



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

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

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January 2019



Justice
and Consumers

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*

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Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019

Print	ISBN 978-92-76-08352-8	doi:10.2838/924103	Catalogue number DS-02-19-443-EN-C
PDF	ISBN 978-92-76-08353-5	doi:10.2838/30513	Catalogue number DS-02-19-443-EN-N

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The report has been prepared by *Suomen Romaniyhdistys ry* (The Finnish Roma Association) in collaboration with Anneli Weiste-Paakkanen (National Institute for Health and Welfare) and Marko Stenroos (Helsinki university).

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 the 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.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ARA	Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland
ESF	European Social Fund
KELA	Social Insurance Institution of Finland
MEAE	Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ROMPO	National Romany Policy 2010-2017
ROMPO2	National Romany Policy 2018-2021
<i>Roosa</i>	Research on Roma health and socio-economic well-being
THL	National Institute for Health and Welfare

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Elaborating on the four key elements of the Roma strategy, it can be observed that education and the process of entering the labour market are the most challenging areas for the Finnish Roma. Although housing and health care are of similar relevance, these areas are better organised and addressed by governmental policies. On the other hand, the implementation of the employment and educational policies depend to a certain extent on short-term project funding. This creates an uncertain situation as the impact has only a temporal effect because of the relatively short duration of the projects. That is why Roma have taken an active role in developing and promoting educational and employment initiatives with a longer temporal dimension.

Employment

The challenges faced by Finnish Roma in employment are linked to the low level of education and the existent discrimination and prejudices in the labour market. According to the *Roosa* study,¹ the average unemployment rate among Roma was as high as 60 per cent. Interestingly, there is a slightly higher employment rate among Roma women compared to men. Instead, the differences in employment appear to be age-related, indicating higher unemployment rates among older generations.

Existing mainstream employment service seem to have limited impact on Roma. In 2018, a new activation model aimed at providing more intense support to unemployed persons was introduced, but its outcomes have not indicated improvement, yet. The problem of Roma employment is more effectively tackled by project-based initiatives, including campaigns promoting the employment of Roma people, or innovative personalised employment services that are implemented by NGOs or local governments.

Through the National Roma Policy 2018-2021 (ROMPO2), the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (MEAE) has committed to conducting a more detailed study on Roma employment and the issues that prevent Roma participation in the labour market.

Housing and essential public services

The housing situation of Roma in Finland is relatively good. There is no identified residential segregation based on ethnicity as Roma live dispersed nationwide as the rest of the population. Probably the issue affecting housing the most is the fact that a significant part of Roma has a lower socio-economic status in the Finnish society.² This makes them on one hand eligible for social housing and housing allowances, but on the other hand, pushes them into lower-status neighbourhoods.

Despite a general improvement in equal access to housing, there are still some municipalities and districts which are more or less "challenging" and with whom the Roma NGOs or public authorities regularly negotiate to ensure equal rights in accessing housing. In some cases, inhabitants of "better neighbourhoods" have prejudices against Roma and reject Roma by not allowing them to move into their areas. Public authorities, in particular, the Ombudsman, and NGOs are active in tackling the problem of discrimination in access to housing.

¹ The National Institute for Health and Welfare conducted a population study titled "*Roosa*" among the Finnish Roma. The aim was to collect comparable data regarding the equal treatment of Roma. The "*Roosa*" study addressed the lack of research data regarding the accessibility to health care services and the quality of health care services for Roma. For more detailed information, please see page 19 of this report.

² Follow-up Report on the Equality of Roma Housing. Available at: http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/160489/YMra_6_2018.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Housing authorities pay particular attention to the gender aspect; preferential treatment is given to single mothers, pregnant or disabled women when allocating housing. However, Roma youth remains one of the vulnerable groups because they often cannot afford housing on their own.

Impact of health care policies on Roma

In general, most Roma have the same access to public health services as the other vulnerable groups living in Finland. The most discriminating factor in healthcare is Roma's weak socio-economic situation stemming from unemployment. The low educational level has a negative impact on their lifestyle choices.

Both NGOs and public authorities focus on Roma's health situation and access to healthcare services. According to an NGO-run research, elderly Roma are particularly vulnerable because they do not use the available preventive healthcare and are reluctant to ask for help in the early stages of the illness. Moreover, there are sometimes communication problems between doctors and their Roma patients because of both cultural and linguistic barriers. Long waiting times are another barrier in accessing healthcare.

Between 2016 and 2018, the National Institute for Health and Welfare conducted a research on Roma health and socio-economic well-being ("*Roosa*"). The aim of the study was to provide data for increasing the sensitivity of social and healthcare services to the needs of the Roma population.

Education

According to recent studies, the Roma education policy does not effectively promote equality as expected. Roma children's education outcomes remain poor, with negative consequences for their further educational and professional careers.

The Finnish National Agency of Education, with a specialised Roma Education Unit, allocates money to municipalities to develop children's basic education in order for them to reach the same level of academic skills as non-Roma children.

Additionally, there have been several projects implemented by public authorities and NGOs aimed at supporting Roma children in education. These projects have proved to be effective in tackling issues such as dropouts; however, the main problem of these initiatives is the discontinuity they face after the project funding ends.

INTRODUCTION

Finland has been a forerunner of Roma integration strategies compared to many other European member-states and has been part of the international team that drafted the transnational Roma integration strategies at the EU and transnational level. However, it appears that the pressure at the governmental, local and municipal levels to invest in addressing the issues of the Roma population, increased due to the attention given to the topic at EU level. In addition, the National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS) has put more emphasis on concerns such as inner group diversity, the situation of women, young people and elderly Roma.

Regarding the impact of the National Policy on Roma (ROMPO),³ it can be assessed that the primary areas that require further policy development are the areas of education and employment. Housing and healthcare face secondary challenges that are also related to education and employment, as the common denominator for housing and healthcare is the poverty among Roma people.

It can also be suggested that, in order to facilitate and benefit from the services provided by the public sector, Roma workers and mediators are necessary assets. Often, Roma and Roma involved as active participants in the inclusion processes are forgotten, and the objectification and discourse on Roma as targets of the different measures and services implemented by the state are commonly accepted by society. The authors of this report consider that the role of the Roma should be emphasized more by national policies addressing the situation of the Roma population, as well as in the follow-up reports on the implementation of the integration policies. It is also important to highlight the country-specific issues that might not follow the agendas set outside the country context. For example, the term antigypsyism in Finland. Reports on the implementation of Roma policies should not solely consider those actions directed towards Roma by the authorities but to also illustrate the overall dynamics within the inner group, such as the Roma communities, and the intergroup relations, such as negotiations between authorities in governmental structures.

In Finland, Roma are active agents in the field of Roma affairs and the Finnish institutional structures support their participation to a certain extent by allowing Roma associations to address matters of their concern. Roma projects, developed in line with ROMPO, contributed to improving the situation of Roma by increasing awareness of the health care conditions Roma face, making the structural discrimination in the labour market more visible and investing more in the education of Roma people by directing additional resources the basic education through such projects.

