



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

*Assessing the progress
in four key policy areas
of the strategy*

Prepared by:
Estonian Human Rights Centre
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the Roma community in Estonia is very small (compared to other European Union Member States), Roma are not seen as a separate target group in national integration policies. The main focus of integration policies is on the Russian-speaking Estonian permanent residents, most of whom are citizens of the Russian Federation or persons with undetermined citizenship. The guiding document of the national integration policy is the development plan "Integrating Estonia 2020". The development plan refers to all individuals with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds living in Estonia. It makes one brief mention of the Roma specifically – it states that the Roma community needs additional attention in the spheres of education, employment and social affairs.¹ Estonia has not developed a Roma integration strategy and there have been no measures implemented by the government that would specifically target the Roma.

Employment

A small minority of the Roma community are employed according to the Estonian Population Register (72 people out of 649 people who identify as Roma).² No labour market services have been developed that would specifically target the Roma community, the Roma have access to the same services as all other Estonian residents, organised by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (*Töötukassa*). An earlier small-scale study reflects that young Roma are aware of state services and trainings offered to jobseekers, but they do not believe that participating in trainings would guarantee employment.³ The study also found that prejudices about the Roma and lack of education among the Roma are hindering factors that affect access to employment. There are no official reports of incidents of work-related discrimination and there are no specific measures to fight antigypsyism in employment. Incidents of discrimination can be reported to the Labour Inspectorate, the Chancellor of Justice, and the Office of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner.

Housing and essential public services

There are no Roma settlements in Estonia, the Roma in Estonia are stationary and live in regular housing – sometimes in social housing, due to difficulties in finding suitable and affordable rental apartments. Those difficulties can be contributed to the overall state of the rental market as well as prejudice against the Roma. The provision of social housing is organised by local government, they determine their own rules for applying for social housing. No special services have been developed for the Roma to guarantee access to housing. Homelessness has not been reported as a problem, but there have been reports of poor living conditions from the representatives of the Roma community.⁴ However, no large-scale research has been conducted into this topic, so it is not possible to give generalised picture of the situation.

¹ Lõimuv Eesti 2020 (*Integrating Estonia 2020*). Available at: https://www.kul.rik.ee/sites/kulminn/files/23748_en_proofreading_je2020_eng.pdf

² Statistics from Estonian National Population Register (dated 01.01.2018)

³ Civitta Eesti AS, "Roma rahvusest noorte olukord Eesti Vabariigis: haridus ja töökeskkond" (*The situation of Roma youth in Estonia: education and employment*), 2014

⁴ Interview with Zalina Dabla ja Farida, representatives of European Roma Forum in Estonia, 10.02.2019

Impact of health care policies on Roma

Every person in the territory of the Republic of Estonia has the right to receive emergency care. General medical care for people covered by health insurance is paid for from the state budget, people not covered by health insurance pay for general medical care themselves. Unemployed people who are registered as jobseekers are also covered by health insurance. This means that the Roma who are unemployed still have access to free health care, but only if they have registered at the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund. There are no statistics available regarding how many Roma are covered by health insurance. There is also no information available regarding discrimination or antigypsyism in health care.

Education

The majority of the Roma have reported through the Population Register that they have either finished up to 6 years or up to 9 years of education. However, it is not possible to determine how many children of Roma origin are currently in the education system, as the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS) only reflects the students whose parents register them as children with Romani mother tongue. By secondary school, most children are registered with Estonian or Russian as their native language, so statistics regarding Roma children currently in secondary education are completely lacking. There are also no statistics on higher education, but according to the interviewed experts, it is not known that any students of Roma origin would have reached higher education, and in case they do, they would already be distanced from the Roma community. The interviews uncovered that the main problem in education is related to school attendance of Roma children. Roma children are no longer placed in special schools, but they often study on either individual or simplified curriculum because they have fallen behind due to poor school attendance. There is no targeted support provided for Roma children in schools, but all schools have to provide individual support to students who need it. There have been no reports of systemic bullying of the Roma students, small-scale surveys have found that bullying does occur, however, no generalisations can be made whether the reason for it is intolerance towards the Roma that results from their ethnicity.

