

## BEING DIFFERENT IN EVERYDAY LIFE – SURVEY ON ROMA’S EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION

### BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE SURVEY

The survey was a response to the need for more data on discrimination experienced by Roma and for comparative data on their experiences of discrimination in relation to similar experiences among other ethnic minority groups in Finland. For this reason, some of the questions are the same as those in the EU-MIDIS Survey (European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey) conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), which surveyed experiences of discrimination among Russian speakers and people of Somali background in Finland. Better data will enable us to intervene more effectively in cases of discrimination experienced by Roma and to improve their position within society on a broader basis than before.

Housing was selected as a survey theme, because Roma contact the Ombudsman for Minorities most actively in cases of suspected discrimination in housing. In housing, the Roma culture also has certain distinctive aspects which are challenging with respect to the Ombudsman's work.

The survey also charts Roma's experiences of discrimination in working life. The Ombudsman for Minorities is not empowered to supervise the prohibition of discrimination in this field, but improved data on the issue will enable the Ombudsman to become more effective at the task of promoting equality.

The third theme was mutual relationships between Roma. In this respect, the aim was to define a policy governing the activities of the Ombudsman for Minorities in relation to individual rights as laid down by the Constitution and with respect to the right of the Roma to maintain and develop their own language and culture.

Of the 249 Roma interviewed, 61 per cent (n=152) were women and 39 per cent (n=97) were men.

The respondents' distribution by age group was fairly even: most respondents were from the age groups 25–34, (n=68) and 35–44 (n=49), while fewest belonged to the over 64 (n=16) age group. The respondents' educational background was as follows: 57.3 per cent (n=142) had completed their basic education at most, 33.1 per cent (n=82) had completed their secondary education and 9.6 per cent had a higher education degree.

### EXPERIENCES OF DISCRIMINATION AND AWARENESS OF RIGHTS

A total of 68.7 per cent of Roma respondents (n=249) report that they have experienced discrimination in some area of life during the last year. A considerable proportion of these experiences involve situations in everyday life, such as shopping or using a service station. Respondents state that they find it humiliating to be shadowed by a shop assistant or guards when shopping.

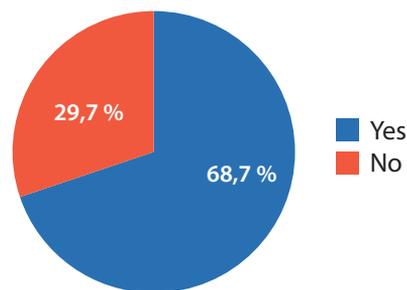


Fig. 1. Have you been discriminated against in one or more ways during the last year? (n=249)

The Roma experience discrimination more often than people of Somali background and Russian speakers. According to the EU-MIDIS Survey 47 per cent of respondents of Somali background residing in Finland (n=484) have experienced discrimination at some point in the last year. The corresponding figure

for Russian speakers residing in Finland (n=562) is 27 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

According to the same survey, the groups experiencing the highest levels of discrimination were Roma in the Czech Republic (64%), Africans in Malta (63%), and Roma in Hungary (62%), Poland (59%) and Greece (55%).

*"At a local service station, Roma are required to pay in advance, but members of the majority population can pay after filling up."*

A Roma male, 49

*"On a daily basis, I notice that when I go shopping for groceries, the guards start to follow me. I dare not touch any products, unless I'm certain that I'm going to buy them. Nowadays, I always go to a certain shop because they know me there and I can shop in peace."*

A Roma female, 32

Roma in Finland have a high degree of confidence in their awareness of their rights in situations involving discrimination. Of the respondents (n=247), 69.2 per cent are of the opinion that they would know their rights if they encountered discrimination or harassment.

