

Roma Youth and Women in Turkey within the Framework of Sustainable Development Goals



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Published by: The Inclusivity Project (TIP), The Global Forum of Communities
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Context and Methodology

This report aims to analyze the access of Roma women and youth in Turkey to social, economic, and political life through a holistic lens aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. The representation levels of Roma women and youth in key development areas, such as education, health, employment, and social participation, highlight the impact of historical, structural, and institutional inequalities on these groups. The report also provides a critical evaluation of how public policies reproduce existing inequalities.

Furthermore, the report examines the phenomenon of deep poverty, arising as a result of discriminatory practices and systematic exclusion, specifically in the context of Roma women and youth. Current and reliable data on these groups are analyzed in relation to SDG themes such as poverty eradication, reducing inequalities, gender equality, and building inclusive societies.

The core argument of the report is that the multilayered exclusion experienced by Roma women and youth is not merely individual but structural in nature and therefore must be evaluated through the lens of intersectional vulnerability. This analysis is supported by field-based observations and data collected by Roma civil society organizations, and proposes solutions aligned with the targets and indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals.

This study not only diagnoses the situation but also aims to develop sustainable policy recommendations focused on preventing social exclusion, addressing structural inequalities, and empowering Roma women and youth.

Research Methodology

This report is based on a mixed-methods approach. By analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data together, the aim is to understand the multilayered inequalities faced by Roma women and youth and to develop policy recommendations within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This approach allows for a more holistic analysis by combining large-scale trends offered by statistical data with the social context and experiences derived from qualitative sources.

Data Sources

The data used in the research were compiled from three main sources:

Secondary quantitative data:

Statistical data published by public institutions such as the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), field studies on Roma conducted by the Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, the Address-Based Population Registration System (ADNKS), the Social Security Institution (SGK), and the Ministry of National Education formed the basis of the research.

Civil society organizations and grey literature:

A total of 15 field reports published by organizations such as the Roma Memory Studies Association, Zero Discrimination Association, Kırkayak Culture, and Nature Association were examined through thematic analysis. In addition, 20 academic studies related to Roma communities were reviewed through a literature scan based on identified keywords.

Analytical Approach and Conceptual Framework

The analysis process was structured based on the indicator sets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The report evaluates the status of Roma women and youth under the following SDG titles:

- SDG 1: No Poverty
- SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being
- SDG 4: Quality Education
- SDG 5: Gender Equality
- SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
- SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

In addition to this framework, the analysis also draws from the literature on vulnerability theory, multiple discrimination, and social exclusion. Through an interpretive and critical analytical method, the report aims to make visible the intersectional inequalities experienced by Roma women and youth.

Preface

The realities faced by Roma youth and women in Turkey must be understood within the broader context of systemic discrimination against communities historically marginalized on the basis of work and descent. These communities—subjected to entrenched hierarchies, social exclusion, and stigmatization—continue to face multiple, intersecting barriers that undermine their dignity, rights, and development.

Roma in Turkey, particularly women and young people, experience discrimination not only because of their Roma identity but also due to the deeply rooted social stratification that relegates them to the margins of society. Their exclusion is perpetuated by limited access to education, healthcare, dignified employment, housing, and political representation. Gender and age further compound these challenges, exposing Roma women and youth to heightened risks of violence, early and forced marriage, intergenerational poverty, and institutional neglect.

This report portrays the experience of Roma youth and women in Turkey within the global struggle of communities marginalized through caste-like systems and inherited discrimination. It explores how descent- and work-based exclusion intersects with ethnicity and gender to create complex forms of disadvantage and social invisibility. Through data, community voices, and policy analysis, the report highlights not only the structural obstacles but also the agency, leadership, and resilience of Roma women and youth working toward justice and transformation.

In line with the Sustainable Development Goals and global human rights commitments, this report calls for urgent and sustained action to dismantle the structures of discrimination based on work and descent. It aims to contribute to a future where Roma communities in Turkey—and all similarly affected groups—can live with dignity, equality, and full participation in society.

Paul Divakar Namala

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1. Introduction

More than 270 million people across the world are discriminated against based on work, descent and/or face caste-based discrimination. Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent (CDWD)¹ are some of the most excluded, segregated, and marginalised groups at the global and local levels within their social, economic, political, and cultural systems. The consequences of this marginalization include deprivation and systematic exclusion from education, health, and access to water and sanitation, employment, voting rights, equal access to land and housing, access to religious institutions in the public sphere. These types of social structures have led to systemic violence for centuries against CDWD² such as Roma in Europe; the Haratine in the Sahel; Osu in Nigeria, Forgeron in West Africa; Bantu in Sudan; Burakumin in Japan; Dalits (formerly known as ‘untouchables’) in South Asia; and Quilombo and Palenque in Latin America.

Roma, one of the largest communities discriminated against based on work and descent in Europe, continue to face deeply rooted, systemic exclusion. Despite existing national and regional legal frameworks, Roma communities remain disproportionately affected by poverty, poor health outcomes, lack of quality education, unemployment, and housing insecurity. These barriers are not only violations of human rights, but also significant obstacles to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. The persistent marginalization of Roma communities makes it clear that without targeted, inclusive policies and disaggregated data, the promise of the SDGs—to ensure development for all—will remain out of reach for those most affected by descent-based discrimination.

The global commitment to Leave No One Behind (LNOB) must be more than a guiding principle—it must drive concrete action to identify, engage, and support communities like the Roma, who remain at the furthest margins of society. Progress toward the SDGs cannot be measured solely by national averages; it must account for the lived realities of those who are systematically excluded. Without recognizing and addressing the specific forms of discrimination faced by Roma and other CDWD communities, development policies risk reinforcing existing inequalities rather than dismantling them. Leaving no one behind requires centering those who have historically been left out—both in data and in decision-making.

¹ See more at [Home - Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent - GFoD \(globalforumcdwd.org\)](https://globalforumcdwd.org)

² *Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent* (CDWD) are communities who experience oppression through discrimination, exclusion, or even violence by “dominant” groups based on perceived social hierarchies or castes that are linked to descent or ancestral occupation. Roma, Dalits, Haratin, Buraku, Quilombola are a small selection of CDWD present across the globe numbering 270 million people.

1.1 Turkey's Report Card on the Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, encompass multidimensional global objectives such as eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities, and combating climate change by the year 2030. Turkey has embraced these goals and taken steps to integrate its development policies within this framework by referencing the SDGs in various national strategy documents. However, the level of progress in implementing the SDGs is assessed using measurable criteria both globally and nationally. In this context, as of 2024, Turkey's performance indicates limited progress and ongoing challenges.

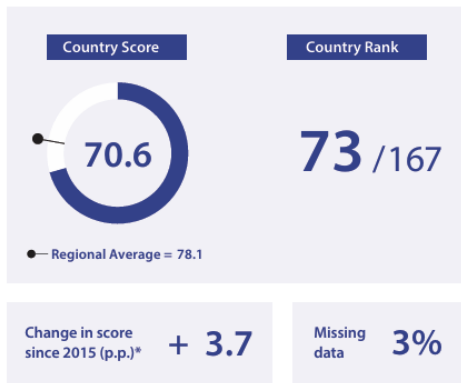
According to the 2024 Sustainable Development Report, Turkey ranks 72nd out of 167 countries in terms of SDG implementation, with a score of 70.61 (Sachs et al., 2025).³ This performance shows that Turkey is above the global average; however, when evaluated among OECD countries in the same report, Turkey falls significantly behind the regional average score of 78.16 (Sustainable Development Report, 2024).⁴ This gap reveals that Turkey faces structural issues particularly in areas such as social inequalities, environmental sustainability, and institutional inclusiveness.

³ Sachs, J. D., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G. & lablonovski, G. (2025). *Financing Sustainable Development to 2030 and Mid-Century*. Sustainable Development Report 2025. Paris: SDSN; Dublin: Dublin University Press. DOI: 10.25546/111909

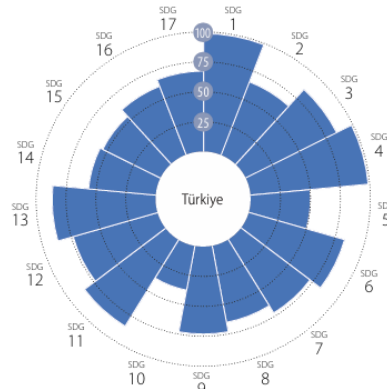
The Sustainable Development Report (2025). *Türkiye Ülke Profili*. Sustainable Development Report. Erişim: <https://dashboards.sdgindex.org/profiles/turkiye>

⁴ Sachs, J. D., Lafortune, G., & Fuller, G. (2024). *The SDGs and the UN Summit of the Future: Sustainable Development Report 2024*. Dublin: Dublin University Press. <https://globalcompact.at/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/SDReport-2024.pdf>

Overall Performance



Average Performance by SDG



SDG Dashboard and Trends



Figure 1 Overall Performance of Turkey on SDGs. Source: Sachs et al., 2025

Although Turkey has increased its overall score by +3.7 points since 2015 (same source), this progress remains insufficient to achieve the overarching goal of sustainable and inclusive development within the multidimensional structure of the SDGs. Additionally, there is a lack of data for 3% of the current indicators, which limits the capacity for evidence-based decision-making in policymaking processes (Sachs et al., 2025).

The report states that Turkey is categorized under “limited progress” or “major challenges remain” in several SDG targets. For example, significant progress has not been achieved in SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 13 (Climate Action); for SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), “major challenges remain,” and for SDG 1 (No Poverty), “challenges remain.” On the other hand, there has been relative improvement in areas such as SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure); however, criticisms exist regarding the unequal distribution of these improvements among social groups.

When evaluated in the Turkish context, the implementation level of these global goals shows significant shortcomings concerning the Roma community, recognized as the country’s

second-largest minority group. In particular, Roma women and youth face multilayered forms of exclusion based on ethnicity, gender, class, and age, especially within the context of intersectional discrimination. This makes them among the most vulnerable social groups.

1.2 The Population Size and Geographical Distribution of the Roma in Turkey

1.2.1 Estimated Population Size

The earliest accessible data regarding the Roma population in the geography of Turkey dates back to the 1831 Ottoman census. Among a total population of 3.6 million, including the Balkans, a Roma population of approximately 36,500 is mentioned (Marsh, 2008).⁵ However, since data collection based on ethnic origin was abolished in Turkey, particularly from the mid-1960s onward, it is not possible to refer to a precise number for today's Roma population. Although current and exact figures are difficult to obtain, there are estimated population data provided by both academic studies and civil society organizations.

For instance, Özateşler (2014)⁶ and the 2009 Roma Workshop Report⁷ estimate the Roma population at around 500,000, while Arayıcı (2008)⁸ cites the figure as 540,000. Higher estimates include 1,900,000 by Aisa, Andaluz, and Larramona (2017)⁹, 2,500,000 in Arus's 2010¹⁰ documentary *Buçuk*, and approximately 2,750,000 in the 2011 ECRI report on Turkey.¹¹ In more recent years, reports prepared by Roma NGOs frequently reference figures ranging between 3 and 6 million Roma people in the country.

