

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Access to Rights of the Roma: Views of a Neglected Community in Türkiye

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Abstract

This phenomenological qualitative study, prepared using the purposive sampling technique, the problems, expectations and difficulties of the Roma experienced in accessing basic human rights in Türkiye assessed. A semi-structured interview form was used in data collection, and 26 Roma individuals from Izmir participated in the study with the help of in-depth interviews. All data were analyzed by being coded in MAXQDA 2020. Based on the participants' life stories, the results were discussed under the themes of Roma culture, access to basic human rights, an apolitical neglected group, and expectations of the future. It was understood that the participants basically experienced economic difficulties and problems intertwined with poverty and could not meet their basic human needs, such as housing, employment, education, and health. Accordingly, the study results demonstrated the importance of rights-based practices for the Roma.

Keywords: The Roma, human rights, basic human needs, rights-based practice, Türkiye.

Öz

Amaçsal örnekleme tekniği ile hazırlanan bu fenomenolojik niteliksel çalışmada, Türkiye'de Romanların temel insan haklarına erişimde yaşadıkları sorunlar, beklentiler ve zorluklar değerlendirilmiştir. Verilerin toplanmasında yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılarak derinlemesine görüşmeler yardımıyla İzmir'den 26 Roman birey çalışmaya katılmıştır. Bütün veriler MAXQDA 2020 ile kodlanarak çözümlenmiştir. Bulgular katılımcıların yaşam öykülerinden yola çıkarak; Roman kültürü, temel insan haklarına ve hizmetlere erişim, apolitik göz ardı edilen bir grup ile gelecekte beklenen temaları altında ele alınmıştır. Katılımcıların temelde ekonomik güçlükler ve yoksullukla iç içe geçmiş sorunları deneyimlediği, barınma, istihdam, eğitim, sağlık gibi temel insani ihtiyaçlarını karşılayamadıkları anlaşılmıştır. Sonuç olarak, çalışma bulguları, Romanlara yönelik hak temelli uygulamaların önemini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Romanlar, insan hakları, temel insan ihtiyaçları, hak temelli uygulama, Türkiye.

Introduction

The concept of rights, which is present in the discourse of many segments nowadays, emerges with various meanings. The definitions we encounter most frequently are the concept of rights in an abstract and concrete sense. The definition of the concept of rights in an abstract sense takes into account the acquisitions in human life and is important in terms of applicability in human life. In an abstract sense, the concept of rights explains a life that respects human values and dignity. When approaching the concept of rights in a concrete sense, we should consider the focus of human rights and start from the relationship between the individual and the state. In concrete terms, the concept of rights should cover the basic rights, living conditions, and services provided by the public to citizens, which are guaranteed by the state, for people to live in better conditions. From this point of view, rights can be considered essentially as a result of human needs. Furthermore, a holistic perspective addressing the needs of all people, citizens, and stakeholders living in a country for access to rights should be put forward by the public.

Human rights as a concept has a multidimensional structure as well as a very rich meaning and content. The emergence of new rights in almost every period, the acquisition of new rights depending on the change and development of society, the changes of rights according to societies, the fact that new rights leave old rights in the background and the relations between them, and the effects of rights on the field of law deepen the subject further (Çeçen, 2013). In this study, the importance of human rights for individuals to achieve their basic life needs is emphasized. Therefore, we will discuss the basic human rights that will protect the basic needs of people in the state. All human beings are born with certain human characteristics. However, it has been obligatory to protect and then develop them over time. Thus, the protection and development of these characteristics has formed the concept of human rights (Yıldırım & Aslan, 2019).

The Roma, claimed to be the largest minority group in Europe with a population of about 11-12

million, create a mosaic of different lifestyles and needs while sharing a different social heritage (Carter, 1996; Orton et al., 2019). The Roma, an important stakeholder and human group, are among the many different ethnic and cultural elements living in Türkiye. Their origins date back to very ancient periods of history, and they do not have a homogeneous identity structure (Yıldırım, 2019). There are thoughts that the Roma population in Türkiye migrated to the country from India or Egypt, but some sources say that the Roma living in Türkiye migrated from Greece in the 1920-1930s through population exchange (Genç et al., 2015). The existence of different tribes, such as Rom (Western Anatolia), Dom (Southeast Anatolia), and Lom (Eastern Black Sea), and their spread to the regions can be mentioned for Türkiye (Kolukırık, 2005; Kolukırık, 2008). All these peoples have been defined as the Roma in Anatolian geography throughout history (Uğurlu & Duru, 2010).

Although the Roma in Türkiye have equal citizenship rights with constitutional regulations, they used to experience significant problems in terms of socioeconomic rights. It is known that the Roma have a low level of education and cannot acquire sufficient qualifications for citizenship rights, have economic difficulties, irregular jobs, and low income, cannot work in secure jobs, cannot give up the nomadic lifestyle in certain regions, and cannot reach healthy housing (Topuz, 2010; Balkız & Göktepe, 2014). This current situation has formed the starting point of the study. Examining the Roma from this aspect can present important data. The objective of the present study is to make a scientific contribution to the problems of accessing rights of the Roma living in Türkiye.