Methodologically, the development of this report consists of reviews of previous researches and indicators and the use of authors' up-to-date knowledge achieved while working in Roma projects (participatory observation). One of these was a consortium project that ended at the end of 2018, which had 16 different project partners nationwide, with 30 project workers, out of which 21 were Roma. Consultations for this report took place within this consortium and with the people affiliated to it. Also, the Finnish Roma Association is highly involved in the current Roma politics and practices and thus, aware of the situation at the grassroots level. To summarise, in Finland, although there are challenges, most of

³ Available at:

http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/160845/03_18_Suomen%20romanipoliittinen%20ohjelma_2018_2022_web.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

them regarding the education and employment of Roma people, "Nothing about us without us"⁴ is in a good developing phase.

⁴ Abstract available in English at: <https://dialogi.diak.fi/julkaisut/uskalla-its-possible-romanien-sujuvat-koulutus-ja-tyollisyyspolut-tsetanes-naal-ja-nevo-tiija-hankkeiden-loppujulkaisu/>

EMPLOYMENT

Improving access to labour market and effectiveness of employment services

The main concern of Roma regarding employment is two-fold: discrimination in the labour market,⁵ and a low level of professional education and skills.⁶ Roma themselves find discrimination in employment to be the most challenging issue. Roma tend not to be part of the supporting public system intended for the people facing extra difficulties in employment. It appears, and unemployment rates indicate this as well, that Roma do not benefit from the public employment services. "Activation model" for unemployment security⁷ has been in effect since January 2018 but possible positive outcomes have not been recorded yet that could indicate improvement. The activation model for unemployment security incorporates measures that encourage people to actively seek work and use employment services at all stages of their unemployment (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health).

At the moment, most of the work to promote Roma employment is done either by Roma associations or through different national and EU-funded employment projects. There have been different campaigns to promote Roma employment and tackle prejudices in the labour market (e.g. guidebook to hire a Roma).⁸ The most recent publication was issued in 2018 about the "Smooth Paths to Education and Employment for Roma", final report of *Tšetanes Naal* ("On the Educational Path") and *Nevo Tiiija* ("New Time") projects.⁹ Funded by the European Social Fund, Roma inclusion projects implemented between 2016-2018 piloted employment services for Roma in the city of Vantaa, among other places. Out of 16 projects in consortium, the Vantaa city case is presented in this report due to its approach to reach Roma and because it followed a different working method that is not used by the public employment services. Roma workers went to talk to Roma people about these services and help them enter the labour market. This method had good outcomes as workers managed to reach out to many Roma people. As previously mentioned, the problem in this case was the short-term project funding without having implemented the method within institutional structures.

According to a governmental employment report from 2008, Roma unemployment is caused by multiple reasons.¹⁰ The high unemployment rate is caused by the low level of education, lack of low-skilled jobs in modern society and by deeply rooted prejudices and negative attitudes towards Roma. The report also indicates that the attitude of Roma might in some cases have negative consequences on their employment chances. However, the report does not explain the reasons for the negative attitudes of Roma. Interestingly, the report does not indicate any gender-based differences either. As the latest survey on Roma

⁵ These challenges have been recently made visible in "*Nevo Tiiija*" and "*Tšetanes Naal*" projects (2016-2018, ESF funded) focusing on employment skills required to enter the labour market.

⁶ <https://www.romanit.fi/viranomaisille/tyollisyys/>. The site www.romanit.fi includes a collection of different issues regarding the Roma population in Finland, such as education, employment and housing.

⁷ For more information on the "activation model", please see: <https://www.kela.fi/web/en/frequently-asked-questions-about-the-activation-model#what-is-the-so-called-activation-model->

⁸ https://www.avi.fi/documents/10191/3556475/Palkkaisinko_romanin_opas_.pdf/e8414a70-c5fd-43a8-9601-7c474c798872

⁹ Niina Mäenpää, Katri Perho & Mertsii Ärling (toim.) 2018. *Uskalla! It's possible Romanien sujuvat koulutus- ja työllisyyspolut. Tšetanes naal - ja Nevo tiiija - hankkeiden loppujulkaisu*. Available at: http://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/153380/Diak_puheenvuoro_15_verkko.pdf?sequence=4&isAlloWed=y (Including a summary in English)

¹⁰ Syrjä H. ja Valtakari M. *Romanien pitkä matka työn markkinoille*, TEM Työ ja yrittäjyys 22/2008, Työministeriö 2008

employment was conducted over ten years ago, the ROMPO2 suggested there should be a follow-up survey. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (MEAE) has informed the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs that it will conduct a new survey in the near future that is most likely to start in 2019.

Fight against discrimination in employment and antigypsyism at workplace

According to the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, only four per cent of appeals concern discrimination in the labour market (the main field in which Roma experience discrimination is housing – see the next chapter). This number, however, does not reveal the whole picture. In order to face discrimination at work, one has to get a job first and, as the unemployment rates are high, situations leading to discrimination are not so common.

The ESF-funded project *Nevo Tiija*,¹¹ mentioned in the previous section, considered also the discrimination Roma face when accessing employment. The project consortium had altogether 16 project partners nationwide and 30 employees, out of which 21 were Roma. The project's preliminary findings emphasize both the effects of the structural discrimination against Roma and Roma's own responsibility: more work needs to be done among Roma and Roma should increase their efforts in achieving the necessary education that prepares them for the labour market; such efforts can help overcome the existing prejudices against them.¹² It is rather rare for Finland to receive resources for Roma inclusion projects of such extent, the total budget of the project consortium being approximately 3 millions EUR. Roma associations are small and often there is neither the knowledge nor the capacity to apply for large scale funding. This consortium project was planned and implemented in line with the National Policy on Roma with a strong input from Roma activists, while being coordinated by a non-Roma institution.

The project implemented during 2016-2018 included a video campaign that was addressing both Roma and potential employers. In various video clips, Roma people were describing their path to employment, what it was required from them and what kind of challenges they faced during the process of seeking employment.¹³ The short and long-term impact of the campaign has not been measured; however, it can be considered to be a promising practice as it has drawn the public attention to the structural discrimination of Roma.

Furthermore, during the Autumn of 2018, a campaign against antigypsyism was launched by the consortium. Four highly regarded public celebrities sent out job applications using typical Roma names on their real CVs. They sent a total of 54 applications and none of them resulted in an interview. This campaign¹⁴ was important as it received a lot of national media attention and made visible what has already been known in practice (e.g. that if your name is a typical Roma name, it will cause difficulties in being accepted for a job interview). Such campaigns are mostly done outside the public sector and the national employment services and thus, these campaigns lay in the hands of Roma activists.

