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Suomen Romaniyhdistys ry
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AN INITIATIVE OF



ROMA WOMEN RESEARCH



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ABSTRACT

Roma women from five different countries (Finland, Poland, Ukraine, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Spain) have been consulted about the following topics: education, employment, health, generational changes, expectations, gender-based violence, discrimination and participation. Women belonged to three segments of population by ages (17-30; 31-45; 45 and older) with the aim of compare the results obtained between the different ages groups (differences found among the countries will be analysed in a different report). A university or research centre from each of the participating countries has been collaborating for getting the most rigorous report-diagnosis. This qualitative research have adopted a *Critical Communicative Methodology* approach advised by the CREA Institute (Community of Research on Excellence for All; University of Barcelona), which is based on dialog, reflection and self-reflection (criticism) and intersubjectivity (communicative) placing women at an equal plane with researchers. This report contains the results of Finland.

Key words

Roma women, communicative methodological approach, intergenerational, education, employment, health, generational changes, expectations, gender-based violence, discrimination, participation, diversity

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INTRODUCTION

General Background

“Roma people are the largest ethnic minority in the European Union (EU) and among the most deprived, facing social exclusion, discrimination and unequal access to employment, education, housing and health”¹.

In particular,

“Romani women across Europe face the additional burden of racism as well as gender discrimination, which push them to the margins of their societies. Low educational achievement, high rates of irregular attendance and school dropouts, high unemployment rates and poor employment opportunities deprive Romani women and girls of realistic possibilities for integration and full participation in society. Lack of personal documents hinders the possibility for many Romani women and/or girls to access education, health care, employment and other related services. Increased racism and anti- Gypsyism in the context of a global economic crisis and international mobility of Romani families affects the safety of Romani women and girls, making them increasingly vulnerable to social exclusion, exploitation, trafficking and violence. Traditional family roles that many Romani women find themselves in, creates additional mechanisms of exclusion. Early and child marriages are still recurrent among Romani girls and boys in traditional families. While there is a positive ascending trend in the gender relations between Romani women and men, there is yet a long way to go for Romani women to become autonomous and feel that they can make choices outside pre-assumed ascribed gender roles.

Romani women and girls are often excluded from consultation and decision-making processes on legislation, policies and programmes, including those that are specifically designed to address their situation. This contributes to a lack of, or a limited perspective on Romani women and girls in policies on gender, social inclusion or Roma which further hinders Romani women’s equal access to resources and their full participation in all spheres of public and private life. While some progress has been made in recognizing the multiple discrimination of Romani women and girls and the inequalities they face in their access and distribution of resources and public services, the lack of disaggregated data by gender and ethnicity addressing the status of Romani women and girls across European countries prevents policy

¹European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights; Roma survey – Data in focus Poverty and employment: the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States (http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra-2014-roma-survey-employment_en.pdf)

makers and human rights advocates from devising viable and meaningful policies and measures for the advancement of Romani women's rights and of their situation at local and national level. The lack of data further prevents the opportunity for establishing a base line and providing a possibility for adequate monitoring and evaluation.”²

This worrying situation leads to an increase of the interest of international organizations on Roma women issues; clear examples of this are the Congress of Roma from the European Union and “Manifesto of Roma Women” referred to the situation of Romani women in Europe; the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) started addressing Romani women's issues more consistently in 2003, when the Ministerial Council endorsed the Action Plan for Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area; the *Council of Europe's* (CoE) public hearing of Romani women, the establishment of the *International Romani Women's Network* (IRWN), the *International Conferences of Romani Women* (2007 –Stockholm, 2009 - Athens, 2011 - Granada, 2013 -Helsinki, 2015 - Skopje), the study realized by *Fundamental Rights Agency* (FRA) regarding Roma women and men's situation (2011), the report about Roma inclusion strategies realized by *European Parliament Committee on Gender Equality and Women's Rights* and so on.

Roma Women Research

Nowadays Roma NGO's and other organizations that work defending minorities' rights are in constantly effort to improve Roma people's situation. Thereby, KAMIRA federation as one of these organisations conducted a participative research regarding Roma women situation and expectations in Spain (2014)³. Thus, rise the idea of expand this research under KAMIRA's coordination improving the methodology and seeking for European partners with the purpose of elaborate on the prior diagnosis of the work on the design of a strategy in accordance with the Phenjalipe's objectives (Helsinki, 2015) and create a networking leads by Roma NGO's and other organizations working on it. This strategy will be designed by the team work (all the countries who have participated in the research) on the basis of the compared results obtained

²Council of Europe;Strategy on the advancement of Romani women and girls (2014-2020) (<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016800c0a86>)

³Find the full report in Spanish language and executive summary in English language here: <http://federacionkamira.es/documentacion/>

through this research, which will be analyzed in a specific report. Note that even though this strategy lied on the common or urgent needs found, each country must adapt it to their context specificities.

This research means a new contribution to the body of knowledge because it arises from Roma women and it is carried out mainly by Roma, advised always by experts; so the work lines proposed mainstream the Roma perception of the issue together with good practices that they perceive as the right ones in order to improve the problems found. In this way, is prevented the wasting of time, funds and efforts when no Roma people try to improve Roma's situation, out of the goodness of its heart, but unfortunately proposals made are not successful, because among other variables are not based on the Roma vision and experience.

On the other hand, the purpose of each national report is to get an inside of the Roma Women situation segregated per three age generations and also to propose future actions for the key national stakeholders based on the urgent needs found in each country.

A *Critical Communicative Methodology*⁴ (Gómez et al, 2006) approach was carried out during the whole process in each one of the participating countries, led by the partner organization. This methodology, developed by the CREA Institute team, has been agreed as the most appropriate, in order to empower Roma women involving them in their own transformation process and also because it has been supported by the European Commission to carry out many researches, especially with vulnerable groups such as the Roma. More specifically it consists of a qualitative research which have used as research instruments semi- structured interviews and focus groups.

Roma women situation in Finland

2.1. The Finnish Kale - an "old" minority

There are approximately 10 000 Roma living in Finland⁵. Giving exact numbers is impossible, for the legislation prohibits the keeping of statistics on ethnic composition⁶. A Roma child, born in Finland,

⁴Gómez, J., Latorre, A., Sánchez, M. & Flecha, R. (2006) Metodología comunicativa crítica. El Roure, Barcelona.

⁵Friman-Korpela 2014, 59.

automatically has the rights and obligations, which are attached to the possession of the nationality of Finland. Getting to this point has been a long and rocky road. Even today, despite the advances, rights are not always fully enforced in practice.

The Roma have a 500-year of history in Finland. There are few written documents about their past, and the existing information mainly builds on tradition and folklore. It was not before the late 1800s when a few people began to record, more or less systematically, the history, customs and folklore of the Finnish Roma.⁷

The majority of the Finnish Roma has arrived to the country from the West, through Sweden. In the 17th century, the then ruler of Sweden, Gustav Vasa, declared that the Roma should be expelled from his empire. Finland, which was part of Sweden up till 1809, appeared as a suitable territory. In addition, there are also those who have arrived from the East and the South. By the 17th century, there were already several Roma groups living in Finland.⁸

Nomadism – going back and forth between rural municipalities with their horses, practicing traditional professions (equine sector, craftsmanship, hawking, healing) – was typical of the Roma lifestyle up to the middle 1900s. In the late 1660s and in the 1800s, there were attempts to restrict the traditional nomadic lifestyle of the Roma from the side of the authorities, but they were not very successful in the end. Many Roma worked in communities, helping out in agriculture work and household chores on farms and big households. Those who had no home of their own, slept in camps or in other people's houses. Attitudes towards the Roma were often sullen, but there was no systematic persecution. The general negative stigma was reinforced by the national Evangelical Lutheran Church, which did not carry out religious ceremonies with the Roma up till the early 1900s. In addition, the Roma were excluded from health care and, in many cases, education.⁹

Efforts to give particular attention to the Roma intensified in the 1800s. The Parliament adopted a guideline with a view to assimilate the Roma into Finnish population and culture. The Roma culture was not much appreciated – it was around that time, when nationalistic atmosphere was deepening among Finns that had begun to dream of independence. Two years since independence and the completion of national constitutional law, in 1919, the Roma people became Finnish citizens. For the first time, the Roma and the predominant population were equal before the law. Discrimination against the Roma, however, continued along with the attempts to assimilate them.¹⁰

In addition to obtaining nationality, the first decades of the 1900s were significant for the Finnish Roma in many other ways, too. Industrialization and urbanization of the country deeply affected their lifestyle.

⁶Finlex 22.4.1999/523.

⁷Blomster, Rekola, Tervonen & Viljanen 2012, 12.

⁸Suomen Romanifoorumi 2016, a.

⁹Suomen Romanifoorumi 2016, a.

¹⁰Suomen Romanifoorumi 2016, a.

As people began to move to cities, many traditional professions became obsolete. The Finnish Roma, most of whom were poorly educated, found themselves in a socially and economically vulnerable situation.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the housing issue of the Roma became overtly heated. By that time, about a half of the Roma population lacked decent housing. The issue was actively raised and discussed by the then Council of Roma Affair (*Mustalaisasiain neuvottelukunta*). A new law, which came into force in 1976, aimed at improving housing of the Roma.¹¹ Nowadays, virtually all Finnish Roma have a home and a permanent address. The national Social Insurance Institution (ISS) and social security services financially support those who cannot afford their housing costs otherwise. The difficult part is finding a house to live in the first place. Due to persistent prejudices, landlords often refuse to rent or sell a flat to Roma.

Compared with the life of the previous Roma generations, improvements in housing are undoubtedly among one of the biggest advances – this is also evident from women’s interviews taken for this research. Permanent housing and modern amenities have further affected many aspects of everyday life of the Roma, such as hygiene and household tasks. These changes are reflected in gender relations. Although gender division and roles are still clear and quite rigid, their boundaries have become somewhat more flexible than they used to be. Women’s household duties, such as cooking, cleaning and washing laundry, have become lighter than before, and Roma women have more spare time than before. Roma women can educate themselves, and, at least in theory, make independent life decisions for themselves. Today’s men, in turn, can also participate in household duties and childcare if they choose to.

There has been compulsory basic education system in Finland since 1921. Children between 7 and 13 were obliged to attend school up till 1970, when the new nine-year education system replaced the older and shorter school curriculum. The network of comprehensive schools is country-wide.¹²

Nearly all Finnish children complete their studies, which gives them access to upper secondary education and training. It is also possible to opt for one extra year on a voluntary basis after completing the compulsory schooling. This voluntary education aims at helping and encouraging young people who wish to strengthen their knowledge, skills and competencies before continuing their studies at the upper secondary level. Basic education is free of charge, including a daily meal and healthcare. All pupils are entitled to receive support and guidance in learning. In most cases, the language of instruction is either in Finnish or Swedish, both of which are official languages of Finland.¹³

¹¹Suomen Romanifoorumi 2016, b.