INTRODUCTION

According to the latest statistics from the National Population Register, there are 649 people living in Estonia who self-identify as Roma.⁵ Unofficial data and international organisations suggest that the numbers are higher in reality and there are approximately 1,000 to 1,500 people of Roma origin in Estonia.⁶

The Roma community in Estonia is divided into three larger groups – Estonian, Latvian and Russian Roma. Linguistically they belong into either *Lotfitka* (Latvian) or *Xaladytka* (Russian) dialect groups.⁷ Some 40 per cent of the Roma in Estonia hold Estonian citizenship, 38 per cent hold Latvian citizenship, 14 per cent Russian citizenship and 7 per cent are stateless.⁸

Integration of the Roma is an area that does not receive much attention in Estonia, there is no national strategy for Roma integration. The development plan “Integrating Estonia 2020” points out that the Estonian Roma community is rather small and this brings difficulties when considering them as a separate target group in integration policies.⁹ The development plan includes no specific measures for the Roma community, although there are specific measures for newly arrived immigrants and residents with other nationalities. The plan includes general measures directed at non-native Estonian speaking minorities that could benefit the Roma as well.¹⁰ However, according to the interviewed representatives of the Roma community, the Roma are reluctant to turn to state institutions for services and would need a centre where they receive assistance from members of their own community.¹¹

In order to map the challenges that the Roma community faces, the Ministry of Culture established the Roma Integration Council in 2015. The Council’s role is to analyse the existing problems and propose ideas to different stakeholders on how to improve the integration of the Roma in Estonia. The Council has 11 members – nine members from ministries and local governments, and two representatives of the Roma community.¹² The Council has been described as an important initiative for sharing information and ideas, but it is yet to achieve any practical results, as the Council only meets twice a year and attendance is not high, especially when it comes to the representatives of local governments.¹³

In the process of compiling this report, the authors interviewed four members of the Roma Integration Council – representatives of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education, and two representatives of the Roma community. The authors also performed

⁵ E-mail from the Estonian Population Register (06.03.2018)

⁶ Baltic Research Institute, *Ülevaade romade olukorrast Eestis* [Overview of the situation of the Roma in Estonia], 2013

⁷ See more at: http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/view_pdf.php?t=culture&s=c_3_7&l=en

⁸ E-mail from the Estonian Population Register (06.03.2018)

⁹ *Lõimuv Eesti 2020* (Integrating Estonia 2020), p. 10. Available at: https://www.kul.rik.ee/sites/kulminn/files/23748_en_proofreading_le2020_eng.pdf

¹⁰ For example, “Measure 2.3 Promotion of equal treatment in the labour market” or “Measure 4.1. Ensuring competitive education opportunities for individuals with a native language different from Estonian”, see more at: https://www.kul.rik.ee/sites/kulminn/files/23748_en_proofreading_le2020_eng.pdf

¹¹ Interview with Zalina Dabla ja Farida, representatives of European Roma Forum in Estonia, 10.02.2019

¹² See more at: <https://www.kul.ee/et/romade-loimumise-noukoda>

¹³ Interview with Viivian Jõemets, Chief Expert of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research, 12.11.2018; Interview with Mall Saul, Chief Specialist of the Cultural Diversity Department of the Ministry of Culture, 25.10.2018

desk research into the relevant legislation and available reports and studies, including a 2014 study into education and employment of the Roma youth; 2013 study into the integration needs of the Estonian Roma community; 2018 study into the participation of the Roma in the Estonian society; 2018 survey among pedagogues who work with Roma children; and European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) report on Estonia from 2015. It is important to note that the research performed to date on the Estonian Roma community has been sparse, therefore several of the studies referred to in this report date back several years and only reflect the opinion of a small sample of the Roma community.

EMPLOYMENT

Improving access to labour market and effectiveness of employment services

According to the Estonian Population Register, only 72 people (out of 649 who identify as Roma) are employed, 163 are jobseekers.¹⁴ The remaining are either not working age, not looking for employment for various reasons, or engaged in informal employment. There are no statistics available on informal employment. According to the most recent study conducted in 2018 that surveyed 53 representatives of Roma community, approximately half of the respondents were working and majority of them as manual labourers.¹⁵

