

“I get the feeling that these people
really accept who I am”

The well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights

Elina Weckström, Karri Kekkonen & Outi Kekkonen



LAPSIASIAVALTUUTETTU
OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN

**”I get the feeling that these people really accept
who I am”**

**The well-being of Roma children and the realisation
of their rights**

Elina Weckström, Karri Kekkonen & Outi Kekkonen



LAPSIASIAVALTUUTETTU
OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN



“I get the feeling that these people really accept who I am.”

The well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights

Elina Weckström, Karri Kekkonen & Outi Kekkonen

Publications of the Ombudsman for Children in Finland 2023:4

Ombudsman for Children in Finland & The Child Strategy, 2023

ISBN (pdf): 978-952-400-426-8

ISSN (pdf): 1798-4009

Graphic design: Hansaprint Oy/Suunnittelutoimisto Tammikuu Oy

Photographs: Office of the Ombudsman for Children/Tuula Ruotsalainen

Photographs included in the report have been taken in connection with the activities of Jyväskylä Roma Youth Association. Children planned the photographs in cooperation with a professional photographer based on the results of the interviews for the study.

Illustration (p. 23): Linda Saukko-Rauta/RedanRedan Oy

Sisällys

Summary	5
Stötjiba Summary in Roma language	6
Tiivistelmä Summary in Finnish	7
Sammandrag Summary in Swedish	8
Foreword	9
Foreword by the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs	11
Foreword by the National Child Strategy	13
Roma in Finland	15
1. Introduction	17
2. Overview of previous studies	19
3. Implementation of the study	21
3.1 Contacting participants	22
3.2 Acquisition of research material	22
3.3 Analysis	26
4. Well-being and realisation of rights as described by Roma children	29
4.1 Leisure	29
4.2 School	33
4.3 Well-being	36
4.4 Relationships	47
4.5 Future	55
5. Discussion	61
5.1 Ethical discussion	61
5.2 Conclusions and proposed measures	63
Sources	66

Summary

”I get the feeling that these people really accept who I am”:

The well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights

The purpose of the survey was to examine the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights in the words of the children themselves. There is very little information available on Roma children in Finland. Roma children cannot be identified from registers, because Finland’s legislation prohibits keeping statistics on ethnic background. Qualitative surveys have mainly collected information from adults, so Roma children have seldom participated in studies or surveys. The results of this survey provide up-to-date information, for example to the Roma community and decision-makers, to support decision-making, development and other activities.

The survey was carried out in 2022 by the Office of the Ombudsman for Children as part of the National Child Strategy. It was taken by children aged 11–17 across Finland who identify as Roma. Eighteen children were interviewed for the survey. An electronic questionnaire was then drawn up based on the interviews. The questionnaire was taken by 93 children identifying as Roma.

The results of the survey can be boiled down to four themes related to well-being and the realisation of rights. They are 1) the significance of family and relatives; 2) pride in Roma culture and wish to learn the Roma language; 3) experiences of bullying and harassment and 4) future plans and dreams.

According to the results, the children felt the most important means for promoting their well-being and the realisation of their rights to be increasing awareness of Roma culture, meetings between Roma children and the majority population, changing the majority population’s attitude towards Roma, and the ability to see Roma children as individuals.

Based on the survey, the most important measure would be to support Roma children in various transitional stages of childhood and youth, such as starting school, changing schools, starting hobbies, secondary education choices and starting to use traditional Roma dress.

Keywords: Children, Roma, Roma children, minority, well-being, rights of the child

Stötjiba

”Vela pinsiba, at doola horttas dena tšiňkeske so me som”:

Kaalengo kentengo tšiňko aaňhíba ta horttibongo tšatšjiba

Roobibosko starkiba sas te reetavel kaalengo kentengo tšiňko aaňhíba ta horttibongo tšatšjiba jakkes sar kenti kokares rakkavena. Finitiko kaalengo kentenna hin horttas kutti džaaniba, Kaalengo kenti na vojuvela te pinsaven registrengo materiaalengo botnosta doolesko ĥaal at Finitiko themmesko laaga niekavela statistikengo tšeeriba etnosko botnosta. Aro kvalitatiivo roodibi hin samlade džaaniba ĥeeresko saakakiires baro komujenna, jakkes at kaalengo kenti hin biofti liine dielos aro roodibi. Dauva roodibosko ĥluutibi rekkavena aka tiijakiro džaaniba naaluno merknoske kaalengo sankibonge ta ĥluutibosko tšeeriboskiirenge fendjibosko buttijako, ĥluutibosko ta aktiviteetengo jelpiboske.

Dauva roobiba sas tšerdo aro kentengo saakengo traadiboskiiresko ofisia bereň 2022 ta ĥunjudiilo aro themmeskiiro kentengo strategios. Aro douva liine dielos 11-17 bereňhengiuro kenti, koon pinsavena peen kaalenge Finitiko themmesko saare ringenna. Roodibosko ĥaal tšerde rakkiba 18 kentensa. Rakkibosko tšeeribongo botnosta laagade elektronisko puňhibosko formulaaros, kai svaarade 93 kenti, koon pinsavena peen kaalenge.

Roodibosko ĥluutibi vojuvela te stötjaven aro staar hilibi so neerjuvena tšiňko aaňhíba ta horttibongo tšatšjiba. Doola hin 1) huupako ta ĥleňtako veera; 2) broosniba kaalengo kultturesta ta haaga te sikjuvel pes kaalengo tšimb; 3) kvinnibosko ta froo dikkibosko pinsibi ta 4) tenkibi avibosko tiijata ta suune.

ĥluutibongo botnosta kenti dikne, at koni fuortunide maneeri sar te tšuuven naal tšiňko aaňhíba ta horttibongo tšatšjiba hin te tiljaven džaaniba kaalengo kulttuuresta, kaalengo kentengo ta gaajengo tšetane prissi aavibi, at gaaje paruveenas sar joon tenkavena kaalenna ta hajuvenas te streffaven kaalengo kenti sar iek ĥlaagakiuro komuja.

Roodibosko botnosta koni fuortunide tšeeriba hin te ĥaňtaven kaalengo kenti aro vauro ĥlaaga paribi maňkar kentiba ta terniba, jakkes sar aro skoolako džaabenosko byrjiba, skoolako pariba, phirro tiijako tšeeribongo byrjiba, vauro trappako skoolibosko velkibi ta kaalengo koolengo rikkibosko byrjiba.

Saakako laave: Kenti, kaale, kaalengo kenti, minoriteetos, tšiňko aaňhíba, kentosko horttibi

Tiivistelmä

”Tulee fiilis, et nää oikeesti hyväksyy mikä mä oon”:

Romanilasten hyvinvointi ja oikeuksien toteutuminen

Selvityksen tarkoituksena oli tarkastella romanilasten hyvinvointia ja oikeuksien toteutumista lasten itsensä kertomana. Suomen romanilapsista on saatavilla hyvin vähän tietoa. Rekisteriaineistojen perusteella romanilapsia ei voida tunnistaa, koska Suomen lainsäädäntö kieltää etnisen taustan tilastoinnin. Laadullisissa selvityksissä tietoa on kerätty pääasiassa aikuisilta, joten romanilapset ovat harvoin olleet tutkimusten tai selvitysten osallistujina. Tämän selvityksen tulokset tarjoavat ajankohtaista tietoa esimerkiksi romaniyhteisölle ja päättäjille päätöksenteon, kehittämistyön ja toiminnan tueksi.

Selvitys toteutettiin osana kansallista lapsistrategiaa lapsiasiavaltuutetun toimistossa vuoden 2022 aikana. Siihen osallistui 11–17-vuotiaita itsensä romaniksi kokevia lapsia eri puolilta Suomea. Selvitystä varten haastateltiin 18 lasta. Haastattelujen pohjalta laadittiin sähköinen kyselylomake, johon vastasi 93 romaniksi itsensä kokevaa lasta.

Selvityksen tulokset voidaan tiivistää neljään hyvinvointia ja oikeuksien toteutumista lähestyvään kokonaisuuteen. Nämä ovat 1) perheen ja suvun merkitys; 2) ylpeys romanikulttuurista ja halu oppia romanikieltä; 3) kokemukset kiusaamisesta ja syrjinnästä sekä 4) tulevaisuudensuunnitelmat ja unelmointi.

Tulosten mukaan lapset nostivat tärkeimmiksi keinoiksi hyvinvoinnin ja oikeuksien toteutumisen edistämiseksi tiedon lisäämisen romanikulttuurista, romanilasten ja pääväestön yhteiset kohtaamiset, pääväestön romaneja kohtaan olevien asenteiden muutoksen sekä kyvyn kohdata romanilapset yksilöinä.

Tärkeimpänä toimenpiteenä selvityksen pohjalta nousee romanilasten tukeminen erilaisissa lapsuuden ja nuoruuden nivelvaiheissa kuten koulun aloituksessa, koulun vaihtamisessa, harrastusten aloituksessa, toisen asteen koulutusvalinnoissa sekä romanivaatteiden käytön aloituksessa.

Asiasanat: Lapset, romanit, romanilapset, vähemmistö, hyvinvointi, lapsen oikeudet

Sammandrag

”Det känns som att de accepterar mig på riktigt”:

Romska barn och ungas välfärd och tillgodosendandet av deras rättigheter

Syftet med utredningen var att granska romska barn och ungas välfärd och tillgodosendandet av deras rättigheter utifrån barn och ungas egna berättelser. Det finns väldigt litet tillgänglig information om romska barn i Finland. Romska barn kan inte identifieras från registermaterial eftersom Finlands lagstiftning förbjuder statistik över etnisk bakgrund. Vid kvalitativa utredningar har man i huvudsak samlat in information från vuxna. Romska barn har sällan deltagit i utredningar eller redogörelser. Resultaten av den aktuella utredningen erbjuder uppdaterad information till exempel till den romska gemenskapen och till beslutsfattarna till stöd av beslutsfattandet, utvecklingsarbetet och verksamheter.

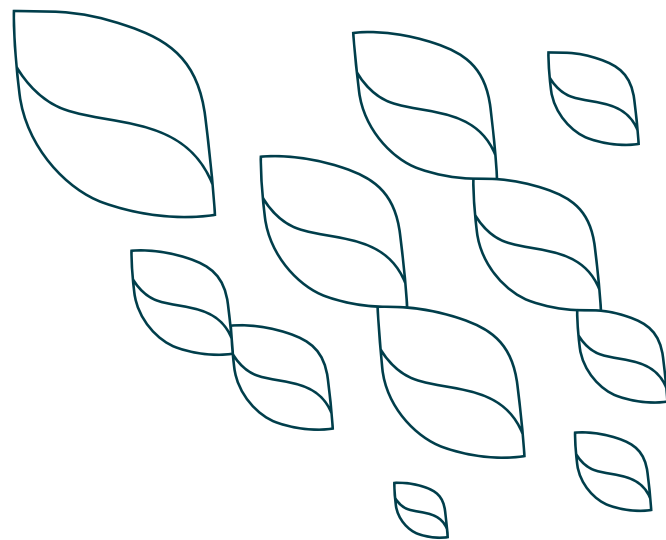
Utredningen genomfördes under år 2022 av barnombudsmannens byrå som en del av den nationella barnstrategin. I utredningen deltog 11–17-åringar som upplever sig själva som romska från olika delar av Finland. 18 barn intervjuades för utredningen. På basis av intervjuerna upprättades en digital frågeformulär som besvarades av 93 barn som upplever sig själva som romska.

Resultaten av utredningen kan sammanfattas i fyra helheter som förknippas med välfärd och tillgodosendande av rättigheter: 1) familjens och släktens betydelse; 2) stolthet över den romska kulturen och vilja att lära sig det romska språket; 3) erfarenheter om mobbning och diskriminering samt 4) framtidsplaner och drömmar.

Enligt resultaten ansåg barnen att de viktigaste sätten att främja deras välfärd och tillgodosendandet av deras rättigheter är att öka kunskapen om den romska kulturen, möten mellan de romska barnen och majoritetsbefolkningen, ändring av majoritetsbefolkningens attityder gentemot romer samt en förmåga att bemöta romska barn som individer.

Enligt utredningen är den viktigaste åtgärden att ge stöd till romska barn i de olika övergångsskedet under barndomen och ungdomen, till exempel när man börjar i skolan, byter skola, börjar med något fritidsintresse, väljer utbildning på andra stadiet samt börjar använda romska kläder.

Stickord: barn, romer, romska barn, minoritet, välfärd, barnets rättigheter



Foreword

When I first started my duties as the Ombudsman for Children in the spring of 2019, one of the first invitations I received was a request to speak at a conference of the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs in Oulu. In my speech, I criticised the lack of available research data on the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights. The wait for more extensive research has been long: the previous study on the subject was conducted in 2009 by Pekka Junkala and Sanna Tawah while Maria Kaisa Aula was the Ombudsman for Children. It was high time to get down to business and investigate what had happened in the past ten years. Pressure to examine the subject also came from an international authority: In its concluding observations, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child draw attention to the lack of information on Roma children in Finland.

Implementation of the study was made possible by the National Child Strategy, which included the study as one of its thirty measures in 2021 as proposed by the Ombudsman for Children. Successful implementation of the study required that Roma children found the matter important and wanted to participate in the study. All of our expectations were surpassed when the research team, with the support of the Roma community, found approximately a hundred children and young people aged 11–17 to participate in the study. Eighteen children provided valuable information on their well-being and the realisation of their rights in focused interviews, and 94 children responded to an electronic survey prepared on the basis of the interviews.

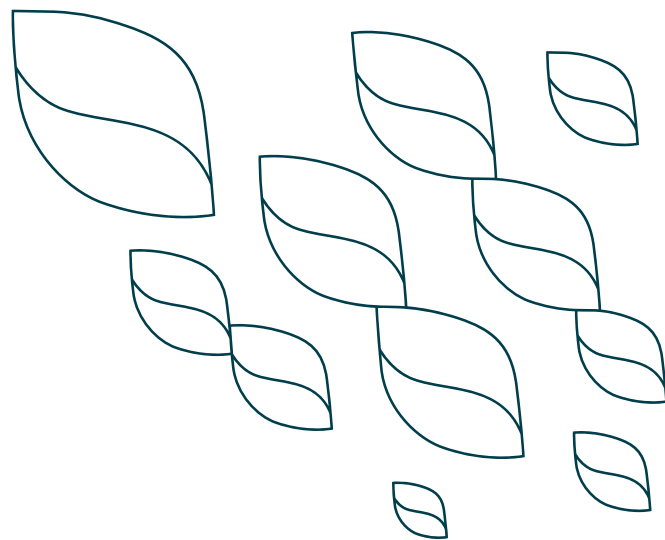
The responses of the children provide diverse insight into the lives of Roma children living in different parts of Finland. Roma culture is an important aspect of daily life, which is also influenced by mainstream youth culture and children's culture. Strong connections with family and relatives have an important meaning in the lives of Roma children. Roma children value and cherish the Romani language, Roma clothing and Roma customs. However, daily life is often overshadowed by common experiences of discrimination that create insecurity. This raises the question of how is it possible that Roma children continue to have to endure discriminatory attitudes and bullying. I find that the study calls for critical self-reflection in our society.

This study would not have been possible without our invaluable interest groups. We have had the privilege to witness impressive expertise and selfless readiness to help. I wish to express warm gratitude to the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs and the regional advisory boards on Romani affairs for collaboration before and during the implementation of the study. Enormous thanks to every child who participated in an interview or responded to the survey. This study would not have been possible without you. Smooth cooperation with local Roma actors made participation of the children possible. I would also like to thank all of you. Thank you to Jyväskylä Roma Youth Association for planning and executing the photographs included in this report.

Finally, a heartfelt thank you to the team who carried out the study – Elina, Karri and Outi. I believe that your open, genuine and broad-minded attitude together with your rock-solid skills and warm sense of humour have been key factors for the successful implementation of this study. Thank you.

Jyväskylä, Finland, 28 November 2022

Elina Pekkarinen
Ombudsman for Children



Foreword by the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs

The publication of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children reveals up-to-date information on the realisation of the rights and well-being of Roma children and young people in today's Finland as described by Roma children themselves. The study provides information on the experiences of Roma children and matters they deem important. The study supplements previous knowledge about the lives of Roma children. The children's own prioritisation of home, leisure, school and Roma culture was acknowledged when conducting the study.

The study helps better understand the importance of hearing the voices of Roma children and young people. It reminds us that all children have an equal right to a good life, which includes care and protection, as well as the right to participate and be heard. The study clearly shows that Roma children want to participate in and have more influence on matters related to their daily environments.



The children describe the significance of family and relatives, their pride in their own Roma culture and language, their plans for the future and their dreams. Unpleasant experiences of being bullied, discriminated against and feeling different from others also emerge in the results. However, it is clear based on the interviews that society is not seen as a threat or the children's own culture as an obstacle to achieving their hopes and dreams.

