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Social Inclusion and Diversity in the Axis of Social Sustainability: A Study on Roma Women Benefiting from the Gallipoli SODAM Project

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Abstract Social sustainability, which focuses on human and societal well-being, encompasses values such as rights and freedoms, equal opportunities, social inclusion, quality of life, diversity, democracy, and governance. Based on these values, this study examines social inclusion and its related concepts of diversity and intercultural communication. Disadvantaged groups in society, such as people with disabilities, refugees, and minorities, fall within the scope of social sustainability. In this study, one of these groups, the Roma, has been chosen as the focus of analysis. The aim of this study is to examine the initiatives undertaken for the Roma community by both public and private institutions, as well as societal responses, within the framework of competence, equal opportunities, discrimination, inclusion, the preservation of cultural diversity, and intercultural communication. Using the in-depth interview technique, a qualitative research method, data were collected from Roma women benefiting from the Social Support and Solidarity Centers (SODAM) project implemented by the Ministry of Family and Social Services. The interviews, conducted through semi-structured questions, were analyzed using the MAXQDA20 content analysis software. The findings reveal that, although the Roma have equal rights in accessing public services such as education, security, and healthcare, they continue to live at the lowest income levels, receive insufficient support, and face discrimination within society. However, in terms of cultural transmission and communication, it was observed that they generally do not experience significant problems and, in some cases, even receive support.

Keywords Sustainability · Social Sustainability · Social Inclusion · Intercultural Communication · Diversity · Roma/Romani

Author Note The umbrella-term ‘Roma’ is commonly used in EU policy terminology (https://www.europarl.europa.eu). Therefore, the term Roma is preferred in the article.

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Social Inclusion and Diversity in the Axis of Social Sustainability: A Study on Roma Women Benefiting from the Gallipoli SODAM Project

The importance and necessity of sustainability have grown rapidly over the years, making the implementation of its complementary components now irreversible. The extent of the world's environmental and social problems is increasing, resources are depleting quickly, and social needs are rising with the growing population. Despite recognizing these challenges in the 1970s and attempting to find solutions through various forums, summits, laws, decisions, statistics, and reports show that progress has been slower than targeted.

The concept of sustainability has brought environmental and economic challenges to the forefront, while studies on social sustainability have remained somewhat overlooked. Social sustainability revolves around two main elements individuals and society. Key concepts within this domain, such as equity in access to basic needs diversity, democratic values, inclusiveness, and social participation, pose broad and complex challenges.

When examining sustainability, which has been one of the most frequently studied topics in recent years, the literature generally emphasizes the economic, environmental, and institutional dimensions (Cantele & Zardini, 2018). In contrast, the social aspect has received comparatively less attention, highlighting a gap in the field that warrants further exploration. Social sustainability is a multidimensional and comprehensive concept and its basis is the question 'what are the social goals of sustainable development?' (Dempsey et al, 2011). Vallance, et all (2011, 342) argue that social sustainability is "a concept in chaos". According to Woodcraft et al. (2011) social sustainability is the way in which a society is created according to the desires and needs of people. Murphy (2012) evaluates social sustainability within the framework of equality, participation, sustainability awareness and social harmony.

The most common topics in the literature on social sustainability include improving working conditions for employees, new business models, ways to increase productivity at work, good governance (Kumbali et al., 2022; Mathiyazhagan et al., 2023; Mogale et al., 2023), and gender equality (Schoonjans, 2024; Yarram et al., 2021; Torchia et al., 2011). This study takes a different approach by focusing on the inclusion and diversity elements of social sustainability, with the Roma community as the sample group. The Roma has been the subject of various studies in Türkiye and around the world. Mirga-Kruszelnicka (2022), who critically analyses Roma political activism in Colombia and Argentina and compares it with that in Spain, argues that the Roma issue is not solely a European problem but a global one. Balidemaj (2021) highlighted the high level of Roma exclusion in Kosovo and proposed strategies to help integrate the Roma community and reduce overall social exclusion. In their study comparing the attitudes of Italian and French youth toward Romanian Roma, Cousin et al. (2021) found that while Italian participants held more negative views than their French counterparts, both groups exhibited a biased perspective.

In Türkiye, several studies have focused on the integration of Roma into Turkish society, covering aspects such as employment, health, housing, education, culture, and exclusion. According to Gök and Dirimeşe (2023), between 2003 and 2022, 11 doctoral and 38 master's theses were written on the Roma. The majority of these studies focused on Roma identity and culture (Alpar, 2003; Eren, 2008; Dişli, 2017; Polat, 2021), exclusion and discrimination (Kolukırık, 2004; Sarıkaya, 2019; Yıldırım, 2019), and art and representation (Sal, 2009; Mert, 2016; Agvan, 2021). Other studies in the literature include Fazla (2020) who examined the

marginalization of Roma women in the labor force and found that women are affected by this situation in psychological, social, and economic dimensions. Güler and Parlayan (2020) revealed that the Roma community could not urbanize due to ethnic identity-based marginalization, making them prone to crime. Gümüş (2020) addressed the problems of Roma social exclusion and emphasized the importance of social inclusion policies implemented by the state. Yanıkdağ (2021) examined the sub-identities of Roma living in Türkiye highlighting differences and drawing attention to identity debates. Ateş and Ünal (2022) explored the problems of Roma mothers regarding their children's schooling and proposed solutions. Karadeniz (2022) analyzed the interrelationship between Roma identity problems, social exclusion, poverty, and social perceptions and proposed different solutions. Dirimeşe and Gök (2023) evaluated the problems and solutions of social exclusion faced by Roma in the economy. Alpar (2023) reviewed recent action plans in Türkiye for preventing the social exclusion of Roma citizens and made various recommendations. Although these challenges are subtopics of social sustainability, no sustainability framework has been developed, and no evaluation has been conducted from this perspective. Addressing the Roma challenge from a sustainability and social sustainability perspective aims to fill gaps and shortcomings in the existing literature. Although social sustainability is less covered among the components of sustainability, it includes a wide range of issues. For this reason, this study is necessary in order to examine the issue with different research samples, to reveal the problems and solutions, and to provide a new perspective. With this study, we aim to draw attention to the need to strengthen policies within the scope of social sustainability, which has increased in importance in every field today. The focus of this study is on Roma citizens, a group often considered disadvantaged in society. For this research, Roma women living in Çanakkale Gelibolu, who are participants in Social Solidarity Center (SODAM) courses organized by the Ministry of Family and Social Services, were selected as the sample due to their accessibility.

The Ministry of Family and Social Services established SODAMs to address challenges in education, employment, housing, health, and social services through the Strategy Document for Roma Citizens (2023–2030) and the Phase I Action Plan (2023-2025). This study, which focuses on social sustainability, addresses the following question: "How do SODAMs help Roma women and their families?" "To what extent can Roma participate in society and access basic social needs?" and "What efforts are made, both individually and by public authorities, to help Roma preserve their culture and pass it on to future generations?" These questions were investigated through content analysis of in-depth interviews with Roma participants.

Before the interview phase, the main concepts of sustainability, inclusion and diversity were outlined. The living conditions of disadvantaged groups are one of the areas of study of social sustainability. Roma people who are considered among disadvantaged groups constituted the sample of this study. After the interviews, the data were analyzed and interpreted with the MAXQDA20 analysis program. The findings show that although positive results of inclusion and support efforts for Roma have been observed, discrimination against this ethnic group continues and solutions have been proposed.