¹²Ministry of Education and Culture n.d.

¹³Ministry of Education and Culture n.d.

The Finnish Ministry of Education states that there have been approximately 800-900 Roma pupils attending compulsory education during school years 2000-2001 and 2010-2011.¹⁴ Assuming that the number has remained fairly constant since then, it can be said that the pupils who identify themselves as Roma, represent a few percent of all school-age children.

According to the recent National Board of Education research, the amount of Roma who have completed the elementary school has risen from 25 % to 80 % during the past 60 years. In this regard, the situation is better for young women than young men. According to the aforementioned study, young students tend to have lower results than their peers. In adult learning, the situation is reverse; Roma students performed very well in their studies.¹⁵ However, in addition to general secondary education, higher education among is still rare among the Finnish Roma. By the year 2014, only 8 % of the Roma had graduated from an upper secondary school.

During the last decades, the importance of education has raised its head in the Roma society. Educating oneself is considered as a means of finding a place in society, as a key to integration and success, and thus as a way to a brighter future. Challenges that Roma students commonly meet often have to do with linguistic and cultural factors rather than economic issues, as it might be the case in some other countries.

Today, many Roma women take a positive view of education. They, however, often experience particular difficulty in finding work. Many employers consider Roma applicants to be less productive or reliable than other candidates, and level of unemployment remains high among the Roma population. Women's traditional costumes do not make it any easier for them to get a job. Uncertain employment prospects are unlikely to motivate Roma students, and it seems that many of them choose vocational schooling and careers – such as basic nursing and cooking – where finding a job is easier. In some cases, even getting a traineeship proves impossible. Notwithstanding, it is encouraging that increasing numbers of both Roma youth and adults educate themselves, take part in working life and get their voice heard in the society.

When it comes to the state of health and welfare of the Finnish Roma population, the issue has not been systematically studied since the 1970s. Back that time, many Roma had a weak position in the society and their health was poorer than average. The National Institute of Health and Welfare is planning a new study on the topic. The study links with the recent Roma policy agenda (*Romanipoliittinen ohjelma Rompo*) that was drawn up in 2009 by several Finnish Roma associations and different administrations. The program is conducted on national, regional and local levels by the decision of the Finnish Council of State. The objective of the programme is to develop equality and Roma participation in Finland; the agenda also suggests that the welfare of the Roma population will be

¹⁴ Rajala, Salonen, Blomerus & Nissilä 2011, 21.

¹⁵ Finnish National Board of Education 2016.

improved as regards health and social services. The Roma policy agenda requires Roma to be active on their own behalf together with the authorities representing different public sectors.¹⁶

Even though health services are available to all citizens, access to healthcare and seeking treatment is not always easy for Roma. Firstly, especially many elderly Roma feel deep antipathy towards hospitals and doctors. In the past, people did not consult doctors until there were no other options, and this was often too late. For a reasonable cause, hospitals were often associated with a hopeless situation rather than hope. Secondly, differences in cultural concepts and practices may prevent Roma from going to a doctor or openly communicating their problems that they may, for example, consider shameful. Thirdly, linguistic barriers sometimes complicate interaction between the patient and the unit providing care.¹⁷ Fourthly, it is not unusual that Roma people encounter discrimination or underrating their problems when seeking for healthcare.

Large-scale socioeconomic changes of the last decades, described above, have but made many things lighter than before, also brought up new questions among the Finnish Roma. Things that had concrete significance in yesterday's life, such as rigid criteria regarding hygiene and purity, now have more symbolic value. The importance of the symbolic scale of values is not to be underestimated. Customs and tradition, clothing and religion form the common ground for the majority of the Finnish Roma to build their identity on. Identities, however, are in constant move. As the world changes, the Roma have begun to discuss the boundaries of the Roma culture. They ask how far can they go without losing our cultural identity, and further: what makes a person Roma in the first place? What lies in the core of a "real" Roma? In the chapter concerning Roma women's expectations, these questions will be studied in more depth.

Today, the same social, economic and cultural rights apply to all Finnish citizens. In practice, the situation of the Roma is not that rosy. The Roma people face with both overt and covert discrimination in everyday life, on both public and private sectors – this becomes clear also in this survey report. The interviewees of this survey, however, point out that some effort is also needed from the side of the Roma themselves. What comes to encouraging openness, tolerance and mutual respect between the Roma and the majority, much remains to be done.

2.2. Characteristics of the Finnish Roma culture

In Finland, the Roma culture is remarkably uniform. Despite, or perhaps because, of the challenging history that the Finnish Roma have overcome, their unique cultural heritage and identity has retained

¹⁶ Weiste-Paakkanen et al. (ed.) 2014, p. 4

¹⁷ Viljanen et al. 2007, 458.

relatively unaltered throughout the centuries. Although the Finnish Roma share their ancient roots with other Roma in the world, they have developed distinctive cultural characteristics. For the Finnish Roma, the most important elements of cultural identity and heritage are their consistent customs, in focus of which lie the respect for old people and norms concerning maintaining both concrete and symbolic purity. In Finland, the Roma language is not granted the same importance than in some other countries; most of the Roma use Finnish as their mother tongue.

Compared to the majority population in Finland, the Roma give a special importance to their extended family and kin. Elderly people are much respected, which becomes evident in the ways they are treated and addressed. It can be said that many habits that were common in Finland decades ago, but which have been largely forgotten, still persist and hold their own among the Roma. Following the unwritten, yet crystal-clear, rules of the community is important for many Roma. These cultural codes of acting and talking, as well the wide frameworks of comprehending the world are adopted by Roma children at the early age. The social lifestyle of the Roma cultivates the ways of coding life situations deep into their memory. For many of them, a daycare center or school might be the first place where the cultural differences between the Roma and Finnish mainstream culture are actually realized.

The social structure of the Roma is hierarchical. The Roma society is based on patriarchal values, and men have traditionally been considered superior to women. Gender-based differences are reflected in men's and women's different ways of acting, talking, moving and positioning in space. Thus, rigid social divisions are drawn but between the generations, also between opposite sexes. Both Roma men and women embody their cultural and sexual identity in their uniform dressing.

Finnish Roma men usually wear long straight trousers with a blouse and a jacket or a pullover. Most Finnish Roma women, in turn, wear decorative, even glorious, national costume. Nowhere else in the world outside Finland (except in Sweden among the Finnish Roma), do Roma women dress in such a grand way. Women are easy to spot in their wide, ankle length black velvet skirts and skillfully embroidered, long-sleeved blouses, the so-called "*röijy*". The dress is referred as "large clothing" (*isot vaatteet*), as opposed to more simple "small clothing" (*pikkuvaatteet*) – typically long dark skirts and jackets – that are worn by teenage girls and those women who do not opt for the "full" clothing.

The idea of the national Roma costume is to show respect towards elderly people. The costume is modest; it effectively hides the body figure and allusions related to sexuality, and it is thus considered as "pure". The subtle symbolic meanings of the traditional dress are multiple – from the moment when a young person first wears it, he/she is treated like an adult and thus expected to fully follow the cultural norms and traditions of the Finnish Roma. References to one's family history, such as women's inherited jewelry, are often worn with the dress. Today, however, many Roma women discuss the possibility of not wearing the costume in the future; heavy skirts (they can weight several kilograms) are but unpractical, also a risk for their health. For Roma women, who have been dominated by men over centuries, discussing these matters among themselves seems to be a big step. Together with their

growing independence and knowledge about their rights, women have begun not only to point out, but to demand for changes.

Although today's women enjoy freedom that their mothers did not have, a woman's social position still highly depends on how she fulfills the idealized role as a Roma woman; a mentally strong but gentle nurturer, diligent and loyal wife, resigned to her husband. Women are to take care of their husbands, children, and home. A laudable wife takes a good care of the cleanliness of the household, prepares the meals, and dresses their family members with decent clothing. She is not to question her husband's decisions, at least in front of other Roma, or to interfere in "men's business". For men, there are no such rigid requirements concerning ideal behaviors.

Men have more... Like, it does not make any difference what a man is like – he is always considered as a good person. And there is always someone who wants to be like him.
(...) There is no such thing that could make a man bad. (Diana, first age group)

Gender-roles being divided and clear, it is challenging to question them without being afraid of becoming socially excluded. Also, the honor of the family and kin are to be respected and protected by acting according to Roma customs. If difficulties are not openly discussed, it may lead to difficult situations, such as hiding gender-based violence from others.

Apart from this visible feature of their culture, there are also things with which the majority of Finns are not that familiar with. One of these is the *Kalo* language, one of the varieties of the Romani language. Most of the Finnish Roma do not speak the Finnish version of the Roma language as their first language, but use Finnish instead. However, as Stenroos remarks, most Finnish Roma do understand *Kalo* language to a certain point, and it is typical to mix its words into Finnish sentences. In addition, the Roma people have their own linguistic practices and ways of speaking Finnish; some words have different meaning for them than for the majority population, and usually sensitive or taboo words are replaced by euphemisms.¹⁸ Different ways of using language may make it challenging for some Roma pupils to follow the classes at school, where teachers usually represent the majority population.

For a long time, the *Kalo* language, as well as many cultural practices of the Finnish Roma, were held secret from the larger society¹⁹. The relatively recent opening of the "Pandora's box" is much needed, both from the perspective of the Roma and from the Finnish society. An open, frank and respectful dialogue is beneficial to everyone.

¹⁸Stenroos 2012, 37–38.

¹⁹ Stenroos 2012, 37.

OBJECTIVES

General objectives

- To get an inside of the Roma Women situation segregated per three age generations
- To propose future actions for the key national stakeholders based on the urgent needs found
- To elaborate on the prior diagnosis of the work on the design of a strategy in accordance with the Phenjalipe's objectives

Specific objectives

- To know the Roma women perception of the education issue and which elements they identify as a support or possibility to overcome the problems related with it.
- To know the Roma women perception of the employment issue and which elements they identify as a support or possibility to overcome the problems related with it.
- To know the Roma women perception of the health issue and which elements they identify as a support or possibility to overcome the problems related with it.
- To identify the generational changes of the Roma women lives and expectations.
- To know the Roma women perception of the gender-based violence issue and which elements they identify as a support or possibility to overcome this problem.
- To know the Roma women perception of the discrimination issue and which elements they identify as a support or possibility to overcome this problem.
- To identify Roma women key strengths.
- To empower Roma women in order to participate in the design of strategies to improve their situation.

