

National set of policy measures for Roma integration in Estonia

Based on Commission's Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies by 2020 of 5 April 2011 and the Council Conclusions of 19 May 2011

1) Description of the current situation

According to the last census data of the Estonian Statistical Office, there are around one hundred nationalities of different ethnic origin in Estonia. There are an estimated 600 to 1,000 Roma living in Estonia and their largest communities are located in Southern Estonia (185 Roma), North-Eastern Estonia (92 Roma), and Western Estonia (69 Roma). Proportionally, the residents who have identified themselves as an ethnic group different from the titular nationality form an estimated 31% of the population, and just 0.04% of them are Roma. Roma in Estonia are not travellers. Roma population is frequently concentrated into relatively small communities in settlements or towns all over Estonia with the exception of 2 counties out of 15.

Estonia supports the strengthening of European Union level cooperation for the better inclusion of disadvantaged groups, including Roma, in the society and focussing on issues of employment, education, healthcare and housing. Like other area-specific strategies, the Estonian National Integration Strategy is built on the principle of equal treatment and on the basis of areas rather than ethnic groups. The Integration Strategy is implemented to include all ethnic groups in the society; there are no separate strategies for including specific ethnic groups. The objective of the Integration Strategy is to support the integration process and to create equal opportunities on the labour market. It is implemented in three areas: educational-cultural, socio-economic and legal-political. Integration is addressed as a two-way process, where the preservation of ethnic identity and culture of ethnic groups is supported and more equal opportunities for subsistence and participation in social life area created through improving the titular language skills.

Roma receive social assistance and services on equal grounds with others. Roma children have equal opportunities in the Estonian educational system compared to children of other nationalities; the applicable regulation of the provision of social services and benefits does not establish restrictions on Roma in the provision/receipt of need-based services. No separate records have been kept on the movement and citizenship of Roma. Indeed, the biggest problem is that the data concerning the number and activities of Roma is incomplete, which also makes the monitoring of their educational progress difficult. One of the keys for breaking out of the vicious circle of social exclusion is namely the provision of education for Roma children. In order to facilitate the increase of the level of education of Roma, proposals are being developed for supporting the education of Roma on the basis of the existing problems and the description of good practices. In addition, relevant further training for pedagogues and members of counselling committees is planned.

The state supports the activities of ethnic groups with the objective of preserving their ethnic identity and cultural heritage. There are currently 9 Roma associations registered in Estonia. Cooperation is particularly active with the North Estonian Roma Association, which includes the Roma community all over Estonia and which the state has been supporting from the very beginning.

2) National goals

We see a need for mapping the problems related to Roma in order to use it as basis for developing appropriate measures that support the target group to the highest degree possible. For instance, the 'location' of Roma children and their educational choices in the Estonian education system will be mapped in cooperation with the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. The aim of such mapping is to use the obtained information for preparing relevant training courses and materials to support teachers. With the state's support and in cooperation with the MoER, the North Estonian

Roma Association and the researchers of the University of Tartu, a relevant study will soon be completed, which can be used as the basis for that.

3) Action plan

Estonia sees the continuation of the implementation of the existing measures for the inclusion of Roma as the most appropriate solution. In line with the Estonian Integration Strategy for 2008-2013, the activities implemented are aimed at all non-Estonian and non-Estonian-speaking residents regardless of their nationality. A survey of sub-cultures, where Roma are one of the target groups, will be conducted in Estonia in 2012-2013 with assistance from the European Fund for the Integration of Third-country Nationals. The results of the survey will map the needs of the target group and describe how Roma cope in the society.

Since 2000, a regular monitoring of integration in the society is conducted every two years, providing an overview of how non-Estonians cope compared to Estonians. Data is gathered on the basis of citizenship, nationality, language, age etc. As the Roma community in Estonia is very small, it has been included in the sample group in such small numbers and so rarely that it would be impossible to draw any generalised conclusions on the basis of the data. It is known that the data on how Roma cope do not differ from the data concerning other non-Estonians¹.

The next monitoring report on integration in the Estonian society will be completed in the second quarter of 2012. If a sufficient number of Roma is included in the sample group, it will allow gathering information also about Roma.