Additionally, in the review of the international literature, it was surprising that there were few studies on the Roma (Réger & Gleason, 1991; Hancock, 1999; Leeson, 2013; Clark, 2014) and the available studies mostly addressed the issues of child welfare (Réger & Gleason, 1991), poverty (Kornblum & Lichter, 1972), and stigmatization (Clark, 2014). In the national literature, it is a significant problem that studies conducted with the Roma (Topuz, 2010; Ünalı, 2012; Balkız &

Göktepe, 2014; Okutan & Turgut, 2018; Öksüz et al., 2018) were included in the scope of certain main themes such as education, citizenship, culture, and poverty and there were enough studies focusing on their rights and access to public services. Hence, the main objective of the study was the problems, expectations and difficulties of the Roma experienced in accessing basic human rights in Türkiye assessed .

1. Methods

1.1. Participants and Criteria for the Study

The methodological tendency of this study was based on the qualitative research design. In the study, a phenomenological approach was employed to more easily reveal the opinions of the Roma on how they evaluate their needs, problems, public service expectations and the difficulties they experience in accessing basic human rights in Türkiye. Purposive sampling was the sampling technique of the study. The choice of purposive sampling made it easier for researchers to acquire an understanding of certain types of case studies for review (Neuman, 2012: 324). Izmir, which is among the cities with a dense Roma population in Türkiye, was selected as the study area. Considering the population density of the Roma, their distribution in Izmir and its districts, and their location relative to the city center, Izmir was divided into three regions: East-South, West-North, and Center.

The three districts identified in red on the map in Figure 1 were addressed in connection with the regions from which Izmir province is separated. Buca district/Göksu neighborhood representing the southeast of Izmir, Karşıyaka district/Örnekköy neighborhood representing the northwest of Izmir, and Konak district/Tepecik neighborhood representing the center of Izmir were preferred as the data collection field in this study.

The administrators of the Roma Community Youth Education and Development Association in Izmir were interviewed to identify the study participants. By taking their opinions, 26 Roma individuals living in the districts shown on the map and in the neighborhoods in these districts that we have mentioned above participated in the sample. In the inclusion criteria, attention was paid to the fact that the participants were over the age of 18 and their genders were equally distributed. Almost equal numbers of females and males over 18 years of age and in different age groups and of different genders participated in the sample from each neighborhood. The total number of interviews specific to each neighborhood was as follows:

- 24 participants from the age group of 18-60 (10 females and 14 males, paying attention to the equal distribution of gender characteristics and conditions as much as possible),
- 2 participants aged 60 and over (2 females),
- Since there are three neighborhoods from three districts in total, Örnekköy



Figure 1: İzmir Research Area

neighborhood = 10 participants / Göksu neighborhood = 8 participants / Tepecik neighborhood = 8 participants.

The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 67, and their mean age was $\bar{x}=42.73\pm 7.97$. Of the participants, 23.07% (n=6) did not receive any education. Of the participants, 50% (n=13) were primary school graduates, 19.23% (n=5) were high school dropouts, and only 7.7% (n=2) were university graduates. Of the participants, 73.07% (n=19) were married, 19.23% (n=5) were single, and 7.7% (n=2) were widowed. Most participants, 88.46% (n=23), worked in traditional low-paid jobs that disregard human labor, such as millet growing-basket making-scrap collecting-flower selling, seasonal agricultural work, cleaning, playing music, and working at funfairs, which are common among the Roma. Only three participants (11.54%) worked in jobs that were socially accepted and respected in Türkiye. Two of these three participants were civil servants in local governments, and the other was a chemist.

1.2. Procedures

The study was initiated with the ethical approval of Manisa Celal Bayar University Health Sciences Ethics Committee dated 04/08-2020 and numbered 20478486-050.04.04-. A field work permit dated 03/07/2020 and numbered 2020/6 was received from the Roma Community Youth Education and Development Association for data collection. Individual interviews with the participants invited to the study were based on volunteerism. The participants who agreed to participate in the study were informed about the study's purpose, details, and possible benefits prior to the interview and signed the "Informed Voluntary Consent Form."

The data were collected through face-to-face in-depth interviews using a semi-structured interview form in line with the main purpose of the study. First, a pilot study was conducted with two participants using a semi-structured interview form. After the pilot study, the feedback received from the participants was re-evaluated, and the semi-structured interview form was revised and finalized. The data collection process was continued with the final version of the form. The

interviews were recorded with two voice recorders simultaneously based on permission and the notes taken by the interviewer during the interview. Ultimately, the interview durations varied between 60 and 93 minutes. Additionally, all interviews were completed within a six-month period from January to June 2021. Due to ethical considerations, the participants' real names were not used in the study, and abbreviations were included. "Participant 1, Male, Örnekköy" referred to the first participant interviewed, and the interviews were ordered.