Concept of Sustainability and Social Sustainability

The term "sustainability" first appeared in a text called "Silvicultural Economic," written in 1712 by the German forester Hans Carl von Carlowitz who described how forests should be managed over the long term. The environmental movements that began in the late 1960s, coupled with the work of environmentalists to link environmental issues to development, placed sustainability on the international agenda. With increased sensitivity to the challenge after the 1970s, "sustainability" became the focus of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly Commission on Sustainable Development, which convened in 1987 under the chairman-

ship of former Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Brundtland. This resulted in a landmark report entitled "Our Common Future" (Scoones, 2007). Which defined sustainability as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). This definition is widely accepted as the definition of sustainability.

Sustainability and sustainable development ensure the continuity of societies in environmental, economic, and social terms. The UN has tried to draw the attention of the world's countries to these challenges through various milestones: the Environment and Sustainable Development Summit in 1972, the Bruntland Report in 1987, the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, the Copenhagen Social Development Summit in 1995, the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, the Millennium Summit in 2000, the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, the Brazil Sustainable Development Conference in 2012, and the Transforming Our Word report in 2015 (Gedik, 2020). In addition, the Paris Agreement (An international treaty under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCC) aimed at limiting global warming) was signed in 2016, the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures recommendations were released in 2017, Global Report Initiative, Sustainability Accounting Standards Board announced plans to collaborate in 2020, the International Sustainability Standards Board was established in 2021 to set global sustainability standards, and COP29 (29th Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC) was held in 2024. As the world's challenges rapidly increase, countries and organizations must focus not only on ensuring profitability and financial sustainability but also on solving global challenges through increased social investment. These organizations identify their focus areas to determine the scope of their sustainability efforts, provide accurate reporting, and make and implement future decisions.

Sustainability has three major dimensions: environmental, economic, and social. Environmental sustainability involves using renewable energy sources and promoting social actors that support environmental self-renewal. Economic sustainability entails producers, distributors, and consumers adopting wise practices to create and maintain stable economic organizations. Social sustainability involves the preservation, cultural integration, access to basic services, and renewal and maintenance of social institutions that form society, such as families, political institutions, and various communities (Carmo & Pinto, 2011; Morelli, 2011).

Social sustainability, being human- and community-oriented is more difficult to address and process than environmental or economic dimensions. It has more cultural and intangible characteristics, making assessment and measurement challenging (Varsei, et al., 2014). Social sustainability includes equal access to basic services for all communities in a country, improved living conditions, social participation, integration of different cultures, and cultural transmission. The implementation, planning, and evaluation of these issues vary according to the needs and interests of each community (McKenzie, 2004; Bramley & Power, 2009). Social sustainability is characterized by a strong sense of social cohesion and equality in access to basic services, such as health, education, transportation, housing, and recreation (McKenzie, 2004; Morelli, 2011). This process of development and growth emphasizes social equality and supports social integration to improve the quality of life for all segments of society while preparing the necessary environment for culturally and socially diverse social groups to live together in harmony (Gedik, 2020).

Social sustainability improves the living conditions of different communities within a country. Key elements include equal access to basic services (transport, health, education, housing, security, recreation); intergenerational equity (preventing future generations from being disadvantaged by the activities of the current generation); the creation of a system of cultural relations that values and protects the positive aspects of different cultures, promoting cultural integration; and widespread political participation of

citizens not only in electoral activities but also in other areas of political activity, especially at the local level (McKenzie, 2004; Bramley & Power, 2009). In social sustainability, criteria such as equality, diversity, social cohesion, improvement of quality of life, democracy, and governance are increasingly recognized international values (McKenzie, 2004). Roma citizens, who have a distinct cultural structure, it is crucial to preserve their cultural values and pass them on to future generations, thus integrating into society and experiencing social inclusion in line with the basic values of social sustainability.

Inclusion and Diversity in the Context of Social Sustainability

In addition, to important concepts such as democracy, governance, social participation, equality, inclusion, diversity, and a sustainable future within the framework of social sustainability stand out as crucial factors. Diversity refers to individuals with different demographic characteristics who work and live together providing a competitive advantage by enriching organizations and societies with varied perspectives, experiences, and talents. Inclusion means that different voices and perspectives are accepted, supported and actively participate in social life without discrimination. Organizations that embrace the principles of inclusion and diversity can better communicate with society by promoting equality and fairness, fostering innovation from diverse perspectives and knowledge, and being prepared to adapt to changing global markets.

Today, a company's future is determined not only by its investments and financial size but also by the perspective, support, or loyalty of all its stakeholders (including employees, customers, suppliers, consumers, local communities, governments and shareholders). This indicates that the sustainability of companies, beyond their financial profits, is closely linked to the value they create for all these stakeholders (https://www.skdturkiye.org/sosyal-icerme-ve-kapsayicilik). Research shows that companies leading in diversity and inclusion metrics increase their market share by 45% and have a 70% higher success rate in new markets than those that do not (https://www.globalcompactturkiye.org/cesitlilik-kapsayicilik/). The first two principles of the UN Global Compact, which are based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 4, 5, 8, and 10 guide companies in their efforts to promote diversity and inclusion.

Social inclusion refers to the active participation of diverse groups within a society, ensuring that no individual is discriminated against based on their beliefs, ethnic origin, age, gender, sexual orientation, political views, socioeconomic status, or disability. It aims to provide equal access to services such as education, healthcare, security, employment, and housing for all, particularly for those considered disadvantaged, migrants, people with disabilities, refugees, youth, women, and children, due to their unique identity characteristics. Social inclusion is essential for fostering an environment where individuals from these groups can fully use their potential, realize and develop their talents, and smoothly integrate into social and cultural life (Öcal, 2018; Çetin, 2017; Altınsoy, 2019). It also aims to include individuals at risk of poverty and social exclusion in economic, social, and cultural life, enhancing their well-being and ensuring equal opportunities to participate in the labor market. Initially, the concept of social inclusion focused on individuals who had difficulty adapting to social norms; however, it has since broadened to encompass all disadvantaged groups, particularly in European countries, where it emphasizes the social analysis of these populations (Rawal, 2008; Gümüş, 2020).

Inclusion embodies democratic, egalitarian, libertarian, and participatory values and understandings that balance the rights and responsibilities of individuals in society. Societies valuing these principles seek to achieve inclusion through practices that eliminate differences based on age, gender, ethnicity, ability,

class, religion, and geography, providing equal opportunity. Despite the general acceptance that societies worldwide should be inclusive and participatory, obstacles and exclusionary tendencies exist in practice (Uştuk & Can Traunmüller, 2022).

In Europe, efforts are being made to promote the social inclusion of Roma minorities and prevent their marginalization. The discourse of cultural relativism explains the special culture of the Roma and encourages special treatment (Roth, 2011). In Türkiye, which has ethnicities and religious beliefs, Roma is a minority group with distinct cultural characteristics (Yanıkdağ, 2021). Roma are from socially disadvantaged backgrounds; they are disproportionately poorer, unemployed, lack adequate housing, lack access to healthcare and education and often involved in criminal activities (Roth, 2011). Planning and implementing social policies aimed at social inclusion to improve the socioeconomic and cultural situation of Roma is crucial for preventing their frequent social exclusion, poverty, unemployment, lack of social security, and discrimination, thus ensuring their social communication and integration (Gümüş, 2020). This approach will also positively transfer Roma's ethnic and cultural structures to future generations and preserve cultural diversity. Highlighting different cultural values, protecting these elements, and passing them on to future generations is essential for ensuring diversity on the sustainability axis. Keeping cultures alive requires multimedia work and the common spirit created by public and private institutions, NGOs, and individuals. Communication and intercultural communication act as catalysts for cultural preservation, diversity and continuity.