Hearing of children and young people leads us to better decisions on matters that concern them. Ascertaining the views of children and young people also benefits decision-makers. Increased interaction between municipal decision-makers and Roma children and young people is needed and desired. Attitudes and methods of adults have too often impeded genuine interaction; laws are not the obstacle. The well-being of children often relies on small but important things, many of which do not cost much.

As a national child welfare and social service organisation, Romano Missio greatly appreciates and welcomes this study. It feels good to have the voices of Roma children and young people heard on matters they find important.

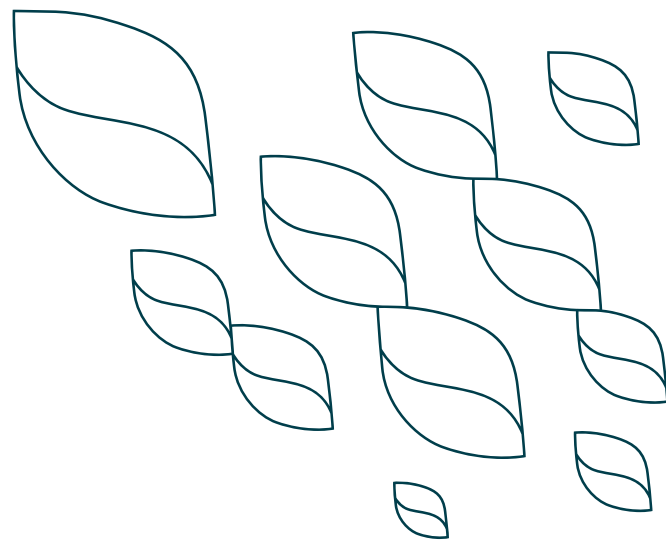
We wish to send a heartfelt thank you to the people working at the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and to others who have taken part in the project. Special thanks to the Roma children and young people who have participated in interviews and taken the survey!

The motto of Romano Missio is: Focus on Roma children! Romano kentos amengo mañkar!

It brings us pleasure to conclude that this motto has clearly been present when conducting this study.

On behalf of the working group for the study

Tuula Åkerlund
Executive Director
Romano Missio ry



Foreword by the National Child Strategy

The starting point for the National Child Strategy is a Finland for all children, which means building a society that is shared by everyone and where every child is important and valued and receives the support they need for their participation in the society. The Strategy is based on knowledge about the status of children, young people and families and on Finland's fundamental and human rights obligations.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has noted that the rights of Roma children in Finland are currently not realised equally with the rights of children belonging to other population groups, and the information available on their well-being is inadequate. The Committee has also drawn attention to discrimination against Roma and urged the State of Finland to strengthen efforts to promote the well-being of Roma children and combat discrimination more effectively.

The National Child Strategy is based on the notion that all children want to feel that they are part of a community and that they are included. They also want to be understood and receive information on what is going on around them, as well as to have a say in matters that concern them and which they find important. This study carried out by the Ombudsman for Children as part of the implementation of the National Child Strategy provides valuable information on the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights. At the same time, it places the focus on information provided by children themselves. How do Roma children experience their own culture and friendship? What do they dream of and what are their plans for the future? The study also reveals children's experiences on discrimination and bullying.

This report puts together up-to-date information on the well-being of Roma children to support decision-making. What makes the study particularly valuable is the fact that the study highlights solutions proposed by Roma children to promote their own well-being. Children have a lot of information and understanding concerning their own life that adults do not have, and it is important to obtain this information for the use of adults who make decisions or work with children.

A heartfelt thank you for this important report to the Ombudsman for Children and the team who worked on the study – Elina Weckström, Karri Kekkonen and Outi Kekkonen.

Johanna Laisaari

Secretary General for the National Child Strategy

Prime Minister's Office



Finland's first national child strategy was completed in 2021 (Finnish Government, 2021a). Preparing a report on the realisation of the welfare and rights of Sámi and Roma children in Finland is included as measure number 5 in the implementation plan for the National Child Strategy (Finnish Government, 2021b).

The implementation plan states the following: "Different human rights bodies have made a recommendation for Finland to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the rights of Sámi children and Roma children, and to improve the children's right to the provision of education and services in their own language. The rights of Sámi children and Roma children are currently not realised equally with the rights of children belonging to other population groups, and the information available on their well-being is inadequate. The measure is used to investigate the implementation of the rights of Sámi and Roma children and to compile up-to-date information on wellbeing to support decision-making. This work must be implemented together with stakeholders, and children and young people."

Roma in Finland

The Roma are a Finnish linguistic and cultural minority and have lived in Finland for more than 500 years. The number of Roma in Finland is estimated to be around 10,000. Approximately 3,000 Finnish Roma live in Sweden.

Finnish Roma are citizens of Finland and they have equal civil rights and responsibilities. The status of the Roma as a national, traditional minority is enshrined in the Constitution of Finland. They have a legal right to maintain and develop their own language and culture. The Romani language is part of the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family.

Roma culture values good manners and getting along with everyone. The most visible component of Roma culture in Finland is the minority's distinctive traditional dress. The traditional dress of a Romani woman has been influenced by peasant clothing from the early 1900s. This way of dressing is based on respect for older people. Roma who decide to adopt the traditional Romani dress typically start wearing it at the age of 17–20. The dress of a Romani woman is an everyday dress which does not prevent her from participating in education or working life.

The majority of Finnish Roma are members of the Lutheran Church. International Romani Day is celebrated on 8 April.

Compiled by Tuula Åkerlund, Romano Missio ry

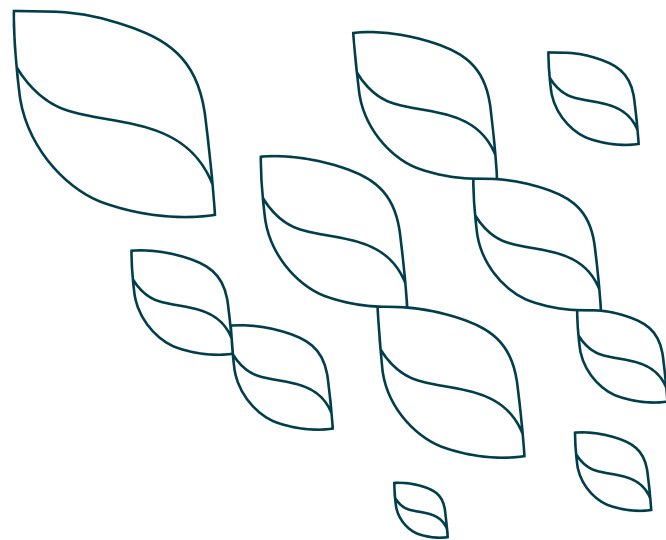
Further information on Roma in Finland

Website of the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs: romani.fi

Website of Romano Missio: <https://romanomissio.fi/roma-in-society/>

Website of the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare: thl.fi





1. Introduction

This study on the well-being of Roma children¹ and the realisation of their rights was carried out by the Office of the Ombudsman for Children in 2022 as part of the implementation of the National Child Strategy. A study on the well-being of Sámi children and the realisation of their right was conducted in parallel with this study (Weckström, Kekkonen & Kekkonen, 2023). Many previous studies have focused on the topics of disadvantage, discrimination and malaise, leaving the strengths, resources and positive aspects of Roma culture invisible. In addition to factors that hinder the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights, the report also focuses on factors that improve well-being and rights as described by the children.

The Ombudsman for Children has had regular contact with the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs. These discussions have led to the conclusion that there is not enough information on the well-being of Roma children. In the General Comments issued in connection with the processing of the fourth periodic report in 2011, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child urged Finland to pay special attention to the well-being of Sámi and Roma children and the realisation of their rights (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2011). It was considered important to examine the well-being of these children and the realisation of their rights from the perspective of the children themselves and as described by them.

Eighteen Roma children between the ages of 11 and 17 were interviewed for the study in different parts of Finland in the spring of 2022. A survey form was then drawn up on the basis of the interviews. The survey was taken by 93 children identifying as Roma. The results of the survey provide unique, up-to-date information on experiences of Roma children regarding their own well-being and realisation of their rights. The results can be utilised by parties such as the Roma community, decision-makers, researchers and people working with Roma children and youth to support decision-making, development and activities.

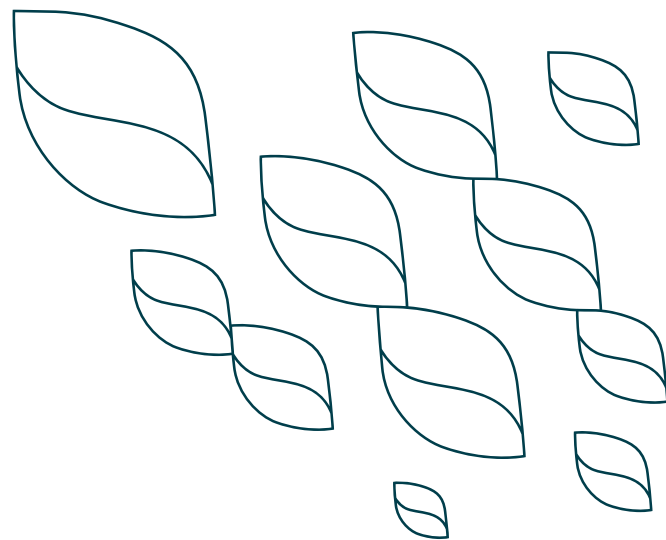
Chapter 2 of the report goes through previous research and study on Roma in Finland and participation of Roma children as providers of research data and as research subjects. Chapter 3 discusses the steps involved in carrying out the study. The chapter goes into more detail on the contacting

¹ All participants are referred to as children in the report in accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to the Convention, every human being below the age of eighteen years is a child.

of participants, acquisition of materials and analysis. Chapter 4 focuses on the results of the study from the perspectives of leisure, school, well-being, relationships and future, in accordance with the survey form structure. Chapter 5 discusses research ethical solutions and presents key conclusions of the study. To conclude proposes measures for improving the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights.



The Ombudsman for Children is tasked with assessing and promoting the realisation of the rights of children. The work is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by Finland. The work of the Ombudsman for Children is based on the Act on the Ombudsman for Children (1221/2004), and the duties of the Ombudsman include monitoring realisation of the rights of children and communicating this information to decision-makers, professionals, parents, children and young people. The Ombudsman for Children publishes studies and reports to carry out these duties.



2. Overview of previous studies

A relatively small number of studies focused on Roma children have been carried out in Finland. Based on the literature review for this study, the amount of information produced by Roma children themselves is particularly sparse. The Office of the Ombudsman for Children studied the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights in 2009 (Junkala & Tawah, 2009). It was the first published report to approach the subject as described by children themselves. The report gave several recommendations for improving the status and rights of children. The report has been widely utilised for research, education and decision-making.

A review of basic education of Roma pupils (Rajala et al., 2011) was carried out in 2011 with the aim of examining the state of basic education of Roma pupils and comparing its development with the results of the previous review conducted ten years earlier. The research material consisted of the interviews of 120 young Roma and 120 custodians of young Roma, as well as survey responses collected from the head teachers of 1,341 comprehensive schools. The results centered around the survey form responses of head teachers and the interviews of custodians instead of the thoughts and views of young people themselves.

A study on the Roma population as customers of services for children, young people and families (Boelius, 2017) was carried out in 2017 as part of the programme to address child and family services (LAPE). The study utilised previous research and no new research material was collected. The Roosa study on the well-being and inclusion of the Roma population in Finland (Weiste-Paakkanen, Lämsä & Kuusio, 2018) did not collect information from children. The results of the study highlighted discrimination experienced by young Roma adults, which had a bearing on their socio-economic status and well-being. Harassment and discrimination, difficulty finding work and need for social assistance was found to particularly heavily impact young women.

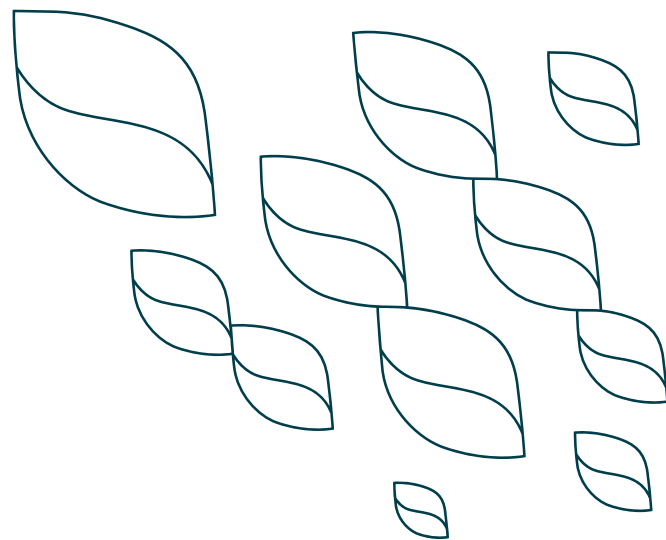
The participants of a study on Roma children in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and pre-primary education (Rajala & Schwartz, 2020) conducted in 2018–2019 consisted of custodians of Roma children in ECEC and pre-primary education as well as staff of ECEC and pre-primary education. The study was the first study to examine the situation of Roma children under school age in Finland.

Roma children's views on their daily life have been made visible by Angersaari (2011), who used the method of storycrafting with Roma children for her Master's thesis. The purpose of the thesis was to examine what Roma children had to say about their social status and environment. The research material consisted of 33 stories told by Roma children between the ages of 5 and 15. A key conclusion of Angersaari's thesis was that the roles in which children placed themselves ranged from victim to survivor and the environment consisting of their social relationships either supported or weakened their status. The children's stories revealed optimism and belief in the future.

Research on the Roma population has been conducted on an international level, but the unique culture and legal status of Roma in Finland should be taken into consideration when examining the results and conclusions of such research. Discussion about Roma in Finland primarily concerns the ethnic Roma minority living in Finland, and not the diverse groups of people leading a mobile lifestyle as is the case in most other European countries (Pulma, 2012). The traditional dress worn by Roma women in Finland is also a distinctive cultural feature not found in other countries (Madetoja, 2009).

Many studies on the Roma population have been hampered by lack of participants. For example, efforts to find young participants for a study on equality of the Roma in housing (Törmä & Huotari, 2018) were unsuccessful. Finding participants for the Roosa study (Weiste-Paakkanen, Lämsä & Kuusio, 2018) was difficult and time-consuming. There were not enough participants at the start of the study, but more participants were reached through intensified measures. New places where participation in the study was possible were established, opportunities to participate were made available in connection with events, a shorter version of the survey form was drawn up, various incentives were offered to participants, home visits were carried out and participants were assisted with the survey form (Weiste-Paakkanen, Lämsä & Kuusio, 2018).

Based on the results of a study by Stenroos et al. (2021), there is lack of confidence among the Roma community in them truly being heard in connection with decision-making, even when authorities ask for views of the Finnish Roma population. Distrust in the effectiveness of results and changes, such as reduction of discrimination against Roma or improved employment opportunities, is considered to lessen people's willingness to participate in studies. However, participation can be increased through close cooperation with stakeholders, as shown by the targeted and intensified data collection methods used for the study on Roma children in early childhood education and care and pre-primary education (Rajala & Schwartz, 2020) and the Roosa study (Weiste-Paakkanen, Lämsä & Kuusio, 2018).



3. Implementation of the study

In connection with preparing the implementation plan for the National Child Strategy (Finnish Government, 2021b), the Ombudsman for Children proposed funding of research into the well-being of Roma and Sámi children and the realisation of their rights. The study on Roma children was planned in the autumn of 2021 in a meeting with the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs and representatives of regional advisory boards on Romani affairs. The National Child Strategy granted the Office of the Ombudsman for Children funds for conducting the studies in 2022.

A total of 2.5 person years was made available as a resource for the studies. The study combined the pedagogical, sociological and cultural anthropological expertise of the team and their familiarity with childhood research and cultural research with the aim of examining well-being and realisation of rights from the perspective of children who belong to a minority. The research team immersed themselves in the culture and history of the Roma through the Kulttuurien koulu training programme organised by the Youth Academy, meetings with the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs and local Roma actors, documentaries on the life of Roma and available written materials.

The working group for the study (Appendix 1) included representatives from the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs and regional advisory boards on Romani affairs. The working group was tasked with helping the research team network with local interest groups, commenting on different stages of the study's implementation and sharing information on the study in their own networks. Members of the working group encouraged the research team to directly contact various Roma actors to build a network. It was openly agreed between the research team and the working group that members of the Roma community could instruct and guide the research team on matters related to culture and provide feedback if the team had not taken into consideration a key cultural factor in carrying out the study or in their activities. This was done to generate open dialogue built on trust and to support inclusion of the Roma community at all stages of the research process.

