

Finland's response to OHCHR's questionnaire on minority issues

Question 1: Roma in Finland

The amount of the Roma population has only been estimated after the 1970 census. The estimated number of Finnish Roma is approx. 10.000 people.

Approx. thirty to forty percent of Finnish Roma speak the northern Kaalo Romani dialect. The Roma language is mainly used within the Roma community. The Finnish Roma language is an endangered language. Data on the Roma cannot be done by linguistic means, since nearly all Roma have been registered as Finnish- or Swedish-speakers in the Population Register.

Question 2: Socio-economic data

The report published by the Ombudsman for Minorities in April 2014, *Erilaisena arjessa - selvitys romanien syrjintäkokemuksista*¹ (*Different in the daily life - a report on Roma experiences of discrimination*), reveals that, despite of a socio-economic progress in their living standards, the Finnish Roma people experience discrimination in all areas of life. A total of 68.7 percent of the respondents interviewed for the report (n=249) confirmed that they had experienced discrimination in some area of life during the last year.

In the report by the Ombudsman for Minorities, most of the respondents say that there are customs in the Roma community that they find detrimental to individuals. The report also indicates that if given the chance, a large number (77.6 percent) of the Roma are willing to change some features of the Roma culture. The results indicate that the Roma community is prepared to discuss on difficult issues as well. Cultural customs should also be assessed from the point of view of fundamental and human rights. In this sense, dealing with customary practices of the Roma community that limit individual rights is not only an internal affair of the Roma community.

The Finnish Roma Association suggests that this report is remade as a slightly more extensive and profound follow-up report, for instance in five years' time, in order to monitor the effect of the measures. Though some cultural customs should change, the change should involve the consultation of the Roma community, and the members of the Roma community and the Roma culture should be respected. Otherwise, there is a danger that the practices was simply continue behind closed doors. The Roma community should be able to participate in making the changes at all stages.

Housing

Due to housing policy measures in particular, the living conditions of Roma have improved. For most of the Roma the housing standard is the same today as for the majority population on average.

¹http://www.ofm.fi/fi/ajankohtaista/1/0/tiedote_syrjinta_arkea-suomen_romaneille_-_lahes_70_kokenut_syrjintaa_viimeisen_vuoden_aikana_52876

In Finland, the Roma live in the same residential areas as other Finnish citizens, and Roma segregation and ghettos are unknown in Finland. The Roma have expressed the wish that plenty of Roma should not live in the same area to avoid social stigmatisation. According to the study, in Finland, Roma housing problems are not related to the standard of housing but rather to finding housing.

But the Roma also experience discrimination in the housing system. According to the report of the Ombudsman for Minorities, 48.5 percent of Roma respondents have experienced discrimination based on ethnic origin during the last year when applying for a rental apartment funded with state subsidies, or typically a municipal rental apartment or a city rental apartment. A total of 54.7 percent of Roma respondents had experienced discrimination based on ethnic origin when trying to rent or purchase an apartment on the private rental market.

Generally, it should be stated that the Roma housing standard is good and that homelessness is exceptional. However, the cumulation of social problems and the related housing problems seem to be on the increase, particularly in families with children. Similarly to the rest of the population, the Roma population is also divided into the well-to-do Roma constructing their future and into the Roma who are in danger of marginalisation and who are already seriously marginalised. The majority of the Roma are between these two extremes, and the measures of the Roma policy programme are particularly important to this middle group.

The Ministry of the Environment carried out the *Romanien asuminen ja yhdenvertaisuus* study (*Roma housing and non-discrimination*)² in 2012. The Advisory Boards for Roma Affairs were represented in the steering group of the study. The reports mapped problems related to the housing of the Roma population and various solutions to these problems. The realisation of the non-discrimination aspect was examined in particular, both in relation to the mainstream population and within the Roma community. The subject was examined by means of complaint material concerning the housing situation of the Roma population, a questionnaire sent to housing operators, as well as the interviews of Roma people and other key operators. The report revealed the diversity of Roma housing questions.

In addition, the Ministry of the Environment, the YES 5 project and the regional Advisory Boards for Roma Affairs organised four regional seminars where they Roma and the housing operators dealt with Roma housing problems together. These problems may vary regionally. For instance, in southern Finland, the general shortage of housing makes it more difficult to find an apartment.

According to the study, general vulnerability factors such as small incomes make it difficult to find housing, but cultural factors cause problems as well. However, in the view of the Advisory Board for Roma Affairs, the greatest problem is the cumulation of social problems (small incomes, poorly operating housing market, the high prices of private rental apartments and the discrimination experienced). In consultation events for the Roma population, the Roma themselves emphasise the cumulation of problems: payment difficulties, discrimination, divorce situations and other similar factors turn housing into a complicated tangle which the current housing system and support measures is unable to deal with it. For instance, social house management has been successfully used for preventing evictions caused by payment difficulties.

² Reports of the Ministry of the Environment 8/2012 <http://yhdenvertaisuus-fi-bin.directo.fi/@Bin/1f7f15b49e7f35967a46065f985f55a7/1401738615/application/pdf/245325/Romanien%20asuminen%20ja%20yhdenvertaisuus%20YMP%C3%84RIST%C3%96MINISTERI%C3%96.pdf>

The YES 5 project created a practical measure focused on Roma clients, the *Haetko vuokra-asuntoa?* (*Looking for a rental apartment?*) brochure to provide highly practical guidance and advice specifically in response to problems finding housing for the Roma.