The in-depth interviews were conducted in the building of the Roma Community Youth Education and Development Association in Karşıyaka-Örnekköy neighborhood, in the South Neighborhood Representative's Office in Konak-Tepecik neighborhood, and in Buca-Göksu neighborhood in the interview settings generally deemed appropriate by the association. The in-depth interviews were continued until the information acquired from the participants was repeated and theoretical saturation was reached, and eventually the actual sample group of the study emerged. The semi-structured form and in-depth interviews allowed us to understand the individuals and their environmental conditions in detail, with reflections on their narratives and statements (Kümbetoğlu, 2012). It was attempted to transfer the evaluation of different rights such as economic, housing, health, and education in the three neighborhoods in the study and the life summaries of the Roma in terms of their access to rights to sufficient statistical analysis.

1.3. Limitations

The current study had some limitations. The first was related to reflections from the data collection field and interview hours. The majority of the Roma community in Türkiye wake up late because they work until late at night in the street economy and informal jobs, such as flower selling, playing music, millet growing, and working at funfairs. In the interviews with the participants, some difficulties were frequently experienced due to the time problem and setting the interview appointments. Moreover, nightlife continued in

the Roma neighborhoods, and it was known that there was substance use in the neighborhoods selected as the data collection field. This prevented the researchers from being present in the data collection field after a certain hour and made the researchers have security concerns.

The third limitation was related to the significant factors limiting the researchers regarding the Roma people's trust issues and compliance with the study. The fact that the Roma became bored quickly in the in-depth interviews with the participants caused the interview durations to be shorter than expected. On the other hand, the Roma community addressed non-Roma people in Türkiye as "Gaco" due to their experiences of social exclusion and discrimination and did not trust them. Fortunately, the fact that one of the researchers had several years of working and practice experience in the Roma neighborhoods in Izmir balanced this limitation. Additionally, it facilitated the adaptation of the Roma to the interviews. Finally, some important issues should not be overlooked in interpreting our study results. We employed a qualitative design to understand and evaluate the need of the Roma for access to rights. Such a study design may make it difficult to explain the actual or the social, or to screen for the direction of causal relationships. However, it does not help to explore longitudinal changes in the need for the Roma in Türkiye to access rights. Hence, there is a need for more research and longitudinal studies focusing on the Roma. Nevertheless, it can be thought that the present study, which was performed with the Roma in Türkiye, may help other intercultural studies.

1.4. Statistical Analysis

The obtained data were deciphered in the computer environment and converted into text using transcription marks. The notes taken by the researchers during the interview were also evaluated to increase the quality of the data obtained from the interviews. As a result, all qualitative transcripts took 407 pages and 1186 lines. For their processing and analysis, the data were coded in MAXQDA 2020, subjected to thematic analysis, and divided into meaning units.

The resulting themes were discussed among the researchers at every stage of the process until a consensus was reached to confirm the accuracy of scientific interpretation.

2. Findings

The study findings were evaluated by reducing them to four themes and meaning units. Figure 2 shows the meaning units and themes obtained as a result of the data evaluation:

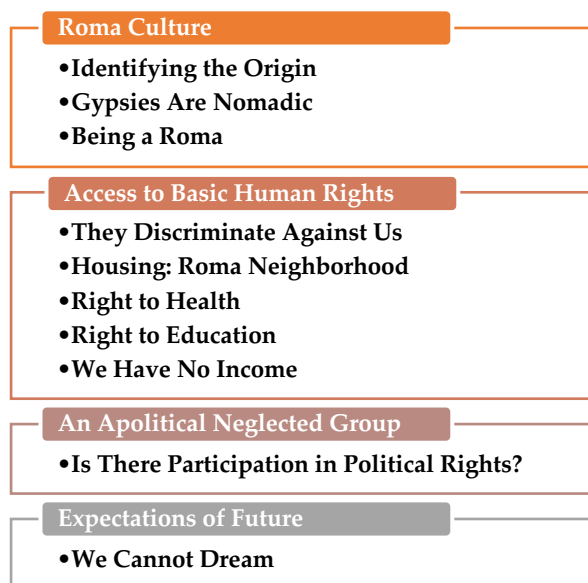


Figure 2: Themes/Meaning Units

Repetitive sentences and words were mostly written in bold in the interviews conducted during the study. This method was followed to provide convenience to the reader, strengthen the reader's mastery of the subject, and make the researchers feel that they are a part of the qualitative research process.

2.1. Theme 1: Roma Culture

The participants' views on the Roma culture were discussed by combining three meaning units: identifying the origin, gypsies are nomadic, and being a Roma.

2.1.1. Meaning Units 1: Identifying the Origin;

Although some participants accepted the definition of gypsy, the majority rejected this definition and expressed themselves as the Roma.