⁵ Adrian Marsh, "Etnisite ve Kimlik: Çingenerin Kökeni", içinde Biz Buradayız!: Türkiye'de Romanlar, Ayrımcı Uygulamalar ve Hak Mücadelesi, yayına hazırlayanlar Ebru Uzpeder, Savelina Danova/Roussinova, Sevgi Özçelik ve Sinan Gökçen (İstanbul: Edirne Roman Derneği, European Roma Rights Centre, Helsinki Yurttaşlar Derneği, 2008), 21, Erişim 27.11.2019, http://www.errc.org/uploads/upload_en/file/biz-buraday%C4%B1z!-t%C3%BCrkiye%E2%80%99de-romanlar-ayr%C4%B1mc%C4%B1-uygulamalar-ve-hakm%C3%BCcadelesi.pdf

⁶ Özateşler, G. 2014. *Gypsy Stigma and Exclusion in Turkey, 1970: The Social Dynamics of Exclusionary Violence*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

⁷ T24, "Roman Çalıştayı Raporu". [//t24.com.tr/haber/roman-calistayi-raporu.71526](http://t24.com.tr/haber/roman-calistayi-raporu.71526)

⁸ Arayıcı, A. 2008. "Gypsies: The Forgotten People of Turkey", *International Social Science Journal*, 59(193-194), 527-538.

⁹ Aisa, R., Andaluz, J., & Larramona, G. 2017. "Fertility patterns in the Roma population of Spain", *Review of Economics of the Household*, 15(1), 115-133.

¹⁰ Arus, E, Arus, H. H. 2007. *Buçuk Belgeseli*. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı.

¹¹ ECRI. (2011). *ECRI report on Turkey (fourth monitoring cycle)*. Council of Europe. https://ihop.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2007/09/tr4_en.pdf

The uncertainty and variation in these data directly undermine the effectiveness of social policies intended for the Roma population and significantly impact the development, implementation, and monitoring of strategic action plans.

1.2.2 Geographical Distribution and Subgroups of Roma

It is indisputable that Roma groups are present in all provinces of Turkey. This distribution is generally analyzed through linguistic, historical, and ethnographic classifications. Turkey's geographical location as a bridge between Europe and Asia, and its position on one of the historical migration routes of the Roma, are major factors contributing to the diversity of Roma groups. Additionally, the Roma's presence in this region since the 9th century, along with their deep-rooted history within the Roman Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and the Republic of Turkey, is another significant factor.

Accordingly, the Roma population in Turkey can be broadly classified into three main groups under the umbrella identity of "Roma": *Rom*, *Dom*, and *Lom*. These groups respectively speak the languages Romanes, Domari, and Lomavren. Each of these languages has been influenced by the dominant language families of the regions in which they are spoken. For instance, Romanes includes Greek and Bulgarian words, while Domari contains vocabulary derived from Arabic, Kurdish, and Persian. Due to these historical and linguistic influences, Turkey is the only country in the world where all three Roma groups coexist, making it a uniquely valuable setting for Roma-related research.

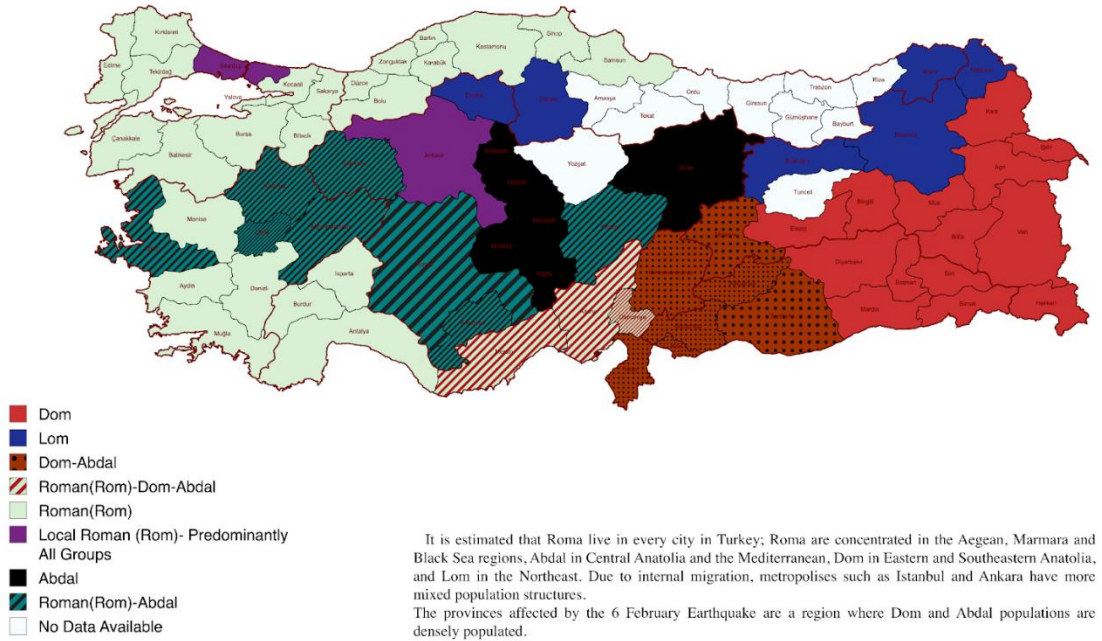


Figure 2 Geographic Distribution of Roma in Turkey. Source: Author

As shown in Figure 2, Roma are predominantly located in Thrace, Istanbul, the Aegean, and Western Mediterranean regions; Lom communities are mostly found in the Eastern and Western Black Sea regions as well as Northeastern Anatolia; Dom populations are concentrated in Southeastern and Eastern Anatolia. Beyond these groups, there are other communities, such as *Abdal* and *Teber*, that, while not always classified as Roma in some sources, display similar cultural and social patterns. There is ongoing scholarly debate as to whether these groups should be considered Roma. It has been observed that these groups are primarily concentrated in the Central Anatolia and Mediterranean regions (Tarlan, 2019).¹² A distinguishing feature of these communities, such as the Abdals and Tebers, is that they do not speak a distinct Roma language (Kolukırık, 2006;¹³ 2008;¹⁴ Marsh, 2008¹⁵).

¹² Tarlan, K. V. (2019). Bölgesel bir sosyal içme strateji önerisi: Türkiye, Lübnan, Ürdün. Kırkayak Kültür - Dom Araştırmalar Merkezi.

¹³ Kolukırık, S. 2006. "Sosyolojik Perspektiften Türk Çingenerleri: İzmir Çingenerleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma", *Uluslararası İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi*, 3(1), 12-30.

¹⁴ Kolukırık, S. 2008. "Türkiye'de Rom, Dom ve Lom Gruplarının Görünümü", *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları (HÜTAD)*, (8), 145-154.

¹⁵ Marsh, A. 2008. "Etnisite ve Kimlik". *Biz Buradayız! Türkiye'de Romanlar Ayrımcı Uygulamalar ve Hak Mücadelesi*. Editör: Uzpeder, E. vd. İstanbul: Mart Matbaacılık.

Roma communities in Turkey also show religious diversity in addition to ethnic and cultural variation. While the majority are Muslim, their beliefs often reflect the sectarian diversity of the regions in which they live. For example, many Roma in western Turkey follow Sunni Islam and identify with the Hanafi school, whereas some communities in Central Anatolia adhere to Alevism, which does not follow a traditional Islamic legal school (Şan, 2022)¹⁶. In addition, there are also Catholic Roma and Roma from other religious traditions in various parts of Turkey.

Another key factor affecting the settlement patterns of Roma communities has been internal migration movements. The rapid industrialization post-1980 triggered a significant rural-to-urban migration, which had profound effects on the demographic and socio-economic structure of Roma groups. The erosion of traditional occupations and shrinking livelihood opportunities prompted a search for new life prospects in urban centers (Gül, 2025).¹⁷

These demographic shifts are not driven by economic reasons alone. The major earthquake that struck the Southeastern Anatolia region in 2023, particularly in provinces where Roma communities are densely populated, led to forced displacement. The destruction caused by the disaster severely disrupted access to housing and livelihoods for these communities and transformed previously more homogeneous settlement patterns into more fragmented, dispersed, and heterogeneous distributions (Romani Godi, 2023).¹⁸

Although rarely mentioned in academic texts, urban transformation projects in Turkey have also significantly impacted traditional Roma neighborhoods through processes of gentrification. In historically Roma neighborhoods such as Sulukule, Küçükbakkalköy, and Sarıgöl, urban redevelopment has forced Roma communities to migrate, reshaping local migration dynamics.

Therefore, the distribution model proposed by Kolukırık (2008), while reflecting traditional settlement areas of Roma populations, is insufficient for explaining current patterns. According to field data and sample analyses from a comprehensive 2024 study supported by Hacettepe

¹⁶ Şan, A. (2022). Çanakkale Romanlarının Dini Kimlik ve İnançları Üzerine Bir Araştırma. Yüksek Lisans Tezi. Çanakkale.

¹⁷ Gül, S. (2025). Industrialisation in Modern Turkey and the Search for Environmental Justice for the Romani Population of the Ergene River Basin: Romani Voices amid Environmental Degradation. *Critical Romani Studies*, 7(1), 14–34. <https://doi.org/10.29098/crs.v7i1.185>

¹⁸ Romani Godi, Eşit Haklar İçin İzleme Derneği & Sivil Düşler Derneği. (2023, Kasım). *Depremin “Roman” Hali: Şubat 2023 depremleri sonrası Roman topluluklarının insani yardıma erişimi* [Araştırma raporu]. Romani Godi. <https://romanigodi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Depremin-Roman-Hali-EnSon-1.pdf>

University Institute of Population Studies and TÜBİTAK, the Roma population in Turkey is estimated to comprise approximately 55% Roma, 25% Lom, 15% Dom, and 5% other non-Roma groups with similar lifestyles (Koç, Saraç, Abbasoğlu-Özgören & Çağatay, 2024).¹⁹ However, further in-depth research is needed to validate these figures. Notably, research on the Lom group in Turkey remains scarce, and the 25% estimate may be considered a high projection for this subgroup.

1.3 Socio-Cultural Characteristics of Roma Groups in Turkey

Roma communities in Turkey vary not only in terms of geography and language, but also in their socio-cultural structures, historical occupational backgrounds, and lifestyles. These groups have diversified over time depending on the regions they inhabit, their interactions with surrounding societies, and their livelihood strategies.

Rom groups mostly reside in areas near urban centers where the informal economy is prevalent. Generally settled, they sustain themselves through various daily jobs and occasionally turn to traditional professions such as music. Dom groups are a Roma subgroup with artisanal roots and a semi-nomadic character, historically forming close ties with Middle Eastern communities. Today, Dom communities live in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Egypt, and Turkey. Their traditional occupations include dentistry, blacksmithing, sieve-making, basket-weaving, tinsmithing, hunting, healing, fortune-telling, and music. They are known for their peripatetic (itinerant artisan) lifestyle, providing services to producer communities (Gezici, 2019).²⁰ Although most of the Dom population in Turkey is now settled, a small portion still maintains a migratory lifestyle, traveling seasonally to different provinces for agricultural or other temporary work.

Teber communities are a Roma group primarily associated with musicianship. Although the term “Abdal” is used in some regions, many individuals from the Teber community find this label exclusionary and discriminatory, and thus prefer to identify themselves with the “Teber”

¹⁹ Koç, İ. Saraç, M. Abbasoğlu-Özgören, A. ve Çağatay, P. (2024) Türkiye Roman Nüfus Araştırması, TÜBİTAK ve Hacettepe Üniversitesi Nüfus Etütleri Enstitüsü, Ankara.