Hyvä asuminen (*Good housing*) consultation events focused on the Roma population were organised in the framework of the YES 5 project. Their purpose was to increase the Roma population's awareness of non-discrimination and housing and to discuss among the Roma population such culture-specific practices that may prevent individuals from choosing a dwelling place. The so-called avoidance behaviour and the building permission practice are so-called detrimental cultural features that have been widely discussed in Finland in recent years.

As a result of the community meetings, it can be said that the Roma are aware of the problem and are prepared to discuss the phenomenon openly. Part of the population is willing to give up these practices, and they believe that younger generations will take a more rational view of some traditional customs with the improvement in education and the increase of employment. It was noteworthy that according to the Roma population, general discrimination and the so-called internal discrimination go hand in hand. If the discrimination generally experienced by the Roma decreases, it will be easier to give up cultural traditions that have served for instance to maintain harmony with neighbours belonging to the mainstream population.

Question 3: Inclusion of Roma

Finland's Roma policy programme was approved in 2009. The Roma policy programme contains six priority areas and ten policies. The programme contains 147 measures, and various sectors of administration are in charge of implementing them. In 2012, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health appointed a working group to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Roma policy programme. The working group included 24 members, half of whom had a Roma background. The deadline for the working group activities was at the end of 2013.

A follow-up report was made on the Roma policy programme³, with information based on data collected in 2013 from ministries and other responsible parties, from municipalities in connection with municipal consultations and from Roma for instance through the consultation of organisations. The report examines how the objectives of the Roma policy programme have been met in the fields of employment, education, social and health services, anti-discrimination activities and housing. In addition, the report explains how the programme was implemented on the regional and local level.

The Roma policy programme has increased the awareness and coordination of Roma affairs on a national level. Measures entrusted to various ministries have been carried out most successfully, and significant progress has been made in some of the measures. Considerable progress has been made particularly in the teaching sector. Implementation on the local level has proved a challenge. Particular challenges can be identified in the fields of Roma employment and adult education.

³ Romanipoliittisen ohjelman toimeenpanon ohjaus ja seuranta – työryhmän raportti. [Guidance and monitoring of the implementation of the Roma policy programme – working group report.] Reports and memorandums of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2013:48.

[Http://www.stm.fi/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=9882185&name=DLFE-30052.pdf](http://www.stm.fi/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=9882185&name=DLFE-30052.pdf)

Municipal consultations and the consultation of organisations as well as the national negotiation sessions of the Advisory Boards for Roma Affairs indicate that there is functional cooperation between the Roma, the Government and the municipalities. The active involvement of the Roma population in the implementation of the programme indicates that there is mutual trust between the actors. The confidential relations are also promoted by the Finnish practice of including the Roma population in the decision-making process concerning the Roma.

Among other things, the working group suggests that the situation of Roma women and Roma men should be more closely monitored in the future. It is suggested that measures entrusted to municipalities should be carried out with the aid of the European Social Fund. Monitoring should be continued, and sufficient monitoring resources should be guaranteed.

Employment

Non-discrimination in working life has been promoted by a campaign targeted at employers, called *Asenne meininki* (It's all about attitude) and aiming to help young people at risk of being discriminated against to get acquainted with each other.

The campaign runs on the equality portal www.equality.fi and on Facebook. A particular target group is Roma adolescents. Equality in working life is also promoted through the network of employers who have signed the Finnish Diversity Charter and by testing a study model enabling longitudinal monitoring of discrimination in working life. The study includes production of information material on workplace and working life practices. A reproduction has been published of the handbook *Palkkaisinko romanin* (Would I employ a Roma person) (2011), and it has been disseminated at Employment and Economic Development Offices and is also available on the internet.

Housing

As a part of the Equality is Priority project a set of projects was carried out in 2012 to promote the equality of Roma in housing (see section 1). There is no segregation relating to the housing of Roma in Finland. The Finnish Roma population is small and is living all over the country and in several residential areas in cities. Thus it has not been necessary to plan or implement measures to dismantle segregation.

The most extensive project carried out in recent years to increase awareness is the establishment of the Roma portal (www.romanit.fi) in 2014. This portal provides information on e.g. the history, customs and present life of the Roma. The portal is targeted to the public at large, as well as to different target groups such as authorities, Roma adults, adolescents and children. The purpose is to continue to develop the portal in the years to come. The portal is maintained by the Ministry of the Interior together within some other ministries.

Health care

This year the Discrimination Monitoring Group published a study of experiences of discrimination that older people belonging to different minority groups have met in social and health care services. The discrimination faced by older persons was structural and indirect by nature. Some of the experiences were such that also other clients generally have, such as long waiting times and bad treatment that older

Roma persons felt to be caused by their ethnic origin. Service housing for older persons was pinpointed in particular, since persons belonging to minority groups felt that their language and cultural background was not taken into account appropriately.

Education

The Ministry of Education and Culture has continued to subsidise the activities of Roma organisations and the citizen activity projects related to the Roma from the arts and culture and youth work appropriations with the objective of reinforcing the active citizenship and the equal opportunities of the Roma. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Finnish National Board of Education support the survival and the development of the Roma language by granting appropriations for Roma language nest and for the teaching of the Roma language as a native language at the basic and upper secondary levels.

Non-discrimination in education and training has been promoted by preparing a handbook on the planning of equal opportunities for educational institutions, instructing universities that provide teacher training, and by commissioning a study of the methods of non-discriminatory pedagogics. At the end of 2014 a study commissioned by the Discrimination Monitoring Group on discrimination in education and equality impacts of pupil guidance and counselling was completed. Discrimination and prejudice faced by Roma have been reduced by preparing electronic teaching material for the secondary cycle of comprehensive school dealing with the history and culture of Roma and the everyday of Roma adolescents, as well as a related handbook for teachers on how to use the material.