METHODOLOGY

Method

Qualitative research methods were used to document including semi-structured interviews²⁰ and facilitated focus groups²¹; in conjunction with desk-based research. It was decided to adopt a qualitative approach in order to provide a deep and detailed view; to create openness on the women responses and to obtain a detailed picture about Roma women' perceptions attempting to avoid pre-judgements. It was taken into consideration also, that the lack of documentation towards Roma community meant an important difficulty if quantitative research were the approach, because it is not even known the real number of Roma people in each country.

We depart from the assumption that there is an imbalance of power inherent in the research process between those who conduct the research and the subjects being researched, so we strive to limit this inequality through critical reflection following the *Critical Communicative Methodology*. *The Critical Communicative Methodology* has been developed by the Community of Research on Excellence for All, CREA as a research response to the dialogic turn of societies and sciences. It should be pointed out that CREA have been a guiding during the whole research.

“In the context of the dialogical change observed in society —based on which social relations are more and more oriented towards communication and dialogue—, social research can no longer ignore the people and the groups at which it is aimed. Traditionally, Gypsy people have seen how the research concerning their own community and culture has not overcome either the discrimination or the prejudices set upon them; on the contrary, sometimes it has even copied the processes of exclusion under which they are forced to live.

The communicative methodology applied to research appeared first in the area of the social sciences, as a result of the above mentioned dialogical changes and in order to fight against those reproductive tendencies. With the aim of favouring the social inclusion of the less advantaged people, that methodology states that all the people and groups analyzed should take part in every step of the research process and always separates those elements that create inequalities (exclusionary components) from those that help to overcome them (transformative components)”²².

Another important thing to point out is that all the interviewers were either Roma women or usual women mediators in order to make women feel comfortable to speak. This decision was made after

²⁰ Find the semi-structured interview attached as appendice 1.

²¹ Find the focus groups's script attached as appendice 2.

²²FLECHA, R., VARGAS, J., DAVILA, A., 2004. “Metodología Comunicativa Crítica en la investigación en Ciencias Sociales: La investigación Workaló”, in Spain. LAN HARREMANAK/11 (2004-II) (21-33).

consideration that the researcher has influence on people's position and behaviour when they are under investigation. Regarding the focus group, it was conducted by one facilitator familiar with the methodology and no necessary Roma, who was the person responsible for giving the turns to speak to the women (all women had to share their opinion of each topic presented) and to mediate in order to obtain a consensus about each question. Also, two lookers were present who took notes about the reactions of women and some important remarks. Women were natural groups (women who usually share their time together) in order to make them feel comfortable to open themselves.

Sample

Women from three different generations are involved in this research:

First age group: 17-30 years old.

Second age group: 31-45 years old.

Third age group: older than 45 years old.

The sample was chosen taking into account the diversity of the Roma women, trying to represent all the realities from each place. Also was taken into account the estimated number of Roma people in each country to determine the sample's size:

Country	Total Population	Estimated Roma Population	% Roma Population	Nº of interviews conducted
Poland	29 582 117	21 000	0,07	35
Finland	6 381 733	10 000	0,16	32
Spain	47 599 370	750 000	1,6	77
Macedonia	2 022 547	53 879	2,7	40
Ukraine	48 457 000	47 600	0,10	20

In Finland, the number of interviews taken for this research was 32. In addition, seven women – three women from the first age category and four women from the third age category – participated in two separate focus group interviews.

Sources:

Total population of Poland, Finland and Spain -> Eurostat (2011)

Total population Macedonia and estimated Roma population -> last census 2002

Total population Ukraine and estimated Roma population -> last census 2001

Estimated Roma population of Finland -> Council of Europe publication 2002

Estimated Roma population of Poland -> Given by Agnieszka Caban (responsible partner of the research in Poland)

Estimated Roma population of Spain -> Ministry of health, social services and equality, 2012

Informed consent

Prior to commencing a consultation the team who is conducting this research ensured that participants were in full agreement with participation. Everyone participating in the study was informed of the purpose of the research from the outset. Participants were informed of their right not to answer any questions they did not wish to answer and were given the opportunity to end their involvement, without explanation, at any time during an interview or focus group. Confidentiality was also ensured from the outset.

Instruments

Semi-structured interviews were the main instrument in this research. It was decided to use them because can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data, allow informants the freedom to express their views in their own terms and at the same time the interview is designed pursuing the achievement of the set objectives. On the other hand, was also taken into consideration that the interviewers were going to be different people even in each country, so it was necessary the semi-structured previous design in order to obtain results, from the different countries, as homogeneous as possible.

Semi-structured interviews were designed in a seminar work session where all the partners, mostly Roma women, discussed and agreed what questions were the best option, on the basis of the previous study conducted by Kamira in Spain together with the experience and point of views of all participants. In this seminar, it was agreed also as the best option to tape-record interviews and focus groups and later transcript these tapes for analysis, although lots of women didn't accept to be recorded, so in these cases the data was written down by the researcher. In this report, all the interviewed women are cited by using pseudonyms.

Focus groups were selected as the complementary instrument for this research because it was considered as an opportunity of digging really deep into an issue. This instrument was considered as a good choice to discover how Roma women think and feel about each topic presented and also to verify or clarify the results from the interviews. Furthermore it constitutes a mechanism for helping people generate and share their ideas, suggesting potential solutions agreed to problems identified also by

them. The consensus or debate was a basic requirement to address each question, therefore respecting the Critical Communicative Methodology.

In order to ensure a good procedure when interviews and focus groups were conducted, a guide setting an action protocol for the interviewers was included in the top of each interview- focus group's script.

Roma women were reached through the collaboration of the Finnish Romani Association and active Roma women across the country.

Data Analysis

Data collecting for the research took place in spring 2016 in different parts of Finland. The analysis of the data, which was gathered through interviews and focus groups, was conducted in the software program Microsoft Excel by using thematic analysis approach. The answers received from the participants in this study were analyzed through three steps: identifying the themes, joining the points of similarity and differences between the themes and comparison.

The questionnaires were analyzed qualitatively, mirroring women's answers against both the Roma situation in Finland in general, as well as answerers' Roma background. The answers were also studied with already existing research material touching different issues concerning the Finnish Roma population, and Roma women especially. In some regards, the data was also quantitatively analyzed.

Threats of validity

In Finland, finding interviewees proved to be relatively challenging. There might be more than one reasons for this. Firstly, the fact that the questionnaire was quite long, six pages in total, might have cut the number of potential participants. Secondly, several surveys have been taken among the Finnish Roma during the past years, and people might have thought whether it makes any difference to take part in one more – some women who took part in this research said that “some things never change”. Thirdly, the questionnaire touched some issues of a highly personal and sensitive nature, such as marriage, partnership and gendered-based violence. Many respondents chose not to answer, or answer only shortly, to certain questions. The Finnish Roma are usually silent on issues that can “bring shame” upon, or create tensions between the person and his/her family and relatives. What is more, men can “blackmail” women not to tell about violence, for example. It has to be remembered, that the Roma culture is holistic: a person does not represent only himself/herself, but his/her kin, and in a broader sense, the (Finnish) Roma people as a whole. Negative stigmatization and disputes between

families are to be avoided, for they often have long-lasting consequences. It can be the case that some Roma women did not want to risk their position in their Roma network by bringing up some of their real problems, even though the questionnaires were analyzed anonymously.

The age groups are not evenly balanced, which is partly due to the reasons described above. Young women were extremely hard to reach. As for the focus group interviews, many Finnish Roma were on vacation when the research was in the making; many Roma travel to meet their relatives living both in Finland and Sweden. The same applied to women who could have taken the interviews. This made it more difficult to organize focus group interviews.

However, as this study aims to withdraw rather qualitative than quantitative conclusions, the material remains uncut. Also, being the focus group participants from the “minority age categories”, the numerical bias gets somewhat corrected.

The results of this research should not be considered as representing the Finnish Roma women as a whole, but rather as a deep insight into their lives as they can be. This report also, can provide the reader with significant hints on questions and changes that today’s Roma women are going through, pondering about, and discussing among themselves.

RESULTS

5. Sociodemographic variables

5.1. Singles, wives, mothers, widows – the many faces of Finnish Roma women

All in all, 32 Finnish Roma women took part in this research by giving an interview. The interviewees are divided into three age categories as follows: five women between 17 and 30 years of age, eight women between 31 and 45 years of age, and 19 women who were 46 years or more. In addition, three women under 31 years old and four women over 46 years of age were interviewed as two distinct groups. In this report, these age categories will be referred – beginning from the youngest women – as the first, second and third age groups.

Women, who participated in this research, live in different parts of Finland, thus representing areas where the Finnish Roma people are spread. In all age categories, there were either one or two women who had been born in Sweden. From the middle-1900s up till 1980s, almost one third of the Finnish Roma moved to Sweden, along with other Finns, in order to improve their societal and economic position in the society. However, some of the outgoing people have later returned to Finland.²³The rest

²³Jeskanen, Inka 2016.

of the women were born in Finland. Among all age categories, there were women who lived in the southern, eastern and western parts, as well as in the interior of the country. The northern part of Finland, Lapland, is sparsely inhabited.

In the first age group, two answerers were singles, one was a divorcee, and one officially married. One of the young women was married by Roma tradition. In Finland the concept of “marrying by Roma tradition” implies that a young couple “runs away” for a couple of weeks before showing up to their families. If parents accept their partnership, the couple can begin to live together. Official marriages and wedding parties are becoming more common than before, especially among religious Roma. Elderly people usually do not take part in weddings due to the concepts of shame, associated with sexual relations. Such issues are not openly discussed between different age groups.

Those two who were married in the first age group, had lived with their partners since they were sixteen. The average duration of all the relationships that had led to marriages, including the marriage split through divorce, was nearly nine years. Out of five interviewees, four had one or two children. The average age of the first-time mothers was 20.75 years, which – in the Finnish context – is early. The corresponding figure for all Finnish women in 2014 was 28.6 years²⁴.

In the second age group, there were two singles and three divorcees. One of the ladies was officially married and one was married by Roma tradition. One answerer was married both officially and by Roma tradition. Six of the women in the second age group had one or two children. The average age for first childbirth was 24.6 years. Two respondents did not have children, although one of them had been married for more than ten years. The average duration of the relationships of the second age group women remains unknown, because only two interviewees responded to the question. However, their relationships had begun later than those of the first age group, at the ages of 19 and 25. Marriages of these two women had lasted for 12 and 23 years.

In the third age group, there were four women representing each of the following statuses: singles, officially married, married by Roma tradition, and divorcees. Two of the answerers were widows, and one woman told that she was currently “in a relationship” (not married). Marriages of the third age group women, including those that had ended up because of a divorce or death, had lasted 21.5 years in average. Only one woman in the third age category told that she had no children. The average number of children among these ladies was 3.1, scales spanning from one to six children. The average age for first childbirth was 21 years. Three of the ladies in the third age category had given birth to a child at the age of just 17. The two oldest mothers had been 27 years when their first child was born.

