



# **Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion**

(LERI) Project

## **Community Summary**

Helsinki, Finland

This community summary forms part of FRA's **Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion** (LERI) project. LERI is a qualitative action research project under [FRA's multi-annual Roma Programme](#). It was developed in response to the [European Commission's Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020](#). LERI brings together local authorities and residents, in particular Roma, to investigate how they can best be involved in Roma integration actions, and identify which aspects of these actions work, which do not, and why. The aim of the project is to facilitate the engagement of all local stakeholders, including Roma, in joint efforts to enable Roma inclusion. The experience gained and the lessons learned during the process will help improve the design, implementation and monitoring of Roma integration policies and actions at the local level.

LERI is the first FRA project to test participatory action research methodology. By identifying the key factors that lead to the success or failure of local integration activities, the project is helping to improve the planning of effective integration programmes for the future. At the same time, facilitating engagement at local level empowers all those involved, building their capacity to participate as equal partners with local administrations and civil society, and enabling a shared understanding of which measures need to be taken and how their implementation can be monitored. The project is being carried out in 21 localities across 11 EU Member States (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom).

## LOCALITIES

Pavlikeni,	Bulgaria
Stara Zagora,	Bulgaria
Brno,	Czech Republic
Sokolov,	Czech Republic
Helsinki,	Finland
Jyväskylä,	Finland
Lille Metropole,	France
Strasbourg,	France
Aghia Varvara,	Greece
Megara,	Greece
Besence,	Hungary
Mátraverebély,	Hungary
Mantova,	Italy
Bologna,	Italy
Aiud,	Romania
Cluj-Napoca,	Romania
Hrabušice,	Slovakia
Rakytník,	Slovakia
Cordoba,	Spain
Madrid,	Spain
Medway,	UK

## Helsinki, Finland

### Overview of the country context

Finland has approximately 5,000,000 inhabitants, out of which around 10,000 are Roma.<sup>1</sup> It is also estimated that some 3,000 Finnish Roma live in Sweden. While Roma are scattered around the country, about half of Finnish Roma live in Southern Finland. A few hundred Roma, mainly from ex-Soviet countries, immigrated to different parts of Finland. In the last few years, Eastern European, Bulgarian and Romanian citizens of Roma origin have also arrived in Helsinki. In Finland, the universal model of welfare has contributed to the promotion of equality among national minorities, nevertheless, Finnish Roma continue to face unequal access to housing, education, employment, different social and health services.<sup>2</sup>

In Finland, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (*Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö*) holds the overall responsibility for the health and welfare of the population. A National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs (*Romaniasiaain neuvottelukunta*) has been in place since 1956 and is subordinated to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. It operates as an expert body and forum for cooperation between the Roma community and the public administration and aims "to promote equal participation

among Roma in Finnish society, to improve their living conditions and socio-economic position and promote Roma culture".<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, four Regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs (*Alueellinen romaniasiaain neuvottelukunta*) were established in 1996, subordinated to the regional State Administrative Agencies for Southern Finland, Southwestern Finland, Eastern Finland and Northern Finland. The Regional Boards act as cooperation forums between the Roma and the local and regional authorities, and work towards the improvement of the social and living conditions of the Roma and their participation in decision-making.<sup>4</sup>

There are a number of Roma organizations and groups that are active at the national and local levels. They work in various areas to advance the inclusion and participation of Roma in Finnish society. They provide social, cultural, employment, youth, religious and leisure activities. They also promote the Roma language and culture through a number of publications. Nevertheless, the overall political influence of the Finnish Roma organizations is still in its infancy<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, the support and consolidation of the Roma civil society remains an important goal of the work on Roma issues.

Finland's first National Policy on Roma 2010-2017 (*Suomen romanipoliittinen ohjelma 2010-2017*) was adopted in 2009,

<sup>1</sup> Finland, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (*Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö*) (2004) *Suomen romanit- Finitiko romaseele*, Helsinki, Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö, available at: [www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/126204/suomen\\_romanit.pdf?sequence=1](http://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/126204/suomen_romanit.pdf?sequence=1).

<sup>2</sup> Finland, The Ombudsman for Minorities (*Vähemmistövaltuutettu*) (2014) *Erilaisena arjessa. Selvitys romanien syrjäytymiskokemuksista*, Helsinki, Vähemmistövaltuutettu, available at: [www.syrjinta.fi/documents/10181/10850/52878\\_romaniselvitys\\_verkkoon+%281%29.pdf/584516fc-d3a7-4f88-8ecc-c8b2271ebf41](http://www.syrjinta.fi/documents/10181/10850/52878_romaniselvitys_verkkoon+%281%29.pdf/584516fc-d3a7-4f88-8ecc-c8b2271ebf41).

