



Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion (LERI) Project

Community Summary

Jyväskylä, 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

Jyväskylä, Finland

Overview of the country context

Finland has approximately 5,000,000 inhabitants, out of which around 10,000 are Roma.¹ 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.²

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".³ Subsequently, four Regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs (*Alueellinen romanasiaain 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.⁴

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 infancy⁵. 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, which aimed at widely advancing

¹ 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.

² 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.

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.

³ 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.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ 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_ISBN_978-952-00-3487-0.pdf?sequence=1.

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

The city of Jyväskylä is located in Central Finland. With a population of 135,000 inhabitants, Jyväskylä is the seventh largest city in Finland. Jyväskylä's population growth rate is one of the highest in Finland.



City Hall of Jyväskylä

It is estimated that only 300 Roma live in Jyväskylä (500 including nearby areas). Approximately 700 Roma live in Central Finland.⁶ The first Roma migrated to Jyväskylä during the 18th century and nowadays live in different areas. Today, although most Roma are unemployed or retired, an increasing number of Roma are seeking education and employment. Statistics are not available due to legislative limitations, but the employment situation of the Roma has been evaluated as part of Roma projects. All Roma children attend pre-school and finish compulsory basic education.⁷ Most

⁶ The numbers of Roma were estimated by the Jyväskylä City Hall for internal purposes.

⁷ Interview with Jyväskylä City Hall's representative, 17 February 2014.

⁸ Interview with Jyväskylä NGO activist, 17 February 2014.

⁹ Interview with Jyväskylä City Hall's representative, 17 February 2014.

¹⁰ City of Jyväskylä (*Jyväskylän kaupungin*) (2006) *Monikulttuurisuusohjelma*, available at:

Finnish Roma women wear traditional clothes, which can lead to further prejudice from the outside population.

Many influential elder members of the Roma community have passed away, but some key persons are employed by the City or work on Roma projects. Some Roma are also influential in spiritual circles.⁸ The Roma instructor employed by the municipality supports Roma children in compulsory schools as well as the co-operation between school and family acting as a crucial cultural mediator.⁹

Jyväskylä has mainstreamed strategies for the integration of minorities.¹⁰ The Roma have played a key role in strategic planning of implementation and evaluation. Jyväskylä has had a Roma co-operation work group since 2003.¹¹



A meeting in Jyväskylä

Roma integration projects have been implemented in Jyväskylä since the beginning of the 2000s. The projects are administered by Jyväskylä Vocational Training Center (*Jyväskylän koulutuskuntayhtymä*), the Non-Governmental Organization Keski-Suomen Yhteisöjen Tuki and the Centre of Excellence (KOSKE). The City of Jyväskylä was also involved in projects of National Board of Education to support the education of Roma children.

www.jyvaskylanseutu.fi/files/monikulttuurisuusohjelma_0701xx.pdf.

¹¹ Interview with Jyväskylä City Hall's representative, 17 February 2014.

Anttonen, R. (2009) "*Manne takaraivossa*" : *ennakkoluulot ja syrjintä suomalaisten romaniyrittäjien kokema* : *fenomenografinen tutkimus*, available at <https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/handle/123456789/20069>.

Objectives and thematic focus of the LERI projec

Inequality remains visible in different societal activities, and prejudices are tangible in social life. For instance, Roma have experienced being followed by security guards in shops. Roma have difficulties in using public services as well.¹² Long waiting lists for city apartment rental pose further problems. Many Roma don't know how to make use of services provided by the public or third sector.¹³



Jyväskylä's plan

The LERI project will cooperate with the City Hall of Jyväskylä, KOSKE and local Roma actors. The goal is to establish the grounds for long-term development work on Roma issues, in cooperation with KOSKE. LERI will therefore support KOSKE's development into a Centre of Excellence specialised on Roma issues. It will promote the equality and inclusion of the Roma, preventing discrimination and contributing to the further implementation of the Finnish National Policy on Roma. Another objective of LERI is to strengthen professional know-how in social work, and offer different professional groups support in their work with Roma, such as providing targeted information regarding the Roma culture to family workers.

Activities implemented and actors involved in the needs assessment phase

The City Hall of Jyväskylä will play a key role as an actor participating in research, education and development activities of LERI. It has participated in the planning

of every Roma integration project carried out so far in the city, by managing and following-up on the projects "Roma to working life" (*Romanit työelämään*) and "Roma to move" 1, 2 and 3 (*Romanit liikkeelle*). It has also taken part in the follow-up of the National Board of Education (*Opetushallitus Utbildningsstyrelsen*) project supporting basic education and in the project "As a bridge to tomorrow" (*Siltana huomiseen*).¹⁴

The other actors involved in the project are KOSKE and local Roma actors. A similar Centre of Excellence exists in Northern Finland to support the Finnish speaking Roma and another is located in the centre/south to help Swedish speaking communities. In central Finland, work is focused on improving knowledge in social and health services, building up better social know-how, combining social services, research, education and training.

The local Roma co-operation working group is also a central actor in the needs assessment. It appoints representatives of several sectors including social work, education, pre-primary education, vocational training, employment services, police, local NGOs and the City Hall. The working group has applied for and participated in integration projects and other Roma-related activities. Through this group, Roma can contribute to the city's decision-making and services development. The local Roma community is very active and the authorities and actors are willing to co-operate.

A participatory needs assessments will be carried out in co-operation with an advisory support team, which will consist of representatives of the actors mentioned above (KOSKE, the City Hall, and local Roma) and a representative of the LERI national team. This advisory support team will carry out a community overview to help assess the effectiveness of the activities carried out from the point of view of the Roma community, and to improve the empowerment of the Roma.

¹² Interview with Jyväskylä NGO activist, 17 February 2014.

¹³ Interview with Jyväskylä City Hall's representative, 17 February 2014.

¹⁴ Interview with Jyväskylä City Hall's representative, 17 February 2014.

Evaluation and planning meetings and a public hearing with local Roma participants will be arranged to better involve the community and ensure that Romas voices are heard. The public hearing will be mainly carried out among and directed to the local Roma community.

Expected outcomes of the participatory action research

A plan has been developed (but not yet implemented) in cooperation with local Roma, to establish a centre of excellence for Finnish Roma. LERI will contribute to looking into possible financing for the project.

KOSKE could create a structure that helps implement and disseminate good practices by making use of its local, regional and national social work networks. The KOSKE Centre of Excellence would improve the working life preparedness of Roma in Central Finland. The goal is to support education, employment and success at work within the Roma community. KOSKE will work in close local co-operation with the City Hall of Jyväskylä and will also participate in national development tasks. It would also provide solid support to local actors.

FRA – EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

Schwarzenbergplatz 11 – 1040 Vienna – Austria
Tel: +43 158030-0 – Fax: +43 158030-699
fra.europa.eu – info@fra.europa.eu
[facebook.com/fundamentalrights](https://www.facebook.com/fundamentalrights)
[linkedin.com/company/eu-fundamental-rights-agency](https://www.linkedin.com/company/eu-fundamental-rights-agency)
twitter.com/EURightsAgency