²⁰ Gezici, Z. (2019). Dom toplumunda toplumsal cinsiyet algısının dönüşümü (Yüksek lisans tezi, Gaziantep Üniversitesi).

identity. The language they speak is referred to as “Teberce” (Gezicier, Gül, Vargün & Yıldırım, 2024).²¹

Lom groups are a settled Roma subgroup that has historically lived alongside Armenian communities in the Eastern Black Sea, Eastern Anatolia, and the Caucasus regions. Today, Lom communities still residing in these areas are often referred to by locals as “Poşa”. They are among the least visible Roma groups in Turkey (Gezicier, Gül, Vargün & Yıldırım, 2024).

These differences reveal that Roma communities in Turkey do not form a monolithic group, but rather a multi-layered social mosaic shaped by distinct historical, geographical, and cultural contexts.

1.4 The Situation of Roma Youth and Women in Turkey

The demographic structure of the Roma population in Turkey displays significant differences compared to the general population. According to current data, 31% of the Roma population is aged 0–14, 62% is between 15–64, and 7% is aged 65 and over. Approximately 40% of the community consists of individuals under the age of 18; children are more prevalent among males, while elderly individuals are more common among women (Koç, Saraç, Abbasoğlu-Özgören & Çağatay, 2024). In contrast, in the general Turkish population, 22% are under 15, 10% are over 65, and the child population rate is 27% (Turkish Statistical Institute, 2023).²² These differences reflect a population pyramid with a wide base and a sharp narrowing at the top among the Roma community, indicating high fertility rates and low life expectancy. Compared to the national average, the Roma population has higher birth and mortality rates and shorter life spans.

A closer look at the socioeconomic status of Roma youth reveals stark inequalities. A study conducted with 95 Roma youth found that 28 individuals had no income, and 30 earned between 0–1000 TL. At least 83 of the youth and 55 of their families lived on incomes below the minimum wage (Çetinkaya & Evcı, 2022, p. 22).²³

²¹ Gezicier, Z., Gül, S., Vargün, Z., & Yıldırım, G. (2024). Roman Topluluklarının Adalete Erişimi ve karşılaştıkları sorunlar. *Romani Godi*.

²² Turkish Statistical Institute. (2023, January 30). *The Results of Address Based Population Registration System, 2022* (Press Release No. 49685). <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=49685>

²³ Çetinkaya, H., & Evcı, H. L. (2022). *Bu Romanlar Hep Böyle: Roman Gençlerin Eğitimde ve İstihdamda Yaşadıkları Ayrımcılık* [“That's How Roma People Always Are: Discrimination in Education and Employment Among Roma Youth”]. Sıfır Ayrımcılık Derneği. <https://sifirayrimcilik.org/raporlar/#>

Discrimination in education is another significant aspect of this inequality. Of the 95 youth interviewed, 61 (64%) reported experiencing discrimination in school settings, and 71 reported facing discrimination from peers or family members; about 26 youth took no action in response; only 8 reported the issue to school authorities, 5 shared it with their families, and 3 either transferred schools or dropped out due to discrimination (Çetinkaya & Evci, 2022, p. 24).

Employment rates among Roma youth are also notably low. Among Roma youth aged 18 and over, only 29.8% are employed, while 70.2% are not working. In other words, only 3 out of 10 Roma youth are participating in the labor force (Zero Discrimination Association, 2022, p. 25). Of the employed youth, 23 work without formal contracts or social security, typically in informal and insecure jobs such as scrap collecting, portering, street vending, cleaning, or peddling (Zero Discrimination Association, 2022, p. 26). Additionally, half of the youth reported facing discrimination during job searches, and 21 shared that they experienced similar treatment at their workplaces (Çetinkaya & Evci, 2022, p. 27).

Field studies on Roma, Dom, Lom, and Abdal women are extremely limited. Existing research predominantly highlights inequalities in housing, education, and employment, as well as structural issues like social exclusion and spatial stigmatization (Bayraktar 2011;²⁴ Çubukçu 2011;²⁵ Demirel 2012;²⁶ Yıldırım 2015²⁷). These inequalities manifest in intersecting ways due to the women's identities, ethnicity, skin color, language, clothing style, and educational background. Particularly during crises and disasters, these vulnerabilities intensify, and economic inequalities become even more pronounced.

1.5 Roma Youth and Women's Movements in Turkey

Since the early 2000s, approximately 600–650 Roma associations have been established in Turkey with the aim of increasing the visibility of Roma identity, strengthening access to fundamental rights, enhancing participation in democratic representation mechanisms, and

²⁴ Bayraktar, Özlem. 2011. "Çingenerler: Başka Bir Dünyanın İnsanları." *Global Media Journal: Turkish Edition* 1 (2): 118-132.

²⁵ Uçan-Çubukçu, Sevgi. 2011. "Mekânın İzdüşümünde Toplumsal Cinsiyet: Sulukule Mahallesi ve Romanlar." *İ.Ü. Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi* 44 (1): 83-106.

²⁶ Demirel, Nurhan. 2012. *Romanların Sosyal Dışlanma Probleminin Romanlar ve Toplum Düzeyinde Karşılaştırmalı Araştırması (Kocaeli Örneği)*. Unpublished Master's thesis, Yalova.

²⁷ Yıldırım, M., Murat, D., and Aca, Z. 2015. "Algılanmış Etnik Ayrımcılık Deneyimleri ile Türkiye'de Roman Kadınlar."

ensuring cultural continuity. These structures have served as platforms for articulating the legal, economic, and social demands of Roma communities and have been regarded as important tools within the field of civil society. However, this quantitative increase has not necessarily translated into a transformation towards inclusive and representative organizational structures.

In particular, the representation of Roma women within these civil society structures has remained extremely limited. Among the established associations, only 5 to 10 are led by Roma women, and just two organizations are known for their active advocacy under female leadership: the Zero Discrimination Association, founded by Elmas Arus, and the Roma Memory Studies Association, led by Fatoş Kaytan. This situation highlights the lack of decision-making power among Roma women in civil society organizations and reflects the fact that a gender-equal civil society structure has yet to be institutionalized.

A similar issue exists for Roma youth. As of today, the only known organization founded and led directly by Roma youth is Romani Godi. However, following the launch of the Roma Opening initiative in 2009, interest among young people in civil society increased. During this period, youth-oriented organizations such as Turkish Roma Youth Network (TRY), the Roma Youth Association, TYRA, Barvali, Neva Terne Roma Platform, and ERRC Turkey National Volunteers came to the fore. While these organizations contributed to the increased social visibility of Roma youth during certain periods, they have faced significant challenges in terms of sustainability.

Roma youth organizations often struggle to maintain their activities due to generational conflicts and hierarchical relationships within the broader Roma civil society. In Turkey, Roma civil society is largely dominated by middle-aged and older men, and this structure hinders the development of participatory organizing models. Women, youth, LGBTQ+ individuals, and other vulnerable groups are underrepresented in this space, and the issues affecting these groups rarely gain visibility on the civil society agenda.

The attitudes of Roma youth toward civil society are shaped by these contradictions. The experiences of older generations are sometimes perceived by young people as models to be avoided, limiting their willingness to engage in civil society. Key factors contributing to the limited success of youth-led Roma organizations in Turkey include the relatively short history of the Roma civil rights movement (about 20 years), the lack of institutional internalization of

rights-based approaches, and insufficient understanding of struggles intersecting with gender, youth, and environmental issues.

Additional challenges include lack of financial resources, insufficient access to mentorship and capacity-building, the instrumentalization of associations for political purposes, and the perception of civil society as a means for personal advancement. In environments where public debates within civil society are intertwined with concerns about security, Roma youth often hold back out of fear—“What if something happens to me?” These challenges severely hinder the ability of Roma youth to develop sustainable and effective organizational models.

2. Findings and Analysis: Roma Women and Youth in the Context of the SDGs

2.1. SDG 1: No Poverty

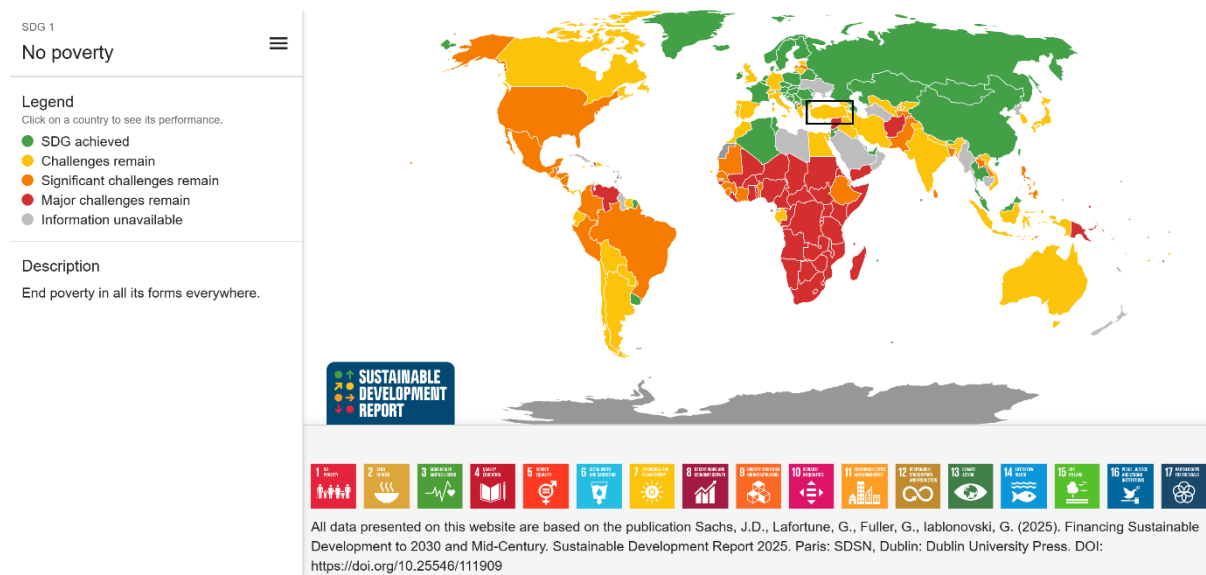


Figure 3 Turkey's Current Situation Within the Framework of SDG 1. Source: Sachs et al., 2025

Among the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Goal 1: No Poverty aims to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. Within this framework, Turkey is still categorized under “challenges remain,” indicating that SDG 1 has not yet been achieved (Sachs et al., 2025). According to the 2024 data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TÜİK), Turkey’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at current prices was calculated as 507,615 TRY, and GDP per capita was announced as 15,463 USD (TÜİK, 2025).²⁸ However, despite these macroeconomic figures, the proportion of the population at risk of poverty or social exclusion remains high at

²⁸ Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu. (2025). Quarterly Gross Domestic Product, Quarter IV: October–December, 2024. Erişim adresi <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Quarterly-Gross-Domestic-Product-Quarter-IV%3A-October-December%2C-2024-54163&dil=2>

29.3%. This reveals that one in every three people in Turkey faces the risk of multidimensional poverty (TÜİK, 2025a).²⁹

This general situation reflects even starker inequalities for Roma communities. According to the study titled “Roma Communities in Turkey,” conducted by the Social Democracy Foundation (SODEV), the Istanbul Planning Agency (IPA), and the Zero Discrimination Association in November 2021³⁰, the average monthly income of Roma citizens was found to be 1,426 TRY. This amount is significantly below the minimum wage of 2,825 TRY at the time. Among Roma individuals who participated in the research:

- 77.5% reported experiencing unemployment,
- 57.5% lived in rented housing,
- 83.2% used stoves for heating,
- 59% had not consumed meat even once in the past year,
- 62% stated they did not benefit from any form of social assistance.

Additionally, 79.8% of Roma individuals were in debt, and 71.5% believed they would not be able to retire (SODEV 2021).