4) Horizontal aspects

The requirement of equal treatment is provided for in the legislation of Estonia. According to section 12 of the Constitution of the Republic of Estonia, everyone is equal before the law. No one shall be discriminated on the basis of nationality, race, colour, sex, language, origin, religion, political or other opinion, property or social status, or on other grounds. The Equal Treatment Act that entered into force in 2009 prohibits discrimination based on, among other grounds, ethnic origin, race, colour and religion. This Act prohibits discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin, race and colour in employment, education and social protection (social security, health care and social welfare), as well as in access to and supply of goods and services available to the public (incl. housing), while protection on the grounds of religious or other belief is limited to the area of employment. Increasing public awareness of the Equal Treatment Act and its full implementation would help avoid cases of discrimination in everyday life, including those concerning the Roma population. Numerous projects conducted in 2010, 2011 and planned for 2012 under the EU PROGRESS programme, such as the publication of a handbook on the Equal Treatment Act and related training, two international conferences "Diversity Enriches" and awareness raising media campaigns, have begun to address this issue. Projects conducted in 2010, 2011 and planned for 2012 under the EU Fund for the Intergration of Third Country Nationals are aimed towards increasing the awareness of both employers and employees concerning their rights and obligations under the Equal Treatment Act, and possibilities for the protection of their rights in potential cases of discrimination.

Starting from 2009, an amendment to the Government of the Republic Act entered into force, pursuant to which the task of promoting equal treatment was placed in the competence of the Ministry of Social Affairs. The Gender Equality Department of the Ministry of Social Affairs has created 0.5 jobs for addressing matters of equal treatment. There have been no complaints with

¹ Integration and Migration Foundation Our People, library <http://www.meis.ee/raamatukogu?page=1>

regards to living conditions at Illuka reception centre (housing centre for asylum seekers) or concerning the right to housing by Roma people.²

Like other strategic documents (e.g. Development Plan of Children and Families 2012-2020), the 2012-2015 Strategic Action Plan of the Ministry of Social Affairs does not foresee specific measures for Roma people. This is due to the fact that pursuant to legislation all residents, aliens residing in Estonia on the basis of residence permits or right of residence and persons enjoying international protection staying in Estonia have an equal right to labour market services, social assistance and social services. Every person staying in Estonia has the right to receive emergency social assistance.

The Strategic Action Plan of the Ministry of Social Affairs sets three objectives for the forthcoming period:

1. The income, quality of life and social security of people have increased;
2. People live a long and high-quality life;
3. The welfare and quality of life of children and families have increased.

Under these objectives a number of measures are foreseen. The most important ones of these are the following:

- To increase the supply of qualified labour force by bringing the unemployed back to the labour market and preventing hopelessness by providing various services, promoting labour force mobility within Estonia and between different branches of economy;
- To increase the quality of labour life through changing the working environment more employee health friendly, increasing the flexicurity and clarity in labour relations and increasing the work life satisfaction of the parties to employment relationships;
- To ensure adequate income for people covered under social insurance schemes through ensuring the minimum standard of the European Code of Social Security (ETS No 48), the need-based availability, efficiency, innovativeness, quality management, supervision and long-term financial sustainability of welfare services, improving the system of analysing the need for and planning welfare services and improving the qualification of specialists in the welfare area;
- To eliminate gender inequality and promote equality through improving the coordination of the mainstreaming of gender equality, reducing violence against women and domestic violence and reducing human trafficking;
- To increase social cohesion through ensuring the social inclusion and the protection of the rights of people with disabilities, implementing the policy for the elderly, promoting the mental health of people and coordinating the equal treatment of people;
- To encourage healthy choices and a healthy lifestyle through increasing the physical activity, improving the eating habits and reducing the risk behaviour of the population;
- To ensure living, working and study environments supportive of health through increasing public awareness, improving the efficiency of the system of assessment, managing and communicating health risks, preventing the spread of infectious diseases and improving the efficiency of supervision over living, working and study environments;
- To ensure the accessibility of high-quality healthcare services to all those in need of assistance through increasing public awareness, developing primary level healthcare services, emergency medical care and residential care, optimising the hospital network and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the financing of healthcare;

² ENAR Shadow Report 2009/2010 “Racism and Discrimination in Estonia”, available at: <http://www.lichr.ee/main/assets/EstoniaShr.pdf>

- To ensure the rights of children through improving the efficiency of child protection systems, shaping the necessary policies, developing the welfare services aimed at children and providing assistance to abused children, unaccompanied children and child victims of human trafficking;
- To ensure the healthy and safe development of children and young people through creating preconditions for the improvement of reproductive health and infant health, improving the monitoring of the healthy development of children and creating conditions for the protection of health;
- To increase the quality of life of families through shaping a knowledge-based and uniform children and families policy, supporting parenthood, supporting the balancing of work, family and private life and developing a balanced and combined system for supporting the economic subsistence of families.

