulos asked the public prosecutor of Nafplion, capital of the Prefecture of Argolis, to initiate an urgent official inquiry. On June 30, 15 advocates and politicians submitted a signed complaint to the public prosecutor's office asking for criminal charges to be filed against Municipal officials according to the anti-racist Law 927/1979.

Two years later, as our fieldwork ended in early November 2002, the situation had not improved considerably. There was no longer any physical violence or angry municipal resolutions, but the conditions of life for the Roma and their relationship to public and local authorities, as well as mainstream local society, had not changed. Roma are still treated with suspicion and denied² access to basic social provisions, such as proper housing, education and decent employment, while local and public authorities still fail to see "any good cause" for improving the situation.

B. Reasons for choosing "Nea Kios" as a bad practice example

Our main guide in proposing the project were the EUMC guidelines stating that the case study should focus on:

- **where one can learn from the analysis and end up with deeper understanding;**
Our analysis will provide an important insight into the discrimination practices by Local Authorities against Roma. No such study has ever been carried out in Greece. Furthermore, the methodology used helps in achieving a deeper understanding of the motives and attitudes of those involved.
- **where the situation in the Member State can be characterized;**
Direct discrimination against the Roma is a frequent practice by Local Authorities. The situation is aggravated by the lack of specific legal provisions, but it is hoped that with the transposition of the Race and Equality in Employment Directives during 2003 the situation will improve. The attempts by the central government to initiate policies and projects to improve the conditions of life for the Roma have been met with suspicion by Local Authorities that have proved reluctant to implement such policies and projects. Resistance to the central government's policies and actions towards integration and against deprivation, social exclusion, illegality and racism is characteristic of the actions and attitudes of most Local Authorities in Greece.

² This denial does not necessarily take a direct form, as indirect discrimination proves even more effective.

- **where strengths and weaknesses can be demonstrated in dealing with ethnic discrimination – violence and in preventing it in its particular cultural – political – social – economic contexts;**

The case of Nea Kios is characteristic of the inability or unwillingness of local authorities to deal with issues of co-existence, discrimination and exclusion, racial tension and conflict by either preventing or resolving them. It is also typical of the situation that may develop, if these issues are ignored rather than tackled with.

- **where the main actors/players can be identified, the obstacles they face and the assistance they get, and by whom;**

In this case the involvement of the local society and neighbouring communities is well documented. The key actors are easily identifiable through their active involvement in the events: the elected officials of Nea Kios including the Mayor and the Roma; government representatives, public authorities, the Greek Ombudsman, activists and NGOs.

- **where recommendations can be given on what the actors could do better in fighting racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, on a national, regional or European level**

The case of Nea Kios is particularly useful as a “bad practice” example showing the serious social consequences of a policy based on intolerance. In this sense it can provide policy makers with an important insight into the problems that the Roma face, but also the potential tensions and conflicts that are the consequence of both an absence of a concrete integration policy and intolerant attitudes. Moreover, it can assist in pointing out the right initiatives and policies public authorities should adopt in order to overcome racial tension and conflicts and restructure social relationships so that they correspond to the democratic principles of equal participation and harmonious coexistence of different social groups.

2. Theoretical and methodological framework

A. Theoretical issues

The collected research material has been elaborated through a number of working concepts and terms used to analyse and interpret the various discourses, behaviours and practices. The following brief discussion of these terms and concepts provides the reader with the theoretical framework used in the context of this case study.

Social exclusion

The term exclusion has two meanings:

- The act of physically expelling a person or group from a place where he formerly belonged;
- The act of depriving a person or group of certain rights by denying access to them.

In both cases the victim of exclusion is "cast out" or "refused acceptance". The term refers to persons or groups who are excluded from areas of social life (employment, education, various institutions, etc.) due to specific social attitudes and values; therefore focusing only on the practices and discourses of those who are excluded, instead of the conflicts and mechanism that lead to their exclusion, would seriously limit the usefulness of the analysis.³

In studies adopting either or both an individual and a structural perspective the concept of "blaming the victim" has played an important role in justifying the local's community practice. According to W. Ryan "blaming the victim" is an ideological process that justifies inequality by finding defects in the victims of inequality that may serve to "naturalise" the appearance of social inequalities. However, the logical outcome of interpreting social problems in terms of the deficiencies of the victim leads to a simplistic formula for action: "change the victim"⁴; furthermore, "blaming the victim"⁵ means that individuals may stereotype an out-group as being responsible for their own misery or misfortune. For instance, according to Ashmore & McConahay (in Jones, 1977), the belief that the poor are lazy and incompetent is used to legitimise differences in economic well-being and to help the in-group justify their resistance to public policies that are designed to alter the socio-economic status quo.

Discriminatory practices are based on ascribing certain, inherent, usually negative features to a group. Quasthoff defines "convictions" as the ascription of qualities to others and often providing rationalisations for negative attitudes and "prejudices" as mental states defined as negative attitudes towards social groups with matching stereotypic convictions or beliefs.⁶

³ Kovács, P (1999) "Social exclusion in the education system. How can the schools in disadvantaged areas of Hungary can provide better chances for their students in the age of globalization.", available at <http://lgi.osi.hu/ethnic/relations/1/kaposvar.html> (15/11/2002)

⁴ Rosado, C., (1998) 'The Undergirding Factor is POWER. Toward an Understanding of Prejudice and Racism', <http://curry.edschool.Virginia.edu/centers/multicultural/papers.html>

⁵ Monette, M., (ed.), (1995) "Stereotyping Monograph", Issue 3, available at www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/publications/monogra/mono3_e.htm (05/11/2002)

⁶ Wodac, R. and Reisingl, M., (1999), 'Discourse and Racism', Vienna: RAXEN Workshop on Racism, 5-6/11-01, p.7

Social prejudices simplify communication within one's group, strengthen the sense of belonging, and delineate the "out-group".⁷ Social functions of prejudice do not only serve to establish and reinforce "in-group" solidarity, but also to mark distance toward out-group. Moreover, Van Dijk designates the categories used to rationalize prejudice against minority groups as the "seven D's of discrimination": Dominance, Differentiation, Distance, Diffusion, Diversion, Depersonalisation or Destruction and Daily discrimination. These serve in various ways to legitimise and enact distinction of the "other" i.e. by dominating the minority groups and by excluding them from social activities.⁸ The group in power employs collective symbols to stigmatise, marginalize, and exclude minority groups.

Stereotypes

"... stereotyping is a problem because it means that individuals are treated as group members who possess a given set of traits rather than as individuals to be judged on their own merits."⁹

Stereotypes are a set of exaggerated and inaccurate generalizations about a group or category of people that is favourable or unfavourable, often emotionally toned and not susceptible of modification through empirical evidence. These generalizations are maintained because they are a shared belief receiving strong support from one's reference groups functioning as "...social scripts in our heads about others and the roles we believe they should play in our socially constructed world."¹⁰ And since "stereotypes often take the form of personality attributions, the tendency of the casual mind is to pick out a sample, which supports its prejudices, and then make it representative of an entire class. But overgeneralizations are a problem because few group members may actually possess the set of traits generally attributed to the group, even when they can be accurately applied to the group."¹¹

Prejudice

Ignorance and fear often lead to prejudicial attitudes. Prevailing norms of separation and segregation that prevent people of different racial, ethnic, cultural origin from interacting with each other in a meaningful and positive way, thus perpetuating ignorance, which in turn gives rise to attitudes of prejudice. Fear goes much deeper than ignorance affecting issues of privilege and power. The danger of prejudice lies in the refusal to change one's attitude even after evidence to the contrary, so that "... one will continue to post-judge people the same way one pre-judged them. This is the due to the fear of losing the power of privilege. In prejudice people are basically defending privilege of position and thus stand to gain

⁷ *ibid*, p.7

⁸ *ibid*, p.8

⁹ Walter G.S. and Rosenfield, D., (1995) "Racial and Ethnic Stereotypes" in Miller, Arthur G. (ed.), *In the Eye of the Beholder: Contemporary Issues In Stereotyping*, New York: Praeger Publishers, p. 116, it is quoted in Monette, M., (ed.)

¹⁰ Rosado, C., (1998) 'The Undergirding Factor is POWER. Toward an Understanding of Prejudice and Racism', available at <http://curry.edschool.Virginia.edu/centers/multicultural/papers.html> (22/11/2002)

¹¹ Monette, M., (ed.), (1995) "Stereotyping Monograph", Issue 3, available at www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/publications/monogra/mono3_e.htm (05/11/2002)

emotionally, culturally, socially and economically from an attitude of prejudice towards others.¹²

Discrimination

Discrimination is the unequal treatment of individuals or groups on the basis of some, usually categorical, attribute, such as race, ethnicity, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, or social class membership. It is based on prejudice, which is an attitude that becomes discrimination, when it results in an action. In this sense “prejudice is an attitudinal bias, while discrimination is a behavioural bias.”¹³

Racism

Racism as “the deliberate structuring of privilege by means of an objective, differential and unequal treatment of people, for the purpose of social advantage over scarce resources, resulting in an ideology of supremacy which justifies power of position by placing a negative meaning on perceived or actual biological/cultural differences” is a socially constructed reality. Both prejudice and racism are rational, cultural and structural phenomena to defend power. However, racism “...goes beyond prejudice and structures this power advantage politically, economically, culturally and religiously within a social system, which gives social advantage to some at the expense of others perceived to be inferior and undeserving.”¹⁴

Thus, “racist beliefs reinforce the social hierarchy because they portray racial-status differences as being legitimately based on inherent differences in group members’ ability and potential”¹⁵ and in this way reduce social mobility and further restrict the life chances of the disadvantaged social groups.