The implementation of the National Policy on Roma is one of the priority areas for the discretionary government transfers allocated for personnel training in the educational system and the system of early childhood education and care in 2015. In 2013–2014 the National Board of Education carried out a study on the education of Roma adults and their educational needs. The study will be published in 2015. Since 2006 about 50 persons have completed the professional education of Romani culture instructor. The education gives information on the Romani culture and capability to work in multicultural communities.

The portal *Romanit.fi*, launched in early 2013, is a network portal widely gathering easily adoptable information on the Roma, particularly on the Finnish Roma community. The portal was realised as a part of the Ministry of the Interior *Yhdenvertaisuus Etusijalle - (YES) (Equality is Priority)* project, which is funded by the EU Commission PROGRESS programme and by various ministries. The realisation of the portal was conducted by a working group with a wide representation of Roma organisations and actors.

In the Government, Roma affairs are dealt with by various sectoral ministries, but the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health plays a coordinating role, since the national Advisory Board on Romani Affairs operates under the Ministry. The tasks of the Finnish National Board of Education include the development of Roma education as well as the promotion of the Roma language and culture. For the development of Roma education, the Finnish National Board of Education grants government subsidies for the support of the basic education of Roma pupils and language nest activities for the Roma language, organises summer schools for the Roma language, produces learning materials and teachers' support materials and prepares various reports.

In spring 2008, municipalities were for the first time given the possibility to apply for government subsidies for the support of the basic education of Roma pupils. Between 2008 and 2014, the amount of

government subsidies for the support of the basic education of Roma pupils totalled EUR 2.17 million. During this period, 37 municipalities have received government subsidies granted by the Finnish National Board of Education. The large number of Roma pupils in the development municipalities has been more important than the number of the municipalities. During their development activities, approx. 85 percent of all Finnish Roma pupils receiving basic education were covered by the transfers. For the period between 2013 and 2015, EUR 320,000 was made available for the support of the basic education of Roma pupils by the Finnish National Board of Education.⁴

The national development activities have aimed at development projects that are as long and comprehensive as possible, with a maximum national impact. The target group for the development activities has included both pupils and their guardians as well as teachers and schools. Municipalities have been obliged to establish the measures as part of the daily life of the school community. The development activities of the basic education for Roma pupils were intended to target measures for finding Roma pupils; promoting tolerance and good ethnic relations; improving knowledge of the Roma culture; fostering ties between the main population and the Roma minority in the school community; promoting the learning of the Roma language; and developing cooperation between Roma homes and schools.

For the first time, the Finnish National Board of Education examined the situation of the basic education for Roma pupils ten years ago, during the academic year 2000-2001. Between 2010 and 2011, the Finnish National Board of Education carried out a follow-up study by interviewing a total of 240 Roma children and adolescents receiving basic education as well as their guardians. A total of 1,341 head teachers answered the electronic questionnaire.

The first Finnish National Board of Education report on the basic education for Roma pupils indicated that for Roma children, school attendance problems were related to retaking classes and to absenteeism. A significant number of Roma children received special education, and preschool education was less common than among children belonging to the main population. Leaving school was also more common than among the main population. Roma children were successful in subjects requiring manual and artistic skills, socialising and good manners.

The latest study indicates that there have been positive developments in aspects such as preschool education involvement and the teaching of the Roma language as well as successes in cooperation between Roma homes and schools. The participation of Roma children in preschool education is still less common than among children belonging to the main population, but it has significantly increased over the last ten years. Roma families have understood the importance of preschool education in terms of preparing children to attend school. The Roma language is particularly important for a positive Roma identity, and the fact that the number of those studying the Roma language has doubled can be considered an excellent result.

In basic education, increasing numbers of Roma pupils are successful at school, but one-fifth of all Roma pupils still have significant problems related to school attendance. Becoming independent at a young age, establishing a family and lacking knowledge and support make it difficult to attend upper secondary education and to learn a profession. This has a direct negative impact on the employment of the Roma.

⁴ The Finnish National Board of Education. Hakutiedote 2013/ Yleissivistävä koulutus romanioppilaiden perusopetuksen tukeminen, [Application notice 2013/ General education, the support of the basic education of Roma pupils] <http://oph.fi/download/147913_hakutiedote_28_2013.pdf>.

Approx. half of Roma students attend preparatory vocational education, but few go to upper secondary school. Compared to other students, Roma students need more support for attending upper secondary education. In the development activities, plenty of attention has been paid to guidance: in many municipalities, Roma students have received support at all transitional stages of education, particularly as they start professional studies or go to upper secondary school. Currently, the cooperation between Roma families and schools is excellent, which is expected to lead to higher educational levels among the Roma in the long term. Various forms of cooperation for increasing the knowledge on education in Roma families and for developing study guidance, mentoring and career guidance for the Roma youth are important.⁵

The absenteeism of Roma pupils is identified as a factor impairing successful schooling, and this should be dealt with. Absenteeism is often due to family reasons. However, a study by the Finnish National Board of Education indicates that Roma children often stay at home more easily than children belonging to the main population.

In the interviews of Roma pupils, school bullying was also revealed as one cause of absenteeism. The school bullying of Roma pupils, which often takes the form of ethnic name-calling, will be handled with increasing efficiency. Ethnic bullying should be included in the KiVa Koulu antibullying programme in order to improve the teachers' abilities to deal with bullying.

UNICEF Finland points out that project-type measures focusing on schools are not sufficient to eradicate school bullying. Instead, human rights should be included in all types of education and training to support the creation of an operating environment where human rights are respected. The Human Rights Delegation has given the extensive recommendations previously mentioned in the report for the promotion of human rights education and training in Finland in 2014. The recommendations also apply to teachers' training.