Intercultural communication occurs between cultures or individuals living in the same culture but belonging to different subcultures. This approach enables individuals from different cultures to understand and communicate with each other through tolerance, understanding, and dialogue (Özdemir, 2011). Cultural communication occurs when individuals and groups with culturally different characteristics interact in a common environment (Ölçekçi, 2020). Evaluating intercultural communication requires analyzing the dialogue or conflict between two or more cultures, the cultures of the parties, and the communities' communication style (Timcheva & Özer, 2021). The main goal of intercultural communication research is to contribute to the intercultural competence by eliminating prejudices between different nations or subcultures within the same culture, different ethnic identities, and dominant culture (Uştuk & Can Traunmüller, 2022; Bitirim Okmeydan, 2019; Özdemir, 2011). Culture encompasses all abstract and concrete life practices passed on from generation to generation. Culture and its elements have a dynamic and changing structure that shapes all societies. In the context of diversity, it is crucial for Roma to preserve and transmit their cultural values and contribute to social cohesion through intercultural communication.

Social Policies for Roma in the Process of Social Inclusion

The Roma constitutes the largest ethnic minority in Europe with an estimated population between 10 and 12 million (EPRS, 2024). The designation "Roma" commonly used in European Union (EU) policy terminology includes various groups such as Sinti, Kales, Romanichels, Boyash/Rudari, Ashkali, Balkan Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom, and Abdal, as well as traveling populations (gens du voyage, Gypsies, Camminanti) (EPRS, 2024:2). In general, the words Roma and Gypsy are used to describe the same community. However, there are differences in their historical and sociocultural dimensions. Although the word Gypsy has historically been the most widely used, those who belong to this community prefer to identify themselves as Roma, as it is considered a derogatory and discriminatory term (Ünaldı, 2012).

The First World Roma Congress in London in 1971 decided to use the word Roma, derived from the root 'Rom' meaning 'man, human being', to refer to this community (Yanıkdağ, 2021; Çelik, 2018). The Roma

is believed to have originated in northwestern India, forced to leave their homeland in the 9th and 10th centuries due to famine, drought, and war (Kolukırık, 2008, Fırat, 2022). Their historical roots in Türkiye date back to Byzantium where they were considered sorcerers and diviners, worshiped astrology, and faced prejudice and discrimination (Marsh, 2008; Yanıkdağ, 2021; Çetin, 2017; Kurşun and Cengiz, 2013).

A study by the Institute of Population Studies at Hacettepe University (H.U.) in 2024 found that the population of Roma and similar communities in Turkiye, is estimated to be between 1.200.000 and 2.300.000 with the majority living settled lives in different regions (https://www.romaar.com, 2024). Accurately determining this number is due to a lack of ethnic characteristics in existing censuses (Ünaldı, 2017). While some Roma speak different languages such as Romani, Lomca, Dom, Teber, and Kurdish, the primary language of Roma in Türkiye is generally Turkish (Karan, 2017). The Roma primarily resides in the Thrace and Marmara regions, with dense populations in cities such as Izmir, Bursa, Eskişehir, Muğla, Ankara, and Bursa (https://www.romaar.com, 2024). The study by the Institute of Population Studies at Hacettepe University (H.U.) in 2024 found that 65% of Roma households are poor or very poor, and 70% believe they have been discriminated against in education, health, employment, housing, and social services (https://www.romaar.com, 2024).

The EU has been addressing the Roma issue since the mid-1990s, launching a major initiative in 2011 to formulate Roma inclusion strategies (2011–2020) and establishing a new strategy in 2021 that will last until 2030. This aims to fight against socioeconomic exclusion and discrimination by promoting equal access to education, employment, health, and housing (EPRS, 2024).

In Türkiye, Roma citizens began forming civil society organizations after the 2000s due to increased awareness of human rights and the development of social dialogue (Çetin, 2017). Roma associations were established in Edirne, Samsun, and İzmir in 2003 (Gümüş, 2020). The Edirne Roma Culture Research, Development Assistance and Solidarity Association (EDROM) was founded in 2004 to organize seminars and workshops to protect the social rights of Roma and improve their welfare. EDROM implemented the "Improving Roma Rights in Türkiye" project together with the European Roma Rights Center and the Helsinki Citizens' Assembly (Gümüş, 2020; Uzpeder, 2008). Subsequently, over 40 Roma associations were established in 16 provinces, including Tekirdağ, Kırklareli, Balıkesir, Mersin, Adana, Ankara, Bartın, Çanakkale, Zonguldak, Manisa, Aydın, Diyarbakır, and Istanbul. In 2006, the Federation of Roma Associations (ROMDEF) was established to unite Roma associations and ensure stronger, more effective policies (Uzpeder, 2008). In 2016, the "Strategy Document and Action Plan for Roma Citizens 2016–2021" was implemented to systematize Roma citizen work and projects. Various activities continued in 2023, with a new follow-up strategy report (2023–2030). The "Supporting Social Inclusion in Areas where Roma People Live Densely (SIROMA)" project was launched to support the improvement of Roma citizens' living conditions. Activities to increase employment, support education and promote health literacy were conducted in 12 provinces with large Roma populations (https://www.aile.gov.tr/media/127013/yeni-roman-strateji-belgesi-_20221222_v19.pdf s.5 2023). In 2022, the "*Resolution on the Implementation of Projects of Family Support Centers (ADEM) and Social Solidarity Center (SODAM*) was approved aiming to protect disadvantaged groups and integrate items into society (Ministry of Family and Social Services, ADEM/SODAM Projects Cooperation Protocol, 2023). These initiatives strive to ensure that Roma citizens benefit from opportunities within the framework of equality of opportunity contribute to the country's values and cultural diversity and preserve their cultural characteristics for future generations.

Methodology

This study is framed within these broad aspects of social sustainability, focusing specifically on the components of inclusion and diversity. This study aims to determine the extent to which improvements made to Roma citizens, a disadvantaged group in society, align with these social sustainability goals. Specifically, this study examines the efforts made by the Ministry of Family and Social Services to integrate and communicate with Roma women participating in SODAM between 2016-2024. By conducting interviews with Roman women, the research aims to uncover the contributions and changes that have resulted from these initiatives, thereby assessing their effectiveness in promoting social sustainability for the Roma community.

This study, while providing valuable insights into the impact of SODAM activities on Roma women in Çanakkale, has several limitations. First, the research is geographically limited to Gallipoli, which may not fully represent the experiences of Roma communities in other regions of Türkiye or different countries. Additionally, the study focuses primarily on Roma women involved in SODAM projects, potentially overlooking the experiences of other Roma groups and men within the community. During the interview period, 27 women who participated in SODAM's activities were asked for their permission to participate, but only 16 women agreed to participate. These women have been attending SODAM trainings for an average of 5-6 years. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, using qualitative research methods. The sample size was determined based on the saturation principle, where data collection ceased after 16 participants as no new information emerged. Face-to-face interviews with these women, selected through purposive sampling, were conducted between June 1 and 15, 2024, and lasted an average of 40–45 minutes. Official approval was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Istanbul Aydın University on April 24, 2024, before conducting the interviews.