Therefore apart from its ideological function “...racism is more than just a meaning system, a reinterpretation of reality; it is also a material system, economically and politically structured, from which this meaning system emerges. In cases that people or social groups use their political or institutional position of power to reinforce their prejudices and to enforce them constraining the rights and opportunities of other social groups, then this is racism. While all people can be prejudiced, only those who have power are really racist.”¹⁶

Discrimination on racist grounds is not carried out only by individuals or groups, but may also be effected through and by social institutions. Institutional racism can be defined as the conscious manipulation of the structures of society's institutions so as to systematically discriminate against certain social groups by their pre-structured practices, policies and power arrangements. Because most people carry out their lives within institutions, control of

¹² Rosado, C., (1998) “The Undergirding Factor is POWER. Toward an Understanding of Prejudice and Racism”, available at <http://curry.edschool.Virginia.edu/centers/multicultural/papers.html> (22/11/2002)

¹³ Rosado, C., (1998) “The Undergirding Factor is POWER. Toward an Understanding of Prejudice and Racism”, available at <http://curry.edschool.Virginia.edu/centers/multicultural/papers.html> (22/11/2002)

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Levin, S ‘Chapter 3: Social Psychological Evidence on Race and Racism’, Claremont McKenna College, available at http://www.stanford.edu/~hakuta/racial_dynamics/Chapter3.pdf (28/11/2002)

¹⁶ Rosado, C., (1998) “The Undergirding Factor is POWER. Toward an Understanding of Prejudice and Racism”, available at <http://curry.edschool.Virginia.edu/centers/multicultural/papers.html> (22/11/2002)

institutions affects people's life choices. Yet, "people don't always know what choices they have until they know what options are available"¹⁷ and when these options are limited or non-existent, then life chances are particularly affected.

However, as Essed argues, it is wrong to distinguish clearly between institutional and individual racism, because such a dichotomist distinction places the individual outside the institutional; However, "structures of racism do not exist external to agents - they are made by agents – but specific practices are by definition racist only when activate existing structural racial inequality in the system." For that reason, Essed integrates both macro- and micro-sociological dimensions in her theoretical framework through the term of "everyday racism" which can be defined as the integration of racism into everyday situations through practices that activate underlying power relations.¹⁸

According to Miles institutional racism is racism under circumstances marked by exclusionary practices that developed from a racist discourse that, usually due to legitimation problems, has either become silent or that has been replaced with a new discourse.¹⁹

The privileges that prejudice rationally defends are products of racism. Racism, however, is more than just prejudice and discrimination combined. Racism is a socially constructed reality at the heart of society's structures. It is the deliberate structuring of privilege by means of an objective, differential and unequal treatment of people, for the purpose of social advantage over scarce resources, resulting in an ideology of supremacy which justifies power of position by placing a negative meaning on perceived or actual biological/cultural differences. Racism and prejudice should therefore not be considered as "psychological abnormalities." Both are rational, cultural and structural phenomena to defend power. Racism goes beyond prejudice (an attitude) to structure this power advantage politically, economically, culturally and religiously within a social system, whether it be simple (as in personal bias) or complex (as in the role apartheid played in South Africa), which gives social advantage to some at the expense of others perceived to be inferior and undeserving.²⁰

Deviance

In order to understand the political debate constructing definitions and arguments on crime and deviance it is necessary to articulate different theories since they can illuminate practices undertaken both by individuals and structural agents.

Labelling theory²¹ focuses on the study of deviant behaviour as a process rather than its causes. Society defines specific behavioural patterns as deviant: for example "a person's manner of speaking or dress or origin could be the key factors that determine whether or not the deviant label is applied".²² Another example that is very helpful for our analysis and the

¹⁷ Ibid

¹⁸ ¹⁸ Wodac, R. and Reisingl, M., (1999), 'Discourse and Racism', Vienna: RAXEN Workshop on Racism, 5-6/11-01, p.3

¹⁹ ibid, p.3

²⁰ Ibid p. 6

²¹ Becker, H. S., (1963), 'Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance' N.Y.: free Press see Giddens, A. (2001), 'Sociology' 4th ed, Cambridge: Polity, Chapter 8.

²² Giddens, A., (2001), 'Sociology' 4th ed, Cambridge: Polity p.210

ways that individuals and groups assign different meanings to an act is when children wander into the neighbours' gardens stealing fruit or playing truant from school. In more affluent neighbourhood, these may be regarded by parents, teachers and police as innocent pastimes of childhood, while in poor ones; they might be seen as evidence of tendencies towards juvenile delinquency.²³

However, in our attempt to understand those processes that lead to the definition of acts as "deviant"²⁴, it is important also to take note of inequalities and differences in power between different social groups. Conflict theories, relying on analyses of the social structure and the reproduction of political, social and economic power among the ruling class, provide an interpretation for the labelling of certain behavioural patterns rather than others. In this context, "members of counter-cultural groups regarded as 'deviant'- as members or supporters of a particular movement- engage in distinctly political acts which challenged the social order."²⁵

The definitions of crime and deviance are directly linked to the formulation and implementation of policies to counteract them. As Giddens points out, "...if crime is seen as the product of deprivation or social disorganisation, policies might be aimed at reducing poverty and strengthening social services. If criminality is seen as voluntaristic or freely chosen by individuals, attempts to counter it will take a different form."²⁶ Moreover, state policies are often the result of media reports encouraging "moral panic"²⁷, which may serve to deflect attention from structural problems within society such as rising unemployment.²⁸

B. Structure and Methodology of the case study

General comments

This is the second case study undertaken by The Greek National Focal Point. The EUMC guidelines were followed as far as practicable; however, the total lack of any academic studies or project reports specifically on the issue of racism and xenophobia has led us to follow a similar approach to our first case study at great cost in terms of resources in primary research. However, we feel that such studies are significant and should be carried out regardless of the cost involved.

Our investigation is not exhaustive or academically rigorous as this would necessitate even more resources and considerably more time for data collection through the application of participant observation methodology and for analysing life-histories in more detail. In this sense our empirical findings have led to a descriptive, explanatory and qualitative study.

²³ Ibid, p.201

²⁴ Ibid, p.202

²⁵ Ibid, p.212

²⁶ Ibid, p. 215

²⁷ For instance "mugging" during the 1970s in the UK; analysed by Hall, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson,T., Clarke, J. and Roberts, B., (1978), 'Policing the Crisis' London: Macmillan

²⁸ See also Giddens, A., (2001), p.212

Our intention was to analyse the specific situation that emerged in May 2000 in certain Municipalities of the Prefecture of Argolis and understand how institutional, formal and informal, practices and discriminatory attitudes may lead to intense social conflict.

Qualitative research methods are well situated to study such phenomena especially since there are no reliable demographic or other statistical data on Greek Roma. Interviewers took into account ethical and practical issues without exposing anyone involved in the research to risk. The situation is still very sensitive and it is difficult even to contact certain individuals as it could be interpreted as “intervention in local affairs”. Therefore, it proved to be excessively difficult to get information on the Roma’s daily life during and after the events without further jeopardising the relationship between them and local as well as public authorities.

The empirical study took place from August until November 2002 in the Argolis area. During several visits we conducted semi-structured interviews with all key players, except those that refused to cooperate²⁹, and informal discussions with several individuals and their families. Interviewers used tape recorders in most cases. In our interviews with certain public authorities³⁰ we were asked not to use tape recorders and notes were taken.

In addition all relevant policy documents, official reports and press material were examined. Mayors of the four municipalities involved, the authorities of the Argolis Prefecture and the Peloponnese Region were contacted by fax and telephone to request interviews and/or specific information and data. We received on 25 November only one reply from the Office of the General Secretary of the Peloponnese Region with very limited data mostly available from their website also.

Furthermore, apart from the Argolis Police Directorate, Prefectural Office for Primary Education, Prefectural Department of the Ministry of the Health and Welfare, representatives of the local Roma organisation, we also interviewed officials from the Roma Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Greek Ombudsman and the Municipal Network Rom. We also visited the local “preparation” school for Roma children and interviewed their teacher. Finally, we visited Roma camps in Glykeia, Nea Tyrintha and the houses of Roma families in Nea Kios where we had the opportunity to interview Roma people and local activists. They all welcomed our visit and willingly participated in the interviews.

We chose to make all local contacts through our local associates, an activist and a journalist working for a local newspaper covering the issue on a regular basis. These two women have functioned as “gatekeepers”, and offered us great assistance in contacting all key stakeholders and locations. Our choice to use the two locals ensured the participation of all key players, some of whom were particularly difficult to approach.

Finally, it is important to note that the officials who were interviewed have a dual identity/role, which emerged during the interviews: That of the official and that of the local resident. During the interviews it was interesting to note how these two identities/roles

²⁹ These were all the Municipalities involved.

³⁰ The Nafplion Police Directorate and the Prefectural Office for Primary education.

interacted presenting us with an important insight into aspects of institutional racism at the local level.

Methods and processes

The study relies on the following empirical material:

- semi-structured individual and group interviews of key players;
- local and national press reports;
- Public authorities' reports;
- NGO reports;
- Policy documents;
- Projects, programmes, initiatives and action plans by public bodies;
- Conferences, workshops and meetings by public bodies and NGOs;
- Accumulated data and information from previous NFP reports.

Individual interviews ranged from approximately 1-2 hours and group interviews from 1,5-2 hours. Approximately, twenty individuals participated in both individual and group interviews.