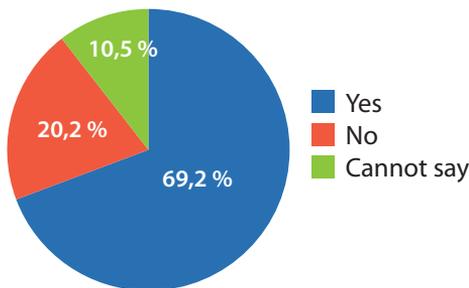


Fig. 2. Would you know your rights if you encountered discrimination or harassment? (n=247)

The responses of Roma are consistent with the Eurobarometer results for Finland. According to the

2012 Eurobarometer, 71 per cent of respondents living in Finland (n=1017) are of the opinion that they would know their rights if they encountered discrimination or harassment. Within the EU Member States, the respondent's awareness of rights is on average 37 per cent.<sup>2</sup>

In Finland, 55.8 per cent of respondents (n=245) know at least one body or actor that provides advice and assistance to victims of discrimination. The respondent's educational level influences such awareness: 46.4 per cent of respondents who have completed their basic education at most gave a positive reply to this question, while the corresponding figure for respondents who have completed their secondary education was 63.4 per cent and that for respondents with a higher education degree was 91.7 per cent.

### Proposals for intervening in discrimination occurring as part of everyday life:

- Enhanced cooperation between Roma organisations and key grocery chains, in order to improve mutual trust.
- Local-level meetings between merchants and Roma within the region, in order to reduce prejudice.
- Opening dialogue between Roma organisations and security companies.
- Increasing information and education on the prohibition of ethnic profiling and the implications of such a prohibition.
- Enhanced training on the prohibition on discrimination among retailers and security companies.

## WORKING LIFE

A total of 53.8 per cent of respondents (n=70) have experienced discrimination when looking for work in the last five years. In the EU-MIDIS survey, the corresponding figure for people of Somali background (n=484) is 41 per cent and for Russian speakers (n=562) it is 25 per cent.

1 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2009) "European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey - Main Results Report". Available at: [http://www.fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/663-FRA-2011\\_EU\\_MIDIS\\_EN.pdf](http://www.fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/663-FRA-2011_EU_MIDIS_EN.pdf) (26.2.2014)

2 European Commission (2012) Eurobarometer - Discrimination in the EU in 2012. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs\\_393\\_fact\\_fi\\_fi.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_393_fact_fi_fi.pdf) (26.2.2014).

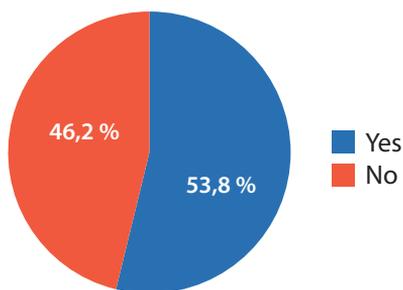


Fig. 3. Have you been discriminated against at any time in the last five years when looking for work? (n=130)

*"I phoned a number given in a job advertisement. When I stated my name, from which it is easy to conclude that I am Roma, I was told that the vacancy was no longer open. After a while, I phoned again under a different name, to be told that the vacancy was still available."*

A Roma female, 28

*"I applied for a job at a local grocery store. Over the phone, the employer sounded really interested and said that they needed to find a new employee urgently. When I sent my details by e-mail, I was told that the vacancy was no longer available. I asked for the reason and the shopkeeper said that he could not hire me because I'm Roma."*

A Roma male, 21

The survey results indicate that young Roma more often participate in working life than older people. In part, this can be explained by the higher educational level among young people, which improves their status on the labour market. However, this does not eliminate experiences of discrimination, which young Roma are more liable to encounter, when looking for work, than older Roma.

In addition to prejudices and discrimination among the majority population, the fact that the educational attainments of Roma tend to fall below those of the majority population weakens the position of Roma on the labour market. Moreover, the traditional Roma clothing poses special challenges in working life. In cooperation with employers, a more diverse dress code should be promoted in working life. At the same time, Roma community should engage in an

internal discussion on reconciling traditional Roma clothing with working life.

Of the Roma who had experienced discrimination when looking for work (n=70), a total of 87 per cent did not report the incident in question.