In sum, it could be said that, compared to the majority population in Finland, Roma women form long-lasting relationships and give birth to their first child at a relatively young age. Also, there were only four

²⁴ Tilastokeskus 2014.

women out of 32, who did not have any children at all. The number of children of the interviewed women, however, was not remarkably big.

5.2. Economic situation of Roma women

According to the main newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, the average earnings of Finns in 2014 were 3538 euros per month (regular working hours combined with a monthly salary). The median salary of Finns, however, was lower than that, being 3135 euros per month.²⁵ Compared to the average income levels in Finland, most Roma women earn noticeably less than the average and live in low-income households.

Between the respondents, the younger generation seemed to be a bit better off than their elders. The average income was 1194 euros in the first age group, 1484 euros in the second age group and 1102 euros in the third age group. The amount of monthly income, naturally, correlated with the working situation and social benefits to which some of the answerers were entitled. The average monthly salary of the regularly working women (2/5) in the first age group was 1800 euros, 2500 euros in the second age group (2/8), and 2367 euros in the third age group (3/19).

In the second age group, those who did not work even occasionally earned 1094 euros a month. In the third age group the corresponding income for non-working women and pensioners was 714 euros. The difference can be explained by the low pensions of the women belonging to the third age group. The monthly amount of pension varied between 525 and 1200 euros. In Finland, the amount of pension is not same for all, but depends on multiple factors, such as previous earnings and the so-called life-expectancy coefficient.

The National Insurance Institution (ISS), grants financial support for Finnish citizens in several different life situations. The ISS supports, inter alia, students, parents of underage children, unemployed job seekers, people on sick leave, and pensioners. In this research, the interviewees were asked whether they were entitled to some sorts of permanent or occasional financial aid.

All of the respondents (100%) in the first and second age groups told that they were entitled to financial aid. In the third age group, 15 out of 19 (79%) interviewees were receiving social assistance.

In the first age group, all the women with children (4/5) received child support benefit and two of them were entitled to single mother support benefit as well. One interviewee also received care allowance. The childless respondent did not specify the type of the aid.

In the second age group, all the women with children (6/8) received child support benefit. Two of them received single mother support benefit. Women without children were also entitled to financial aid – the other permanently and the other occasionally – but the reason was not further elaborated. As the

²⁵ Liimatainen, Karoliina 2015.

women in question were non-working or working only occasionally, it is probable, that they receive unemployment allowance or other social benefits. The other of them earned hardly 500 euros a month, which was one of the lowest monthly incomes among all the women that took part in the research.

In the third age group, five women out of nineteen received child support benefit. One of them also received single mother child support. One of the women received unemployment allowance. In this age group, four women, all of them under pensionable ages, told that they received social benefits. They did not elaborate what the financial aid in question was, but in three cases it was permanent and in one case occasional.

Four of the eight ladies in the second age category – one single and three divorcees – had children. All of them received child support benefit and two of them single mother support benefit. This leads one to think that, following a separation of their parents, children in question had remained with their mothers. According to the Finnish Roma customs, children typically remain with their father after a separation. These cases, however, show that not all follow these traditions today. The reasons for not doing so were not further elaborated on; any conclusions on them thus stand on a slippery slope. Another interesting remark, linked to the previous one, was that there were more divorcees in the second age group than in other groups; the percentage of divorcees was 38% compared to the 20 % in the first age group and to the 21 % of the third age group. There might be several reasons for this. Firstly, the random variables are big when the age group samples are small and mutually unbalanced. Secondly, during the recent times, breaking up has become somewhat more common and acceptable than it used to be in the past. Thirdly, adult children of older mothers do not need them as much as younger women's children, which might make leaving a relationship easier. What the women themselves think about generational changes will be discussed later in this report.

6. Education

6.1. Basic education and the popularity of vocational training

As all the women interviewed for this study were born after 1921, they have attended elementary school. All of the answerers, with only two exceptions in the third age category, had completed their studies in compulsory education. Thus, 100% of the answerers in the first and second age categories had completed the elementary school. The corresponding percentage in the third age category was 89%.

In the first age group, all of the five interviewees had continued studies after completing their compulsory school. Four of them had finished, or were currently in the midst of career school training. One of the young women had already graduated from a polytechnic school with a Bachelor's degree. In the second age group, three out of eight women had gone to a career school, and one was currently studying at a polytechnic school. There were also women in the third age group with a vocational or

technical qualification. Seven of them had attended career school and passed the examination of professional competence. One of the ladies in the third age category was currently attending a career school. Two of the women had studied even further and earned a Bachelor's degree.

One reason for not continuing studies might be the fact that many Roma establish families at an early age. According to the interviewed women, this can happen before their seventeenth birthday. After "running away" from home with their future partners, Roma youth are not supposed to move back to their parents' houses, but to find one of their own. In case of fast pregnancy, a young girl often stays at home. Later on, it often proves difficult to get back to studies. This is a difficult issue to handle, for Roma parents avoid discussing these kinds of topics with their children. Yet – they are worried and hope that young people would not rush with their big decisions, as it became evident in the third age group discussion. There should be some way to delay marriages and motivate the youth with studies, women thought.

For those young Roma who continue their studies after elementary school, vocational training seems to be the most attractive option – this trend is also reflected in this Roma women research. According to one of the youngest ladies, the popularity of vocational training can be explained by better employment opportunities and less requirements regarding reading.

Many shun reading. (...) There are many who do not believe in themselves. (...) The pressure from the community is always there. So, if I go there, I am not like a Roma.
(Tanja, first age group)

The young women, cited above, further elaborated on her comment by telling that some Roma consider college or university studies as something not coherent with Roma lifestyle. She told having noticed that few Roma, knowing about her education and success in working life, would easily comment on her "brightness". This "brightness", however, is not faced with valuation but rather with bitterness and jealousy. Jealousy, in turn, springs from feelings of inferiority and social marginalization. As the participants or third age group discussion stated, low self-esteem hinders women from achieving a lot of things. Women in both discussion groups agreed that improving Roma women's self-esteem would do a lot of good for the whole community. Education and work were considered crucial for helping women to become more independent and empowered actors in their own lives. Women need to be encouraged. Motivation stems not only from dreams, but also from positive experiences and the faith in changes are possible in the reality.

6.2. Meanings of education

Education was seen highly important among most of the interviewees, regardless of age. There was only one person in the third age group saying that education meant “nothing” to her. It might be the case that she, as one of her peers, found no personal meanings for education as she had already reached pensionable age. Her answer was not further elaborated on the questionnaire, though.

In the first age group, three interviewees out of five considered education as a key to working life and a better future. Two of them elaborated on the issue, mentioning that education will help the Roma to integrate into the wider society. According to these women, education and work enable one to live a “normal life”. Education was also considered as an essential means of societal participation and development. The young lady who had graduated from a polytechnic school said that for her, education was a big achievement of which she felt happy about.

In the second age group, education was given a variety of meanings. Three women out of eight mentioned either intellectual or human capital, or civilization and self-development as results of education. One mentioned societal activity and participation, claiming that education is the key to integration. Three out of eight ladies said that they see education as a path to working life. One of the women did not express her opinion and another said rather vaguely that “education is everything, a good thing”.

Perspectives of the women of the third age category echoed those of other groups, but their responses were shorter and more concise than those of younger answerers. Implications of education were considered as follows: “important”, “alfa and omega”, “good future”, “going forward in life”, and “achievement”. Two individual answerers also brought up denominations such as “developing one’s own understanding” and “security”.

Even if education is considered as a positive opportunity among the Finnish Roma, attending school can be a challenging experience for many of them. Cultural collisions, linguistic difficulties and lack of support are not the only knots to deal with. Roma children may also face bullying because of their ethnic background. The respondents of this survey had their say on the issue, as well as suggestions for improving the schooling system.

6.3. Support and areas and educational improvement

Four of the five respondents in the first age group had got support for their studies, although one of the women said that the amount of support was “little”. Two of them told that they would have needed/need help in vocational selection. Both of these answerers worked part-time or occasionally, and the other one wished to get help in job search. The young women would improve current education system by taking both individuals and the Roma better into account, encouraging and providing students with more support. One respondent would improve access to teachers, for they are “hard-to-

reach". Two answerers told that they were satisfied with the education system. Two young women also said that they were happy with attitudes of school personnel – another two women, however, disagreed. One of the women had no special opinion about attitudes of school personnel.

Regarding the second age group, three individual respondents told that they had been given support in writing, reading and concentrating, whereas four women had not been given any support. One woman said that she had missed the support of her own family. One interviewee chose not to answer to most of the questions on education. Women in the second age category would improve the education system by enhancing flexibility as regards the access to schools and training programs. One respondent hoped for more apprenticeships, and another wished that the entrance exams would take better account of the minorities. A third woman would tackle racism, for prejudices still make it challenging for the Roma to attend schools and find a job. Three women told that they had faced negative attitudes from the educational personnel because of their ethnic background. One of the argued, thus making a reference to another significant ethnic minority in Finland that "attitudes towards Russians are better than towards the Roma". Three answerers said that they were mostly satisfied with the attitudes of educational personnel, although two of them had faced discrimination in their past. One of the women believed that in spite of prejudices, one should not give up but to prove them wrong by their own good behavior.

The majority of the women in the third age category had got no support for their studies. Out of these sixteen women one elaborated her answer by saying that "she did not know how to ask" and another woman said that "no extra help" was given to her. Five of these sixteen women said that attending support classes would have helped them. Two answerers would have benefited from counseling in economic issues, such as study loan arrangements. Two respondents had missed individual tutoring, and one bilingual woman told that she would have welcomed help with reading and writing.

Only two women, who have studied or study at a vocational school, told having received help and support – the other had needed extra help in writing. Both of these women also said that they were satisfied with the attitudes of educational personnel, and the other said that the attitudes were better in the adult learning sector. In sum, seven women in the third age group told that they were satisfied with the attitudes – however, one woman said that "some people have prejudices". Two women said that she was "sometimes" happy with the attitudes. Six women were not satisfied, four did not want or know how to answer.

Three women in the third age group would improve the education system by making the access to training programs easier and more flexible. One woman wished that "diplomas would not be the only thing to be seen" and that "there could be a possibility to demonstrate one's competence in practice". Three respondents hoped for more individual encounters and support, and two argued that schools should pay special attention to Roma pupils and support them at their special needs. One woman called for smaller classes; due to national savings, class sizes have actually been a "hot potato" in the Finnish

society for years. One woman would provide students with “richer and more varied educational options and training”. Another woman would “change it all” - however, she did not further elaborate on the issue. Nine interviewees had no opinion or did not want to answer to the question. Two of them said that they do not know modern education system well enough to make a statement about it.