The questions focused on:

- the events in May and June 2000
- attitudes of and towards public authorities and services
- attitudes of and towards Roma
- analysing of the current situation in this area
- thoughts and ideas on the aim, philosophy, problems and local impact of the situation in the four municipalities
- finding out the political will and the possible ways to lead to incorporation of the Roma in this region

Group interviews:

- Members of Roma families, both women and men in their home;
- Roma women and children at the camp of Nea Tyrintha;
- Director and Deputy Director of Primary Education in Argolis and their assistant specialised on Roma pupils;
- Social workers and supervisors of the Argolis department of the Ministry of the Health and Welfare;
- Representative of local Roma organisation and representative of local political party;
- Local journalist and activist, publisher and journalist of a local newspaper.

Individual interviews:

- Assistant Ombudsman, author of the Ombudsman Report of the events in Kea Kios;
- Local activist;
- Teacher of the local Roma "preparation school";

- Representative of the Argolis Police Directorate;
- Representative of the Municipal Network Rom;
- Representative from the Roma Office of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

C. PROBLEMS

While the Roma are generally considered to be among the poorest and most marginalized social groups in Europe, information on their living conditions and the characteristics of their poverty is scarce and fragmented. Research and measurement problems include under-sampling in censuses and other surveys, the reluctance of many Roma to be identified as such and the diversity of Roma groups. This lack of reliable data and information is especially true for Greece, as we have repeatedly stated in our reports.

Therefore our main problem was the lack of both statistical data or background information and previous research as outlined above. Another problem was the achievement of the necessary level of trust from our subjects, especially Roma, in order to interview them. This was made possible primarily with the help of a devoted local activist, Ms Vasso Christopoulou who introduced us to all the key actors and facilitated in several ways our communication with them.

Local authorities were asked to participate in our research both informally and formally by faxes to which we never received any reply. We therefore had to rely on secondary data and information³¹ concerning the local authorities' positions, attitudes and reactions.

³¹ Media interviews and reports, accounts of third parties.

3. The social context: Roma in Greek society

A. The socioeconomic position of Roma in Greece

Historical evidence suggests that Roma have been living in Greece at least since the Middle Ages. According to various authors³² the Roma do not constitute a homogeneous social group since they belong to quite separate communities, “tribes” and “clans” with distinct cultural and linguistic characteristics. In terms of religion there are two main groups Christian and Muslim. The Muslim Roma lived until recently mostly in Thrace, but during the past 20 years many have moved to the urban centres of Athens and Thessalonica in search of employment. A common feature of all Greek Roma is that they have Greek citizenship and to a greater or lesser speak Greek and also Romani as their mother tongue, while about 20,000 living in Thrace have Turkish as their mother tongue. New arrivals from neighbouring Balkan countries do not speak Greek, but manage to communicate with other Roma using the Romani language.

There is no official definition of the Roma: For the purposes of this study we may define Roma as *“members of a social group sharing certain common ethnic – linguistic – cultural characteristics that may differ according to their tribe or clan”*.

The last Greek Census that contained linguistic data in 1951 recorded 7,500 Muslims speaking Romani in the Thrace area³³. However, several studies³⁴ show that the number of Roma was always far higher than that. Existing research on selected samples in certain municipalities indicates that their number may be anything from 150,000³⁵ – 300,000³⁶ loosely organised in “tribes” that are distinguished by features not always identifiable by the non-Roma. There are about 200 Romani ‘communities’ that are found all over Greece³⁷ with greater concentration in the Northern Greece, in Attica and in the Peloponnese.

During the 2002 National Round Table Mr. Freddy Stamos representing the Prime Minister’s Office for the Quality of Life³⁸ stated that the numbers of the Roma are now officially estimated by the Interior Ministry at around 80.000, an estimate which is in stark contrast to the much larger figure given in the “Integrated Action Plan for the Greek Roma” mentioned above. The demographic situation becomes even more complicated in view of the entry into the country of Roma from neighbouring Balkan countries especially after the Bosnian and Kosovo wars.

³² Exarchos, G. (2001), “Social exclusion of the Roma”, in the Centre of Social Morphology and Social Policy, “Social Exclusion: the Greek Case”, Athens: Gutenberg, pp.193-220 and Pavli, M. and Sideri, A. (1990), “The Roma of Agia Varvara and Kato Achaia”, Athens: Ministry of Education, General Secretariat on Popular Education.

³³ K. Tsitselikis (1996), “The international and European protection status for the linguistic rights of minorities and the Greek legal order”, Sakoulas Editions, p. 291

³⁴ Vaxevanoglou, A. (2001), “Greek Gypsies: Marginalised and family men”, Athens: Editions Alexandria, p. 17

³⁵ Komis, K. (1998): “Gypsies: History, Demography, Culture”, Athens: Editions Ellinika Grammata

³⁶ EETAA (2001): “Integrated Action Plan for the Greek Roma”, Athens: EETAA, p.45

³⁷ Doussas, D. (1997), “Rom and race discrimination”, Athens: Gutenberg

³⁸ Freddy Stamos, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister on Roma issues, unpublished paper presented during the two-day Conference On Integration of the Two Directives in Greek legislation, 2nd and 3rd December 2002, Athens, Greece.

Until 1955 the Roma were stateless. Since then, gradually until 1978³⁹, according to the provisions of the Citizenship Code⁴⁰ they were all granted Greek citizenship, but many still do not register with either the police in order to acquire an identity card or with a municipality in order to receive social benefits⁴¹. Growing deprivation, though, is leading an increasing number to register in order to claim financial and other social benefits. This frequently leads to friction and conflict with municipalities that try to prevent Roma from registering as residents. The Ombudsman has recorded a number of such cases.⁴²

In general, the Greek Roma constitute a marginalized social group suffering from varying degrees of discrimination in Greek society⁴³. However, many studies deny⁴⁴ the existence of one “Roma community” with a unified set of social characteristics.⁴⁵ A number of recent reports⁴⁶ point to significant differences between Roma groups as far as social stratification, life chances and social expectations are concerned: “In the municipality of Agia Varvara, Roma live since 1923 and their living and working conditions are satisfactory and similar to the conditions of the rest of population of the area. On the other hand, in the municipality of Ano Liosia, Roma live in a shabby settlement. Each Roma group faces particular problems: the more integrated groups face discrimination by public authorities and suffer the consequences of the intolerant attitudes of the rest of the population, while the largest population of Roma also faces crucial subsistence problems.”⁴⁷ A common feature of this second group is their relative social exclusion⁴⁸ from essential public social services, such as education, vocational training, social welfare and health care and from other social activities and their marginal position in Greek society. The problems created by social exclusion have led many such groups to develop and rely on extensive informal aid and self-assistance networks that have further alienated them from mainstream society.⁴⁹

Until recently only “clan” and “tribal” leaders -usually the wealthiest individuals- publicly represented the Roma. The only form of collective organisation existed in the Agia Varvara municipality: the “Gypsy Association of Agia Varvara” established in 1939 and frequently claiming to represent all Roma in Greece and abroad. During the last ten years, the

³⁹ Those born before the introduction of Law 3370/1955 were also granted Greek citizenship status by Law 481/1968 and General Orders of the Citizenship Department of the Interior Ministry 69468/212/20-10-1978 & 16701/51/12-03-1979.

⁴⁰ Law 3370/1955

⁴¹ ROM Network, (2000) “Panhellenic Census Study investigating the social, housing conditions and needs of Greek Roma Citizens”, unpublished, available on written request from the ROM Network <http://www.romanet.gr>

⁴² Greek Ombudsman (Annual Report 2001), available at <http://www.synigoros.gr/annual01/ST/195-207.pdf> (01/03/2002)

⁴³ National Commission for Human Rights, Annual Report 2001, p. 183

⁴⁴ Georgiou G., Terzopoulou M. (1996) “Gypsies in Greece: History – Culture”, Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs – General Secretariat of Popular Education, Athens

⁴⁵ Greek NFP, (2002), “Analytical Study: Education” RAXEN, EUMC

⁴⁶ Karathanassi E. (2000) “Roma life: The bio- and socio-space of Roma”, Gutenberg, Athens and National Committee for Human Rights, (2001) ‘Annual Report’

⁴⁷ National Committee for Human Rights, (2001) ‘Annual Report’

⁴⁸ Although formally entitled to such services, members of these groups will in many cases not use them either because they are (self) intimidated by poor language skills or because of ill-treatment by officials or because they see no real benefit.

⁴⁹ Greek NFP, (2002), “Analytical Study: Employment” RAXEN, EUMC

Roma have gradually started to organise themselves in associations⁵⁰, although the influence of clan and tribal leaders is still strong in most areas.

“In 1998, the Pan-Hellenic Federation of Greek Roma Associations (POSER) was established, uniting 22 Associations, among them also Turkish speaking Muslim Roma Associations. In the mid-1990s, the Municipal Rom Network was established as an effort by local authorities to approach the Roma and acknowledging their problems to propose, in co-operation with them, policies that would contribute to finding concrete solutions. Currently the Municipal Rom Network numbers 61 members out of a total of some 100-110 Municipalities with Roma within their boundaries. It has a consultative role to the Prime Minister, has contributed to drawing the Integrated Action Plan and monitors its implementation.”⁵¹

The attitudes of the Greek population towards the Roma have not yet been recorded in any academic studies or even surveys, but Roma organisations as well as NGOs regularly report on various incidents of discrimination and racist violence. However, and despite the fact that discrimination and racial prejudice against the Roma has always been widespread in Greek society, no attempt has been made either by schools or the media to raise awareness and educate the Greek population concerning the culture, characteristics and problems of the Roma people who have come to constitute the most marginalised and socially excluded social group.⁵²

One of the major problems Roma face is related to their civic status. As most reports indicate⁵³ many Roma lack municipal residency status. This causes a variety of problems that drives them into illegality. According to the findings of the Pan-Hellenic Census study⁵⁴, 10% have not obtained an identification card or any other such document, 25% have not been registered to vote and 50% are not registered in any municipality⁵⁵. Municipal civic status is, however, an essential legal requirement for a number of welfare benefits and for the exercise of fundamental democratic rights, such as voting.