Based on the development trends highlighted in the Development Plan of the Ministry of Social Affairs, the national development plans “National Health Plan 2009-2020” and “Children and Families Development Plan 2012-2020.”

The educational possibilities and the increase of the level of education of Roma are supported by measures aimed at the prevention of dropping out of school and early interruption of the educational path. In 2010 Estonian Ministry of Education and Research launched a research project to find out the real number of Roma students and the problems and difficulties Roma pupils face in educational system. Activities are planned in 2011 and for the following years according to the results of the research. The first priority is to prepare teachers and other pedagogical staff to support Roma-students in educational environment. The second priority will be the involvement of the parents. To achieve these goals, the best practices of different schools will be described and shared. Representatives of the Roma community will be included in this process. To avoid sending Roma-students to special education institutions without medicinal basis, the members of the Councillor commissions are invited to participate in in-service training. To strengthen the ethnic identity of the Roma-students, creating the possibilities to study their mother tongue is one of the next task at the level of the Ministry of Education and Research.

The support programmes of cultural projects of ethnic minorities also finance the preservation of cultural heritage of cultural associations of ethnic minorities. The Ministry of Culture has since 2008 implemented a support programme for the cultural projects of ethnic minorities, under which financial assistance is provided to various projects of cultural associations of ethnic minorities for the preservation and introduction of their ethnic culture, organisation of song and dance festivals, training camps, introducing their traditions, and many other activities. Furthermore, cultural activities of ethnic minorities are supported by local governments, the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education and Research, the Integration and Migration Foundation Our People (founded in 1998), the Cultural Endowment of Estonia, the Gambling Tax Council and the National Foundation of Civil Society.

The Ministry of Culture supports professional and hobby theatres of ethnic minorities including Roma, concert organisers, museums, publishing projects and also the organisation of literary events, festivals and other cultural events of ethnic minorities in Estonia on a regular basis.

This year, Roma have been in the focus in Estonia through the following activities:

- On 5 January 2011, the officials of the ministries related to the area gathered at the Ministry of Culture and formed a Roma workgroup, which discussed cooperation possibilities with the members of the Roma community.

- On 6 June 2011, the Ministry of Education and Research organised a seminar at the Tallinn Teachers' House, where lecturer Leena Nissilä from the Finnish Education Board introduced examples of good practices.
- Another meeting of the Roma work group was held on 14 June 2011. The aim of the meeting was to determine the socio-economic situation of Roma in Estonia, to assess the availability of information in the related areas and to identify the possibilities of cooperation.
- Estonia celebrates the Day of Ethnic Minorities on 24 September. This year, the Ministry of Culture organised a tri-lingual conference on the given topic, "Ethnic Minorities, Culture and Media"³ and the Estonian National Broadcasting channel ETV2 produced its own schedule based on the Day of Ethnic Minorities, dedicating the programmes aired on 25 September to ethnic minorities, primarily to Roma. The schedule included programmes, documentaries and feature films about Roma⁴.

On 4 November 2011, the representatives of the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Education and Research met with the members of the South Estonian Roma Association in Tartu. The discussion focussed on possible cooperation in the region of South Estonia, particularly in Valga, where the Roma community is the largest. Relying on the example of Norway, it was found that the idea to jointly create an exhibition of Roma history and culture in Valga County deserves more serious discussion in the near future.

5) Governance mechanisms

The socio-economic situation of the Roma population can be characterised on the basis of the 2000 census, a study concerning Roma women⁵, international reports and information given by Roma leaders.

The study concerning Roma women has identified that economic difficulties are a problem for most of the families where both parents are ethnic Roma. Mixed families where one parent is Estonian or Russian had fewer coping problems. Since income is often earned with temporary jobs, state support is very important for many families as it is one of the few permanent sources of income. The pension for incapacity to work is a very widely used option, also among young Roma women. Many women also receive allowances for raising children of relatives.

According to the Social Welfare Act, all Estonian residents have an equal right to social assistance and social services. The provision of social assistance and services is based on the principle of subsidiarity. Therefore the main providers of social services and assistance are local governments.⁶ Some services, the provision of which at the local level is not reasonable due to their complexity, are provided by the state.⁷ Accessibility of assistance mainly depends on the awareness of Roma of the services as well as on the skills of local social workers in reaching those who need help. The study of Roma women pointed out that awareness of subsidies and benefits varies to a great degree – there were those who were very well aware of their rights and possibilities whereas in some cases people lacked awareness of how to find housing or get support from their local social worker

³ Via the ethnic minorities portal: <http://www.etnoweb.ee/ConferenceProject.aspx>

⁴ See in the archive at <http://etv2.err.ee/videod/bdb43493-7399-4b68-a9d4-686374ea355c>

⁵ Tali, M., Kollom, K., Velberg, M.-L. 2007. Women in Estonian Roma Communities. Research Report. Estonian Institute of Humanities of Tallinn University, Civil Society Research and Development Centre. Available at: http://www.sm.ee/fileadmin/meedia/Dokumendid/Sotsiaalvaldkond/kogumik/Naised_20Eesti_20mustlaskogukondades_uuringuraport_1_.pdf.