²⁹ **Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu. (2025).** *Yoksulluk ve Yaşam Koşulları İstatistikleri, 2024*. Erişim adresi: <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=Yoksulluk-ve-Yasam-Kosullari-Istatistikleri-2024-53714>

³⁰ Sosyal Demokrasi Vakfı, İstanbul Planlama Ajansı ve Sıfır Ayrımcılık Derneği. (2021, Kasım). Türkiye’de Roman Toplulukları ve Yoksulluk Araştırması, <https://sodev.org.tr/sodev-turkiyede-roman-topluluklari-ve-yoksulluk-arastirmasi/>

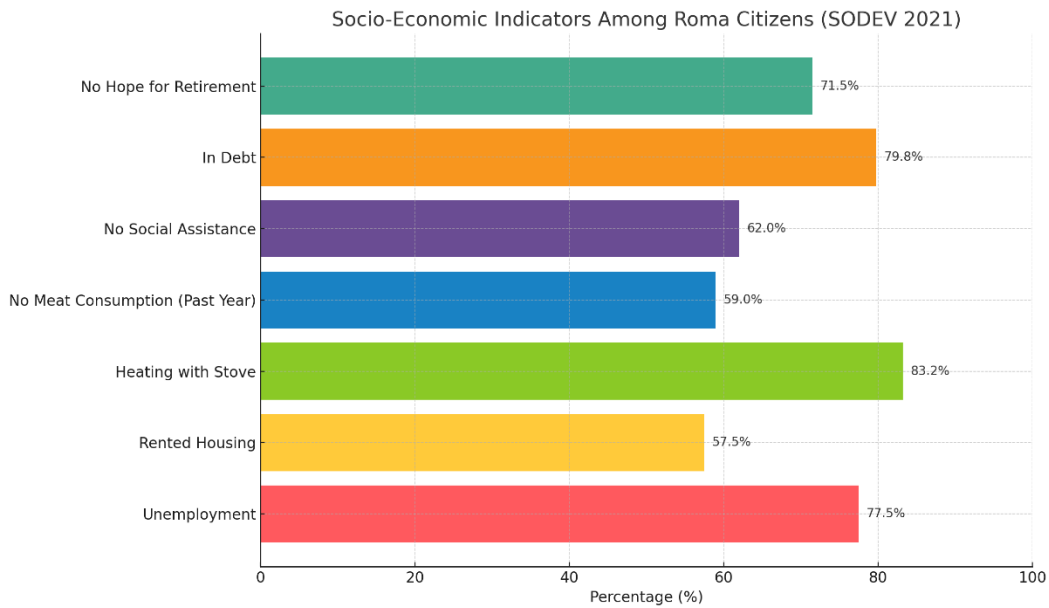


Figure 4 Socio-Economic Indicators Among Roma in Turkey. Source: Adapted from the SODEV 2021 research

These figures stand in clear contradiction to SDG 1.3, which calls for access to nationally appropriate social protection systems for all.

2.1.1 Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty: Child and Youth Poverty

Poverty experienced during childhood often persists into adulthood. According to OECD data, as of 2019, Turkey ranks third globally in terms of child poverty, after South Africa and Costa Rica, with 22.4% of children living in poverty (OECD, 2025).³¹ According to TÜİK's "Statistics on Children 2021," out of 23 million children in Turkey, approximately 7.38 million are living in poverty (Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, 2021).³²

For Roma youth, the situation is even more alarming. In a 2022 study conducted by the Zero Discrimination Association involving 95 Roma youth:

- About two-thirds reported having either no income or income below the minimum wage,
- The employment rate stood at only 29.8%,

³¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2025). *Poverty rate*. OECD Data. <https://data.oecd.org/inequality/poverty-rate.htm>

³² Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu. (2021). *İstatistiklerle Çocuk, 2021*. Erişim adresi: <https://data.tuik.gov.tr/Bulten/Index?p=İstatistiklerle-Cocuk-2021-45633&dil=1>

- A significant portion of those employed worked in informal and insecure jobs,
- Half of the participants reported experiencing discrimination while job hunting (Çetinkaya & Evci, 2022).

Similarly, a 2011 study conducted with 235 Roma women in Bursa found that:

- 88.2% worked informally,
- 81.8% earned less than the minimum wage (Yıldırım & Aca, 2015).

2.1.2 Earthquakes, Pandemics, and Deepening Poverty

The earthquakes centered in Kahramanmaraş on February 6, 2023, significantly worsened the already fragile socioeconomic conditions of communities such as the Dom and Abdal. These groups lost their homes, family members, and sources of livelihood, while government interventions remained inadequate in compensating these losses. During the early stages of the earthquake response, waste-picking and recycling, the primary means of income for many, were prohibited in affected areas, further deepening poverty.

Additionally, most Roma are employed in informal, public-facing sectors such as street music, agricultural labor, and street vending. These were either temporarily banned or severely disrupted due to reduced demand, especially with the collapse of the entertainment sector (Gül, Orun, Yıldırım, Eriş Örnek & Kızılkaya, 2024).³³ A similar economic breakdown was observed during the COVID-19 pandemic due to lockdowns (Uzpeder, Gül & Yıldırım, 2023).³⁴ The ongoing economic crisis has further exacerbated these structural inequalities.

2.1.3 Roma Women and Poverty

Roma women experience poverty in multidimensional, layered, and chronic forms. According to a 2024 study by the Roma Memory Studies Association in Malatya, most Roma women stated they worked in:

- Waste collection,

³³ Gül, S., Orun, P., Yıldırım, G., Eriş Örnek, A., & Kızılkaya, M. (2024). *Rengarenk çadırlar ve farklı plakalar: Kahramanmaraş depremleri sonrası Adıyaman'da Dom ve Abdalların durumuna dair bilgi notu*. Roman Hafıza Çalışmaları Derneği. <https://romanigodi.org/category/yayinlarimiz/>

³⁴ Uzpeder, E., Gül, S., & Yıldırım, G. (2023). *COVID-19 pandemisinden çıkış sürecinde Türkiye'de Romanlar*. Romani Godi. <https://romanigodi.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Eomani-Godi-Rapor-Turkce.pdf>

- Domestic cleaning,
- Daily labour,
- Seasonal agricultural work, all of which are insecure, irregular, and low-income jobs.

Interview excerpts vividly illustrate these realities:

“I make a living by selling tissues and also collecting scrap with a cart. I’m a mother of three, and my husband died just before the earthquake. I was verbally harassed because of my job, and I can’t work in the public sector because there’s no one to look after my children.”

45-year-old Dom woman, Malatya (Gül, Orun, Gezici & Zengin, 2024³⁵)

“We have difficulty finding jobs. Sometimes we are even subjected to violence because of how we look. The way we dress is an issue for some.”

19-year-old Dom woman, Malatya (Gül, Orun, Gezici & Zengin, 2024)

“We Abdals sometimes have two or three families living in the same house just so we can afford the rent. Our house collapsed in the earthquake; all my belongings were buried under the rubble. They offered to place us in a container, but it was too far from where we make a living through street music, so we didn’t go. We don’t even have a tent now—we’re living on the street. We get electricity from a streetlamp and water from a fountain across the main road.”

40-year-old Abdal woman, Malatya (Gül, Orun, Gezici & Zengin, 2024)

These findings and testimonies show significant shortcomings in Turkey’s efforts to ensure inclusive access to social protection systems as outlined in SDG 1.3, particularly for Roma

³⁵ Gül, S., Orun, P., Gezici, D., & Zengin, D. (2024). 6 Şubat 2023 Kahramanmaraş depremlerinin Malatya’da Dom ve Abdal kadınlar üzerindeki etkilerinin afet adaleti ve toplumsal cinsiyet bağlamında incelenmesi. Roman Hafıza Çalışmaları Derneği.

communities. Likewise, the principle stated in SDG 1.5 to reduce vulnerability to social, economic, and environmental shocks is clearly being violated for Roma women and youth.

Poverty experienced by Roma communities cannot be explained by income levels alone; rather, it reflects multidimensional inequalities and systemic exclusion rooted in discrimination. Therefore, producing Roma-specific data and implementing targeted policy interventions are urgent priorities in monitoring progress toward the SDGs.

2.2 Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3)

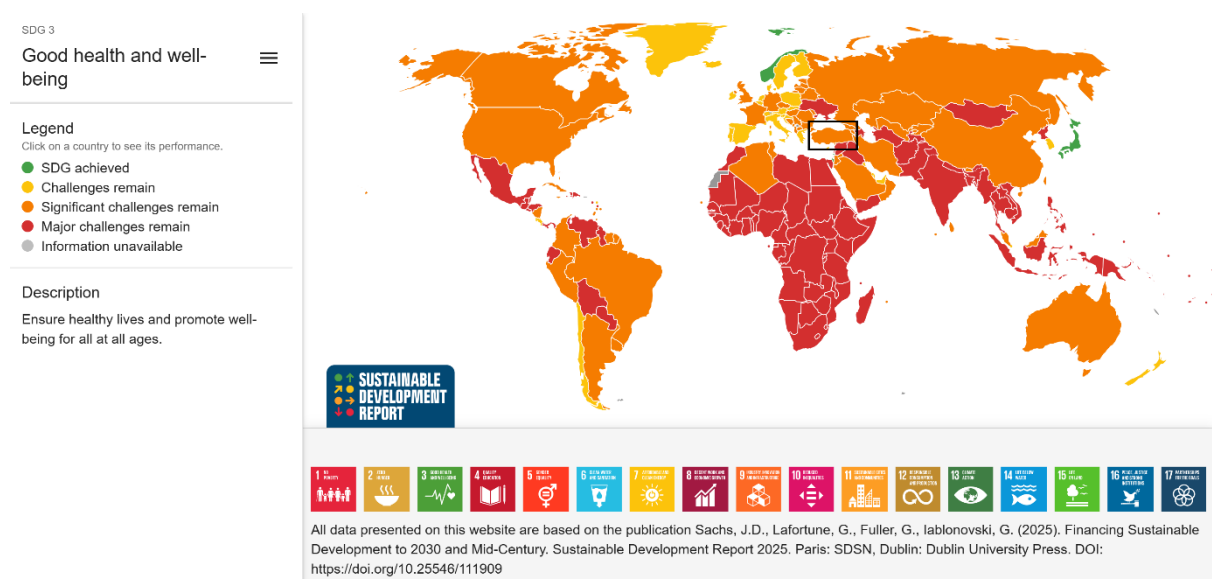


Figure 5 Turkey's Current Situation Within the Framework of SDG 3. Source: Sachs et al., 2025

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3) aims to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. However, Turkey still ranks among the countries facing “significant challenges” under this goal and exhibits serious inequalities in terms of health indicators (Sachs et al., 2025). One of the groups where these inequalities are most visible is the Roma communities.

The forms of social, economic, and spatial exclusion faced by the Roma have negative consequences in many areas, from access to basic health services to life expectancy. While the

average life expectancy in Turkey is 78.6 years, it drops to as low as 68.5 years for Roma communities (SODEV 2021).³⁶

Moreover, while approximately 10 to 15% of Roma have no access to health services at all, 20 to 30% can only benefit from these services to a limited extent (SODEV 2021). This situation poses a serious challenge to the goal of “universal health coverage” under SDG 3.8.

Child health indicators are also concerning. While the infant mortality rate in Turkey is 9 per 1,000 live births, this rate rises to 19 per 1,000 among Roma communities. In other words, the current infant mortality rates resemble Turkey’s averages in the 1990s, revealing that Roma communities are being left behind in terms of health (Koç, Saraç, Abbasoğlu-Özgören & Çağatay, 2024).