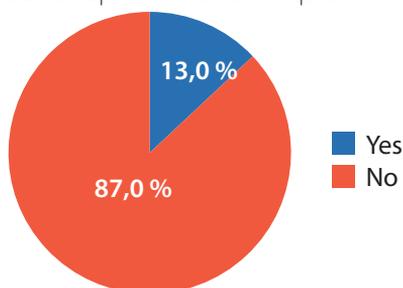


Fig. 4. Did you or did someone else report your experience of work discrimination? (n=69)

The few people, who did report such cases, did so to the police, a non-governmental organisation, the office of the Ombudsman for Minorities, or a trade union. It is notable that no reports were submitted to the local Regional State Administrative Agency's occupational safety and health authorities, even though supervising discrimination in working life is expressly one of the Regional State Administrative Agencies' duties.

#### Proposals for action to promote the position of Roma in the labour market:

- Joint meetings between employers and Roma at local level, in order to reduce prejudice and enhance mutual trust.
- Development of mentoring activities between the majority population and the Roma in order to enhance employment among the Roma.
- Opening up a dialogue with employers on a more diverse dress code at work and the possibilities of reconciling work clothing with traditional Roma clothing..
- Beginning a discussion within Roma community on conflicts between traditional Roma clothing costumes and working life.
- Discussions with various employers aimed at increasing the transparency of the recruitment process.

- Enhanced communication with Roma community to lower the threshold for reporting discrimination at work.
- Targeted measures for improving jobseeking skills among Roma.
- Training opportunities targeted at Roma, developed on the initiative of employers, in support of employment.
- Development of mentoring activities to improve the educational level of Roma.
- Enhancing awareness among Roma of their basic rights.

## HOUSING

Of the respondents (n=248), 68.5 per cent have attempted to rent or buy housing in the last five years. Almost one half, i.e. 48.5 per cent of those who have been active on the housing market (n=169), have experienced discrimination on the ground of their ethnic origin when applying for rental housing financed through state subsidies, typically rental housing belonging to the municipality or city.

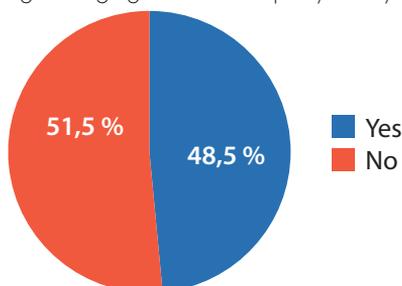


Fig. 5. Do you feel that you have been discriminated against on the grounds of your ethnic origin when trying to rent housing from a municipal or city housing agency at any time in the last five years? (%) (n=169).

*"We have encountered a great deal of discrimination by the authorities. The city housing agency does not rent housing to the Roma. If they offer a flat, it is often in the same building as other Roma, which we cannot move into for cultural reasons. If you have to refuse a flat for this reason, you will not be offered another flat because you refused the previous one."*

A Roma female, 33

Although Roma rarely inform the Ombudsman for Minorities of discrimination experienced when seeking privately financed rental housing, the survey responses indicate that discrimination is experienced on the so-called private housing market even more often than when applying for rental housing from a municipality or city. More than one half (n=170), or 54.7 per cent of respondents find they have been discriminated against on the grounds of their ethnic origin when attempting to rent or buy housing on the private housing market.

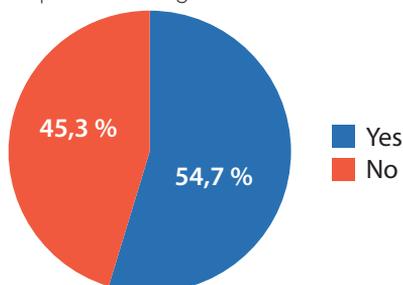


Fig. 6. Do you feel that you have been discriminated against on the grounds of your ethnic origin when trying to rent or buy housing on the private housing market during the last five years? (%) (n=170)

*"My partner and I tried to rent a flat. We telephoned the landlord on the basis of an advertisement. Over the phone, the landlord asked about our employment situation and credit history, and was almost ready to offer the flat to us. We went to see the flat on-site, but when the landlord saw that we were Roma, he refused to rent the flat to us because, according to him, we constitute an investment risk."*

A Roma male, 24

Roma have distinctly more experiences of discrimination in housing than people of Somali background or Russian speakers living in Finland. According to the EU-MIDIS Survey, 22 per cent of people of Somali background in Finland (n=484), and 11 per cent of Russian speakers (n=562) who have applied for housing in the last five years find that housing agencies or private landlords have discriminated against them due to their ethnic origin.

