



# Civil society monitoring report on implementation of the national Roma integration strategies in Finland

Focusing on structural and horizontal  
preconditions  
for successful implementation of the strategy

**Prepared by:**  
Suomen Romaniyhdistys ry – Finnish Roma Association  
May 2018



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers  
Directorate D — Equality and Union Citizenship  
Unit D1 Non Discrimination and Roma Coordination

*European Commission  
B-1049 Brussels*

**Civil society monitoring report  
on implementation of the  
national Roma integration strategy  
in Finland**

Focusing on structural and horizontal preconditions  
for successful implementation of the strategy

***EUROPE DIRECT is a service to help you find answers  
to your questions about the European Union***

Freephone number (\*):  
00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11

(\* ) The information given is free, as are most calls (though some operators, phone boxes or hotels may charge you)

**LEGAL NOTICE**

"The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein."

More information on the European Union is available on the Internet (<http://www.europa.eu>).

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2018

Print	ISBN 978-92-79-97699-5	doi:10.2838/807102	Catalogue number DS-07-18-026-EN-C
PDF	ISBN 978-92-79-97700-8	doi:10.2838/848759	Catalogue number DS-07-18-026-EN-N

© European Union, 2018  
Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

The report has been prepared by the NGO *Finnish Roma Association – Suomen Romaniyhdistys ry.*

The Report has been prepared as part of the Roma Civil Monitor pilot project, 'Capacity-building for Roma civil society and strengthening its involvement in the monitoring of National Roma Integration Strategies'. The pilot project is carried out for the European Commission, DG Justice and Consumers. It is coordinated by the Center for Policy Studies of Central European University (CEU CPS), in partnership with the European Roma Grassroots Organisations Network (ERGO Network), the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) and the Roma Education Fund (REF), and implemented with around 90 NGOs and experts from up to 27 member states.

Although the Roma Civil Monitor pilot project, as part of which the report was prepared, is coordinated by CEU, the report represents the findings of the author and it does not necessarily reflect the views of CEU. CEU cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

# CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	6
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	7
<b>GOVERNANCE AND OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK</b> .....	9
Mainstreaming Roma inclusion across ministries and other national level public authorities .....	9
Mainstreaming Roma inclusion from the administrative level across the local authorities .....	10
Promoting empowerment and participation of Roma .....	11
Guarantees for the effectiveness of programmes with the largest budgets.....	12
Civil society’s access to funding for Roma inclusion activities .....	12
Availability of reliable data on the situation of Roma.....	13
Policies and measures addressing specific needs of Roma women, children and youth ..	13
<b>ANTI-DISCRIMINATION</b> .....	14
Implementing the Racial Equality Directive.....	14
Educational and residential segregation .....	15
Discriminatory behaviour by police, misconduct by prosecutors or courts .....	16
<b>ADDRESSING ANTIGYPSYISM</b> .....	18
Institutional settings for fighting discrimination and addressing antigypsyism .....	18
Combating hate speech and hate crime .....	18
Awareness of discrimination, antigypsyism and hate crime among Roma .....	18
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	20
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> .....	21

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DG JUST	Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers
EDUFI	Finnish National Agency for Education
ESF	European Social Fund
FLHR	Finnish League for Human Rights
FRA	EU Agency for Fundamental Rights
HSL	Helsinki Public Transportation Department
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ROMPO	Finnish National Policy on Roma
RIKU	Victim Support in Finland
STEA	Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organizations

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Regardless of the long shared history in Finland, Roma still form a marginalized group. They have the same equal legal status, but in practice there is a difference in reaching equal opportunities and capacity building in the Finnish society. Although the Finnish Roma have been considered well integrated from the perspective of guaranteed income and permanent housing, Roma still need affirmative actions to ensure their social, cultural and economic equality. One of the most challenging areas is employment,<sup>1</sup> which is going to be one of the topics analysed in the second National Policy on Roma (ROMPO2).

### Governance and overall policy framework

Governmental and institutional structures to promote Roma rights are well conceived in Finland. The Finnish National Policy on Roma (ROMPO)<sup>2</sup> is well mainstreamed at the governmental level, but the challenge is how to turn the goodwill of the ROMPO into an action at the local level. This would require additional resources and cooperation between local authorities and Roma associations. There is a strong political will to promote Roma rights and it is stated by politicians that Finland wants to be a forerunner in the Roma inclusion. The challenge is to translate this goodwill into concrete actions that would promote equal cultural and social justice.

### Anti-discrimination

As a Nordic country, Finland is considered one of the leading countries on gender equality and parity. The development during the last few years has been that equality is promoted as a generally accepted notion in the society. There is a tendency favourable to the promotion of equal rights of groups and individuals. With regards to Roma, this approach is challenging because it neglects the historical weight that defines the social relations with the majority people. Stereotypes and attitudes are deeply rooted in the minds of the majority Finns. It would be ideal to organize campaigns against antigypsyism in Finland, as suggested in the next chapter. However, it is a good message that Roma are prominently involved with the existing anti-discrimination campaigns, run mostly by the non-governmental associations.

### Addressing antigypsyism

The concept of antigypsyism is not commonly recognized in the Finnish context. There are very few Roma activists who have been involved in the international Roma movement and thus trying to raise awareness about the concept of antigypsyism also in Finland. This awareness hasn't yet reached the public and more work should be done on this issue. This is also an issue that was not given enough importance in the current National Policy on Roma.

---

<sup>1</sup> Interview with Ms. Laiti, member of the Advisory Board on Romany Affairs 2018.

