



REPORT OF THE ROMA NETWORK MEETING:

“MAKING EU FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS A REALITY FOR ROMA – ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE AND ADEQUATE HOUSING”

27-28 SEPTEMBER, HELSINKI, FINLAND

SUMMARY

On 27 and 28 of September, Eurodiaconia held its annual Roma Network Meeting in Helsinki, hosted and co-organised by the Helsinki Deaconess Institute. 20 participants from Eurodiaconia member organisations came together for two days to exchange and learn more about how to support Roma communities in accessing healthcare and adequate housing. The meeting aimed particularly at exchanging best practice of members in those areas and to discuss the current situation of Roma in the respective Member States.

After an introduction to the work of Eurodiaconia and the recent developments at EU level concerning Roma, the first day was mainly dedicated to the situation of Roma in Finland and the exchange of best practice. The participants had the opportunity to listen and exchange with Marko Stenroos, a researcher from Helsinki University, and Anneli Weiste-Paakanen (Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare) on the situation of Roma in Finland. Furthermore, projects from the Eurodiaconia membership on access to healthcare and housing for indigenous Roma and migrant Roma in Serbia (Sladjana Jovanovic, EHO) and Norway (Joanna Eidse-Fraenke, Kirkens Bymisjon) have been presented. Based on the sharing and exchanges around the projects, participants also discussed the key elements for the success of a project during an interactive session.

The second day focused on the EU Framework of National Roma Strategies and started with an exchange with the Finish National Roma contact point, followed by a group activity in which the participants were invited to reflect and share their demands for the future of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies. The meeting ended with a study visit to the Hirundo Centre run by HDI, which is a community centre in Helsinki providing Roma migrants with a place of support and feeling of being welcome.

Next steps

- The “Eurodiaconia Roma network” will continue in 2019 with a joint meeting together with HEKS/EPER (Swiss Church Aid) and ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America) in Serbia, hosted by EHO
- The Eurodiaconia Secretariat will use the input received during the network meeting to formulate recommendations to the European Commission on the future EU Roma Strategy.
- The Eurodiaconia Secretariat will continue its advocacy work on Roma inclusion, with particular attention to the situation of Roma EU mobile citizens.





MEETING NOTES

PART I: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF EU DEVELOPMENTS

- **Introduction and updates from Eurodiaconia**

After a word of welcome and brief introduction to the programme for the following two days, Célimène Bernard, Policy Assistant at Eurodiaconia, gave some updates from Eurodiaconia on the latest developments of EU Roma Policies and Eurodiaconia's activities related to Roma inclusion.

She reminded participants of the role of the EU in Roma policies and recalled the instruments and frameworks existing at EU level. She particularly insisted on the EU Framework for national Roma integration Strategies, which sets goals to be achieved by 2020 in four key areas: employment, education, housing and healthcare. However, the Midterm Review has shown that there have been limited achievements and impacts on Roma inclusion. She explained that as the framework is coming to an end in 2020, Eurodiaconia will engage in the discussion with the EU Institutions on the future of the strategy.

Then, participants were informed on Eurodiaconia's work on Roma inclusion at EU level, including the Policy Paper on "*Promoting Roma inclusion*" from January 2017, and the mapping "*Improving health and housing conditions of Roma: Good practices from Eurodiaconia members*", which was published a couple of days after the network meeting. She finished her intervention by calling on the participants to actively take part in the discussion around the future of the EU Framework for national Roma integration Strategies as Eurodiaconia will use this input and actively engage with EU institutions to push for its members assessments and views.

- **Presentation of Helsinki Deaconess Institute: "Boldly working for human dignity", Olli Holmström**

Olli Holmström, Director of the Helsinki Deaconess Institute (HDI) gave a quick overview of HDI's work with people at risk of social exclusion. HDI was created in 1867 as a small hospital during a year of famine. Since then, HDI has developed a wide range of activities towards a large public. Today HDI provides protection and advice for migrants, youth support, care and rehabilitation for children and families, support for asylum seekers and undocumented migrants, homes for long-term homeless people, care and homes services for the elderly, low threshold support and activity, help for substance abusers, coaching for jobseekers and rehabilitation of victims of torture. One of the most important aspect of HDI's philosophy is to work with people, not on their behalf.



Participants also had the opportunity of doing a tour around HDI's facilities, which include Housing First and other types of accommodation for vulnerable groups and several support facilities.