Viljanen, A., Hagert, T. and Blomerus, S. (2010) 'Tasa-arvon harha: romanit suomalaisessa terveydenhuollossa' in: Antti P. and Matti O. H. (eds.), *Kulttuurit ja lääketiede*, Helsinki, Duodecim.

<sup>3</sup> Finland, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (*Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö*) (2009)

*Suomen romanipoliittinen ohjelma- Työryhmän esitys*, Helsinki, Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriön selvityksiä 2009:48, available at: [www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/112356/URN%3aNBN%3afi-fe201504225296.pdf?sequence=1](http://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/112356/URN%3aNBN%3afi-fe201504225296.pdf?sequence=1).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Finland, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (*Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö*) (2014), 'Steering and Monitoring of the Implementation of the National Policy on Roma Working group report' in: *Reports and Memorandums of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health*, Helsinki, Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö, available at: [www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/116174/URN%3AISBN%3A978-952-00-3487-0.pdf?sequence=1](http://www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/116174/URN%3AISBN%3A978-952-00-3487-0.pdf?sequence=1).

which aimed at widely advancing equality and inclusion of Roma in society. The participation of the Roma themselves in these actions is the core element and overall objective of this policy. The National Board of Romani Affairs plays an important role in the implementation of the national policy.

### Locality background information

Helsinki is the capital and the largest city in Finland, with a population of 614,074 and metropolitan population of 1,361,506 as of 31 January 2014.

The current size of the Finnish Roma population in Helsinki is estimated to be approx. 2,000. This figure is based on data provided by experts and activists working in the field. There are no official statistics in this respect as the Finnish law forbids the collection of data on the ethnic origin of citizens.



*Fourth International Conference of Roma Women Helsinki, 2014*

<sup>6</sup> Tervonen, M. and Enache A. (2012), 'Uusia tulijoita', in: Pulma P., *Suomen Romanien historia*, Helsinki, SKS.

Markkanen, A., Puurunen, H. and Saarinen, A. (2012) *Huomio! Romaneja tiellä*, Helsinki, Like Kustannus Oy.

<sup>7</sup> Enache, A. (2012), 'Köyhyyden kiertokulku – Romanian romanien viimeaikainen muutto Helsinkiin elonjäämisstrategiana' in

Markkanen, A., Puurunen, H. and Saarinen, A. (eds.), *Huomio! Romaneja tiellä*, Helsinki, Like Kustannus Oy.

Markkanen, A., Puurunen, H. and Saarinen, A. (2012), *Huomio! Romaneja tiellä*, Helsinki, Like Kustannus Oy.

From 2008 onwards, Roma originating from Eastern European countries such as Romania and Bulgaria have arrived in Finland especially in the area of Helsinki. The Helsinki Deaconess Institute (*Helsingin Diakonissalaitos*), which is involved in providing support to Roma originating from Central or Eastern Europe (CEE), estimates that an approximately 300 - 400 currently reside in Helsinki. Those living in Helsinki can find themselves in a vulnerable position both in Finland and in their home countries<sup>6</sup>. Most earn a living outside the formal labour market, selling street magazines, begging, collecting bottles or doing short-term work. These activities, which are perceived as work in the mainstream societal discourses<sup>7</sup> result in precarious incomes and poor everyday living conditions.<sup>8</sup>

The majority of Roma of CEE countries in Helsinki are not enrolled the Finnish social security system, which is residency-based. The residency permit is granted on grounds such as: family ties, Finnish descent, return migration, studies or employment and humanitarian grounds. Additionally, the applicant must be able to provide proof of regular income, and, for the first permit, should commit to being self reliant, and not depend on financial social assistance. As most Roma from CEE countries do not meet the above mentioned criteria, they face difficulties in gaining this permit and therefore only have the right as European Union citizens to acute social and health services in

Roman, R. B. (2014), 'Trans-national migration and the issue of 'ethnic' solidarity. Finnish Roma elite and Eastern European Roma migrants in Finland', *Ethnicities*, Vol. 14, No. 6, pp. 793-810.

<sup>8</sup> Enache, A. (2012), 'Köyhyyden kiertokulku – Romanian romanien viimeaikainen muutto Helsinkiin elonjäämisstrategiana' in Markkanen, A., Puurunen, H. and Saarinen, A. (eds.), *Huomio! Romaneja tiellä*, Helsinki, Like Kustannus Oy.