6.4. Future prospects

When the women in the first age group were asked about their possible future studies, all of them except one (with a BA degree and a permanent job) had some pleasant options in mind. One said she would prefer to become a cultural producer or community educator. Another woman dreamt of becoming either a cosmetologist or getting a BA degree on social work. A third answerer said she could think of music or psychology. One woman told that she is currently aiming to complete her second degree, and that she wishes to find a job that corresponds her latest training in the field of Roma culture. Second age group respondents said they would like to study practical nursing (4/8), social work (2/3) or food sector (1/8). One woman was currently studying at a polytechnic school. Eight women in the third age group would prefer social and health sectors: these women wished to study practical nursing (3/8), social work (2/8), youth leadership (1/8), as well as caring for the elderly (1/8) and substance abusers (1/8). Two women were interested in food sector, namely baking and preparing cold foods. One woman would go for commercial sector, another for interior design and a third for languages. Two women were currently studying, one said that she would like to study another degree (from a polytechnic school). Three women did not answer to this question, which could be explained by their age – all of them were 60 years or more and thus studying was not considered that relevant in their life situation. One woman had no opinion. She had already achieved a vocational qualification but was currently unemployed, wishing to find a meaningful job.

Education raises a lot of feelings and hopes for a better future, where the Roma people have similar access to working life as other Finns. Their dream jobs tell much about the empathy: they want to help people who have special needs and experience social exclusion, for one reason or another. Respect for elderly people also proves to be common. Nursing and caring seems to be close to these women. It is also a socially acceptable choice for a Roma woman, who is considered as a nurturer and care-taker.

Conclusion

In sum, the urgent need regarding education is to keep Roma girls and women motivated and encourage them with their studies, be it basic, vocational, college, polytechnic or academic studies. Individuals should be taken better into account – this includes discussing cultural differences and possible learning problems openly between the parties. It is noteworthy to increase trust and mutual understanding between Roma students, their families and their schools. As for adult learning, Roma

women hope for more flexibility in training programs. Whenever extra support is needed, it should be easy to access.

7. Employment

7.1 The troublesome act of becoming employed

In (the name of the city), it is a small town, Roma people have been working already for 50 years, but less women. (...) Women have nothing else really than these supported systems... That is, kindergartens or classroom assisting. And I can tell you about my own daughter that, when she graduated and looked for a job equivalent to her training, well, no, there were no possibilities. So, it is really difficult for women. In my city, I know no woman who has got a job with a real salary; it is always something short-term or (state) supported work. (Rosita, third age group)

The difficulty of becoming employed is a real problem among the Finnish Roma. Most women were concerned that it is of utmost difficulty to find a permanent, paid job. If a Roma woman is working, her input is often funded by employment support, or then she works as a trainee, a substitute or as a volunteer. Even with vocational proficiency, finding a job is not guaranteed.

In the first age group, all of the interviewees were working either full-time (3/5) or part-time (2/5). All of them told that they liked to work with young people, and four of them had had or had a job with them. One of the interviewees worked in projects. It was telling that all of the women, who had a full-time job, preferred their job to other jobs and felt happy about their professional choices. However, getting a job had been easy only to two of them, and that was because of networking (knowing or being in good terms with the employer in advance). It seems that the role of good networks are extremely important in today's labor markets, and especially so when it comes to Roma people. Stereotypes and prejudices persist in many employers' minds, and sometimes people are not given even the first opportunity to disprove them.

All the young women had studied, or were currently studying, careers through which they were able to help young and marginalized people, for example as youth leaders and family counselors. Two of them also had experience of distributing information about Roma culture in Finland, both in practice and in written form.

As for the second age group, two out of eight answerers had a permanent job. They worked in civil organizations dealing with Roma issues and in social sector with families. Both had a degree, the other one from a career school and the other one from a polytechnic. One woman with a career school degree worked occasionally but she did not tell where. One of the women with lower-secondary (basic school) education was currently in internship. Four of the women did not work. Three of them had finished the

basic school and one of them, with a career school degree, said she was on sick leave. The probability to partake in working life was thus higher among the women who had studied after the basic school.

In the third age category, three out of nineteen women had a job. Four of them were already pensioners. Two of them worked occasionally or part-time. One was currently studying. Almost a half of the women in the oldest age group did not have a job. Those permanently working had jobs in Roma associations and organizations, and one of them worked as a nanny in a day care center. Those who were working occasionally or part-time, had jobs on economic sector as a sales negotiator and in “projects”.

Gaining employment had been easy for only one answerer in the second age category. One interviewee said that her lack of education made the process more difficult than her Roma background, whereas another woman told that despite of her education it was difficult to get a job, because she was Roma. Four out of eight told that finding a job was difficult for them. One of the ladies told that the elderly people who she was helping, were more likely to employ her privately than businesses or enterprises. As for the third age group, two women out of nineteen said that finding a job had been easy to them – in the case of the other woman, networks had once again proved useful.

The employed Roma women who participated in this study, were mostly working in the social and health sector, as well as in Roma associations and organizations. These choices reflect both the internal and external boundaries that affect employment of Roma women. Firstly, professions of the women reflect the values of the Roma culture, and mostly go hand-in-hand with the idealized position of women. Taking care of children and seniors, as well as sick people, are considered as “feminine” duties. Sewing, cleaning and cooking fall into the same category. Secondly, in addition to their gender and values of the Finnish Roma culture, experiences of marginalization might have played a role in the vocational choices that the interviewed Roma women have made. This becomes visible in women’s efforts for other vulnerable groups, both in the private level and their societal and organizational activity. Thirdly, the care sector is one of the few in which Roma women can get employed relatively likely.

Yet another thing that affects employment of Roma women is their traditional clothing. Many respondents considered their large skirts as a practical burden, which prevent them from doing several things. On the other hand, taking it off may also prevent them from taking up job offers.

Young people say that one could go (working) to a shop, but they do not dare to. When you have small clothing on, others cannot come there. And you cannot go telling people not to come. Because some people are mean, anyway, and they come. (Mirella, third age group)

For a Roma woman, who once has chosen to wear the traditional costume, can never take it off in front of elder Roma. To do so is regarded highly inappropriate and disrespectful. In turn, many employers

prohibit wearing large skirts at work for different reasons – let it be for safety or the image of business, for instance. This being the case, the scale of job opportunities becomes narrower for Roma women than for the majority of Finnish women. The opinion of many interviewed Roma women was that, for this setting to change, more flexibility is required from both sides. In fact, as some of them said, it would be ideal to abandon the demand for wearing the traditional costume in the first place. According to the women of both discussion groups, to be a “real” Roma is something else than the way a person dresses. However, if a person chooses to wear the costume and it does not affect the quality of her work, she should be treated equal to other applicants and recruits.

7.2. On the quality of work and enjoying working life

Several women who took part in the study, considered working life a positive and desirable thing for Roma women. Respect for work and willingness to be worthy of others’ confidence, were highly relevant for these women. This tendency was not present only among the youngest age group, but especially so among women representing the third age group. In their group interview, working life and generational changes linked to it provoked a lively discussion.

The women of the youngest age group, except one, had a bunch of meanings to describe a “quality work”. Two women associated quality of work with the environment: good work can be done in a comfortable, respectful, bully-free setting with appropriate working tools and meal breaks. Two young women considered quality work as working with commitment and “heart” – good results follow when there is “the right person in the right place”. One of the interviewees considered a quality work as a work that is done properly from the beginning till the end with results. She also thought that perseverance was essential.

The women were also asked what kind of work they would choose if they could make a professional choice now. As said before, all of the women who were working full-time would stay where they are. One of them, however, would like to study further in order to get a Bachelor’s degree in social work; In Finland, this degree enables one to take more responsibility over decisions and work on the management. Those women who were working part-time, wished to work with families or music and to work for the Roma and marginalized people in Finland. The other of them also dreamed of the possibility to work in the cultural ministry.

In the second age group, the term “quality work” was given a variety of attributes. For two women “quality” referred to the sensibleness and meaningfulness of work, and for other two to a know-how that leads to a desirable outcome. Two women considered nice and friendly personnel as a crucial factor measuring quality, and one of the women highlighted the importance of fearless atmosphere at the workplace. One respondent said that “quality” refers to being respectful of work. One woman replied that “giving your best” is important, and another one gave big value to the independency of the work.

Five out of eight women in the second age group said that the best job they had had was humane; they had worked with children as well as with elderly and marginalized people. One of the interviewees enjoyed her current internship at office work – she was particularly happy of being able to both help others and learn new skills. Two of the women did not answer the question. When the women were asked about their dream professions, four of them mentioned social work and social services. One of them wished to take part in societal decision making and promote social changes. One of the ladies, with a career school diploma, dreamed about becoming self-employed. Her dreams were also linked to humane social work.

In the third age category, the best working experiences the women had had were from the care sector with children, elderly and disabled people (7/19), food sector (4/19), cleaning (1/19), and sewing (1/19). Two women said they were happy with their current job, and one woman wished that the best job was yet to come. Three women said that, so far, it had been easy for them to get a job, and all of them were currently working, either full-time or occasionally. One of the unemployed answerers told that it had been easy for her to get a job when she was young but not anymore. The majority of women who were not yet retired (10/14) said that getting a job was difficult for them. According to them, finding a job was challenging because of their Roma background (5/14), lack of education (2/14) and physical disability (1/14).

The women were also asked what profession they would choose if they could go for anything. Ten out of nineteen women in the third age group would choose the care sector (working with children, youth, elderly, disabled people). Three would choose catering, and two expertise on the Roma issues. Other dream jobs were a sales person (1/19), interior designer (1/19), seamstress (1/19), and a cleaner (1/19). In many cases, these choices went hand in hand with their educational training and or current jobs. Again, dream jobs of the interviewees tend mostly to reflect what is considered appropriate in the Roma culture. Women are seen as nurturers and care-takers, and the women seem to cherish these sides of their femininity. Also, the respect for elderly people becomes clear in the answers, for many of the interviewees mention them in their answers.

Even though most of the oldest women did not work, all but one had opinions about “quality work”. Seven women thought that nice and friendly atmosphere were important factors in this sense. Good salary was mentioned five times. Enjoying one’s work and being interested in it was important for four answerers. Opportunities for self-fulfillment and development were mentioned twice, and challenges once. For one woman, it was essential that the job was equivalent to one’s training. Two respondents defined quality as “giving your best” or as “the right person being in the right place”. Other definitions were the following: importance of the work (2/19), effectiveness (1/19), equality (1/19), supportive foreman (1/19), appropriate amount of time and resources compared to the expectations (1/19) and valuing the work (1/19).

In the group discussion of the third age group ladies, working was also considered as something that improves one's self-esteem. Respecting one's contribution is something that seems common to the interviewed Roma women. Carita, representing the third age group, told about her positive work experiment as a cook. During the interview, she was wishful of getting a permanent job after the experiment; her boss had given her encouraging feedback and told having had to give up past prejudices towards the Roma. It seems that the fastest and most profound attitudinal changes often happen on the grassroots level.