In many EU Member States, Roma experience less discrimination in housing than in Finland. For instance, according to the EU-MIDIS Survey, 29 per cent of

Roma in Hungary and 34 per cent in Greece have experienced discrimination in housing. The high figures for Roma in Finland are at least partly explained by their greater awareness of rights. Another explanatory factor may be that housing for Roma is not segregated in Finland. Instead, the Roma live in the same neighbourhoods and use the same housing markets as the majority population.

The results indicate that Roma report experiences of discrimination in the public rental housing market more often than in the private housing market. Discrimination experienced in the provision of municipal or city rental housing was reported by 44.4 per cent of respondents. In most cases, the report was submitted to the Ombudsman for Minorities.

Only 15.1 per cent of respondents reported discrimination in the privately financed rental housing market. Almost one half (49.4%) believed that reporting cases of discrimination was pointless. The second most common reason given for low reporting rates was lack of information (24.1%).

Many Roma and private landlords seem to think that prohibition of ethnic discrimination does not apply to the rental of privately financed housing. Although this is basically true, even on the private markets housing applicants cannot be sidelined on discriminatory grounds. Prohibition of discrimination provided in the Non-Discrimination Act applies just as much to business activities and the rental of buy-to-let flats by private individuals as it does to public sector activities.

Based on the ombudsman's customer contacts it is not plausible to consider all all negative experiences by Roma in access to housing as discrimination prohibited in the Non-Discrimination Act. In some cases, difficulties in finding housing are related to the applicant's housing history, financial and social difficulties and the difficult rental housing situation in general. Certain problems concern the fact that the supply of rental housing does not meet the requirements of Roma culture or that the customs, maintained by some Roma, of permission to move and avoidance behaviour restrict the housing of other Roma and result in unexpected requirements to move house or change locality.

Within municipalities, various administrative sectors should engage in more comprehensive intervention and networking in order to support Roma, who suffer from discrimination and the consequences of dis-

crimination. Municipal housing agencies and rental housing agencies alone cannot prevent this vicious cycle. In addition, expertise and cooperation with social welfare, early education, education and health authorities, debt advisory services and substance abuse prevention should be applied to this problem. Assessment of child welfare requirements may be justified in some cases. A subjective right to housing or improvement of housing conditions may even apply to certain cases concerning families with children. Any situation involving a dispute between Roma and including the threat of violence calls for cooperation with the municipal authorities, the local Roma community, shelters and the police.

## **PROPOSALS FOR ACTION TO REDUCE THE DISCRIMINATION AND EXCLUSION EXPERIENCED BY ROMA IN HOUSING**

### **The Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA)**

- More specific guidance targeted at municipalities and owners of rental housing built with state subsidies
- Greater transparency in the selection of residents
- Evaluation of how well resident selection, for which municipalities are responsible, functions
- Examining the consequences of the incorporation of rental housing agencies

### **Municipalities and the local authorities**

- In cooperation with the local Roma, implementation of the measures included within the National Policy on Roma
- Efficient supervision of the selection of residents
- Equality promotion and planning
- Compliance with sound administration principles when interacting with customers
- Multi-professional cooperation between officials representing different administrative branches and

comprehensive intervention in cases where Roma families are in a difficult position

- Establishment of local and regional Roma work groups
- Introduction of social housing management
- Adopting the best interests of children as the guiding principle in activities by the authorities
- Introduction and promotion of mediation procedures in disagreements between neighbours, disputes between Roma and conflicts between Roma and the authorities
- Strengthening the role of shelters and the police in conflicts between Roma

#### Providers of privately financed rental housing

- Enhancing awareness of the scope of prohibition of discrimination in business activities and the rental of buy-to-let flats owned by private individuals

#### The Advisory Board on Romani Affairs

- Continued practical implementation of the National Policy on Roma
- Maintaining the discussion on issues sensitive to the Roma
- Provision of resources to Roma organisations in terms of project skills, for example

#### The Roma at local level

- Implementation of good customer relationships during the housing application process
- Prevention of mutual conflicts and introduction of a mediation procedure
- Submitting requests for clarification to municipalities about decisions on resident selection found to be contrary to the law, regarding rental housing financed with state subsidies
- Identification and reporting of discrimination
- Local cooperation and influence, and possibly getting organised

- Internal value discussion on sensitive issues
- Implementation of the National Policy on Roma at local level

## MUTUAL RELATIONSHIPS OF THE ROMA

In the last five years, as many as 39.7 per cent of respondents (n=234) have either complied with or encountered customs belonging to the Roma culture that have caused harm to the respondent him- or herself or the family in question.