To summarize, the problems that Roma face in entering the labour market are multiple and simultaneous – low levels of skills and education, prejudices and structural discrimination that apply to both private and public sector. Most of the work that is done to promote Roma employment is done by associations and through projects, while very little is done by the public employment authorities in the sense that Roma are not involved in designing programmes that target vulnerable people in the labour market. However,

¹¹ <https://dialogi.diak.fi/julkaisut/uskalla-its-possible-romanien-sujuvat-koulutus-ja-tyollisyyspolut-tsetanes-naal-ja-nevo-tiija-hankkeiden-loppujulkaisu/>

¹² Note from the author: the project seemed to emphasise the responsibility of Roma themselves to adjust to the Finnish society, whereas the prejudices and negative attitudes towards them were, if not downplayed, at least paid less attention to during the two-year period.

¹³ An example of the video is available in Finnish at: https://youtu.be/Gek34E_PW7A

¹⁴ #TYÖNIMI, available at: <https://dialogi.diak.fi/2018/10/31/tyonimi/>

through the new study (*Roosa*) and the ESF-funded project, the societal forces and discriminating structures affecting and hampering Roma employment were brought more strongly to the attention of the general public. The Advisory Board on Roma Affairs supports the idea to further study Roma unemployment in order to gather more data on the issue. The above-mentioned new study, which will presumably start in 2019 by the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment (MEAE), will focus also on the problem of discrimination.

Gender perspective in Roma's employment

Unemployment is one of the biggest challenges Roma face in Finland. This seems to affect both men and women. When asked in the survey whether Roma consider the situation in the labour market to have improved or worsened, there were no significant differences in responses based on the respondent's gender (OPH 2015, 85).

There is no systematic and comprehensive data on Roma's participation in employment due to the fact that it is not allowed to collect data based on one's ethnicity.¹⁵ The same issue emerges when the gender perspective is considered, there being no data indicating whether Roma women are more discriminated in the labour market than men. However, there have been wide public discussions about Roma women's clothing (the traditional big velvet skirt)¹⁶ that it is said to prevent women from attaining employment in some labour sectors. The problem in these discussions is mostly related to the question of whether or not Roma women can wear traditional clothing in the working place. It has been emphasised in discussions, both inner-group and public, that in those places where changing clothes for hygiene or other reason is necessary, Roma women will change their clothes. If there is no clear reason to change clothes, Roma women should have the right to wear their clothes at work (for example, if working in an office). In a sense, it is a question of accepting different culture or religion-related (symbolic) markers in the working place, and as such, this is similar to the "hijab-issue".

In ROMPO1 for 2010-2017, the gender issue was not clearly stated in the employment section, but in ROMPO2 for 2018-2022, gender issues are emphasised, especially regarding young people belonging to NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). As it is the case with the majority of Finns, in the case of young Roma people, it is mostly young Roma men who are categorised as belonging to the NEET group. Generally, it is said that the problem of the early parenthood start is the interruption of one's educational path. This reverts to the need of having and re-shaping different paths of education so that achieving professional skills at a later age will also be possible. It seems that after reaching the age of 30 and above, the eagerness to re-educate oneself increases.

¹⁵ ROMPO 2009. *Suomen romanipoliittinen ohjelma*. Sosiaali- ja terveysministeriö, p. 93.

¹⁶ For the image of Roma women's dress, see: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-9554347>

HOUSING AND ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES

Except few attempts to forcefully settle Roma during the period of 1650-1660 in the Eastern part of Finland, and similar attempts of some municipalities between 1700s-1900s, most Roma in Finland were forced to lead a vagrant life until the 1970s. During 1960s and 1970s, many Roma moved to Sweden to look for better employment, as did 700,000 to 800,000 Finns. There are approximately 3,000-5,000 Finnish Roma living in Sweden today.¹⁷

The Finnish Roma Policy started registering structural changes at the end of the 1960s when the Finnish Roma Association started to determine the Roma and the authorities to pay more attention to the living conditions of Roma and demand measures from the Advisory Board on Roma Affairs. One of the key issues was the improvement of housing conditions. The joint efforts of many Roma individuals, Roma NGOs and authorities have led to the improvement of the overall situation of Roma. The road was long but the Board has been gradually transforming itself and today is an effective tool for democracy and equality at the governmental level, its development and progress being described in the Board's 60-year anniversary publication,¹⁸ as well as in the History of Finnish Roma.¹⁹ There is also an article about Roma movement in Finland at the digital archive of Roma.²⁰

Granting permanent housing was one of the key interventions that had a profound impact on the Roma population. The new housing legislation in 1976 obliged municipalities to find proper housing for Roma. The housing legislation, governmental financing for communities and accessible loans with low interest rates for Roma continued until 1981.²¹ The housing process still took place a few years after and 1984 is considered, by Roma NGOs, to be the starting point when Roma could let go of the vagrancy.

There are no multi-stored houses, segregated settlements or housing projects for Roma only or other ethnic groups. The Finnish housing policy has never built houses for any ethnic groups alone on a large scale. To avoid the ghettoization of the poorest areas, the new areas are built based on the diversity of different types of housing (student-housing, the right of occupancy/dwelling housing, partially-owned property, etc).

During the period 1978-1981, those Roma who had been without housing and living in tents, abandoned houses, deserted railway wagons etc. were settled in renovated houses or in communal houses, most of which were located near essential public services (schools, day-care services, banks, shops, health care centres etc). Those families who were located more than five km away (nowadays three km) from the nearest schools were given free bus tickets for the children. In some smaller communities, Roma were also offered small houses with yards. In some cases, houses were located a little further away from the centre, or they were not in perfect conditions, but the overall housing of Roma was improving. 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 elementary education.

To help with the housing of newcomers in the 1980s and to work with authorities in difficult situations, many activists have engaged as mediators in communities (usually older inhabitants of the areas) who were consulted by authorities when housing new Roma

¹⁷ Pulma P. toim. (2012) *Suomen romanien historia*, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

¹⁸ Available at: <https://romani.fi/ronk-60v>

¹⁹ Pulma P. toim. (2012) *Suomen romanien historia*, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura.

²⁰ Stenroos, 2019. Available at: <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/roma-civil-rights-movement/roma-civil-rights-movement-counter-weight-religiou/>

²¹ *Idem*.

people in the area. The NGO *Ryhdyt ry* (active during 1999-2008) was an association of Roma mediators, including mediators from many municipalities. *Ryhdyt* organised training courses and issued certificates to the mediators and helped them negotiate with the housing authorities. Some of the mediators had a half official status in a few bigger cities (i.e. they could use office space once a week for a few hours for the consultative works etc.). Instead of mediators, the housing issue today is dealt with by many of the local Roma working groups among other issues rising in communities.

