

WHEN SCARS BECOME ART

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR INCLUSION AND MENTAL WELL-BEING
OF YOUNG ROMA, MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

– *Hellas* –



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**Mental Health of marginalised youth:
a critical discussion over Policy Recommendations**

Critical Discussion:

A distinction crucial for the critical discussion and the Recommendations should be made: according to the Constitution of the Hellenic Republic the Roma are Citizens and not an ethnic, linguistic or religious minority. Hence the Hellenic Roma should enjoy and practice all obligations and rights as defined by the Constitution and the Laws of the state.

In reality many Roma still live under unacceptable conditions in settlements with no infrastructure (electricity, fresh running water or sewage system) in geographical isolation from the urban or rural network of the region they reside. There are Roma communities that exist in the borders of the cities or in the outskirts of villages that have infrastructure yet they live in poor condition. It's not a rare condition to find small "favela like" neighborhoods in the communities and the Roma population suffers from poverty, social or/and institutional antigypsyism.

On the other hand, youth of migrant and refugee origins have different status: i.e. population that has residence/working permit, population that lives under asylum protection and population living in hotspots and camps.

According to the findings of the national research that was held for the purposes of the "*When Scars (!) Become Art*" project we feel the need to underlying the necessity of an intersectional approach in policy making.

Mental Health is seriously deteriorated when people are living under conditions of poverty and exclusion while according to the conclusions of the above mentioned



research is being enhanced when inclusive policies and measures are being implemented.



Housing, physical health, education, access to services and work are interlinked and influence the mental health status of the marginalised populations, youth even more so.

It is highly evident that when people live in geographical isolation, without proper housing conditions and infrastructure their general health will be negatively affected. Moreover for many of them the geographical distance and the difficulty or absence of mass transportation creates a tangible obstacle into accessing public health and support services.

All the above mentioned create a mistrust between the marginalised communities and the state or the public services and creates a vicious circle of exclusion, marginalisation, inequality.

Moreover the self image, self esteem and self efficacy of young people is negatively affected alongside the image of the world as a fair and just place, while the general population grows -instead of tackling- the pre-existing negative social representations and discrimination against the Roma, migrants and refugees. (romaniphobia and xenophobia)

It is more than self-evident that this phenomenon creates and feeds a vicious circle of discrimination, antigypsyism and xenophobia that solidifies the marginalisation



having in parallel negative outcomes in the communities' mental health and wellbeing.

Poverty is not a characteristic of a cultural or ethnic identity yet it plays a crucial role in the deterioration of quality of life. When poverty is combined with institutional lack of services and discrimination then the self is faced with a difficult situation where all main features of one's self are being perceived as less worthy. A negative self perception combined with negative social representations and chronic discrimination or/and antigypsyism is nurturing the margin, creating mistrust between the communities with less opportunities and the great dominant part of the society. Another vicious circle.

Hence a holistic, intersectional approach is needed in order to enhance the quality of life in multiple sectors: health, education, housing, legality -in the case of refugees-, access to services and provision of inclusion.

In accordance with all the above mentioned are the findings of all national researches contacted in the frame of the project, that inclusive measures and policies empower the youth, supporting them into building a healthier self image, image of the world and the society they live in.

In this frame the recommendations mentioned here should be interconnected in a spherical plan of inclusion and social justice and equality.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Adequate Social Housing inside the urban/rural net of Hellas and economic support to the families living on the edge of homelessness

The settlements and marginalised ghettos should seize existing while the inhabitants should be included in a project of social housing that will tackle the poor conditions of life and the geographical isolation

2. Safe and guaranteed access to Mental Health services for all minors regardless of their documentation

National reforms and legislation in order to remove any administrative obstacles and include physical and mental health services for all young people, including asylum-seekers and undocumented minors.

3. Legalisation and citizenship to all unprotected minors and children born in the Hellenic territory

Youth without adequate documentation grows and lives under a feeling of insecurity and being unwanted or dangerous. A minority identity produces feelings of inadequacy and negative self images deteriorating once feeling of belonging and well being. The fear of expulsion on the onset of adulthood can be a source of stress and depression. Citizenship provides safety, feeling of homeland and a set of obligations and rights that can nurture youth

4. Guaranteed culturally and linguistically appropriate services for all minors regardless of their documentation or origin.

Cultural and linguistic mediators who will support the social services and guarantee a safe, private and appropriate service while empowering the youth with fewer opportunities to seek help.

Ongoing training should be provided to the health practitioners who work in the public services.

5. Recognition of antigypsyism as a distinct and systemic form of discrimination in legislation and implementation of proactive measures in all sectors of public life.

Hellas should recognise antigypsyism as a form of discrimination and violence that can lead to hate crimes or negligence of the Roma citizens and provide culturally relevant support in the public services.