<sup>2</sup> The Proposal of the Working Group for a National Policy on Roma. Working group report available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/finland\\_national\\_strategy\\_2009\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/finland_national_strategy_2009_en.pdf)

## INTRODUCTION

Finland's first National Policy on Roma or ROMPO, was drawn for the 2010-2017 period and was published in December 2009. However, it is known that a first version of the Policy was already published back in 1999. The goal of the National Policy was to promote the equality and inclusion of Roma in various spheres of life. The objective was to make Finland a forerunner in promoting the inclusion of Roma in Europe by 2017. ROMPO was developed by a working group of 24 members representing different administrative areas and the Roma civil society organizations. The working group held five hearings for the Roma population in five different cities and one hearing for the representatives of the Finnish municipalities. The National Policy on Roma entered into force in 2010.

The National Policy on Roma was a comprehensive and concrete action programme intended to achieve permanent improvements for the position of the Roma population within the Finnish society. Initially, ROMPO consisted of a total of 147 measures and after 2011 six more cross-sectoral measures were initiated by the Government. The implementation of the measures is within the responsibility of the appropriate Ministries. The National Policy on Roma was approved by the Governmental Programme in 2011.

There are approximately 10,000 Roma who live in Finland and about 3,000 Finnish Roma who live in Sweden. Finnish Roma are legally well protected, as following Finland's independence in 1917, Roma were officially granted citizenship in 1919. Roma have lived in Finland for about 500 years, and there are no separate Romani communities or settlements, they live all-around in Finland, and about 3,000 Roma in the metropolitan area of Helsinki. The attempts of assimilation and/or extinction are defining the historical trajectory of the Roma in Finland before the 1960s social movement. The participation of Roma in Finland's wars during 1939-1945 had a strong influence in shaping the sense of national identity of the Roma people. Nowadays, Finnish Roma are more actively involved in building the Finnish society. The change in Romani politics began after the year 1968, when the new Advisory Board on Gypsy Affairs (later Advisory Board on Romani Affairs) was established. After 1968, half of the members of the Advisory Board had to consist of people of Romani background. Although the history of co-existence has been harsh, today the life of Roma has improved. The Finnish Roma are recognized in the Constitution of Finland as a national minority. The reform of the constitutional rights in 1995 and the new Constitution of 2000 have improved the legal and formal status of Roma: their cultural and linguistic rights are legally recognized.<sup>3</sup>

The Nordic policy of universal welfare has played a major role in the life of the Finnish *Kalo* Roma as a leveller of their socioeconomic status. Still, generally speaking, Roma have not been able to narrow the social, economic and educational gap that still exists between them and the majority population. With the Finnish Roma, there is no discrimination on the level of legal citizenship. However, discrimination is an issue about social and cultural citizenship, as it appears visible in the gap between the majority and Roma.<sup>4</sup>

In Finland, there is only one Roma group, *Kalo*, which holds the legal status of national minority. Recently arrived Roma from Eastern and Central Europe are not under, and benefiting from, the current Roma Policy.

The Finnish National Policy on Roma is focusing mainly on the issues concerning Finnish *Kalo* Roma. Since 2008 the EU Roma citizens from Eastern Europe, particularly from

---

<sup>3</sup> Finland, Ministry for Social Affairs and Health (sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö, STM / social- och hälsovårdsministeriet, SHM) (2009).

<sup>4</sup> Nordberg, 2007.

Romania and Bulgaria, have been migrating to Finland, especially to the capital city, Helsinki. However, they do not have the equal rights regarding public services and other rights guaranteed by the citizenship. There is a non-governmental organisation working on migrant Roma related issues, but the situation of migrant Roma is challenging as they are lacking the basic fundamental human rights in the territory of Finland.

Concepts such as 'racialization', 'racial categories' and 'racial identities' are not common in the research on racism in Finland. The focus has been on the attitudes of the majority, on the integration of immigrants or on ethnic minorities<sup>5</sup>. Research on racism reflects the mentality and the attitude towards racial issues in the Finnish society generally; race as a concept has been avoided in public and scientific discourses. As the focus has been on the integration, this process is considered also in the Finnish society as a one-way road, not as a mutual one. In other words, what has been found in studies on Roma inclusion applies also to Finland: "Roma integration in Europe has shifted to a right-wing definition of integration where the onus is being placed on the minorities to make the adjustments and accommodations deemed necessary for social cohesion".<sup>6</sup> Although there is a lack of research on racialization or antigypsyism in Finland, it does not mean that they do not exist in the Finnish society.

The tendency and sentiments of downplaying discrimination and antigypsyism in authoritative discourse is noticeable also in the Roma policy(ies); socioeconomic challenges of Roma are clearly expressed in the strategy texts but discriminatory and exclusionary practices in different social spheres as a cause are faded in the background.

The authors of this report work on the Roma projects and/or for a Roma association. Working with the Roma on a daily bases enabled the authors to conduct broad consultations with public authorities, Roma associations, project workers and Roma people. Additionally, an online survey was conducted in order to extend the views on the related issues addressed in the report among Roma people living outside the capital area and with those familiar with, for example, the Roma women's situation.

The studies used in this report are generally prepared in co-operation with the Roma Advisory Board or Roma associations, such as an academic study that was conducted in affiliation with the Helsinki University, *The Boundaries of the Citizenship, - The Case of Roma and the Finnish Nation-State* by Nordberg (2007). However, the recent study about the Roma housing by the Ministry of Environment (2018) indicates accurately the problems Roma are facing in their living situations. Also, relevant for this report has been the study by the Finnish National Board of Education (2011) as their findings indicate that with completion of basic education and seeking further education too many Roma still fail to gain their basic education certificate or do not seek further education, especially immediately after leaving comprehensive school.

The studies used in this report have been compared to the experiences and observations from the field. Overall, consultations with actors in the Roma field took place throughout the development of the report.

---

<sup>5</sup> Rastas, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Rorke 2014.

