



Finland

Promoting Social Inclusion of Roma

A Study of National Policies

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Summary

Finland has a Roma population of 10,000 to 12,000 persons. A number of studies have already been carried out on the Roma population and housing, education and employment. These have all tended to be single sector based research endeavours, primarily due to the law forbidding data gathering on ethnic grounds. In addition, due to the lack of comparative data on the status and position of linguistic minorities, considerable data gaps have emerged on issues concerning social exclusion and the inclusion of the Finnish Roma population. The population is, moreover, small and regionally dispersed, which makes definitive conclusions on the basis of single issue studies even more difficult. It is clear however that from a 'inclusion' perspective there are a number of issues, including education, housing and social and health services where studying the Roma as a group in its own right could potentially provide a better basis for such social policy concerns.

The available data does not allow us to generalise in terms of patterns of social exclusion. What is clear however is that the dynamics of social exclusion among Finland's various minority groups differ and do so often markedly. The Roma population does display a historical tendency to become excluded – in one way or another – from both the educational system and the traditional labour market. This may be due, primarily, to cultural and family reasons. A modern scientific education has not been culturally valued and the often transitory traditional lifestyle of the Roma has created further difficulties for those who do want to pursue such a course. Lingering prejudice has clearly also been an additional negative factor influencing educational attainment. The low level of pre-school attendance among the Roma population has been highlighted as representing one of the most significant impediments to integration into the Finnish population and educational system. All of this clearly contributes to the reality of social exclusion as without an education one cannot easily expect to gain employment beyond the marginal sectors of the transient economy. Indeed, the labour market position of any individual remains the single most important determinant of social exclusion/inclusion.

Finnish institutional structures and the voluntary sector are well organised and the various interests involved here all have ample opportunity to be heard. Public debate has in recent times however become increasingly less tolerant which may also have had an impact on the position of the Roma population. While national minority groups are well organised, the arrival of new Roma groups has ignited public debate in a way that could be reflected in an increasing intolerance and prejudice towards traditional national minority groups.

Nevertheless, the policy for the Roma population addressed the main obstacles in the way of integration and is a welcome step forward in further supporting the educational and equal opportunity bottlenecks faced by the Roma in Finland. As the actual implementation was only very recently added to the governmental agenda, the effects in terms of social inclusion and labour market position naturally remain to be mapped and assessed.

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1. Description and national situation: Roma population in Finland

1.1. The overall context¹

The first written reference to the Roma in Finland dates from 1559. Over history the Roma earned their livelihood mainly as horse traders, fortune tellers and beggars, but a steady number of Roma men were in public employment. From the 1850s the Roma started to attract a new kind of interest. Language nationalism proper was still of minor significance but the clergy started to demand more efficient measures to prevent the Roma from roving, as this meant they were excluded from all religious education. The Gypsy Affairs Committee in 1900 wanted to assimilate the Roma people into the Finnish majority population.

Finland had no policy for Roma until the 1940s. After the Second World War the position of the Roma people in Finland deteriorated; there were regions in Finnish Karelia with a dense Roma population and evacuees from the ceded territories included almost two thirds of the Finnish Roma. Resettlement of the Roma in the new areas turned out to be a complete failure, leading to social misery for the Roma people. The Advisory Board on Romani Affairs was founded in 1956. Not until the 1960s was the status of the Roma in Finland discussed in the media. Some radical associations were founded, for example, the Finnish Romani Association in 1967.

While a separate policy addressing the needs of the Roma has been a late-comer and in one sense also fairly controversial (as it has been argued that Roma rights should be those of all other Finnish citizens and no specific policy should be needed), Finland has been a forerunner in the development of the administrative structures of the policy on Roma. Founded as early as 1956, the National Board on Romani Affairs has been responsible for the monitoring and supervision of the development and improvement of the social conditions of the Roma. The Board also submits proposals necessary for the advancement of these goals. However, it was only in 1968 when several Roma representatives were nominated to the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs in connection of the reforming the Board. Supported by the general social atmosphere prevalent at the time, this marked the beginning of the development of an actual policy on Roma with an emphasis on the rights of the Roma.²

Today the Roma are one of the largest linguistic and cultural minorities in Finland. There are an estimated 10,000 Roma living in Finland, and about 3,000 Finnish Roma living in Sweden.