A joint steering group for the studies on Roma and Sámi children was also put together (Appendix 1). The steering group was tasked with supporting the research team, having critical discussions on the implementation of the study and scientifically assessing its progress. The steering group met four times during the course of the study. The research team also had contact with members of the steering group when necessary.

3.1 Contacting participants

The study started off with networking with local Roma actors. The Ombudsman for Children and the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs (2022) published a joint announcement on the launch of the study. Building trust with local interest groups and participants was crucial for the success of the study.

For the purpose of finding participants, the research team contacted local actors in advance to discuss the aim of the study and the importance of finding participating Roma children who are of different ages and genders and have diverse backgrounds. Local actors selected the children to be interviewed. For this reason, the interviewees selected for the interviews may have included children from Roma families that are interested in social issues, believe in the effectiveness of studies and have a positive attitude towards authorities. Similar distortion of representation can be observed with respect to research participants in general (Myllyniemi & Kiilakoski, 2019; Pääkkö & Gissler, 2018). Efforts were made to account for any distortion of representation when distributing the survey form, in order for the survey to reach children from as wide a variety of backgrounds as possible.

3.2 Acquisition of research material

The study aimed to provide as many Roma children as possible with an opportunity to participate in producing information. The work of the Ombudsman for Children and the National Child Strategy are focused on children under the age of 18. The minimum age limit for the study was set at 11 years to ensure that the child can read and write with ease. Children younger than this also have the ability and desire to participate in producing information, but it was not possible to use additional material acquisition methods for this study, which would have been required for inclusion of younger participants.

3.2.1 Focused interviews

The categories of national indicators reflecting the well-being of children (Ombudsman for Children, 2014), and discussions with various parties, such as the working group, the National Sports Council and the Voice of Children and Young People in Europe project, were utilised for preparing the interview structure (Appendix 7). The following were chosen as the themes of the interviews: 1) interests, 2) participation, 3) relationships, 4) emotions, 5) discrimination and protection, and 6) future. Interviewees were also asked to imagine what kinds of images they would use to tell others about matters that are important to them in Roma culture. The interview structure was trialed with two children of different ages and developed based on the trial.

Notices on the interviews were prepared for the interviewees and their custodians (Appendices 3 and 4), as well as a cartoon illustration on the implementation of the study (Image 1). The cartoon

illustration provided the interviewer with a tool with which to visually explain the course of the study to participants, as grasping the concepts and context of the research might be challenging for children.



Image 1 Cartoon illustration on the implementation of the study.

The goal was to interview 20 Roma children. The research team conducted the interviews. The interviewed children were contacted through Roma actors². The interviewers participated in meetings of the Roma community in different parts of Finland, and it was natural to conduct interviews in connection with these meetings. Local actors were asked to arrange a quiet space for conducting interviews. The children may have found being alone with two unfamiliar interviewers uncomfortable, so the participants were also offered a choice of participating in an interview together with one or more other children. It was important to provide the children with a pleasant and safe experience of interview participation.

Participation in an interview was voluntary. The children gave their consent to being interviewed by giving a negative or affirmative response to the interviewer's question on consent. Before asking the child for their consent to be interviewed, the interviewers told the child about the implementation of the study, the rights of research participants, privacy protection, voluntariness of participation and the possibility to stop the interview without any special reason. All of the children who came in for an interview were willing to be interviewed. One of the children was unable to attend the interview due to a last-minute impediment. It was possible for custodians to decline the participation of their child, as a contact person scheduled all interviews with custodians. Custodians were not asked for written consent.

Local actors were committed to the study's tight schedule, and interviews were conducted in March 2022. The children primarily participated in interviews in their free time. One interview was conducted on school premises during the school day. During the interviews, the participants were able to freely discuss the presented topics and the interviewers asked further questions or requested the participants to talk more about a specific subject. The interviews were recorded and saved as audio files. Introductory and closing discussions were not recorded.

The children were provided with an opportunity to give feedback at the end of their interview. One interviewed child stated: *"This was quite nice, to get to talk to people."* Feedback was positive in general, although some children were nervous about the interview. The children had thought about the interview in advance, as expressed by one child: *"I thought that this would be much worse."* The participants also felt that they got to talk about matters important to them, as described by one of the interviewed children: *"I didn't lose anything. I got to pretty much say my piece in this."* Each participating child received a hamburger restaurant gift card worth EUR 10 to thank them for their participation.

Eighteen children were interviewed for the study. A total of 12 interviews were conducted with individual children, pairs of children or groups of children. Nine of the interviewees were girls and nine were boys. Assumptions on gender were drawn on the basis of external factors. As background information, each child was asked which age group they belong to and whether they live in a city or a rural area. Six of the interviewees were aged 11–13 and twelve of the interviewees were aged 14–17. Eleven of the participants said that they live in a city, six in a rural area and one was unable say.

2 In order to protect the privacy of children who participated in the study, names of local actors and individual towns and cities are not mentioned in this report.

3.2.2 Survey

An electronic survey form (Appendix 5) was prepared on the basis of interviews of children. The working group and the steering group commented on a draft of the survey form. The length of the survey was the subject of particularly critical discussion and many interesting questions had to be left out. Two Roma children and three children from the majority population gave trial responses to the survey. The following were chosen as the themes of the survey: 1) leisure, 2) school, 3) well-being, 4) relationships and 5) future. Based on the trial responses, the time needed by children to complete the survey was estimated to be 10–20 minutes.

A link to the electronic survey prepared on the basis of the interviews was sent by email to the members of the working group and other national and local Roma actors in May 2022. They were asked to share the survey in their own networks with the accompanying message. In addition to the link to the survey, the email attachments included information for participants and custodians (Appendix 6). The goal was to get one hundred responses to the survey. As the number of responses received each week was low, the research team assumed that the survey had not reached children.

It was decided that the deadline would be extended over the summer break until the start of the school year. Opportunities for children to take the survey were discussed together with a youth worker working with Roma youth. It was decided that each participating child would receive a hamburger restaurant gift card worth EUR 10 to thank them for their participation. During the extended survey period, adults working with Roma children encouraged children to take the survey, and if the child so wanted, an adult would read them the questions and write the child's responses on the survey form. The participants liked this method of providing their responses, and the final number of completed survey forms was very close to the original goal.

The children responded to the survey in their free time. Taking the survey was voluntary. Custodians were not asked for consent for their child's participation in the survey, but rather the children were also able to independently respond to the survey after receiving a link to the electronic form.

The children were provided with an opportunity to express their opinion on the survey. Most of the respondents found the survey to be *“quite good”*, *“useful”* or *“important”*. One respondent described the survey as *“nice and fun. It was nice to explain my own opinions”*. Some considered the survey to be *“too long”*, *“difficult”* or *“boring”*. Several respondents expressed that they would not have responded to the survey alone, but the support of an adult helped. Some respondents found their possibility to respond to the survey and the study itself to be significant. One respondent stated that the survey *“helped clear my thoughts about myself and my culture.”* Another respondent reflected that *“this was awakening because discrimination has been normalised for me.”* The respondents also brought up their hopes that their responses will benefit people. It can be concluded on the basis of the responses that the children primarily viewed the survey in a positive light, and participation was considered important.

A total of 94 children responded to the survey. The survey research material consisted of the 93 completed survey forms, the respondents of which considered themselves to be Roma. Fifty-two of the Roma children who responded to the survey were girls and 40 were boys. One selected the option *“both, other, or I do not wish to specify.”* Twenty-eight of the respondents were aged 11–13 and 65 of the respondents were aged 14–17. Fifty of the respondents reported living in a suburb or outskirts of a large city, 16 in the centre of a small city or town, 15 in the centre of a large city and 11 in a sparsely populated area of a small city or town or in a rural area. One respondent was unable to specify their place of residence.

3.3 Analysis

The research material consisted of interviews of 18 children and survey responses of 93 children. The research material was analysed through content analysis and basic statistical methods.

Analysis of the interviews started with a discussion between the interviewers. Discussions took place after every interview, which helped in conducting the next interviews and in interacting with the interviewed children. The length of the recorded interviews varied between 21 min and 1 h 8 min. The total length of all the interviews was 7 h 37 min. The interview recordings were transcribed word for word. The total length of the transcribed material was 163 pages with a line spacing of 1.15. Direct identifying information was removed from the transcribed material. The transcribed text was reviewed by listening to the interviews and making notes, after which the audio files were deleted. The material was sorted using data-based content analysis.

Analysis of the survey responses started with the research team familiarising themselves with the material. Initial observations provided insight into the emphasis of responses and the functionality of the phrasing of questions. Many responses were written down by adults as dictated by children. It was delightful that the responses had been written down in accordance with the children’s way of speaking. The children had understood the questions and maintained interest in the survey all the way to the last questions, despite the length of the survey. The distribution of responses to different questions was even.

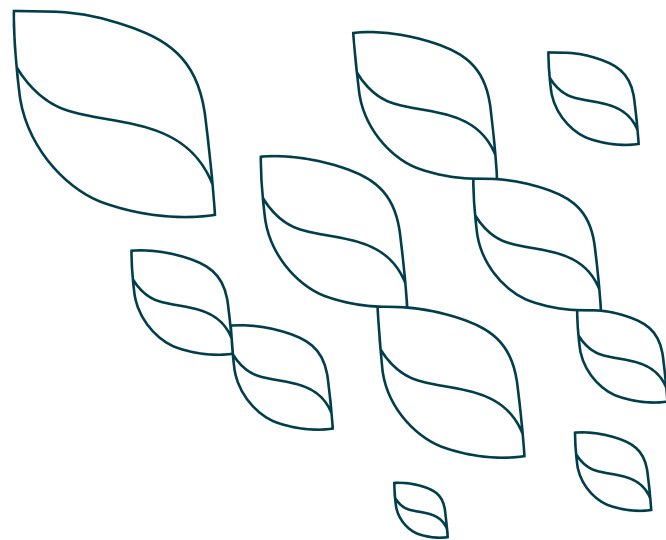
Responses to the multiple choice questions and responses to some of the open-ended questions were examined through basic distribution. The responses to each question were first grouped into categories on the basis of prevalence. Also the categories were then combined on the basis of the survey form themes.

The small sample size was taken into consideration when carrying out statistical analysis. Due to the low number of respondents, the quantitative results are not statistically significant. It should be noted that the sample size is relatively large in proportion to the number of 11–17-year-old Roma children living in Finland – up to approximately 10 per cent according to estimate. For the sake of comparison, the sample size of 1,835 respondents in the Youth Barometer covers approximately 0.2 per cent of the same age group in Finland (see Kiilakoski, 2021; Statistics Finland, 2022).

According to a study on Roma children in early childhood education and care and pre-primary education (Rajala & Schwartz, 2020) the size of the Roma population in Finland is approximately 9,200. According to Statistics Finland (2022), 10–19-year-olds make up 11 per cent of the population in Finland. Based on this, it can be concluded that a similar population structure would mean that there are approximately one thousand Roma children aged 11–17 living in Finland. The study reached 93–111³ children, which is approximately ten per cent of Roma children aged 11–17. Definite information on the representativity of the sample size is not available because the actual size of the Finnish Roma population is unknown, as registering of information on ethnic background is prohibited by the Personal Data Act.

3 The exact number of participants depends on whether or not the interview participants also responded to the survey.





4. Well-being and realisation of rights as described by Roma children

The purpose of this study was to examine the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights in the words of the children themselves. Thoughts, experiences and views expressed by children are the main focus of this report. The results of the interviews and survey have been categorised in accordance with the themes and questions of the survey form. Individual samples from the research material are used to illuminate the children's own words. The results of the study are also compared with other studies and research. Individual articles from the Convention on the Rights of the Child⁴ have been included in the report to help examine how these rights of the child are realised in the lives of Roma children.

4.1 Leisure

Article 31 *Children have the right to rest, play, and leisure. Children have the right to learn about the arts and culture.*

The survey asked children how they spend their free time. Forty-seven per cent of the children described spending time and doing activities at home. Nearly an equal number of respondents (43%) said that they spend time with their friends. Thirteen per cent of the children mentioned spending time with their family. The remaining 30 per cent of leisure activities included in the responses were individual mentions of various activities, such as spending time outside, hobbies and working. These ways of spending free time may actually be connected to friends, home and family, but direct conclusions could not be drawn from the responses.

Time spent with friends was described as seeing friends and hanging out, and the responses did not indicate a specific activity. During interviews, however, children gave diverse descriptions of time they spend with their friends. Activities with friends included going outside, playing, gaming and listening to music.

⁴ The articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child used in this report are shortened versions of the articles as used in brochures of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children. <https://lapsiasia.fi/en/brochures-on-the-rights-of-children>

"Well, I like to be outside sometimes. And spend time with friends, play or talk or something. Hide and seek or such."

"So, I go to school and spend time with friends and play and all the things a normal child does."

"I quite like being somewhere with a big group of people. We might listen to music and what not with other young people while we talk and so on."

"And then I might have a video call with friends, if they like live further away."

Places where children meet include school, home, friends' homes, youth centre, library, church hall and beach. The research material included few mentions of nature.

Children spend free time with their family by relaxing or helping others.

"By helping my mum and granny."

The children talked about games and mobile phones in connection with leisure spent at home. They also mentioned other activities done at home, such as drawing, baking and housework.



"I play video games."

"I go outside, look at my phone, draw, play with the dogs."

"I draw and listen to music. I watch films/tv series. I do homework."

"Cleaning and cooking."

4.1.1 Hobbies and physical exercise

The participants were asked whether they have a hobby⁵. As a follow-up question, they were asked to specify what their hobby is. Fifty-five per cent of the respondents reported that they have a hobby and 45 per cent reported not having a hobby.

Hobbies were most commonly independent activities, such as *"drawing"*, *"watching movies"*, *"music"* or *"playing games"*. One in three (36%) of the children who had a hobby specified a form of exercise as their hobby, such as *"going to the gym"*, *"boxing"* or *"dancing"*. A few of the respondents take part in team sports, such as *"football"*.

The hobbies of the Roma children were similar to the hobbies of children in other studies, but the number of Roma children who have a hobby was lower than average compared to other studies. Fifty-five per cent of the Roma children reported having a hobby, whereas other studies indicate that hobbies are clearly more common among children on average. Ninety-one per cent of the respondents of a study on leisure of children and young people (Salasuo, 2020) reported having a hobby, as did 95.8 per cent of 8th and 9th graders who responded to the School Health Promotion Study 2021

⁵ In the survey, hobbies were defined as regular leisure activities intended to relax and bring pleasure, such as playing games, taking photographs, crafts, cycling, reading, sports, music and animals.

(Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2022). It should be noted, however, that the phrasing of questions regarding hobbies was slightly different, which may have a bearing on the respondents' understanding of what constitutes a hobby.

Sixty-four per cent of the respondents brought up positive aspects of hobbies. Many respondents mentioned doing things yourself, feeling good and relaxation as positives of hobbies.

"I can relax, it's just a fun and nice activity."

"I enjoy that hobbies let me do what I like."

The children also enjoy the fact that hobbies allow them to use their strengths and learn new things.

"I get to do what I'm good at."

"You learn new things."

Friends were mentioned less often than other positive aspects of hobbies. During the interviews, the children described that they do not always want the company of a friend when they do activities such as go out for a walk, as they can listen to music or call someone. The lower number of responses that mention friends may also be due to favouring independent activities as hobbies, which leaves less room for social aspects of hobbies.

However, when the children were asked if they exercise alone or with friends and how they exercise, most reported exercising with friends. According to the results, most of the children exercise regularly. The children exercise by doing activities such as playing football, playing, cycling and going for walks. Some responses did not directly reference physical activity, placing more emphasis on the social aspect of exercise. Some respondents answered this question by describing going from one place to another with friends using means such as public transport or motor vehicles of friends, which may be due to the dual meaning of the Finnish word used for exercise in the question.

4.1.2 Obstacles to hobbies

Many of the children (42%) were unable to specify or had not anything that would prevent their participation in hobbies. Especially children who have a hobby have not experienced obstacles related to hobbies. Ten per cent of the participants said that they do not want a hobby. This can be interpreted as meaning that the children view not having a hobby as the child's own choice.

Ten per cent of the children considered that their clothing prevents participation in hobbies. Reasons included "skirt", "Roma clothing" and "clothing that comes with hobbies". An equal number of respondents (10%) felt that the cost of hobbies prevents them from participating. The following comment on leisure activities and hobbies by a 14–17-year-old respondent is also noteworthy: "it's hard to enter a group of Finns as the only Roma."

4.1.3 Places of comfort

Leisure can also be approached from the perspective of places where children feel good. The children were asked about places where they can be themselves and relax. The responses show that the most common place of comfort for children is clearly home (Figure 1).



Figure 1 The children's responses to the question: "where can you be yourself and relax?"

The children consider their own room to be particularly important.

"And at home, there's usually also this feeling of peace and I get to just be, I don't have to think about anything."