B. Settlement and housing infrastructure

Roma housing conditions are considered by both official and NGO reports⁵⁶ to be very poor particularly for the nomadic Roma who have no access to regular sanitary facilities, water or electricity. Most camp settlements have no organised refuse collection and are usually situated near landfills or heavily polluting industrial sites.

The absence of reliable demographic data do not allow us to have a clear picture of the number of nomadic Roma, however the Municipal ROM network suggested that they

⁵⁰ *ibid*, p. 32

⁵¹ Greek NFP, (2002), “Final Report”, RAXEN, EUMC

⁵² *Ibid*

⁵³ National Commission for Human Rights Report, Annual Report 2001 and Samaliki, A., (2002), ‘ Problems of urban and municipal situation of the Greek Roma through the Ombudsman’ experience’, presentation in the 2nd Pan-Hellenic Conference ‘Social Exclusion and Social Integration of Greek Roma’, Rhodes, 21-23 June 2002

⁵⁴ ROM Network, (2000) “Panhellenic Census Study investigating the social, housing conditions and needs of Greek Roma Citizens”, unpublished, available on written request from the ROM Network <http://www.romanet.gr>

⁵⁵ National Commission for Human Rights Report, Annual Report 2001, p. 193

⁵⁶ EETAA (2001): “Integrated Action Plan for the Greek Roma”, Athens: EETAA, p.57, and also several reports from the Greek Helsinki Monitor available at <http://www.greekhelsinki.gr/special-issues-roma.html> (12/09/2002)

probably constitute about 20% - 30% of the total population. It is also difficult to define the nomadic Roma, as many tend to transform camp sites to semi-permanent or permanent settlements sometimes purchasing land. Local authorities are often in conflict with groups of Roma that set up unregulated camps on public land and there are several recorded cases where they have forcibly evicted them⁵⁷. Due to the fact that Roma do not have any other option for settlement, they establish themselves in public or private grounds or outside the city limits. Particularly for the tent-dwelling Roma, this has as consequence to “live under the constant fear of eviction since they usually occupy land belonging to the state or private individuals. Despite case law to the effect that no eviction of Roma dwellers can take place if a suitable place for relocation has not been found, a number of municipalities have proceeded to evict Roma.”⁵⁸

Roma wishing to rent houses are often discriminated against even in areas where they are well established for decades; they are either refused or offered substandard accommodation at high prices in impoverished neighbourhoods.⁵⁹ Roma wishing to purchase housing find it very difficult to secure any mortgage or loan, because of the nature of their employment. As part of the “Integrated Action Plan for the Greek Roma” the Interior Ministry has allocated funds for special housing loans, but the unwillingness on the part of many local authorities to register Roma makes the claiming of these loans difficult.

Two main studies provide some data on the housing of Roma in Greece:

A. The “Pan-Hellenic Census Study Investigating Social Habitation Conditions and Needs of Greek Roma Citizens”⁶⁰, which took place in 2001 recording around 700 households (and thus not a “census” study per se), gives us a multi-faceted picture of the destitute living conditions for the majority of Greek Roma: 57.5% live in bad quality houses, 38% live mostly in shacks and tents, while the remaining 4.5% live in prefabricated homes, old vehicles and hovels. 5.2% of houses have no kitchen, 19.9% of houses lack a bathroom, while 6.5% doesn’t even have a toilet. Concerning shacks, the corresponding figures are 52.7% (no kitchen), 89.8% (no bathroom) and 74% (no toilet). Only 55% of all houses are connected legally to the Public Power Company (DEH), about 35% use electricity generators, and 10% use oil lamps for lighting. The problem of water supply is equally widespread. Again, only half of all homes (56%) are directly connected to water supply networks. 14% borrow water from neighbours or use a common water supply and 30% haul water over a distance. The sanitation network covers only 30% of all homes and 37% have no telephone.

⁵⁷ See for the example of the Municipality of Alikarnassou in the National Committee for Human Rights, (2001) ‘Annual Report’

⁵⁸ Statement on the Situation of the Roma in Greece by the International Romani Union Secretary General Christo Kyuchukov, 20 December 2001, available at http://www.errc.org/rr_nr1_2002/noteb5.shtml (23/05/2002)

⁵⁹ Fragouli-Papantoniou, M. and Dourida, V., (2001), ‘Migrants and Ethnic Minorities on the Margins’, Athens: Re-Integration Centre for Migrant Workers, Ecumenical Refugee Project

⁶⁰ ROM Network, (2000) “Panhellenic Census Study investigating the social, housing conditions and needs of Greek Roma Citizens”, unpublished, available on written request from the ROM Network <http://www.romanet.gr>

B. "Study of a Draft Program for Addressing the Immediate Housing Problems of the Greek Roma", which was carried out in 1999 by the Research Department of the Public Corporation of Urban Planning, Housing and Shelter (DEPOS)⁶¹. According to the DEPOS report, Roma live in four types of settlements; permanent located camps, permanent mixed settlements, "Roma-neighbourhoods" and seasonal and /or removable ones.⁶² Most of the camps are considered to be improper for habitation since they lack even basic infrastructure.

C. Roma Education⁶³

According to the "Pan-Hellenic Census Study Investigating Social Habitation Conditions and Needs of Greek Roma Citizens", around 60% of the Roma have never attended school, and 24% has not completed even primary education. It is not only the older age group who are organically or functionally illiterate⁶⁴, but also the younger age group, who drop out of school because they are unable to follow classes, because of language among other reasons, without any support.

Official data concerning Roma enrolment are not reliable: Roma pupils are not recorded systematically and it is argued that many enrol only in order to collect the €300 incentive benefit and do not attend classes. There are no official statistical data on attendance and dropout rates available, but the Education Ministry has repeatedly stated that after the implementation of the programme "Roma Children Education" project, the dropout rate was reduced from 75% to 24%⁶⁵.

The available official statistical data indicate that during the school year 1999 – 2000 8,500 Roma pupils were registered in primary schools, 1,500 in lower secondary and 250 in higher secondary⁶⁶ schools. It is obvious that the dropout rate is extremely high by any standards.

Roma educational attainment is at very low levels: According to the final report of the 2nd Community Support Framework Project "Roma Children Education"⁶⁷ and other studies⁶⁸ approximately 60%-80% of the Roma (18-50 years old) are illiterate (they have never attended school), while around 20% are functionally illiterate (UNESCO standards). The Roma find often that schoolmasters under pressure from local parents will -illegally- refuse to enrol their children. On the other hand studies also suggest that many Roma will avoid sending their children to school either because they fear the loss of their Roma identity or because they see no value in education.⁶⁹

⁶¹ Unpublished mimeographed report made available from the Municipal ROM Network by request at www.rom.gr (12/11/2002)

⁶² Fragouli-Papantoniou, M. and Dourida, V., (2001), p.29

⁶³ The material of this section is based on the "Analytical Study of Education" Greek NFP, RAXEN, EUMC, 2002

⁶⁴ According to the UNESCO definitions

⁶⁵ Stamelos G., (ed), (2002) "The Greek Educational System", Centre for Educational Research, Ministry of National Education and Religious Affairs, Athens, p. 238

⁶⁶ RAXEN2 Database No. 3A0010

⁶⁷ As yet unpublished, but kindly released to us by Professor A. Gotovos, scientific co-ordinator of the project

⁶⁸ Tsiokos G., Vergidis D., Nikolakopoulos I., (1998) "National study on illiteracy", National Book Centre – Book Observatory, Athens

⁶⁹ *ibid*, p. 144

A recent national survey⁷⁰ on the educational level of male leaders of Roma families (average age 40), shows that: 35% has never attended school, 27% attended erratically primary school up to the 4th grade, 26% are primary school graduates and only 2% have completed compulsory education (lower secondary), while another 2% has graduated from higher secondary education.

Until two years ago a significant number of Roma children could not enrol at all due to the lack of necessary documents and proof of vaccination. Since 2000 the establishment of the "Roma Student Card" by the Education Ministry⁷¹ enabled Roma pupils to enrol without further formalities. However, even today after they manage to enrol, often against opposition from other parents – and on occasion teachers and local authorities –, they are faced with insurmountable difficulties, as they mostly speak only Romani and are thus largely incapable of communicating either with other children or teachers. Furthermore their socialisation and family life patterns are not compatible with the dominant norms and values of the primary school: discipline, obedience to authority and individual achievement. Public school teachers have had little, if any, training in dealing with the problems of Roma children and find it difficult to understand or empathise with the Roma culture. Unofficial teacher reports also indicate that Roma children are often met with hostility by other children and some teachers. A 1997 study has indicated that incidents of racist behaviour against Roma children by other children, parents and teachers have increased as more Roma children enrolled and started to attend school.⁷²

In a further effort to provide incentives to families with a declared income of less than €3,000 annually (mainly Roma families) the Education Ministry established an annual benefit of €300 for every child enrolled (but not necessarily attending) in primary education.

Still, most Roma children find themselves in a hostile environment as they constitute a cultural minority with different mother tongue, customs and norms. There have been several media reports of parents complaining that the co-existence of their children with Roma children will affect negatively educational attainment due to the cultural differences and the low educational level of Roma children which slows down the progress of the entire class.

Researchers⁷³ have attributed poor attendance and academic performance also, partly, to the Roma perception of the value of education: Although in surveys all Roma find that educating their children is desirable, it seems that they do not consider that education has anything to offer to the Roma in terms of improved life chances, since even well qualified Roma will not be able to find suitable employment due to the prejudice of employers. Moreover, some Roma consider that daily school attendance may even be harmful in that it

⁷⁰ RAXEN2 Database No. 3A0013

⁷¹ As proposed by the "Roma Children Education" project report.