For the reliability and the validity of the study, both researchers participated in all interviews simultaneously. The interviews were conducted in a meeting room at SODAM Office where only the researchers and the interviewer participated. Face-to-face interviews were recorded by both researchers using two different recording devices. All coding and theme formation stages were carried out by both researchers, and the analysis was completed based on the shared decisions reached. Furthermore, the findings were supported by direct quotes from the raw data and the evidence reached was presented as much as possible.

This study is based on descriptive analysis, utilizing the “Business World Diversity and Inclusion Guide” prepared by the “Global Compact Türkiye Diversity and Inclusion Working Group” to design semi-structured questions aimed at achieving the study’s purpose. Initially, demographic questions, such as age, gender, occupation, and income level, were asked, followed by 11 topic-specific questions. To ensure the validity and reliability of the questions, a pilot study was conducted with 5 participants. Based on the responses from the pilot study, the open-ended questions were finalized.

The study’s primary research challenge was explored through six main questions:

- Q1: What has changed the living environment of Roma citizens due to SODAM activities?
- Q2: How do Roma particiopants position themselves in society?
- Q3: Do Roma particiopants perceive themselves as accepted and equal in society?
- Q4: Do Roma particiopants feel discriminated against?
- Q5: What is being done at the individual and public levels to preserve and continue Roma culture?
- Q6: What is the extent of communication between Roma and other cultures?

The data obtained from the in-depth interviews were analyzed and evaluated using MAXQDA20, a qualitative data analysis program. A framework was created based on the research questions and responses to facilitate the descriptive analysis. Categories and themes for content analysis were determined using this framework. As recommended in many qualitative studies, data collection and note-taking were conducted concurrently, followed by data analysis and interpretation. The data were coded using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis approach. This method involves examining a dataset—comprising individual or focus group interviews or various texts—to identify recurring patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). An inductive approach was adopted, and the interviews were reviewed multiple times to ensure familiarity with the data, as required by thematic analysis. In the initial phase of Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis, which involves becoming acquainted with the data, preliminary codes were generated. These codes then served as the foundation for identifying sub-themes and main themes. Concept maps and figures were generated using MAXQDA20.

Findings

Demographic Findings

As shown in Table 1, all participants were Roma women aged 18-66. Most are married with an average of two children and live in their own homes. Among the participants, two were retired, and four worked in cleaning positions. Their husbands are either retired from lower-level jobs or work in similar positions. Most participants earn the minimum wage with three receiving social welfare. Their educational level is generally at the primary school level, with those with high school education continuing in open high schools. It is also observed that most of their children are educated at the primary school level.

Table 1

Demographic Status of Participants

	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education	Who's Working	Occupation of Who Works	Income TL	House	Number of Children	Number of Households	Education of Children
K1	Female	55	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Construction worker	10000	Own house	4	2	Primary School
K2	Female	60	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Retired	13000	Own house	2	2	University
K3	Female	48	Widow	Primary School	Self	Cleaning staff	5000	Own house	2	1	University, Primary School
K4	Female	48	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Self-employment	10000	Tenant	0	2	0
K5	Female	57	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Retired	13000	Own house	2	2	University, Primary School
K6	Female	66	Divorced	Primary School	Self	Retired	16000	Own house	4	1	Primary School+High School
K7	Female	59	Married	Not Attending School	Spouse	Retired	10000	Own house	2	2	Primary School+High School
K8	Female	51	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Peddler+ Retired	17000	Own house	3	4	Primary School+High School

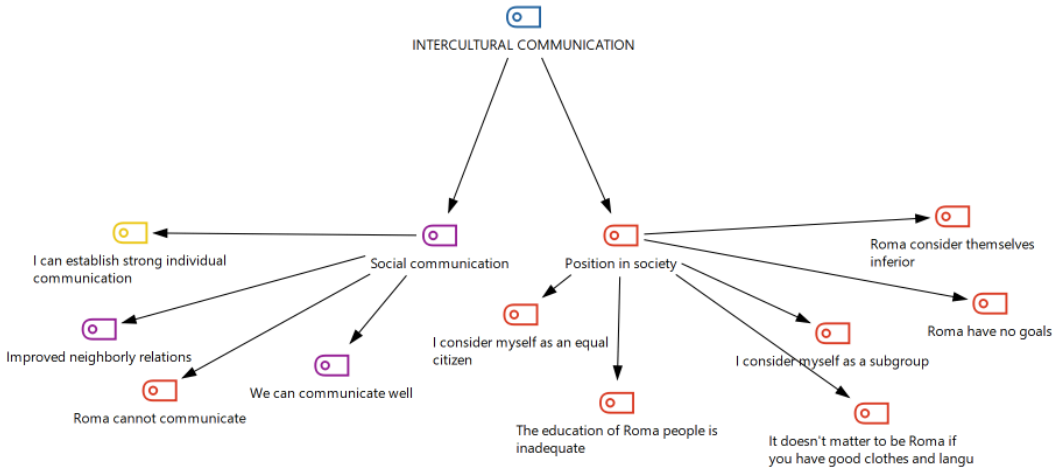
	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Education	Who's Working	Occupation of Who Works	Income TL	House	Number of Children	Number of Households	Education of Children
K9	Female	59	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Retired	10000	Own house	2	2	High School+High School
K10	Female	51	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Cleaning staff+ Retired	20000	Tenant	1	5	Primary School
K11	Female	63	Married	Primary School	Spouse+Self	Driver+ Retired	30000	Own house	2	2	Primary School
K12	Female	18	Single	High School-Still	Parents	Cleaning staff	35000	Tenant	0	4	0
K13	Female	27	Married	Primary School	Spouse	Musician	11000	Tenant	1	3	Primary School
K14	Female	61	Married	Primary School	Spouse+Self	Retired	20000	Own house	1	2	Primary School
K15	Female	36	Married	High School	Spouse	Parking Staff	17000	Own house	2	4	Primary School
K16	Female	18	Single	High School-Still	Mother	Cleanimg Staff	17000	Tenant	0	2	0

Cultural and Social Dynamics

Understanding and appreciating cultural differences is crucial for intercultural communication. The positioning of different communities with a culture and their perceptions by others are also important. Interviews and intercultural communication emerged as the main categories, with social (Figure 1), social communication (4 sub-themes), and position in society (6 sub-themes) identified as the main themes.

Figure 1

Hierarchical Subcode Model: Intercultural Communication



Roma citizens are integral to Türkiye's cultural diversity, enriching this mosaic through their traditions and way of life. However, many participants criticized their identity and communication methods. While they can develop close and warm relationships individually, Figure 2), they often face communication diffi-

culties due to lack of education, poor language skills, and a sense of social inferiority. Despite positioning themselves as equals in society, they feel discriminated against. For example, the opinions of P1, P2 and P5 support this finding.