"My room. It's sort of my own hut that no one else can enter."

"It's good to go to my own room to rest."

The children feel calm and can rest in their places of comfort. Spending time with similarly minded people and gaining their acceptance was also described in connection with talking about places where children feel good.

"Where there's a lot of close people."

"Like it's comfortable. I get the feeling that these people really accept who I am."

This means that these places are not always linked to physical locations, but rather to mental and social security. Experiencing their own homes as being particularly safe places is also indicated by 6–7-year-old children's responses to the Child Barometer 2022 (Tuukkanen 2022).

4.2 School

Article 28 *Children have the right to attend school. Primary education must be free. School discipline must be reasonable and fair. The State must offer as many children as possible the opportunity to continue studying after completing primary education.*

Article 29 *School must develop a child's skills. School must develop a child's native language and provide information about the cultures of the child's own and other countries. Schools should provide information about the rights of children and other people. Children learn at school what multiculturalism, environmental protection, and gender equality mean.*

The children were asked whether they receive education at school or at home. All but one of the respondents were educated at school. For this reason, homeschooling is not separately discussed in this report, and the responses of the homeschooled child are examined together with the responses of children who attend school.

4.2.1 School satisfaction

Two thirds of the children (67%) reported that they like being at school or like being at school relatively much. One in four (23%) responded that they sometimes like being at school, and slightly less than one in ten (9%) do not like being at school at all.

Children's feelings about school were also examined in connection with the School Health Promotion Study 2021 (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2022) by asking pupils how they like school. Seventy-seven per cent of 4th and 5th graders and 58 per cent of 8th and 9th graders reported that they like going to school.

When the children were asked what they are satisfied with at school, one in four said that they are satisfied with teachers, teaching or support they have received.

"I'm happy that I have a good teacher."

"I'm glad I get to learn new things such as crocheting."

"I get the support I need at school. I study at a vocational school. Comprehensive school was challenging, because I didn't get the support I needed until the last grade. I got into small group teaching."

Many of the children view school as important because of friends in particular. Children spend time with their friends during breaks and friends offer support with schoolwork, which has a bearing on success at school.

"I like going to school because of my friends."

"And there's usually a different group to hang out with every break. So, I might call someone to ask where they are and then we all go there."

"Well, my friends have encouraged me with some exams."

*"Studying for exams, for example, and I don't usually study. Then they say that if you study, I'll study too.
Then I will study."*

Absence of friends from school sometimes causes concerns about being left alone and challenges in concentrating on lessons.

"Maybe when I couldn't find my friends during break, then I had to be alone during break."

"I think it's harder to concentrate in class when I don't have friends next to me."

Breaks and food also increased the children's satisfaction with school. Only some individual responses indicated indifference towards school.

4.2.2 Proposed changes to school

The children were asked what they wish would change at school. One in three (33%) of the children did not specify anything they wanted to change at school. Eighteen per cent of the children wished for changes to actions of teachers and 13 per cent to acknowledgement of individual needs.

The children did not feel that teachers intervene in discrimination experienced by children enough. The children also wished that teachers would take them seriously when it comes to both studies and situations involving discrimination.

"Teachers could take Roma children into consideration better, and not leave them out just because they assume that Roma children are not interested in school. It can sometimes just be poor self-esteem, shyness or feeling like an outsider."

Discrimination at school based on a child's status as a minority, not being included, underachievement, lack of support for learning and school attendance and preconceptions of teachers about attitudes of Roma children and their parents towards school may hinder school motivation and success at school. The children's clear wishes for improvements at school included provision of individual support, intervening in discrimination and equal treatment of everyone. As solutions to these issues, the children proposed changes in values and attitudes, and active interaction with Roma through means such as getting to know Roma children without prejudice. Learning can be expected to get easier by ensuring these basic things suggested by the children.



"The school should be better at intervening in bullying, and teachers should take bullying seriously."

"Racism. I'm the only Roma person at school. I get bullied about it quite often. I don't care about it because I'm proud of who I am. Teachers do not intervene in it."

4.2.3 Support of family and relatives

The results of the interviews indicate the significance of family and relatives when it comes to matters related to school. Parents have intervened in bullying at school and defended children. In addition to members of the immediate family, cousins and other relatives also encourage children to study and inspired belief in their ability to learn.

"Well, if I have some difficult schoolwork, for example, they say that I can do it and so on."

"Because I have this one cousin who actually says that I can do it. Encourages me saying you can do it."

The COVID-19 pandemic was ongoing at the time of conducting the interviews. The only positive thing children associated with the pandemic was distance learning, as it allowed the children to sleep longer in the morning.

"You needed to attend the classes and do the schoolwork, but didn't have to go anywhere."

However, distance learning was not solely a positive thing, as it also involved many negatives relating to learning, social relationships and daily structure with which parents could not always support their children.

"I don't use laptops and such a lot. I couldn't really use them well."

"I've become lazier about things such as school. For example, when we had those distance learning periods and you were just at home and did schoolwork and everything at the same time."

The children managed periods of distance learning with support from teachers.

"I was doing the schoolwork at the time and might have a call with my teacher. The teacher would explain how to do things."

4.2.4 Learning Romani language

Ninety-two per cent of the Roma children said that they want to learn more Romani. The children preferred to learn the Romani language at home with their family (56%), at school as a school subject (36%) or in their free time in a Romani language club (31%) (Figure 2).

Slightly less than a third of the respondents wanted to learn the Romani language in more than one of these situations. Thoughts expressed by the children show respect towards their own culture.

It can be concluded that there could be ways to motivate children to also learn other school subjects when the situation and circumstances are favourable. Attention should be paid to diversity of education and individual ways of learning.

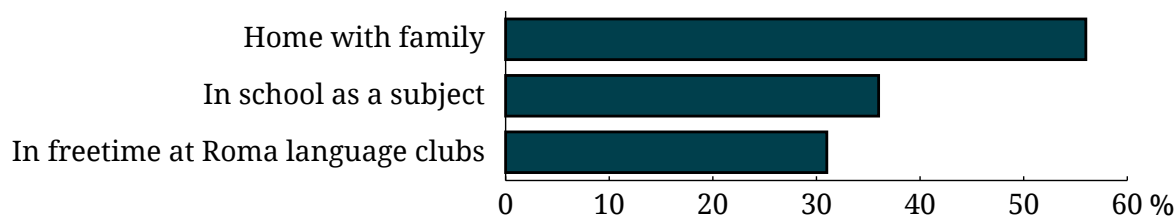


Figure 2 Distribution of responses to the question: “would you like to learn/learn more Romani?”

4.3 Well-being

The participants were asked how satisfied they are with their life. Most of the Roma children (53%) reported that they are very satisfied with their life, and 39 per cent reported being fairly satisfied with their life (Figure 3). Four per cent of the children were fairly dissatisfied and another four per cent very dissatisfied with their life.

Compared to the results of the 2021 School Health Promotion Study (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2022), the Roma children who participated in the current study are slightly more satisfied with their life than average, although the proportion of very dissatisfied children was also higher compared to the School Health Promotion Study.

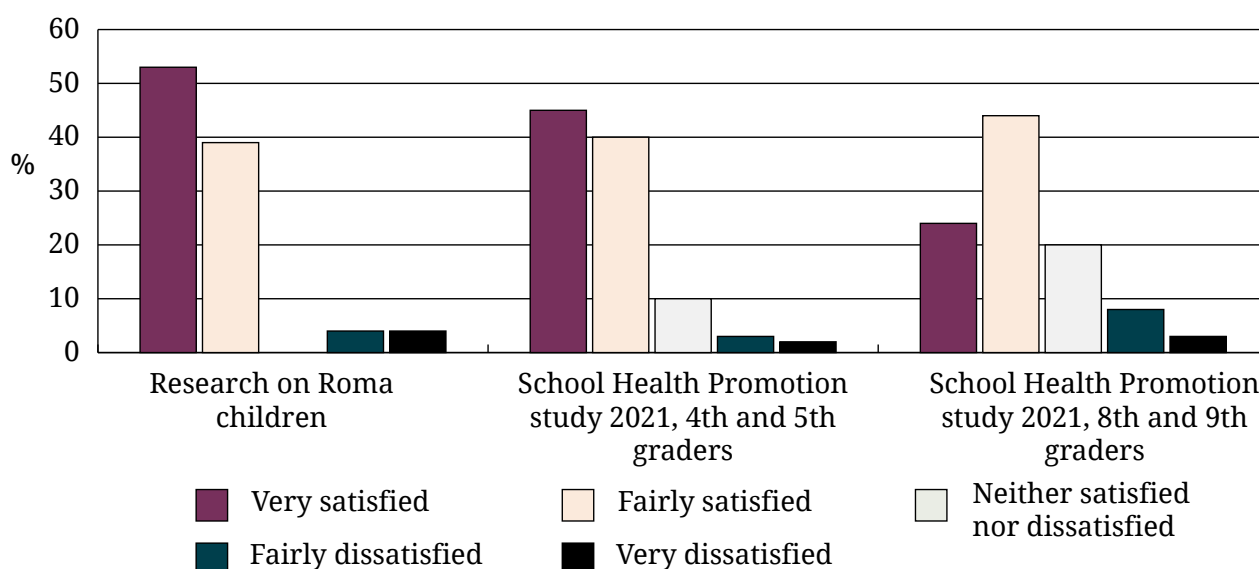


Figure 3 Distribution of responses to the question: “how satisfied are you with your life?” in this survey and the School Health Promotion Study 2021.

4.3.1 Roma customs, traditions and culture

Article 30 *Children belonging to a minority or an indigenous group have the right to their own culture, religion and language.*

One's cultural identity and its significance in one's own life can be considered to be one of the basic foundations of well-being. The children were asked what they consider to be important about Roma customs, traditions and culture⁶. The respondents specified many different Roma customs (Figure 4).



Figure 4 Children's responses to the question: "what is important to you about Roma customs, traditions and culture?"

Matters relating to behaviour and respecting older people were mentioned most often.

"Manners, such as being polite to everyone."

"Respect, addressing people formally, giving way to others."

Communality and caring for others were also mentioned in many responses on Roma culture.

"Spending time together and visiting others more than the majority population."

"Not leaving anyone alone."

"Family is important. It is important to live and interact with other Roma. Friendship and respect between everyone."

⁶ Further information on Roma culture <https://romanomissio.fi/roma-in-society/>

Rules relating to the kitchen and kitchenware were often mentioned in connection with cleanliness.

"Well, you can't go into the kitchen without wearing these clothes, these day-time clothes."

"For example, if you go into the kitchen, you don't put your phone on the table."

"And if you drop a fork or something in a place like a cafeteria, you must take it away and get a clean one."

Most of the interviewed children considered wearing Roma clothing a matter of honour and intended to wear Roma clothing themselves.

"The clothing shows that you are part of the Roma community."

"And the clothing becomes more important the longer you wear it."

Many of the children considered all customs and traditions to be important.

"All of the culture itself."

"Respecting older people. Adhering to Roma customs. Customs relating to cleanliness are very important to me. Wearing the Roma dress is important to me. Roma music is important to me."

The interviewed children in particular talked about Roma culture not being entirely uniform, and families having their own customs and traditions that they want to uphold.

"All Roma are not the same... And quite a few families have different customs."

"And not everyone wears the clothing. It's not the clothing that makes you Roma, it's how you behave."

The participants also viewed some factors relating to customs and culture in a negative light.

"When both of my parents are wearing Roma clothing if I go out with them, I can sometimes see people frowning on us."

"Some people know how to behave and some don't."

The children pointed out that following customs related to Roma culture is easy when those customs have been around your whole life.



"Some people may find them a little strange, but when you have always lived with them, they're not strange at all."

"I think it's easy because I have grown up following them. It's been automatic."

The children's responses convey pride in their origins. Roma identity and awareness of Roma customs, traditions and cultures is strong, even though many of the participants expressed that they are ordinary children and do the same things as other children.

4.3.2 Emotions

During the interviews, the children put into words many emotions, such as joy, sadness, anger, happiness, embarrassment, tiredness, nervousness, fear, anxiety, excitement, frustration, boredom and longing.

"Anger over someone being annoying or a know-it-all."

"Yeah, but embarrassment can be due to many different things, from the past, something that someone has shot on video or photographed you fooling around or something."

"Kind of nervous when I can't do my homework or something."

"Boredom. Usually in the evening when I'm too tired to do anything and too tired to stay up."

The range of emotions described by children was extensive. Failures caused not only sadness but also anger. Anger was also felt when someone acted impudently or intentionally tried to irritate the child. Uncertainty caused embarrassment, anxiety, nervousness and fear. The children feared that others would laugh at their failures. Tiredness and boredom were felt at home in the evening. These were not considered to be solely negative feelings, however, as the children also viewed them as being part of relaxation.

The survey asked children in three separate questions what makes them happy, what makes them sad and what makes them scared.

Fifty-one per cent of the respondents mentioned their family and 43 per cent mentioned their friends as things that make them happy (Figure 5).



Figure 5 The children's responses to the question "what makes you happy?"

"Having a family, having a mum and dad."

"Seeing good friends. If I run into them in town, for instance, it always makes me feel good."

Friends put the children in high spirits and encounters with friends cheer them up. Interacting with pets also brings joy.

"Umm...what makes me happy at home is seeing my dog after a long, hard day at school."

The respondents were made particularly happy by people who genuinely wanted to spend time with them.

"And what makes me happy is that while some people don't want to have anything to do with people like us, or their parents don't let them or something like that, then, what makes me happy is having a nice person who can be with you, and you don't have to hide it and things like that."

"What last made me happy at school was when someone from my class, who never talks to me, came to talk to me and said things like "well done, good game."

Friendliness and joy from interaction with others sometimes even surprised the children and put them in a good mood for a long time.

In addition to happiness brought by friends and family, the children are also happy when fundamentals, such as food, health and money, are in order in the life of the child and their family. The children's own successes also bring them joy. School, games, motor vehicle purchases or being accepted into studies could bring feelings of success. When it comes to bigger things to do with futures, joy should be taken from every step, as, in the words of the children, it is good to go *"one step at a time."*



"Other family members doing well because it also affects me."

"If I've won something at school, like a basketball game or what have you."

"Probably getting to purchase the car."

"My moped working."

"Things like me sending applications to a vocational school last week."

The respondents were also asked what makes them sad (Figure 6). Responses were most commonly related to bullying, discrimination and racism (26%). The second most common category of response was the child not feeling sad or being unable to specify things that make them sad (22%). Nine per cent of the respondents brought up problems related to people close to them, such as indifference towards the child or substance abuse of parents.

"It's sad how much discrimination there is. It's sad that some people see me as a thief, a bad person, stupid."

During interviews, children also mentioned failures at school as something that makes them feel sad. The participants felt sad about not doing well at school, regardless of efforts to study.

"If I get a really bad grade when I have made an effort to study, for example."

"I've started feeling a bit bad about me not being very good, even though I try."

Racism

Harassment

Discrimination

I don't know

Family relations

Failures

Figure 6 The children's responses to the question "what makes you sad?"

Arguments, death and concerns relating to money were also sources of sadness.

"Hmmm...well, arguments make me sad and disagreements and not getting along with people."

"Probably when my bunny died."

"Well, the war."

"Petrol."

"What if money runs out."

The children described how their circle of friends might change as a result of arguments, and they would no longer have contact with their old friends. People intentionally being nasty to each other in places such as social media also makes the children sad. Arguments between siblings were also mentioned. The children are also made sad by the death or sickness of a loved one or a pet and Russia's offensive warfare against Ukraine. Increases in prices and the price of petrol in particular make children who drive motor vehicles sad. Money running out is another cause of sadness and concern, as the children felt that even studies will not guarantee employment in the future.

When asked what makes them scared, 42 per cent of the respondents were unable to specify anything that makes them scared or were not scared of anything. Nineteen per cent of the Roma children responded that they are scared of life changes, future and growing up. Fifteen per cent of the participants mentioned various phobias, such as snakes, spiders and heights. Some also mentioned war, the coronavirus, death and the end of the world.

"Whether I'll succeed in life."

"Will I get to study. Will I get a flat and a job when I want them."

"The future. Whether I'll find work and succeed in life."

"The coronavirus and war scare me. What if Finland goes to war."

Many of the fears are associated with the future. When asked about their plans for the future, it was clear to the children what they want to study and what they want to do for a living. It is concerning that the future appears to be frightening to the children despite these plans.

Based on the responses, the children's emotions are affected by their level of energy, their personal experiences and the reactions of others. Social issues such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's offensive warfare against Ukraine have also impacted the children's emotions. Children also brought up social issues, such as violence and war, during Young Advisers meetings organised by the Ombudsman for Children (Ombudsman for Children, 2022).