I am expecting of getting a permanent job... It looks promising. And I like it also. I can be with other people, it is giving me much. You get and you can give. (...) Everyone has come to me, one by one, and said that we have to change our picture on you, that you (Roma) are not all the same. (...) I have encouraged my children by saying that all possibilities are open for them.

7.3. Women's own proposals for improvements

What could help the Roma to get a job? How the women would enhance the working opportunities of the Roma people? Women in the oldest age group highlighted the importance of education more than the other groups. Younger respondents tended to see problems rather in the structure and discriminating attitudes of the surrounding society. The difference can be partially explained by the socioeconomic and attitudinal changes in recent decades. Whereas the older Roma generation was used to cope on their own, with no claims to the larger society, the younger generation is more aware of their rights. The Roma does not have to "apologize their existence" anymore, as one of the youngest interviewees said.

The youngest interviewees wished for actions to prevent discrimination by making the applying process transparent or anonymous. Also, the prejudices towards the Roma are strong – changing them would do a lot of good. One of the answerers saw education as a key to better working possibilities. Another woman said that there are mainly rehabilitative working opportunities and less "real" jobs available for the Roma.

When the women of the second age category were asked means of helping further the employment of the Roma, a variety of perspectives pushed through. Three respondents called for breaking down prejudices and enhancing openness between the mainstream and minority cultures. Two women hoped for more possibilities for apprenticeship and traineeships, one for longer vacancies, and another one for better day care possibilities for children.

The oldest women would help forward the job opportunities by cutting down prejudices and learning to see the Roma as individuals, not as a group (4/19), lightening application processes and making it easier

to get a job (3/19), offering more traineeships/apprenticeships and “real” jobs instead of rehabilitative work (2/19). Single answerers would take specific needs better into account (1/19), make work economically reasonable²⁶ (1/19), and improving cleanness (good hygiene is one of the pillars of the Roma culture) at the working place (1/19). As means of obtaining their dreams, the working-age women named education (6/14), structural changes (tailored help for different people) (1/14), co-operation of things with faith and will (1/14), and eradicating prejudices towards the Roma (1/14). Five women did not answer to the question. Among the interviewed ladies, willingness to work was high. They were ready to do voluntary work if nothing else was available.

Many (women) go to seek for a voluntary work or a work experiment. They want to do something, (women) of our age. It is a bad thing that one cannot find a paid job, though. They want to do something, anyway. In my neighborhood, there are three or four women who all go to work. But in smaller cities, I think, it is more difficult. (Mirella, third age group)

Changes of the Roma women seem to depend much on their contacts and making themselves known to possible future employers. Open markets do not promise much for Roma women. A “wrong” name on a job application (Finnish Roma often have recognizable surnames) can reveal their background and close the door before any interview is taken with them. In case that, for instance, an apprenticeship is offered, Roma women often feel disproportionate pressures on showing that they are reliable and industrious workers. Also, if something goes wrong at the work, they often fear of becoming the scapegoat.

Even though advances are slow, there is also light in the tunnel. In Kajaani, for instance, local Roma activists have managed to create a sound and interactive relationship with local authorities and employers. The strategy is to provide both the Roma and employers with information, break down prejudices, as well as to make the parties find and communicate with each other. Thanks to the program, increasing number of Roma get informed about open working possibilities. In turn, employers get to know about the know-how of the Roma involved and, in case there is quest for a worker, rather easily find and employ a suitable person.

Conclusion

To conclude, the biggest obstacle concerning employment for Roma women is not their sex, but their ethnic identity and prejudices associated with their Roma background. For those who wear the national dress, however, clothing makes possible job careers even narrower. As Roma, most women face discrimination from the beginning of the job seeking process. Making job seeking processes transparent or anonymous could be a possibility. Fighting prejudices with the help of Roma mediators, who already have good contacts with local employer, also seems to be a working option.

²⁶ The Finnish social security system is often criticized for not encouraging unemployed people in job seeking. Unemployment safety net is, in many cases, stronger and more stable than that of part-time or short time workers.

8. Health

8.1. Definitions of good health

During the past decades, the health of the Roma population has been estimated poorer than the Finnish average. This situation was affected by demanding housing conditions, poverty, and inadequate knowledge on health care.

Things are so well today, food and everything. People could not even ask for, or dream of, anything like that before... It was not part of their life... Only today Roma women, and the whole population in general, have learned to understand what good, I mean healthy, food is. (Carita, third age group)

Some cultural factors have also made it difficult, especially for women, to take care of their health. For women, it has not been ideal to think of their own health; they were to take care of others' wellbeing. Women's heavy skirts, which they cannot take off in the presence of other Roma, make it difficult for them to exercise. In the long run, carrying several kilograms of velvet around their waist – on high heels that most Roma women favor – can also cause back injuries.

Things have begun to change, though. Today, women have begun to care for themselves. One of the ladies, representing the third age category, told that she had undergone personal attitudinal changes and begun to care for her own wellbeing.

I think that people do take a better care of themselves today... In all ways, women also. Before, they were men who went to a gym and did everything... But, during the past few years, I have noticed that also women have begun to, like, eat healthily. (Mirella, third age group)

Young girls are very active; they play all kinds of games and take care of themselves. I have also begun to think that I have to give time to myself and be selfish in a healthy way. So that, I have always been unselfish and served others, guarding the oven... (...) But now, after I left for a sick leave, I have time to take care of my own health. (Rosita, third age group)

Most interviewed women underlined the importance of healthy eating and physical exercise. Other definitions for good health were also abundant. In the youngest age category, good health was defined as "living without medicine" (2/5), "overall wellbeing" (2/5), "ability to move/mobility" (2/5), "healthy nutrition" (1/5), and as "extremely important" or "vital condition" (1/5). Women in the first age category took care of their health by physical exercise (4/5) and healthy eating habits (3/5). One of the women told that she tried to look after her health, but that sometimes she did that "lazily". These women thought that they could take better care of their health if they did more physical exercise (4/5),

ate more healthily (3/5): one said she wished to eat more biologically grown food. One (1/5) of the young women hoped to develop a more regular sleeping pattern. One of the interviewees did not reply to the last question, but according to her previous answers, she was already leading a healthy and active life.

The second age group defined good health as an “important/vital condition” (6/8), “living without medicine” (1/8), overall well-being: healthy soul in a healthy body (1/8), “basis for everyday life” (1/8), and as “safety” (1/8). These women took care of their health by eating healthy food (5/8), doing special physical exercise, such as training at a gym (3/8), physical exercise of everyday life (1/8), taking vitamins (2/8). Two respondents said that they don’t take look after their health”, and one uttered that “I somewhat take care of my health”.

As regard the second age group, six women out of eight thought that they could improve their health by exercising more in everyday life; two of them thought that going to a gym would be a good idea. Three respondents said that they should eat more healthily, and one woman thought that she should eat vitamins. Two wished to have a more regular sleeping pattern. One woman was pondering on the possibility of having some beauty treatments, and another one said that she should look after her health more actively.

The third age category women defined good health as “important/vital condition” (17/19), overall wellbeing/healthy soul in a healthy body (2/19), eating healthily (2/19), living without medicine (1/19), and being able to move (1/19).

Women in the third age group told that they took care of their health by physical exercise (12/19): four of them preferred walking as a mode of exercise, one said she regularly went to a gym and another woman said she liked swimming. One of the eldest ladies over 60 years of age considered household chores as a means of taking care of her health: in fact, staying active with cleaning, laundry and kitchen work – in the heavy traditional dress – does require some physical effort and mobility. Three women said they tried to eat healthy food, whereas one woman said that she tried to eat regularly. Two respondents had a daily medication. One of the women met her doctor and another one her physiotherapist, on a regular basis. Other of the respondents said that she sought to have a regular sleeping pattern and a life without stress. One woman said that due to her sickness, she could not move a lot. Another woman (said that just because she had a disease, she looked after her health carefully. Two women told that they do not pay special attention to their health, although the other one said that she ate vitamins.

Most of the women in the third age category thought that they could take a better care of their health by exercising more; two women elaborated on this further by saying that they could go to a gym. One of the sixteen ladies wished to “have a regular sports activity”, and one would walk more. Six of the women thought that they should eat more healthily. Two of them would consume more vegetables, one

would get rid of sweets and one would “eat not only healthier food but also less”. Individual interviewees also had other means in their minds, such as taking care of social relationships, quitting smoking, going to health controls on a regular basis, and “own activity”. One respondent said that she already took a good care of her health. One woman did not answer to this question.

Although Roma women seem more interested in their health than before, there are things that make it difficult for them to get involved with sport. Firstly, their clothing makes it impossible to exercise or play games outdoors; the risk of being seen by older Roma is often too big. Secondly, doing sports indoors is likewise impossible if there are other Roma, especially men, around. Going to a gym or swimming hall “safely” must thus be prepared in advance. Roma women often ask, for instance, a gym receptionist to inform other Roma about their presence. Thirdly, memberships of sports clubs are often very expensive for low-income households. In some Finnish cities, however, Roma organizations have been able to solve some of these problems. In the city of Varkaus, for example, Roma activists have managed to get season tickets for gyms and swimming. Tickets are further distributed to local Roma. In the same city, Roma elders have warmly welcomed conducted water sports sessions, specially tailored for them.

As indicated in the beginning of the chapter, taking care of one’s health raises questions on one’s worth and position in the Roma society. Women, who were supposed to stand aside in the past, now ask for their rights in a newly manner. According to Roosa, a participant of the third age group discussion, it is a good thing for women to “become selfish in a healthy way”. One does not have to find her happiness in trying to fulfill others’ expectations. She saw the development as a sign of women’s empowerment;

I have noticed that women (...) have begun to care for themselves more than before. And I think that, today, it is happening that women pass the authority that has been there, so that they have been subordinated and haven’t cared about themselves. (...) But, today, I see that it is not enough for them anymore. They want to go forward and take care of themselves and feel good. I think that it is really good that women in this society mind their wellbeing. I think it is a good sign that they have risen above the authority that has dominated them.

Interestingly, one of the older women told that for the younger generation, it may be difficult to accept that their mothers want time for themselves – as if they were more conservative than their parents.

I have noticed –I don’t know about others –, in my own children, that it is really difficult for them to digest, that a person wants time some own time. (...) So it is like... we are not satisfied with being at home all times and taking care of others, so that everyone else felt good. Now we are not happy with that anymore, we want to feel good too.
(Mirella, third age group)

8.2. Access to health services

To the young Roma generation, access to health services seems to be slightly easier than to others. Correspondingly, the older generations had more to complain about and more suggestions for improvements in the health care system. Reducing waiting times was the most commonly mentioned wish among all the women (47 %).