Roma have access to labour market services equally to all other Estonian residents, no measures have been developed that would specifically target the Roma community. Provision of labour market services is organised by the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund (*Töötukassa*). After a person registers as unemployed, the Fund provides assistance with finding job offers and suitable work, improving skills required for job-seeking by offering various trainings, devising an individual action plan, analysing any problems that may arise from job-seeking and entering employment, identifying the support services they may require to find employment.¹⁶ The Unemployment Insurance Fund terminates a person's registration as unemployed if the unemployed person fails to appear at the Unemployment Insurance Fund for a visit within a period of 30 days without a good reason, or if the person refuses to accept suitable work for the third time without a good reason.¹⁷

The measures related to employment in the national integration policy plan "Integrating Estonia 2020" are mainly targeted at newly arrived immigrants and residents of other nationalities.¹⁸ The measures for residents of other nationalities include offering Estonian language training and providing labour market services in Russian, which could theoretically also benefit part of the Roma community, as approximately 15 per cent of the Roma in Estonia consider their mother tongue to be Russian.¹⁹

The Unemployment Insurance Fund has justified not having targeted measures for Roma with the fact the labour market services are already provided based on individual needs.²⁰ The Fund implements an individual approach to each person, regardless of their nationality or language skills, identifying the needs of the specific unemployed person and their prospects upon entering the labour market.²¹

However, there are specific measures for beneficiaries of international protection and young people. As part of the "My First Job in Estonia" package of services, employers can apply for services when they employ a beneficiary of international protection. The services

¹⁴ Statistics from Estonian National Population Register (dated 01.01.2018)

¹⁵ Karabeshkin & Derman, *Eesti romade kuuluvustunne ja osalemine ühiskonnaelus* [Participation of the Roma in the Estonian society], 2018, p. 2

¹⁶ Official website of the Unemployment Insurance Fund: <https://www.tootukassa.ee>

¹⁷ Labour Market Services and Benefits Act § 7, available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/504022019003/consolide>

¹⁸ Measures 3.2. and 6.1. of "Integrating Estonia 2020". Available at: https://www.kul.rik.ee/sites/kulminn/files/23748_en_proofreading_je2020_eng.pdf

¹⁹ Statistics from Estonian National Population Register (dated 01.01.2018)

²⁰ E-mail from the Valga municipality office of the Unemployment Insurance Fund (07.12.2018)

²¹ *Lõimuv Eesti 2020* [Integrating Estonia 2020], p. 10. Available at: https://www.kul.rik.ee/sites/kulminn/files/23748_en_proofreading_je2020_eng.pdf

include wage subsidies and compensation of the cost of training and translation services.²² A similar scheme has been created for young people – in order to help a young person who has little work experience, the Fund grants a wage subsidy to the employer and compensates training costs of the hired young person (aged 16-29).²³

The scheme for young people could potentially benefit Roma youth as well, however, the services of Unemployment Insurance Fund often do not reach the Roma community. According to the interviewed representatives of the Roma community, the Roma are reluctant to turn to the Unemployment Insurance Fund for assistance, mainly because they either consider it pointless, or they are afraid of the bureaucracy and discriminatory attitudes. This is why the Roma community would benefit from a support centre that is created specifically for the Roma, run by representatives of the Roma community, who can provide guidance and assistance in all different areas of life, such as employment and education.²⁴

In 2014, ten young people of Roma origin (aged 16-26) were interviewed on the topics of education and employment.²⁵ Most of the respondents had heard about the various services and trainings offered to jobseekers, but at the same time, none were optimistic about these opportunities, as they did not believe that participating in trainings would really guarantee employment. Majority of the respondents preferred to work on an official contract, but in the absence of a better option, were prepared to work informally too. The results of the study reflected that cultural views of gender responsibilities can hinder the access of Roma women to employment – two respondents (both young women) stated that women could only do part-time work, as otherwise they would not be able to commit enough to domestic work.²⁶ There has been no further research into the connection between gender roles and access to employment, but the interviewed experts also expressed their opinion that the way gender roles are viewed within the Roma community affect the education and employment options of Roma women, since it is considered that a woman's primary role is to take care of domestic responsibilities and raise children.²⁷

Fight against discrimination in employment and antigypsyism at workplace

In the 2014 study on Roma youth employment and education, the majority of respondents claimed that they had experienced being denied employment despite having the necessary skills, they considered the main reason for that was their ethnicity and prejudices about Roma. At the same time, two respondents expressed their opinion that the difficulties in finding employment result from economic reasons and lack of education, not their

²² Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, *My First Job in Estonia*. Available at: <https://www.tootukassa.ee/eng/content/employers-and-partners/my-first-job-estonia-recipients-international-protection>

²³ Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund, *My First Job*. Available at: <https://www.tootukassa.ee/eng/content/employers-and-partners/my-first-job>

²⁴ Interview with Zalina Dabla ja Farida Tšimbota, representatives of European Roma Forum in Estonia, 10.02.2019

²⁵ Civitta Eesti AS, *Roma rahvusest noorte olukord Eesti Vabariigis: haridus ja töökeskkond [The situation of Roma youth in Estonia: education and employment]*, 2014

²⁶ Civitta Eesti AS, *Roma rahvusest noorte olukord Eesti Vabariigis: haridus ja töökeskkond [The situation of Roma youth in Estonia: education and employment]*, 2014

²⁷ Interview with Viivian Jõemets, Chief Expert of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research, 12.11.2018; Interview with Mall Saul, Chief Specialist of the Cultural Diversity Department of the Ministry of Culture, 25.10.2018

ethnicity. All respondents stated that they have sometimes perceived employers' fears of the Roma.²⁸

Twelve companies were also questioned for the same study. According to the representatives of the companies, the non-employment of Roma is related to lack of education and lack of previous work experience. All of the companies stated that they would be ready to hire an employee of Romani ethnicity, only four companies had actually employed a person of Romani ethnicity currently or in the past. It was also mentioned that young Roma speak Estonian very well, however, problems occur with correct written Estonian and English.²⁹

Incidents of work-related discrimination can be reported to the Labour Inspectorate. The Labour Inspectorate is a government agency which, among other tasks, deals with resolution of labour disputes through the Labour Dispute Committee.³⁰ The Committee publishes annual summaries of the cases where employees have argued they have faced discrimination. There has been no information published about cases where the applicant would have been discriminated against for being of Roma ethnicity.³¹ Of course, this cannot be interpreted to mean that cases of discrimination against the Roma do not occur, as it may also be a reflection of the fact that the Roma tend not to take legal action in cases of discrimination.

Cases of discrimination can also be reported to the office of the Chancellor of Justice. It is one of the tasks of the Chancellor of Justice to verify that persons are not being discriminated based on their gender, race, nationality, language, origin, religion or other status named in law. In order to settle a discriminating dispute, the Chancellor of Justice can initiate a conciliation procedure on the basis of an application. Consent of both parties is needed for conciliation procedure.³²

Any person who suspects that they have been discriminated against can also consult the Office of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner. The Equality Commissioner is an independent and impartial official who monitors compliance with the requirements of the Gender Equality Act and the Equal Treatment Act.³³

There is no information available whether any cases of work-related discrimination against the Roma have been brought to the attention of the Chancellor of Justice or the Office of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner.

²⁸ Civitta Eesti AS, *Roma rahvusest noorte olukord Eesti Vabariigis: haridus ja töökeskkond* [The situation of Roma youth in Estonia: education and employment], 2014, p 9

²⁹ *Ibid* 19-20

³⁰ Official website of the Labour Inspectorate: <http://www.ti.ee/en/>

³¹ Labour Dispute Committee statistics regarding discrimination cases 2007-2017: <http://www.ti.ee/est/meedia-trukised-statistika/statistika/toovaidlused/>

³² Official website of the Chancellor of Justice: <http://www.oiguskantsler.ee/en/other-duties>

³³ Official website of the Office of the Gender Equality and Equal Treatment Commissioner: <http://www.volinik.ee>

HOUSING AND ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES

The Roma in Estonia are stationary and live in regular housing, there are no Roma settlements in Estonia. Difficulties with finding suitable and affordable rental apartments sometimes lead to living in social housing. Those difficulties can be contributed to the overall state of the rental market as well as prejudice against the Roma.³⁴ The Estonian Human Rights Centre has been contacted on one occasion by a family of Roma origin who claimed they were denied an apartment because of their ethnicity, but there has not been any research conducted into this issue more broadly. This one occasion resulted with the family moving to a different city in Estonia to finally find housing.