## GOVERNANCE AND OVERALL POLICY FRAMEWORK

The period starting from 1950s influenced the institutional structures of Roma representation. A permanent National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs (formerly Advisory Board on Gypsy Affairs) was formed in 1956. During its first two decades, the practices and policies of the Advisory Board on Gypsy Affairs resulted in an anti-Roma agenda and assimilation policies. In 1965, the Advisory Board proposed the creation of an ethnic register of Roma people,<sup>7</sup> but the initiative was not successful.

The structural change in the end of the 1960s had a profound effect on the Roma population: due to the new legislation on housing, municipalities were forced to find proper housing for Roma, as until then most of the Roma were vagrants. The end to the vagrant lifestyle was encouraged and promoted by the Advisory Board and the Finnish Roma Association and thus it created a shift that was endorsed by Roma themselves. The permanent housing enabled Roma to receive public health services, pension and other social benefits and made it easier for Roma children to have access to the elementary education.

The National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs and the National Roma Contact Point work both under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The Advisory Board is appointed by the Government and half of its members are of Romani background. Usually, the Roma representatives in the Advisory Board come from various Roma organizations. The civil servant appointee of the National Roma Contact Point is part of coordinating the development of the relevant policies addressing the situation Roma, and is also a member of the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs.

Another governmental agency relevant for Roma inclusion is the Finnish National Board on Education, where a unit for Roma education - Education Unit for Roma, was established. The role of the unit is to empower the adult education for Roma. The Education Unit works also as a consulting body for the elementary education for Roma children. The unit operates independently, and it has a steering group of Roma representatives to advise and monitor its activities. The main responsibility of the Unit is to develop and implement the nationwide education strategy for Roma. It also aims to further promote Romani language and culture. In 2008, The National Board of Education started the development work of the basic education of Roma pupils, allocating more funds for the municipality level to promote Roma schooling. Gradually this has improved the situation, especially regarding the attendance to the pre-primary education of the Roma children. There are two different studies on Roma education (2003, 2011).

### Mainstreaming Roma inclusion across ministries and other national level public authorities

In Finland, the structures and actors behind the Roma Policy are a historical outcome of the continuous activism on Roma. It was, like it has been similarly in many countries, developed mostly outside of the arena of electoral politics<sup>8</sup>. As the Advisory Board is under the authority of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, it ensures that there is a direct link to promote Roma issues in Parliament and generally at the governmental level.

The status and actions of the Advisory Board are based on the statements of the Government Act. The National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs is responsible for formulating the National Roma Policy, ROMPO<sup>9</sup> (in English see page 7). ROMPO is

---

<sup>7</sup> Friman-Korpela, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Vermeersch, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> The National Roma Policy is available at:  
<http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/72788/URN:NBN:fi-fe201504225296.pdf>

developed in line with the *2011 Framework for the National Roma Strategies by the European Commission*. As the representatives of the Ministries are members of the Advisory Board, the Roma Policy is incorporated into the Strategies of each Ministry. The Ministries are committed to implement the National Policy on Roma. With such a structure, advocating for Roma issues is not without challenges, although it must be considered as an important achievement from the Roma participation point of view. This structure enables Roma issues to be mainstreamed in the governmental institutions more efficiently than without the Advisory Board. The problem with Roma politics in Finland is not that Roma representatives constitute a small elite group, but the absence of a political field outside the elite. This implies that also the definition of procedures, agendas, actors and space lay within the hands of a rather small group of people, and, what is more, subjected to a governmental institution<sup>10</sup>.

Furthermore, one activist describes the situation in the following manner: "Half of the members of Romani Advisory Board are representatives of different ministries and the other of institutionalized bodies. The outcome of the work is always the result of a consensus between Roma associations and authorities."<sup>11</sup>

## Mainstreaming Roma inclusion from the administrative level across the local authorities

### The Regional Advisory Boards

There are six Regional State Administrative Agencies in Finland. The agencies work in close collaboration with the local authorities. One of the tasks of the agencies is to promote regional equality by carrying out executive, steering and supervisory tasks expressed in the law.

There are currently four Regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs (the 5<sup>th</sup> is under preparation) which are placed under the Regional State Administrative Agencies. Regional Advisory Boards have been operating since 2006. They work as cross-administrative and cooperative bodies between administrative authorities and Roma in the local and regional level. Their aim is to ensure the hearing and participation of Roma living in different parts of Finland in the decision-making processes regarding Roma issues such as housing, welfare, education and employment. The task of the Regional Advisory Boards is also to promote the equality and prevent the discrimination towards Roma. Unfortunately, through the survey developed for the purpose of this report, responses from the Regional Advisory Board on matters related to discrimination were not received. However, through phone conversations with the representatives of the Board, information was also collected from the follow-up reports and from the annual meetings with the Regional Advisory Boards.

As an interviewee from a Regional Board stated: "The most important task is to be the spokesperson and consultant to the different municipal and regional authorities and decision makers. Our task is to raise the Romani issues to the knowledge of different workgroups and to assure the authorities that the Romani issues are included in the public services to guarantee the equal access to all the services. The other equally important task is to hear the local Roma NGOs and grassroots Roma, to empower them. Furthermore, we try to empower the Romani NGOs to become advisors and consultants in our work".<sup>12</sup>

### Local Roma working groups at municipal level

The oldest Local Roma Working Groups have been working since 2002. Due to the initiatives of Regional Advisory Boards or by the municipalities, there are Local Roma

---

<sup>10</sup> Nordberg 2007.

<sup>11</sup> A Roma activist. Interview 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Member of the Regional Board. Interview 2018.

Working Groups working in 20 municipalities.<sup>13</sup> The municipalities invite local Roma and/or representatives of local Roma NGOs a few times a year to meet with the key authorities of the municipalities. Usually, the working group meets with the representatives of housing, social welfare, childcare, police, employment office and educational committees or departments. In the best case, they resolve the different issues concerning equality and welfare early in the decision-making process, or they can take preventative/corrective steps. Only rarely are they formally fulfilling the hearings, but this is still a way for municipalities and Roma to create dialog with each other.