All five women in the youngest age group told that it was easy for them to get health services. Three of them were satisfied with the attitudes of health personnel; two of them had faced prejudices. Two of the answerers would develop health services by reducing waiting times for doctor's appointments.

In the second age group, six out of eight women told that it was easy for them to get health services. Two of them said that this was difficult, even if the other one of them was seriously ill. Women hoped for shorter waiting times (4/8), smoother customer service (2/8), more Finnish-speaking doctors (1/8) – there are many immigrant doctors working in Finland nowadays –, and informing the staff more about the Roma culture (1/8). Half of the women in the second age category were satisfied with the attitudes of the health care personnel. One of these women noted, however, that some of the personnel have racist attitudes, but that you can affect how you are treated by your own behavior. Two of the women had sometimes been satisfied, whereas two were not satisfied with the attitudes at all; they found the health care personnel discriminating and biased.

For eight out of nineteen women in the third age category, it was easy to get health services, and for two it was sometimes easy. Nine respondents felt that getting health services was difficult. Five women did not have ideas for improving health services, but the others did. The most common comment was that access to the doctors should be easier and the queueing times should be shorter (9/19). Two women thought that more personnel is needed, which might be linked to the long waiting times in public health care. Also, two women hoped that there would be more time for individual encounters – due to savings and lack of personnel, meeting times are typically short. Three women hoped for more Finnish-speaking doctors. Four respondents wished for more profound approach to health issues and more holistic treatments. One woman would improve the health care of elderly people. One respondent would “change everything”; in her opinion, public health services have been wound down. Regarding satisfaction with the attitudes of the health care personnel, six women told that they had no complaints. Nine respondents said that they were sometimes satisfied with the attitudes. Four of the women were not satisfied, and one of them thought that she had been treated in a crude manner.

Especially older Roma often feel uneasy about seeking for healthcare. Certain body parts and their functions (such as gastrointestinal, entrails or genitalia) are not openly discussed in Roma culture, which can lead to suffering from them alone. Even if they went to a doctor, it can be challenging for them to understand what is being discussed. Concerning health matters, linguistic practices of the Roma and the

majority population, let alone the healthcare professionals, differ a great deal. Also, prejudices from both sides often make situations more complicated than they could be.

They often see us as a burden. I have given lectures at nursing schools, and I have told that, it doesn't mean that they (Roma) always want to be first, but it is rather that they are afraid, they are emotional. So that they (Roma) need guiding, counselling. And if you talk to them and take this into account, you will manage with them. (Carita, third age group)

As an example of a good practice with which these kinds of problems can be handled, is recruiting Roma mediators. In Helsinki area, there is a non-Roma person helping out Roma elders in a wide range of circumstances, including healthcare. The project has proved to be very important for senior Roma citizens. Also, providing healthcare staff with more information about Roma culture would benefit both sides.

Conclusion

In sum, Roma women seem more interested in their health and wellbeing than before. Urgent needs regarding health have to do with easier access to health services; this implies both concrete access as well as finding ways to fight different fears and cultural and linguistic barriers. Informing healthcare personnel with Roma culture and customs is one step to a better understanding and promising direction. As for physical activity, it is often impossible for women to exercise if men or elder Roma are present, or if there is a possibility of their presence. Thus, providing women with tailored sessions and/or "safe" sports areas, could be named as a good practice. Roma organizations are needed here, for these kind of arrangements often require interaction with administrates, as well as economic resources.

9. Expectations

Women were also asked about their expectations and goals in life. Finding a place in society with the help of education and profession were among women's top expectations, regardless of their age.

All of the youngest women except one wanted to take part in the working life. One of them wished to start her own family and find "a place in the society". Another woman, already married, dreamed of a Bachelor's degree, a well-paid job and acquiring housing for her family. A third lady, who already had a job, wished to retrain and change professional direction. A fourth woman desired to start her studies again, find an interesting job and develop as a person. These answers reflect determination and ambition. Women consider themselves willing and able to educate themselves, find a job – even though all of them already worked either full- or part-time –, and take part in economic and social life. They had big but reasonable dreams, such as owning an apartment, that require work and effort. Among the

youngest age group, education, permanent job and better economic situation were considered as means of realizing dreams. One interviewee also pointed out that her own activity and courage could help her forward.

All of the three youngest women who answered the question regarding their children, mentioned education; they wished that their offspring would go to career school (1/3), upper secondary school (3/3) and even further to a polytechnic or university (2/3). It did not play an important role what field of employment or science they would choose – the interviewees told that the women would let their children make the choices for themselves.

There were two women also in the second age group who hoped to study more and four women who dreamed of getting a profession and a permanent job. One of them told that her motivation was to improve her economic situation, and another one wanted to “affect society and create future”. A couple of women with career ambitions saw education and their own activity and diligence effective in helping them to realize their vision.

Four out of eight ladies in the second age category did not mention education or work as their goal. Two of them already had permanent jobs which might have affected their answers. The other of these two women hoped to “live a full and happy life”, whereas the other wished to be able to “educate and raise my children and live in a safe, democratic country”. These ladies thought that reducing stress factors and focusing on the positive, as well as determination in bringing up children would help them get closer to their goals. One of the women wished to improve her health – she was seriously ill. One of the interviewees did not answer to questions related to this thematic area.

In the third age group, six out of nineteen women wished to study more – there were both early school leavers and those with a career school or BA degree among them. Eight of them hoped for a job. Like among younger women, those who wished to get more education and with the help of that, a job, saw studying and their own activity and diligence as important factors in helping forward their goals. One of the ladies with a career school diploma said that if only she was healthy, she probably had a change to work. One of the ladies who wished to get a good job, said that her Roma background and discrimination in the society prevented her from finding a job. These women hoped for education and job not only on economic grounds – in fact, only one of them explicitly said that she wished to get a job in order to support herself by gainful employment. A second lady said that having a job would enable her to plan her life and make her dreams come true. Yet another woman thought that as an educated social worker she could help people more than she can in her current position.

Women in the third age category had also other goals and expectations. There was clear division in their answers after the age of 57. Women under that age were more likely to wish for education and job except one woman who was reaching retirement age and still hoped to get a job. She belonged to the minority (7/19) among the third group women, who had continued her studies after the upper

secondary school and reached vocational qualification. Women older than 57 wished for healthy ageing (4/6), peace of mind (1/6) and a possibility to travel (1/6). Four out of thirteen ladies under 57 years also wished for health. Other expectations of the women in the third age group were happiness and balanced life (2/19), self-development (1/19), raising and educating children (1/19) and a possibility to support socially disadvantaged or excluded people (1/19).

As for their children, the women of the third age category had more wishes for them than women in the younger age groups. Most of the women (14/19) hoped that their daughters would study and/or get a job. Together there were three interviewees in this age category who told that their daughters already had a degree. Only one woman did not answer to this question, and another one said that she did not have any special expectations for her daughters. Six women in the oldest age category hoped their daughters to study whatever they like. Five out of nineteen answerers hoped that their daughters would graduate from a university or a higher technical college. Two women wished that their children would study social and health issues. For the interviewees, it was important that the current or future job of their daughters would be suitable with their training (9/19) or otherwise pleasant and significant for them (7/19). One of the ladies hoped her daughter to study a profession that could allow her access to good employment opportunities.

I hope that she could go forward in working life. She should not just be waiting what her spouse gives to her. (...) They (children) grow in a healthy way... That they don't need to be subordinate to anyone. (Mirella, third age group)

One's self-esteem improves when you have the feeling of not being dependent on anyone. So that I can live independently, get a profession... It is good for you. (Rosita, third age group)

In sum, the role of education was seen essential in achieving a better future perspectives. *One* mother hoped that her daughter would become a doctor or a lawyer, for example – she explained that the Roma are lacking but much needed on important positions in the society. Another mother said that she could see her daughter working in the Parliament. None of the women said that it would be inappropriate for women to receive training and enter into working life. However, there were only a few who had ideas about means of helping and supporting them in achieving these goals. According to one lady, diligence was the key; if you know what you want, you need persistence. Another woman hoped that the society would learn to see and respect the potentiality of Roma women.

As for the personal lives of their daughters, apart from studying and working, women in the third age category wished for the following things: happiness and good life (8/19), study/work (5/19), home and family (5/19), health (4/19), success (3/19), "blessed life"/peace (2/19), and love (2/19). One answerer said she hoped her children to be able to do what they want, and another woman wished for "honest life" to her offspring. Two of the women who expected their daughters to study or work, hoped that

they would not just “live at home but go outside of it”. Three of the women who hoped their daughters to start a family or have their own homes, wished them to form “healthy relationships”.

10. Generational change

10.1. The changing lives of Roma women

Most of the interviewed women named more than one factors that, in their opinion, have changed Roma women’s lives in comparison with the preceding generations. Just one person in the group aged 31-45 had no opinion about the issue.

Interviewees under 30 years felt that lives of Finnish Roma women have changed for the better and easier. There is more options, spare time and freedom. According to the young women, the way of seeing the role of a Roma woman has changed. Today, there is more equality than before, and they are no more considered as mere “workhorses”. Reading between the lines, it seems that these positively regarded changes stem from the change in Roma men’s attitudes towards women and the society; as if the Roma men were those who allowed the change to happen. Three out of five answerers told that it is normal for today’s men to carry a share of household work. One woman also added that “women are no more dominated by coercion”. Another woman said that, nowadays, also men can show their feelings. A third woman touched the same issue by saying that “the Roma men have changed – they understand that also women want to build a future and achieve something”, and a fourth answerer thought that “men have begun to comprehend that women should educate themselves and partake in the working life”. One woman brought up two important factors that have made everyday life easier compared to the past: improved housing conditions (nomadism among the Finnish Roma has become rare since the 1970s) and household appliances. Another woman mentioned day-care centers; without childcare, women could not even think of working outside the home.

According to the women aged 17-30 years, attitudes of both the Roma and the majority population towards the Roma have changed for the better. Among the Roma, education and schooling are appreciated more than before. Due to changes both in the larger society and among the Finnish Roma themselves, women now can educate themselves, search for a job, and say their opinions and influence the society. As two of the answerers put it, “women are able to do more than clean and take care of children” and “do the laundry and cook”.

In the second age category, the answers were quite similar than those of the younger women. When the women were asked about changes and improvements in comparison to the life of the previous generations, the growing importance of education was mentioned four times and the possibility to take part in the working life five times. Three women mentioned improvements in housing. Other things that were brought up once were “day-care centers and pre-school education” and “internationalization”.

Among the things that today's Roma women can enjoy, unlike their mothers, were work (5/8), free mobility (2/8) "without the fear of being attacked", and leisure activities (1/8). One of the women said that "everything is possible", whereas another woman thought that "the possibilities for the women were the same before, but today they are 'more natural'".