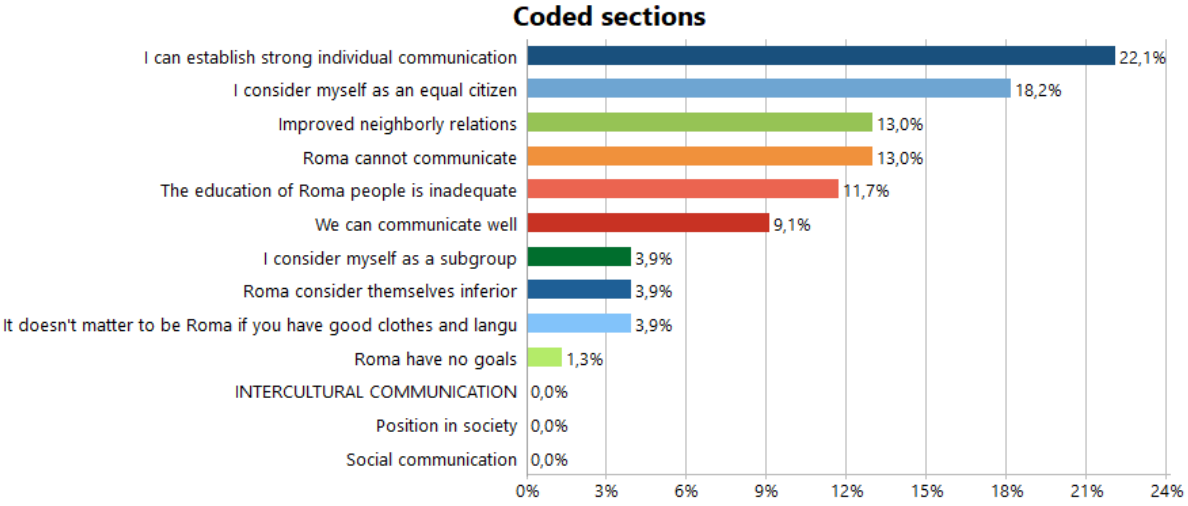
P1: *"Some Roma perceive themselves as inferior, which hinders their ability to enter social settings and express themselves, leading to feelings of isolation and difficulty in communication."*

P5: *"Many Roma struggle in society; they often feel excluded, humiliated, discriminated against based on wealth. However, I don't feel that way."*

P2: *"When we go somewhere, how would anyone know we are Roma? If you dress well speak well, and communicate effectively, there's no issue. Behavior is key if one knows how to behave, there is no difficulty in communicating."*

Figure 2

Roma views on establishing intercultural communication



Cultural Preservation and Transmission

Cultural diversity is essential for preserving various ways of life, traditions, and values, thus bringing richness and flexibility to societies. Different cultures support and reinforce each other to achieve development goals and generate new ideas. In this study, cultural diversity and the preservation and transmission of culture emerged as a main category (Figure 3), with cultural rituals (7 sub-themes), individual efforts to preserve and transmit culture (3 sub-themes), and support for culturally specific needs (4 sub-themes) identified as key themes.

Figure 3

Hierarchical Subcode Model: Cultural Diversity and Protection of Culture

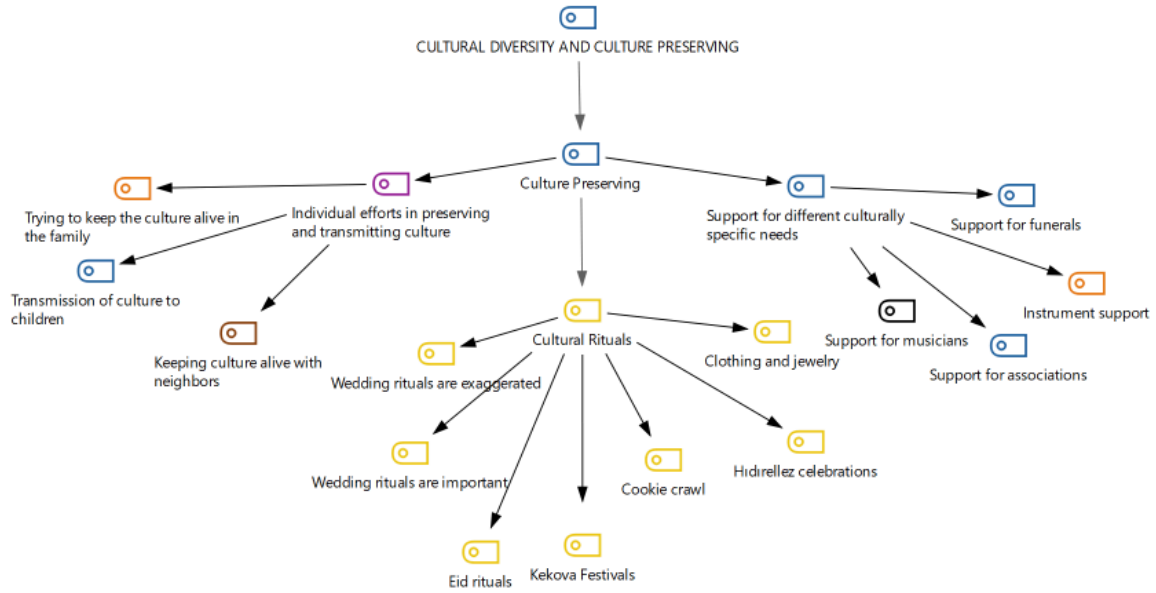
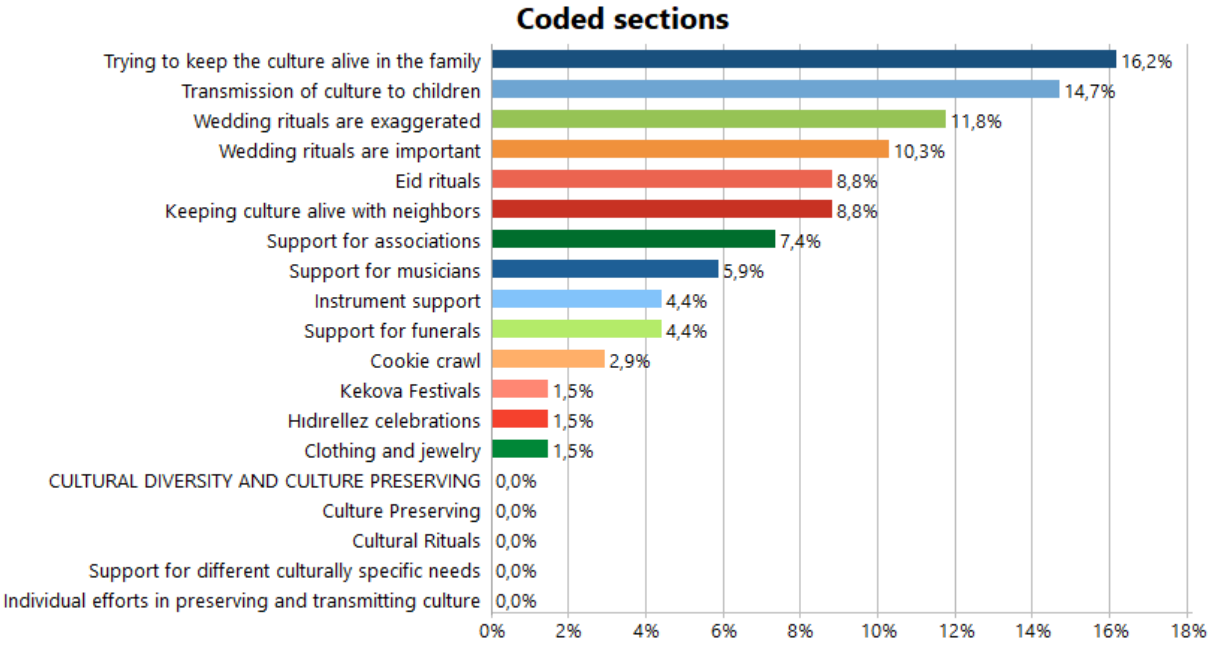


Figure 4

Roma views on cultural diversity and the preservation and transmission of culture



The preservation and transmission of culture to new generations are vital for maintaining cultural heritage. The interview results (Figure 4) indicate that Roma maintains many traditions, such as preparing for and celebrating holidays and wedding ceremonies, as well as specific events like Hıdırellez, Kekova Fest, and the cookie crawl. These traditions are maintained within the family, shared with neighbors and passed on to children.