## Promoting empowerment and participation of Roma

A survey was sent out to different NGOs and other institutions working with Roma related issues (four Regional Advisory Boards, the Romani Education Unit, five nationwide Roma NGOs and 24 local Roma NGOs) in order to understand their involvement in the formulation, implementation and the follow-up processes with the current Roma Policy.

As the results from the survey indicate, the possibilities to participate in the planning process of policies were regarded positively. The respondents considered it a good sign that the grassroots actors and individuals were given the possibility to participate, and to express their opinion. At the same time, they wondered if there was any concrete impact from being part of the process.

The respondents were asked to evaluate the participation giving the ranking from 1 to 5, where 5 indicated the satisfaction with the process. The average result was 3.44 with ten respondents. In the feedback provided, patriarchal unbalance and lack of representation of the young people was mentioned. The question "What is the actual benefit of the ROMPO for the local NGOs?" was also raised.

The challenge has been to involve "ordinary Roma" in the process in order to become aware of their rights (as a national minority). Larger-scale involvement would increase the sense of societal participation and thus empower people. It was also noticed that power relations play a significant role. Also, the absence of women, youth and also "minorities within the minority" was indicated. Overall, questions of representation were a challenge; Roma Policy promotes "collective cultural identity and goals" but forgets diversity within the Roma group.

In Finland, the governmental level is working relatively well, and the legal citizenship guarantees a certain status in the society, but that doesn't mean Roma are seen as a full members of the society.<sup>14</sup> Legal status does not guarantee social inclusion. The top-down approach is not reaching the local Roma; the empowerment from bottom-up is the next step to promote Roma inclusion. One of the respondents, Romani man, stated in the survey: "there have been for 20 years different Roma projects, but people have stopped to believe in them because they're not helping anyone". However, the impact of Roma Policy should not be belittled; with policy (and research behind it), local actors can justify and legitimize their actions to promote Roma issues.

It is a basic idea of the welfare state that everyone living in a country has access to different services of the state. In principle, those services are available for Roma as well, but sometimes cultural and social differences restrict the availability of those services. For example, the project initiated by the Education Unit for Roma, *Basic Education for Roma Pupils*, aimed to support Roma pupils at school. By the regulations from the funders, municipalities were not able to hire within the project funding any of the educated but unemployed Roma assistants to strengthen the identity of Roma pupils at schools.<sup>15</sup> This was not taken into consideration even though one of the

<sup>13</sup> ROMPO 2018-2022, [http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/160845/03\\_18\\_Suomen\\_romanipoliittinen\\_ohjelma\\_2018\\_2022\\_web.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/160845/03_18_Suomen_romanipoliittinen_ohjelma_2018_2022_web.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y), page 67.

<sup>14</sup> Nordberg 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Education Unit for Roma, interview 2018.

recommendations for good practices from the project was the positive and identity strengthening influence of the Roma assistants/mediators in the classroom and with the parents.

### Guarantees for the effectiveness of programmes with the largest budgets

There is an ongoing national Roma consortium project (2016-2018). This project is a transformation of the Roma Policy into the local action plans, meaning that the aims of the project was adapted from the National Policy on Roma. This project followed the principles of participatory practices recommended by the funder, the European Social Fund. From its planning stage, the project involved Roma as well as several actors from municipalities, Roma associations and actors from civil society. A consortium project is a combination of two different project entities with separate funding streams and goals. There is a program for education, skills and lifelong learning<sup>16</sup> and the other program is preventing poverty and social exclusion.<sup>17</sup> The latter project entity is administered by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the first one with a focus on lifelong learning is administered by Ministry of Education and Culture. Both projects were coordinated by Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, located in Helsinki. In practice, however, the projects were one consortium divided into two units, due to financial reasons.

As the Roma population in Finland is relatively small, it is not often that Roma projects receive funding from the ESF. This consortium project is an exception and, as it is still ongoing while writing this report, there are no actual results available yet.

### Civil society's access to funding for Roma inclusion activities

There are systems of governmental funding for the NGOs that are available for registered NGOs. Mainly, the Romani NGOs receive funding from the Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organizations (STEA), which is the most significant funding operator for organizational operations within the social and health services in Finland. STEA is operating in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and their funding is nationwide. It also trains new applicants on how to apply.

The Arts Promoting Centre Finland has special funding for promoting multiculturalism and tolerance. At the local level there is also funding from the municipalities, for example, for preventing marginalization, or to organize events for different groups. Furthermore, there are private sector foundations that are equally open for the calls from academic studies to produce music.

The challenge is that many NGOs do not have enough knowledge to apply or do not have administrative capacity to take care of the needed accounting or payroll services, or they do not have their own funding which is demanded.

Among noteworthy projects implemented with the governmental funding, we can mention a project of the Refugee Council called "Organization Incubator", created to support associations, helping them to work independently alongside other Finnish organizations. The umbrella organization Finnish Roma Forum has organized learning cafés to all Romani NGOs with the help of the Refugee Council.

The EU-funded projects are too difficult to manage by NGOs alone, so mostly bigger organizations apply for and Roma are joining the projects only as implementers.

---

<sup>16</sup> Structural funds in Finland, <https://www.rakennerahastot.fi/web/en/education-skills-and-lifelong-learning-esf-#.WoHwVp3FLIU>

<sup>17</sup> Promoting participation, see: <http://stm.fi/en/promoting-participation>

## Availability of reliable data on the situation of Roma

The ethnic registration is prohibited in Finland, so the data is not always easy to find. As the Roma population is quite small, the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs along with the Regional Advisory Boards and Education Unit for Roma are estimating the basic data, e. g. how many Roma live in some areas, how many children are attending basic education etc.