The research participants were asked a separate question on how they consider current issues, such as COVID-19, the war or climate change, to impact their life. Forty-three per cent of the children felt that these issues do not impact their life in any way. Many of the children's responses expressed fears of war and bad experiences related to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the responses did not include any references to climate change. The state of world affairs, including current crises, is relatively absent from the responses as a whole.

4.3.3 Health

When the respondents were asked how satisfied they are with their state of health, 49 per cent of the Roma children reported being very satisfied, 38 per cent fairly satisfied and 13 per cent fairly dissatisfied. None of the respondents were very dissatisfied with their health. The results of the School Health Promotion Study 2021 (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2022) showed that 30 per cent of 8th and 9th graders considered their health to be very good and 44 per cent fairly good. Thus, it can be concluded that Roma children are slightly more satisfied with their health than children on average, although the slight difference in the phrasing of the questions should be taken into consideration when comparing the results.

As a follow-up question, the respondents were asked how they look after their health. Common responses included *"sleeping"*, *"eating"*, *"exercising"* and *"maintaining hygiene"*. The children's responses were mainly related to maintaining physical health. There was one direct response related to mental and social well-being: *"I can talk to family and friends, they support me."*

The children may have associated the question with various health surveys that they have taken in connection with school health care, for example, or the children did not think to talk about mental health when responding to questions about their health. Nineteen per cent of the respondents reported that they do not look after their health in any way or were unable to specify how they look after their health.

4.3.4 Social participation

Article 12 *Children have the right to have their say in matters that concern them. Adults must ascertain children's opinion before they make decisions concerning them. Children's opinions should be considered in respect of their age and development when making decisions about them. Adults must justify decisions to children in a manner that they can understand.*

Article 13 *Children have the right to freely express their opinions. They may not, however, offend other people.*

The respondents were asked who has asked or encouraged them to express their thoughts or opinions. The most common response was a family member (43%) (Figure 7). Twenty-five per cent of the children mentioned their friends, 20 per cent mentioned teacher or other professionals such as a youth worker, a Roma employment counsellor or a therapist. 11 per cent mentioned other relatives such as a cousin or a grandparent. Other people were mentioned by six per cent. Eighteen per cent of the children responded that no one has asked or encouraged them to express their thoughts or opinions, or that the child expresses them without asking.

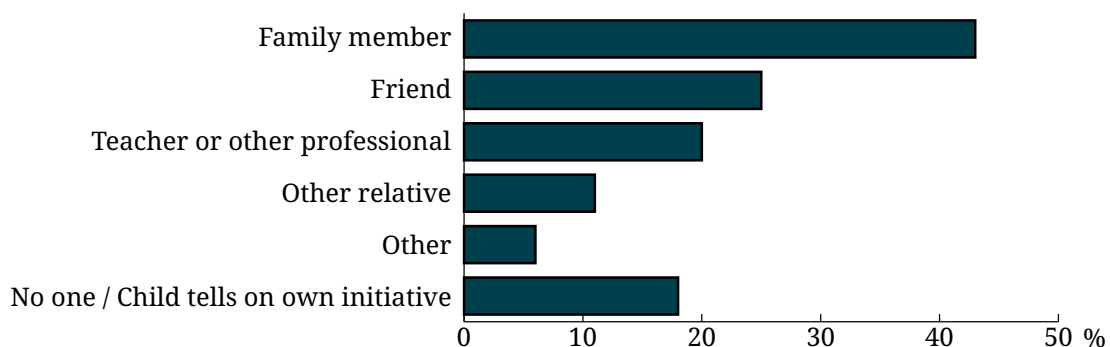


Figure 7 Distribution of responses to the question “who has asked or encouraged you to express your thoughts or opinions?”

Based on the results of the survey, the children most often discuss their thoughts and opinions with their parents, who encourage them to share their thoughts.

“Luckily, my mum supports me with everything. Otherwise I’d be in trouble everywhere in Finland.”

“Dad has encouraged me a lot. He talks about the importance of being yourself and holding your chin up high.”

The children also described taking the initiative in expressing their thoughts and opinions. The role of parents as listeners who are present appears to be important to the children.

“I get listened to quite a lot at home.”

“Yeah, usually my big brother listens to me, and my father.”

The research participants were also asked about the impact their thoughts and opinions have had at home, at school and in their free time. The question may have been difficult, as the children often (57%) responded that they do not know.

The children felt that at home they could have a say in the food they eat and what they do with their family. The children were also allowed to decide whether they want to participate in the family's activities.

"Well, the first thing I can think of is talking about what food we're gonna cook."

"If there are some basic things, like should we do this or are we gonna go somewhere, they do listen to me and others."

"Sometimes we've agreed that I get to stay at home."

The children have also had a say with regard to **"clothing"**, **"decoration of their own room"** and **"daily chores"**.

However, the participants also described situations at home during which they have not been heard and situations they have not been able to influence.



"Then they just decide a place where we'll go."

"Hardly anything. I get chores and I do them."

"It depends a lot on what mood our parents are in."

"Yeah, I can say what I think, but I don't even know if they always take me seriously."

Some of the children felt that their parents do not take their thoughts into consideration, and some even wondered whether their parents listen to what they have to say or take it seriously.

The most common response with respect to school was that children's thoughts and opinions did not have an impact on anything. Individual responses mentioned matters related to studies, the student body, certain school subjects and school events and trips:

"I'm shy, I don't want to have an impact, but during music class I was able to have a say in the programme for the end of term celebration."

"I have had the chance to influence many matters that concern young people, such as trips, collection of fares and the way things should go when it comes to Roma youth."

Individual support was also mentioned in some responses.

"I have been heard and received support with my studies."

Individual needs had also been taken into consideration through measures such as being exempt from certain obligations related to school, either on the initiative of the teacher or the child themselves.

"The work I do. When I go home."

"Getting easier days."

Based on the results, in children's free time their thoughts and opinions matter the most when they interact with their friends. The most common response was that children can have a say in everything in their free time.

"Pretty much everything, plans for the day and chores."

"Where we go, what we do."

There are also ways of resolving conflicts between friends.

"If we need to make a plan, everyone says what they think, and we take everyone's opinion into account.

We'll think about what is best. What everyone likes."

"For example, if some people prefer to go shopping with a friend, but I would like to go to a place like the youth facilities, we resolve it with rock paper scissors."

However, there are also situations in which children's opinions are not heard in a large group of people, or they are not properly able to form their own opinions.

"In a group of friends. If there's a lot of people, they don't really listen to opinions."

"There's never really a situation where I would've had to express my own opinion. What I'm usually like is that I go along with the opinions of others."

The fact that many of the children were unable to specify situations in which their thoughts and opinions have been heard raises the question of whether these children are aware of their possibilities to influence matters. The results make the researchers wonder whether the children have been asked for their opinions, whether they are afraid to express their opinions, whether they want to be adaptable and not give their opinions or whether they have had poor experiences of having expressed their opinions.

The children's possibilities to have a say in matters were mainly limited to situations involving their family and friends. Representative participation, such as voting in parliamentary elections, was viewed as distant by the children who gave interviews.



"I don't really know. I haven't really voted almost ever and I probably won't in the future. When you know that quite a few people will vote, I don't really need to."

"It isn't any use because people have so little influence there. When voting."

Only three participants said that they plan to vote in the future. Even those comments were related to presidential elections.

"I will have just turned eighteen before the next presidential election. It gives me a nice opportunity to participate. At least I'll get to influence something. And it's like free, it doesn't cost anything."

During interviews, individual children brought up student body work as a possible way to influence things, but the children were uncertain about their own ability to participate in student body work.

"I've applied there twice and have not been accepted either time. But it's good because ultimately I wouldn't have been able to do it, as I understand what they do there (--) For example, having to come to school an hour early, and I'm such a late riser that I don't necessarily even wake up when my alarm goes off."

"I understood how difficult it is. You have to remember so many things. I'm like I don't always remember everything, so it would have been pretty difficult, to remember everything someone has suggested."

4.3.5 Money

During the interviews, the participating children were asked whether they have their own spending money and what they use it on. Parents support their children by providing money for the children's own purchases, such as clothing, cosmetics, car and moped equipment, pets and treats.

"If I just ask for money, like can I get money for this or that, they just say yeah, but I will have to do something to earn the money."

Based on the results, regular weekly allowances are not common. Instead, the children receive money for a specific purpose or for completed chores. Aunts, uncles and grandparents also give the children money as gifts or in connection with visits.

"And if we visit relatives, I always get money. They just suddenly give it sometimes."

The children often spend money when they get it, and saving is considered to be difficult.

"All my money was spent, I would wake up in the morning go to a store, buy things and go to the beach."

"We can't really save properly. Every time we get money, we spend it in a day."

However, some children also want to save and buy something useful later.

"I just collect money."

"I save and sometimes go shopping."

"I save some of my money and spend some of it."

Many of the children hoped to find summer jobs and earn their own money. The children also receive money as a reward for something done well.

4.4 Relationships

Article 14 *Children have the right to think freely. Children have the right to belong or not to belong to a religion. Parents have the right and the duty to advise and guide children in the exercising of this right.*

When the children were asked about people who are important to them, 87 per cent mentioned their family or a specific family member, 46 per cent mentioned a friend, 42 per cent mentioned another relative such as a cousin or a grandparent and 5 per cent mentioned other people (Figure 8). One respondent said that they do not have anyone who is important to them.

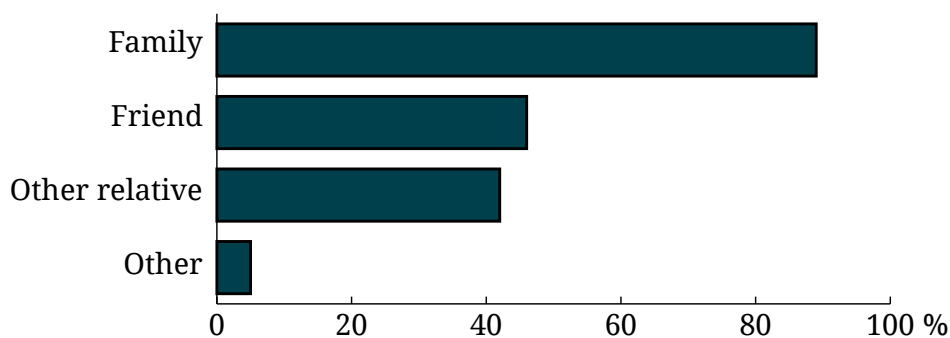


Figure 8 Distribution of responses to the question “who is important to you?”

The children were asked what kinds of people they would want in their life. Several of the children expressed that their life should include people who are reliable and accept them as who they are. The children appreciate both similarities and differences. Acceptance, similar sense of humour and shared interests were considered to be important.

“A person with whom you can relate to many things and with whom you can talk about everything.”

“Reliable people who don’t leave when I need help.”



“People with a sense of humour, and when we grow up and become adults, I would like to be with people who have been with me since childhood. Then you don’t have to start thinking of things to say because we have experienced a lot together and so on, and you know the person well.”

“I want people in my life who appreciate me for who I am, and even though I’m different from others, they’ll still think of me as the same.”

The research participants were asked how satisfied they are with their relationships. Fifty-seven per cent of the participants reported that they are very satisfied with their relationships. Thirty-nine per cent were fairly satisfied, 3 per cent fairly dissatisfied and 1 per cent very dissatisfied with their relationships.

Forty-one per cent of the children responded that they hardly ever feel lonely. Forty-nine per cent of the children reported feeling lonely sometimes, 7 per cent fairly often and 3 per cent often. In the School Health Promotion Study 2021 (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2022) loneliness was surveyed using slightly different questions. Fifty-nine per cent of 4th and 5th graders and 24 per cent of 8th and 9th graders who participated in the School Health Promotion Study did not feel lonely at all, whereas 41 per cent of the Roma children who took the survey for the current study hardly ever feel lonely.

4.4.1 Family and relatives

When asked about people who are important to the children, the most common response by far (58%) was family, siblings and parents.

"Family comes first, of course."

"Definitely my parents, friends and my brother. We have spent a lot of time together with my brother, whenever we have time we're together."

Other relatives (37%), and cousins (7%) specifically, were often mentioned as important people. Nearly all of the interviewed children said that their cousins are also important friends.

"Then there's my cousin. The cousin doesn't live here, but we talk on the phone a lot."

The interviews indicate that time spent with parents, siblings, cousins, grandparents and other relatives is important to Roma children. Family members and relatives are important as reliable relationships, as people who encourage the child and as friends.



"Because I love my family, and they're important to me."

"Well you know, maybe because I spend a lot of time with them, and we have shared interests and just do stuff together and so on. Like being there, to sum it up."

In addition to time spent together, closeness was also increased by trust, showing of affection and sharing joyful moments.

The families of many children also include pets. The children spend a lot of time with their pets, and they are an important reason to exercise and spend time outside. The children also buy toys and treats for their pets. Many of the children consider their pets to be close and important family members.

"I also count my dog as part of my family."

"My dog for one, in addition to my friends, is someone who listens to me. He can't answer me, but he's a good listener and won't tell anyone."

According to Tammi et al. (2020), a child's relationship with their pet can be an important interindividual relationship where the pet not only represents its species, but it also has a name and the child shares their daily life with the pet in the same way as they would with other family members.

Parents, cousins and other relatives give children encouragement with respect to school, hobbies, plans for the future and other important matters.

"Encouragement feels like safe. It feels like you can do this or something like that."

"Well, especially in difficult and uncertain situations, it changes the situation when someone encourages you, for example if you have something that makes you nervous coming up, it gives you a little courage to take a new perspective."

The respondents were asked whether they could talk about things that concern them with their parents. One third (33%) of the children responded that they can talk about things that concern them with their parents often, one quarter (24%) fairly often, 38 per cent occasionally and 5 per cent hardly ever (Figure 9).

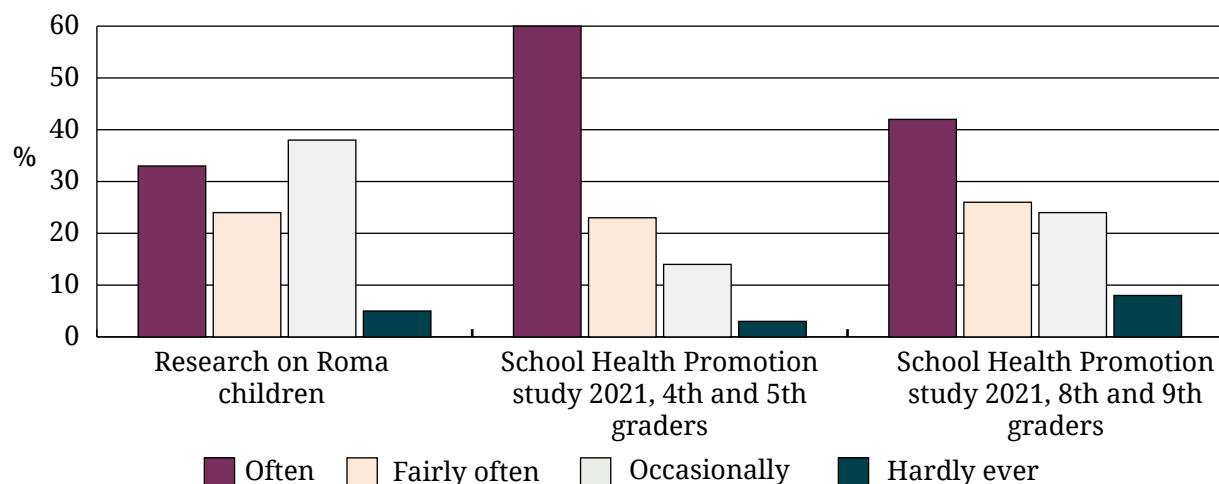


Figure 9 Distribution of responses to the question: "can you talk about things that concern you with your parents?"

The Roma children who participated in this study talk about things that concern them with their parents less frequently than the respondents of the School Health Promotion Study 2021 (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2022). Eighty-four per cent of 4th and 5th graders and 68 per cent of 8th and 9th graders who responded to the School Health Promotion Study talked about things that concern them with their parents often or fairly often, whereas 57 per cent of the Roma children who responded to the current survey gave a corresponding response.

The respondents spend time with their families at home and mostly meet family members face to face. The respondents said that they also keep in contact with family members who have moved out and with other relatives by telephone and via social media. Time spent with people close to the child protected the child from loneliness.

The children view home as an important place, even though duties, such as cleaning, and occasional feelings of injustice that are related to matters such as rules, are also experienced at home. The respondents spend a lot of time with their family and report being happy with the time they spend with family. The time spent with family increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We probably had the coronavirus. It was pretty bad. We couldn't go anywhere and had to just stay at home."

The significance of home changed during the pandemic, as the children had to stay at home and were not allowed to meet their friends or attend events.