One participant described himself/herself as both a gypsy and a Roma. Except for two participants, all participants stated that the gypsy expression was not correct and the concept of gypsy had a stigmatizing emphasis. The participants indicated that the gypsy expression evoked the concepts of theft and crime more and said that they preferred the Roma as their origin:

"...Well, our community generally prefers the term Roma because people mostly use the term gypsy to refer to thieves, ominous, vulgar people..." (Participant 2, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...Actually, there was no difference between gypsies and the Roma based on ancient times. But when you say gypsy, something happens, they regard us simpler, as thieves, ominous, this and that. But when you say the Roma, it is regarded as neater and more organized among the people. That's why we accept being the Roma, not gypsies..." (Participant 9, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.1.2. Meaning Units 2: Gypsies Are Nomadic;

The participants summarized the difference between gypsies and the Roma through their nomadic status. They expressed that gypsies were nomadic, while the Roma lived in a more organized way. It was remarkable that the participants used the definition "they are different / they are others," when explaining the difference between gypsies and the Roma:

"...Now, we are not actually gypsies. We know ourselves as the Roma for years. According to our research, the adjective gypsy is the nickname given to oneself, as we say, nomads were called like this. For example, those in horse-drawn carriages, without a home. For example, one leaves from here and takes his family with him on horse-drawn carriages, stays in a field for 3-5 days. This is actually the adjective gypsy... They are different." (Participant 3, Male, Tepecik Neighborhood).

"...The gypsy life is normally related to tents, is less organized, like more relaxed people, in other

words, in an unmodernized way. But we have quite a lot of differences from them, like the Roma...They are different..." (Participant 1, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.1.3. Meaning Units 3: Being a Roma;

It was revealed that the participants talked about their cultural belonging and produced some metaphors while expressing their feelings about being a Roma:

"...The Roma are the colors of the world. They have transferred to a more settled life. They have a certain family, a certain order, a certain income level. Or there are those with certain jobs. There are musicians, those who go to house cleaning, repair shoes. Those who have a fixed salary." (Participant 20, Male, Tepecik Neighborhood).

"...They are very innocent. I mean, you've visited the Roma neighborhoods, there are such innocent children. We are a forgotten community, no one has taken care of, which continues only on parents and race..." (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...Well, being a Roma is a very nice feeling (laughs). The Roma are straightforward. I mean- they are hot-blooded, they are very hospitable. They like to travel and dance. You know, they are not like that, the Roma are natural people, straightforward..." (Participant 8, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.2. Theme 2: Access to Basic Human Rights

The research results revealed that the Roman community has almost no access to basic human rights. It was seen that the fact that the Roma have primarily housing problems is an important barrier to their access to other human rights. The problems they experienced in accessing education, health, and employment rights were parallel to the problems they experienced in accessing the right to housing. However, above all, discrimination was the root problem.

2.2.1 *Meaning Units 1: They Discriminate Against Us;*

Most participants stated that they were discriminated against because they were the Roma. The participants' memories of discrimination were embodied in issues such as the problems they faced due to discrimination when entering a job:

"...For example, we are going to enter a job, they ask, are you a Roma? Do you have children? So they are prejudiced, they don't hire us. They think about whether we will do something. Will we do any harm? Will we take their money and leave? So they look at us badly. That's why people are afraid of looking for a job inevitably and withdraw from life..." (Participant 6, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...When we first came to Izmir, we used to work in agriculture around Seyrekköy. The people there didn't want us, although we worked for them, they stoned our tents. I am always discriminated again." (Participant 3, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.2.2. *Meaning Units 2: Housing: Roma Neighborhood;*

Most participants stated that they could not access hygienic conditions and educational environments due to their housing conditions. It was remarkable that all participants had either acquaintances or neighbors staying in the tent. The statements of the participants, who also had the experience of living in a tent, regarding the difficulties they experienced drew attention:

"...You say the right to housing: Most Roma people already live in tents. What right to housing? How can you reach education in an environment where you can't live?" (Participant 25, Female, Tepecik Neighborhood).

"...How can a person not experience difficulties? Imagine a tent without electricity or water, without anything. Imagine a tent without a toilet or bathroom. How can you manage? We didn't have water, we used to go for a kilometer away, fill our water, cook our food and drink our tea with it. We used to take a bath once a week. We used to carry the water to a part of the tent, stretch a cloth, enter and take a bath. Do you think this is life?" (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

It was seen that the participants generally adopted the neighborhoods they lived in, but they also experienced different problems other than access to basic rights in their neighborhoods. The increased substance use in Roma neighborhoods and the dangers it has brought about are the prominent issues among the different problems specified by the participants. Moreover, some Roma individuals stated they were considering moving from their neighborhoods due to this problem. On the other hand, there was no discrimination in the neighborhoods compared to the outside world since people from the same culture and sharing this culture live in Roma neighborhoods:

"Since I live in a Roma neighborhood, there is no much discrimination in our neighborhood because we all know and embrace each other..." (Participant 23, Female, Tepecik Neighborhood).