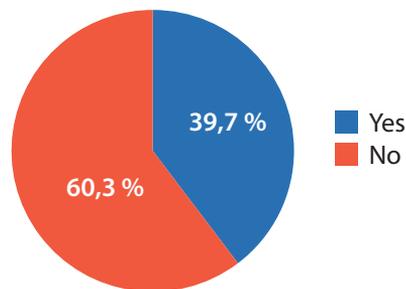


Fig. 7. In the last five years, have you complied with or encountered customs belonging to the Roma culture that have caused harm to you or your family? (n=234)

In the opinion of the Ombudsman for Minorities, one clear principle is that the so-called customs of permission to move and avoidance behaviour, followed by some Roma, violate the rights of individuals. Another principle is the fact that the Constitution requires public authorities to take the special characteristics of the Roma culture into consideration insofar as possible. This means that, whenever possible, account must be taken of the special characteristics of the Roma culture in, for example, the provision of state-subsidised rental housing.

It should be borne in mind that, on the basis of the Non-Discrimination Act, authorities must engage in the methodical and goal-based promotion of equality to the extent required by the nature of the authority's activities. This means that authorities must systematically seek opportunities to take account of the Roma's cultural preferences.

Compliance with the harmful customs mentioned by respondents commonly emphasises the unity of the group and a sense of identity between its members. While the strength of the Roma community lies here, it is also the reason why, in the opinion of some, the rights of the individual are secondary. Customs considered problematic from the viewpoint of individual rights have developed over the course of history and were relevant in their day. These still command the behaviour and actions of some Roma and lead some to demand the same compliance from other members of Roma minority.

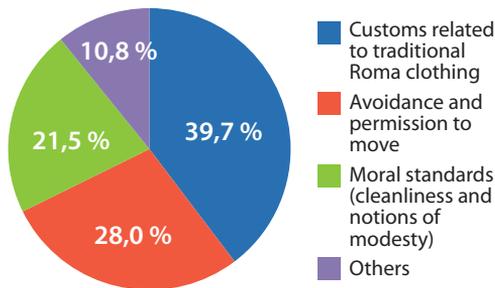


Fig. 8. Which customs of the Roma culture have been harmful to you or your family? (n=234)

*"My daughter gave up the traditional Roma clothing a few years ago. This decision was not accepted by Roma community and I am continuously contacted about the issue. My daughter is regarded as a turncoat and has been excluded from the community."*

A Roma female, 56

*"I have been forced to avoid other Roma and certain locations due to a family feud."*

A Roma female, 52

*"I have been forced to comply with cleanliness rules, according to which I cannot, for instance, use a toilet used by older Roma. It is also difficult to go jogging in public or visit a public indoor swimming pool, because you have to check carefully that other Roma people are not around."*

A Roma female, 34

As many as 36.2 per cent (n=83) of the respondents (n=229) find that decision-making in the Roma community involves harmful aspects. Responses can be classified into two groups on the basis of the aspects of decision-making found harmful by the respondents: ignoring the rights of the individual and pressure to live in accordance with the Roma culture.

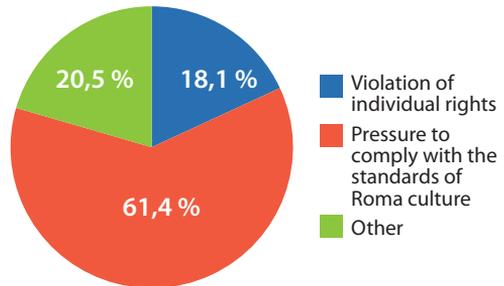


Fig. 9. What kinds of harmful aspects are involved in decision-making? (n=83)

A total of 77.6 per cent (n=184) of the respondents (n=237) named one issue in the Roma culture that they would like to change. With regard to willingness to change, there are fairly large differences between age groups: the youngest respondents express least readiness to change, whereas the oldest are most willing to do so. As many as 67.5 per cent of young Roma (aged 16–24) and up to 85.7 per cent of over 64-year-olds would change something in the Roma culture.