PART II: PROMOTING ROMA INCLUSION IN FINLAND

- **The situation of Roma in Finland, Marko Stenroos**

Marko Stenroos, PhD candidate at the University of Helsinki is Finnish Roma himself and worked during two years on the grassroot level with Roma communities in the eastern part of Helsinki. This experience makes him critical of the term of integration, which he develops in his research.

To start, he gave a quick overview of Roma history in Finland (more on the [Digital Archive of the Roma](#)), which impacts the current situation of Roma (education, employment etc). Before the 1970s the policies towards the Roma population were developed around an assimilation strategy. In this context, some Roma children were taken away from their parents to be placed in Children's homes. The dynamic changed with the first protest in 1971 where Roma people dared to speak about their rights and a law in 1975 to improve Roma housing conditions. Today there are about 10.000 Finnish Roma, according to estimations.

In view of Roma policy today, he shares the view of many Roma academics that the Roma decade of inclusion (2005-2015) failed and that the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies had only very limited impact. He also expressed regret for the fact that Roma policies are not considering the social realities of the Roma and how they themselves perceive society. For him, this lack of recognition can explain the failure of Roma integration and inclusion policies.

He also gave a brief presentation of the Roma civil monitor, which is a pilot project initiated by the European Parliament and managed by the European Commission and helps monitoring different policy developments in 27 EU Member States. In Finland he has also been part of two different projects funded by the European Social Fund: one for the promotion of education, skills and lifelong learning and one on the prevention of poverty and social exclusion. In both projects, many partners are involved (Roma associations, municipalities, educational institutions etc) and a participatory approach is used. However, he pointed to the problem, that often only the Roma elite is participating, representing only a segment of the Roma population.

Finally, he presented how the municipal youth work was restructured in Helsinki from centralized Roma youth work to mobile Roma youth work and collaboration, which manages to better reach young Roma people. In answer to some questions from participants, he explained that the Roma are a recognized minority since about 15 years. He also explained the relation between the Roma elite and the rest of the Roma population, as there is a socio-economic structure inside the Roma population. Despite being rather middle-class and not rich, compared to the general population, they are seen as Roma elite and others sometimes feel they are forgetting their Roma background.

- **“Romani inclusion and well-being project”, Anneli Weiste-Paakanen**

Anneli Weiste-Paakanen from the Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare, an independent government research institute presented the study “*Romani inclusion and well-being project*” funded by the European Social Fund, which will be published by the end of the year.

It is the first quantitative study done since the census of 1970, after which date ethnic data collection has been forbidden in Finland. Its objective is to collect data on Roma health and wellbeing which is comparable with the data from other population surveys and giving a baseline to assess the impact of policies on the situation of Roma in Finland. 300 participants took part in the study, which consisted in a health examination and a long-structured interview (questions on living conditions, employment, experiences of communication etc) on a voluntary basis. One of the challenges for conducting the study, was related to the difficulty of gaining trust among the Roma population due to the long history of Roma discrimination. A pre-study with focus group interviews helped to understand cultural sensitivities and to know which questions could be asked. Furthermore, a participatory approach and the use of Roma mediators also helped building trust with the community.

The final results of the study will be available by December 2018 and will be used in several ways. The result will show the need for additional activities in the area and the hope is to receive new funding to develop projects



improving the well-being of Roma communities in Finland. Furthermore, the participant Roma communities have been strengthened through the study and new grassroots Roma NGOs have been created. Those small NGOs could apply for a grant and be backed by the Institute. Another participant was interested to know if the view of the social workers involved in the study on the Roma population changed, which was confirmed by the speaker.

PART III: MEMBER PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

- **Working with EU migrant Roma, Johanna Eidse-Fraenke**

Johanna Eidse-Fraenke presented the work of the Church City Mission in Oslo with EU vulnerable migrants, out of which many are Roma.

In 2007, with the enlargement of the European Union, EU migrants from Romania arrived for the first time to Norway. While EU migrants were not only composed of Roma from Romania, these were the most vulnerable ones generally begging in the streets and being in bad health conditions. Even if the numbers were relatively small, they were very visible in the streets and the media presented them then as dangerous migratory wave. This was a new situation as there had been no visibly poor people in Norway before, thanks to the welfare state. Therefore, one of the most important tasks of the Church City Mission in Oslo was to present new narratives to the society and to change the perception of the population. They developed different projects targeting vulnerable EU migrants: a health care centre for undocumented migrants, an emergency centre, a pilot project (little emergency centre for migrants with further needs), and a resource centre.