P2: *"For example, during holidays, we make lokma with our neighbors and distribute it throughout the neighborhood. When we want to make stuffed grape leaves, we wrap them together. We also make our baklava; these are things we always do with our neighbors. I set up my table and I serve them. I've tried to pass this culture on to my children. Similarly, P1, P2, P9, P10, P11, P13, and P14, mentioned that they prepared for the feast with their neighbors and passed these cultural values on to their children.*

However, the elaborate nature of Roma wedding ceremonies, especially in terms of clothing and jewelry, was criticized by some participants.

P4: *"I think the practices at weddings are unnecessary and costly. I'm against them. The constant introduction of new customs strains the budget."*

P1: *"I do not attach much importance to weddings. I find them noisy and exaggerated, and I would rather not have them."*

Supporting culturally specific values is crucial for social sustainability. Public institutions such as the Governor's Office, Municipality and District Governor's Office support music and musicians, which are significant in Roma culture.

P4: *"Official authorities particularly support musicians in preserving this culture."*

P14: "The *authorities grant necessary permissions, and the district governor supports musical activities. For example, my uncles received support from the district governor for drums, clarinet, and darbuka."*

Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is a crucial aspect of social sustainability (Figure 5), focusing on integrating disadvantaged groups into society, ensuring that their voices are heard, and providing equal opportunities. This category (Figure 5) was analyzed under themes such as quality of life (6 sub-themes), equality (4 sub-themes), efforts of public institutions (3 sub-themes), and reduction of discrimination (2 sub-themes).

Figure 5

Hierarchical Subcode Model: Social Inclusion

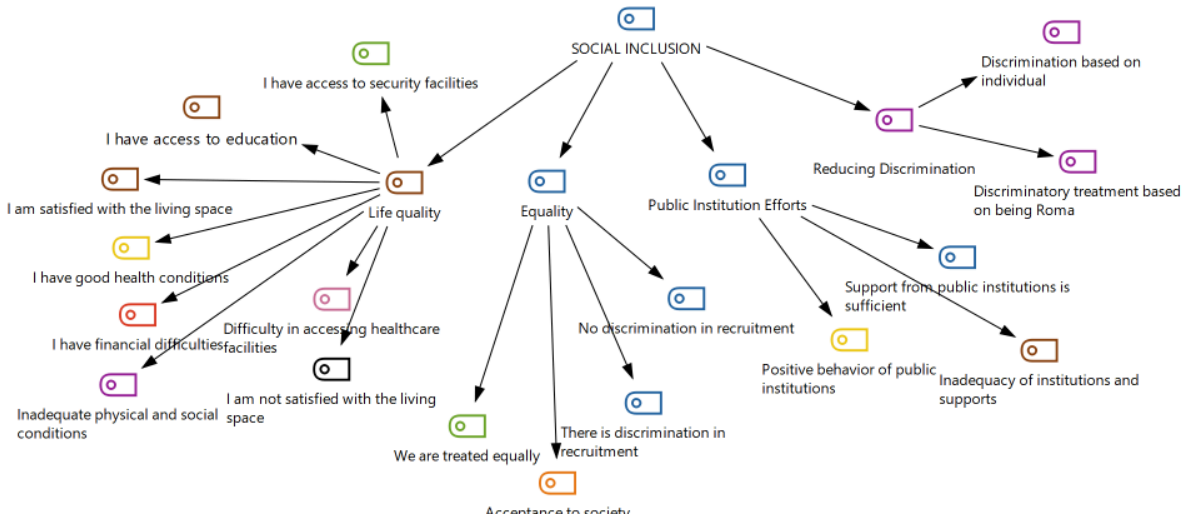
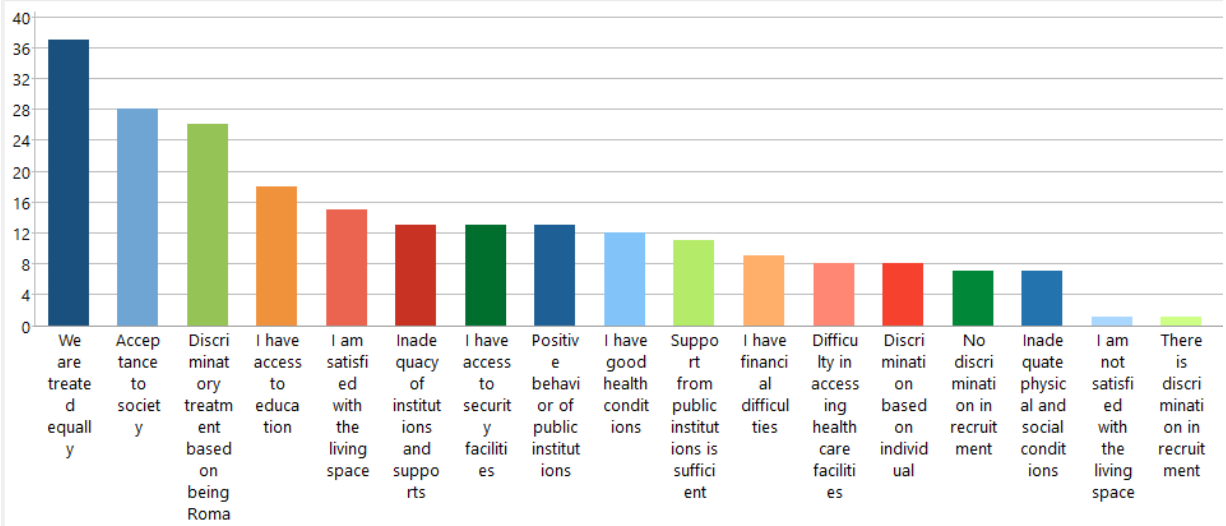


Figure 6

Roma women' views on Social Inclusion



Social inclusion is the process of ensuring that all individuals in society participate equally in economic, social, cultural and political life. Social inclusion aims to ensure that disadvantaged groups such as the disabled, the elderly, women, ethnic minorities, immigrants and low-income individuals are fully and effectively included in society. In this context, Roma women have generally stated that they are treated equally in public institutions. However, they state that there is general discrimination in society in general due to their Roma identity. Many respondents indicated that Roma still faces discrimination, particularly in housing and education. This theme is further exemplified by the following participant quote:

P3: "*When you go to the hospital, or anywhere else, people immediately pout as if to say, 'Oh, these are the Roma.' There is a sense of being looked down upon, and we are subjected to such treatments in society.*"

P11: "*I think there is a lot of discrimination. For example, I used to work as a cleaner, and people would be afraid when we mentioned that we were Roma.*"

P14: "*Some of our children's teachers discriminate against them in schools. They are racist.*"

However, some participants believed that discrimination was more related to individual behavior than to being Roma.