According to the Social Welfare Act, the provision of social housing is organised by the local government, for people who due to their socio-economic situation are unable to find housing which corresponds to their needs.³⁵ Local governments determine their own rules for applying for social housing. The Roma community is the largest in Valga, as Valga is located near the Latvian border and most of the Roma have moved to Estonia from Latvia.³⁶ In Valga, a one-page application has to be submitted to the local government and the provision of housing will be decided by an employee of the social service office of the local government or the social committee of the local government.³⁷ According to the interviewed representatives of the Roma community, there have been issues with availability of social housing in Valga, and often the available social housing is not suitable for families.³⁸

No special services have been developed for the Roma to guarantee access to housing, either by the government or civil society. Homelessness has not been reported as a problem, however, there have been reports of poor living conditions. In a small-scale study conducted in 2013, the interviewed members of the Roma community found that their living conditions could definitely be better, there was one example outlined of a five-member family living in a one-bedroom apartment.³⁹ It was also reflected that some of the Roma living in Estonia live without water and electricity.⁴⁰ During the interviews with the representatives of the Roma community it was revealed that there are still Roma families who live without running water.⁴¹

It is important to note that these are just single examples based on small samples of the Roma community and no large-scale studies on this topic have been undertaken.

³⁴ Interview with Mall Saul, Chief Specialist of the Cultural Diversity Department of the Ministry of Culture, 25.10.2018

³⁵ Social Welfare Act, Article 41 (1). Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/528062018001/consolide>

³⁶ Eva-Liisa Roht-Yilmaz, Roma in Estonia. Available at: http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/view_pdf.php?t=culture&s=c_3_7&l=en

³⁷ Valga Municipality Government, *Social Housing*. Available at: <http://www.valga.ee/sotsiaalkorterid>

³⁸ Interview with Zalina Dabla ja Farida Tšimbota, representatives of European Roma Forum in Estonia, 10.02.2019

³⁹ Tartu University, *Eesti roma (mustlaste) elanikkonna olukord ja lõimumise vajadus [The situation and the need for integration of the Estonian Roma community]*, 2013, p 48. Available at: https://www.yti.ut.ee/sites/default/files/aki/roma_uuring.pdf

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

⁴¹ Interview with Zalina Dabla ja Farida Tšimbota, representatives of European Roma Forum in Estonia, 10.02.2019

IMPACT OF HEALTH CARE POLICIES ON ROMA

According to the Health Care Services Organisation Act, every person in the territory of the Republic of Estonia has the right to receive emergency care. Emergency care provided to a person not covered by health insurance is paid for out of the state budget.⁴² General medical care for people covered by health insurance is also paid for from the state budget, but people not covered by health insurance pay for general medical care themselves.⁴³

Health insurance payments are made by the majority of the working age population through the social tax payable from the gross salary of a working person. From those payments, the health care of the population groups who currently are not making insurance payments are also compensated for. This group includes children, seniors, pregnant women, mothers raising small children at home, also unemployed people who are registered at the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund.⁴⁴

Therefore, the Roma who are unemployed are still covered by health insurance and have access to free general medical care, but only if they have registered at the Estonian Unemployment Insurance Fund. According to a report from 2018, the share of uninsured people in Estonia is around 6%.⁴⁵ There are no statistics available about how many Roma are covered by health insurance, but from the interview with representatives of the Roma community, it can be concluded that lack of health insurance is indeed a problem in the Roma community. However, further research is required to determine the scale of the problem. The interviewed representatives of the Roma community explained that the lack of health insurance is caused by high unemployment rate and reluctance to register at the Unemployment Insurance Fund. This reluctance can be explained by fear of bureaucracy or discrimination.⁴⁶

There is also no information available regarding discrimination or antigypsyism in health care. The interviewed representatives of the Roma community confirmed that they have heard about cases of discriminatory attitudes from family physicians, however, it is impossible to assess how systematic it is without wider research.⁴⁷

⁴² Health Care Services Organisation Act, Article 6. Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/508012018001/consolide/current>

⁴³ *Ibid*, Article 11

⁴⁴ Estonian Health Insurance Fund (*Eesti Haigekassa*) – Health Insurance. Available at: <https://www.haigekassa.ee/en/people/health-insurance>

⁴⁵ European Social Policy Network, *Thematic Report on Inequalities in access to healthcare in Estonia 2018*. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=20368&langId=en>

⁴⁶ Interview with Zalina Dabla ja Farida Tšimbota, representatives of European Roma Forum in Estonia, 10.02.2019