The Roma are Finnish citizens and enjoy full civil rights, subject to the civic duties these entail. They have a strong cultural identity of their own but also regard themselves, emphatically, as Finns. With the 1995 Constitutional amendment the Roma were given rights to their own language and culture, to the teaching of Romani as a mother tongue in schools and its use as a language of instruction, and support for Romani language and culture in the educational objectives. There was also the establishment of the Decree on Children's Day Care and weekly national network radio news broadcasts in Romani. Other important measures have included support for education of teachers in Romani language and publication of teaching materials. All of this has contributed to the modernisation of the language. Educational issues are still a major concern, though and according to a study in 2002, only 8% of Roma children received teaching in their own language.

¹ This section is largely based on Laaksonen et al. (2008).

² Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2009), p. 20.

The numbers are low, mostly because the Romani language lessons are not offered or accessible in every school with Roma pupils, despite the Governmental recommendations (Tawah, 2011, p. 5).

Despite their equal legal status, the Roma continue to experience discrimination in their everyday life. On average, the Roma are in a weaker economic and social position compared to other Finns.

1.2. Geographic distribution of Roma

The actual distribution of Roma population is difficult to assess, as there is not data available and the numbers can only be estimations. The majority of Roma live in the cities of southern and western Finland, though there are Roma communities throughout the country.

In recent time the Roma debate in Finland has centred on the Roma from other European countries, who have come to Finland and set camps and joined with the squatters to find housing for themselves. The majority of these individuals have settled in Helsinki. Much of the public debate has centred on the issues of housing for the homeless and the right to beg around public spaces. The issue first emerged on the public agenda in 2007, with the arrival and visible presence of new Roma groups of non-Finnish origin, who set up camps and begged in the streets. In the Finnish context, where the homeless have been relatively well catered for and begging is uncustomary, this caused a lot of confusion, concern and debate. Also crime committed by non-Finnish groups has been a cause for concern. For instance in the period 2006-2009, in the statistics on criminal activity for different nationalities, suspects for Penal Code crimes amongst foreigners increased particularly visible in certain nationality groups, such as Romanians, whose share of criminal suspects increased by 1,546% (Ministry of the Interior, p. 9).

A working group was subsequently organised by the Ministry of the Interior, responsible for home and justice affairs, as well as migration and soft security. The working group reported in 2010, with proposals including ban on begging, to be established in Public Order Act. It was suggested that a specific decree to ban begging also as a means of reducing the risk of organized crime. The report also proposed a ban on setting up illegal camps. Another conclusion was to establish closer cooperation with countries of origin in order to ensure that the travellers have realistic and accurate information about the living conditions in Finland. The report and proposals of the working group were not unanimous however and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Justice for instance expressed a dissenting opinion.³ Viewed from the perspective of the non-Finnish Roma minorities, there are a number of social problems that require attention, both in the countries of origin and in Finland. Unemployment, insufficient social security, problems with education, childhood and families require more attention. The larger scope raises questions of Roma's situation in Europe and different stances of the EU countries. (Deaconess Institute 2009). In June 2011 a day centre was established for the homeless Roma in collaboration between the Deaconess Institute⁴ and City of Helsinki. The centre has been open for four hours a

³ Ministry of the Interior 2010, p. 3.

⁴ The Institute has been one of the most active parties in seeking to investigate and alleviate the situation of the homeless in general and the non-Finnish Roma in particular. They have also had specific projects to study the phenomenon. (See for instance Helsinki Deaconess Institute 2010.) The purpose of the project reported here was mapping the living conditions among the people begging, selling or performing in the streets and providing acute humanitarian aid when necessary. The study included for instance 196 interviews amongst people living on the street, mainly Roma from Romania and Bulgaria.

day and has provided an opportunity for the homeless Roma to shower, do laundry and use the Internet. There were approximately 80 visitors daily and the organizers estimated that there are currently close to 200 homeless Roma in Helsinki. Previously the Roma were offered the possibility for sheltered housing in one of the homeless' shelters in Helsinki, but they declined this offer.

