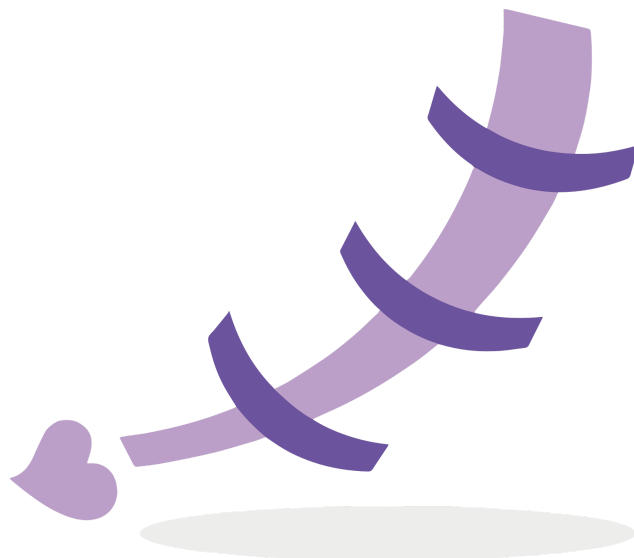




WHEN SCARS BECOME ART

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCLUSION, MENTAL HEALTH, AND
EMPOWERMENT OF ROMA AND REFUGEE YOUTH IN TURKEY

– *TURKEY* –



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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCLUSION, MENTAL HEALTH, AND EMPOWERMENT OF ROMA AND REFUGEE YOUTH IN TURKEY

1. THEME AND PURPOSE

Roma, refugee, and other vulnerable youth in Turkey continue to face structural and social barriers in accessing education, mental health support, and employment. Social barriers are reinforced by discrimination, limited institutional coordination, and lack of culturally responsive public services.

The aim of this policy paper is to propose feasible and sustainable actions that can enhance inclusion, mental well-being, and empowerment of young people at local and national levels. The recommendations presented here were developed as an outcome of a policy panel held on 25 September 2025 at Sakarya University Center for Diaspora Studies, with the participation of sociologists, psychologists, academics working on migration and human rights, representatives of Roma NGOs, and international student associations.

2. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

i) Mental Health and Psychosocial Support

Public authorities should provide free and culturally sensitive mental health services for Roma and refugee youth by employing multilingual professionals and qualified interpreters.

Mental health professionals should receive language and intercultural communication training, while recruitment processes should prioritize staff able to engage with diverse communities.

Youth centers and schools should integrate art-based psychosocial and therapeutic activities that help young people express emotions, recover from trauma, and build self-confidence.

The visibility of mental health services needs to be enhanced through multilingual public campaigns, awareness materials, and accessible digital content.

It is recommended to develop trauma-informed education programs for teachers and youth workers through partnerships between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, and psychiatric institutions.

ii) Inclusive Education and Employment

Educational institutions should strengthen anti-discrimination mechanisms through internal monitoring, reporting, and disciplinary committees.

The Ministry of Education is encouraged to integrate diversity, equality, and global citizenship principles into national curricula from early education onwards.

Universities and student clubs should organize intercultural and art-based events promoting dialogue and understanding among students from different backgrounds.

Public inspection mechanisms should impose stronger penalties on employers exploiting migrant or underage workers, ensuring fair and safe labor conditions.

Legal and institutional pathways should be established to enable refugee and migrant youth to access internships and long-term employment opportunities in both public and private sectors.

iii) Empowering Youth Workers and Cross-Sector Cooperation



Youth organizations should create multidisciplinary work environments that prevent burnout and strengthen the well-being of youth workers.

Continuous psychological support and recreational programs should be provided to sustain motivation and professional resilience.

Capacity-building workshops and project-writing trainings should be organized to improve NGOs' access to EU and national funding mechanisms.

Public institutions and NGOs are encouraged to develop transparent, long-term partnerships for co-managed youth programs that link social inclusion, mental health, and art-based initiatives.

Media regulatory bodies should ensure accountability in preventing hate speech, misinformation, and discriminatory narratives, while credible journalists and content creators should be supported through public or private grants promoting inclusive storytelling.

iv) Participation, Governance, and Monitoring

Local and national authorities should strengthen the participation of Roma, refugee, and migrant youth in policy design and decision-making through local youth councils and spokesperson networks.

A quota system should be introduced in national and municipal youth projects to guarantee the inclusion of disadvantaged groups.

Transparent monitoring mechanisms should include independent observers, satisfaction surveys, and publicly accessible reports on project spending and outcomes.

Sustained dialogue should be promoted between policymakers, youth representatives, and NGOs to ensure long-term cooperation and policy continuity.

3. EVIDENCE AND SOURCES

The policy recommendations presented in this paper are grounded in national field research conducted by KARGENC and the joint cross-country research developed within the “When Scars (!) Become Art” project, implemented across six European countries.

National evidence:

KARGENC's research identified multiple layers of structural and social exclusion affecting Roma, refugee, and migrant youth in Turkey. Quantitative data was collected from 122 young participants, and qualitative interviews were conducted with youth workers and community representatives. The findings revealed that:

Discrimination and exclusion are primary determinants of reduced mental well-being and social withdrawal.

Refugee youth reported the lowest mental health scores and the highest level of internalized discrimination.

Roma youth faced persistent barriers in education and employment, including stereotyping, low school attendance, and limited institutional support.

Dom communities, facing both ethnic and refugee-based discrimination, were identified as the most vulnerable due to poverty, documentation gaps, and poor housing conditions.

The 2023 earthquakes and the COVID-19 pandemic further widened inequalities, deepening unemployment and restricting access to education and mental health support.

Complementary data and frameworks:

These findings are supported by national statistics and policy reports from the Directorate General of Migration Management, the Ministry of National Education, and the Turkish Statistical Institute (2023–2024).

At the European level, the recommendations align with the EU Youth Strategy (2019–2027) and the EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion, and Participation (2020–2030), as well as Turkey's National Roma Strategy (2023–2030) and the Migration Harmonization Strategy (2018–2023).

Supporting Sources

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