P10: "*I do not think there is any discrimination at all. I believe the negativity stems from individuals themselves.*"

Government institutions such as the District Governor's Office, Municipality and SODAM, provide significant support to improve the quality of life, although this support is often insufficient for low-income families. Despite this, many participants expressed satisfaction with their housing and the general support from public institutions.

P3: "Yes, we receive support, but it is insufficient. We get assistance from the family support program and while it helps to an extent, unfortunately, it is not enough given Türkiye's current conditions."

Some participants generally perceived their experiences within public institutions positively. They reported being treated equally, having no issues with access to education and security, and experiencing

no discrimination in hiring. They also appreciated that officials attended ceremonies such as association meetings, funerals, and weddings, expressing satisfaction with the activities conducted for them.

P10: *"Thanks to the government, I worked in the public sector and was very happy. I was not marginalized; my insurance was paid, I retired, and there was no discrimination. I was very satisfied."*

P4: "The state supports everyone in times of need. From what I observe, people around me receive help from Mukhtar's office, the District Governor's Office and the municipality."

P11: *"They treat my daughter very well at her workplace. She has become like family to them; they take care of all her problems. My son works in a hospital. and earns a good salary as a government employee, and I don't think he will face any discrimination."*

P11: *"Our mayors attend our weddings and funerals. They send us rice; and aid, and they provide a car when we are sick. In that sense, I am very satisfied; our family is also very satisfied, and we receive help for almost everything."*

However, participants expressed significant concern about health services. Despite expressing satisfaction with equal opportunities in education, employment, and security, respondents highlighted significant issues regarding access to healthcare. They emphasized that these problems are widespread and not specific to the Roma community.

P4: *"Regarding local facilities, our hospital is inadequate, so we often have to visit other hospitals."*

P16: *"In terms of healthcare, for example, there aren't enough doctors here, so we must go to Çanakkale."*

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion in sustainability aims to eliminate inequalities and enhance integration among different segments of society by establishing balanced social, economic and environmental relationships. In this context, SODAM activities initiated by the Ministry of Family and Social Services are designed to serve this purpose. Proper planning, implementation, and management of social cohesion components are necessary to create a healthy social structure.

Participants were also asked questions about SODAM's work, its contribution to their lives, and the changes it has brought. Based on the responses it was found that SODAM contributed to the participants at four different levels (Figure 7). Four main themes emerged within the framework of social cohesion: social (2 sub-themes), psychological (8 sub-themes), communication (2 sub-themes and economic contribution, 3 sub-themes).

Figure 7

Hierarchical Subcode Model: The Contribution of SODAM Activities to the Social Cohesion of the Roma Women

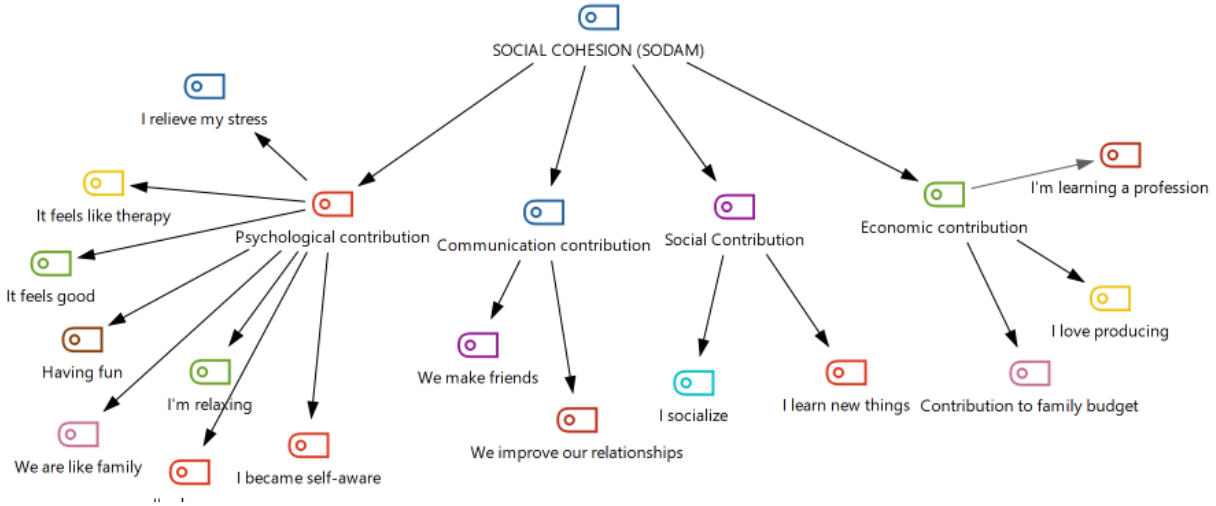
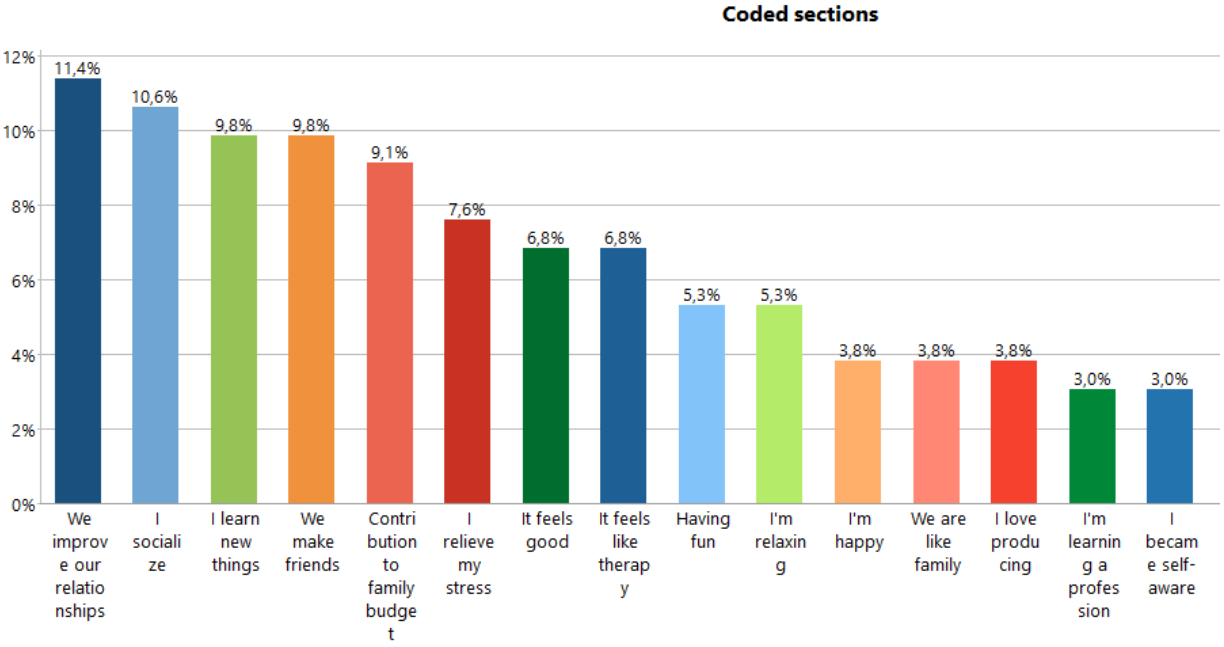


Figure 8

Roma Women' views on SODAM's Contribution to Social Cohesion for Roma



From this perspective, it has been observed that the participants in this project have added value to their lives through SODAM's initiatives. Eight participants have been in SODAM activities for 8-10 years, while the other eight have participated for 1-5 years. The participants emphasized (Figure 8) that they learned new things, socialized, and improved their friendships during these years.