To date begging has not been banned and setting illegal camps is dependent on the local authorities, their regulations and the way in which these regulations are implemented. In the case of Helsinki, it was only in June 2011 that the police was given orders to purge the illegal camps and houses with squatters in the harbour area of "Kalasatama", where the activists had set up their centre and where most of the homeless non-Finnish Roma were camping.⁵

The Ombudsman for Minorities has expressed her concern with the proposals and the eviction activities. The Ombudsman requested that the working group would pay particular attention to ensuring that all individuals in Finland enjoy basic human rights, also those that are not Finnish citizens. Also individuals begging should enjoy equality of opportunity, freedom of movement and right to social security. Particular attention should be given to the rights of children.⁶

1.3. Poverty and social inclusion of Roma

Data on poverty and social exclusion does not address or monitor minority groups separately and therefore we cannot really say whether statistically Roma are more or less excluded or at risk of poverty. Previous studies tend to support the view that Roma are more likely to be community and family-centred and in that sense also some of the social problems are taken care of within the community, rather than with societal help. Due to lack of data, we cannot say anything about the income levels or welfare dependency of minority groups.

Most information on Roma in Finland is collected in studies on housing, education and employment⁷. These are individual research projects or studies and hence the lack of longer time series is a problem for any quantitative or trend analysis.

According to a recent study on employment and labour market status of Roma population in Finland (Syrjä/Valtakari 2010), there a variety of problems facing the Roma in the labour market. The main obstacles for the Roma in access to the labour market are low educational level, lack of vocational education and vocational skills, lack of working experience, the negative attitudes towards the Roma and discrimination. Historically education has not been highly valued within the Roma community. The travelling lifestyle has also made educational attainment difficult. Studies have also shown that the degree of bullying faced by young Roma at school far outweighs that faced by other population groups. (See for instance Tawah 2011) Prejudice is a major impediment of employability for Roma population. Many of the impediments have been known for decades, and recent studies have simply strengthened the knowledge base. (Syrjä/Valtakari 2008, p. 130). While the employment authorities' data showed that 70% of the Roma job seekers

⁵ Activities were organised around a social centre maintained by a social movement involving 50-100 activists. Once evicted from the Kalasatama location, they took over an empty house in Kallio. <http://satama.org/>.

⁶ The Ombudsman for Minorities is an authority with the basic task of advancing the status and legal protection of ethnic minorities and foreigners as well as equality, non-discrimination and good ethnic relations in Finland. For more information, see: <http://www.vahemmistovaltuutettu.fi/intermin/vvt/home.nsf/pages/index3>.

⁷ See for instance Granqvist and Granqvist et al. 2002, Nordberg 2005, Syrjä 2008 and Syrjä/Valtakari 2009.

only had finished primary education or not finished their primary education, the survey undertaken amongst the job-seeker Roma showed that 70% of the respondents saw gaining employment as a major goal in their lives. The situation is clearly contradictory and the modern society and traditional Roma values are still in stark contrast. Attitudes of the Roma towards education and participation in the labour market have changed in recent years however, although earlier the formal education was not valued in the Roma Community.

1.4 Discrimination experienced by Roma

The Finnish Constitution states that nobody shall be discriminated against on the grounds of sex, age, origin, language, religion, conviction, opinion, health, disability or other reason that concerns her/his person. The Non-Discrimination Act bans discrimination on the basis of age, ethnic or national origin, nationality, language, religion, belief, opinion, health, disability, sexual orientation or other personal characteristics. Despite this, the Roma in Finland are faced with many forms of discrimination.