It is to be highlighted that the steering groups of the national surveys on Roma issues (for example on housing, health, education, employment), which have been conducted by different Ministries or other actors, usually include Roma.

## Policies and measures addressing specific needs of Roma women, children and youth

In the National Policy on Roma (2010-2017), Roma women are mentioned in several sections. Among some of the issues identified are the discrimination faced by the Roma women in the labour market and the need to increase awareness of the gender issues in Roma families. At the same time, the municipalities were recommended to pay more attention to arranging sport opportunities for the Roma women as often their participation is restricted due to the cultural norms and customs (e.g. Roma women in Finland wear a heavy velvet dress).

At the national level, there are no Roma-specific programmes addressing the needs of Roma women, children or youth. However, a project<sup>18</sup> aimed at building the Finnish national Roma platform, funded by the EC/DG JUST, includes the gender equality as one of its topics. Generally, Roma are included in, and embedded in, different national mainstream programmes concerning women, children or youth. The National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs has stated that a detailed study on how these programmes are implemented from the perspective of Roma inclusion and participation should be considered.

Currently, there is one Roma Women's Association in Finland, which participated in the process of updating the National Policy on Roma in 2018, in its capacity as a member of the National Board on Romani Affairs. According to the representatives from the Association, issues of Roma women are more strongly represented in the latest Policy version, which was developed in line with the *Phenjalipe* strategy.<sup>19</sup> The positions of women in the boards of the Roma associations, the number of women employed in the Roma associations and the number of women working in the institutionalised structures dealing with Roma issues, are some of the gender equality indicators identified to be analysed. Still, and based on the interview with the Roma Women's Association, it can be stated that there is still work to be done on gender equality related issues in Finland.

At the European level, Roma Women's Association has been in practice the main intermediary addressing and making known the realities faced by Roma women in Finland. The Association has also been among the key contributors of the existent *Strategy on the advancement of Romani women and girls in Europe 2014-2020*, which was developed following the 4<sup>th</sup> International Romani Women's Conference, organized by the Finnish Government in cooperation with the Council of Europe. Generally, issues of Romani women in Finland continue to be addressed, through the representation of the Roma Women's Association, at the informal network of Romani women – *Phenjalipe*, as well as through other international conferences, such as the International Romani Women's Conference. In addition to Roma Women's Association, Roma women are part of the governmental structures and civic sector to advocate gender equality (e.g. National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs).

<sup>18</sup> For additional info, see: <http://romani.fi/en/building-a-national-roma-platform>

<sup>19</sup> For additional info, see: <https://rm.coe.int/16800c0a86>

# ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

## Implementing the Racial Equality Directive

### Ombudsman<sup>20</sup>

The mandate of the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, formally known as the Ombudsman for Minorities, is to advance equality in Finland and to prevent and tackle discrimination. The Non-Discrimination Ombudsman is an independent and autonomous authority. According to the information received from the office of Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, there has not been any drastic change regarding contacts or complaints from the Roma concerning discrimination since 2014. The quantity and quality of matters have remained the same. Exact numbers from 2017 were not published yet at the time of writing this report.

The Office of Ombudsman for Minorities was established in 2002, in Helsinki. From its beginning, the Romani issues were noticed and targeted in the office's actions, given that its only mandate was to tackle ethnic discrimination. Each Annual report on the activities of the Ombudsman for Minorities from 2003 to 2014 contained special chapters or recommendations on Romani issues. This had a huge impact on Romani issues especially on the grassroots level, as the Annual reports were widely distributed among the actors. Romani NGOs used the Annual reports to justify and to verify the need of their work against discrimination.<sup>21</sup>

The renewed office of Non-Discrimination Ombudsman as of 2015, was re-established with a wider scope and tasks on equality. At the same time, the Racial Equality Directive was implemented to a new law of Non-Discrimination Act<sup>22</sup>. Related issues belong to the office of Non-Discrimination Ombudsman. It must be mentioned here that the Commission refers Finland to the Court of Justice for not having a racial equality body for employment matters in 2014 and this new Equality Act obliges every public employer to have an equality plan.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, since 2014,<sup>24</sup> Romani issues are no longer noticed in the Annual reports prepared by the Office of Ombudsman. This is giving a signal that Roma issues do not need special attention, which weakens the positions of Roma as well as Romani NGOs to tackle discrimination.

### The Finnish League of Human Rights

The Finnish League for Human Rights (FLHR) is a religious and politically independent general human rights NGO. Its principal objective is to monitor the human rights situation in Finland and raise awareness on human rights situation and to promote the fulfilment of these rights. The work of FLHR is based on the Finnish constitution and other national legislation and international human rights instruments. It was founded in 1979 and pursues the work of the League for Human Rights, established in 1935.

The FLHR is a member of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and a founding member of the European Association for the Defence of Human Rights (AEDH). It acts as the National Focal Point of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) since 2000.

---

<sup>20</sup> Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, see: <https://www.syrjinta.fi/web/EN/frontpage>.

<sup>21</sup> Finnish Roma Association, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Non-Discrimination Act 1325/2014.

<sup>23</sup> Commission refers Finland to the Court of Justice, see: [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-14-811\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-14-811_en.htm).

<sup>24</sup> Annual reports of Non-Discrimination Ombudsman 2015 and 2016.

FLHR has regularly reported to FRA on the existent discrimination in Finland, including special reports on the situation of Roma. It has also conducted the survey "Roma and the Culture" in 2012, in which attendance and involvement of Roma in cultural activities in Finland were mapped out. FLHR had also had a Roma project "Community for the empowerment" 2012-2014, which organized human rights training and advised the victims of discrimination and racism. FLHR also lead campaigns against racism with different minority groups for example of Somali, Sami and Roma.