Health indicators related to nutrition are similarly striking. The stunting rate in Roma communities is 1.78 times higher than the national average, while the underweight rate is 2.5 times higher. In contrast, the rate of overweight, as another dimension of malnutrition, is 2.6 times lower compared to the general population (Koç, Saraç, Abbasoğlu-Özgören & Çağatay, 2024).

As a result, the principle of SDG 3 to “leave no one behind” has yet to be realized for the Roma. Ensuring the Roma's right to healthy living can only be achieved through a holistic approach that includes combating discrimination and restructuring health policies in an inclusive manner.

³⁶ Sosyal Demokrasi Vakfı, İstanbul Planlama Ajansı ve Sıfır Ayrımcılık Derneği. (2021, Kasım). Türkiye’de Roman Toplulukları ve Yoksulluk Araştırması, <https://sodev.org.tr/sodev-turkiyede-roman-topluluklari-ve-yoksulluk-arastirmasi/>

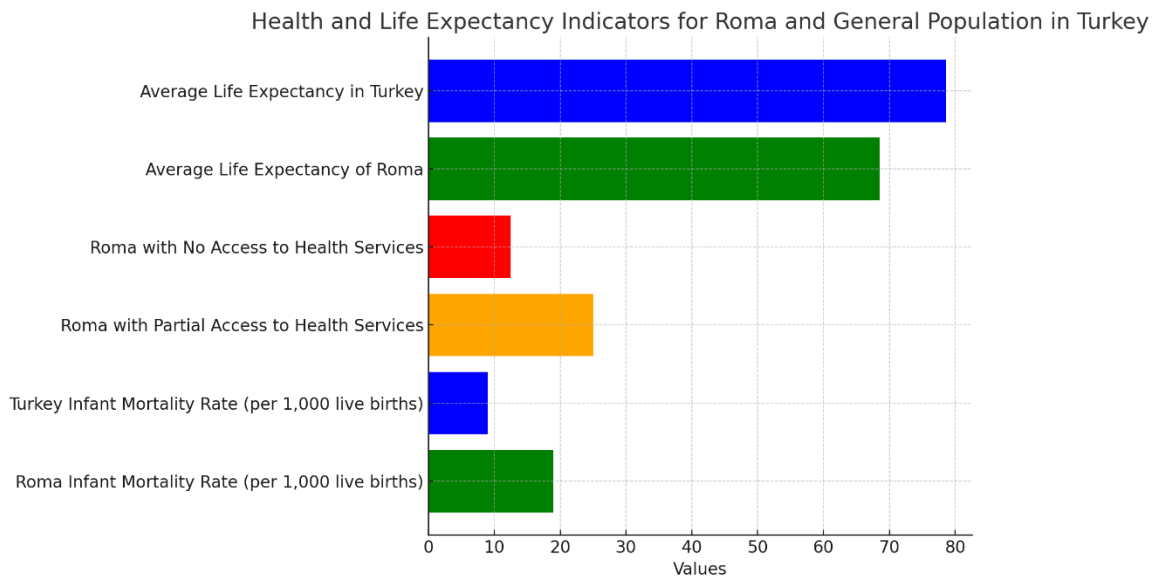


Figure 6 Health Indicators of Roma in Turkey

2.3. SDG 4: Quality Education

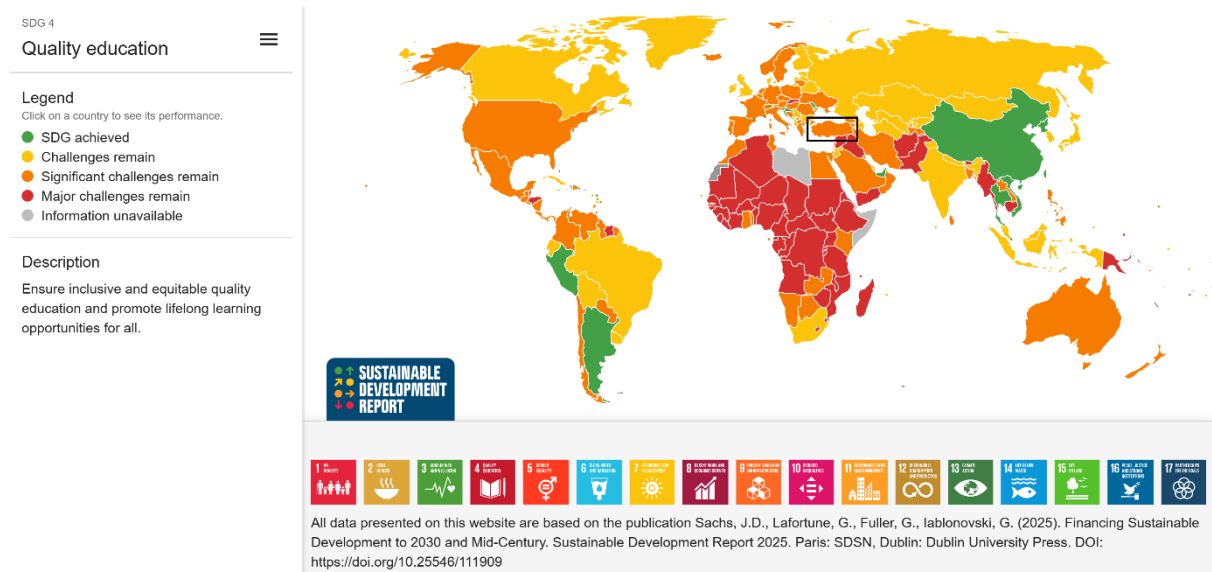


Figure 7 Turkey's Current Situation Within the Framework of SDG 4. Source: Sachs et al., 2025

The fourth of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), "Quality Education", aims to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all and to promote lifelong learning opportunities. However, as of 2024, Turkey is categorized as a country where "significant challenges remain" on the SDG indicator map with regard to this goal. This clearly shows that the goal has not yet been achieved (Sachs et al., 2025).

When evaluated in terms of Roma communities, reaching SDG 4 faces even greater structural obstacles. Particularly at the secondary education level, the participation rate of Roma children

in education is far behind the national average in Turkey. While the national net enrollment rate for girls at primary and lower secondary levels is 94%, this rate drops to 72% among Roma girls. The situation is even more striking for boys: the national average is 95%, whereas it is only 65% among Roma boys. At the transition to secondary education, only 15% of Roma girls and 8% of Roma boys continue their education (Koç, Saraç, Abbasoğlu-Özgören & Çağatay, 2024). These figures reveal that Roma children's participation in basic education is severely limited and that gender-based inequalities are further deepened.

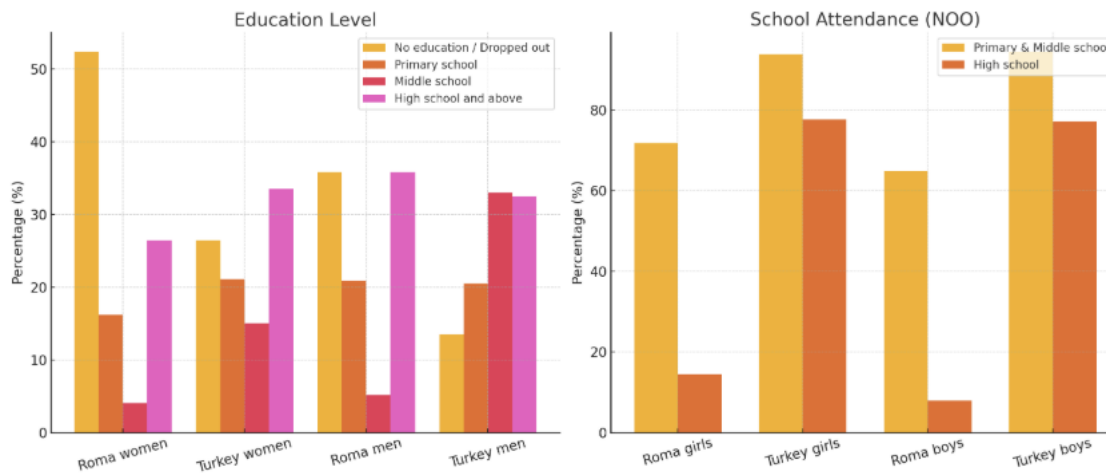


Figure 8 Education Situation of Roma in Turkey. Source: Adapted from Koç, Saraç, Abbasoğlu-Özgören, and Çağatay, 2024

2.3.1 Child Labor

Among the main factors that hinder Roma children's access to education are poverty, discrimination, child labor, and the low educational attainment of parents. 24% of school-aged Roma boys and 7% of girls are forced to work (Koç, Saraç, Abbasoğlu-Özgören & Çağatay, 2024). This situation points to a serious violation of SDG 4.1 and 4.5 sub-targets, namely, universal completion of primary and secondary education and the reduction of educational inequalities among vulnerable groups.

2.3.2 Early Marriage

Disengagement from education leads to the widespread occurrence of early marriages among Roma women and young girls. Among Roma women aged 25–49, 21% were married before the age of 15, and 53% before the age of 18. The proportion married by the age of 20 is 74% (Koç, Saraç, Abbasoğlu-Özgören and Çağatay, 2024). This indicates that early marriage is not a cause, but rather a result, a structural problem faced by Roma youth who are denied equal

access to education, subjected to discrimination in school, and forced out of the education system due to economic hardship.

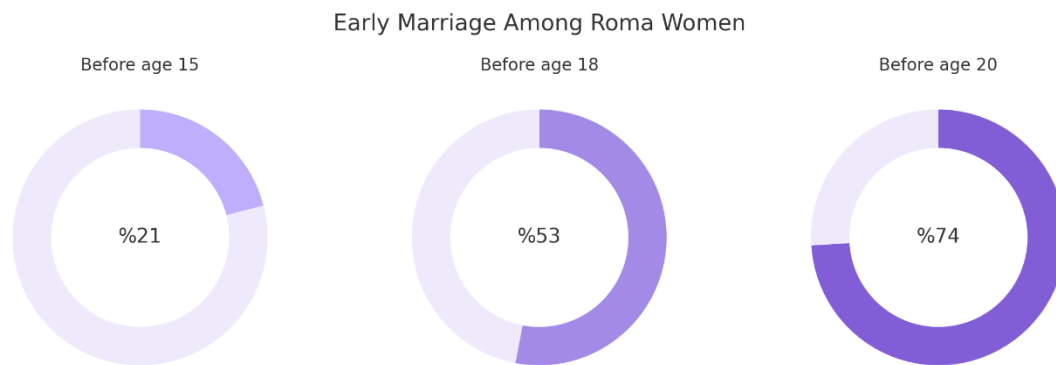


Figure 9 Early Marriage Among Roma Women. Source: Adopted from Koç, Saraç, Abbasoğlu-Özgören, and Çağatay, 2024

2.3.3 Post-6 February 2023 Earthquake: Access to Education for Dom and Abdal Children

The earthquakes centered in Kahramanmaraş on 6 February 2023 have rendered access to education almost impossible, especially for Dom and Abdal groups. The loss of income suffered by these communities in the aftermath of the earthquake made it difficult to cover education-related expenses. Damaged educational facilities, lack of teachers, the distance between existing schools and container living areas, and limited transportation options have led to children becoming disconnected from school.