Roma are mainly suffering from forms of indirect forms of discrimination. The reasons lie in lack of information, ignorance and prejudice. Though the rights and responsibilities of Roma are exactly the same as that of other population groups, Roma tend to remain marginalised in the social and health services, as well as in educational systems. Partly this is due to cultural barriers. In the case of social and health care for instance Roma culture is marked by the strength of support and security provided by the family. It is usual for the family to provide care for sick or disabled members in preference to institutional care. It is often emphasised that the Roma need more information about what social and health services are available and how they can benefit from them. In order to achieve this in turn, it is important that health care personnel are aware of the effects of Roma culture on health care, and a greater number of Roma people should be encouraged to get education and work more actively in the social and health sector for instance.

Most cases brought to the attention of the Minority Ombudsman involve housing issues. In many cases local authorities have been found guilty of discrimination in not providing council housing to Roma families.⁸ Local authorities enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy and there has in many cases and many localities been considerable reluctance of allocating housing to large Roma families with transitory lifestyles. Most cases are not brought to the attention of the Minority Ombudsman.

In 2001–2002 the Romani Education Unit of the National Board of Education carried out a wide-ranging nationwide project on Roma primary education. According to this investigation, only about two percent of Roma children go to preschool in Finland. The role of preschool is important for Roma children as it softens the culture shock of school and equips them with better linguistic tools for fully participating in school work. Major obstacles in Roma children's school performance are high absenteeism, emotional and social problems at school, relatively poor grades, the extent of special education and dropping out of school before graduation, as well as problems arising from the upheaval in cultural identity.

Also teacher training should raise minority awareness and it has been proposed for instance that the teaching materials should include information on the Roma minority, their culture and history.

⁸ Helsingin Sanomat 16th March 2007: "Romanien syrjintä asunnon saannissa nostattaa yhä enemmän oikeusjuttuja", [Increasing number of lawsuits expected due to discriminating against the Roma in housing]

This would contribute to the raising of awareness and mutual understanding. It is clear from the studies undertaken over the years that while discrimination is most visible in housing and services, it is education that remains the key to ensuring the equality of Roma minority in Finland in many respects.

In addition to the 2001-2002 research, Finnish National Board of Education/Roma Education Unit is currently implementing a development project (2008-2012), which aims to develop the basic (primary) education of the Roma children. Municipalities can receive discretionary governmental transfer for the development activities within the project. Thirty municipalities have joined to the project and it is estimated to cover 80% of the school aged Roma children. Aim is to promote the learning skills, increase school attendance, develop teaching methods and pedagogy as well as develop co-operation between the schools and Roma homes. A study of the results and best practices of the project is being implemented at the moment.

1.5. Main data gaps

There are major data gaps in assessing the position of Roma in Finland and statistics are largely non-existent. There are however good sources and qualitative studies and investigations, largely due to the institutional bodies such as the Advisory Board of Roma affairs under the auspices of Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

The role and functions of this body are defined as follows:

- enhancing the equal participation of the Roma population in the Finnish society
- improving their living conditions and socio-economic position
- promoting their culture.⁹

The work also includes cooperation and expert help in matters involving the Roma and the authorities in Finland. The Government appointed the first Advisory Board on Romani Affairs in 1989, but its work actually began in 1956 under the name Advisory Board on Gypsy Affairs. The Advisory Board functions in conjunction with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

The Government appoints the Advisory Board for three years at a time. The Advisory Board includes a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and a maximum of 16 other members. Half of the members represent the Roma population; the other half represent the administrative sectors of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Employment and Economy, Ministry of the Environment, and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities. The Advisory Board employs a full time General Secretary and a secretary. The General Secretary prepares the work of the Advisory Board and carries out its decisions.

The task of the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs is to

- monitor the development of the social participation and living conditions of the Roma in order to promote equality;

⁹ Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2002

- by taking initiative and making proposals, improve the social and economic position and promote the culture and employment of the Roma population;
- work to eliminate discrimination;
- promote the Romani language and culture;
- take part in Nordic and other international cooperation in order to improve the position of the Roma;
- provide statements on the position of the Roma for other authorities and organisations, and provide expert statements for example concerning how Finland follows the relevant international agreements (Ibid).