In 2009 they opened the health care centre for undocumented migrants in cooperation with the Red Cross. At the opening people were scared that it could lead to arrests inside the centre. 10 years later, the opinion of the population has changed and now health care for undocumented migrants is not a debate anymore. The project receives funds from the municipality of Oslo and especially the Romanian speaking staff leads to the establishment of good relations and trust with the users.

The emergency centre was also opened in cooperation with the Red Cross to provide humanitarian aid through shelter to people living in the street. As for the health care centre, at the beginning of the project, the Church City Mission in Oslo invested its own money and receives now also funds from the municipality of Oslo. Most of the population is quite positive about the project because they have seen that it didn't lead to an additional influx of migrants.

Finally, a small shelter for the most vulnerable migrants was developed as pilot project. The small centre is a place where people with serious mental health or health issues can stay for a couple of weeks and are closely followed by social workers and a nurse. The project has now ended but they hope to re-open it at the beginning of 2019.

In response to some questions, Johanna explained that at the beginning the relation with the municipality was inexistent. But as the projects were going well, last year the municipality provided some funding, which was a major positive change and facilitates their work significantly. However, next year there will be elections in Norway and the situation might change.

- **Working with autochthonous Roma, Sladjana Jovanovic**

Sladjana Jovanovic from the Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation (EHO) presented their work with autochthonous Roma in Serbia.

In Serbia, about 200 000 Roma are living in permanent settlements, most of the time in bad housing conditions. According to official data, in 2015 38% of those houses were not connected to water supply systems, 74% were not connected to any sewage and 80% of the houses were built illegally. Those settlements show the long-lasting systemic discrimination of Roma, their lack of political power and the revelatory of a non-active citizenship. Starting from this observation, EHO developed a participatory approach model (called DDM model)



to upgrade houses in the settlements. The key component of the project is a multi-sectoral and human rights-based approach, developed in 6 steps:

1. Advocacy toward the government to integrate those settlements in the urban plan.
2. Supporting legalization of illegally built Roma houses
3. Improvements of sanitation and housing conditions. Hygienic minimum and then renovation.
4. Securing access to basic communal infrastructure
5. Health and environment workshops with supported Roma families
6. Resetting Roma families from unsafe and unsecured areas.

EHO is developing this approach all over Serbia. The core team of the project is composed of 3 an engineer, an architect and an animator (from the community). Each project in a new settlement starts with different informative fora with the concerned municipality. During one of the meetings, a settlement developing board, composed of people which will be involved in the different meeting with the municipalities, is elected. Then, the core team does a survey on the living conditions of families in the settlement and goes from house to house to assess the situation and select the beneficiaries. Depending on the budget, up to 100-150 families are supported each year.

After that, the detailed planning of the individual construction interventions with the families can begin. In this project, 3 different types of interventions can be chosen depending on the situation. The families and the core team must agree on one of them.

1. **Standard solution:** building a bathroom and small house repairs. 2 000 euros per families. Results since 2008: 1 068 bathrooms.
2. **Massive house repair:** reconstruction of part of the house. 3000 euros. 60 done by the end of 2017.
3. **building a small core house:** for example, if the house can't be improved or has burned etc. 1 or 2 room, it can be expended later by the family. From 4500 to 5500 euros.

The most important point is that families are active stakeholders of the process. They participate in the decision-making and basic construction work.

Participants wondered about the selection criteria for the upgrading. Sladjana explained that they have transparent, written selection criteria. The families must answer a detailed questionnaire which assesses the socio-economic conditions of the family (education, income, legal status), the condition of the houses (access to the infrastructure, existence of a bathroom or not) and the number of family members. With these selection criteria, usually the poorest families are coming first on the list.

- **Group work: Which are the key elements of success to support Roma accessing healthcare and adequate housing?**

Following the presentations, the participants were split into small groups to discuss the key elements of success in supporting Roma in accessing healthcare and adequate housing.

One of the identified key success factors was the involvement of the local Roma communities in the project and approaches that aim at empowering them by working closely together. This would also mean supporting Roma communities in speaking out and better understanding what they need, for example regarding the schools for their children. Equally important was the participation of other stakeholders, such as the municipalities. It was also considered essential to provide long-term support and have a long-term view of the project which needs to last as long as the need exists.

It was also stressed that the dedication of organisations toward Roma inclusion and the importance of developing an increased understanding of the Roma communities was crucial for well-functioning projects. In addition, the projects should be transparent and have a clear vision of what the project should achieve.