⁷² Dussas D., (1997) "Rom and racial discrimination", Gutenberg, Athens

⁷³ Chryssakis M., (1989) "Family investment practices by the poor and non poor and educational inequalities", *Revue of Sociological Research*, Vol. 75, p. 89 – 120

deprives children from spending time with their family and socialises them into different values and norms.⁷⁴

Many Roma parents seem to expect from the education provided by the school to be complementary to the education they provide to their children, which, they believe, is the main one; the education which socialises them and provides the necessary knowledge and skill for their future life. So, since their needs and expectations regarding formal education are limited, and since children learn from their parents how to calculate and have dealings, the thing parents expect from the school is simply to teach their children reading and possibly writing.

Most importantly the Roma have had no “tangible proof” that formal educational qualifications can be translated into improved life chances, better employment, improvement in the quality of life and their social status. In a “cost – benefit analysis” practically all Roma find that education has a very high cost and provides few and questionable benefits⁷⁵.

Poverty, social exclusion and lack of educational qualifications create a vicious circle: deprived and socially excluded Roma find it very difficult to attend school, while the lack of formal educational qualifications does not allow them to improve their social status and life chances⁷⁶.

D. Roma Employment⁷⁷

Roma are usually employed as unskilled and unregistered workers in agriculture and trade experiencing insecurity and discrimination despite the fact that they are considered to be Greek nationals⁷⁸: “The chances of finding employment within an increasingly competitive labour market are virtually nonexistent. If one adds to the above the prevailing stereotypes concerning the indolence of the Roma, it will be only the “bravest” employer who will ever think of employing a Roma. In the public sector, the possession of a junior high graduation certificate (compulsory education) is the legal precondition for employment, thus excluding practically all the adult Roma.⁷⁹

There is no available statistical data concerning Roma employment. According to estimates of the ROMANET⁸⁰ network most Roma are self-employed small traders and among the few who have managed to settle in certain areas, particularly the area of Agia Varvara in Athens some have established flourishing businesses, but most are wandering traders. The more affluent with some capital to finance their operations will trade in household

⁷⁴ Vasilidou, M, Pavli – Kore, M, 1996, “KON JANEL BUT, BUT C’RDEL” AMA ÉM “KON C’RDEL BUT, BUT JANEL”, (in Greek), Athens, Ministry of Education / General Secretariat on Popular Education

⁷⁵ Kogidou D.,Tressou – Mylona E., Tsiakalos G., (1993) “Social exclusion and education – the case of linguistic minorities in western Thessalonica

⁷⁶ Kogidou D.,Tressou – Mylona E., Tsiakalos G., (1993) “Social exclusion and education – the case of linguistic minorities in western Thessalonica”, Poverty Editions -3, Thessalonica

⁷⁷ This subsection is based on the “Analytical Study of Employment” Greek NFP, RAXEN, EUMC, 2002

⁷⁸ Exarchos, G. (1998), Social Exclusion of Roma, in Kassimati, K. (ed) “Social Exclusion: The Greek Experience”, Athens: Gutenberg

⁷⁹ Statement on the Situation of the Roma in Greece by the International Romani Union Secretary General Christo Kyuchukov, 20 December 2001, available at http://www.erc.org/rr_nr1_2002/noteb5.shtml (23/05/2002)

⁸⁰ The Municipal Network for the Roma in Greece. More information available on www.romanet.gr mostly in Greek (23/02/2002)

goods like plastic kitchenware and plastic furniture. The rest will traditionally sell agricultural products in local markets as street vendors.

The Roma wandering traders find it increasingly difficult to compete with the low prices offered by the supermarkets and most choose to operate without the (expensive) license that often results to problems with the police. Since street vendor licenses are issued by the local authorities Roma are disadvantaged as most local authorities refuse to grant them.

A small number of Roma are specialist craftsmen in traditional arts or music; they have relatively stable employment, but their numbers are dwindling, as there is no interest by the young to follow a long and difficult period of apprenticeship. A very small number of Roma has managed to study and find employment as professionals. However, they have rejected their cultural and ethnic characteristics in order to blend into mainstream society and avoid discrimination and harassment⁸¹. Although it is very difficult to estimate Roma unemployment the Social Welfare service of the Ministry of Health and Welfare has reported that the number of Roma who register for benefits is rising rapidly indicating possibly that unemployment is driving poverty levels higher.

The rising unemployment and poverty among the Roma has significant negative effects and is an important factor of the rising criminality among them. Many young Roma are attracted by the “easy money” that can be made through the drug trade and some of their settlements are already well known as drug trafficking and trading areas with all the negative consequences for the Roma social image and their relations with the local population. Racist stereotypes, a deeply rooted mistrust and cultural misunderstanding often lead to conflicts that frequently characterise the Roma’s relationship to public authorities and especially the police.

Employment in the public sector is formally open to Roma and members of Muslim minority in Thrace as Greek citizens. However, although there is no data available concerning the number of minority groups employed in the public sector, it is highly unlikely that any are actually employed. Due to the lack of positive discrimination actions concerning the specific vulnerable groups in the public sector, there is no data concerning their rate of participation in them⁸².

The Roma population seems to suffer most from the existing inequalities and the racist attitudes prevailing against them in the labour market. Marginalised and neglected it is not accidental that so many young Roma are attracted by criminal activities with little prospects than long-term unemployment.

E. Roma Health

The “Pan-Hellenic Census Study Investigating Social Habitation Conditions and Needs of Greek Roma Citizens” noting the lack of reliable data, states that around 45% of the

⁸¹ Lydaki A., (2000), “Balame and Roma: the Gypsies of Ano Liosion”, Athens: Kastaniotis, p. 153

⁸² Data and research are absent on the issue with an observation regarding Pomak employment in this sector in Thrace in Labrianidis, L (1998) The effects of supervised zones on the local economies in Saki Karagiorga Foundation, Social Inequalities and Social Exclusion, Conference Proceedings, Athens, p. 562

Roma suffer from chronic health problems, such as hepatitis⁸³, 70% has serious dental problems and in general the life expectancy of the Roma is low ranging for men between 64-65 years while for women 66-67 years with a corresponding high rate of infant mortality⁸⁴.

According to the Doctors of the World, Roma have a limited use of public health services due to practical obstacles and not because of their cultural attitude towards it.⁸⁵ The 77 per cent of Roma population are not covered by social security, so Roma as Greek citizen can benefit from the 'uninsured health booklet' that provide them with free access to public health services. However, even they are eligible, they have difficulty to obtain it while their treatment in public hospitals is characterized by discrimination.

F. Violation of Roma human rights

Historically the Roma have been described in Greek folklore as a dangerous, possibly criminal element in Greek society and generations of children have been treated with admonitions such as, "The Gypsy will take you away if you don't behave". Largely marginalised and excluded from full participation in society Roma have for a long time been the outcasts of Greek society. Negative stereotypes and prejudice have led to the establishment of discriminatory patterns by both individuals and public authorities that consciously or unconsciously are accepted as "natural" by society.

Violations of Roma human and civil rights are frequent⁸⁶. There are several well documented cases of violent "sweep" operations of special police forces on Roma camps. Local authorities have also been known to attempt forceful unlawful evictions of Roma from campsites. Although there is no official statistical evidence concerning Roma criminality⁸⁷, in most cases criminality, particularly for Roma living in camps, is related to petty theft, like stealing electricity and water from the main supply lines or driving without a driving licence. More recently, Roma, have become more involved in small scale drug dealing and the police have used this as an excuse for large scale raids into settlements. The lack of education, the rise of Roma unemployment due on the one hand to their replacement with cheaper Albanians and other migrants in their traditional employment as seasonal agricultural workers and on the other in the decline of their activities as street vendors due to the competition by supermarkets are some of the factors leading Roma youth to crime.

The police have frequently been accused by NGOs for targeting Roma and reports by independent public bodies (the Ombudsman and the National Commission for Human Rights)

⁸³ See National Committee for Human Rights, (2001) 'Annual Report' for results of the research of the Doctors of the World

⁸⁴ Article in Newspaper Eleftherotypia 28-2-96 cited by Fragouli-Papantoniou, M. and Dourida, V., (2001), p.53

⁸⁵ *ibid*, p.54

⁸⁶ There are several well documented cases in the RAXEN Racial Violence database and the NFP's Analytical Study on Racial Violence.

⁸⁷ The police keep records of Roma criminality, but they are not publicly available. Therefore, our request for data from the Police Headquarters in Athens was rejected since "Roma criminality is not recorded separately, as they are Greek citizens". However, after a similar request to the police authorities of Argolis we were sent a fax with all major crime statistics for the years 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002 concerning specifically the Roma population.

corroborate this view. There have been several violent incidents, including three homicides, where the police has been charged with using unnecessarily excessive force⁸⁸.

G. The situation of Roma in the Prefecture of Argolis

The administrative area of the Prefecture of Argolis is situated in the Region of Peloponnese. It covers an area of 2.154 km² with a total recorded population of 97.636; its capital is Nafplion a few km away from Nea Kios.

It is an affluent area deriving most of its wealth from agriculture (orange and olive orchards) and tourism from both the coastal area and the nearby important archaeological sites (Mycenae, Epidaurus, etc). Roma settlements have existed in the area since anyone can remember, but not necessarily inhabited by the same families, as Roma tend to move to different locations in search for better employment prospects. Since the 1990s many migrants from Albania, the CEEs and the NIS have also established themselves in the area competing with the Roma as seasonal labour in agriculture.