⁴⁷ *Ibid*

EDUCATION

Access to quality preschool education

There are no statistics available regarding how many children of Roma origin currently attend or have attended kindergarten. The interviewed experts and representatives of the Roma community brought out that cultural gender roles can prevent Roma children from accessing preschool education as it is seen as the mother's role to stay home with children.⁴⁸ It has also been observed that Roma parents can be reluctant to place their children to kindergarten because they are concerned about the assimilating influence – adapting to Estonian culture is sometimes seen as a threat to cultural roots.⁴⁹

Kindergarten is not compulsory in Estonia. The kindergarten fee varies by municipality and is normally tied to the minimum wage, ranging from 15 euros a month in Valga to 70 euro a month in Tartu.⁵⁰ It is possible that it could also hinder the access to preschool of Roma children, however, it was not brought out as the main problem by the interviewed members of the Roma community. Cultural differences were considered to be the main reason that Roma children do not attend kindergarten.⁵¹

The measures related to education in the national integration development plan "Integrating Estonia 2020" are targeted at children with a native language different from Estonian.⁵² The measures are mainly focused on supporting the learning of Estonian language. However, the interviews did not reveal that language would be an obstacle to access to education for Roma children.⁵³

Improving quality of education until the end of compulsory schooling

In Estonia, a minor is subject to the obligation to attend school until the age of 17 or until finishing basic school.⁵⁴ According to the Population Register, majority of the people who self-identify as Roma have reported that they have either only finished up to 6 years of education (155 people) or up to 9 years of education (204 people). However, it is not possible to determine how many children of Roma origin are currently in the education system, as the only way to keep track is through the Estonian Education Information System (EHIS), and it only counts the students whose parents register them as children

⁴⁸ Interview with Viivian Jõemets, Chief Expert of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research, 12.11.2018; Interview with Mall Saul, Chief Specialist of the Cultural Diversity Department of the Ministry of Culture, 25.10.2018

⁴⁹ Tartu University, *Eesti roma (mustlaste) elanikkonna olukord ja lõimumise vajadus [The situation and the need for integration of the Estonian Roma community]*, 2013, p 53. Available at: https://www.yti.ut.ee/sites/default/files/aki/roma_uuring.pdf

⁵⁰ ERR, *Alampalga tõus kergitab paljudes kohtades lasteaia kohatasu [The increase of minimum wage raises kindergarten fees in many places]*, 31.08.2018. Available at: <https://www.err.ee/857804/alampalga-tous-kergitab-paljudes-kohtades-lasteaia-kohatasu>

⁵¹ Interview with Zalina Dabla ja Farida Tšimbota, representatives of European Roma Forum in Estonia, 10.02.2019

⁵² *Lõimuv Eesti 2020 [Integrating Estonia 2020]*, p. 20. Available at: https://www.kul.rik.ee/sites/kulminn/files/23748_en_proofreading_le2020_eng.pdf

⁵³ Interview with Viivian Jõemets, Chief Expert of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research, 12.11.2018; Interview with Mall Saul, Chief Specialist of the Cultural Diversity Department of the Ministry of Culture, 25.10.2018; Interview with Zalina Dabla ja Farida Tšimbota, representatives of European Roma Forum in Estonia, 10.02.2019

⁵⁴ Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Article 9. Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/ee/530102013042/consolide/current>

with Romani mother tongue.⁵⁵ In Tallinn, only a couple of students have been registered as Roma through EHIS, although the Population Register reflects that there are many more children of Roma origin living in Tallinn. However, as the Population Register data is not personalised, it is impossible to have an overview which schools these children attend.⁵⁶

According to a representative of the Ministry of Education, access to compulsory education is guaranteed to all children, however, there are issues with school attendance of Roma children, as the Roma community does not see school as compulsory, family events regularly take priority.⁵⁷ The interviewed representatives of the Roma community agreed that schools have difficulties understanding when Roma children are missing school for family events – for example, attending a three day long funeral. It was noted that this can bring about hostile treatment from the teachers who do not understand the importance of culture to the Roma community.⁵⁸

There is no targeted support provided for Roma children at schools, all schools have to provide individual support to students who need it, the way it is organised is up to the specific school.⁵⁹