4.4.2 Friends

Friends were the second most common (44%) response to the question about people the respondents consider to be important to them. Based on the results, the children spend a lot of time with their friends. It is worth noting that friends also include many relatives, such as cousins and aunts and uncles who are the same age or slightly older than the child. Making a distinction between friends and relatives in connection with analysing the material was challenging. Relatives are often also friends. Someone being a child's relative does not mean they cannot also be the child's friend. Thus, the partial overlap does not distort the results on the importance or number of social relationships.

Most of the children (68%) had at least two friends with whom they can talk about things that concern them. One in four of the children (25%) had one such friend. Seven per cent of the survey respondents did not have a friend with whom they can talk about things that concern them. The results were similar to the results of the School Health Promotion Study 2021 (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2022), which indicated that nine per cent of 8th and 9th graders did not have any close friends.

The children most often maintain social relationships by telephone or via social media. Mobile phones and online connections play a clearly more significant role in maintaining relationships with friends than with family and relatives, who the children primarily see in person.

The respondents said that meeting new friends is sometimes difficult and makes them nervous. It can be hard to talk to unfamiliar classmates in group assignments.

"Yeah, so, there are people in my class, for example, who I don't always get along with. But I still, you know, try."

Uncertainty about the other person's reaction or fear of rejection prevented the children from going to speak to others. Joining large groups was regarded as difficult. When a child described difficulties getting along with others, the difficulties were often related to friends or groups of friends.

"If you, like, go to a new class at school, it's sometimes pretty hard. You get nervous."

Conflicts that take place during the children's free time arise when different groups of friends meet or when defending a friend.

"What I will say is that if the other person starts it, I will easily get involved. But I don't usually start fights myself, regardless of whether or not I know the other person."

Based on the responses, the interviewed children do not initiate conflicts, but they easily get involved if they feel that they or their friend has been treated inappropriately. In addition to physical fights, there is also yelling, name-calling and talking behind people's backs.

"Someone might yell something like offensive like "manne" when passing by."

"People talk behind your back and are two-faced and so on."

Some children said that they consider yelling insults to be childish, and they pretend not to hear them. Disagreements, provoking and attitudes of others can also make interaction more challenging. Loss of trust was mentioned as a reason for not getting along with someone.

"If the other person lies a lot."

4.4.3 Bullying, discrimination and racism

Article 2 *Every child is entitled to the rights of the child equally. A child must not be discriminated against for any reason.*

Roma children continue to face discrimination and racism in Finland. During the interviews, children primarily talked about bullying even when the research team interpreted the described situations as discrimination. The children were more likely to use the concepts of discrimination and racism on the survey form. For this reason, it is natural to analyse bullying, discrimination and racism in the same connection, despite their conceptual differences.

The research participants were asked whether they have been in a situation where they or someone else was bullied or discriminated against. Forty-four per cent of the participants responded that they have hardly ever been in such situations. Forty per cent responded that they have occasionally been in such situations, 11 per cent fairly often and 6 per cent often. Twenty-six per cent of the 8th and 9th graders who responded to the School Health Promotion Study 2017 (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2018) reported having experienced discriminatory bullying based on different factors.

The School Health Promotion Study 2021 (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2022) asked about discrimination experienced by pupils at school or in their free time. Twenty-nine per cent of 8th and 9th graders had experienced discrimination. A significantly higher portion of Roma children have experienced situations involving discrimination at least occasionally – 57 per cent of the survey respondents. However, the results are not directly comparable due to the different phrasing of the questions.

Children who had experienced bullying and discrimination were asked about the situations in which this has happened. Bullying and discrimination most commonly took place at school. Some of the bullying described by the children was directed at all the pupils at the school but, based on the results, there is also a lot of discriminatory bullying on the basis of a child's background, which can be considered to be discrimination and racism.

7 Ethnic slur used against Finnish Roma.

"I was at my first school for half a year and got bullied and taunted there. I was still a young first grader who had just started school and the older sixth graders teased me."

"My classmates have said that the Roma only steal and stab, and we are immigrants, and we should get out of Finland."

"My classmates at school shout things at me quite a lot. Something like "you dirty manne"⁸ and stuff like that. And that you must keep your things with you, so they don't get stolen."

"People didn't believe I was Finnish and claimed that I'm a foreigner."

"A boy at school strangled me because he hated the Roma."

Situations described by the children mainly involved continuous racist name-calling, exclusion and suspicion, but sometimes also physical violence. The situations were diverse, but nearly all responses describing bullying point to prejudice against the Roma population.

"Well that's just it, when I told them that I was Roma, they felt that they couldn't be with me. So I was alone at school."

"I gave a presentation on the Roma. And after that they no longer let me play football with them."

"Friends don't ask me to their homes, and they are friends with me in secret."

The children were asked how others have intervened in bullying. Approximately half of the children felt that people do not intervene in situations involving bullying or discrimination.

"Not at all. Teachers claim that they didn't notice, even though they were in the classroom and heard everything."

Half of the children responded that either adults at school or their own parents have intervened in bullying.

"Teachers came to help and my parents always intervene."

When asked how intervening in bullying helped, responses most often (36%) indicated that intervening worked and "bullying stopped". However, 26 per cent felt that attempts to intervene did not help.

"And it doesn't help at all if someone intervene because it goes on and on anyway."

"They think that it's like a joke."

The children's responses were split based on whether people had intervened in the bullying and discrimination they had experienced and whether the efforts to intervene had been successful. Experiences also vary on a national level. According to the School Health Promotion Study 2021 (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2022), half of 8th and 9th graders felt that bullying had decreased after an adult was told about the bullying. A considerably smaller number (36%) of the Roma children felt that efforts to intervene helped.

8 Ethnic slur used against Finnish Roma.

Customs and traditions related to Roma culture are part of Roma children's daily life. The research participants are proud of Roma customs and traditions, although experiences of prejudice and discrimination are more common when wearing Roma clothing, especially for girls. Even though the respondents did not necessarily experience discrimination directly targeted against them before they started wearing Roma clothing, even young children are exposed to racist treatment when they are in public with their parents or relatives who wear Roma clothing.



"The guards thought that I was stealing. I was 12. They emptied my backpack and did not find anything."

"We were buying some clothes and had this guard behind us the whole time. The guard was standing behind us at all times to see that we don't steal anything."

When the children were asked whether bullying, discrimination or fear of these prevents them from doing something that is important to them, hardly anyone responded in the affirmative. However, based on responses to other questions included in the survey and the interviews, other people's attitudes and hindrance to studies and work resulting from them weakened the children's belief in their own future.

"I don't raise my hand in class as often as I would like, for example. I want to be invisible."

"I'm sometimes wary of the majority population."

"I've started talking myself out of things I would like to do. I make excuses for why I'm not good enough, or I convince myself that I won't be accepted there because of my ethnicity."

"Discrimination has become normalised for me."

"Maybe studying feels frustrating when discrimination prevents me from getting a job."

Discrimination and the resulting insecurity further increased feelings of not being an equal member of the school community. Bad experiences increase uncertainty when interacting with the majority population, raising one's hand in class or going to certain places. Steckermeier (2019) has studied children's experiences of agency in relation to perceptions of safety. Her results indicate that insecurity increases children's feelings of not being able to influence their environment or community, which inevitably decreases perception of agency. Perception of agency prevents feelings of insecurity and improves well-being (Steckermeier, 2019).

The most unfortunate thing is that discrimination and fear of discrimination prevented the Roma children from being themselves. The responses indicate that some children have adopted feelings of loneliness and perceptions of being an outsider as part of their identity, and consider that it is not possible to change the situation by intervening in it. Rastas (2002) noted that emphasising or concealing different identities depending on the situation may be used as a strategy to protect against discrimination. Children may shy away from features that are stereotypically connected to a certain culture or from the company of others who have a similar cultural background to avoid

pigeonholing and othering. Children may also emphasise their own cultural background to gain social appreciation and various benefits. It is good to acknowledge this when examining the actions of Roma children in various situations.

A study on basic education by Helakorpi et al. (2019) found that schools have a silent understanding that intervening in discrimination in the school environment is the responsibility of staff with Romani backgrounds, even in the case of extensive structural racism. The conclusions of the study emphasise that discrimination can be reduced by increasing information on the Roma and, most importantly, by viewing Roma children as children instead of representatives of their culture (Helakorpi et al., 2019).

The same issues are evident from the children's responses to the questions in this study. When the children were asked if they could think of ways to reduce or prevent bullying and discrimination, they brought up changing of attitudes, increasing of information on Roma culture and acknowledging people as individuals in addition to their cultural background.

"Talking more about the Roma and their culture at school and elsewhere."

"The majority population and the Roma should spend more time together."

"Taking more drastic measures and informing young people that the Roma are the same as all other young people."

The children also gave reminders that discrimination must not be silently accepted. Rather, people should intervene.

"Adults believing me and not always belittling me if something feels bad to me. Not saying 'you shouldn't care.'"

Bullying and discrimination should be addressed in a manner that does not automatically place the child in the position of someone who has been bullied or discriminated against. It is important to remember that Roma children interact with many different people and are members of various communities. Viljanen et al. (2015) pointed out that if ethnicity, identity and being part of something are not understood as constantly negotiable and changing concepts, there is a danger of children who belong to a minority being seen solely as "poor victims".

In addition to the current study, previous research (Junkala & Tawah, 2009; Rajala & Schwartz, 2020; Törmä & Huotari, 2018; Weiste-Paakkanen, Lämsä & Kuusio, 2018) has also shown that Roma children face structural discrimination starting from childhood while growing up to be members of society, and targeted measures to address these problems are necessary.

4.5 Future

4.5.1 Growing up

The participants were asked who they talk to about matters relating to growing up and becoming an adult. Thirty-eight per cent of the children mentioned friends, 27 per cent mentioned their parents or one parent, 25 per cent mentioned a sibling or a cousin, and 19 per cent mentioned another relative (Figure 10). In nine per cent of the answers, other adult such as a teacher or other professional was mentioned. Ten per cent of the respondents said that they do not talk about becoming an adult with anyone.

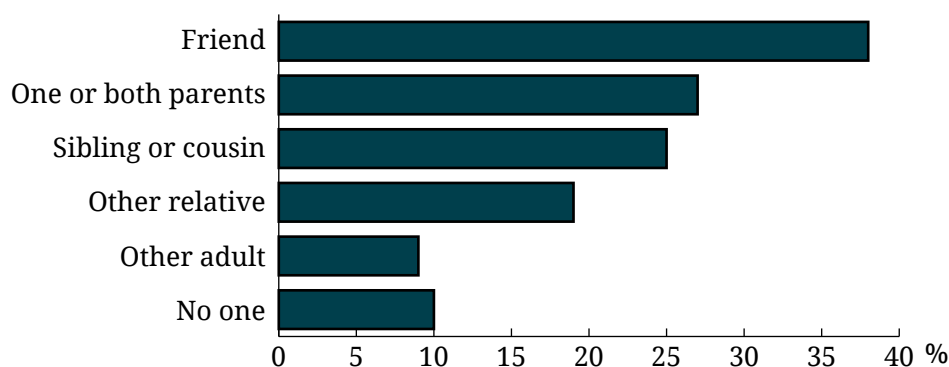


Figure 10 Distribution of response to the question “who do you talk to about matters relating to growing up and becoming an adult?”

The responses of many children indicate that the child’s bond with their parents became less tight in adolescence.

“I used to be close to my mother, for example, but us men can’t be as close to our mothers anymore. You can still talk to her and stuff, but you can’t hold her hand or like hug her.”

“You can’t be too close with your parents like you are with your friends.”

Traditional Roma rules relating to modesty⁹ prevented many of the children from discussing matters related to puberty and growing up with their parents, or from showing affection through actions such hugging or other physical contact. Some children were upset about this. Not all views on growing up were positive.

According to Tuukkanen (2022), physical touch, such as hugging or caressing, as well as conversations with a reliable adult increase a child’s internal perception of safety.

Many of the children responded that, instead of their parents, older Roma youth often act as reliable older individuals who helped younger Roma children. In this context, the significance of slightly older siblings, cousins, uncles and aunts was emphasised.

9 Further information on Roma culture <https://romanomissio.fi/roma-in-society/>

"My parents are important to me, but because of this culture I'm probably closer to my uncle. He's a little older than me, a few years."

"They aren't adults either and don't have the same thoughts and advice as my grandparents or parents, but they're still like a bit older and know more about the world and have more experience."

It appears that some Roma children have to become independent very early. Early independence was also indicated by a study on equality of the Roma in housing by Törmä and Huotari (2018).

4.5.2 Plans for the future

The research participants were asked what they would like to do in the future. The future plans of many children were still uncertain. The plans of children who had thought about their future were often related to education and work.

"After graduation, I would like to study and go to work, then I will study at a business college, and I was thinking of maybe continuing my studies at a university of applied sciences."

"Maybe go and study the restaurant and catering business and qualify as a chef. There are also other options."

Nearly all of the interviewed children had a positive view on extending compulsory education until the age of 18. The reform on extending compulsory education entered into force in 2021. The children responded that they had intended to continue from basic education to upper secondary education in any case.

The children's vocational plans were diverse, and included occupations requiring vocational studies as well as professions requiring tertiary education (Figure 11).



Figure 11 Professional dreams of Roma children from responses to the survey.

In addition to studies and work, the children also had other plans for the future. Hopes for the future were related to matters such as the child's own successes, starting a family, moving into their own home and improvements in the status of the Roma.

"Having the possibility to get a good life."

"Owning a fancy house and succeeding."

"I hope that I can provide my child with a good future."

"Start a family. Wear big skirts. Go to meetings more often."

"I would like to start my own company, one that is related to my culture, so that I could show that we are not bad, and we are people the same as others."

4.5.3 Dreams

Dreams of the respondents were mostly related to the same aspects of life as their future plans. Dreams included professional dreams, dreams of moving into their own home, and dreams relating to well-being.

"Being a good football player, a professional."

"Well, I would like to get a job. Move into a nice house. Lead a normal life."

"To get a good life."

"Right now I'm dreaming of a Romani dress and my own home."

"Yeah, I can't wait to finish school. I would get to work. And what I'm looking forward to the most is moving out and getting to do the house up, you know, decorate."

"A good job, a family, peace on earth, like we are people too, let us be people. And for everyone to accept each other as they are."

The children also dream of money, specific items and travel.



"Being a millionaire."

"I'd want my own computer."

"I would like to travel a lot in the future. Around Finland and the world."

Some children did not have any dreams. Many of the children considered that dreaming was made more difficult by the lack of opportunities to influence one's own future, as finding employment and achieving a good financial situation is uncertain regardless of education.

"I don't really have any dreams."

"I don't think about my future a lot. I just think about the next day or week, about what we'll do at school."

Similar dreams were expressed by young people in a study by Niemi et al. (2010) on the educational and working life experiences of young people with disability, Roma and immigrant background, who studied in special education classes. Young adults dreamt of work, family and travel. Their future fears also included worries about unemployment (Niemi et al., 2010). According to the results of the Youth Barometer 2019 (Haikkola & Myllyniemi, 2020), approximately one in three children is worried about their employment in the future. Feelings of uncertainty with regard to growing up and finding employment appear to be more common among Roma children.

Pekkarinen et al. (2020) also wonder whether it is still possible for children to dream. Dreaming is easier if the child does not see obstacles to achieving basics of life and when the world does not feel uncertain.

4.5.4 Towards a better future

The children did not think that future plans and dreams will happen on their own. Rather, they understood that they must work to achieve those dreams. The research participants were of the view that they need to practice skills needed for their dreams, work on their studies, take it one step at a time and lead a healthy life.

"I practice a lot. I have motivation. And money."

"I invest my energy in school and everything."

"They're all a little like those one step at a time things, that if you start striving for them all at once, you quite quickly lose motivation."

"I first have to finish my studies, and then I'll work really hard to get money. And after that I will buy the house and then maybe a dog."

"Exercising as much as possible and trying to eat somewhat healthily and cutting down on nicotine and every other possible thing."

"You also need patience. If you don't succeed at first, you must keep trying."



When examining the future, it is worthwhile to pause and consider the children's views on how the status of Roma children in Finland could be improved. The results show that the most important means for improving the status of Roma children, as described by the research participants, include changing of values and attitudes, increasing information on cultures, encountering people as individuals and interaction with the majority population.

"Putting an end to discrimination."

"Teachers sometimes show their attitudes. Tolerance is needed. How can this be achieved? I can't say. Teachers don't believe in Roma youth and their competence. Student counsellors encourage you to apply for practical nurse's studies, even if you dream of something else."

"Teaching more about the culture at school."

