



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

The survey examined the well-being of Roma children and the realisation of their rights in the words of the children themselves. The results paint a quite positive picture of the life of Roma children in Finland. Roma children still face discrimination and racism, however, and should not be seen as a single, homogeneous group.

The survey was carried out by the Office of the Ombudsman for Children in cooperation with Roma stakeholders 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.

Results

Significance of family and relatives

The well-being of Roma children is strongly based on tight-knit family relations. Children spend a lot of time with their families and have large support networks 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. Home is a safe place for the child, where they can be themselves, relax and be heard.

"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."

Significance of culture

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 important thing is to live with and be connected to other Roma. Friendship and respect between everyone."

Bullying and discrimination

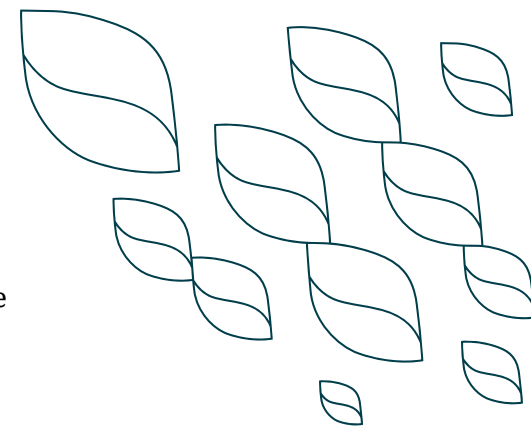
The discrimination faced by the children degrades their well-being. This discrimination is recurring, and adults seldom have the means to support children or to put a stop to discrimination at school or in children's free time. Repeated experiences of discrimination weaken the children's sense of security and possibility to be themselves. Children are especially vulnerable to discrimination in 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.

"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!"

Dreaming and the future

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 erodes the children's belief in a better future. The children see their employment prospects and livelihoods as uncertain regardless of education. Dreaming is made difficult by the uncertainties related to the future.

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



Suggested measures

Significance of family and relatives

1. Support parenthood and safeguard well-being in Roma families.
2. Organise common leisure activities for children and their parents.
3. Engage reliable Roma adults to support the 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 the 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 the children.
10. See Roma children as individuals instead of representatives of their culture.

Plans for the future and dreaming

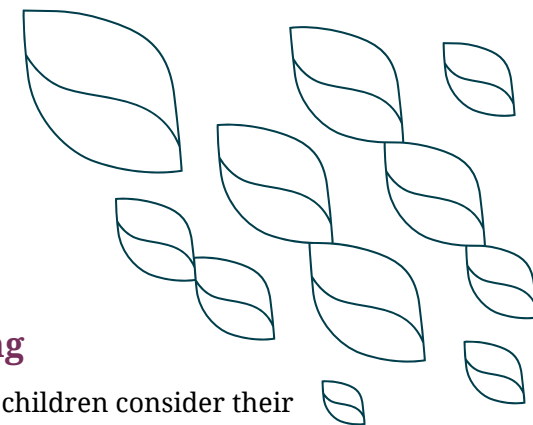
11. Invest in student counselling when Roma children consider their further study options and choice of profession.
12. Arrange diverse internships and summer job opportunities for the children.
13. Give the children the chance to dream and support them in setting targets to achieve their own dreams.

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.

Solutions proposed by the children for promoting the well-being of Roma children

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





The Roma in Finland

- The Roma are a Finnish linguistic and cultural minority that has lived in Finland for over 500 years.
- The status of the Roma as a national, traditional minority is enshrined in the Constitution of Finland.
- There are approx. 10,000 Roma in Finland. Another 3,000 or so Finnish Roma live over in Sweden.
- The Roma 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. This way of dressing is based on respect for older people.
- Roma who decide to adopt the traditional Roma dress typically start wearing it at the age of 17–20. The traditional Roma dress is worn every day, also at school and work.
- International Romani Day is celebrated on 8 April.

Read more:

Elina Weckström, Karri Kekkonen & Outi Kekkonen (2023).

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

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

Publications of the Ombudsman for Children in Finland 2023:4.

Office of the Ombudsman for Children.

<https://lapsiasia.fi/en/publications>



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