FACT SHEET⁸⁹:

Argos, Midea, Nafplion, Nea Kios and Nea Tiryntha are the five municipalities of the Argolis Prefecture that have Roma settlements or Roma in permanent dwellings as part of their recorded populations. According to a census implemented by the Prefecture of Argolis on December 19 2001, 102 families live in the municipalities of Midea, Nea Kios and Nea

⁸⁸ These are the cases of A. Muratis (1996), A. Cellal (1998) and M. Christopoulos (2001). More information available at www.greekhelsinki.gr (21/11/2002)

⁸⁹ The information presented has been collected by us in the course of our fieldwork, while data were also made available to us upon written request by the Region of Peloponnese.

Tirynta, while for the other two municipalities no Roma are recorded⁹⁰ Specifically the census yielded the following results:

- 26 families live in the area of Agia Triada of the Municipality of Midea
- 39 families live in the area of Glykeias of the Municipality of Nea Tirynta
- 32 families live in the area of Karakaxa of the Municipality of Nea Kios
- 17 families live in the area of Panitsas of the Municipality of Nea Kios

According to the DEPOS⁹¹ report, a large number of Roma (estimated at about 8% average for Greece) do not register in the Municipal rolls. This situation is similar in the municipalities of Nea Tirynta where only 4 families out of 39 and Nea Kios, particularly in the area of Karakaxa, where only 10 families out of the 32 have registered.

According to information provided by our field study the Peloponnese Region and reports by the Greek Helsinki Monitor, the Minority Rights Group⁹² and other NGOs the social conditions in the areas with Roma settlements are the following:

Karakaxa, Nea Kios: Approximately 30 families live on land they own. Nevertheless, only a handful has built and lives in houses, the remainder living in shacks. Those living in houses have electricity, water and telephone installed, but no sewage system. Garbage collection is not regular. 30 children attended school in 2001-02, but only 6 finished the school year (those living in houses, demonstrating that there is an intrinsic connection between living conditions and school attendance/performance). Several incidents of direct and indirect discrimination and harassment, especially by the police, were also reported (it appears that the police stops Roma drivers more frequently, while taxi drivers frequently refuse to carry Roma passengers). It is reported that “special” (segregated) rooms are designated for Roma in the local hospital. In our visit we did not see such rooms and hospital authorities denied their existence, however, the Roma we spoke reported discriminatory and segregationist practices in hospitals.

Agia Triada, Midea: About 17 families live in olive orchards, since the early 70s, in small shacks. Only 5 families own the land on which they live, the rest are squatters on privately owned land. There are only 4 taps providing running water, of dubious quality as it was reported (this problem, however, affects the neighbouring village as well). There is no electricity, telephone, sewage system and garbage collection is erratic. Approximately 15 children attended school throughout the year and parents reported that teachers do try to help

⁹⁰ This information is based on official data sent to us after written request to the Region of Peloponnese. We have no knowledge how the registration was carried out. However, local sources informed us that the numbers are totally inaccurate. Therefore, the actual number of Roma living in these Municipalities remains unknown. The local Roma representatives suggested to us that their number must be “around 5,000”.

⁹¹ Unpublished mimeographed report made available from the Municipal ROM Network by request at www.rom.gr (12/11/2002)

⁹² GHM/MRG-G joint field visits to Roma communities in Greece, carried out in August 2001 by monitors Theodore Alexandridis and Apostolos Stragalinos, in the framework of the regular GHM monitoring in cooperation with the European Roma Rights Center and of the MRG-G’s partnership in Minority Rights Group International (MRGI)’s RomaSEE (Roma in South East Europe) Project. Reports available in both Greek and English at www.greekhelsinki.gr (21/11/2002)

them overcome the difficulties they face. Relations with the police were a major cause of concern in the past, with frequent road checks and incidents of ill-treatment occurring frequently. Lately however, such incidents have been largely eliminated probably due to the attitude of a newly appointed police chief in the area.

Glikia, Nea Tiryntha: Together with Aspropyrgos near Athens, the settlement of Glikia constitutes the most destitute we visited during our field visits. 30 families live on publicly owned land, next to a heavily toxic polluting olive oil refinery in a field that also serves as an illegal dumping ground. They have lived there for more than 40 years, but still they have no electricity, telephone, sewage system or garbage collection. There are only 3 taps providing water which is of bad quality (the whole region of Argos seems to suffer from the same problem). Relations with the municipal authorities are reportedly tense, although they have not been threatened with eviction and on occasion the municipality collects their garbage and clears the site of rubble they have received no real support. Surprisingly 20 children attended school continuously last year and parents reported that cooperation with the teachers is excellent. We spoke to the teacher, a Roma rights activist and very eager to help and support Roma children, but facing a variety of problems with the local education authorities. Relations with both the municipal and the regular police are reported as bad: frequent road checks and verbal abuse are frequent. It was also reported to us that the local hospital has a specially designated recovery room for Roma mothers, after they have given birth.



Roma children playing next to heavily polluted pools of water in their camp



Roma camp in Glikia. In the background the polluting olive oil refinery

H. Past projects and future plans for the Roma

During the past ten years the Ministry of Labour and Social Security has financed through European Initiatives like ADAPT, INTEGRA, YOUTHSTART, etc a number of projects aiming at improving the education and training of the Roma. However, the general evaluation of the effectiveness of these projects is clearly negative: According to the official EETAA⁹³ report: “these projects can only be evaluated empirically, since there is a total absence both of reliable and scientific appraisals of the quantitative and qualitative data concerning these projects and of official statistics concerning the Roma population.”⁹⁴ Furthermore, the evaluation report⁹⁵ of the Community Initiative “Employment 1996-2000” notes that neither HORIZON, NOW nor YOUTHSTART targeted the Roma and in INTEGRA the Roma had very low rates of participation. NGOs and Roma organisations have also criticised these projects as ineffective as they were not part of a comprehensive strategy, but rather isolated examples of good practices whose effect has been minimal. The Municipal ROM Network and DROM organisations have proposed the establishment of a monitoring centre for the Roma population that would be able to record their activities and provide the necessary reliable data for the planning of effective employment and social support strategies but it has not realised yet.

According to the Labour Ministry’s final report⁹⁶ on the “Operational Project against Social Exclusion from the Labour Market 1997-2001” 35 projects for short term vocational training of Roma were implemented. The total budget was 3,939,152 Euro for 531 participants, 297 men and 234 women. The cost - benefit per participant is excessively high.

The National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2001-2003⁹⁷ outlines the ambitious “Integrated Action Plan for the Greek Roma” aiming to improve significantly the social situation of the Roma population: **The Integrated Action Plan for the Roma**⁹⁸ includes measures and practices to be implemented by various national actors including local authorities, prefectures, NGOs and others for the improvement of the social situation of the Greek Roma population. It is a seven-year (2001-2008) plan to be financed primarily from the 3rd Community Support Framework and also from national funds to a total 35 MEURO. Actions are aimed at the creation of infrastructure (housing and Roma support centres) and the provision of services (training, employment, adult education, etc). Approximately 20% of the above sum is earmarked for training and employment measures. The project is the result

⁹³ Hellenic Agency for Local Development and Local Government (public body supporting local authorities). More information available at <http://www.eetaa.gr> (18/09/2002)

⁹⁴ EETAA (2001): “Integrated Action Plan for the Greek Roma”, Athens: EETAA, p. 23

⁹⁵ “[Evaluation of Community Initiative Employment in Greece](http://www.europeanevaluation.org/pdf/2-3_Ioannou.pdf)”, compiled by Dr G. Amitsis and Dr. N. Ioannou of REMACO available at http://www.europeanevaluation.org/pdf/2-3_Ioannou.pdf (10/07/2002)

⁹⁶ Ministry of Labour and Social Security (2002), “Operational Project against Social Exclusion from the Labour Market: Process of implementation of the Project towards Roma and Pomaks as target groups that belong to the social groups with cultural and religion specificities during the period of 1997-2001”, Athens, available only upon written request from the Ministry.

⁹⁷ Ministry of Labour and Social Security, “National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2001-2003”, available at http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/news/2001/jun/napincl2001el_en.pdf (21/06/2002)

⁹⁸ EETAA (2001): “Integrated Action Plan for the Greek Roma”, Athens: EETAA

of a consultation process between the government, local authorities, the Municipal ROM network and the Federation of Greek Roma Associations. The measures for services in employment include interventions for pre-training, training and access to employment, counselling and supporting services and education for the Roma. However, since the implementation of most of its actions depends on local authorities, it is doubtful if any will actually be carried out.

Most of the plan's actions are focused on providing housing and building sanitary facilities. Since 1999 the state has provided a number of Roma groups with 2,500 pre-fabricated houses in settlements around Greece. Meanwhile, a recent Ministerial Decision 18830/09-05-02 defined the terms for granting 3,500 housing loans to Greek Roma, 80% of the loans' interest being subsidised by the state. However, a major problem that remains to be solved is the legal definition of the Roma population, which given the lack of demographic and other statistical data will prove to be a daunting task that may seriously delay or even endanger this project. In this context the competent agency EETAA has already tendered in 2002 a demographic study to be conducted in 2003.

During 2002 the Municipal Rom Network implemented an information, training and awareness campaign⁹⁹ addressed to local communities. Meetings have been held in co-operation with the Greek Committee for co-operation with UNICEF, and the Greek Social Workers' Association, under the title "**Travelogue for Combating Social Exclusion and for the Social Integration of the Greek Roma**". The three meetings held up to this moment have been attended by over 400 people, while another three meetings are pending in 2002 and 2003. These meetings are intended to mobilise local opinion makers, train local officials and raise public awareness on issues that concern the Greek Roma. The contribution of the Roma to local community development is given particular emphasis.