"...The Roma are a closed community, in the form of a neighborhood, ghetto. Apart from that, the Roma have a saying; the friendship of a gaco¹ is above the knees, I have never asked for help from anyone else in these matters... For the Roma community, being safe means being in the Roma neighborhood. No Roma is safe outside of the Roma neighborhood. At least, being outside the Roma neighborhood means being exposed to social exclusion and discrimination..." (Participant 3, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

¹ The term "gaco" is a description used by the Roma for persons outside the Roma cultural circle. The term "gaco," which has also entered the Turkish spoken language, also

has the meanings of "lover, mistress, foreign man, foreign woman."

“...You have to stay 3-4 months in the Roma neighborhood to understand what it means living here. **You have to see all this dirt.** There is nothing to say, Roma neighborhoods are very bad. Nobody has education, the majority are illiterate. It is a normal life; one eats what he finds, daily. There is every way, this is the way of life. So it's a troubling situation... **There is a lot of quarrel, there is a lot of noise, there is a lot of drug dealing.** I don't want my children to grow up in such an environment and see what is happening here. If I get the chance, I will immediately move from the Roma neighborhood.” (Participant 19, Male, Tepecik Neighborhood).

2.2.3. Meaning Units 3: Right to Health;

When the health issue comes to the fore, citizens are expected to have some level of knowledge. However, some participants in the present study had no knowledge of the health system and health institutions. The participants' relationship with the health system and health institutions did not go beyond their communication with the health personnel. Additionally, some participants emphasized that they were exposed to social stigma in hospital settings:

“...I don't know anything, so I can't even get an appointment, I ask for help from those who know, they take me to the hospital. I talk to the doctor when I enter his room. So I ask the doctor in a language that I can understand. For example, doctors talk to you in medical language, I don't understand it. **Doctor, could you please explain in a language I can understand? He says okay and explains to me...**” (Participant 10, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

“...Here, around Tepecik, hospitals are problematic. They put everyone in the same pot because you're dirty, for example. They are approaching you in a directly insulting way. They behave like this, go there, wait there...” (Participant 19, Male, Tepecik Neighborhood).

Poverty was another problem experienced by the participants in accessing the right to health. They had to continue to work due to financial impossibility when experiencing health problems

and could not buy vitamin-rich foods when they got sick. Actually, the Roma in Türkiye were introduced to the health system in a full sense owing to the green card application:

“...We don't have problems with medications, but when we get sick and **do not receive vitamins, you need to have good food. We don't have that, you can't get quality foods.** Well, there is a problem there. They say, you will not work at work, but how will you not work? They say, you will rest, but there is no rest, go back to work. You cannot make a living when you are not working because...” (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

“...First, economic difficulties. We, the Roma, started to go to the hospital when the green card project in health emerged for the poor and those with payment difficulties in Türkiye. Because before, we couldn't go because we didn't have money...” (Participant 3, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.2.4. Meaning Units 4: Right to Education;

The issue of continuing education was a complete dilemma among the Roma. Most of our participants were uneducated, just like the general Roma community in Türkiye. The majority of our participants indicated that the access of Roma children to education was not equal to other children due to economic reasons. Moreover, it was important for them to present their experiences at school due to financial inadequacies and situations from their own educational life:

“...But people without financial means, unfortunately, cannot achieve this. Some send their children to public schools, **keeping thinking:** “I will send this child to public school, but I have to put pocket money in this child's pocket every day, how can I manage this?”” (Participant 14, Male, Göksu Neighborhood).

“...There is something like this; some due to financial problems, some because they don't want to study or because they shy away from it. For example, there are secondary schools in Roma neighborhoods. But because non-Roma people enter a high school or a university, some don't want to enter

such an environment by their own will. Some cannot afford to enter those environments financially..." (Participant 7, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...Have we not suffered poverty? I didn't have shoes on my feet. Sometimes I didn't even have slippers, we slept a lot in the tent. Children, mothers, siblings. One of my siblings was crying so much to go to school. But my mother always resented him because we didn't have an opportunity..." (Participant 15, Male, Göksu Neighborhood).

Child labor is a common problem among Roma children who cannot continue their education. Roma children have to work, and the lack of access to the right to education creates new problems feeding each other:

"The inability to continue education is actually a common problem. Some do not even send their children to public schools so that children can contribute to the family economy and work..." (Participant 14, Male, Göksu Neighborhood).

"...Some drop out in primary school, some in secondary school, so the man has to work. A person says, I won't study, I will work, I'll help my family..." (Participant 1, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...The child is forced to work after a certain age. He helps with work somehow, either he takes the paint box and goes painting or takes the carriage and goes to scrap collecting. So he starts struggling to earn an income. What good can come from this child? No school, no education. He won't get a job when there is a job opportunity someday. His parents are scrap collectors. You see, the child is continuing the same profession as a scrap collector for years. After that, he is uneducated. Of course, the child remains uneducated. Won't children study if you give them a good education opportunity? They will..." (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

The participants stated that working in seasonal agricultural work also affected the disruption of Roma children's education. Some participants said that their children could not attend school due to seasonal work:

"...None of us could go to school. There is still seasonal labor, people in Örnekköy still go to

cherry farming, tomato farming, pepper farming, go to hoeing. At that time, children cannot access education opportunities in any way..." (Participant 3, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...For example, the time for olives is coming. You go to olive grooves. You get permission from the school. So what's happening? The child is again away from school for two or three months. Well, this time, there is nothing left in that child, there is no love for school. The child gets poor notes from the exam, the lesson, and fails the lessons. It clearly hinders the child's right to education..." (Participant 8, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...Children go to tangerine and grape farming. For example, we took our daughter from school. Tangerine harvest starts around October-November. We take a month off; the work takes two to three months, tree pruning. We couldn't send our daughter to school. Now, they will go to grape collecting. The work is still going on..." (Participant 4, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

It drew attention that most participants also experienced discrimination in their school life. Whereas some participants mentioned their negative memories of school life, some participants expressed their opinion in favor of Roma children continuing their education despite all the difficulties:

"...We were beaten a lot. At that time, not many Roma children were receiving education at schools. How can I tell you? There were at most 50 Roma children in a 400-person school. We used to go to school, but either we were constantly ostracized, we were beaten a lot by the teacher, or we were fighting with other children every day. What do you expect from such an environment..." (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...So were we humiliated? We were humiliated. But now my only wish is that people like us educate the children of the Roma community..." (Participant 10, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.2.5. *Meaning Units 5: We Have No Income;*

The lifestyles of the Roma affect their job choices. In the neighborhoods where the research was conducted, it was understood that the participants were engaged in works identified with the Roma community: forging, tinsmithing, scrap collecting, paper collecting, seasonal agricultural work, basket making, working at funfairs, flower selling, fortune-telling, playing music, and door-to-door selling. It is obvious that these jobs are low-income, insecure, and irregular. Especially seasonal agricultural workers work informally:

"...Now you already know, 80% live in an area, without a job, without insurance. Seasonal agricultural work is like that, and you don't have a record. No one working in seasonal agriculture has any social security..." (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...There are tribes among the Roma. There are basket makers. There are tinsmiths. There are the Roma who do farming. I mean, my father was a farmer because I worked in the fields since childhood. Then I got married and worked in cleaning jobs. I didn't enter into anything like that, I mean, I didn't enter society much like that..." (Participant 10, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...Since machines are used in agriculture, children are not preferred in every sector nowadays. For example, the cotton business has ended, why? Machines emerged. They used to employ workers from here, they used to come and take workers... Or, there used to be a funfair as well. Working in an amusement park, entertainment, I mean, related to children. They used to go there as well, they used to travel for 9 months. For a long time, there are people here who work just as basket makers, work at funfairs, and as door-to-door sellers. When they all used to go somewhere, they used to go far from home. They didn't return for 9 months.... Working at funfairs was called the profession far from home... After a while, it was prohibited to work at funfairs. Then we went to fields, vineyards, orchards, plains..." (Participant 4, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

The majority of the participants had to migrate because they were engaged in seasonal agricultural work. It has been observed that also migrant lifestyle and seasonal agricultural jobs made difficult the access of the participants to the rights:

"...Of course, it is seasonal. Tobacco harvesting, tobacco planting, cotton, cotton hoeing, grapes and olives, etc. All of these are the traditional works of the Roma people. We could not work, we could not live anywhere. We were rooted a lot in manual work. We used to go to olive grooves, cotton fields, hoeing a lot. We couldn't see beyond ourselves because we worked so hard in such works, in the field work... We didn't know anything about health or education..." (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

"...There are those who go to tomato farming. They go to Çanakkale. They go to olive grooves, around Edremit. It becomes quite intense... Housing is in tents during seasonal migration. Who knows the importance of education, who knows about health services among the Roma..." (Participant 4, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.3. Theme 3: An Apolitical Neglected Group

2.3.1. *Meaning Units 1: Is There Participation in Political Rights?;*

It was surprising that most participants wanted to listen to the questions on political rights directed to the study participants again and again. It has been examined that the research participants got surprised and had difficulty with understanding the political questions. It can be said that most participants are not aware of political rights. Concerning political rights, it was seen that the participants were generally aware of the right to vote, they voted, and they did not mention political rights other than the right to vote:

"...I don't think I have a right other than my right to vote (she paused here and contemplated for a long time) because no one has the right to have a say among the Roma. Even if they say something, they ignore it. For example, the Roma cannot file a petition.

Participation in political rights? Especially if you are a Roma?" (Participant 23, Female, Tepecik Neighborhood).

*"...Although every politician comes and says, "We love you," we know they don't like us. They always ignore us in the end. **We have always been deceived by provisions, we have been deceived by votes.** Somehow, someone tricked us... **because we are a crowded but unorganized community...**" (Participant 5, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).*

"...The Roma are not aware of their political rights. Therefore, they don't participate in politics. Actually, no one reads the bylaw of parties and says, "Oh, look, this party will do this, I will vote for it..." (Participant 20, Male, Tepecik Neighborhood).