Access to secure and affordable housing

Today, housing allocation is based on the actual socio-economic situation or the urgency or vulnerability of the applicants. Housing allocation is also following the human rights regulation according to which the freedom of movement is granted to all. The quality of housing is guaranteed by laws which are followed accordingly and monitored by the Housing Finance and Development Centre of Finland (ARA).²²

The rent is also regulated and there is a system of supporting housing by granting general housing allowances to low-income households awarded by the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (KELA).²³ The allowance is available to all those who need it, including Roma and is based on the income and the minimum living area (m²) per person. The allowance is available for both rental and owner-occupied housing in municipal and private housing sectors. As most of Roma's socio-economic status is low, the majority of Roma are eligible for and receive such allowances.²⁴

The ROMPO1 (2009-2017) suggested a study on Roma housing as a step towards improving the housing for Roma. The Ministry of Environment conducted the first survey of the study in 2012. The Roma and the Roma NGOs were involved in the process. The "Follow-up Report on Equality of the Roma in Housing" (the Follow-up Report) published by the Ministry of Environment in 2018 studied housing from the perspective of equality in accessing housing.²⁵ The data used in the follow-up report included "information from contacts and complaints to the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, ARA and Parliamentary Ombudsman, inquiries from Roma, and expert interviews".²⁶ According to the Follow-up Report, the housing conditions of Roma living in Finland is mainly good. There is no segregation based on ethnicity, and Roma live dispersed nationwide in the same locations as the rest of the population. Most of the housing issues are generated by the social-economic status of Roma. However, according to the report, the gap in equal access to housing between Roma, ethnic Finns and other groups has been closing up and Roma have now more chances as potential housing applicants.

The report concludes that there is still a need to strengthen mutual understanding and for further discussions between housing authorities and Roma, especially at the local level. There is also a notable risk that affects Roma's equal chances when it comes to housing as there is a tendency to minimise and cut the welfare costs, with significant negative impact on Roma, whose unemployment rate is high. It is thus recommended that policy authorities continue to monitor discrimination in the housing sector and address the challenges in the

²² ARA's webpage: www.ara.fi

²³ KELA's webpage: www.kela.fi

²⁴ Törmä S ja Huotari K. Romanien asumisen yhdenvertaisuuden seurantaselvitys (Follow-up report on equality of the Roma in housing) YMrä 6/2018.

²⁵ *Idem.*

²⁶ *Idem.*

event that these appeared. Furthermore, it is advisable to encourage Roma people to discuss the issue of the moving permit²⁷ regarding equal housing within their communities.

Today, the overall socio-economic situation of Roma (similarly to other marginalised groups) is weakening because of massive ongoing governmental reforms in provincial governments, the social security and healthcare system, combined with tightening the savings program in the public sector, a process that started in 2017. Cutbacks in housing allowances have increased the need to replace bigger housing for smaller and cheaper ones. Based on the authors' experience, it can be assumed (due to the data protection law, data on Roma households are not available) that Roma families consist of more family members than mainstream population (in 2017, an average Finnish family had 2.8 members).²⁸ This combined with the higher unemployment rate²⁹ is positioning Roma in a more disadvantaged situation as there are less available large size apartments or these apartments are located in the older residential areas and are thus, often populated with lower social-economic status residents.

Furthermore, due to the moving permit practice (followed by some Roma), there might be fewer alternatives for choosing the housing location and this consequently affects the process of finding an appropriate place of residence. As the *Follow-up Report on Equality of the Roma in Housing*³⁰ suggests, Roma have more demands regarding apartments than any other applicants (based on cultural practices and norms). These features of the housing process are often the factors that lead to the "ghettoization" of Roma in certain areas. In practice, this "ghetto" means that there are only a few (one to three) families in a neighbourhood of 100 communal apartments, or one family in each building of ten houses; it all depends on the size and infrastructure of the building blocks. Those who can afford to buy their own flats or houses, have no limitations in purchasing the house they want, except for cultural reasons.

Regarding community housing, the problem is the limited number of apartments available and the specific cultural needs to be matched. Although many municipalities try to adjust to the different cultural norms of different groups, finding appropriate housing arrangements can be a lengthy process

Equal access to housing and particularly vulnerable groups among Roma

When it comes to the question of equality in community housing, Roma NGOs confirm that in many places the demands of Roma are taken into consideration when they are offered housing. Nevertheless, there are still some districts that are more or less "challenging" and with whom the Roma NGOs, the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman and ARA are regularly negotiating. In earlier times, the former Ombudsman for Minorities, the Finnish League for Human Rights and the Parliamentary Ombudsman of Finland were helping with Roma housing issues by offering local authorities' expert opinions, legal aid and litigation. Since 2010, ROMPO has had a positive influence in the housing negotiations processes between the above-mentioned authorities and Roma NGOs, creating the conditions for potential

²⁷ For example, the practice of asking Roma living in certain areas for permission to move in (the tradition of guarding the livelihood of the old inhabitants and preventing "bad" people from moving in their neighbourhoods); or avoiding neighbours with whom the family has hostile relations. For more information on granting such permits and Roma, please see the study by Jenni Berlins titled "The moving-permit custom of the Finnish Roma" in *Romani Studies*, Liverpool University Press, Volume 25, Number 2, December 2015, pp. 151-166, available at: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/604276/pdf>

²⁸ https://www.stat.fi/til/perh/2017/perh_2017_2018-05-25_tie_001_fi.html

²⁹ Syrjä H. ja Valtakari M. Romanien pitkä matka työn markkinoille, TEM Työ ja yrittäjyys 22/2008, Työministeriö 2008. No more updated data is available, but a new survey is planned for 2019.

³⁰ Törmä S ja Huotari K. Romanien asumisen yhdenvertaisuuden seurantaselvitys (Follow-up report on equality of the Roma in housing) YMr 6/2018.

conflicting situations to be solved, in most cases, through negotiation. The ROMPO2 is similarly focusing on monitoring equality in housing, as well as other issues.

According to the Follow-up Report on housing, 55 per cent of the 74 Roma interviewees said that they had been discriminated in the private housing sector. In most cases, they do not report private sector discrimination as often compared to community housing discrimination cases, as they see that complaining does not change anything. Even though there are Roma living in private sector houses, they are few. Although it is more difficult to have control over existing discrimination in the private sector, there have been a few litigated cases that led to a decrease in the visible discrimination. It is difficult to prove that discrimination is the official explanation for "the apartment has just been rented" when Roma are applying for housing rentals.

During a meeting with Roma civil society representatives (2 October 2018), the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman's Office stated that out of all the 87 discrimination cases Roma reported in 2017, 43 per cent were housing-related. The Ombudsman's report³¹ does not mention how many cases were ruled to be actual discrimination cases. The Ombudsman report also shows that Roma are the most discriminated group by ethnicity (in 2017, the total reported cases were 1,107 of which 237 cases were based on discrimination by ethnicity, including 87 Roma cases). The Ombudsman is planning on making discrimination towards Roma more visible in the next year's reports.

Roma NGOs are helping Roma with their housing problems by acting as mediators, and in most cases, that is enough. If there is a suspicion of discrimination, NGOs can approach authorities with clients' cases, but more and more Roma themselves contact the authorities directly. In 2017, there were many report cases (not only concerning Roma) of discrimination regarding access to rental housing – nine cases reported by NGO ARA, 241 cases by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman (241 cases in 2017) and seven cases by the Parliamentary Ombudsman. On average, it is estimated that the number of Roma cases litigated by each of the three large NGOs active in the field and each of the four Regional Advisory Boards ranges between one-six every year.