"Anti-racist Charter for Local Authorities": In view of the October 2002 municipal elections the "Citizens' Movement against Racism" drew up in May 2002 this charter and urged candidates to incorporate it into their election programmes and campaigns. A large number of candidates signed the charter.

The project "**Roma Children Education**" was launched in 1997 under the auspices of the Ministry's Special Secretariat of Intercultural Education. This project funded by the 2nd Community Support Framework aimed at the reform of the education provided to the Roma (excluding Roma children living in Thrace and enjoying official Muslim minority status. The main goals of the project have been to:

1. Study and understand the conditions of existence of the Greek Roma and the causes for their massive educational underachievement;
2. Develop the appropriate curricula, syllabi and educational material as well as mechanisms for the integration of the Roma children to the educational system;
3. Implement the educational curricula to selected schools;
4. Develop innovative strategies for the enrolment of nomad Roma children to schools.

⁹⁹ There is no published information available. For more details please contact the NFP (ind@acn.gr)

The project was implemented by the Department of Education, Faculty of Philosophy, Psychology and Education of the University of Ioannina by an interdisciplinary team of experts under the direction of professor A. Gotovos and was generally considered successful in producing highly regarded textbooks and other educational material.

However, the actual implementation of the Roma education programme in schools was met in most cases with resistance by local authorities and parents who insisted on segregation, which would undermine the main objectives and the philosophy of the project. Therefore the implementation is still limited to a very small number of schools. Nevertheless the programme succeeded in establishing the "Roma Pupil Identity Card", an official document that allows nomadic Roma to enrol and follow classes in any school of the area in which they temporarily reside for any amount of time. This provides them with the desired flexibility to continue their way of life and receive the benefit of state education. In practice this card also allows permanently settled Roma to avoid various bureaucratic formalities when enrolling their children. According to the Education Ministry the project was instrumental in raising Roma enrolment in the educational system at primary school level from 25% to 75%. Critics point out though, that enrolment by itself does not prove that students will actually attend classes and there is some evidence to suggest that the actual participation of Roma children in the Greek educational system is still too low and more efforts must be made by the state especially in employment and housing to improve the situation. Furthermore, the Ministry does not collect or release any information concerning the attendance or the educational attainment of Roma students. The impact of this project has not yet been publicly evaluated, although it continues into its second phase funded by the 3rd Community Support Framework.¹⁰⁰

The EQUAL Initiative has approved a number of projects targeting Roma¹⁰¹ in all strands relate to vulnerable social groups (migrants and refugees, religious minorities, repatriated ethnic Greeks). However, few Roma organisations are even aware of the EQUAL initiative, due mainly to the inadequate and inappropriate methods for disseminating information. Since the EQUAL projects only started in the autumn of 2002 no further information is as yet available.

¹⁰⁰ More information available at <http://www.uoi.gr/services/epeak/metro11/ergo0664.htm> (15/06/2002)

¹⁰¹ Information on the approved EQUAL Projects in Greek only available at <http://www.labor-ministry.gr/ekt/equal/index.htm> (22/04/2002)

4. Events in Nea Kios; key actors and consequences

A. Chronicle synopsis of the events.¹⁰²

17 May 2000: A dispute between the Mayor of Nea Kios and a Roma concerning the parking of his vehicle results in a violent episode with Roma being chased out of the city.

19 May 2000: An open town meeting is held in Nea Kios with the participation of Mayors and Councillors from neighbouring municipalities with Roma populations, representatives of the Argolis Prefecture, the Police, the Public Electricity Company and the Local Association of Cities and Communes.

20 May 2000: The Nea Kios Municipal Council issues a formal decision to evict Roma residents and a series of measures and prohibitions against the Roma.

22 May 2000: An open meeting of the City Council is held and residents of Nea Kios; form vigilante groups armed with torches and batons to patrol the city streets.

24 May 2000: The Prefect briefs the Mayors of the Municipalities.

25 May 2000: The police raids Roma camps after allegations for illegal weapons.

26 May 2000: The party “Coalition of the Left and Progress” issues a statement condemning the events.

28 May 2000: The Prefect holds a Press Conference.

29 May 2000: The Communist Party of Greece issues a statement condemning the events. 16 Roma are prosecuted for stealing electricity from the main supply lines. The Office of the National Ombudsman¹⁰³ issues a strongly worded report asking the General Prosecutor to file criminal charges against the municipal authorities according to anti-racist law 987/1979.

30 May 2000: Parliamentary questions are tabled by the Argolis Members of Parliament from both the “New Democracy” and “Coalition of the Left and Progress” parties. Two activists, one Roma artist and one local teacher form a “Committee for the Support of Roma” with other local residents. Nea Kios vigilante groups physically attack Roma and members of “Committee for the Support of Roma” who attempt to enter Nea Kios. Unofficial meeting of the two activists with the Mayor of Nea Kios.

31 May 2000: Meeting of the “Committee for the Support of Roma” is held with the Argolis Prefect. The Mayor of Nea Kios and the newly formed “Committee for the confrontation of problems caused by Roma” hold a press conference. The City Council of Nea Tyrintha issues a resolution to evict all Roma from public and private lands.

1 June 2000: The Ombudsman sends a strongly worded letter to the Nea Kios City Council.

2 June 2000: Officials from the Prime Minister’s Office visit Roma camps and hold meetings with the Prefect and the Mayors presenting three proposals for the solution of the problem.

¹⁰² The events are described in detail in the national press. Our interviews and the Ombudsman’s report confirmed the media reports.

¹⁰³ Office of the Ombudsman; Report (Prot. No. 8267/29-5-2000) on “The participation of the municipality of Nea Kios in the provocation of racial conflict against Roma”, available at www.synigoros.gr (11/03/2002)

3 June 2000: Open air concert is held in Nea Kios for collecting funds to buy back land from the Roma. During the event victims of “Roma criminals” are asked to sign a petition to the Ombudsman.

5 June 2000: One member of the Nea Kios Municipal Council resigns after vigilante groups assault a citizen that spoke in favour of the Roma in a previous meeting with the Prefect. The Secretary General of the Ministry of Public Order visits Nea Kios and forms a committee to examine possible solutions for the problem composed of representatives of all level of local authorities, members of parliament, representatives of political parties, Roma representatives, and specialists on Roma affairs from public institutions such as the Service of Urban Planning, the Office of the Prime Minister, the Public Health Service and the Municipal Network-Rom. The committee works on a 60 day deadline with no apparent result.

8 June 2000: NGO and political parties’ representatives and journalists visit Nea Kios to meet with the Roma, the Mayor and members of the City Council. They are physically assaulted by vigilante groups outside the City Hall.

9 June 2000: A Roma shack in the Karakatsa settlement, home to a Gypsy couple with a young child, is torched and burned down during the night. The perpetrators have not been found. The Ministry of Internal Affairs tries to intervene between the Municipality and the Roma in order to find a solution. Several meetings with the Secretary General of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Prefect, the Mayor of Nea Kios and representative of the Municipal Network Rom lead to no satisfactory solution.

15 June 2000: An 18-year-old Gypsy is shot and wounded in the arm by unknown perpetrators. When the victim and his mother, who claim that the assailants were residents of Nea Kios, lodge a formal complaint at the police station they are arrested and charged with perjury.

21 June 2000: The Secretary of the ruling Socialist Party, PASOK, issues a statement condemning the events.

30 October 2000: The Special Committee set up to investigate the situation and propose solutions is dissolved unable to agree on a sustainable solution to the conflict.

9 December 2001: Roma from Argos and Nea Kios set up an Association.

10 January 2002: The newly formed Roma Association sends letters of protest to the local authorities and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

18 January 2002: The Roma Association holds a protest meeting outside the Argolis Prefecture.

B. Brief analysis of the events and the discourse of the main actors

After a seemingly minor incident it is surprising to note the rapid escalation of events and the intolerance shown by all those involved. The Municipal Council of Nea Kios took swiftly a series of extreme measures that increased the tension between the communities and turned local residents into vigilantes. Roma were prohibited from entering the town while groups of locals were guarded the main roads so that only two Roma at a time could enter the town centre to shop. Electricity and water was cut off in the Roma settlements. The Roma

claimed¹⁰⁴ “that those who dared a foray into the main square risked being beaten and having their vehicles smashed by angry mobs.” Additionally Roma children¹⁰⁵ were told that they were no longer “welcome” in the local schools. Any locals who decided to sell land to the Roma and shopkeepers who continued to serve them were also seen as responsible for this situation.

The Municipal Council justified its actions by referring to the alleged rising criminality of the local Roma. They suggested that their actions did not target the Roma as such, but rather the state and public authorities that tolerated the crimes committed by Roma against local residents of Nea Kios. The Council’s argumentation, expressed in the public debates during May and June of 2000 is revealing:

- The residents of Nea Kios feel insecure, as a result of Roma criminality;
- The increasing number of Roma in the area changes its social “character”;
- The local community has failed to assimilate the Roma;
- The Roma are an important obstacle to the tourist development of the area.

The aims of the actions undertaken from the Mayor, the city Council and the local community (vigilante groups) were the following:

- To prevent more Roma from settling in the area;
- To defend themselves against “Roma criminals”;
- To “undo” sales of land to the Roma by either forcing them to sell the land back;
- To make state and public authorities “apply the law on equal basis for all citizens”;
- To increase police control of the Roma.