Each year, a total of 150 to 180 pupils study the Roma language in a total of approx. twelve municipalities.

With the YES project, basic education learning material on the history and culture of the Roma and the modern life of Roma youth has been created online. The material also deals with the prejudice and beliefs related to the Roma. The learning material is focused on upper comprehensive school pupils and contains a teacher's manual. The Finnish National Board of Education has organised seminars for Roma parents. In the municipalities where basic education for Roma pupils is developed, preschool attendance has been promoted in events focused on Roma families. The attitudes of Roma families have been positive.

In 2013, the Finnish National Board of Education produced a brochure, *Romanioppilaiden ohjaus toiselle asteelle ja tuki jatko-opinnoissa (Guiding Roma pupils to upper secondary education and supporting them in secondary education)*, which is meant to be used by schools and the Roma families. The Finnish National Board of Education has cooperated with teachers' training institutions, the municipalities and schools for supplementary education intended to improve the abilities of teachers in order for them to support the school attendance of Roma pupils.

Homework clubs as a means of supporting the learning of Roma pupils have also proven a good practice. At the clubs, doing one's homework regularly has improved many pupils' ability to attend school. The

⁵ The Finnish National Board of Education reports 2011:26

homework club also sets an example for the whole family on the long-term nature of school attendance and studies. With the homework club, the study results of Roma pupils have often improved, leading to a decrease in absenteeism.

There are good experiences of school assistants with a Roma background. The school assistants support all pupils in the classroom, which has proven a viable practice. They particularly support the identity of Roma children.

The versatile possibilities of professional education for the Roma have been improved between 2011 and 2013 by increasing the numbers of students allowed for each professional education organiser at the Roma training centre. The Ministry of Education and Culture has also granted that training organiser a permit to organise basic education.

Education is never fully neutral at the cultural level. Instead, it is a part of social structures. In Roma education, problems may arise when the system of values of various institutions, such as schools and their activities, meets the cultural background of the Roma students. It has been suggested that one of the reasons why the Roma do not enjoy going to school is the fact that schools do not sufficiently consider the special features of the Roma culture. Instead, all pupils are treated in the same way.

In professional basic education, there is a trend towards social and healthcare degrees where students aiming at a licensed practical nurse's degree include both Roma and immigrant women.

Databases for guidance and learning are developed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, and the objective is for students to be able to independently search for training in electronic study databases. As for professional education, the electronic joint application system will be used for the first time in autumn 2013. This system should increase the equality between various applicant groups.

The Ministry of Education and Culture has granted separate funding for the basic and subject studies of the Roma language at the University of Helsinki. The Roma language and culture studies provide professionals for various posts requiring expertise in the Roma language, such as researchers and experts on Roma language culture, literature, and communications, as well as translators. The Roma language and culture studies also prepare students for working as learning material experts, teaching and the study of learning. The objective of the studies is to prepare students for teaching the Finnish Roma language and culture at various levels of education. The Roma language and culture is also a suitable secondary subject for future nursery school teachers.

As a cooperation project between the University of Helsinki and the Finnish National Board of Education, the *QualiRom* project conducted by the Council of Europe is carried out. The project produces electronic learning material on the Roma language for Roma students of various ages. In addition, reading material, dictionaries and grammar guides for students of various ages are being produced at the Finnish National Board of Education. The results are difficult to assess, but the availability of learning material has improved in recent years.

As the result of a multidisciplinary research project mapping the history of the Roma, a work on the history of the Finnish Roma was published in October 2012. The particular objective was to find the point of view of the Roma themselves on their history. The project was funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture and it was carried out by the Finnish Literature Society in conjunction with the national

Advisory Board for Roma Affairs. Researchers involved in the project were granted the State Award for Public Information in September 2013.

Roma organisations have stated that the oral traditional knowledge of the Roma, the knowledge of the families on the nomadic lifestyle and old customs is disappearing. In addition to the published review mentioned above, oral traditional knowledge should be recorded systematically.

Many adult Roma have special needs related to education, such as completing basic education or obtaining vocational education. It is important to make the whole educational system available to the adult Roma population, too. In 2013–2014 the National Board of Education surveyed the education of adult Roma and their needs related to education. The survey is one of the measures included in the National Policy on Roma, and its results will be published in 2015. On the basis of its results, the National Board of Education will draw up an action programme to develop the education and training of adult Roma. The measures will be deliberated together with various stakeholders.

Culture

In 2012, the Finnish League for Human Rights published a report financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture on the inclusion and participation of the Roma in cultural activities in Finland⁶. For the report, an extensive study was made to map the use of cultural services by the Finnish Roma aged over 15 years. The report examined all sectors of arts and culture. At the same time, an attempt was made to acquire information on the wishes and needs of the Roma for developing cultural services and for thus promoting the right of the Roma to their own culture.

The report provides information on how the Roma themselves determine the quality and contents of cultural services. The study also indicates that the Roma culture is at a turning point. For most respondents, the changes are frightening, and it is felt that the generations have increasingly grown apart, that the community is disappearing and that the traditions have changed so that it has become more difficult to observe them. Whereas the respondents were happy with the increasing education and employment of the Roma, they were wondering whether the Roma culture would disappear due to the changes. The replies particularly emphasised the importance of the language to the culture. It was felt that the language played a key role in the Roma culture but that learning the language should take place within the Roma community. The respondents hoped that the Roma culture would be better introduced to the cultural institutions of the mainstream population and that cultural centres upholding the Roma culture would be established.