Gender aspects

Housing authorities also consider the gender issue as one possible cause of vulnerability and consequently, it affects the process of selecting residents for the apartments available. In practice, this means that single mothers, disabled or pregnant women without housing are "first in line" when they apply for residence. There are also women's shelters for the victims of domestic violence and abuse, where social workers and child protection authorities help women in need to find new housing. However, there are not enough places in shelters. Finland has not acted on the recommendations of CEDAW according to which "the number and services of shelters [...] are insufficient to meet the needs of women as victims of violence".³²

³¹ [https://www.syrjinta.fi/documents/10181/10850/52878_romaniselvitys_verkkoon+\(1\).pdf/584516fc-d3a7-4f88-8ecc-c8b2271ebf41](https://www.syrjinta.fi/documents/10181/10850/52878_romaniselvitys_verkkoon+(1).pdf/584516fc-d3a7-4f88-8ecc-c8b2271ebf41)

³² United Nations Report on Women's Discrimination, art. 18/f and 19/f, available at: https://um.fi/documents/35732/48132/komitean_loppup%C3%A4%C3%A4telm%C3%A4t_suomen_7_m%C3%A4%C3%A4r%C3%A4aikaisraportista_28_2_2014

According to the Follow-up Housing Report, 74 per cent of interviewees were women and based on the information from collected documents and data from the authorities, in Finland Roma women are more active in contacting the authorities than men. In the Housing Report, Roma women are the ones who take care of the housing application process most of the time (women are those who communicate the most with authorities on behalf of their families – probably because they have a higher education level compared to men) and it could be one of the reasons why they report discrimination in housing more often.³³

Youth

One of the vulnerable groups among Roma is youth. According to the Follow-up Housing Report (prepared by the Ministry of the Environment), half of the 74 interviewees said that they personally know at least one young person between 18-25 years old in need of their own housing. This particularly affects Roma men, as culturally it is expected from young women to stay at their parents' home until they get married; therefore, young men need to find housing if they want to establish a family. There are also cultural norms that do not allow Roma youth to live with their parents after a certain age, when they should move out (this concerns both men and women). Consequently, many of them stay long periods of time in their friends' houses or reside with other relatives before getting their own housing.

Based on the author's observations, Roma youth does not want to live in student apartments or in shared housing, which could solve most of the problems. Still, this is considered as a hidden problem and needs to be studied further. The reason why this sort of housing arrangements is not convenient for Roma youth should be elaborated on.

Intra-EU mobile, migrating and undocumented Roma

There is no permanent and sustainable solution to the problems caused by undocumented immigrants or immigrants and intra-EU mobile persons without permanent housing or Roma beggars, and no willingness to solve the problem. The migrant or intra-EU mobile Roma are not entitled to community housing unless they have the permanent residence permit. In some of the municipalities, there are shelters for homeless people and they are, to some extent, available for migrant or intra-EU mobile Roma as well. Though it varies, the emergency shelter is available in the winter time, too. The police usually take down illegal camps and shelters. In some cases, where there are illegal camps, some social workers and NGO workers monitor the situation and do whatever they can to help the residents of the camps.

There is an ongoing debate about by whom and how the migrant or intra-EU mobile Roma situation should be resolved. It is part of the humiliating politics of European countries, who forget that Roma have rights, too, and Finland is not any better in this regard. However, some basic healthcare is available, but they have to pay for it. Emergency care is mandatory, but it has to be paid, as well. The international organisation *Médecins sans Frontières* help them, too. In Helsinki there is the Hirundo Day Centre, where foreign Roma can take a rest, meet volunteers, use the computer, meet social workers and have the possibility to take a shower and do their laundry. The Helsinki Deaconess Institute and the Hermanni Congregation Centre provide shelter for people without documents.³⁴ There is a recently published ethnographic research on Roma mobility with an emphasis on Roma children, and this research presents the above-mentioned challenges in more detail (see Assmuth et. al, 2018.).

³³ Törmä, S., & Huotari, K. (2018). *Romanien asumisen yhdenvertaisuuden seurantaselvitys*. YMra 6/2018

³⁴ <https://www.hdl.fi/en/support-and-action/immigrants/>

IMPACT OF HEALTH CARE POLICIES ON ROMA

Ensuring equal access to public health care services

The Finnish Roma receive full access to the health and welfare system of Finland, as well as to the services of the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (KELA)³⁵ as of 1976 when the Special Housing Act for Roma was passed, which guarantees permanent housing for Roma. In Finland, all Finnish citizens and people living in Finland with permanent residence or work permits are eligible for KELA services. KELA takes care of the basic security for different life phases and its services are complemented by social security services, health services, and allowances. As for the health services, Roma are eligible to receive the same services as all the other citizens, provided by the municipalities, or they can purchase similar services from the private healthcare sector.

Public services are not available for undocumented immigrants or intra-EU mobile people from different ethnic backgrounds. They are entitled to emergency healthcare treatment, but they have to pay for it. The same applies to all the other non-urgent healthcare needs. The Ministry of Social Services and Health asked THL to conduct a research on the services available for undocumented persons living in Finland.³⁶ This survey was published in 2014 and it clearly stated that medical services were not adequate. In 2018, the University of Turku published a research on the services available for undocumented immigrants in Finland.³⁷ They are entitled to non-urgent medical treatment and social services, but practices vary considerably between communities. According to the survey on elderly Roma in the Southern part of Finland and their needs for services from 2008,³⁸ most of the elderly Roma were satisfied with the accessibility and the basic services offered by healthcare centres and hospitals. For cultural reasons and due to illiteracy, many elderly Roma were reluctant or afraid to get help in early stages of illnesses.

According to the survey on Mediating Roma Health from 2005,³⁹ there was no need to have special Roma mediators for health services in Finland. On the other hand, the data collected by the Finnish Roma Association *Bahtalo phuuriba*'s projects (2005 – ongoing)⁴⁰ show that some of the elderly people are either illiterate or do not have enough knowledge of preventive healthcare, nor do they understand the illnesses they have. According to the projects' statistics, in Helsinki, ten to 12 people out of 150 patients every year need assistance with doctors and health personnel. The other experience *Bahtalo phuuriba* has identified is that in some cases, doctors are not careful enough with the elderly Roma. Some of the doctors do not understand their patients as they cannot explain their own symptoms due to their uneducated background and the use of a different Finnish language; thus, they are not taken seriously.⁴¹

This only complicates the previously reported problems when accessing healthcare services: the share of people with unfulfilled medical needs in Finland is rather high by European standards. The main reason is the long waiting times. Low-income (5.2 per cent),

³⁵ www.kela.fi

³⁶ [THL_RAP2014_011web.pdf \(583.2Kt\)](#)

³⁷ http://urmi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/URMI_kaupunkianalyysi_3.pdf