The population of Nea Kios¹⁰⁶ in contrast to the rest of the Argolis are descendants of 1922 refugees from Asia Minor. In the past they had been discriminated against in a variety of ways, for instance they were given swamp land to settle which they managed to transform into arable land after enduring great hardships. Their cultural difference has led them in the past, but also even today to feel and occasionally act “superior” to the rest of the population in the area. In discussions with residents of the nearby city of Nafplion we were often told of the “different mentality” of the Nea Kios residents.

"We welcomed them into our town, but they have taken advantage of our hospitality. They (Roma) are now causing trouble. They are building illegally; they are trespassing on land, stealing electricity and committing thefts. There is also a drug trafficking problem and there are Roma who block roads, stopping cars and robbing and beating up the drivers. We are not racists. We just want to put an end to all these problems." (President of Nea Kios' Municipal Council in an interview for Athens News 13/6/2000).

¹⁰⁴ Athens News, 1/6/00

¹⁰⁵ 142 Roma children Athens News, 21/6/00

¹⁰⁶ More information on Nea Kios (with no mention of these events) can be found at <http://www.neakios.gr> (02/09/2002). It is interesting to note on the website the great importance attached to the “refugee descent” which

"We cannot say that there is a high crime rate among the Roma community. Most violations include driving unregistered vehicles, petty theft and trespassing on fields." (Police Director in an interview for Athens News 13/6/2000).

"We want to live with them as long as they abide by the rules we live by... We have to take a stance and fight for the people who voted for us...It's not as if the fly of racism suddenly stung a whole community..." (President of Nea Kios' Municipal Council in an interview for Athens News, 1/6/00).

The statements of the Mayor, the President of the Municipal Council and other members of the Council, rejecting outright any argument to the opposite, emphasise dyadic and incompetent realities such as theory against practice, the relative comfort of living rooms against the prevailing insecurity of farmers in the fields, people from Athens against locals. For the Nea Kios residents what "others" may define as racism is simply the expression of a desire to retain control over their community and mark clearly the boundaries between them and the others (Roma, migrants, etc) in terms of rights and privileges. The Roma (or any other out-group) are thus seen as "guests" who must abide by the host's terms and agree to the conditions of life offered. In this sense any attempt by the Roma to improve their situation legally or illegally is met with suspicion, hostility and aggression precisely because it seeks to transform the essentially domination – subordination "host-guest" relationship into a relationship between equal parties.

Today, even though the physical violence is not evident, stereotypes and prejudices continue to prevail. Moreover, the local authorities are not willing to take any initiative in order to resolve the conflict. The Municipality of Nea Kios is still reluctant to register Roma as it was reported by the press and Roma organisations.¹⁰⁷

Public authorities failed in either averting the situation or reducing friction and conflict. Officials preferred not to confront the local authorities and in many cases, as we discovered, still share the same prejudices and stereotypes. We were particularly impressed by open and frank statements of the police representative as well as the Director of Primary education revealing prejudice and lack of knowledge for the culture and conditions of life of Roma people living only a few miles away, such as:

"Housing policy cannot be effective. Look at Roma women they have lots of jewellery, but prefer sleeping on the ground."

"In Nea Kios the Roma living conditions are good, in some cases, they live better than our people."

"Roma families don't really want their children to attend school. They only enrol to get the benefit and they never come again."

"Roma students are dirty and smell. Other children don't want to be friends with them."

"The Roma do not like discipline. They used to cause a lot of trouble in local communities. If you stop a Roma, you are bound to find something illegal. After the

¹⁰⁷ Local Newspaper "Ta Nea tis Argolidas", editorial on 14-6-02.

intensification of police controls, a number of Roma left the area... they are nomads you know.”

“Roma children are free to attend any school they want, but the Roma are reluctant to integrate in society, the local people do not have any problem with them. There is no racism in the schools of Argolis.”

“We have no statistical data as there is no official record of Roma pupils, only an unofficial one.”¹⁰⁸

“There is no need for special schools for the Roma since they are so dispersed. At any rate the Roma do not want to attend school, they prefer to be married and work from an early age.”

The representative of the police, a resident of Nea Kios himself, saw the police as a “force of balance protecting the Roma, even though some have complained for its actions”. He stated that the crime rate of Roma is only slightly above the rest of local population and denied that Roma are to be blamed for more criminal activities than the rest of the population. He did mention, though, that “Roma seem to find it harder to comply with basic rules, like having properly registered, taxed and insured cars”.

Social workers at the Health and Social Welfare Department of the Argolis Prefecture pointed out that the Roma living conditions are very bad and working with the Roma is very difficult due precisely to these conditions. Since 1996 they have been reporting these conditions and problems to the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, but had no response. They argued that the most acute problem of the Roma is housing for which the state should find a solution. At the same time the social services themselves are grossly understaffed and poorly equipped (they are not provided with vehicles to visit Roma settlements that are frequently far away from local bus lines and are forced to use taxis which they pay themselves).



The teacher of the only Roma “preparatory school”, where 15-20 Roma children attend classes daily (which is in itself a small wonder) told us that the only reason the school functions is because he himself asked for transfer to that school. He has managed to gain the trust of the local Roma and has persuaded their children to come to school

daily. The ages of students are mixed: we saw 14 and 15 year-olds sitting (and learning) with 7-8 year olds seemingly without any problem. However the conditions of school are very bad:

¹⁰⁸ It should be noted that in our in depth interview with the Director of Education of Argolis (Prefecture of Argolis, Peloponnese) he revealed that “unofficial data” concerning the number of Roma students in primary schools was sent to the Education Ministry, but since Roma are not recorded as a separate category in the official school Student Register (Mathitologio), such data cannot be made publicly available. However, the Education Ministry has released such data to the Press on occasion in reply to criticism concerning the educational provisions for the Roma; the reliability of such data cannot be evaluated, since sources or collection methods are not publicized. The data is available since May 2002 in the publication of KEE: Centre for Educational Research (2002), “The Greek Educational System”, Ministry of Education, Athens

there is not central heating, no toilet facilities, no proper teaching materials and more teachers are required.



The school is scheduled to close after this school year; the formal reason is because it is situated next to a prison, although another educational institution, a vocational training centre operates there also. Furthermore, this school is very close to the Roma settlement, a fact that permits young children to walk to school easily.



Most of the Roma themselves had little to say to us. Their conditions of life are best described by our photographic record, a small sample of which is presented in this case study. It was difficult for them to understand the concept of a case study and they were mostly interested in finding out if we can help them in their dealings with public authorities and complained bitterly about their conditions of life.

The president of the local Roma association, however, spoke to us at length about the problems they face. Most seem to stem from their employment in precarious, badly paid and insecure jobs. Largely uneducated and lacking any vocational training these are the only jobs available to them. This situation coupled with long periods of unemployment and large families lead Roma into deprivation. He denied the allegations of Roma criminality suggesting that on the contrary they are so frequently the target of police controls that it would be more difficult for them to break the law. He did, however, concede that Roma have committed infringements of state and municipal regulations, such as building small houses without the necessary permits or connecting to the electricity or water main supply. He suggested that the reason for this lies mainly in the reluctance of the authorities to grant them the necessary licences or their high cost. Concerning the relationship between the Roma and the Nea Kios municipality he was very sceptical as to the future suggesting that the Municipality is not interested in communicating or coming to terms with the Roma. As an example of this attitude

he cited the reluctance of the municipality to register the applications of Roma for house loans under the government's new scheme¹⁰⁹.



Another "playground" available to the Roma children next to their settlement. Refuse collection is not carried out by the municipality.

¹⁰⁹ A month later the Peloponnese Region informed us that the Municipality did register a number of loans.

5. Conclusions

Although vigilante groups no longer patrol the streets of Nea Kios, and Roma children have been readmitted to local schools, the tension produced by the events in the summer of 2000 lingers on and local authorities, despite their evident failure to “deal forcefully with the Roma problem”, still refuse to compromise, accept the existence of Roma within their communities and assist them in improving their situation. Not surprisingly the mayor of Nea Kios has been comfortably re-elected at the October 2002 municipal elections securing more votes even than in 1998¹¹⁰. This is particularly worrying in view of the fact that his declared position concerning the Roma has not changed since 2000. Thus, the local Roma are forced to live in a community that not only rejects them, but is openly hostile to them.

The role of the local authorities in creating a social environment where minorities can integrate into mainstream society, while retaining their cultural or linguistic traditions is crucial. Therefore, the situation in Nea Kios and the Argolis prefecture generally is not only negative because of the racial tension it creates, but mostly because, it presents a dangerous model for other communities with similar problems of racial tension.

The diverging life models, social values and behavioural patterns of the Roma and mainstream society continue to breed mistrust and suspicion. Furthermore, the continuing deprivation of many Roma in Greece that often goes beyond the threshold of what is considered to be the absolute standard of poverty constitutes a serious threat to the sustainability of the local societies triggering long-term effects of discontent, racial tension and alienation. The Roma's impoverishment is complex and multidimensional, related to a broad range of factors, including poor health and educational status, limited chances in the labour market, as well as discrimination and unique aspects of the social organization of Roma society, which together contribute to their exclusion. Under these precarious conditions, the traditional negative Roma stereotypes gain additional strength. The economic, educational and value-normative distances between the Roma and “mainstream society” become larger, while the prospects for social inclusion of the Roma decline.

We cannot claim that we have fully analysed the terrible events during the summer of 2000. This would necessitate a full scale study, rather than a limited case study, utilising an interdisciplinary approach to understand both the social interaction as well as the group dynamics at work. Nevertheless, we believe that we have compiled all relevant information concerning the events and illuminated the most visible part of the complex web of causes underlying the actions of the municipal authorities and the surprisingly supportive reactions of the local mainstream society.

¹¹⁰ Roma voters are largely conspicuously absent: most either have either not yet been able to register or are still registered at other municipalities and can therefore not vote in Nea Kios.