Few respondents felt that a traditional Roma outfit or appearance was be an obstacle to using cultural services. In addition to the lack of interesting cultural contents, the lack of time was considered a much more important obstacle. This information is fascinating, since according to various studies and reports, racism in particular may be a clear obstacle to the use of cultural services. However, according to this report, the culture-specific outfits of the Roma and the related fear of discrimination are not significant reasons for not attending cultural events.

⁶ Romanit ja kulttuuri - Selvitys romanien osallisuudesta ja osallistumisesta kulttuuritoimintaan Suomessa. [The Roma and culture - a report on the inclusion and participation of Roma in cultural activities in Finland.] Toivanen, Reetta (2012). The Finnish League for Human Rights. <http://www.ihmisoikeusliitto.fi/images/pdf_files/Romanit%20ja%20kulttuuri.pdf>.

The study clearly indicated that the use of cultural services is by no means a part of Roma life. Various open replies stated that the Roma are not accustomed to using cultural services. Instead, they are more accustomed to visiting friends and family members, and many cultural experiences, music and narration, are related to these visits. The majority of the respondents clearly hoped for cultural services that somehow included the Roma culture.

Based on the study, it can be stated that the Roma are very active users of the media. Both television and radio programmes should be improved by increasing the Roma inclusion in the production of programmes and in performing in programmes. The importance of Roma-language programmes was also greatly emphasised.

Based on the study, there is cause for concern about the situation of Roma artists. The art made and produced by the Roma is often not recognised as art. Various technical and financial support structures should be rapidly created for upholding and developing the work of Roma artists.

For several years, the Advisory Board for Roma Affairs has paid attention to the fact that programme time destined for the Roma population has not been increased on the radio since the weekly fifteen-minute *Romano Mirits* programme was launched in 1995. There are no television programmes in the Roma language or destined for the Roma. In addition, the five-minute news broadcast in the Roma language, included in the *Romano Mirits* programme, is the only minority-language news broadcast edited in the culture and lifestyle newsroom instead of the news and current affairs newsroom. The Advisory Board for Roma Affairs has long proposed that current affairs broadcasts are launched in the television and on the radio, but for the moment, the initiatives have not increased the programme time at the Finnish Broadcasting Service. The Advisory Board considers that the Finnish Broadcasting Service does not realise its public service programme activities as intended by the legislator.

Finnish Roma organisations are relatively small social and cultural organisations. The publication of magazines is carried out as part of the other activities of the associations, and they have not been able to engage editorial staff for these activities. However, the magazines of Roma organisations are a significant channel for the Roma population itself to receive information on the population and to publish material in the Roma language. Due to these facts, subsidies to publications with a small circulation would be a significant opportunity for increasing the publication activities of the Roma population.

Roma magazines have not received or applied for press subsidies focused on minority-language magazines. Information for applying for subsidies should be targeted to minority group organisations, and where necessary, they should be assisted in the application process.

Questions 4-5: Roma women

A study on the intimate partner and domestic violence experienced by Roma women⁷ was carried out on the initiative of Roma women. The purpose was to examine the intimate partner and domestic violence experienced by Roma women, the special community features of the experiences as well as the help sought and received by Roma women. The purpose was to produce information for the prevention and

⁷ Reports and memorandums of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2013:33. http://www.stm.fi/julkaisut/nayta/-/_julkaisu/1865576

identification of violence, for the protection of victims and for surviving violence. The study is based on interview and survey material and research literature. One of the central points of view of the study is the child's point of view.

According to the results, Roma women experienced same types of serious intimate partner and domestic violence as women belonging to the mainstream population. The violence is physical and psychological abuse and subjugation. Many interviewees had experienced persecution related to the violence. This refers to a situation where the spouse terrorises a former partner and attempts to control her in various ways even after the divorce. The study also revealed features related to the Roma culture that influence the help sought and received by Roma women. They are created by the control of individuals by the community and by their reactions in conflict situations. Having experienced violence, Roma women must take the reactions of the community into consideration. For instance, speaking of the couple's problems to one's own parents is often considered shameful. Speaking of the violence and seeking the help of the authorities may also lead to the escalation of the violence into a conflict between the extended families. This means that the violence experienced by Roma women is even more easily concealed than the violence experienced by women belonging to the mainstream population. In the hierarchy, the Roma women are below Roma men, which allows the men to abuse their own position as the head of the family. According to the traditions of the Roma culture, children are also left to the husband and his family, if the woman wishes to divorce him and to enter into a new relationship. This prevents women from leaving violent relationships.

The study revealed the strained position of Roma women between their husbands, the Roma community as well as the surrounding society and the requirements of the society's service systems. The help received from outside their community is extremely important to Roma women, since the possibilities of the Roma women to act and to find support from their family members are limited in violent situations. Women's refuges and other support services are very important to Roma women. They should be made more easily accessible, and their personnel's knowledge of the Roma culture should be significantly improved. According to the study, women's refuges are familiar with parts of the Roma culture only, but they are not sufficiently familiar with the reactions of the community to violent situations. The proposals for developing this study are largely related to the increase of information. The service system needs realistic information on the culture and on the situation of women where violence is concerned. Within the culture, features supporting and concealing violence should also be identified, and violence should be more clearly condemned on a collective level.

Roma women and Roma men need information on the society's legislation that has priority over the community rules. The mainstream population and the Roma should carry the change-oriented work together, since the culture cannot be influenced from the outside only. On the other hand, it can be difficult to see and question the familiar structures within the community. A persistent process of change requires an improvement in the general educational level of the Roma and the adaptation of the cultural customs to the surrounding society. Society should also deal more actively with the inequality within closed communities and with the concealed violence related to it.