Challenges concerned communication and also the problem of responsibilities and accountability of the stakeholders and the question to whom and how the Roma community should be accountable. It was also shared that the lack of knowledge about the Roma communities and culture could also create difficulties.

PART IV: THE EU FRAMEWORK ON NATIONAL ROMA INTEGRATION STRATEGIES

- **EU Roma Strategy and national implementation today and tomorrow, Henna Huttu**

Henna Huttu, from the National Roma Contact Point in the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, began her presentation by describing the evolution of the policy development towards Roma in Finland. This evolved from assimilation policies in the 50s, to an integration approach and finally focussing on inclusion today.

The Finnish government developed its first strategy for the inclusion of Roma in 2009. The second strategy has been published recently for the period 2018-2022 and is developed around different lines: education; development of professional skills; promoting equal treatment, access to housing and the effective usage of basic services; and supporting the preservation and development of Romani language, arts and culture. Some lines of actions have been added to overcome shortcomings of the first programme. These include empowering Roma people and strengthening Roma participation on all societal levels; promoting Roma integration through the provision of accurate information, different means of communication and media; developing regional and local Roma work and international Roma work (ex: Finland is one of the biggest funders of the Council of Europe's work with Roma). A scoreboard has also been developed to better monitor what is happening at local level.

The Roma integration strategy also addresses mobile EU Roma and currently, a survey on mobile EU Roma and their needs for vocational education and employment is planned. She stressed the fact, that many of the measures for the indigenous Roma are also applicable to mobile Roma, for example the promotion of equality.

Despite the efforts of the government throughout the last years, some issues remain such as the still considerable inequalities in health between Roma and the general Finnish population. Ms Huttu stressed the important role of churches in the implementation of the NRIS, as they can intervene in spiritual and psychological support, in humanitarian help, in the promotion of good relations between different groups of population, in restorative justice practices at the community level, in the work against harmful cultural practices (early forced marriages and human trafficking), in supporting Roma education, employment, language and culture.

Henna Huttu finished her presentation by pointing to two useful websites, where several resources on Roma work can be accessed: Romani.fi and Romanit.fi.

- **World café on the Future of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies.**

For the discussion on the future EU Roma Strategy, the participants were invited to take part in a "world café", which was organised around 4 tables with different questions. The results will be used by the Eurodiaconia Secretariat to compile recommendations to the European Commission for the next EU Roma Strategy. The meeting report will only briefly summarize the outcomes of the discussion.

- **Table 1:** *According to your experience, what was the impact of the Roma Integration Strategy in your country, region or city? According to you, how has the situation of Roma evolved in the last years?*

The participants commonly agreed that in general Roma inclusion has not significantly changed, except for some improvements in the education sector and a **higher awareness among politicians** of the topic in certain countries. It seems that the local Roma communities are not aware of the National strategies, although NGOs active at the local and national levels generally are. The participants found that there is a need of **more contribution from the local Roma communities** and not only from the big organization and leaders.



- **Table 2:** *According to your experience, what are the most important issues concerning the integration of Roma which should be addressed by the strategy? The last EU framework focused on education, housing, employment and healthcare. Should this focus continue? Are there other issues which the strategy should include?*

The focus on education, employment, housing and health care should be continued because the needs remain very high in those fields. Furthermore, the participants noted other important issues concerning the integration of Roma: giving opportunities for **specific target groups**; **promote social entrepreneurship and sustainable employment** and create a forum to discuss the failures and to understand them. The participants also stated the importance to **promote the rights of Roma mobile EU citizens**.

- **Table 3:** *According to you, which concrete targets on Roma inclusion should Member States achieve by 2030?*

Participants agreed that there was a need for **more awareness raising and sensitisation of the general population about the fact that Roma are a recognized minority**. Concerning education, **Romani language** should be introduced in school curricula, vocational training and apprenticeship should be further developed. Poverty should be addressed, amongst others through the provision of adequate social services. Regarding employment, the **recognition of informal skills** (e.g. housekeeping, cleaning) should be further developed. The participants also discussed about the rights and obligations of EU Roma migrants and how the receiving countries should use the contribution that those persons can make to society.