The Finnish League for Human Rights, in cooperation with RIKU (Victim Support in Finland) and the Ministry of the Interior, has translated a brochure on hate crimes into 11 different languages. The brochure aims at encouraging hate crime victims or witnesses to report the offences to the police. Only this way the police will be able to investigate, the victim can get justice and the perpetrator will face the consequences of their actions.

The Ministry of Justice was responsible for the reform of the legislation on Equality and Non-Discrimination and coordinates the implementation of the Non-Discrimination Act in the government. It also has the responsibility to monitor the implementation. The Annual reports of different ombudsmen are also monitoring the implementation of the Non-Discrimination Act.

### Educational and residential segregation

The elementary education is free, and it is available for everyone. The schools are obligated to offer education to all the children living in the school district and pupils have to attend the elementary education until the age of 16.<sup>25</sup> The parents have the right to choose the school for their children if there are special reasons for it, so the school attended is not always the nearest school in the neighbourhood.

As mentioned earlier, the number of Roma is approximately 10,000, of whom 850 are pupils in comprehensive schools.<sup>26</sup> One school might have one or two Roma pupils and based on the survey conducted in 2016 by the Helsinki municipality, Education Department, Helsinki has around 45 Roma pupils in different schools. Roma pupils attend the school based on their area of residence. In practice, it is impossible to form classes or schools just with Roma children. There are problems with the education of Roma but those issues are not related to segregation.

The Ministry of Environment has conducted two surveys on housing for Roma in 2012 and in 2018.<sup>27</sup> In both surveys, representatives of the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs and Romani NGOs were invited to take part in the steering group. In general, there is no housing segregation among Roma. Nevertheless, according to the survey from the Ombudsman for Minorities in 2014,<sup>28</sup> of the respondents (n=248), 68.5 per cent have attempted to rent or buy housing in the last five years. Almost one half (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.

Although, there is no segregation in the schools, Roma students face different kinds of challenges. The number of problems that Roma pupils faced in the school environment and in education were reportedly large. Roma students had repeated school year more often than the children of the majority Finnish, had a lot of absences from the school and

---

<sup>25</sup> Finlex (628/1998).

<sup>26</sup> Education Unit for Roma, interview 2018.

<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Environment 6 | 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, see: [https://www.svrjinta.fi/documents/10181/10850/54366\\_romanitutkimus\\_tiivistelma\\_eng\\_final.pdf/555a7857-41b2-48f2-848b-224c5a32f665](https://www.svrjinta.fi/documents/10181/10850/54366_romanitutkimus_tiivistelma_eng_final.pdf/555a7857-41b2-48f2-848b-224c5a32f665).

Roma pupils were regularly directed to the education for children with special needs according to the reports from the National Board of Education.

### Discriminatory behaviour by police, misconduct by prosecutors or courts

Closely associated with the trust that the actions of a public servant must inspire is the official's behaviour both in office and outside it. The legislation on public servants requires both State and municipal officials to behave in a manner that his or her position and tasks presuppose. Public servants holding offices that demand special trust and esteem must behave in a manner commensurate with their position also outside their official working hours.

A police officer posted a message on his private Twitter account which was not consistent with an ethical behaviour required from a public official (a joke about Roma people). Due to its nature, police activities are subject to heightened expectations with regard to impartiality. The law requires a high standard of ethical conduct from the police officers and this is specifically extended to include private life. Furthermore, in this case the police officer was a sergeant who carried out a lot of police work in social media and was a public figure. It could be difficult for the public members to determine in which capacity the police officer in question was acting in his communication in the social media. In practice, the police officer cannot detach from his official role, especially in communication dealing with police matters.<sup>29</sup>

### Position of Roma prisoners

In some prisons, Roma prisoners are only placed in closed wards (and their activities are therefore limited). Prisons have been urged to act to improve the position, conditions and possibilities of being active of Roma prisoners and to take into consideration the operating models required in the Criminal Sanctions Agency equality plan. According to the equality plan, personnel should be appointed in each unit to look after those who belong to a minority group and to actively liaise with minority prisoners. The plan also requires intervention in all racist speech and recording of all cases that come to light.<sup>30</sup>

Prisoners should be allowed to wear their own clothes during visits. This also applies to the skirts worn by Roma prisoners.<sup>31</sup>

### Legal aid<sup>32</sup>

The Legal Aid service is available for all citizens. The Roma NGOs know the Legal Aid system and can guide their clients to contact them and some Roma have also used it.<sup>33</sup> Some are satisfied, some not, but the satisfaction depends more on the results of the cases than on the quality of the Legal Aid.

The process of complaint, reclamation and litigation is often long and slow, and in many cases, there is no material compensation, but a written statement. Thus, the threshold to start the process is still too high for any average person including Roma.<sup>34</sup>

There have been several projects focused specifically on Roma women implemented by the oldest national Roma organization, established in the year 1906, Romano Mission<sup>35</sup>.

---

<sup>29</sup> Act for Police Officials (4670/4/12). Parliamentary Ombudsman of Finland. Summary of the Annual report 2013, p. 109

<sup>30</sup> Parliamentary Ombudsman Report 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Parliamentary Ombudsman Annual Report 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Legal aid, see: <https://oikeus.fi/oikeusapu/fi/>.

<sup>33</sup> Information provided by The Finnish Romani Association.

<sup>34</sup> Aaltonen, Heino & Villa, Sisäasianministeriö 13/2013

<sup>35</sup> Further information can be found at:

[http://www.romanomissio.fi/?Romano\\_Missio\\_in%26nbsp%3BEnglish](http://www.romanomissio.fi/?Romano_Missio_in%26nbsp%3BEnglish)

Romano Mission is a national child welfare and social service organization. It also offers Christian and educational services for the Roma people. The projects included: 2010-2014 Women's turn, 2015-2016 Turn for Changes and from 2017 ongoing Women's corner. The initiative came from Vanaja prison where they had noticed that they need to pay attention to the Roma women's special needs in prison. The aims of the projects were, and still are, to create cooperation between Roma women and the personnel offering support services in prison, create and use the culturally sensitive rehabilitative program *Voiva* for Romani women to support the sentenced persons' individual growth, to prevent the re-run of the criminal actions and to create the network to help Roma women released from the prison in their intentions to lead a life without crime.