³⁸ Viljanen A. & Majaniemi P. Romanivanhusten palvelutarvekartoitus, Suomen Romaniyhdistys, 2008

³⁹ Mediating Romani Health, Open society Institute, Network Public Health Program, 2005

⁴⁰ Interview with the project worker of Bahtalo phuuriba project 1.11.2018

⁴¹ Interview with the project worker of Bahtalo phuuriba project 1.11.2018

elderly (7.3 per cent) and young people (4.1 per cent) suffer from unfulfilled medical needs more than people of working-age (3.1 per cent).⁴²

The Roma wellbeing study "Roosa" 2016-2018

The National Institute for Health and Welfare (THL), conducted a population study titled "Roma Wellbeing Study" (*Roosa*) among the Finnish Roma between 2016 and 2018 and published it at the beginning of 2019.⁴³ The aim of the study was to collect comparable data in order to improve the equal treatment of Roma by developing culturally sensitive, yet universal services within the social and healthcare services system. The study is part of the *Nevo Tiija* project, funded by the ESF. *Nevo Tiija* is a large social inclusion and employment project for Roma.

The *Roosa* study has been conducted because there was not enough data on the services available for Roma people, as well as their quality. The last thorough survey on Roma (before the personal data act banning ethnic registration) was conducted during the 1970's census and it revealed that the socio-economic status and the living conditions of Roma people were remarkably poorer compared to the rest of the population.

On the other hand, the *Roosa* awakened in some Roma the fear of ethnic registration or that the results of the study will be used against them. This was an issue THL took seriously and had been discussed during the whole process. Earlier similar studies regarding immigrants have been conducted without much ado from anybody and a similar study conducted regarding the Sami population.⁴⁴

The *Roosa* study collected data around Finland (N=365) in Roma community meetings, during home visits and by personal appointments. The participation in the study was based on self-identification as a Finnish Roma, on a voluntary basis, with no previously set quota from the Personal Register. The majority of the participants participated in the health examination (75 per cent, i.e. 277 persons of 365). There were two types of questionnaires: the extensive version (Q1=247) and the short version (Q2=113).

As the Roma were "hand-picked" by their willingness to take part in the survey and due to the small number of participants, the results are neither comparable with the main population, nor do they relate to the entire Roma population. Instead, they are indicative and could be used for further measures to improve the health and well-being of Roma.

In the first ROMPO (2009-2017),⁴⁵ it was stated that health and social services must be developed and more efficiently targeted at Roma, but data is needed in order to know which services, where and how. The ROMPO2⁴⁶ is continuing targeting (universally) social and health services for Roma people with a better coordination and culturally sensitive approach. The mainstreamed actions and measures specifically targeting the Roma population and set out in the ROMPO2 are expected to create further capacities for considerable improvements in the rights and socio-economic status of Roma people. Policies must be implemented by increasing the level of activity, inclusion and access in

⁴² <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=20367&langId=lv>

⁴³ See: <https://thl.fi/fi/tutkimus-ja-kehittaminen/tutkimukset-ja-hankkeet/romanien-hyvinvointitutkimus-roosa->

⁴⁴ <https://thl.fi/en/web/immigrants-and-multiculturalism/immigrants-health-and-wellbeing>

⁴⁵ <http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/72788/URN%3aNBN%3afi-fe201504225296.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

⁴⁶ For more info, please see: http://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/160845/03_18_Suomen%20romanipoliittinen%20ohjelma_2018_2022_web.pdf

order for these policies to have an influence on the Roma population. Collecting data through surveys, such as the *Roosa* study, can be an important measure of a minority's self-governance level.

The contents of the study included health examination (blood pressure, heart rate, height, weight, waist circumference, test of cognitive functions (verbal fluency, memory test), hand grip strength test, joint function tests, chair stand test, eyesight tests (near and distant vision) and Hopkins Symptom Checklist (HSCL) of psychological symptoms. Moreover, a structured face-to-face interview or self-filled questionnaire included questions about socio-economic status, housing conditions, employment, education, health, experiences regarding discrimination, use of services, and self-reported functional ability and health.

Addressing needs of the most vulnerable groups among Roma

In terms of human rights and equality, it is important to have reliable data on the minority group's realistic situation. In order to improve the wellbeing of Roma on a long-term basis, one must be able to follow-up on the wellbeing development, according to comparable, valid key indicators. The Finnish legislation (Personal Data Act) does not allow ethnicity-based registration. Thus, a population survey is the only method to gather statistics about certain minorities, whose wellbeing is under consideration.

Roma have used the services of healthcare centres less than the main population. And the main result was that the overall health situation of the Roma population is worse than the average main population. This could be due to the socio-economic situation of Roma: they rarely use the private sector's medical services and they do not have access to the medical services offered by employers to their employees as occupational health care.

Roosa study's results indicated that Roma women seem to suffer from depression more often than men, the incidence of being overweight is slightly higher for both Roma men and women than the main population, physical activity was lower than for the main population, smoking habits among young Roma were higher, and Roma suffered more from vision problems. These are all findings that need more thorough attention. Regarding positive aspects recorded by the study, the help offered to other members of the commune or through congregations was considered to be important and helped increase the quality of healthy lifestyle.

As previously-mentioned, health services are available for all, but poverty, more than anything else, is the reason for inequality in health services in Finland as the overall downshifting of the public services costs affects the healthcare sector, too. Due to legislation, Roma are not officially registered by their ethnicity, so there is no data on the gender issues Roma encounter in healthcare. Doctors should be more educated regarding Roma as they might be faced with gender-related issues, e.g. the health impacts of wearing traditional women clothing,⁴⁷ domestic violence, inequality among sexes etc., which need further research.⁴⁸

One challenging issue is providing information on and answers to sexual and reproductive health questions and preventative measures. These issues are problematic because of

⁴⁷ Wearing the heavy skirt, previously mentioned in this report, is mandatory for women in families keeping Roma traditions. The skirt is heavy, weighing up to five-nine kg, and it is long, so women have to wear high heels to bear it. If women choose to wear it, they start doing so between the ages of 16-18 and wear it most of the time, even at home. Due to its weight, wearing it causes a lot of health issues, including back pain, bruises, and even the internal viscera are slowly changing their location because of the impact of the waistband and the material the skirt is tied around. It also has a negative effect on the metabolism.

⁴⁸ Federación Nacional de Asociaciones De Mujeres Gitanas, Kamira report on *Roma Women in Finland*, by Minna Kulmala, Finnish Roma Association 2016

cultural taboos and strong religious beliefs, which prevent discussions on such issues among Roma. There are programmes in schools for pupils and students, free youth clinics, as well as healthcare centres that offer education on these issues, on which many Roma parents are relying.⁴⁹ There are also free online education services organised by the Family Federation of Finland for all age groups and especially for youth, which some Roma are using, as well as other free healthcare services.