In terms of providing monitoring and data, it has been the provincial advisory boards on regional / local level that carry the main responsibility. There are very few concerted efforts for data gathering and apparently few connections to statistics Finland responsible for collection of national statistics, mostly information is provided in separate studies or analyses.

It has been argued by the statistical and social exclusion experts that one would need more information and data on employment, inclusion/exclusion, poverty, etc. topics for minority groups. In 1970 an extensive survey-based study was undertaken on life patterns and living conditions of linguistic minorities (Swedish speakers, Sami and Roma), but since then nothing similar has been done. At this stage the national board of social affairs (which ceased to exist in 1995 and whose tasks were moved to National Institute for Welfare and Health). Data was collected for 58,880 persons and 87% of the id numbers were also verified through population registrar.

There are two main reasons for the lack of data: *firstly*, collection of personal data that can be considered sensitive is prohibited by law (Henkilötietolaki 22.4.1999/523; Law on personal information), which states that data bases are prohibited, which contain information on person's race or ethnic origin (11 §). *Secondly*, it has been argued that also the increase in immigration and a more multi-cultural society has somehow decreased the interest in the national minorities. Some claim (Paananen 2009, p. 1) that there is more data and information collected on ethnic minorities as immigrants (though this cannot be collected on the basis of ethnic origin, given the legislative restrictions referred to above). The current number of Roma in Finland (10,000-12,000) is an estimate (Syrjä 2008).

As no statistical data concerning the number of Roma or their socio-economic status are available, it has been deemed necessary by the national authorities to carry out special surveys and compile reports for the appropriate allocation of development measures, as well as for the development of the monitoring of the implementation of the policy on Roma or the evaluation of its results. As reported by the Advisory Board in Roma (2007, p. 35), a proposal to this effect has been included also in the National Policy on Roma, which proposes carrying out an extensive survey with the purpose of acquiring data on the welfare, health and living conditions of the Roma population. Due attention should be paid to the different age groups and both sexes, as well as the effects of the action taken, in all surveys and reports concerning the Roma. To ensure the proper monitoring of the surveys, they should be repeated regularly, every four or five years, for example. It is acknowledged however that due to historical reasons, the Roma are very suspicious and sceptical of such surveys, which provides a major obstacle.

In order to address the main roots and reasons for social exclusion of the Roma population, recent studies have emphasised the need to address Roma (as well as other minority groups) as a separate group. When launching new research programmes and studies, Roma could be included as a separate target of investigation. Examples of such studies include exclusion amongst the young and continuing education, where means of addressing the skills shortages and the causes of exclusion could be studied in more detail (e.g. Syrjä/Valtakari 2008, p. 139).

1.6 Roma-relevant issues in the Europe 2020 strategy

According to "Finland's Draft National Policy 2010", published by the Ministry of Finance in April 2011, it is mainly through the benefit system that the needs of the Roma are addressed. The strategy argues that "Benefit systems should safeguard income security in working life transition situations and reduce poverty, particularly in those groups where the risk of exclusion social exclusion is greatest. Such groups are single-parent families and minorities, including the Romani, the disabled and those partially able to work, children and young people, elderly women and men, legal immigrants and the homeless." (Ministry of Finance 2011, p. 43). The minimum income and benefit system was also one of the main topics discussed during the recent parliamentary elections and the new government has expressed a strong commitment to addressing the needs of those on minimum income support and promised a wide-reaching renewal of the benefit system. (Council of the State 2011, pp. 12 and 55)

2. The policy framework in place

A Finnish minority policy began to change at the end of the 1970s, when anti-discrimination law was put into place. This was significant also for improving the position of Roma people in the economic, cultural and social spheres. In addition to equality and anti-discrimination legislation amended in the 1990s and 2000s, an active policy for Roma has gradually emerged. In December 2008, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health appointed a Working Group to prepare Finland's first National Policy on Roma

The National Policy on Roma is the main single policy instrument in place. As argued earlier, while the position of Finland's Roma population is equal in law to other citizens and they therefore enjoy the right to participate in education, use of public services, as well as to participate in and influence the society's activities, there are a number of issues that make this difficult. In addition to ensuring equality in face of law, positive discrimination or special measures are at times required. In this spirit, the Constitution of Finland also contains the right of the Roma to their language and culture.