"...I vote. I never miss it. At that time, when I'm going to vote, I'll vote for the one I'll like at that time... I want Türkiye to be governed well and those who run the country not to ignore us..." (Participant 10, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

2.4. Theme 4: Expectations of the Future

The fact that the Roma have basic problems, such as poverty, education, health, and employment, and that they live in their neighborhoods in the social sphere showed that they saved the day in terms of their expectations of the future. It was a sad experience to learn that the Roma did not expect or dream about the future beyond the problems of accessing rights.

2.4.1. Meaning Units 1: We Cannot Dream;

*"...You know, it never crossed my mind what I think about the future. We don't have an opportunity due to some problems... **We cannot dream.**" (Participant 4, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).*

"...Well, if you knew our situation regarding the future, if you understood what we were going through, you wouldn't be able to think too much as well. My only hope is that my children will take care of me. The future is just this..." (Participant 10, Female, Örnekköy Neighborhood).

The following statement of a Roma individual expressing the discrimination experiences that prevented the participants from dreaming actually summarized most of the problems experienced by the Roma community in Türkiye:

*"...Even the dreams of the Roma are standard. I mean, when you do research about our children, when you ask them, what professions you think of in the future, they think of scrap collecting because their parents do scrap collecting. **We cannot dream a lot. We cannot dream big dreams. Because every time we dream, social class and economic discrimination hinder our dreams...** For example, the retirement rate in the Roma community is very low because we work here and there, in insecure jobs. We can't dream even of retirement. About access to which rights should we talk, dream, think?..." (Participant 3, Male, Örnekköy Neighborhood).*

3. Discussion

This phenomenological study, based on a qualitative research design, evaluated the problems, expectations and difficulties of the Roma experienced in accessing basic human rights in Türkiye assessed. The results were generally consistent with previous research because the problems of the Roma had to be very well identified culturally. However, our study revealed slightly different results than previous research.

In general, Romani citizens in Turkey basically; They experience problems in accessing housing, education, employment, health and some basic rights and services. These problems essentially trigger each other. For this reason, Turkey has a Strategy Document and Phase 1 Action Plan for Roma citizens prepared in six different areas: education, employment, housing, health, social service, social assistance and general policies. The strategy document, consisting of 34 actions and 78 activity areas, aims to facilitate Roman citizens' access to rights and services (ASHB, 2023). In fact, the difficulties that Roma people experience in accessing basic human rights in our country are also at the center of social policies. However, there is also a need for new, unifying and inclusive social policies regarding Romani citizens and measures that will prevent inequalities based on differences

from turning into social inequalities (Pirpir et al., 2017). Bringing to the whole society an understanding that can eliminate stigma, prejudice and social exclusion practices will be a positive step towards solving many problems specific to Romani citizens (Çetin, 2017).

In a study covering a total of 178 Roma, 130 of whom were adults and 48 of whom were children, through in-depth interviews and focus group studies in the provinces of Artvin, Izmir, Edirne, Gaziantep and Şanlıurfa (Adaman et al., 2022), it was found that Roma in general had access to employment and social assistance. It shows that there are additional problems in education, housing, health and gender inequalities. Research results of different studies indicate that despite all the measures taken, a significant portion of Roma, most of whom work in unregistered jobs, cannot adequately benefit from rights and services (Adaman et al., 2022; Uştuk & Güleç, 2021; Akgül, 2010). Moreover, other studies (Kende et al., 2021; Bačlija & Haček, 2012) mention that in an electoral democracy, both national and European-oriented policies offer limited opportunities to ensure adequate representation of novels, ensuring that novels have equal opportunities and participate effectively in public life. argues that conditions should be created for their participation.

On the other hand, while these views, most of which are advocated on the basis of modern policies, promote the integration, rights and equal opportunities of Roma people, they impose the recognition of permanent structural stigma and increasing social injustice on Roma people using hypocritical approaches (Ram, 2014). The failure to create flexible practices for Roma people to access rights and services, but treating this situation as a problem, displays a contradictory attitude in order to maintain the secondary position of the Roma population (Kóczé, & Rövid, 2017). However, the potential positive effects of expanding the Roma community's access to rights and services; There are also studies arguing that it is hindered by limited resources, blurred state-civil society relations, and a culture of polarization in both European and Turkish societies (Sayan & Duygulu, 2022; Selimovic, 2022; Ivasiuc, 2020; Trehan, 2009).

In the literature review, some studies (Hancock, 1999; Hajiov & McKee, 2000; Dişli, 2016) specifically mentioned the origin of the word gypsy. Moreover, the Roma in many countries of the world were known by names such as Gypsies, Zigeuner, Gitanos, Heiden, and Cigani (Dişli, 2016). In the present study, although many participants were uncomfortable with the use of the gypsy expression based on stigmatization and discrimination, it was seen that there were also those who accepted the gypsy expression politically. Even in defining the word gypsy, the Roma emphasized the nomadic status of the others from their own culture. Thus, the majority of the participants living in Izmir preferred to use the word Roma as their origin rather than the gypsy definition. Our participants defined gypsies as a nomadic and homeless subgroup that still exists nowadays. The Roma name has more positive, understandable, acceptable, and non-prejudiced meanings in Türkiye (Kolukırık, 2005; Ünalı, 2012; Kaya & Kaya, 2019).