Markkanen, A., Puurunen, H. and Saarinen, A. (2012), *Huomio! Romaneja tiellä*, Helsinki, Like Kustannus Oy.

Finland.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the Helsinki municipality guarantees access to all public health services for Roma pregnant women and children under eighteen.

There is no national or local institutional structure in charge of the inclusion of Roma from CEE countries in Helsinki. Different national and local authorities deal with the acute issues affecting the Roma from CEE in different areas of life.

The role of the civil society has been very important in providing concrete support and advocating for the promotion of the human rights of this Roma community. Few Finnish organisations have been involved in this work.

### **Objectives and thematic focus of the LERI project**

As mentioned above, Roma coming from other EU member states like Romania and Bulgaria face many difficulties in Helsinki, especially because of their non-Finnish national status. Ethnicity, gender, social class and age are some of the dimensions that affect the status of the Roma from Romania and Bulgaria. The overall aim of LERI in Helsinki is to advance the participation of these Roma in areas of life that are relevant for them. This will be done by building a discussion forum between Roma from CEE countries and relevant actors, and also by producing action research based knowledge on their concerns and interests.



*Hirundo's representatives and other actors involved in the Roma from other MS issues, at the Finnish Social Forum 2014.*

<sup>9</sup> Tervonen, M. and Enache A. (2012), 'Uusia tulijoita', in: Pulma P., *Suomen Romanien historia*, Helsinki, SKS.  
Enache, A. (2012), 'Köyhyyden kiertokulku – Romanian romanien viimeaikainen muutto

### **Activities implemented and actors involved in the needs assessment phase**

Hirundo is the key implementing partner of the LERI project in Helsinki. Hirundo has been the main project providing acute social and health services precisely for the Roma from Romania and Bulgaria in Helsinki, and serves as a forum for encouraging their participation and inclusion, in cooperation with different actors. The core principle behind Hirundo's activities is the participation of the Roma themselves at all stages. Hirundo works in the areas of social and health services provision, education, combating discrimination and exclusion, human rights and advocacy. It is an umbrella program that includes a day shelter and various other projects, initiatives and partnerships implemented in continued cooperation with various actors in the field, as well as with the Roma of CEE origin themselves. Hirundo is built as a partnership between the Helsinki Deaconess Institute (*Helsingin Diakonissalaitos*), The Helsinki City (*Helsingin kaupunki*), The National Forum of Finland (*Kansalaisfoorumi*), Helsinki Evangelical Lutheran Parish Union (*Helsingin seurakuntayhtymä*) and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland (*Suomen evankelis-luterilainen kirkko*).

The participatory needs assessment research in Helsinki will be composed of: two collaborative crafts workshops, collaborative ethnography and collaborative reflection sessions. The participants will be involved in the workshops and be co-researchers during the research stage. Hirundo has already established a steering committee of Roma.

The two workshops will serve as a forum and collaboration between the Roma and different stakeholders, civil society and other actors. The representatives of the Helsinki City, the National Romany Advisory Board, the Roma civil society and

Helsinkiin elonjäämisstrategiana' in Markkanen, A., Puurunen, H. and Saarinen, A. (eds.), *Huomio! Romaneja tiellä*, Helsinki, Like Kustannus Oy, pp. 42–71.

the Ombudsman for Equality will all be invited to participate as well.

The aim is to understand the needs and wishes of Roma from CEE countries in Helsinki through a collaborative, non-hierarchical context based process. A number of thematic areas will be chosen as priority areas and the work will be further developed in these areas.

The use of collaborative ethnography,<sup>10</sup> visual materials and representations, such as photography or collages will be encouraged as documentation tools. Participants will also be invited to write blogs and other texts.

A collaborative reflection meeting will be organized to discuss the overall process, the methodology, the results and the continuity of the initiatives. The aim of all actions is that the Roma and different stakeholders would together define the aims of the research activities, carry them out and finally analyze them. The results will include developing ideas and plans for potential further initiatives and areas of focus to ensure the sustainability of the project.

### **Expected outcomes of the participatory action research**

The main outcomes of the participatory action research will be the development of the needs assessment paper which will comprise:

- key areas of interest and needs
- future actions that can operationalize the findings.

Secondly, a very short and concrete action plan will be developed to establish priority initiatives and the actors responsible for them.

Furthermore, the overall outcome will be the development of a dialogical, collaborative and democratic process between the Roma from CEE countries and the other actors involved in the research.

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<sup>10</sup> Lassiter L. (2005) *The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, p.16.

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