Finland's first policy for Roma was established in a broad partnership and after intense public debate. The overall objective of the policy is the promotion of equality and inclusion, and ensuring that the life of the Roma in the different areas is one of equality and non-discrimination.

The vision of the policy is that Finland will be in 2017 a forerunner in Europe in promoting the equal treatment and inclusion of the Roma population. The overall objective of Finland's first National Policy on Roma is to promote the inclusion and equal treatment of the Roma in different

spheres of life by mainstreaming the promotion of equal treatment and non-discrimination into different functions in society.

The starting point in the Policy on Roma is that the present legislation and service system should create a good basis for promoting the equal treatment of the Roma population. Special measures are however needed at all levels of authorities to reach the goal of inclusion and de facto equal treatment of the Roma. A principle in the policy is also to reinforce the Roma population's active involvement and functional capacity by making use of their own strengths.

The policy acknowledges the central role of local authorities, who in the Finnish constitution enjoy extensive autonomy and thus also have a central role in promoting equal treatment. In practice equal treatment and inclusion are realised in everyday life and at the local level, through access to and quality of public services available. The Policy on Roma includes a proposal for adding to the state budget a particular grant for municipalities that they could use for developing the practices referred to in the Policy to promote the equal treatment of and to complement the basic services for the Roma population. This has thus far not been achieved.

Strengthening the participation of Roma in education and raising their level of education in general are primary objectives in the Policy on Roma. The Romani language is a language under threat, even though the right of the Roma to maintaining their language and culture is safeguarded under the Finnish Constitution. Maintaining the Romani language, among other things by developing its instruction and research at university level, is seen as constituting a prerequisite for implementation of the cultural rights of the Roma.¹⁰

The preparation of the policy was based on the objective of drawing up a comprehensive, concrete action program, which could achieve permanent and lasting improvements in the position of the Roma population. In addition to the role of the authorities, the role of the third sector is emphasised.

The preparatory discussions for the policy are indicative of the themes that emerge as most critical. In the hearings held for the Roma population on increasing their equality and inclusion, the following *key areas of development* emerged:

- supporting early childhood education and care, parenting skills and families, as well as the prevention of marginalisation
- strengthening the Roma population's participation in education from basic education all the way to vocational education and training for adults, as well as supporting transitional stages in education with affirmative action
- supporting and promoting their access to the labour market
- strengthening the active social participation of the Roma
- preservation of Romani culture (Ibid, p. 27)

¹⁰ Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (2009), p. 3.

Main attention in the programme is given to educational issues. The priorities are as follows:

- Policy Guideline 1:** Enhancing the participation and equal treatment of Roma children in early childhood education and care
- Policy Guideline 2:** Enhancing the social inclusion and equal treatment of Roma children and youth in basic education and upper secondary education
- Policy Guideline 3:** Enhancing the participation in vocational education and training of adult Roma
- Policy Guideline 4:** Supporting and promoting the Roma population's access to the labour market
- Policy Guideline 5:** Promoting the welfare of the Roma population and enhancing the allocation of social welfare and health services
- Policy Guideline 6:** Ensuring equal treatment in housing and reducing insecurity
- Policy Guideline 7:** Promoting the development of the Romani language and culture
- Policy Guideline 8:** Enhancing the equality and non-discrimination of the Roma
- Policy Guideline 9:** Development of the administrative structures for handling Romani affairs and enhancing the policy on Roma
- Policy Guideline 10:** Promotion of participation in international cooperation on Romani issues (ibid, pp. 136-140.)

There is an ambitious monitoring and reporting structure to follow the implementation and results of the policy. A report on the realisation of the implementation of the Policy is submitted annually to the Monitoring Group for the National Policy on Roma. Additionally, some measures included in the Policy will be monitored separately in terms of the implementation of the Policy and the realisation of its objectives. (ibid, p. 131)

Finnish policy for Roma population has gained some European visibility and the Finnish parliament (select committee responsible for Roma policy) organised a seminar on the policy in Brussels in November 2010. The effectiveness of the policy remains to be seen and no monitoring reports are currently available to judge the success rate in this regard.