A number of improvements should be made in meeting the economic, social, cultural, educational, and accommodation needs of Roma citizens to prevent them from withdrawing from social integration networks and reach normal living conditions. Especially the education process of Roma children must be closely monitored. Another study performed by Titova et al. (2019) in Tatarstan is parallel to our results. It was stated that more than a third of children belonging to local Roma groups in Tatarstan were illiterate. As in Türkiye, Roma children in Tatarstan also experienced problems adapting to school culture and rules for various reasons (Öksüz et al., 2018). Therefore, schooling rates should be increased to raise the general cultural levels of children, and those who can receive high school and university education should benefit from equal opportunities in education. Thus, it would be easy for the Roma generation to become visible in the public sphere and benefit from public services (Genç et al., 2015). Similar studies (Topuz, 2010; Potar et al., 2011; Hajiov & McKee, 2000; Dunajeva, 2021) showed that the Roma were among the marginalized groups in numerous countries of the world and

their access to rights should be supported in the context of equal and active citizenship.

The Roma were deeply affected by socioeconomic problems. The reasons for their inability to work in secure jobs, not having a worthy occupation, not being able to live in healthy environments, and not having regular income were their informal and marginal jobs. Other studies (Genç et al., 2015; Panayiotopoulos & Zachariades, 2017; Fırat & Açıkgöz, 2020) also supported this finding, and all of these increased the risk of social exclusion of the Roma. In the labor market, the fact that the Roma turned to informal and marginal jobs made it difficult for them to make a living and access economic and social opportunities. The Roma community in Türkiye comprehended the importance of vocational formation, education, and employment, although late. However, contrary to this situation, the level of knowledge of the Roma community of political rights consisted only of knowing their right to vote. Nevertheless, the declaration of Türkiye as a candidate country to the EU in 1999 and the beginning of negotiations with the EU in 2005 brought Roma rights back to the agenda in Türkiye (Akdemir, 2014). As a result of the "European Union Harmonization" process in Türkiye, the right to organize was given to different identities, but the Roma community could not organize among themselves (Akgül, 2010).

On the other hand, health policies aiming to reduce health inequalities for the Roma should be harmonized with education, economy, labor market, housing, environmental, and regional development policies and comprehensive policy frameworks allowing effective integration should be created within a plan (Fesüs et al., 2012; Fırat & İlhan, 2019). The Roma groups living in all European countries and Türkiye found themselves among the poorest minority groups who could not access basic rights, such as education, health, and housing, mainly because they did not have a land or homeland connection to support them and were among the disadvantaged groups in their countries (Bucuroiu, 2013; Özateşler, 2013).

The most general result of the current study was that the spiral of poverty is a situation that cannot be ignored among the Roma because their poverty is actually ethnic poverty, representing a

fate that haunted them from birth to death, from Roma neighborhoods to education, from accessing health services to being forced to live on a low income. It is a natural inference that the Roman community, sharing such a common destiny, cannot dream and have no expectations of the future. It is a humanitarian problem that the Roma are deprived of the financial and spiritual resources necessary for their survival. The present study showed that the Roma community could not benefit from basic citizenship rights such as housing, education, health, and political rights and could not access public services. In line with the principle of social justice and equality, the results of this study drew attention to the fact that rights-based studies were conducted with the Roma community in Türkiye.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Implication for Practice

This investigation of the need for the Roma in Türkiye to access rights stressed the charismatic impact of individual participant views and also revealed some problems. Developing quality legal regulations and social policies for the Roma in Türkiye would be a tremendous step as a starting point. This research and Strategy Document and Phase 1 Action Plan for Romani Citizens (Including activities prepared in 6 different areas as education, employment, housing, health, social services, social assistance and general policies) should be associated. Thus, the evaluation of the difficulties the Roma in Türkiye experienced in accessing rights was an important research area. Moreover, the study results demonstrated that the needs and expectations of the Roma in Türkiye were also a neglected area of research, and their thoughts could be a productive resource. The assumption that the Roma should have a greater say in the policies that would be formed concerning their expectations was also strengthened. The reason for this was the understanding that the participants basically experienced economic difficulties and problems intertwined with poverty and could not meet their basic human needs, such as housing, employment, education, and health. Professionals and

policymakers who will work with the Roma community should make multidimensional plans in micro, mezzo, and macro dimensions while addressing their problems and needs. It is possible to solve the intertwined problems of the Roma through interdisciplinary cooperation and approaches based on human rights. Accordingly, the study results demonstrated the importance of rights-based practices for the Roma community. It also has been acquired that Roma do not know about the relation with the state and protection of human rights. In this regard, future research may emphasize the importance of rights-based practices for the Roma community.

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