

Regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs

In addition to the National Advisory Board there are four Regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs in conjunction with Regional State Administrative Agencies. The Regional Advisory Boards operate as cooperation organs between the Roma and authorities on local and regional level. The aim of the Regional Advisory Boards is to develop the living conditions of Roma on regional and local level. Their work is also aimed to enhance equality and prevent discrimination against Roma. In addition, the Regional Advisory Boards provide an opportunity for Roma to participate in the decision making process about issues concerning their lives.

The tasks and status of the National and Regional Advisory Boards are based on statutes issued by the government.

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The National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs

The National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs aims to promote equal participation of Roma in Finnish society, to improve their living conditions and socio-economic position and promote Roma culture. The Advisory Board functions both as an expert organ and a forum for mutual cooperation between the Roma community and public administration. The National Advisory Board on Roma Affairs operates in conjunction with the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health. The Advisory Board was appointed for the first time in 1956.

The Government appoints the Advisory Board for three years at a time. The Advisory Board consists of a chairperson, a vice-chairperson and a maximum of 16 other members. Half of the members represent the Finnish Roma community. The rest of them represent the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Employment and the Economy, Ministry of the Environment and Finnish National Board of Education.

The Advisory Board employs a full-time General Secretary and a part-time secretary. The General Secretary prepares the work of the Advisory Board and implements its decisions. The chairperson of the Board is usually a current member of the Finnish Parliament.

The Advisory Board convenes annually 6 to 8 times. A subsection called "work section" attached to the Advisory Board prepares the issues to be brought up in its meetings. Experts in certain fields may be appointed as members of the work section. The Advisory Board organizes annual seminars to which both authorities and representatives of the Roma community are invited. The topics of these seminars are related to current themes pointed out in the annual action plans of the Board. The Advisory Board is also engaged in Nordic and international cooperation.

Tasks and responsibilities

The tasks of the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs include:

- monitoring the development of social participation and living conditions of the Roma community in order to promote equality;
- taking initiatives and issuing proposals in order to improve the economic, educational, social, cultural and living conditions of the Roma and in order to enhance employment opportunities of Roma;
- promoting the activities aimed to prevent discrimination against the Roma;
- promoting actions aimed to strengthen the Roma language and culture;
- supporting the work of the Regional Advisory Boards on Romani Affairs;
- participating in Nordic, European and international cooperation on promoting the rights and improving the living conditions of Roma.

In 2009 the first National Policy on Roma was launched. The policy is aimed to enhance the social inclusion and equality of the Roma in all areas of life. The National Policy on Roma is in effect until 2017. During this time the Policy sets a framework for the activities of the Advisory Board. The Advisory Board monitors and supports the implementation of the National Policy on Roma.

The Advisory Board has a Finnish website:
www.romani.fi.

Cooperation

The Advisory Board on Romani Affairs has had an influence on the development of Finnish legislation and administration on Roma related issues. As an initiative undertaken by the Advisory Board a Roma Education Team was established in the Finnish National Board of Education in 1994. In 2000 the rights of Roma to maintain and develop their own language and culture were included in the Constitution.

The main focus of the activities of the Advisory Board is on national level. The scope and meaning of international cooperation has significantly increased over the recent years, however. The development of international and national legislation in the fields of human rights, minority rights and discrimination has brought new tasks.

The Advisory Board works in close cooperation with public administration, organizations and other institutions relevant to Roma. The Advisory Board also monitors closely the work of the Council of Europe, the European Union and OSCE aimed to enhance the equality and participation of Roma in society.