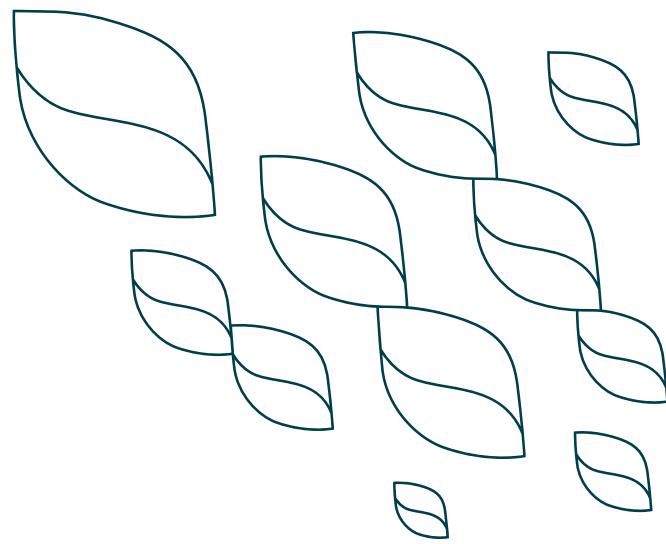
"Taking us into consideration when making decisions."

"By people like teachers getting to know the culture in advance and taking cultural things into account when meeting people from that culture."

"More active involvement with the Roma."

"By organising shared activities for all young people, the majority population and the Roma alike."





5. Discussion

5.1 Ethical discussion

The right of children to express their thoughts and talk about their experiences was the ethical starting point for this study. The ethical principles of research of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (2019) were followed at all stages of the research process. The currently unfinished ethical guidelines for Sámi research were also utilised when planning this study by adapting the guidelines to research concerning a cultural minority. The ethical guidelines deal with the significance of the research to the community participating in it, the involvement of the community in the implementation of the study and the provision of the results for the use of the community. The guidelines urge people conducting research to consider: 1) Where does the need for the research stem from? 2) How to ensure that the study does not further burden a people and community that has already been burdened by studies? 3) Who does the research benefit and how?

It was natural to also consider these questions from the perspectives of the study concerning Roma children and the ethics of child research in general. Planning and implementation of the study involved active and critical discussion on the need for the study and the means of implementation at the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and together with the working group and the steering group. It is not reasonable to conduct a study on children who are in a vulnerable position and belong to a minority without justified grounds, hence, the purpose and implementation of the study needed to be discussed thoroughly. Conducting the study was deemed to be ethically justified, as it allowed researchers to obtain up-to-date information on the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights from the perspective of Roma children themselves. The Ethics Committee of Youth and Childhood Studies of the Finnish Youth Research Society performed a preliminary ethics assessment on the study.

Data collection from minor children requires thorough consideration of research ethics. An unequal power structure always exists between children and adults in connection with knowledge production, which places children in a subordinate position compared to adults. Thus, it was important to consider decisions and their significance from the perspective of the children and hear them

as individuals and representatives of their age group and culture. When meeting the children, the research team emphasised children's expertise on matters concerning themselves and told participating children that they have a lot of information that adults do not have.

Taking multiple discrimination of Roma children into consideration in connection with data collection was particularly thoroughly discussed in steering group meetings. It was decided on the basis of this discussion that, because various measures of the National Child Strategy pertain to children in a vulnerable position, active efforts will be made to bring information from the perspective of Roma children into other measures. Cooperation was most heavily focused around measures 16 and 26 of the National Child Strategy, in relation to which a teaching pack on the rights of the child was prepared and a training module on participation of children was implemented.

The data collection methods for the study provided valuable information on children's experiences relating to matters such bullying and discrimination. This information may have remained obscured if only one data collection method had been used. During the interviews, the children nearly exclusively talked about bullying when describing experiences of discrimination or bullying that constitutes racism. A study by Rajala et al. (2011) found that it is difficult for Roma children to recognise and identify discrimination, even though the most common form of bullying appeared to be name calling and mocking based on their Roma background. For this reason, the survey form asked about both bullying and discrimination. In the responses to the survey, the children more openly brought up experiences related to specifically discrimination and racism. This shows that even though interviews are considered to be a more interactive and trust-evoking method of data collection, it may be too difficult for a child to recount personal and possibly anxiety inducing experiences in person to an unfamiliar adult (see also Tuukkanen, 2018).

During discussions on the results of the study, stakeholders wondered why intoxicants or physical violence experienced or employed by children are not addressed in the study, even though they are known to affect the well-being of children. Intoxicants, physical violence and mental health did not come up during the focused interviews. For this reason, they were not included as separate questions in the survey. In the survey, physical violence was mentioned as one way of resolving challenging situations and as a form of racist bullying. Use of intoxicants by the child or others was mentioned in some responses. This does not mean that intoxicants, physical violence or mental health problems do not affect Roma children on a wider level.

Ethical reflection included discussion on derogatory expressions used to refer to the ethnic group, which were mentioned by children during their interviews. It was decided that the expression used by the child would be used for the direct quotes from interviews included in this report, in the same way as Rastas (2007) did in her study on racism. Exclusion of derogatory terms from the quotes might have concealed discrimination experienced by children and made racist treatment invisible. Rastas (2007) has discussed research ethical approaches to repeating racist and othering words in research. Rastas came to the conclusion that the research subject has the right to choose the words they use, as they are quite aware of the meaning of those words. However, Rastas emphasises that racist terms should be avoided in the body text to maintain an anti-racist perspective.

A key research ethical decision was to examine the preliminary results of the study together with the Roma children, stakeholders and research communities before finalising the report. It was important for the effectiveness of the study to also use the preliminary results as a basis for reflection on measures to be included in the National Roma Policy to promote the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights through Roma policy measures in 2023–2030. The implementation and preliminary results of the study were also discussed at a conference of the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs, as well as with the steering group and the working group. The results of the study were also utilised for the reporting of the Voice of Children and Young People in Europe project. The material will not be stored for further use, as requested by the stakeholders.

Roma children participated in planning the photographs used for the report in connection with activities of the Jyväskylän Roma Youth Association, where they discussed the implementation of ideas that emerged during the interviews for this study together with a professional photographer.

5.2 Conclusions and proposed measures

The key results for this study are related to the significance of family and relatives, Roma culture, experiences of bullying and discrimination and future plans and dreams.

The study paints a relatively positive picture of the life of Roma children in Finland. The results show that Roma children should not be seen as a single homogenous group. In their responses, the children described overlapping identities that were connected to acting as a member of the family, relationships with friends, school, studies, work and future plans.

Tightly knit family relations can be considered to be a particularly strong source of strength for Roma children. Children spend a lot of time with their families and, despite discrimination, they have a large support network of people close to them. Their friends also include cousins and other relatives. Younger Roma children in particular spoke of openness and closeness with their parents. It would be wonderful if these warm relationships continued into adulthood. Home is a safe place for children, where they can be themselves, relax and be heard. The good life of parents is reflected in their children, as are matters such as financial worries, mental health problems and substance abuse. It must be ensured that the well-being of Roma families can be supported, and it should be ensured that children and their parents can engage in meaningful shared activities.

The children are proud of their heritage and also want to learn the Roma language. Knowledge of their own culture, customs and traditions reinforces the children's identities and fosters a feeling of kinship with their family and relatives. Donning traditional Roma dress is a matter of honour for many children, even though they know that it will increase prejudice from the majority population.

The discrimination faced by the children impairs their well-being. This discrimination is recurrent, and adults seldom have the means to support their children and put a stop to discrimination at school or in their children's free time. Repeated experiences of discrimination weaken children's sense of

security and possibility to be themselves. Children are particularly vulnerable to discrimination at various transitional periods of their lives, such as when starting school, moving to secondary school, donning Roma dress and considering their upper secondary education options. Efforts should, therefore, be made to improve the ability of adults to support children. Children must receive the individual support they need at school and in their free time.

Roma children have diverse plans for the future, and vocational training is a logical next step to primary education for them. A fear of growing up and fears relating to the future erode children's belief in a better future. Children view employment and income as uncertain regardless of the level of education they intend to seek. Fears relating to the uncertainties of the future make dreaming challenging. It is important for student counselling in lower and upper secondary school to provide Roma children with encouragement and concrete steps they can take to achieve their dreams.

Solutions proposed by Roma children to promote their own well-being work well as a conclusion to this study:

- increasing awareness of the Roma and their culture;
- encounters between Roma children and the majority population;
- changing the majority population's attitudes towards the Roma; and
- ability to see Roma children as individuals.

Proposed measures were prepared based on the study. Many of them promote the well-being of all children and families and would benefit the entire population. The proposed measures also include special issues that, on the basis of this study, appear to affect Roma children, in particular. Particular attention should be paid to these issues.

Proposed measures

Significance of family and relatives

1. Support parenthood and safeguard well-being in Roma families.
2. Organise joint leisure activities for children and their parents.
3. Engage reliable Roma adults to support children in their adolescence and on the cusp of adulthood.

Pride in Roma culture and the wish to learn the Roma language

4. Increase the availability of information on Roma and their culture in schools and various communications channels.
5. Provide more opportunities to learn the Roma language, both as a school subject and in club-type leisure activities and through children's programmes, books and stories.

Experiences of bullying and discrimination

6. Increase encounters between Roma children and the majority population, for example through shared hobbies, camps, events and internships.
7. Support and reinforce children's social inclusion and social skills at school and in leisure activities.
8. Bolster the ability of teachers and other adults to intervene in discrimination.
9. Support Roma children in the transitional phases of childhood and offer individual support to children.
10. See Roma children as individuals instead of representatives of their culture.

Plans for the future and dreaming

11. Invest in student counselling when Roma children are considering their further study options and choice of occupation.
12. Arrange diverse internships and summer job opportunities for children.
13. Give children the chance to dream and support them in setting targets to achieve their dreams.

Hearing Roma children

14. Going forward, it will be important to ensure that Roma children are regularly consulted on issues related to their well-being and the realisation of their rights, using both qualitative and quantitative methods, and also in order to collect follow-up data.

Sources

Act on the Ombudsman for Children 1221/2004.

Angersaari, I. (2011). *Näkymättömästä näkyväksi – Romanilasten sadut ja tarinat: tutkimus kuopiolaisten romanilasten asemasta*. [From Invisible to Visible – Stories and Narratives of Roma Children. A Study of the Status of Roma Children in the City of Kuopio]. Master's thesis. University of Eastern Finland, Faculty of Social Sciences and Business Studies. <http://urn.fi/urn:nbn:fi:uef-20110367>

Boelius, T. (2017). *Romanilapset, -nuoret ja -perheet osana LAPE-muutosohjelmaa*. Keski-Suomen sosiaalialan osaamiskeskus Koske. https://koskeverkko.fi/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/LAPE_Romaniselyitys_VALMIS_31.1.2017.pdf

Finnish Government (2021a). *National Child Strategy: Committee report*. Publications of the Finnish Government 2022:16. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-740-9>

Finnish Government (2021b). *Implementation plan for the National Child Strategy: Government Resolution*. Publications of the Finnish Government 2022:38. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-383-823-9>

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (2018). Results of the School Health Promotion study 2017. Sotkanet.fi statistics and indicator bank. www.sotkanet.fi

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (2022). Results of the School Health Promotion study 2021. Sotkanet.fi statistics and indicator bank. www.sotkanet.fi

Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (2019). *The ethical principles of research with human participants and ethical review in the human sciences in Finland: Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK guidelines 2019*. https://tenk.fi/sites/default/files/2021-01/Ethical_review_in_human_sciences_2020.pdf

Haikkola, L. & Myllyniemi, S. (2020). *Hyvää työtä! Nuorisobarometri 2019*. [Good work! Youth Barometer 2019]. Publications of the Finnish Youth Research Network. <https://tietoanuorista.fi/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/nuorisobarometri2019-netti.pdf>

Helakorpi, J., Lappalainen, S. & Sahlström, F. (2019). Becoming tolerable: subject constitution of Roma mediators in Finnish schools. *Intercultural Education* 30(13), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2018.1537671>

Junkala, P. & Tawah, S. (2009). *Enemmän samanlaisia kuin erilaisia: Romanilasten ja -nuorten hyvinvointi ja heidän oikeuksiensa toteutuminen Suomessa*. Publications of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children 2009:2. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN::978-952-00-2855-8>

Madetoja, P. (2009). Romanipuvut Suomen kansallismuseon kokoelmissa. *Suomen Museo* 116, 101–125. <https://journal.fi/suomenmuseo/issue/view/7827>

- Myllyniemi, S. & Kiilakoski, T. (2019). Tilasto-osio. [Statistic]. In E. Pekkarinen & S. Myllyniemi (eds.) *Vaikutusvaltaa Euroopan laidalla. Nuorisobarometri 2018. [Youth Barometer 2018. Influence on the Edge of Europe]*. State Youth Council, Finnish Youth Research Society, Finnish Youth Research Network, Ministry of Education and Culture, 9–112. https://tietoanuorista.fi/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/NB_2018_web.pdf
- Niemi, A., Mietola, R. & Helakorpi, J. (2010). *Erityisluokka elämänselityksessä: Selvitys peruskoulussa erityisluokalla opiskelevien vammaisten, romaniväestöön kuuluvien ja maahanmuuttajataustaisten nuorten aikuisten koulutus- ja työelämäkokemuksista*. [Special Needs Class in the Course of Life: A study on the educational and working life experiences of young people with disability, Roma and immigrant background, who studied in special education classes]. Publications of the Ministry of the Interior, No. 1. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-491-550-2>
- Ombudsman for Children (2014). *Childhood Inequality –The Wellbeing of Children as shown by National Indicators. Annual Report of the Ombudsman for Children 2014*. Publications of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children 2014:3. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-00-3663-8>
- Ombudsman for Children (2022). *Young Advisers meeting: Meeting with middle school pupils at Borgaregatan skolan* [memo]. <https://lapsiasia.fi/lasten-kuulemiset>
- Ombudsman for Children & National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs (2022). *Uusi selvitys romanilasten ja -nuorten hyvinvoinnista ja oikeuksien toteutumisesta* [press release]. <https://lapsiasia.fi/-/tiedote-selvitys-romanilapset-ja-nuoret>
- Pekkarinen, E., Tuukkanen, T. & Kekkonen, K. (2020). Maapallon tulevaisuus ja lapsen oikeudet – Johdatus teokseen. In E. Pekkarinen & T. Tuukkanen (eds.) *Maapallon tulevaisuus ja lapsen oikeudet*. Publications of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children 2020:4, 5–13. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-259-843-1>
- Pulma, P. (2012). *Suomen romanien historia*. Finnish Literature Society, SKS.
- Pääkkö, L. & Gissler, M. (2018). Katoavatko katoanalyysit? *Sosiaalilääketieteellinen aikakauslehti* 55, 266–269. <https://doi.org/10.23990/sa.70434>
- Rajala, S., Salonen, M., Blomerus, S. & Nissilä, L. (2011). *Romanioppilaiden perusopetuksen tilannekatsaus 2010–2011 ja toimenpide-ehdotukset*. [Basic Education of Roma Pupils – Review 2010–2011 and proposals]. Finnish National Agency for Education. Opetushallitus, Raportit ja selvitykset 2011:26.
- Rajala, S. & Schwartz, M. (2020). *Romanilapset varhaiskasvatuksessa ja esiopetuksessa*. Finnish National Agency for Education. Opetushallitus, Raportit ja selvitykset 2020:26. <https://www.oph.fi/fi/tilastot-ja-julkaisut/julkaisut/romanilapset-varhaiskasvatuksessa-ja-esiopetuksessa>
- Rastas, A. (2002). Katseilla merkityt, silminnähdyn erilaiset: Lasten ja nuorten kokemuksia rodullistavista katseista. *Nuorisotutkimus* 3, 3–17. <https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi:uta-201301301018>
- Rastas, A. (2007). Neutraalisti rasistinen? Erään sanan politiikkaa. In J. Kuortti, M. Lehtonen, & O. Löytty (eds.) *Kolonialismin jäljet: Keskustat, periferiat ja Suomi*. Gaudeamus, 119–141.