P3: *"These courses have greatly enhanced my learning. First of all, you should socialize. Your circle of friends grows, and your dialogue with people changes. At least you learn how to interact with others appropriately."*

P12: "*It contributed a lot to me. We learned new things, expanded our circle of friends and socialized. It made me feel good.*"

The project has been beneficial for all participants, especially in terms of the psychological realization of their talents, stress relief, happiness, fun, and relaxation, almost like a form of therapy. Additionally, participants stated that they achieved economic gains and contributed to their family budgets through the skills they acquired during these courses.

P9: "*I found myself here. I socialized, and we created a great environment with friends. We had fun and laughed. This place has been very good for me; I say I won't attend each year, but I can't resist coming back.*"

P8: "*Economically, it is significant that we set our clothes. I've also sold what I made, I'm still selling it, and my sales are increasing because I'm becoming more recognized.*"

The responses of the Roma participants selected for this study, which explored the dimensions of social inclusion, diversity and intercultural communication within social sustainability (Figure 7), indicate that they are generally satisfied with the projects implemented for them.

Discussion and Conclusion

Sustainability, founded on three interconnected pillars environmental, social, and economic is an arena with numerous problems awaiting resolution in each pillar. This study focuses on social sustainability, which includes shared goals and values. Social sustainability offers various business and social models to enhance the living, working, educational, health, and cultural conditions of people across all societal segments. It seeks to protect social institutions and provide opportunities for different social groups to live harmoniously. This approach promotes social welfare and preserves social justice for future generations.

Social sustainability, with its focus on people, encompasses a multifaceted and comprehensive set of objectives. It aims to improve living and working conditions and ensure equal access to basic rights such as education, health, security, employment, social participation, inclusion, diversity, governance, gender equality, and the preservation and transmission of cultures. Studies (Woodcraft, 2015; Eizenberg, & Jabareen, 2017; Ajmal et al, 2017; Cuesta et al, 2024) generally suggest that the social dimension of sustainability receives less attention than its environmental and economic counterparts. Although we acknowledge that socially oriented practices are essential for sustainability, efforts in this area will be weakened due to numerous gaps in both theory and practice. This study, framed by the components of inclusion and diversity, specifically examines the situation of Roma women. In order for societies to live together in peace and tranquility, it is important that they find common ground and share similar rights and freedoms. The study is based on the idea that various institutions should organize ongoing projects and collaborations for the acceptance and integration of communities that have been living together for hundreds of years under the same roof. The study aims to examine how Roma position themselves and how the support they receive from state institutions has changed their lives. These objectives are framed by the components of inclusion and diversity as components of social sustainability.

There are important studies (Stewart 1997; Fonseca 2002; Hancock 2010; Kurşun and Cengiz, 2013; Çetin, 2017; Yanıkdağ, 2021; Fırat, 2022; Dişli, 2016 etc.) in the literature on the living conditions, origins, migration problems, education, employment, etc. of Roma. However, the lack of publications on social sustainability and its components constitutes the basis of this study. Roma are considered one of the most disadvantaged groups in Türkiye and globally. Due to the difficulty of accessing the Roma population, estimated to be between 1-2 million in Türkiye and dispersed across various cities, this study focused on those living in

Gallipoli, Çanakkale. The research involved interviews with Roma women who voluntarily participated in SODAM projects initiated by the Ministry of Family and Social Services.

The analysis of the impact of SODAM activities on Roma women in Çanakkale Gelibolu revealed that these centers significantly contribute to their integration into social life and access to basic social needs. SODAMs encourage Roma women to take a more active role in their communities by providing social support, education, and psychosocial services. Increased self-confidence, socialization, and the development of skills and competencies among women are important steps toward social integration and inclusion.

In the context of the main problematics of the research, this study shows that Roma in Türkiye are discriminated against and excluded by the society at large, despite the fact that they position themselves as equals in society.. The findings indicate that existing policies addressing social exclusion, unemployment, health, education, and housing are inadequate and inappropriate, reinforcing the disadvantaged position of Roma. Most Roma work in low-level jobs, such as cleaning, market work, music, and paper collection, which do not require special skills or education, preventing them from raising their income levels. Additionally, children are often required to contribute to the family budget, hindering their education. The struggle to preserve cultural identity while integrating into society leads to social exclusion in various areas, including education, health, employment, and housing. This situation, which has become a vicious circle, prevents the Roma from improving their negative social identities and perceptions. These conclusions align with the findings conducted by H.U (https://www.romaar.com, 2024), the European Parliament Research Unit (EPRS, 2024), and the works of Genç et al. (2015, Gökçe (2018), Alpar (2023), Roth (2011) and Balidemaj (2021).

Diversity in sustainability brings together people of different ages, genders, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and economic, educational, and professional experiences, facilitating macro level problem-solving and solutions. Cultural knowledge and local traditions can be crucial to the sustainable management of social and natural resources. The Roma participating in this research strive to keep their traditions alive and pass them on to their families, children, and communities. In addition, to their efforts, they receive support from public institutions, such as the district governor and municipality, for weddings, festivals, funerals, and traditional professions like music and musicianship. While there is a consensus that Roma do not have issues communicating within their community many struggles to communicate outside it due to a lack of education and social skills.

Linking social sustainability with values such as social inclusion, equity, and justice is crucial for building a sustainable society. This study confirms the benefits of diversity and inclusion in promoting social innovation and prosperity. Various studies have demonstrated that inclusive and diverse structures provide a competitive advantage for organizations and societies and strengthen social cohesion. “It is at the intersection of changing and maintaining society that social sustainability can be realized” (Åhman, 2013). This intersection can only be realized when equal and fair rights are granted to different structures and groups within society. In other words, initiatives focused on trust, justice, and equity form the foundation of social sustainability, which is one of the three main pillars of sustainability. We argue that if individuals can first experience secure and just environments in their private spheres, they will be more actively engaged in societal, environmental, political, and economic development.

In conclusion, this study on social sustainability highlights the importance of protecting the cultural and social rights of Roma, ensuring their integration into society, and strengthening policies for disadvantaged groups. Furthermore, the role of intercultural communication and dialogue in supporting Roma social cohesion and preserving cultural diversity is crucial. In this context, social policies and strategies must

be redesigned and implemented according to sustainability principles. Such actions will enhance society's overall well-being by enabling the Roma and other disadvantaged groups to participate more effectively in social life, making an important step toward a sustainable future. Ensuring the continuity and diversification of the efforts initiated by the EU in 2011 and Türkiye 2016 to address the challenges faced by the Roma and improve their lives is essential. Future research could address these limitations by expanding the geographic scope to include a broader range of locations and by including a more diverse sample of Roma individuals, both men, and women, as well as those not involved in SODAM projects. Investigating the long-term effects of such programs on Roma integration and well-being could provide deeper insights into their sustainability and effectiveness. Furthermore, comparative studies across different regions and countries could enhance understanding of the varying impacts of social support initiatives on Roma communities.

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Informed Consent	Consent was obtained from the participants.
Peer Review	Externally peer-reviewed.
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