In addition, the discrimination Dom and Abdal children face at school is one of the main reasons for school dropout. Some statements from children, featured in a report prepared by the Roma Memory Studies Association (Kaytan et al., 2024), clearly illustrate this situation:

"The other children don't play with me. They don't play with me because I'm a Gypsy. I'm the only Dom child in the class."

(10-year-old boy)

"We have a neighbor here, it would be great if he wasn't around. When my brother passed by, he called us 'Karachi'."

(12-year-old boy)

"And someone in our class committed suicide this year. She hanged herself at home. She was in sixth grade. Our classmates used to make fun of us. She said she couldn't take it anymore and would kill herself. She was my friend. I told her not to do such a thing. Then it was evening, we were about to sleep, and the phone rang—they said the girl had killed herself. I face discrimination because I'm Dom. The other kids mock us by calling us 'Karachi'."

(12-year-old girl)

These examples show that children face severe discrimination in educational settings and, as a result of systematic exclusion, are being pushed out of school.

Another issue is the low access to preschool education in neighborhoods where Roma youth live. This reveals that the SDG 4.2 goal of equal access to early childhood development and preschool education has not been achieved. As a result, Roma youth do not feel a sense of belonging due to discriminatory attitudes they face at school, which leads to higher school dropout rates. This clearly contradicts the SDG 4.5 objective of eliminating inequalities in education.

2.4. SDG 5: Gender Equality

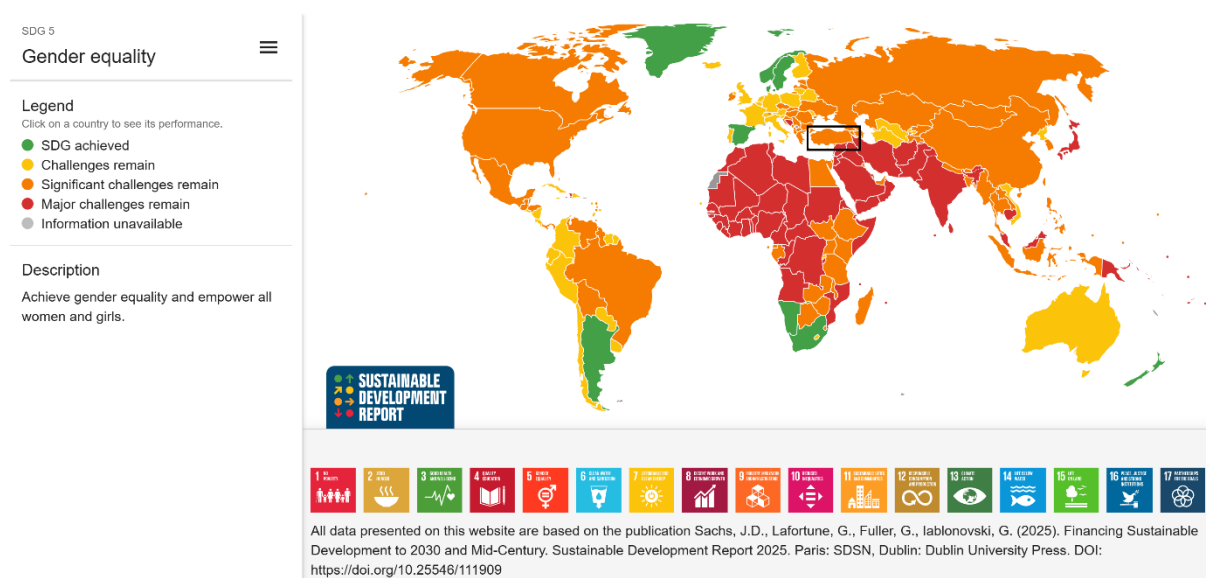


Figure 10 Turkey's Current Situation Within the Framework of SDG 5. Source: Sachs et al., 2025

Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) aims to achieve gender equality and empower all

women and girls. However, in Turkey’s Roma communities, gender-based inequalities are particularly evident in girls’ access to education. Nearly half of Roma girls are married before the age of 18, and one in four is married before the age of 15. This directly contradicts the SDG 5.3 target, which seeks to eliminate child, early, and forced marriages.

Along with early marriage, the rate of adolescent fertility is also alarmingly high among Roma communities. The fertility rate among Roma women aged 15–19 is 114 per 1,000, whereas the national average in Turkey is only 12 per 1,000 (Koç, Saraç, Abbasoğlu-Özgören and Çağatay, 2024). This high rate disrupts girls’ education and pushes them into socially and economically disadvantaged positions, demonstrating that access to sexual and reproductive health rights, targeted under SDG 5.6, has not been achieved.

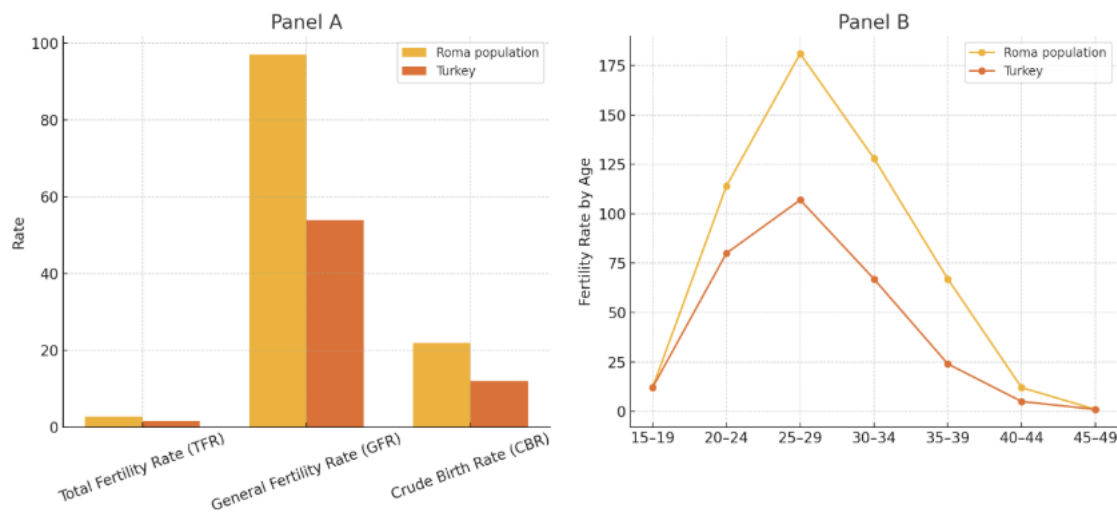


Figure 11 Fertility Statistics of Roma in Turkey. Source: Adopted from Koç, Saraç, Abbasoğlu-Özgören, and Çağatay, 2024

Educational indicators further support these inequalities: 52% of Roma women have never received education or dropped out after primary school, and only 4% have reached secondary education or beyond (Koç, Saraç, Abbasoğlu-Özgören, and Çağatay, 2024). These figures clearly show the intergenerational reproduction of gender-based inequalities and make it nearly impossible to achieve equal opportunity as envisioned by SDG 5.

The inequalities faced by Roma women are multilayered; due to both their ethnic identity and gender, they experience exclusion within their families and in accessing public services.

Following the earthquake on February 6, 2023, the risk of multiple discrimination against women further increased, along with a significant rise in anxiety and concerns for the future. Infrastructure deficiencies and problems in accessing clean water have increased health risks, especially for women and girls. In addition to difficulties in accessing general hygiene

products, women’s specific hygiene needs are largely unmet. After the earthquake, unpaid domestic labor for Dom and Abdal women increased, and the burden of caring for children and the elderly grew significantly. The sense of responsibility and guilt in the face of food shortages, combined with the expectations imposed by gender roles, creates intense psychological pressure on women (Gül, Orun, Gezici & Zengin, 2024). According to the Malatya field report by the Roma Memory Studies Association, despite the passage of a long time since the earthquake, some women are still forced to live in tents, without electricity, and using carried water. Unsafe living and social environments have increased the risk of verbal harassment against women (Gül, Orun, Gezici & Zengin, 2024).

2.5. Reducing Inequalities (SDG 10)

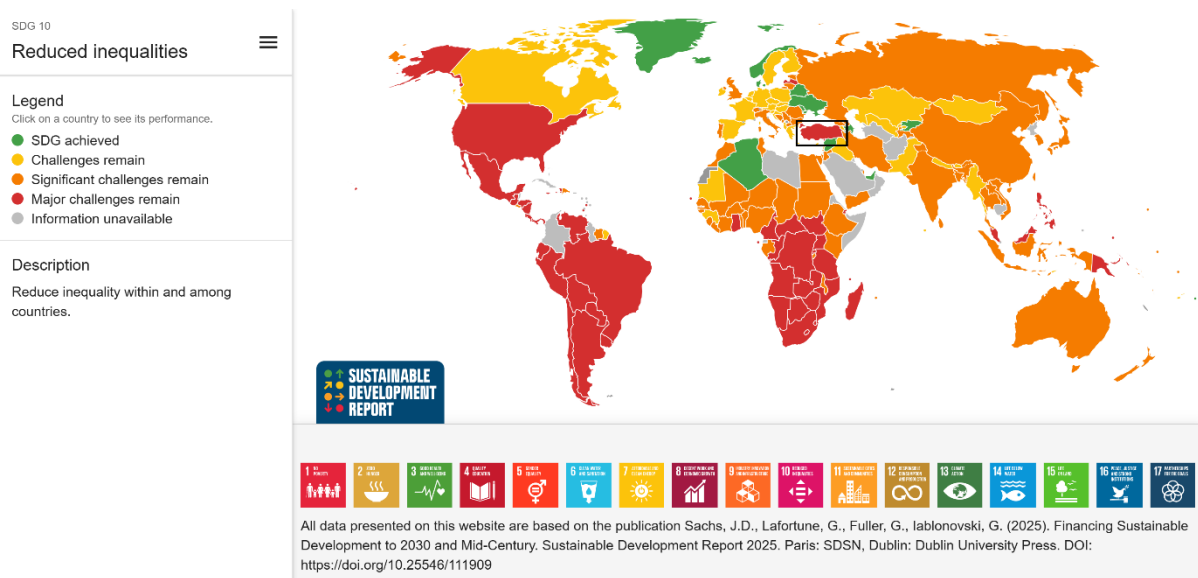


Figure 12 Turkey’s Current Situation Within the Framework of SDG 10. Source: Sachs et al., 2025

Sustainable Development Goal 10 (SDG 10) aims to reduce inequality within and among countries. Among the sub-targets of this goal, especially Targets 10.2 and 10.3 prioritize the empowerment of discriminated and marginalized groups and ensuring their full participation in social, economic, and political life. A recent field study focusing on the Abdal and Dom groups, which are part of the Roma communities living in Turkey, reveals that significant structural problems persist in achieving these targets.

Conducted by the Social Democracy Foundation (SODEV 2021), the study with most participants being Roma women and youth demonstrates that these groups are systematically exposed to identity-based discrimination. According to the research, 76% of the Abdal community and 79.3% of the Dom community reported experiencing discrimination due to their ethnic identity. These findings indicate that the objectives envisioned under SDG 10.3,

namely ensuring equal opportunity and eliminating discrimination, have yet to be fulfilled, particularly for ethnic minorities.