6. Improvements on Judicial Services and Reporting Access

Legislation should be reformed in order to protect, defend and secure the Greek Roma citizens.

In addition platforms where problems and discriminatory practices are reported and addressed should be created. The Hellenic Ombudsman institution is currently providing services and mediation that should be part of the legislation.

7. Multicultural inclusive measures throughout the public sector

Training on inclusive services, cultural and religious sensitivity and relevance should be given throughout the public sector. Mental Health services should be able to understand the special conditions and characteristics of these minors and support, empower and guide them into a path to inclusion and mental wellbeing.

8. Inclusive Educational Reform

School curricula should reflect multidiversity and create a shared sense of belonging. School curricula that include Roma history and culture alongside the national history. Measures should be taken regarding the diversity of religions and the dominance of Orthodox Christianity in the educational system and the religious classes.

Tutoring and intensive classes of Greek language for the youth with refugee/migrant background and English language classes for the young Roma, in order to be able to have access to more educational and professional opportunities.

9. Establishment of public inclusive multicultural youth clubs, youth mental health hubs and cultural centers.

Community youth centers with a multicultural programme of educational, artistic and recreational activities that enhance inclusion, acceptance and embrace of diversity while nurturing a feeling of belonging and self worth.

Counseling, educational & professional orientation and mental support sessions should be provided there by certified practitioners.

10. Mobile and digital mental health services

Establishment of mobile mental health clinics to serve settlements/communities that are located in geographical distance and reception centres for refugees and asylum seekers. Creation of multilingual 24/7 helplines and safe, moderated apps for psychoeducation and brief interventions or/and reference to a mental health center/service.

11. Psychological support services in schools

In Hellas there are schools characterised as multicultural and schools that are considered as mono-cultural. In reality all schools should embrace multicultural diversity and acceptance and should provide counseling and psychological support to all students.

Special provision should be taken for students that are into the sensitive, fragile transition to a new educational and national environment.

12. Early reception & cultural friendly asylum procedures that prioritize mental-health



The time of reception in a new country is a post traumatic fearful experience and the PTSD should be taken into consideration.

Certified mental health practitioners and therapists should be part of the receiving procedures and provide support and therapy pre, during and after the asylum seeking procedures.

13. Implementation of national campaigns against stigma, hate speech, discrimination and xenophobia.

The mentality of multicultural diversity, acceptance and respect should be cultivated on a national level by the public sector.

Anti-hate speech and anti-discrimination topics should be included in the school curricula.



Final comment: the recommendations listed above are mutual to most of the countries that participated in the project and should be regarded steps and combinations in a holistic and intersectional approach to promote social inclusion and enhance the mental well being through the feeling of equally valued and treated belonging.

CONCLUSION

Hellas has traditionally been a country that has embedded in our transgenerational memory the pain and the trauma of the uprooting through waves of refugees being repatriated and modern Greeks migrating in central Europe during the 50s and the 60s. During the recent past and due to the last ongoing economic crisis, the country has been called to tackle the phenomenon of brain drain as thousands of Hellenic youth are migrating.

The last years -with the refugee crisis of 2015 being the crowning phenomenon- Hellas has been transformed into a receiving country, either as the basic entry for populations fleeing the warzones and instability of the Middle East, Asia and Africa or as the new chosen homeland.

Hence the hellenic state has the obligation to treat these people with dignity and a sensitivity to the trauma they are suffering from. Many of the people arriving in the country are unprotected minors and many more are being born during their stay in the country. These youth are living and growing under fragile conditions and many reside in hotspots, geographically isolated from the rest of the society, lacking the opportunity to receive educational, physical and mental health services.

On the other hand the Greek Roma have always been an active part of the hellenic population treated unequally and suffering from the outcomes of negative social representations, hate speech, isolation, social and institutional antigypsyism and hate crimes.

The Greek Roma are citizens of the Hellenic Republic and should enjoy the same rights as the rest of us, while in reality they are deprived of many basic human rights. In the recent past we have been witnesses of Roma citizens being victims of hate



crimes, on institutional level as well.

The current national strategic plan might have good intentions, yet it is not being fully implemented. There are still settlements throughout the country where citizens live in hideous conditions, without adequate housing, infrastructure behind a veil of marginalisation and inequality.

It is necessary for a holistic, intersectional plan to be drafted and implemented in order to tackle -once and for all- the inequalities, provide solutions and emphasis to the mental wellbeing and health of the population and the residents.

According to the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1971) a minority identity is a source of distress, negative self images, low self esteem and efficacy that manifest themselves through mental issues and psychological problems.

An inclusive policy plan should benefit the rest of the society as well by nurturing ideals such as acceptance of diversity, solidarity and cohesion. Elements needed by any health society in order to put in good use all the talents, skills and competences of its youth and create a better social and community environment for the future.