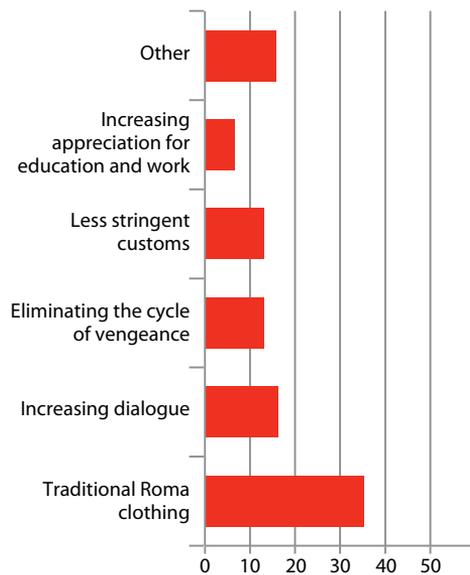


Fig. 10. What would you change in Roma culture? (n=184)

A total of 37.7 per cent (n=86) of the respondents (n=228) are of the opinion that the position of women within Roma community is particularly problematic. In this respect, there were no significant differences between male and female respondents and the age of the respondent had barely any influence on the response. The educational level of the respondents somewhat influenced their views. More than one third (34.9%) of those who had completed their basic education at most were of the opinion that the position of women is problematic. The corresponding figure for those who have completed a degree is 50.0 per cent.

Respondents (n=86) who see special problems in the position of women in Roma community cite gender inequality as the cause of such problems. In this regard, a total of 62.8 per cent (n=54) of respondents highlight gender equality and the submissive position of Roma women with regard to men. A total of 22.1 per cent (n=19) find the traditional Roma clothing problematic and a total of six respondents mentioned other factors such as engaging in physical exercise and fitness training, and notions of modesty.

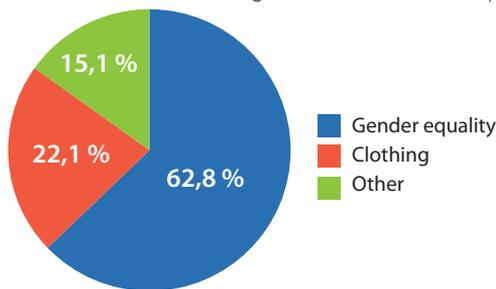


Fig. 11. What kinds of problems are involved in the position of women within Roma community? (n=86)

*"In crisis situations, women are in a weak position. Divorce is an example of such a crisis. Women do not dare to challenge men, because they fear for their extended family and next of kin."*

A Roma female, 29

*"This largely depends on the extended family and immediate family. In some families, the role of women is very old-*

*fashioned, the position of women is weak and women are not appreciated, while in others, women and men are equal. Men make the decisions. A woman's status is low if the man wants it to be that way. However, this largely depends on the man in question."*

A Roma female, 33

*"Gender equality does not apply. The man is the head of the family and women have no decision-making power. This applies to young people as well. Boys order girls around."*

A Roma male, 41

## FURTHER ACTION

Now is the first occasion on which we have had access to information which is more tangible than assessments of discrimination experienced by Roma in Finland. This provides us with a more detailed understanding of the extent of discrimination against Roma in Finland, and in what kinds of everyday situations it occurs.

The results of the survey should awaken us to the extent of social injustice that discrimination practised against the Roma involves within our society.

The results should also encourage Roma population to engage in an open discussion of traditional customs that violate individual rights and on the related need for change.

Boosting anti-discrimination work will not be enough to improve the equality and position in society of Roma. A key role will be played by fostering cooperation between public sector actors at municipal level in their interactions with Roma and by the creation of models for preventative action. In addition, active measures are required in order to improve levels of trust between Roma and the majority population in various walks of life. It would be equally important to support Roma community in guaranteeing individual rights.