In 2018, a survey was conducted among 25 teachers and social pedagogues who work with Roma children. 30% of the teachers responded that the Roma children they teach are studying on individual or simplified curriculums, which are meant for students with special educational needs.⁶⁰ This does not reflect the intellectual capabilities of these Roma children, but is caused by poor school attendance, which makes the students fall behind.⁶¹ Pursuant to the Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, a student with special educational needs means a student whose talent, specific learning difficulties, health status, disability, behavioural and emotional disorders, longer-term absence from studies or insufficient proficiency in the language brings about the need to make changes or adjustments in the subject matter, process, duration, workload or environment of study.⁶²

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) has previously urged the Estonian authorities to remove Roma children who were not disabled from special schools and reintegrate them into mainstream schools.⁶³ In 2015, the Estonian authorities confirmed that only one Roma child was in a special school, further to a medical diagnosis.⁶⁴ According to the interviewed experts, the placement of Roma children to special schools

⁵⁵ Interview with Viivian Jõemets, Chief Expert of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research, 12.11.2018

⁵⁶ *Ibid*

⁵⁷ Interview with Viivian Jõemets, Chief Expert of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research, 12.11.2018

⁵⁸ Interview with Zalina Dabla ja Farida Tšimbota, representatives of European Roma Forum in Estonia, 10.02.2019

⁵⁹ Interview with Viivian Jõemets, Chief Expert of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research, 12.11.2018

⁶⁰ Ministry of Culture, *ESTROM küsitlus roma laste ja peredega töötavate pedagoogide seas [ESTROM survey among pedagogues working with Roma children and families]*, 2018

⁶¹ Interview with Viivian Jõemets, Chief Expert of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research, 12.11.2018

⁶² Basic Schools and Upper Secondary Schools Act, Article 46 (1). Available at: <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/530102013042/consolide>

⁶³ ECRI, *Country Monitoring in Estonia*. Available at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/Estonia>

⁶⁴ *ECRI report on Estonia (fifth monitoring cycle)*, adopted on 16 June 2015, p 27

is no longer an issue.⁶⁵ Placement of any children into special schools has largely decreased in general since inclusive education became the leading principle of the Estonian education system.⁶⁶

There are no Romani language textbooks used in schools – creating a Romani textbook has been discussed in the Ministry of Education, but the Roma community has been wary about sharing their language and to transform from an oral culture into a written one. However, the representatives of the Roma community have liked the idea of creating a book of fairy tales and stories in the Romani language, which is currently in the planning process by the Ministry of Education.⁶⁷

In 2018, the Ministry of Culture started a project in which one of the aims was to identify 20 young Roma who are interested in becoming the local spokespersons of the Roma community, supporters of the education of Roma children, and cultural translators between schools, local governments and the Roma families.⁶⁸ This could help to increase trust and reduce misunderstandings between schools and the Roma community, but it is not sure yet whether the project will continue this year.

The interviewed representatives of the Roma community suggested that it would be helpful to have a Roma support centre where volunteers of the Roma community could help out other members of the community, including with school work for students who are falling behind in school.⁶⁹

Support of secondary and higher education particularly for professions with high labour market demand

Following graduation from basic school (9 years), students have the option to acquire general secondary education (3 years) or vocational education. Secondary education is not compulsory. There is no data available regarding how many Roma students are currently enrolled in secondary or vocational education. When Roma students reach that level, they often no longer register as students with Romani mother tongue in EHIS.⁷⁰

There are also no statistics regarding Roma students in higher education, but according to the interviewed experts, it is not known that any students of Roma origin would have reached higher education, and in case they do, they would already be distanced from the Roma community.⁷¹ In the study that was conducted among Roma youth in 2014, most of the respondents had not given higher education any thought because they did not find it would give them a serious advantage – university was considered to be too time-

⁶⁵ Interview with Viivian Jõemets, Chief Expert of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research, 12.11.2018; Interview with Mall Saul, Chief Specialist of the Cultural Diversity Department of the Ministry of Culture, 25.10.2018

⁶⁶ See more at: <https://www.hm.ee/et/hariduslike-erivajadustega-opilaste-toetamine-oppekorraldus-ja-tugiteenused>

⁶⁷ Interview with Viivian Jõemets, Chief Expert of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research, 12.11.2018

⁶⁸ See more at: https://www.kul.rik.ee/sites/kulminn/files/1.12.2018_protokoll.pdf

⁶⁹ Interview with Zalina Dabla ja Farida Tšimbota, representatives of European Roma Forum in Estonia, 10.02.2019