## ADDRESSING ANTIGYPSYISM

### Institutional settings for fighting discrimination and addressing antigypsyism

According to the report prepared by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman,<sup>36</sup> 87 per cent of the Roma who faced discrimination, antigypsyism or hate speech/crime did not report the case to anybody. As mentioned earlier, the survey was sent to those bodies dealing with Roma issues. It was also relatively difficult to get responses regarding antigypsyism. The reason for this might have been the unfamiliarity with the concept. In Finland, the Anti-racism and Anti-discrimination Acts are following the spirit of the Equality Law Enforcement with an approach on individual rights, not regarding ethnic/racial/cultural groups. This means, that there are no Roma specific campaigns against racism or discrimination, but Roma are involved with those campaigns. Having a strong identity as Finnish Roma (it is often emphasised by Roma that "we are *FINNISH* Roma") they do not like to be aligned with more recently arrived groups. This could be considered as a downside for the work against antigypsyism.

Also, in the Roma Policy, antigypsyism and discrimination is almost like a footnote, it is mentioned but not as one main reason for exclusion or something to be tackled first. As the lack of equal opportunities for Roma is a reality, for example in the labour market, antigypsyism should be paid more attention to.

### Combating hate speech and hate crime

In June 2017, the Helsinki Police Department established a unit to work against hate speech in social media. The unit's tasks are to prevent, detect and investigate foremost the kind of hate speech which fulfils the criteria of penalized criminal offence. So far, they have found over fifty cases of which about half have been taken to the court.

Between 2013 and 2017, the Finnish Red Cross implemented a campaign Against racism. It was a nationwide project which tackled the hate speech through different methods. It was accomplished with many different NGOs, one of which was Romano Mission.<sup>37</sup> The coordinator of the project reported that most of the cases they dealt with were Roma facing discrimination in public spaces, like shopping malls, restaurants etc. Their goal was to increase awareness of racism in the Finnish society.

Public transportation department in Helsinki (HSL), FLHR and the city of Tampere implemented the campaigns "*Stop! Stop for discrimination and hate speech in public transportation*" in 2016 and 2017, where the passengers were informed on how to tackle hate speech and hate crimes. They made videos and brochures and pamphlets and invited minorities to take part, including Roma. In their previous project HSL asked the passengers to tell their stories in social media, how they had promoted the safe travelling. This campaign is extending to other cities and aims more concretely to give tools on how to intervene against hate crimes and speech.

### Awareness of discrimination, antigypsyism and hate crime among Roma

During the spring and early summer in 2018, Roma people started to share videos of the discriminating events in the social media. These incidents took place in a gas station, in health centres and in the amusement park. Simultaneously, there were several videos/stories of discrimination posted and written papers about those incidents that received social media attention.

---

<sup>36</sup> Non-Discrimination Ombudsman report 2014.

<sup>37</sup> For additional info, see: <http://www.romanomissio.fi/>.

There is no single reason to explain why posting of such videos suddenly took place. However, it indicates that Roma people are becoming more aware of their rights and resist the discrimination acts they face in public spaces. As there is clearly understatement in Roma policy regarding discrimination and antigypsyism, it would be highly recommended that the Roma Advisory Board, together with Roma associations and governmental authorities would promote the awareness of these concepts among Roma and the local authorities. Consequently, this would decrease the discriminatory practices, as the discrimination that Roma are facing, would be revealed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Governance and overall policy framework

1. The Finnish National Policy on Roma is well mainstreamed within the governmental level and is a good example in terms of recognizing the importance of institutionalized representation of Roma. One good practice stemming from the governmental actions is the Education Unit for Roma. A next step which may lead to increasing the impact of the Policy, is to bring it down to the local level. A bottom-up approach should concretize the aims of the Policy at the local level more efficiently.
2. In order to influence Roma integration, social inclusion and societal participation, local actors should be more strongly involved, and resources should be directed to the local level.
3. Diversity among Roma is not expressed in the Roma Policy. According to the feedback, there is an absence of women, adolescents and other “minority within minority’s” representation. These points should be stated in the National Roma strategy.
4. With Roma Policy – as a governmental dossier demanding social and cultural rights – there is a danger of reinforcing the existing stereotypes and victimizing Roma. In that perspective, possibilities for Roma agency should be more emphasized and it should also be emphasized more clearly in all the documents published by the Advisory Board and other actors.
5. Financial resources should be allocated for implementing Roma Policy at the local level from the national state budget.

### Anti-discrimination

6. In the surveys conducted by the Ombudsman for Minorities, Roma are often considered the most discriminated against. This problem should be tackled more effectively, especially paying attention to structural discrimination (for example in employment more affirmative actions could help Roma). Resolving Roma unemployment and discrimination in the labour market should be part of the strategy of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment.

### Addressing antigypsyism

7. Roma Policy should emphasize the impact of antigypsyism more clearly than it is doing in current dossiers. This is an issue that the Advisory Board on Roma Affairs should address. An awareness-raising campaign should be developed targeting local authorities, as well as Roma people. The campaign should be developed in co-operation with the Advisory Board, Roma associations and governmental authorities.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Annual reports of Non-Discrimination Ombudsman 2015 and 2016.* Available at: [www.syrjinta.fi/julkaisut](http://www.syrjinta.fi/julkaisut).