The International Conference of Roma Women was organised in Finland between 16 and 17 September 2013. Its theme was *Acting Now for an Equal Future*⁸. The Advisory Board for Equality (TANE), the

⁸ http://www.stm.fi/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=5088341&name=DLFE-27514.pdf

Advisory Board on Romani Affairs (RONK) and the Council of Europe organised an international conference for Roma women promoting the position of Roma women, for the organisations they represent and for national and international equality organisations. Approx. 200 participants from 47 countries attended the conference.

The objective of the conference was to promote the protection of Roma women's rights and their equality in all European countries and to create a proposal for a European strategy for Roma women. The aim was to boost the activities of Roma women's organisations and to help them network among themselves and with other equality institutions.

Question 6: Main priorities for Roma inclusion

Most important proposals for the years 2014 – 2020

The starting point for Finland's policies on Roma is that the present legislation and service system provide a good basis for promoting the equal opportunities of the Roma population.

Work in particular on the following themes needs to be continued:

1. Participation in implementing the European policy on Roma
2. Monitoring the National Policy on Roma at all levels
3. Strengthening the inclusion of the Roma and cooperation
4. Prevention of social exclusion among Roma adolescents
5. Implementation of the National Policy on Roma after 2017

Question 7: Government's monitoring process

Finland's Roma policy programme was approved in 2009. The Roma policy programme contains six priority areas and ten policies. The programme contains 147 measures, and various sectors of administration are in charge of implementing them. In 2012, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health appointed a working group to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Roma policy programme. The working group included 24 members, half of whom had a Roma background. The deadline for the working group activities was at the end of 2013.

A follow-up report was made on the Roma policy programme⁹, with information based on data collected in 2013 from ministries and other responsible parties, from municipalities in connection with municipal consultations and from Roma for instance through the consultation of organisations. The report examines

⁹ Romanipoliittisen ohjelman toimeenpanon ohjaus ja seuranta – työryhmän raportti. [Guidance and monitoring of the implementation of the Roma policy programme – working group report.] Reports and memorandums of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2013:48.

[Http://www.stm.fi/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=9882185&name=DLFE-30052.pdf](http://www.stm.fi/c/document_library/get_file?folderId=9882185&name=DLFE-30052.pdf)

how the objectives of the Roma policy programme have been met in the fields of employment, education, social and health services, anti-discrimination activities and housing. In addition, the report explains how the programme was implemented on the regional and local level.

The Roma policy programme has increased the awareness and coordination of Roma affairs on a national level. Measures entrusted to various ministries have been carried out most successfully, and significant progress has been made in some of the measures. Considerable progress has been made particularly in the teaching sector. Implementation on the local level has proved a challenge. Particular challenges can be identified in the fields of Roma employment and adult education.

Municipal consultations and the consultation of organisations as well as the national negotiation sessions of the Advisory Boards for Roma Affairs indicate that there is functional cooperation between the Roma, the Government and the municipalities. The active involvement of the Roma population in the implementation of the programme indicates that there is mutual trust between the actors. The confidential relations are also promoted by the Finnish practice of including the Roma population in the decision-making process concerning the Roma.

Among other things, the working group suggests that the situation of Roma women and Roma men should be more closely monitored in the future. It is suggested that measures entrusted to municipalities should be carried out with the aid of the European Social Fund. Monitoring should be continued, and sufficient monitoring resources should be guaranteed.

Question 8: Ongoing challenges

The National Policy on Roma has improved the awareness and coordination of Roma issues at national level. Hearings with local authorities and NGOs are an indication of the effective cooperation between the Roma, the state administration and local authorities. Active participation by the Roma population in implementing the Policy is a sign of confidence between the actors. As a good practice can be considered the principle to include the Roma population in the decision-making concerning themselves.

The implementation of the Policy at local level is a challenging task, however. The scanty resources of local authorities and uncertainty about whose responsibility it is to implement the Policy in municipalities affect the implementation of the Policy negatively.

There has been considerable progress in the basic education of Roma, which is based on the commitment of the management of the National Board on Education to the implementation of the National Policy on Roma in their branch of administration and the discretionary government transfers paid to municipalities/organisers of education from the budget item of the Ministry of Education for supporting the schooling of Roma pupils. In recent years the focus in the activity has been shifted to guiding Roma pupils to secondary education and supporting them in continued studies. The channel from basic education to vocational education has been found, but the challenge is still how to encourage Roma pupils to attend the upper secondary school.

Particular challenges can be identified in the field of employment and adult education. Good projects have been launched to improve the housing and employment of Roma, which are still under way. The Ministry

of the Environment explored the housing situation of Roma in 2012. The study requires continued measures in municipalities, the implementation of which is being planned. The measures requiring actions by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health are mostly under way or have not been implemented, and so there are challenges in regard to taking care of the health and welfare of the Roma. The work to fight discrimination must go on.

There have been significant steps forward in regard to the Romani language and culture. A work on the history of the Roma in Finland was published in 2012. Since 2012 it has been possible to study the Romani language and culture at the University of Helsinki. The University of Helsinki is one of the few European universities where the Romani language and culture is being taught. Furthermore, the Ministry of Justice published in February 2014 a report on the implementation of the language rights of the Roma as laid down in the Constitution of Finland.

As regards Roma women, important milestones have been the development project regarding rehabilitation of female Roma prisoners Naisten vuoro (Women's turn), a study of interpersonal and domestic violence regarding Roma women and the international conference on Roma women arranged on 16–17 September 2013 in Espoo, Finland.

The Breaking the Barriers seminar arranged in Helsinki in December 2014 discussed multiple discrimination of Roma. One of the working groups dealt with special challenges related to Roma women, Roma with disabilities and Roma belonging to sexual minorities.