⁶ Welfare services provided by local governments are, for example, personal assistants, support persons, transportation for the disabled, adaptation of the place of residence, shelter, asylum, social housing, foster care, social advice and nursing services.

⁷ State welfare services are: community living services for people with severe and long-term mental special needs; technical aid service distributed at a discount; rehabilitation services for disabled people and substitute home service for children. The state also supports the provision of child care services to children with severe and profound disabilities.

because they did not know where to turn for help and it is easier and more common to find support within the community.

Many Roma families are living in moderate housing conditions. The study of Roma women highlighted that limited living space is an acute problem (especially for large families), and in some cases Roma have also very poor living conditions.

The state is obligated to create conditions in the housing market (legislation, institutional arrangement and support measures), which enable residents to solve their housing problems independently. The implementation of the Estonian Housing Policy⁸ is designed to be supported by employment, welfare and regional policy measures. Pursuant to the Constitution and the Local Government Organisation Act⁹, local governments are responsible for organising housing and utilities in their administrative territory. Local governments have to establish the procedure for keeping account of persons who have no dwelling or the right to use a dwelling, or persons who need assistance in improving their housing conditions; the procedure for managing, using and disposing of dwellings in municipal ownership, including establishing maintenance and repair regulations and deciding other issues which by law are in the power of local government councils. Local authorities are therefore obligated to guarantee that target groups¹⁰ are supplied with suitable housing and to reduce homelessness by increasing the proportion of social housing units and housing belonging to the fund of social or municipal rental dwellings.

Unemployment influences the life of the entire Roma community. According to the 2000 census, more than a half (54.4%) of Roma aged 18 and older were inactive in the labour market, one third (30.2%) were unemployed and only 15.1% of the Roma population were employed. At the same time, the leaders of the community estimate that according to their knowledge the rate of unemployment within their community is 90%.¹¹ The disadvantaged conditions of Roma in the labour market are also reflected in the Human Rights Centre report on Human Rights in Estonia 2010.¹²

The high rate of unemployment and inactivity among Roma may also be influenced by the fact that they live in regions with a high unemployment rate (for example Valga and Ida-Viru counties). The employment of Roma can be described in greater detail on the basis of the study of Roma women:

- Women are mostly blue-collar workers, e.g. sell goods at the market, do simple cleaning or kitchen works, tell fortune. Fortune telling is used for earning a living by women with children who under the general unemployment situation often have no other possibility of maintaining their family.
- Sources of income for spouses of Roma women often include the gathering of scrap metal, ancillary farm work and ancillary work in workshops.

The provision of labour market services and the payment of employment subsidies in Estonia is regulated by the Labour Market Services and Benefits Act.¹³ Like all permanent residents of

⁸ The Estonian Housing Sector Development Plan 2008-2013 (administered by Ministry of Economic Affairs and Communications) is available at: www.mkm.ee/index.php?id=1733

⁹ The Local Government Organisation Act is available at www.riigiteataja.ee, the official translation is available at www.legaltext.ee

¹⁰ Target groups of the Estonian housing policy are: young families, children without parental care and young people without parental care, disabled people, elderly people, families with many children, people released from prison and probationers, the homeless, owners of returned dwellings, students. Roma are not a specific target group, but the target groups may also contain Roma population

¹¹ ENAR Shadow Report 2009/2010 “Racism and Discrimination in Estonia”, available at: <http://www.lichr.ee/main/assets/EstoniaShr.pdf>

¹² The Report “Human Rights in Estonia 2010” is available at: <http://humanrights.ee/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/aruanne2010-et-61.pdf>

¹³ The Labour Market Services and Benefits Act is available at www.riigiteataja.ee, official translation www.legaltext.ee

Estonia, Roma have the right to receive labour market services¹⁴ and benefits.¹⁵ Regardless of the large number of services, it seems that working-age Roma people have mostly been away from the labour market for so long that they need additional measures and services to reach the labour market. Although women included in the study mostly justified job-finding difficulties with their nationality, there may also be more objective reasons, for example, lack of education required for a particular job. Many Roma women in Estonia have been working abroad with their families for some time, mainly in Finland, Sweden and the UK.