One challenge is the doctors' lack of awareness on domestic violence. This is also observed in Europe by the WHO report on Violence and Healthcare in the World (commented on by The Finnish Medical Association (FMA) and THL).⁵⁰ In addition to the issues related to criminal law and the implementation of social services, many Finnish doctors are not able to detect and address the domestic violence in its many forms and there is a lack help for the victims. There are no effective culturally-sensitive approaches in Finland, nor preventative programmes against sexual and domestic violence.

⁴⁹ Kamira report on *Roma Women in Finland*, Minna Kulmala Finnish Roma Association 2016/ interviews of Roma women by PM.

⁵⁰ https://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/violence/world_report/full_fi.pdf

EDUCATION

Improving access to quality preschool education and care

Preschool education attendance has been gradually increasing among Roma since the 1970s together with education in general due to measures and renewed laws passed in the 1970s on Roma housing. Overall, the situation of Roma educational level remains under national average (see e.g. OPH 2015:8) and it is intertwined with other challenges the societal participation faces, as it has direct impact on employment and participation in healthcare provided for employees.

According to an interview (January 2019) with a person working with intra-EU mobile Roma, especially from Romania, these families rarely take their children with them as they move from Romania to Finland. This is because the lack of permanent housing would cause problems with the child protection authorities. This issue is also linked to education as cities are divided into school districts and the school where the child receives basic education depends on the place of residence. In other words, the lack of a permanent address causes difficulties in finding schools for their children. In contrast, foreign Roma with permanent housing and who have taken their children with them have access to basic education. It must be noted that, although permanent housing and access to school is an ideal case for children, they still face similar problems as Finnish Kale Roma children (and other children with foreign background).⁵¹

According to the Finnish National Agency for Education/Roma Education Unit, preschool education for Roma children has received extra attention due to the fact that Roma children used to have repeated the 1st and 2nd grades more often, thus indicating that preparation and schooling skills were not adequate among Roma children. Roma Education Unit together with Roma associations promoted the idea of Roma children attending preschool care and education, and project workers from *Romano Missio* working with Roma families stated that they did not register absences in preschool education. Problems with Roma children's education do not emerge until later on in higher grades when skipping school and absences start becoming a matter of concern among Roma.

Pre-primary education is compulsory from August 2015. Pre-primary education as part of the ECEC is the education provided in the year preceding compulsory education.⁵² Roma children attain pre-school education mainly in public day-care centres run by municipalities. Concerning the unemployment rate and the fact that often at least one of the parents stays at home, it has been an improvement that Roma children attend pre-school and that they have this regardless of their parents' employment status.

In addition, attention has been given to Roma language skills and early education at home. In 2005 *Draba kentoha* ("Read with the Child"),⁵³ in 2007 *Barju kentoha* ("Develop Together with a Child"),⁵⁴ in 2009 *Broñta daane kentoha* (Brush Teeth Together with a Child)⁵⁵ and in 2011 *Tšalju ta phersa kentoha* ("Move and Play with a Child")⁵⁶ were published by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. These publications were written by Roma prepared in order to support Roma families in child upbringing.

⁵¹ Assmuth, L., Hakkarainen, M., Lulle, A., & Siim, P. M. (Eds.). (2018) *Translocal Childhoods and Family Mobility in East and North Europe*. Springer.

⁵² For more details, please see: https://www.oph.fi/english/education_system/early_childhood_education

⁵³ Lingren, Tuula 2005. Lue lapsen kanssa.

⁵⁴ Lingren, Tuula & Majaniemi, Päivi (2007) *Kasva lapsen kanssa*

⁵⁵ Lindgren, Tuula & Majaniemi, Päivi (2009) *Harjaa hampaat lapsen kanssa*

⁵⁶ Lindgren, Tuula & Majaniemi, Päivi (2011) *Liiku ja leiki lapsen kanssa*

Improving quality of education until the end of compulsory schooling

Currently, there is a nationwide project to tackle the challenges Roma face in education, funded by ESF under the funding stream of promoting education, skills and lifelong learning.⁵⁷ The project consortium consists of Roma associations, educational institutions and municipalities. The project's key concern is the education of Roma regardless of the gradual improvement that can be read about in various available surveys. Preliminary project results present an extremely good outcome gained in the city of Tampere, where, as reported in a local newspaper – no single Roma pupil dropped out of school during the project.⁵⁸

The good results in the city of Tampere were attained thanks to a Roma mediator engaged by the municipality's department of education. Similar results, regarding the support offered to Roma children by a Roma mediator at school, can be observed in other areas in Finland. As this has been proven to be an efficient way to support Roma children's education, we can only wonder why this practice has not been implemented more widely. However, according to a study from 2019, mediation, as an action designed to tackle the inequalities that Roma children face, is a fairly new practice in Finland but one that is rapidly expanding.⁵⁹

Roma mediators can be considered a good practice, and this has been noted by educational authorities as well. Since it is a relatively new model, this practice is not full proof and does pose some challenges.⁶⁰ There are no indications that would suggest gender differences among Roma mediators.

The Roma Education Unit in the National Agency for Education promotes and studies the education of Roma in Finland. Their 2015 survey review of the educational backgrounds of adult Roma is one of the measures of the National Policy on Roma.⁶¹

The results of the 2015 survey indicate that approximately two-thirds of all Roma adults have completed basic education (no significant gender differences found in this regard). From a historical perspective, improvements have been significant, as stated in the survey review and illustrates increasing share in successive cohorts: 25 per cent of Roma who attended school in the 1950s completed basic education, these numbers increasing to approximately 40 per cent in the 1960s, approximately 65 per cent in the 1970s, nearly 70 per cent in the 1980s, nearly 80 per cent in the 1990s, and slightly more than 80 per cent in the first decade of the 2000s.

Since Roma children do not face segregation in schools (and have never done so in Finland) and the good quality of the Finnish educational system has been acknowledged, it is questionable where the problems with Roma education are stemming from. Project workers, who work with Roma families in the Helsinki metropolitan area, have observed that one of the biggest problems in the family is the education of children. Many social problems appear because children do not attend classes and they spend their time elsewhere. Furthermore, the Finnish law obliges children to attend basic education. This is not a financial problem *per se*, as attending school is free of charge (no tuition fees etc). There might be issues that relate to poverty but in those cases, the situation is similar to that of poor families in general (e.g. computers etc).

⁵⁷ <https://www.rakennerahastot.fi/web/en/education-skills-and-lifelong-learning-esf->

⁵⁸ www.tamperelainen.fi/artikkeli/706233-tampereella-viettiin-lapi-projekti-jonka-avulla-yksikaan-romaninuori-ei-pudonnut

⁵⁹ Helakorpi, J., Lappalainen, S., & Sahlström, F. (2019) Becoming tolerable: subject constitution of Roma mediators in Finnish schools. *Intercultural Education*, 1-17.

⁶⁰ *Idem*

⁶¹ Rajala & Blomerus, 2015:8.