- Salasuo, M. (2020). *Harrastamisen äärellä: Lasten ja nuorten vapaa-aikatutkimus 2020*. [A close Look at Participation in Hobby Activities. A Study of Children's and Young People's Leisure Activities in 2020]. Finnish Youth Research Network. Nuorisotutkimusverkoston julkaisuja nro 233. <https://tietoanuorista.fi/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/lasten-ja-nuorten-vapaa-aikatutkimus-2020-web.pdf>
- Statistics Finland (2022). *Official Statistics of Finland (OSF): Age structure of population 31 December*. https://www.tilastokeskus.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto_en.html
- Steckermeier, L. C. (2019). Better safe than sorry: Does agency moderate the relevance of safety perceptions for the subjective well-being of young children. *Child Indicators Research* 12, 29–48. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-017-9519-y>
- Stenroos, M., Jääskeläinen, K. & Attias M. (2021). *Suomalaisten romanien ja romaniasioissa toimivien vaikutusmahdollisuudet alueelliseen ja eurooppalaiseen romanipolitiikkaan*. National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs. <https://romani.fi/-raportti-suomalaisten-romanien-ja-romaniasioissa-toimivien-vaikutusmahdollisuudet-alueelliseen-ja-eurooppalaiseen-romanipolitiikkaan>
- Tammi, T., Hohti, R., Rautio, P., Leinonen, R. & Saari, M. H. (2020). *Lasten ja eläinten suhteet: Monilajista yhteiselo*. Into.
- Tuukkanen, T. (2018). *Lapsibarometri 2018: Lasten kokemustiedon keräämisen metodologisia kysymyksiä*. [Child Barometer 2018]. Publications of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children 2018:4. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-259-726-7>
- Tuukkanen, T. (2022). *Lapsibarometri 2022: ”Jos joku on mun lähellä, sillon mä en pelkään” – lasten näkemyksiä turvallisuudesta*. [Child Barometer 2022]. Publications of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children 2022:9.
- Törmä, S. & Huotari, K. (2018). *Romanien asumisen yhdenvertaisuuden seurantaselvitys*. [Follow-up report on equality of the Roma in housing]. Reports of the Ministry of the Environment 6:2018. <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-11-4783-8>
- UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2011). *Committee on the Rights of the Child, fifty-seventh session: Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention*. Concluding Observations: Finland. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/708484?ln=en>
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Viljanen, A. M., Granqvist, K., & Enache, A. (2015). Suomalaisen romanitutkimuksen vuosisadat. *Idäntutkimus* 22(3), 41–53. <https://journal.fi/idantutkimus/article/view/77977>
- Weckström, E., Kekkonen, K. & Kekkonen, O. (2023). *The well-being of Sámi children and the realisation of their rights*. Publications of the Office of the Ombudsman for Children 2023:2. <https://lapsiasia.fi/en/publications>
- Weiste-Paakkanen, A., Lämsä, R. & Kuusio, H. (eds.) (2018). *Suomen romaniväestön osallisuus ja hyvinvointi: Romanien hyvinvointitutkimus Roosan perustulokset 2017–2018*. Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare. Terveysten ja hyvinvoinnin laitos, Raportti 15/2018. <https://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-343-246-8>

Members of the working group and the steering group

Working group / Survey Study of the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights

Inga Angersaari, Suomen Romanifoorumi - Fintiko Romano Forum

Janette Grönfors, Senior Specialist, Acting General Secretary, National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs

Pia Kara, Project Coordinator, Romano Missio ry

Malla Laiti, Senior Planning Officer, Regional Advisory Board on Romani Affairs for Southern Finland

Henry Lindgren, Planning Officer, Regional Advisory Board on Romani Affairs for Northern Finland

Helena Valentin, Planning Officer, Regional Advisory Board on Romani Affairs for Eastern Finland

Anneli Weiste, Senior Specialist, General Secretary, National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs

Tuula Åkerlund, Executive Director, Romano Missio ry

Katja Ärling, Senior Planning Officer, Regional Advisory Board on Romani Affairs for Southwestern Finland

Steering group / Surveys Studies of the well-being of Roma and Sámi children and the realisation of their rights

Elli-Marja Hetta, Youth Secretary, Sámi Parliament of Finland, Sámi Expert

Riitta Lehtola-Kosonen, Planning Officer, Sámi Parliament of Finland, Sámi Expert

Anne Länsman-Magga, Social Affairs and Health Secretary, Sámi Parliament of Finland, Sámi Expert

Elina Pekkarinen, Ombudsman for Children, Office of the Ombudsman for Children

Kirsi Pollari, Senior Specialist, National Child Strategy

Marko Stenroos, Planning Officer, Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, Specialist in Romani Studies

Terhi Tuukkanen, Senior Researcher, Office of the Ombudsman for Children

Kaisa Vehkalahti, Academy Research Fellow, University of Jyväskylä, Specialist in Youth and Childhood Studies

Study of the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights: Framework of focused interviews

During the interview, you can discuss different aspects related to **home, friends, relatives, school, hobbies, social media and other leisure activities** as extensively as possible.

Participation in this interview is voluntary and the conversations are confidential. You can participate in the discussion in any manner you want and you can choose not to answer all questions. We can end the interview whenever you want, even in the middle of the interview. If you are eager to continue the discussion, we can spend as long as you like on the interview.

INTERESTS

First, I would be interested in hearing about things that interest you.

PARTICIPATION

Participation and expressing your opinion on matters that concern you are closely connected to the rights of the child. I would like to hear your thoughts about your possibilities to influence things.

Could you tell me what the rights of the child mean to you?

RELATIONSHIPS

We interact with various people at home, at school, when visiting relatives, on social media and in our free time. I would be interested in hearing about people who are close to you.

EMOTIONS

Next, I would be interested in hearing about emotions you feel at school, at home and in your free time.

FUTURE

Next, I would like to hear your thoughts on the future.

DISCRIMINATION AND PROTECTION

Our next topic is discrimination and protection. I would like to hear about discrimination, violence or mistreatment you have witnessed or experienced.

Please describe how you being Roma can be seen in your life or how it impacts your life.

The Roma have a legal right to maintain and develop their own language and culture. Please describe how the right to your own language and culture can be seen in your life.

Imagine getting to choose three photographs that say something about things that are important to you about being Roma. What kinds of photographs would you choose? What would the photographs show?

Can you think of anything else that affects your well-being or the realisation of your rights?

Dear research participant,

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children and the National Child Strategy are carrying out a study on the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights in Finland. The research material will be collected from participating Finnish Roma children and young people between the ages of 11 and 17. The study is a type of research for which we wish to hear your thoughts and the thoughts of other Roma children and young people. We will compile those thoughts together and the results will show us what Roma children and young people think about their well-being and the realisation of their rights.

The research material will be collected in two phases. 1) The first phase consists of **focused interviews** and 2) the second phase involves an **electronic survey**, which is based on views that emerged during the interviews. The interviews and the survey will be implemented in the spring of 2022.

The interviews will be conducted by Senior Researcher **Elina Weckström**, Research Assistant **Karri Kekkonen** and Planning Officer **Outi Kekkonen**. The interviewers have agreed on certain topics related to well-being and realisation of rights to be discussed during the interviews. The participants can freely discuss the presented topics and the interviewers may ask further questions or request the participants to talk more about a specific subject.

You can participate in an interview alone or with one or two other children or young people. The interviews will be recorded, transcribed into text format and all identifying information will be removed from the text. Once the final report is complete, the original audio recording will be destroyed. The interview takes approximately one hour.

You can take part in an interview if you identify as Roma. We respect your right to decide on your own participation, and we will ask for your consent for your participation in connection with your interview and the survey. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can ask for more information on the study or stop your participation whenever you want.

When reporting on the results of the study, it will be ensured that individual participants cannot be directly identified. The final report on the study will be published in early 2023. The report will be sent to decision-makers on the national, wellbeing service county and municipal levels. The report will support researchers and people working with children when it comes to decision-making, development and practical measures. The results will also be discussed with children and young people who participated in the study.

Senior Researcher **Elina Weckström** from the Office of the Ombudsman for Children is responsible for the study. If you have any questions regarding the study, please contact Research Assistant **Karri Kekkonen** by email at **karri.kekkonen@oikeus.fi** or by telephone at **029 5666 864**

Best regards,

Elina Weckström
Senior Researcher

Karri Kekkonen
Research Assistant

Dear custodian,

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children is carrying out a study on the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights in Finland. The research material will be collected from participating Finnish Roma children and young people between the ages of 11 and 17. The study is part of the Implementation Plan for the National Child Strategy (see [measure 5](#)) and it is funded by the National Child Strategy. A preliminary ethics assessment has been performed on the study, and the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs has granted communal consent for the implementation of the study.

The objective of the study is to hear thoughts, opinions and experiences of Roma children and young people on their well-being and the realisation of their rights. The research material will be collected in two phases. 1) The first phase consists of **focused interviews** and 2) the second phase involves an **electronic survey**, which is based on views expressed by children and young people during the interviews. The interviews and the survey will be implemented in the spring of 2022.

Any child or young person who identifies as Roma can participate in the study. Custodians will not be asked for written consent for their child's participation in the study. However, if you do not want your child to participate in an interview, please inform Research Assistant Karri Kekkonen about this in advance. We respect the right of children and young people to decide on their own participation, and we will ask for consent from all participants in connection with the interviews and the survey. Participation is voluntary.

Children and young people can take part in the interviews alone, in pairs or in groups of three. The time reserved for each interview is **approximately one hour**. The interviews will be conducted by Senior Researcher **Elina Weckström**, Research Assistant **Karri Kekkonen** and Planning Officer **Outi Kekkonen**. The

interviews will be conducted in Finnish. The interviewers have agreed on certain topics related to well-being and realisation of rights to be discussed during the interviews. The participants can freely discuss the presented topics and the interviewers may ask further questions or request participants to talk more about a specific subject. An electronic survey will be conducted later with a more extensive reach. Children and young people who provide an interview are not required to take the survey, nor are they prevented from taking the survey.

The research material obtained through the interviews and the survey will only be processed by the senior researcher and the research assistant. All identifying information, such as names mentioned during interviews, will be removed before processing the material. It will not be possible to directly identify individual participants from the research report. The final report on the study will be published in early 2023. The report will be sent to decision-makers on the national, wellbeing service county and municipal levels. The report will support researchers and people working with children when it comes to decision-making, development and practical measures. The publication event will be open to everyone and the results will be discussed with children and young people who participated in the study.

Senior Researcher **Elina Weckström** from the Office of the Ombudsman for Children is responsible for the study.

If you have any questions regarding the study, please contact Research Assistant **Karri Kekkonen** by email at karri.kekkonen@oikeus.fi

Best regards,

Elina Weckström
Senior Researcher

Karri Kekkonen
Research Assistant

Survey of Roma children and young people aged 11 – 17

We want to hear your thoughts and opinions on living as a Roma child or young person in Finland!

You can respond to the survey if you are 11 – 17 years old and identify as Roma. The survey takes approximately 10 – 20 minutes to complete. The survey is available until 10 August 2022. Please note that you cannot save your responses before completing the whole survey, so you should respond to all questions in one go.

Your responses will provide important information on the well-being of Roma children and young people and the realisation of your rights to support decision-making. You can also share the link to the survey with other Roma children and young people.

Participation in the survey is voluntary. By taking the survey and pressing the Send button you give your consent for the use of your responses as research material for this study. Individual respondents cannot be directly identified from the report on the results of the study. The final report on the study will be published in early 2023 in various places, including the website of the Ombudsman for Children lapsiasia.fi.

The study is carried out by the Office of the Ombudsman for Children and the National Child Strategy. Further information on the study is available [here](#). You can also ask for more information from Research Assistant Karri Kekkonen: karri.kekkonen@oikeus.fi or 050 541 5656. Senior Researcher Elina Weckström is responsible for the study.

We appreciate your participation!

BACKGROUND QUESTIONS

- 1) I am
 - ☐ a girl
 - ☐ a boy
 - ☐ both
 - ☐ other
 - ☐ I do not wish to specify
- 2) My age is
 - ☐ 10 years or younger
 - ☐ 11 – 13 years
 - ☐ 14 – 17 years
 - ☐ 18 years or older
- 3) I identify as Roma
 - ☐ Yes
 - ☐ No
- 4) I live in
 - ☐ the centre of a large city
 - ☐ a suburb or outskirts of a large city
 - ☐ the centre of a small city or town
 - ☐ a sparsely populated area of a small city or town
 - ☐ a rural area
 - ☐ I don't know

LEISURE

- 5) How do you spend your free time?
- 6) Where can you be yourself and relax?
- 7) Do you have a hobby? What is your hobby? *(In this survey, hobbies mean regular leisure activities intended to relax and bring pleasure, such as playing games, taking photographs, crafts, cycling, reading, sports, music, animals)*

- 8) What do you like about hobbies?
- 9) What prevents you from participating in hobbies?
- 10) Do you exercise alone or with friends? How do you exercise? *(In this study, exercise means activity that raises your heart rate and makes you get out of breath, such as playing with your friends, walking a dog or cycling to school.)*

SCHOOL

- 11) Do you receive education at
- ☐ school
 - ☐ home
- 12) How do you like school or home-schooling?
- ☐ I like being at school
 - ☐ I like being at school relatively much
 - ☐ I sometimes like being at school
 - ☐ I do not like being at school at all
- 13) What are you satisfied with about school or home-schooling?
- 14) What do you wish would change about school or home-schooling?
- 15) Would you like to learn / learn more Romani language?
- ☐ At home with your family
 - ☐ In your free time in a Romani language club
 - ☐ At school as a school subject
 - ☐ Somewhere else, please specify
 - ☐ Not at all

WELL-BEING

- 16) How satisfied are you with your life?
- ☐ I'm very satisfied

- ☐ I'm fairly satisfied
- ☐ I'm fairly dissatisfied
- ☐ I'm very dissatisfied

17) What is important to you about Roma customs, traditions and culture?

18) What makes you happy?

19) What makes you sad?

20) What makes you scared?

21) How do you consider current issues, such as the coronavirus pandemic, war or climate change, to impact your life?

22) How satisfied are you with your health?

- ☐ I'm very satisfied
- ☐ I'm fairly satisfied
- ☐ I'm fairly dissatisfied
- ☐ I'm very dissatisfied

23) How do you look after your health?

24) Who has asked or encouraged you to express your thoughts or opinions?

25) What impact have your thoughts and opinions had? (text field)

- ☐ at home
- ☐ at school
- ☐ in your free time

RELATIONSHIPS

26) How satisfied are you with your relationships?

- ☐ I'm very satisfied
- ☐ I'm fairly satisfied

- ☐ I'm fairly dissatisfied
- ☐ I'm very dissatisfied

27) Who is important to you?

28) Can you talk about things that concern you with your parents?

- ☐ Often
- ☐ Fairly often
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Hardly ever

29) How many friends do you have with whom you can talk about things that concern you?

- ☐ None
- ☐ One
- ☐ Two or more

30) Do you feel lonely?

- ☐ Hardly ever
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Fairly often
- ☐ Often

31) How do you keep in contact? (text field)

- ☐ with your friends
- ☐ with your relatives
- ☐ with your family

32) Have you been in a situation where you or someone else has been bullied or discriminated against?

- ☐ Hardly ever
- ☐ Occasionally
- ☐ Fairly often
- ☐ Often
 - i. What happened during the situation? (occasionally/fairly often/often)
 - ii. How did people intervene in the situation? (occasionally/fairly often/often)
 - iii. How did intervening help? (occasionally/fairly often/often)

33) How could bullying or discrimination be reduced or prevented?

34) Does bullying and discrimination or fear of bullying and discrimination prevent you from doing something that is important to you? What?

FUTURE

35) What would you like to do in the future?

36) Who do you talk to about matters related to growing up and becoming an adult?

37) What do you dream of?

38) What would be ways of improving the status of Roma children and young people in Finland?

39) Do you wish to say something else or send your comments to the research team?

40) What did you think about the survey?

When you are finished, please press the **Send** button below.

Thank you for your responses!

If a question or topic related to the survey has stayed on your mind, it is important to talk to an adult about it. You can also discuss your thoughts with the Mannerheim League for Child Welfare by contacting their telephone helpline or chat (www.nuortennetti.fi).

The number of the helpline for children and young people is 116 111

*The number of the helpline for children and young people is open: Mon – Fri, 2 pm – 8 pm and
Sat – Sun, 5 pm – 8 pm*

The helpline is open on every day of the year. Calls to the number are free of charge and will not show on your telephone bill. You can contact the service anonymously. The calls are not recorded.

The Office of the Ombudsman for Children and the National Child Strategy are carrying out a study on the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights in Finland. The objective of the study is to hear thoughts, opinions and experiences of Roma children and young people and use this information to support decision-making and development.

Roma children and young people aged 11 – 17 can participate in the study. The study has been planned together with the Roma community and a preliminary ethics assessment has been performed on the study. 18 Roma children and young people were interviewed during the first phase of the study. In the second phase, children and young people will take a survey that has been prepared based on the interviews. The survey can be taken between 2 May and 5 June 2022.

Taking the survey is voluntary. In order to obtain as much information as possible on the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights, we hope that as many children and young people as possible will take the survey. The link to the survey can be shared. With regard to consent, we respect the right of children and young people to decide on their own participation.

It will not be possible to directly identify individual participants from the research report. The final report on the study will be published in early 2023 and the results will be discussed with the children and young people who took part in the study.

Senior Researcher **Elina Weckström** from the Office of the Ombudsman for Children is responsible for the study. If you have any questions regarding the study, please contact Research Assistant **Karri Kekkonen** by email at karri.kekkonen@oikeus.fi or by telephone at 050 541 5656. Further information on the study is available on the [website](#) of the Ombudsman for Children.

The survey can be taken [here](#).



LAPSIASIAVALTUUTETTU
OMBUDSMAN FOR CHILDREN