According to the Health Care Services Organisation Act, all the people staying in the territory of the Republic of Estonia have the right to emergency care.¹⁶ Health insurance is provided also for the registered unemployed in order to alleviate the negative impacts of unemployment on health. Free health services are also available for all people with HIV or tuberculosis infection. There are no statistical data available on the health and health insurance of the Roma population; therefore there is no official information on how many of them are not covered by health insurance. The study of Roma women indicated that Roma are covered by state health insurance and they do not have problems with accessibility to health insurance. Some women had health insurance coverage while being on parental leave, pension or disability. The study identified that although Roma have many different health problems, they do not often seek medical assistance. For the prevention of health problems they rarely go to a doctor. Although they are mostly satisfied with the work and complaisance of doctors, they often lack the financial means for purchasing medicine.

6) Monitoring the implementation of the strategies/policy measures and adjusting them in time

The monitoring report on integration in the Estonian society, where data is also gathered on the basis of nationalities, will be completed in the second quarter of 2012. If a sufficient number of Roma are included in the sample group, it will allow gathering information also about Roma.

Since the Roma population in Estonia is quite small, it is not very likely that the Roma get into the sample group of the Estonian Social Survey (EU-SILC). And it is not possible to make generalisations when only a few Roma people happen to be in the sample. The poverty and social exclusion situation of Roma have not been investigated separately because of the same reasons. Therefore, there is no statistical data, which could be used to characterise the poverty and social exclusion situation of Roma in relation to the general population. The information systems and registers that are in use in the social and employment sector do not distinguish people according to their nationality, only the distinction of “Estonians” and “non-Estonians” is used. Also it is not possible to collect detailed data about the social situation of Roma people from local governments, because many local governments only have very few Roma residents and giving (even generalised) information about their situation is against the Personal Data Protection Act.

Therefore, the only comprehensive and reliable data about Roma can be collected through regular Censuses (next census in Estonia will be conducted 2012) and special surveys.

The integration of the small Roma community in the national targets and activities of the National Reform Programme “Estonia 2020” is too detailed an approach. Nevertheless, as increasing the general employment rate to 76% and reducing the number of people living at risk of poverty to 15%

¹⁴ Labour market services are: information about the situation on the labour market and about labour market services and benefits; job mediation; labour market training; career counselling; work practice; public work; wage subsidy; business start-up grants; adaptation of work premises and equipment; the ‘special aid equipment’ service; communication support at interviews; the ‘working with a support person’ service. There are also additional services and benefits besides those regulated by the Labour Market Services and Benefits Act above through the European Social Fund programme “Increasing the Supply of a Qualified Labour Force 2007–2013”

¹⁵ Labour market benefits are: unemployment benefit; grant to take part in work experience, work practice or labour market training; transport and accommodation benefits to take part in labour market training or work experience

¹⁶ The Health Care Services Organisation Act. 2001. <https://www.riigiteataja.ee/akt/12991957>.

are among the “Estonia 2020” targets, all the activities that help increase the level of employment of the Roma people and reduce their poverty also contribute to the achievement of respective targets in “Estonia 2020”.

Although Estonia does not have an official Roma integration policy, the Estonian independent expert of social protection and social inclusion has elaborated several recommendations that Estonia should follow in the forthcoming years. The recommendations are following¹⁷:

- Improve the level of economic coping of the Roma population by increasing the level of employment of working-age Roma. It is necessary to develop special measures and activities for bringing the Roma people, who have been away from the labour market for a long time or who have never been there, to labour market services and benefits, i.e. to develop so-called ‘pre-labour market services’ to incite interest and encourage participation in the labour market. However, the Roma themselves need to wish to participate in the labour market as employees..
- Improve the health of the Roma population. Get a picture of the health condition of the Roma population and their access to health care, develop measures for improving it, including improving their own health behaviour.
- Improve housing and environmental conditions of the Roma population. With the help of local governments, get a picture of the conditions, and develop measures and activities for improving these conditions in cooperation with the Roma community.
- Reduce poverty among the Roma population. Identify the incidence and intensity of poverty among the Roma population; use an individual approach to ensure their coverage under minimum income schemes.

7) Details of the National Contact Point

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¹⁷ Viies, M. Promoting social inclusion of Roma (not published yet, but will be available at Social Protection and Social Inclusion Peer Review website <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.eu>