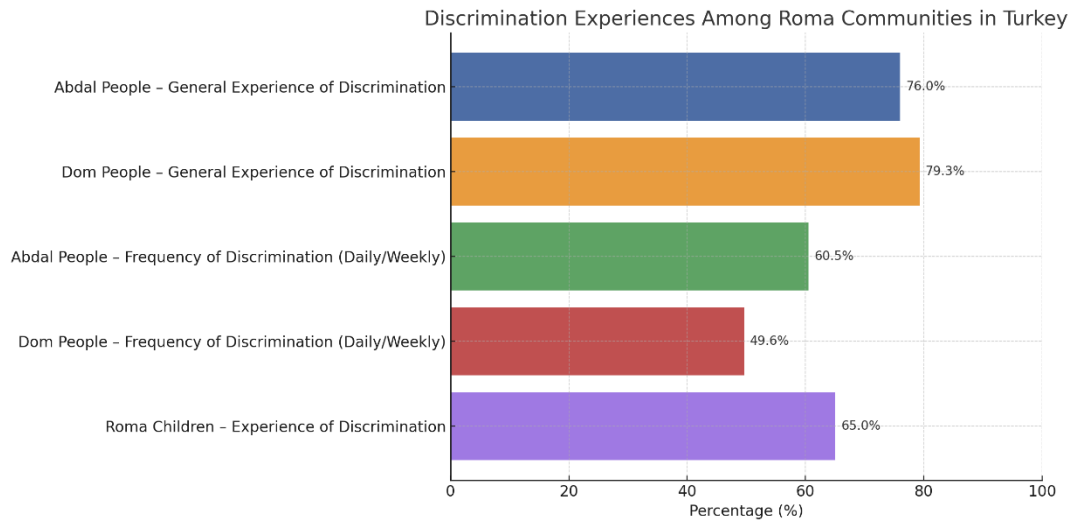


Figure 13 Discrimination Experiences Among Roma in Turkey. Source: Adopted from SODEV 2021 Research

The study also shows that discrimination is not merely a perceived condition but a frequent and recurring experience that penetrates various aspects of social life. This is clearly seen in the frequency with which participants report facing discrimination: 60.5% of Abdals and 49.6% of Doms stated they face discrimination several times a week or daily (SODEV 2021). These rates indicate that discrimination is not limited to individual cases but is a structural and ongoing issue, directly contradicting SDG 10.2's goal to "empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status" by 2030.

Another dimension of discrimination is observed in the exclusion and inequality experienced by children and youth in educational environments. Among young participants, 61 out of 95 (approximately 64.2%) reported experiencing significant or some level of discrimination in schools or similar educational settings (Çetinkaya & Evci, 2022). The fact that two out of every three young people have such experiences underscores the persistence of discrimination.

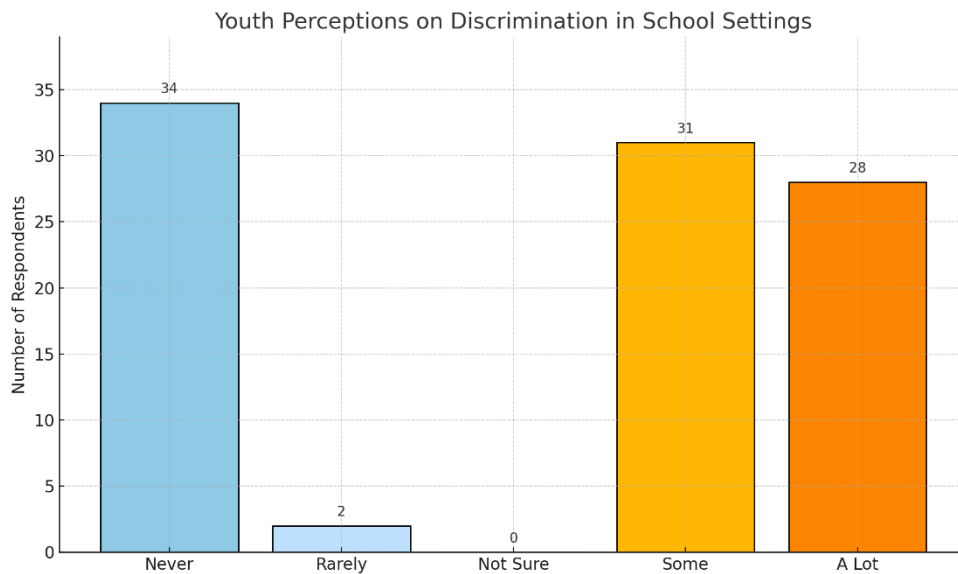


Figure 14 Youth Perceptions on Discrimination in School. Source: Adopted from Çetinkaya & Evci, 2022

In conclusion, inequalities affecting Roma groups in Turkey are diversifying over time, and existing disparities are deepening. Serious violations of SDG 10 persist, particularly concerning these marginalized communities.

2.6. Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8)

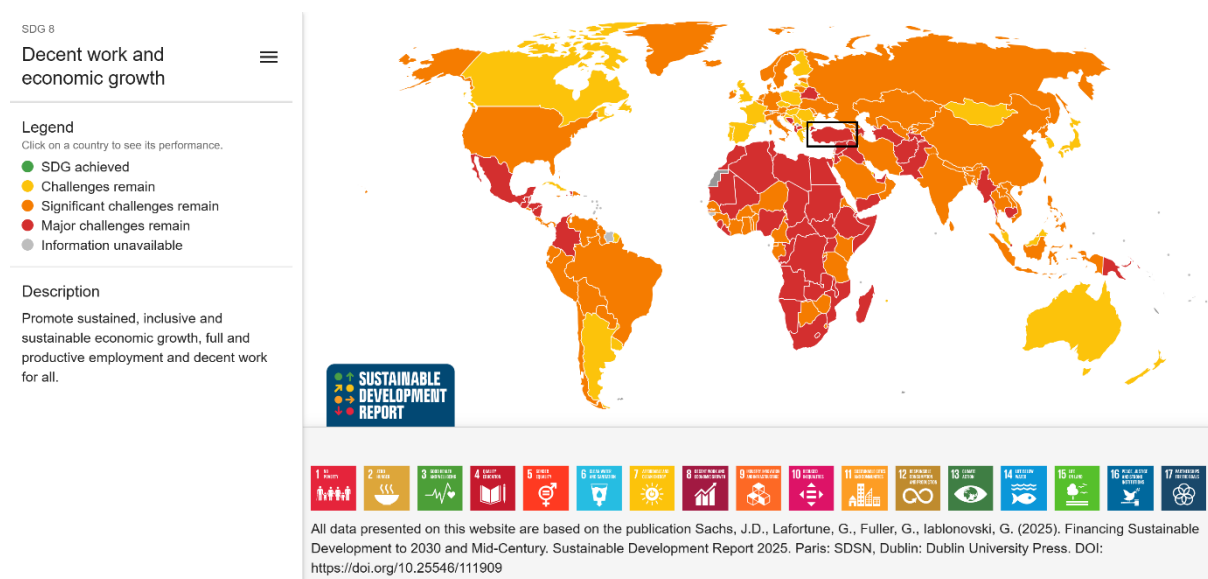


Figure 15 Turkey's Current Situation Within the Framework of SDG 8. Source: Sachs et al., 2025

Sustainable Development Goal 8 aims to promote productive employment and decent work opportunities for all individuals. However, the current employment practices among Roma communities in Turkey paint a picture far from this goal. According to a 2021 study conducted by the Social Democracy Foundation (SODEV), 77.5% of Roma individuals do not work in

any formal sector. Among those who are employed, only 12.3% work as regular wage earners, 8.5% are engaged in street vending, and 1.7% are self-employed.

These figures indicate that the target outlined under SDG 8.5, “full and productive employment for all”, has not been met. Additionally, 26.2% of respondents reported having no social security at all, while 71.5% stated they do not have access to basic rights such as retirement benefits. This shows that Roma communities are confined to temporary and informal job sectors, excluded from long-term income security and social protection mechanisms.

In Turkey, Roma communities predominantly work in informal and insecure jobs such as musicianship, street vending, flower selling, and cleaning. These jobs leave them largely deprived of social security-based rights such as pensions, maternity leave, and disability benefits. This vulnerability was further exacerbated during the pandemic. According to the research, 62.3% of Roma lost their jobs during the pandemic. The proportion of those who said “all my income was wiped out” reached 55.7%, and 33.2% reported a significant decline in their earnings (SODEV 2021). Occupations that rely on public space, such as musicianship, street vending, and cleaning, came to a virtual halt due to lockdown decisions. This directly contradicts SDG 8.8, which calls for “protecting labor rights and promoting safe and secure working environments.”

Similarly, after the earthquakes centered in Kahramanmaraş on February 6, 2023, the income sources of Roma people were once again disrupted. The banning of waste collection activities, along with either the decline in demand for or outright prohibition of musicianship and street-based jobs, eliminated the primary means of subsistence for these communities (Gül, Orun, Gezici & Zengin, 2024). Excluded from social protection networks, Roma individuals have become not only economically but also socially invisible.

Another important dynamic is the discrimination faced by Roma youth in their job-seeking processes. According to a study focusing on youth, current data shows that one in three Roma youth (32.8%) report experiencing discrimination while looking for a job. Moreover, one in five (22%) say they have faced discrimination in the workplace (Çetinkaya & Evci, 2022).

In addition, Roma communities face spatial stigmatization, meaning that living in a Roma neighborhood becomes a marker of exclusion and identity erasure, institutionalizing discrimination in employment. In other words, not only ethnic identity but also the area of

residence becomes a criterion for exclusion in job applications (Gezicier, Gül, Vargün, & Yıldırım, 2024)³⁷. This indicates that inequality is also being reproduced through geography.

In conclusion, achieving SDG 8's goal of inclusive, equitable, and sustainable economic growth is only possible by ensuring dignified working conditions for Roma communities. There is a clear need for inclusive employment policies that protect the labor of Roma women and youth from exploitation, make them more visible, and guarantee their rights.

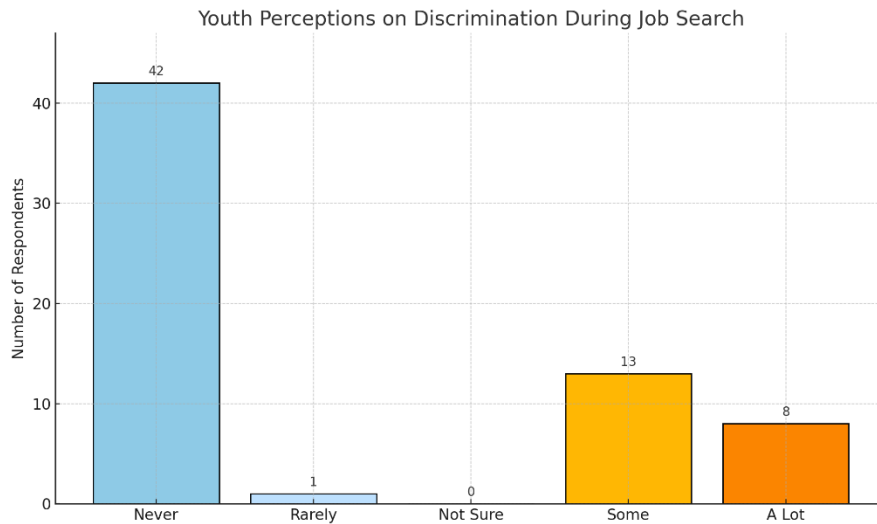


Figure 16 Youth Perceptions on Discrimination During Job Search. Source: Adopted from Çetinkaya & Evcı, 2022

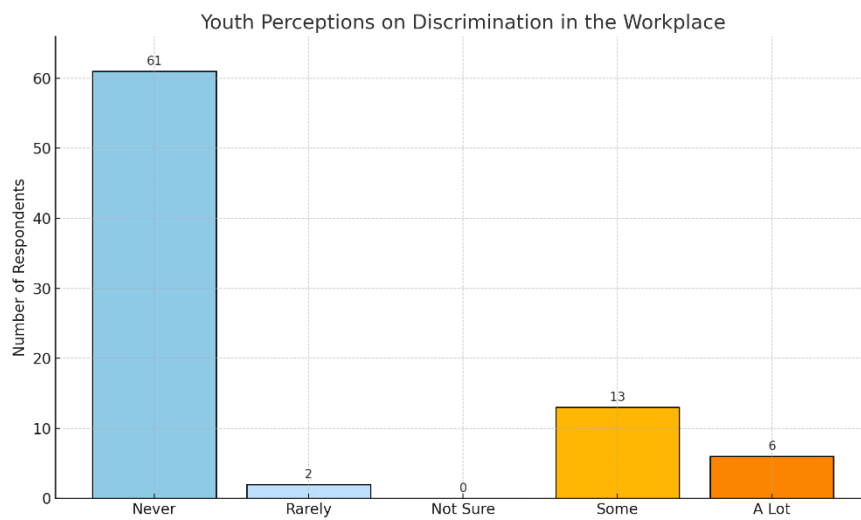


Figure 17 Youth Perceptions on Discrimination in the Workplace. Source: Adopted from Çetinkaya & Evcı, 2022

³⁷ Zühal Gezicier, Sergen Gül, Zozan Vargün, ve Göktan Yıldırım, *Roman Toplulukların Adalete Erişimi ve Karşılaştıkları Sorunlar* (Romani Godi, 2024), <https://romanigodi.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Romani-Godi-AdaleteErisim-Raporu-.pdf>.

