

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN THE FIELD OF PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

In response to the invitation by the Commissioner for Human Rights

Example from Finland

**“A good practise for participative structures on Roma inclusion:
The advisory board on Romani Affairs in Finland”**



1. DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTISE

Administrative and inclusive structures on the Roma

In Finland the position of the Roma is secured in Constitution. The Finnish Constitution guarantees the Roma the right to maintain and develop the language and the culture of their own. In Finland the administrative structures for handling Romani affairs have been developed since 1956. The participation of the Roma in these structures has been enhanced since the late 1960s.

Administrative structures that focus especially on Roma issues include the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs, the Regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs, and educational services for the Roma population. The rights of various minorities and ethnic equality are also supervised and promoted by specialised authorities, such as the Ombudsman for Minorities, for example.

The National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs is a cooperation body for Roma and the authorities. The Advisory Board on Romani Affairs is linked to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The legal basis of the Board lies on the Decree stated by the Government. The Advisory Board is appointed by the Government for three years at a time.

The Advisory Board consists of representatives of both Roma NGOs and the ministries and authorities relevant to handling the Roma affairs. The Advisory Board includes a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and a maximum 16 other members. Half of the members represent the Roma population (proposed by the Roma

NGOs and Regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs); the other half represent the administrative sectors of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Employment and Economy, Ministry of Environment (housing issues), the National Education Board and the Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities.

In the Advisory Board the Chairperson has usually been a Member of Parliament in office, which provides the Board with a link to parliamentary decision-making. The Vice-Chair has usually been a representative of the Roma population. The Advisory Board has a full-time General Secretary, who is a civil servant employed by the Ministry. The General Secretary prepares the work of the Advisory board and carries out its decisions. The Advisory Board on Romani Affairs convenes about 6-7 times per year. The Advisory Board has a working section which prepares matters to be brought up at meetings.

In addition, at the regional level there are four Regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs in conjunction with the State Provincial Offices, their activities covering the whole of the country. The Regional Advisory Board on Romani Affairs consists of a Chairperson, a Vice-Chairperson and 8 -12 members, at least half of whom represent the Roma population. Since 2006, the Advisory Boards also employ a full time secretary who is working as a Planning Officer for Roma issues on the State Provincial Office. The Regional Advisory Boards work in a close contact with the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs and with the municipalities in their region.

The tasks of the Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs

The aim of the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs is 1) to enhance the equal participation of the Roma in the Finnish society, 2) to improve the living conditions and socio-economic position of the Roma, 3) to promote the rights and equality of the Roma, 4) to promote the culture of the Roma and 5) to enhance dialogue and co-operation.

The task of the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs is to act as an expert on issues regarding the Roma population, to monitor the development of the circumstances of the Roma population, take initiatives, issue statements and opinions.

According to the Decree on Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs the task of the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs is to:

1. monitor the development of the social participation and living conditions of the Roma in order to promote equality, and to issue statements on these for various authorities;
2. improve the social and economic position and promote the culture and employment of the Roma population by taking initiative and making proposals;
3. work to eliminate discrimination against the Roma;
4. promote the enhancement of Romani language and culture;
5. support the activities of the Regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs; and
6. take part in Nordic, European and other international cooperation in order to enhance the rights of the Roma and improve their conditions.

In their respective regions, the four Regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs are responsible for the same tasks as the National Board.

Voluntary Local Roma Working Groups on the municipal level

There has been a considerable increase in the development of cooperation structures between the Roma population and local authorities in recent years. The Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs have shown initiative and supported the establishment of Local Roma Working Groups in various municipalities or regions. In 2010 there were Roma working groups, either in operation or in the process of being established, in more than 20 Finnish municipalities.

The aim of the National Policy on Roma, adopted 2010, is to enhance these structures on the local level. The structures for dialogue and co-operation are needed between the authorities and the Roma on local level, because equality and inclusion of the Roma will be realized in everyday life on the local level. These structures serve also as measures for transferring the national Roma policy to local strategies on the inclusion of the Roma.

Co-operation, partners and stakeholders

The tasks of the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs include cooperation with different authorities and partners at the national level as well as in international cooperation. These partners and stakeholders include:

- The Ministries and other authorities
- The Roma Organizations and Roma Experts
- The National Board of Education; Team for Roma Education,
- The Ombudsman for Minorities
- The Ombudsman for Children
- Research Institute for the Languages of Finland; Board on Romani language
- The Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities
- Educational institutions
- Non-governmental organisations working with minorities and human rights issues
- European organizations and networks

2. HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES AND EQUALITY AT STAKE

The Advisory Board on Romani affairs has influenced to the development of Finnish legislation and administration in matters regarding the rights and the equality of the Roma. As its initiative, the Roma education Unit was created within the National Board of Education in 1994 and the Regional Advisory Boards were settled by the Government Decree in 2003. The Regional Advisory Boards have reinforced the link and co-operation to the local level.

The right of the Roma to their language and culture was included in the Constitution in 2002. Thanks to the initiatives of the National Board of Romani Affairs the proposal for National Roma Strategies was prepared in 1999 and the proposal for the first National Policy on Roma in 2009, which has been adopted by the Government Resolution in 2010. The aim of the National Policy on Roma is to promote the equal treatment and inclusion of the Roma in different spheres of society.

By the expert statements on the position of the Roma and the developmental needs for other authorities, for parliamentary committees and for other organizations the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs has been able to influence to the development of the equality and inclusion of the Roma.

3. CONCLUSIONS FOR INSPIRING SIMILAR STRUCTURES TO PROMOTE THE EQUALITY AND INCLUSION OF THE ROMA

The structures at national and at local level for dialogue, interaction and co-operation between the Roma and the authorities are needed all over the Europe.

In Finland, where the Roma population is quite small, about 10 000 - 12 000, the Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs, has been a means to increase the participation and possibilities of the Roma to influence their rights and position in the Finnish society.

As all the relevant ministries participate in the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs it serves also as a measure for mainstreaming Roma inclusion and issues into the national policies.

4. DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

One of the aims in the Finnish National Policy on Roma is to improve the administrative structures on Romani affairs and to enhance the participation of the Roma which includes also the enhancement of the capacities of Roma organizations. The number of active Roma organisations is not constant as organisations come and go and only some of them remain active in the long run.

There is a need to reform the Decree on National Board on Romani Affairs in order to guarantee better representativeness of the Roma organisations. The composition of the Board should be reviewed and reformed as the number of Roma organisations in Finland has increased in the past few years. Decree states that of the eight organisations with a Romani background, representatives of four shall be appointed from the Regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs. This leaves the national Roma organisations with four seats, which is not sufficient for all the Roma organisations in the present situation. In addition, the composition of the Board should also be reformed through the introduction of personal deputies which is not the case at the moment. Appointing personal deputies for all Board members would ensure the equal representation of all parties even if a member were absent.

5. CONTACT

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