A municipal worker in Helsinki, familiar with Roma issues, stated that teachers are sometimes troubled as they do not know how to proceed with Roma children as they skip school to the extent that no academic skills test is possible to be conducted. This testing is necessary to be done so that the teachers are aware of the knowledge level of their students. This way, problems such as an inappropriate teaching level and students' difficulties in following teaching could be avoided. According to the coordinator of the Roma Education Unit, the biggest problems in Roma education can be found in larger cities. Helsinki, or the capital area, is the most challenging regarding the resources and money allocated to support Roma basic education.

The problems of Roma children's education (we cannot say all Roma pupils are performing poorly – there are Roma pupils whose performance is average or above average)⁶² and further job prospects are societal problems that are linked to the recognition of Roma in the Finnish society. As a welfare country, basic living conditions are relatively well organised, there is no housing or school segregation and education is free of charge, but, in the country of high PISA scores (Programme for International Student Assessment), one-third does graduate basic education still. Keeping this in mind, accessing the labour market demands much more than completing basic education.

Publications of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children 2009 indicate that Roma children are more likely to repeat the school year or drop-out from school more often than the majority of children.^{63 64} The survey conducted by the National Agency for Education targeting schools, indicates that there are very few to no gender-based differences in school drop-outs.⁶⁵ Thus, challenges in completing basic education equally concerns boys and girls.

What is noteworthy is that there are no Roma segregated schools or classes.⁶⁶ However, it is a question of definition how segregation is understood: in 2017, the European network of legal experts in gender equality and non-discrimination listed Finland as a country in which Roma children experience segregation in school. Still, there are no segregated schools or classes for Roma students in elementary education, but Roma are overrepresented in special classroom settings. Here again we encounter the problem of ethnic-based statistics, as no nationwide or comparative data is available, but instead, regional-targeted surveys are conducted through different projects, associations, as well as by the Roma Education Unit under the National Agency for Education.

Special classroom settings mean a smaller number of students as they are often students that require additional attention. This affects the curriculum taught in that classroom setting. This is not considered as Roma segregation *per se*, as there are students with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, but it does represent a mean of segregation compared to the regular classroom settings.

As previously-mentioned, adult education and lifelong learning are good educational principles of the Finnish education system. It allows Roma to receive a certificate for graduating basic education at a later stage in life and facilitates the path for further

⁶² Socio-economic differences among Roma and their effect on education has not been studied yet but it can be predicted that these kinds of factors influence school performance. The problem is that in many studies Roma are categorised as one single coherent group.

⁶³ Junkala, P., & Tawah, S. (2009). Enemmän samanlaisia kuin erilaisia. Romanilasten ja-nuorten hyvinvointi ja heidän oikeuksiensa toteutuminen Suomessa. Lapsiasiavaltuutetun toimiston julkaisu, 2, 25-31.

⁶⁴ For English summary, see: <http://lapsiasia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/romanilasten-hyvinvointi.pdf>

⁶⁵ Rajala, S., Salonen, M., Blomerus, S. A. T. U., & Nissilä, L. E. E. N. A. (2011). Romanioppilaiden perusopetuksen tilannekatsaus 2010–2011 ja toimenpide-ehdotukset. Raportit ja selvitykset, 26.

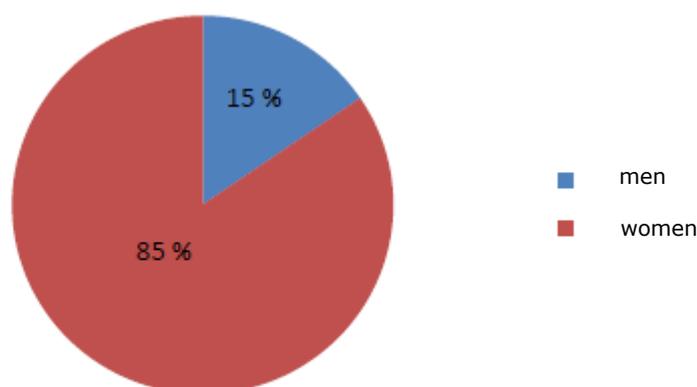
⁶⁶ In practice, the number of Roma pupils in one school district is so small that it would have been impossible from a historical and contemporary perspective to segregate Roma pupils as separate units.

education in the adult age. Although it is a proper system for educating oneself later in life, it would be necessary to gain studying skills as early as childhood and adolescence.

Gender issues in education

ROMPO2 (2018-2022) states that specific attention should be given to young Roma men whose representation in the NEET category for young people (Not in Education, Employment, nor in Training) is worrisome. The study conducted by the National Agency for Education⁶⁷ indicates the same problem. More Roma women than men are enrolled in vocational school or training:

Roma attending vocational training by gender during the school year 2013-2014; N=168.



The chart indicates that 85 per cent of those Roma attending vocational training are women. It appears that the problem with attaining education is greater among young Roma men than among Roma women. In this sense, young Roma men seem to be in a more vulnerable position than women. Although the statistics cover vocational training only, it is worth mentioning that in Finland, the percentage of Roma attending high school is lower compared to that of the majority. It is 19 times more common among Roma to attend vocational training than to study in high schools.⁶⁸ During 2007-2010, based on the responses given by schools, only seven Roma went to high school, while 133 went to vocational training.

However, observations made during the *Nevo Tiija* project (2016-2018) indicate that both young boys and girls are influenced by the challenges of completing basic education. As data is based on surveys that do not necessarily meet the standards of statistical studies, it is difficult to draw final conclusions on gender equality, though different studies and surveys indicate that the educational level of Roma is below average in Finland.

⁶⁷ Rajala, S., & Blomerus, S. (2015). Katsaus aikuisten romanien koulutustaustoihin [A Review of the Educational Backgrounds of Adult Roma]. Helsinki: National Board of Education.

⁶⁸ The National Agency for Education, 2015:8 pp. 62-63

RECOMMENDATIONS

Employment

1. The local employment service authorities should adopt and continue implementing the working methods developed in projects so that good practices are maintained. Promoting Roma employment should not solely depend on project funding.
2. The public and private authorities should take stronger steps in addressing the employment situation of the Roma population, similar to the actions taken regarding housing and health care issues. As there is structural discrimination and employment is hard to find for Roma people, even the interest and motivation to seek employment is endangered. This means that promoting Roma employment is encouraged to be directed not only towards potential employers, but also towards Roma people.

Housing and essential public services

3. There is an increased demand for housing from young Roma who should be looked at closer in order for their needs to be identified and made visible, and adequate measures (different housing possibilities for young people) to be developed and implemented.

Impact of health care policies on Roma

4. For better healthcare services, there is a need for culturally competent public professionals. It is recommended to include diversity and multicultural classes in the training curriculum for healthcare personnel, as well as in educational institutions.

Education

5. As social inclusion and participation starts from and with basic education, investing in the education of Roma children should be continued with a more strategic and long-term approach.
6. School authorities should collaborate more with local Roma associations/active Roma. It is also recommended to transfer Roma children's education from a project-based approach to a permanent supporting system for Roma education.

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