⁷⁰ Interview with Viivian Jõemets, Chief Expert of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research, 12.11.2018

⁷¹ Interview with Viivian Jõemets, Chief Expert of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research, 12.11.2018; Interview with Mall Saul, Chief Specialist of the Cultural Diversity Department of the Ministry of Culture, 25.10.2018

consuming, with no guarantee of employment afterwards. Only one respondent had a plan to go to university.⁷²

The Estonian state has currently not taken any action to support or encourage the Roma students to reach secondary or higher education. However, since one of the reasons Roma students do not continue in secondary or higher education is that the Roma community believes that Estonian education threatens their culture⁷³, the Ministry of Education is considering to organise study visits to Finland to demonstrate through the Finnish Roma community that education and Roma culture are not mutually exclusive. These plans are still in the development process.⁷⁴

Fight against discrimination and antigypsyism in education

There have been no large-scale surveys into discrimination or bullying of Roma students in school, single incidents have surfaced, based on which it is impossible to make any wider generalisations.⁷⁵ The interviewed members of the Roma community explained that bullying might not always be directly caused by the Roma origin of the children, but sometimes due to the fact that many Roma children come from poor backgrounds and that is reflected in their appearance. They confirmed that bullying can play a large role in making school a place where Roma children do not feel included and do not want to go to.⁷⁶

In the Roma youth study, majority of respondents confirmed that bullying does occur, but not all of them thought it was because of their ethnicity. The respondents also noted that the level of tolerance depends on a specific school.⁷⁷

Over 70 schools in Estonia are involved with research-based antibullying programme called KiVa, which was developed in the University of Turku, Finland.⁷⁸ However, there are no programmes that would have a specific focus on antigypsyism – which can be explained by the fact that the number of Roma students is small and there is no reliable data available that would recognise antigypsyism as a problem in education.

⁷² Civitta Eesti AS, *Roma rahvusest noorte olukord Eesti Vabariigis: haridus ja töökeskkond* [The situation of Roma youth in Estonia: education and employment], 2014, p 7-8

⁷³ Interview with Viivian Jõemets, Chief Expert of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research, 12.11.2018; Interview with Mall Saul, Chief Specialist of the Cultural Diversity Department of the Ministry of Culture, 25.10.2018

⁷⁴ Interview with Viivian Jõemets, Chief Expert of the General Education Department of the Ministry of Education and Research, 12.11.2018

⁷⁵ *Ibid*

⁷⁶ Interview with Zalina Dabla ja Farida Tšimbota, representatives of European Roma Forum in Estonia, 10.02.2019

⁷⁷ Civitta Eesti AS, *Roma rahvusest noorte olukord Eesti Vabariigis: haridus ja töökeskkond* [The situation of Roma youth in Estonia: education and employment], 2014, p 8

⁷⁸ Official website: <http://kiusamisvaba.ee>

RECOMMENDATIONS

Employment

To assess the needs of the Roma in employment systematically and develop a strategy for addressing the needs

The current policy of treating the Roma as any other cultural minority leads to their specific needs and challenges being overlooked. Needs of the Roma community should be assessed separately, and they should be included as a specific target group in any relevant development plans and strategies.

To open a Roma support centre staffed by Roma

The members of the Roma community have outlined the need for a support centre where members of the Roma could receive assistance and guidance from other members of the community – for example, to receive information and help with any bureaucracy related to the labour services.

Housing and essential public services

To conduct research into the reasons for the challenges the Roma community faces in the housing sector

There are reports of poor living conditions, lack of access to water, and difficulties with finding rental apartments among the Roma community. However, specific research is required to find out the underlying reasons for the challenges and ways to address them.

Impact of health care policies on Roma

To collect more data on the Roma community's access to health care

Currently, there is not enough generalisable data available to make any wider recommendations on this topic.

Education

To employ mediators at local governments who would introduce different educational opportunities and encourage the Roma to attend school

This is an idea brought out by the interviewed experts and is already in progress through the project of the Ministry of Culture, financed by the European Commission. It is important that this initiative is not abandoned or stalled when the current European Commission project and funding is finished at the end of 2018.

To provide teachers specific training for working with Roma students

Currently, the provided trainings are mainly focused on newly arrived immigrants, but the cultural differences of the Roma community make it necessary to also train teachers on integration of Roma students.

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