Influencing the international policies on Roma has been successful. Channels of influence that are important to Finland include in particular the European Union and the Council of Europe. In 2010–2013 Finland supported programmes strengthening the rights and status of the Roma by means of voluntary funding to the Council of Europe. Finland finds it important that Roma themselves take part in international activities, and it has e.g. contributed to the process of reforming the European Roma and Travellers Forum (ERTF) under the auspices of the Council of Europe and has drawn particular attention to the representation of Roma women and adolescents. Since 2013 Finland has financed the work of a national expert on Roma affairs (of Roma origin) in the unit for non-discrimination in the EU Commission, DG Justice. Different ministries have also raised Roma issues in their own work. Solving the varying situations of Roma arriving from other EU countries still requires discussion and measures. In this we can make use of the good practices from other countries and cities.

Four representatives of the Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC) of the European Social and Economic Committee visited Finland in June 2014. They acquainted themselves thoroughly with the Finnish policies on Roma and met authorities and also representatives of the Roma population.

The visitors considered Finland a forerunner. They stated that Finland's policies on Roma are based on a comprehensive approach, which is unique. They stressed the political will in Finland as an advanced culture of democracy and the different governments' commitment to the issue over several decades. By means of the coordination mechanisms measures at all levels are coordinated rather systematically, while all interest groups participate in the process consistently. There is a culture in Finland that extends farther than hearings, and forums for a continuous dialogue exist.

According to the Committee, perhaps the most convincing aspect in Finland's examples and the most important message based on them is that those concerned themselves participate in and contribute to making decisions. Roma were well represented at all meetings where policies on Roma were dealt with.

Question 9: International Roma Day

The Almanac Office at the University of Helsinki has approved that the International Romani Day should be entered into the calendar on 8 April. The day was first entered into the calendar in 2014.

Question 10: Representation of Roma in decision-making

Since 1956 there has been an Advisory Board on Romani Affairs and four Regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs in Finland. All these advisory boards have full-time secretaries general. The advisory boards serve as a cooperation body between the relevant authorities and the Roma population, and their task is to promote the status, inclusion and living conditions of the Roma. Furthermore, there are 20 local working groups on Roma affairs in municipalities. The organisations mentioned above constitute a good basis for the implementation of the National Policy on Roma at both the national level and the regional and local level. Each Regional Advisory Board convenes about four times a year. In addition, the coordinating officers of the Regional State Administrative Agencies arrange regional and local hearings, assist the local working groups on Roma affairs set up in municipalities and actively promote the establishment of new working groups. They convey information to the social, health, education and housing authorities of their region according to the local needs. In 2014 they also informed stakeholders in their regions of the start of the European Social Fund's financial term and were actively involved in the working groups preparing projects. The point of departure is that the Regional State Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs and the coordinating officers employed in the Regional Administrative Agencies respond to the local needs. The coordinating officers have regular meetings with the Secretary General of the National Board on Romani Affairs and share information and good practices between themselves.

The steering and monitoring group for the National Policy on Roma appointed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health organised a hearing for local authorities in Helsinki on 11 October 2013. Local authorities are in a key position to implement the Policy on Roma in their area. The purpose of the hearing was to collect the views of local authorities on how the Policy is seen in municipalities and how the activities of local authorities could be promoted in the implementation of the Policy. Eleven municipalities participated.

It appeared from the addresses of several municipalities that there is uncertainty as to which body should be responsible for Roma affairs in municipalities. The handling of Roma affairs often depends on how active individual officials are in this field. It was proposed as a concrete solution to mainstreaming Roma affairs that each municipality should appoint an official responsible for Roma affairs. The limited resources of local authorities were also referred to as an obstacle to the implementation of the Policy on Roma. Local authorities were encouraged to apply for funding from the National Programme for Social Welfare and Health Care (Kaste) or the Social Fund. It was also stated that it is possible to achieve good

results even by limited resources if there is willingness and ability to cooperate in municipalities. It was proposed at the hearing that local authorities could convene annually to exchange information about good practices.

The national Equality is Priority programme organised in 2012, together with the Ministry of the Environment and the Regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs, a series of four regional seminars dealing with problems related to Roma housing, discrimination in access to housing and practices to promote equal opportunities in regard to housing. These “Home sweet home” seminars were attended by housing and other authorities as well as representatives of Roma communities and NGOs. A joint report on the seminar was drawn up and communicated in an electronic version to all municipalities in Finland.

In 2013 the Ombudsman for Minorities launched a pilot project to promote good ethnic relations at local level. For instance, a conciliation process was experimented with in a municipality with long-standing problems in Roma housing. The aim was to find a solution to conflicts and restore confidence between Roma and the municipality’s flat rental company. The situation was monitored and cooperation with the municipality continued in 2014.

National conferences of the Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs are held annually. These occasions arranged in various parts of Finland are attended by actors in the local working groups on Roma affairs and Roma NGOs. They represent authorities, cooperation partners and the Roma. The theme of the conference held in 2013 in Vantaa was policies on Roma at local level, with presentations of five municipalities’ experiences. As the theme of the conference held in Oulu in October 2014 was chosen the implementation of the National Policy on Roma, which was discussed from the perspective of e.g. discrimination, education and training, Roma NGOs’ activities and local working groups on Roma affairs.