Up to now the policy has not been a major priority for the government, but the current government has stated that it will start the implementation of the national policy on Roma. It could be added that the Government Resolution on the implementation of the National Policy on Roma was stated in December 2010. Special measures are to be targeted at improving the educational attainment and labour market position of Roma population, as well as 'solving the housing problem' and improving the inclusion of Roma children, youth and families in the Finnish society (Council of State 2011, p. 59).

3. Structural Funds

The Structural Funds and programmes of the European Union have been an important instrument of development for the enhancement of inclusion, education and employment. In Finland, ESF projects were especially aimed at the Roma population during the second implementation round (2004-2007) of the EQUAL Community Initiative Programme carried out in the previous

programming period. These projects yielded positive results. During the current programming period, enhancing the status of the Roma and their social inclusion have not received special emphasis and so far only scarce projects aimed at the Roma population in particular have been initiated. There are 14 ESF projects being implemented where the Roma are one of the target groups. The interim evaluation of the ESF programme period in 2011 was the “check-point” in this regard and offered the opportunity to allocate additional ESF resources for the enhancement of the conditions of the Roma. There has been relatively little attention given to minorities in the programme, though some important exceptions exist such as the anti-discrimination information campaign ‘YES – Equality is Priority’, which receives funding from the EU’s PROGRESS programme (2007-2013) and which aims at the promotion of non-discrimination, equal treatment and acceptance of multiplicity. It is also relevant for the Roma minority as it offers an opportunity to support the realisation of the objectives of the National Policy on Roma. During the current programming period YES 4-project supports educational activities for voluntary organisations for the Roma.¹¹

4. Conclusions and policy recommendations

Finland has a Roma population of 10,000 to 12,000 persons. There have been a number of studies on housing, education and employment of Roma population, but these have been single research endeavours, due to the law forbidding data gathering on ethnic grounds. Due to lack of comparative data on the status and position of linguistic minorities, there are considerable data gaps on issues having to do with social exclusion and inclusion of Finnish Roma population. The population is small and regionally dispersed, which makes definite conclusions on the basis of single issue studies even more difficult. Yet there are a number of issues, including education, housing and social and health services where Roma should be studied as a group in its own right in order to provide a better basis for policy.

The data does not allow us to generalise in terms of patterns of social exclusion. What is clear is that dynamics of social exclusion among the different minority groups vary. Roma population has a historical tendency to become excluded from the education system and labour market due to the cultural and family characteristics. Education has not been valued and the transitory lifestyle has made it difficult to pursue education. Prejudice has been an additional negative factor influencing educational attainment. The low level of pre-school attendance among the Roma population has been taken as a significant impediment for integration into the Finnish population and educational system. All of this is seen to contribute to social exclusion, as without education one cannot attain employment and the labour market position is the single most important determinant in social exclusion/inclusion.

The Finnish institutional structures and voluntary sector are well organised around the topics related to Roma population and the different interests have ample opportunity to be heard. Public debate has in recent times become increasingly intolerant, which may also have an impact on the position of Roma population. While the national minority groups are well organised, the arrival of new Roma groups has stirred the public debate in a way that is likely to be reflected in an increasing intolerance and prejudice against national minority groups.

¹¹ See for instance. http://www.yhdenvertaisuus.fi/kampanjat/yes-yhdenvertaisuus_etusijalle/yes4-koulutusohjelma-romani-ja-v/.

The policy for Roma population addressed main obstacles in the way of integration and is a welcome step in further supporting the educational and equal opportunity bottlenecks faced by Roma in Finland. The effects in terms of social inclusion and labour market position remain to be fully mapped and assessed. Main target groups are children, youth and families, as with most inclusion measures implemented amongst minority groups in Finland.

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"Romanien uusi päiväkeskus ruuhkautui heti", [The new day-centre for the Roma was immediately congested with visitors.]