*Annual reports of Ombudsman for Minorities 2003-2014.* Available at: [www.syrjinta.fi/julkaisut/vahemmistovaltuutettu](http://www.syrjinta.fi/julkaisut/vahemmistovaltuutettu).

Finland, Ministry for Social Affairs and Health. 2009. *ROMPO*. Available at: [https://adsdatabase.ohchr.org/IssueLibrary/Roma Finland Strategy.pdf](https://adsdatabase.ohchr.org/IssueLibrary/Roma%20Finland%20Strategy.pdf)

Finlex. *The Basic Education Act (628/1998)*. Available at: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/1998/19980628>.

Finlex. *Government Decree on the National Advisory Board on Roma Affairs and Regional Advisory Councils on Roma Affairs (1019/2003)*. Available at: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2003/20031019>.

Finlex. *Government Decree amending Section 7 of the Government Decree on the National Advisory Board on Roma Affairs and Regional Advisers in Roma Affairs (1350/2009)*. Available at: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2009/20091350>.

Finlex. *Non-Discrimination Act (1325/2014)*. Available at: <https://www.finlex.fi/fi/laki/alkup/2014/20141325>.

Finlex. *Act for Police Officials (4670/4/12)*. Available in Finnish at: [http://www.eduskunta.fi/triphome/bin/thw.cgi/trip/?\\${APPL}=ereopaa&\\${BASE}=ereopaa&\\${THWIDS}=0.9/1529014149\\_2057&\\${TRIPPIFE}=PDF.pdf](http://www.eduskunta.fi/triphome/bin/thw.cgi/trip/?${APPL}=ereopaa&${BASE}=ereopaa&${THWIDS}=0.9/1529014149_2057&${TRIPPIFE}=PDF.pdf).

Friman-Korpela, S. 2009. *Romanipolitiikasta roma-nien politiikkaan. Poliittisen asialistan ja toimijakonseption muutos 1900 -luvun jälkipuoliskon Suomessa*. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä.

Huttu H. Laiti M. Lindberg S. (Eds.). 2014. *Roma policy for associations*. Järjestörompo. Fintiko Romano Forum – Suomen Romanifoorumi ry, Juutiprint, Vantaa.

Nordberg C. 2007. *Boundaries of Citizenship, the Case of the Roma and the Finnish Nation-State*. SSKH, skritter 23. Swedish school of Social Science, University of Helsinki.

Parliamentary Ombudsman of Finland. *Summary of the annual report 2013*. Available at: <https://www.oikeusasiames.fi/documents/20184/39006/2003eng>.

Rajala, S. & al. 2011. *Romanioppilaiden perusopetuksen tilannekatsaus 2010-2011 ja toimenpide-ehdotukset, OPH Raportit ja selvitykset 2011*. Juvenes Print - Tampereen yliopistopaino Oy 2011.

Rastas, A. 2005. *Racializing categorization among young people in Finland*. Nordic Journal of Youth Re-search. Vol 13(2): 147-166.

Rorke, B. 2014. *Roma integration and 'a normal way of living*. Open Democracy. Available at: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/can-europe-make-it/bernard-rorke/roma-integration-and-normal-way-of-living>.

Sisäasiain ministeriö & Opetushallitus [Ministry of the Interior and Finnish National Agency for Education]. 2007. *Romanin ja poliisin kohdatessa [Encounters of the police and the Roma]*. Available at:  
[http://www.oph.fi/download/46738\\_romaninjapoliisinkohdatessa.pdf](http://www.oph.fi/download/46738_romaninjapoliisinkohdatessa.pdf).

Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriön selvityksiä Suomen [Ministry of Health and Social Affairs] 2009. *Romanipoliittinen ohjelma -Työryhmän esitys. [National Policy on Roma – Presentation from a Working Group]*. STM julkaisut.

Suonoja K., Lindberg V., 2000. *Romanipolitiikan strategiat, Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö, julkaisut 1999 [Strategies of the policy on Roma Reports of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 1999]*. Helsinki.

Syrjä, H. 2008. *Romanien työllistyminen tutkimuksellisenä haasteena [Roma employment as a challenge]*. Työpoliittinen aikakauskirja, Katsauksia ja keskusteluja 4/2008.

Törmä S, Huotari K, Tuokkola, K, 2012. *Ympäristöministeriön raportteja [Report on Roma housing by Ministry of the environment]*. Romanien asuminen ja yhdenvertaisuus, Helsinki. Available at: [www.ymparisto.fi/julkaisut](http://www.ymparisto.fi/julkaisut).

Törmä, S. Huotari, K. 2018. *Ympäristöministeriön raportteja [Report on Roma housing by Ministry of the environment]*. Romanien asumisen yhdenvertaisuuden seurantaselvitys.

Vermeersch, P. 2006. *Romani Movement. Minority Politics & Ethnic Mobilization in Contemporary Central Europe*. Berghahn Books, New York.

Vähemmistövaltuutettu [Ombudsman]. 2014, *Erilaisena arjessa – selvitys romanien syrjintäkokemuksista [Being different in everyday life – Survey on Roma's experiences of discrimination]*. Vähemmistövaltuutettu, julkaisusarja 15, Helsinki.

## HOW TO OBTAIN EU PUBLICATIONS

### Free publications:

- one copy:  
via EU Bookshop (<http://bookshop.europa.eu>);
- more than one copy or posters/maps:  
from the European Union's representations ([http://ec.europa.eu/represent\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/represent_en.htm));  
from the delegations in non-EU countries  
([http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/index_en.htm));  
by contacting the Europe Direct service ([http://europa.eu/europedirect/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/europedirect/index_en.htm))  
or calling 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (freephone number from anywhere in the EU) (\*).

(\*). The information given is free, as are most calls (though some operators, phone boxes or hotels may charge you).

### Priced publications:

- via EU Bookshop (<http://bookshop.europa.eu>).