In 2008–2014 the National Board of Education granted annually discretionary government transfers from the budget item of the Ministry of Education totalling EUR 2.42 million to local authorities for supporting the basic education of Roma pupils. Altogether 37 municipalities and at least 85 % of all basic education age Roma pupils were covered by the support. In recent years support has in particular been allocated for guiding Roma pupils from basic education to continued studies. The organisers of education can also apply for discretionary government transfer from the National Board of Education for teaching the Romani language in preschool and basic education as well as in upper secondary education. Annually, about EUR 40,000 has been granted for teaching the Romani language within basic education. In addition, the National Board of Education has granted a special allocation for language nest activities, aiming to revive the Romani language spoken in Finland, providing oral activities for Roma of all ages.

Grants have been allocated to municipalities and NGOs, totalling EUR 286,000 in 2011–2014. In 2014 there were 14 Romani language nests in operation in different localities in Finland. The grants allocated by the working group on Roma education in the National Board of Education have been used for instance for arranging seminars dealing with education themes for Roma parents and supplementary training in the Roma culture for teachers.

The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities established in 2013 a website on Roma issues <http://www.kunnat.net/fi/palvelualueet/hyvinvointikunta/romanipoliittinen-ohjelma/Sivut/default.aspx>.

The website informs about the National Policy on Roma, education and training for Roma and the Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs.

Reinforcing the role of the National Roma Contact Point

A civil servant employed at the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health has been appointed as the national Roma contact person. The contact person coordinates the policies on Roma vis-à-vis the Commission as part of her other duties. The contact person is also a member of the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs, which gives her expert support. This arrangement ensures that the inclusion of the Roma population is realised in all phases of the implementation of the policies on Roma. The resources allocated for the post have been dimensioned according to the resources available. The national Roma contact person does not directly participate in the planning and implementation of the European Structural and Investment Funds. The contact person can, however, as a civil servant influence the preparation of matters within the Ministry.

Dialogue with Roma civil society / NGOs

In Finland the central principle in the development of the status and living conditions of the Roma is that the Roma themselves are involved in this work together with authorities and other stakeholders. Through involvement the Roma can influence the content of activities and adapt it so that they feel that they benefit from them.

The steering and monitoring group for the implementation of the National Policy on Roma set up by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health arranged a hearing for Roma NGOs in Helsinki in May 2013. Representatives of eight Roma NGOs of different sizes and working in different sectors from different parts of the country participated. The purpose of the hearing was to collect Roma NGOs' views on how the National Policy on Roma is seen from their perspective and how the Policy could make use of the knowledge and skills of Roma NGOs. The NGOs told about their activities and future plans, challenges and resources for their activities and areas of focus and benefits of the Policy.

NGOs are committed to the Policy on Roma and find that its objectives and measures are appropriate, although difficult to understand. Information on the Policy on Roma should be provided in particular to those Roma NGOs that are not aware of it yet. It appeared at the meeting that NGOs are willing to implement the Policy on Roma in cooperation. Roma NGOs have published a handbook on the Policy on Roma intended for NGOs. The handbook tells what Roma NGOs can do to promote the National Policy on Roma.

On 10 June 2013 the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs heard Roma adolescents and young adults about how they could be encouraged to engage in hobbies and professions in the field of culture and performing arts. Besides members of the Advisory Board, present were young adults from Turku who were involved in the musical *Syvä laulu* (Deep song) presented in summer 2012. Roma adolescents in Northern and Western Finland are very interested in developing their performing skills and pursuing hobbies, doing plays and musicals.

The Advisory Board on Romani Affairs in Southern Finland arranged in cooperation with the Youth Centres of the Greater Helsinki Area a meeting for Roma adolescents in Vantaa in October 2014. About

250 Roma adolescents from the Greater Helsinki Area were attending. They told about their experiences of education and training, employment and social inclusion. The purpose is to continue arranging these meetings for Roma adolescents in 2015.

The City of Tampere has hired a school assistant with Roma background. The local working group on Roma affairs convenes regularly. A camp has been arranged for elderly Roma in Tampere. The associations Elämä ja Valo ry, TamRoma ry and the youth services of the City of Tampere have since 2007 organised a club called Laiffiklubi that provides activities for Roma adolescents. Also, a basic education project for Roma children organised by the National Board of Education is under way in Tampere.

A family camp has been organised in Pietarsaari together with the parish. The local working group on Roma affairs provides a scholarship for Roma pupils advancing from primary cycle to secondary cycle and those completing basic education. On the National Roma Day a celebration reception has been arranged in the City Hall of Pietarsaari, attended by local Roma people, the working group on Roma affairs and decisions-makers of the city.

In Jyväskylä there is a project called Siltana huomiseen, a bridge to tomorrow, which is administered by Roma adolescents in Jyväskylä and funded by the City of Jyväskylä and Finland's Slot Machine Association RAY. The project is targeted to Roma adolescents, and its aim is to promote equal opportunities and prevent discrimination, through strengthening inclusion. In Jyväskylä, an application has been submitted for launching an ESF project Rainer, which aims to promote the integration of Roma into society. In 2014 a pilot project Romko was carried out in Jyväskylä related to raising the level of education among the Roma. The pilot project included a two-part report that deals with obstacles to education and needs for support. The other part describes the possible role of the Centre of Excellence on Social Welfare in Central Finland as a national development unit in social and health care administration promoting the integration of the Roma.

Hirundo is a day centre maintained by the Helsinki Deaconess Institute in cooperation with the City of Helsinki for Roma travelling within the EU area. It provides services such as shower, meals and use of the internet and corresponding low threshold services mainly for Roma from Romania and Bulgaria. The centre also provides guidance in acute medical problems and appropriate information on Finland. The Advisory Board on Romani Affairs decided in 2014 to invite a representative of the Hirundo day centre as its permanent expert so as to strengthen its expertise in regard to travelling Roma people.