2.7. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16)

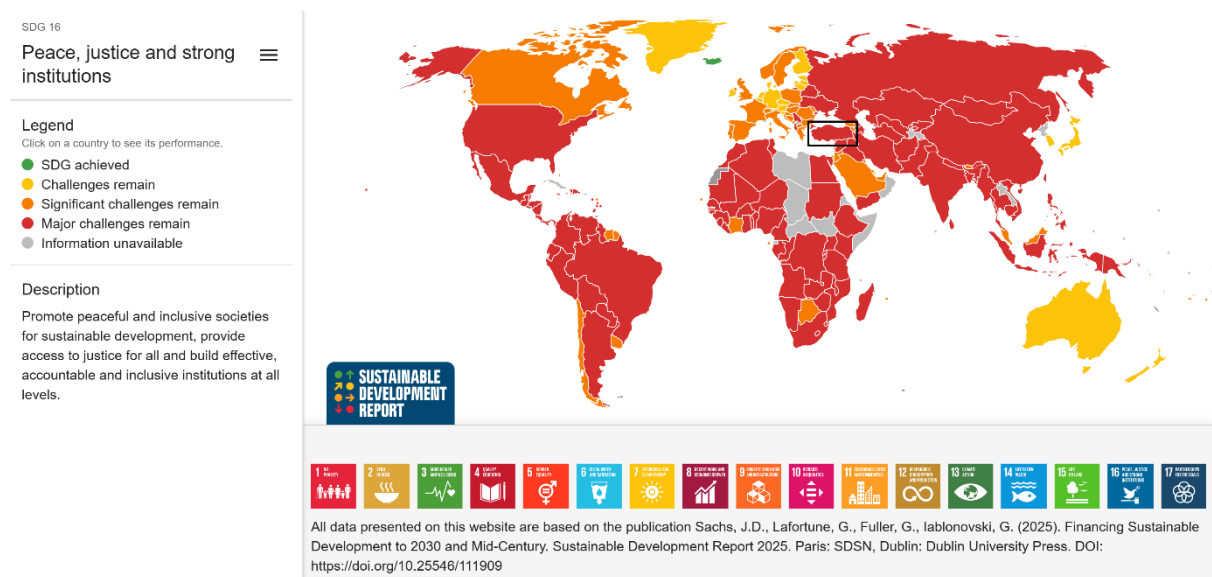


Figure 18 Turkey's Current Situation Within the Framework of SDG 16. Source: Sachs et al., 2025

Sustainable Development Goal 16 (SDG 16) aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, ensure access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. As shown on the map, Turkey is marked as facing "major challenges remain" under this goal category.

Observations indicate that in Turkey, public and civil representation of Roma communities, especially in terms of youth and women, is extremely limited. Currently, there is no Roma member of parliament; during the previous legislative term, the two Roma MPs were both middle-aged men.

Moreover, there are no Roma academics in the institutes researching Roma culture and history in Turkey. Similarly, within the relevant departments of the Ministry of Family and Social Services, which is responsible for developing public policies regarding Roma people, there are no Roma experts employed. In other words, Roma policies in Turkey are being developed without Roma representation and active participation. Additionally, among the Roma coordinators working in governorates and municipalities, representation of young people and women is almost non-existent. The dominance of middle-aged men in these positions contradicts the principles of inclusivity and equality in representation within institutions.

Roma civil society structures are also not exempt from this representation crisis. Among the approximately 600 Roma NGOs operating across Turkey, only two have female presidents who

are actively working in the field, and only one of them is young. In many NGOs, young Roma are perceived by existing leaderships as a threat and are excluded from decision-making processes. This seriously hinders the development of a participatory and inclusive civil society.

On the other hand, youth and women's rights organizations working with a rights-based approach often lack sufficient awareness and self-reflection regarding Roma issues. These civil society organizations either do not recognize Roma individuals or hold existing societal stereotypes and prejudices against them. As a result, Roma representation in these organizations is nearly absent. Roma youth and women are often excluded from such rights-based platforms, and when they attempt to build their own advocacy spaces, they encounter both institutional and societal barriers. Other rights movements and political organizations also tend to either render the specific issues of Roma communities invisible or fail to acknowledge their representational capacities.

In conclusion, the inclusive decision-making mechanisms and strong institutions envisioned by SDG 16 have yet to be realized for Roma communities in Turkey. A representational structure that excludes youth and women, and where participation remains largely formalistic, prevents the visibility of existing inequalities and sustains ongoing rights violations

3. Conclusion

When evaluating the participation of Roma women and youth in social life in Turkey within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it is clear that we face a serious inclusivity problem. These groups are situated at the intersection of multiple layered inequalities such as ethnic origin, gender, age, spatial location, and poverty. The table below summarizes the current situation of Roma women and youth based on the SDG categories:








SDG Title	Key Findings	Incompatibility with Human Rights
 SDG 1: No Poverty	77.5% unemployment, 81.8% earn below minimum wage, high debt levels	UDHR Art. 25: Right to an adequate standard of living
 SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being	Average life expectancy 68.5 years, 10–15% have no access to healthcare	UDHR Art. 25: Right to health and care
 SDG 4: Quality Education	Enrolment: 72% girls, 65% boys; secondary attendance: 15% girls, 8% boys	UDHR Art. 26: Right to education
 SDG 5: Gender Equality	52% of women have no education, 74% married before age 20	CEDAW, UDHR Art. 1–2–16
 SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth	Labor force participation: 29.8% (youth), 88.2% informal employment (women)	UDHR Art. 23: Equal pay and safe working conditions
 SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities	79% ethnic-based discrimination, recurring weekly exclusion	UDHR Art. 2 & 7: Equal citizenship
 SDG 16: Strong Institutions	Zero Roma youth or women in public office, 2 female NGO leaders	UDHR Art. 21: Right to political participation

Figure 19 Assessment Table of the SDGs for Roma Youth and Women. Source: Author

Not:

- *UDHR* = Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- *CEDAW* = Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

The table above demonstrates that the fundamental principle of the SDGs, "leave no one behind", has not yet been realized for Roma women and youth in Turkey. It reveals that key rights defined in human rights instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), particularly

the rights to equality, dignity, freedom, and protection from discrimination, continue to be violated.

4. Recommendations

To ensure the participation of Roma women and youth in rights-based development processes in Turkey and to concretize the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) principle of “leaving no one behind,” the following recommendations are presented. Each policy recommendation is aligned with relevant SDG targets and fully compatible with fundamental international human rights instruments, primarily the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

SDG 10 & SDG 16: An Anti-Discrimination Law should be enacted.

A comprehensive “Anti-Discrimination Law” containing deterrent sanctions against hate speech targeting Roma, discriminatory practices in public services, and spatial exclusion must be adopted by the Turkish Grand National Assembly (TBMM). Mandatory training programs for public officials should be implemented under this law, and effective complaint mechanisms for discrimination cases should be established. This step fully complies with ICERD Article 4 (obligation to prohibit racial hatred and discrimination), UDHR Article 2 (right to equal enjoyment of rights without discrimination), and the European Convention on Human Rights Article 14 (right to equal enjoyment of rights).

SDG 5 & SDG 10: The Roma Strategy Document should be updated and a National Action Plan implemented.

A new National Action Plan, prepared with the active participation of Roma women, youth, LGBTQ+ individuals, and persons with disabilities, addressing intersectional inequalities, should be launched by 2027. The plan must be structured in accordance with CEDAW Article 7 (right of women to full participation in political and public life) and UDHR Article 21 (right of every individual to take part in public affairs and representation).

SDG 1 & SDG 5: Social protection packages specific to Roma women should be implemented.

Social protection systems for Roma women should include rights such as childbirth assistance,

premium support, childcare grants, and flexible retirement. This practice aligns with CEDAW Article 11 (right of women to social security), ICESCR Article 9 (right to social security), Article 10 (right to protection of the family), and UDHR Article 25 (right to health and well-being).

SDG 3: Mobile health units and neighborhood health centers should be established.

Mobile units should be deployed in Roma communities to provide access to basic health services; neighborhood centers should offer women's health, vaccination follow-up, and psychosocial support services. This recommendation fully complies with ICESCR Article 12 (right to the highest attainable standard of health) and SDG 3 (health and well-being).

SDG 4: Positive discrimination should be applied for early childhood education.

Free transportation, nutritional support, and family guidance services should be provided to increase preschool education access in Roma neighborhoods. This approach supports CRC Article 28 (right of every child to education) and UDHR Article 26 (right to education), along with SDG target 4.2 (universal access to early childhood education).

SDG 8 & SDG 13: Green vocational programs should be implemented for Roma youth.

Skills development and employment programs should be launched to encourage Roma youth towards recycling, energy efficiency, ecological agriculture, and similar fields. This step addresses environmental and economic inclusion simultaneously in line with ICESCR Article 6 (right to work), SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), and SDG 13 (climate action).

SDG 16: Legal guarantees should be established for Roma women and youth representation in public institutions.

At least 40% female and 30% youth Roma representation should become a legal requirement in municipalities and social service institutions. This regulation directly relates to CEDAW Article 7 (women's participation in decision-making) and UDHR Article 21 (right to public representation), as well as SDG 16.7 (inclusive and participatory decision-making).

SDG 17: Micro-funding and mentorship support should be provided for Roma NGOs.

Project support, digital infrastructure, capacity building, and campaign management technical assistance should be offered to civil society organizations founded by Roma youth and women. This measure will expand the rights-based civil space in line with SDG 17.17 (capacity building for NGOs) and UDHR Article 20 (freedom of association).

SDG 10 & SDG 4: Nationwide anti-discrimination campaigns should be launched.

Public service announcements targeting prejudices against Roma and teacher training programs should be implemented in collaboration with RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) and MEB (Ministry of National Education). This practice fully complies with ICERD Article 7 (education and awareness obligations in combating discrimination), UDHR Article 1 (principle of dignity and equality), and Article 2 (prohibition of discrimination).

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