- **Table 4:** *Which recommendations would you make to your government to improve the inclusion of Roma?*

One of the most important recommendations of the participants is to have an adequate **budget** to implement the National Roma Integration Strategies, which in many countries is not the case. Furthermore, a governmental body should be **responsible of the Roma issues**, if not a ministry, a State secretary should at least exist and coordinate policies with the different ministries. It was also stressed that **employees of public services should receive culturally sensitive and legal training on working with Roma people**. Finally, participants also wondered whether it would be possible to remove the obligation to have a permanent address in order to receive identity documents.

PART V: STUDY VISIT AND CONCLUSION

- **Hirundo drop-in Centre**

The meeting finished with a study visit to the Hirundo drop-in Centre run by HDI. The participants were welcomed by the staff of the centre, which also includes several Roma. They had the opportunity of doing a tour through the centre and were presented the different support possibilities the centre is offering.

The Hirundo drop-in Centre is a community centre in Helsinki which provides Roma migrants with a place of support, community and feeling of being welcome. The Hirundo drop in Centre is opened five days per week, from 10 am to 4 pm, offering a place to rest, to relax, warm food and access to a computer. Furthermore, the users of the Centre can have access to showers, wash their clothes and receive support to access healthcare services. Most of the staff of the Centre speak Romani, Romanian or Bulgarian which facilitates the relations with the users.

Since the beginning of the year a social enterprise is also connected to Hirundo and helps users to do small paid jobs. The biggest project is a catering project, which employs some of the Roma women to cook for events. Furthermore, a partnership with a school that does vocational training for cleaners, allows to validate the cleaning skills of some of the users, who can then be employed under regular contracts for cleaning. These employment related projects are a crucial step forward for Hirundo to better support its users into autonomy and improve their social inclusion.



- **Feedback and Conclusions**

Overall the Network Meeting was very appreciated by all participants. The external speakers and project presentations as well as the opportunities to exchange with colleagues also during the breaks were very appreciated. Most participants felt that they had learned new things or received good inputs, which they could take back home.

Several recommendations for future meetings have been made. It was requested to have more time for exchange for example through longer breaks or more time for questions after presentations. There was also the question of having better Roma representation during the Network Meeting, which would also need to adapt the structure of the meeting. Oslo City Mission has positive experience with such meetings and would be willing to help in re-thinking the Network Meeting structure and preparation. It was also suggested to work more on concrete actions or recommendations which could be pushed forward together on national and European level.

Participants also raised several ideas for topics for next year's Roma Network Meeting. It was suggested to discuss the role of churches for Roma communities, focus on discrimination and anti-gypsyism (invite Roma to join and explain when and how they feel discriminated and what can be done against it), address education of Roma children with special needs or discuss how we understand integration or inclusion and how can we create a space for Roma within our societies.

Finally, the next Roma Network Meeting has been announced. It will be a joint meeting, organised in cooperation with HEKS/EPER (Swiss Church Aid) and ELCA (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America), taking place in Serbia and hosted by EHO, from 18th to 20th September (tbc).





AGENDA

27 September 2018

09.00 – 9.30	Registrations and Coffee
09.30 – 10.30	Introduction
10.30 – 11.00	Updates from Eurodiaconia
11.00 – 11.45	Keynote Address <i>The situation of Roma in Finland</i> Marko Stenroos Ph.D candidate, University of Helsinki
11.45 – 12.15	Presentation of HDI's work at Alpikattu Mika Paasoleinen
12.15 – 13.00	Lunch
13.00 – 14.00	Project Presentation <i>"Romani Inclusion and Well-being project"</i> Anneli Weiste-Paakkanen Finnish National Institute for Health and Welfare
14.00 – 15.00	Member Project Presentations I <i>Healthcare and Housing for mobile Roma</i> Church City Mission, Norway
15.00 – 15.15	Coffee Break
15.15 – 16.30	Member Project Presentations II <i>Healthcare and Housing for indigenous Roma</i> Ecumenical Humanitarian Organisation (EHO), Serbia
16.30 – 17.30	Group Work <i>Which are the key elements of success to support Roma accessing healthcare and adequate housing?</i>
19.30	Dinner

28 September 2018

8.30 – 9.30	Finnish National Roma Contact Point <i>The EU Roma Strategy and national implementation today and tomorrow</i> Henna Huttu Ministry of Social Affairs and Health
9.30 – 9.45	Coffee Break
9.45 – 12.00	World Café – Group work <i>What needs to be included in the EU's post 2020 Roma Strategy?</i>
12.00 – 15.30	Lunch and Study Visit to Hirundo HDI drop-in service for Roma EU migrants Hämeentie 31, Helsinki
15.30 – 16.00	Conclusions & Evaluation