Like the young women, six out of eight women, aged 31-45, agreed that the position of Roma women is somewhat better than it used to be and that the Roma community has become more egalitarian. Half of the women elaborated on this by saying that also men take care of children and household tasks. One lady said that men have become more open-minded and tolerant, and another that women and men can work at same places. Two women did not express their opinions here.

As for the eldest age group, women aged 46 years and more, all had their say. Today, women have better access to education and work – young women in particular. Respect for education and work has increased, which gives hope for better future perspectives. According to one lady, parents now support their children more than before.

As for the external living conditions, seven women felt that a set of remarkable changes had taken place: for there is no more nomadism and the Roma now have houses, the everyday life of the women has become easier and lighter. Also, four women told that women's role has improved. Some men take their share of the household work, and women are respected and taken into account. Improved attitudes towards the Roma was mentioned three times. Other changes for the better that were mentioned by singular respondents were improved attitudes of the Roma towards the society, human rights, overall wellbeing, healthcare, social security, social activity (of the Roma), freedom, mobility, and safety. One woman felt that "there is more of everything" than before.

In general, the interviewees felt that there is more freedom and mobility regarding Roma women's lives in the modern society. But what such things women can do than they could not do before? Seven women, aged 46 years and more, responded that it has become possible for them to study and work. Four women felt that today's women live independently and take their own decisions. Three women mentioned women's possibilities for practicing their preferred hobby. Individual answerers also brought up economic security and the possibility to leave from a violent relationship. One respondent said that "everything" has improved and another one agreed that, yes, she "could do things that were not possible for my mother". Two women choose not to reflect on the theme.

Regarding the changes in relationships between men and women, most of the women in the third age category felt that they have developed to a better direction. Five respondents felt that, in general, the relationship has become more egalitarian and that the "gap is not as big as it used to be". Women now appreciate themselves, was the comment of one of the interviewees. Two women said that men take women better into consideration than in the past, and three felt that today's men actively participate in household tasks. Two respondents said that women are more independent, and one felt that women

now have right to their own opinions. One woman mentioned the access to education and working life. Another lady said that today's men support women in their education and job search. Two women were hesitant about increased equality: the first lady felt that life might be better for some but not for all, and the other told that "nothing" has changed between men and women. Three women did not answer to this question, although one of them said elsewhere, with a positive mood, that women now attend schools and participate in working life.

10.2. On inspirational women and the question of Roma identity

Who do the women look up to, whom they respect? In the first age group, two women told they admired their mother, and singular respondents named their sister, cousin, former colleague and Miranda Vuolasranta, a Finnish Roma woman, who has made her way into international politics where she stands for the Roma people and their rights. Attributes that were linked to these persons were strength and bravery, tenderness and care, mettle and diplomacy, as well as fairness, loyalty to one's values and principles, wisdom and sophistication, and "personal relationship with Jesus". Two respondents said that they respected women who have gone through hard times with perseverance.

Regarding the second age group, mother and grandparents were mentioned twice, and a friend, Miranda Vuolasranta, and "many successful Roma women" once. In them, the interviewees appreciated such traits as strength, positivity, joyfulness and hilarity, diligence and working morals, fairness, tenderness and care, wisdom and sophistication and rhetorical charms. One woman also said that she admired women who have gone through hard times with perseverance. Another lady told that she was grateful to her parents and grandparents for passing the Roma culture to her, for she "loved to be a Roma woman". Two women did not name any role models.

The women in the third age category looked up to the following personalities: grandmother (5/19), mother (4/19), aunt (4/19), cousin (1/19), Miranda Vuolasranta (1/19), Mother Teresa (1/19), and colleagues (1/19). One woman said that there were many women she respected because of their admirable traits. Four interviewees admired such personality traits as wisdom and sophistication. Economic efficiency and independence, helpfulness and friendliness, decisiveness and assertiveness, diligence, mettle and diplomacy, genuineness, fairness, femininity, knowledge of the human nature, mental quickness, and religiousness were also mentioned by a couple of answerers. Two women admired women who had been "successful" in their lives and helping the Roma. Strength, bravery, and perseverance during hard times were appreciated by five respondents. One of the women proudly said that her mother was a single mother who "went with the horses", thus referring to the nomadic lifestyle of many Finnish Roma in the past.

The Roma nowadays live among other Finns and they enjoy the same social benefits and health care services than everybody else. The overall economic and societal situation has improved. Two women

mentioned safety and security, which might be linked to this – however, this was not expressed explicitly. However, improvements in living conditions were mentioned especially among women in the two older age categories in which many women have personally experienced what life used to be like before the special issues of the Roma community were taken into serious consideration in Finland. After settling down, the Roma women have begun to enjoy a very different kind of “mobility” than before. Modern mobility is considered rather as a broadened field of life prospects than as necessity of being constantly on the move.

Almost all women, regardless of age groups, mentioned education and work as new and promising possibilities with the help of which the future can be even better. Some women added that the Roma themselves now respect education and working life in a different way than before. The possibility to use day care services makes studying easier for women.

Roughly a half of participants, especially the older women, felt that Roma women’s position has enhanced, both in the Roma community and in the society. The pressure from the side of the Roma community, however, still strongly affects women’s lives. The pressure is felt with the regard to behavior and one’s outfit. For a girl, overcoming her teens can be very stressful in case she does not wish to opt for the traditional clothing. As one of the young women, Tanja puts it: “One’s teens are really brutal – other young people eat you alive”.

Because of the pressure, the choice for changing one’s clothing is often hastily made. All the women who took part in group discussions highlighted the fact that a girl’s choice for clothing deeply affects their future choices by limiting their possibilities and mobility. Both young and older women expressed their wish to reduce the importance of traditional costume in the future.

When we grow old, it will not make any difference to us, whether this or that child has a skirt or not. Who of us cares about that anymore? (Melissa, first age group)

An alternative for the traditional costumes is “small clothing”: long and chaste skirts and a jacket, for example. In the discussion groups, “small clothes” were discussed in a positive light. Among the Finnish Roma, who are the most traditional and loyal to their old heritage, this is a noteworthy step. The traditional way of clothing has played an important role for decades – it is one of the pillars of their ethnic identity – and giving it up would push Roma to build their identity in other ways²⁷.

Identity is being built on wrong things. So that if you do not dress like the *Kale* (the Finnish Roma people) usually do... But it is not the case. The blood does not change. (Tanja, first age group)

As several women brought up, changing one’s way of dressing does not mean giving up to what one of the young ladies called assimilation. These women underlined that abandoning “full clothing” does not

²⁷ Stenroos, Marko 2012, 426-428.

automatically imply desecrating one's tradition. Also in both discussion groups, the participants agreed on this. One of the youngest ladies said that to be a "true" Roma depends entirely on other factors than her clothing.

This... humaneness. It is what is real. Old people often say that being a Roma is something that stems from the heart. Other people are taken care of, it does play no difference whether they are *Kale* or not. The wellbeing of people around you is the most important thing, and the respect and good behavior. (Diana, first age group)

11. Gender-based violence

11.1. Violence in relationships and ways of handling it

In this study, gender-based violence refers to physical, sexual and physiological violence against women. In most cases, the women understood it as a form of domestic violence.

Almost all the interviewed women, regardless of their age, saw gender-based violence as wrong and distasteful. In the first age group, women viewed violence as "wrong" (2/5), "terrible" (1/5), and cowardly (1/5). One of the youngest women told that she used to live in a violent relationship. She wishes that women would learn to appreciate themselves and walk away from a violent man. She lamented, however, that women often choose to surrender in the face of violence.

In the second age group, one woman defined "gender-based violence" as patronizing and subjugating women, which is accompanied with lack of respect, humiliation and contempt. Women her age group considered violence against women as "sick" (1/8), "incomprehensible" (1/8), "sad" (1/8), "terrible" (2/8), "not acceptable in any forms or circumstances" (1/8). One woman said that there should be more interventions in order to prevent violence.

Among the women aged 46 years and more, attitudes regarding violence were alike. Women considered violence as a "bad and unfortunate" (5/19), "terrible" (5/19), "wrong" (4/19), "cowardly" (2/19), and "repulsive" (1/19) thing. One of the women replied that she had not experienced violence. Another woman told that she had lived in a violent relationship herself, and that violence dreaded her. A third woman felt that violence "is still a part of everyday life" and that "the responsibility for men's deeds is still transferred to Roma women". She added that mental violence and suppression are often worse than physical violence.

Domestic violence puts Roma women in a difficult and vulnerable situation. Women, who meet violence, are often alone with their suffering. In the Finnish Roma community, sensitive private problems are not considered as appropriate discussion topics, especially if persons of different age are

present. A woman who chooses to talk about violence, puts her kin in a challenging situation, in which the problem extends to touch not only her and her spouse, but the whole kinship network around them. Thus, women often remain silent about their suffering and wish to see a peaceful end to violence. Traces of battery are easily covered with long-sleeved blouses and ankle length skirts.

Traditionally, Roma women could not leave their men, for that was not socially acceptable. Women want to give such an impression that everything is well and maintain the façade. Women's shelters have proved extremely important for Roma women, who cannot stay at their homes but who are too afraid of going to police or report their spouses to their kin or authorities. For women who cannot go to their close ones in fear of disputes between families, a shelter home is often the only option. It is not always easy to find a place there, either.

It is quite difficult to get into a shelter home. There are just a few of them, and the demand is large... And they have even closed some shelter homes! (Rosita, third age group)

According to the survey carried out in 2010, there were 21 shelter homes in Finland. Most of them were located in Southern Finland. The total number of family places was 123, which was less than the EU recommends.²⁸

What is more, children often stay with their father after separation. It is understandable, that women do not want to leave their kids behind. Economic security can also raise questions; how will a separated Roma woman provide for herself if she has no education or work?

In this survey, the interviewees were asked whether, in their opinion, a Roma woman can leave a violent relationship. All but one woman in the oldest age category considered that it was possible – however, one elderly lady was uncertain about how to solve this kind of a complex situation. “Nobody is obliged to suffer from violence and abuse”, the women argued. One of the youngest women said that “one can be crazy but not foolish”, thus highlighting women's own responsibility to stand for themselves and flee violence. Her peer felt that everyone has the right to integrity, pointing at universal human rights. Also one woman in the oldest age category referred to violence as degrading human dignity. Two women in the second age category, however, added that even if they see it acceptable, it is hard or unlikely for a Roma woman leave her spouse in real life. According to them, women either stand still or suffer; they do not have enough courage to break up.

The women were also asked what they would do in case of violence in their relationships. Answers of the youngest and oldest women varied here. The youngest women told that they would leave the relationship (3/5), ask the man not to do it again /forgive him (3/5), go to a family member (2/5) or a friend (2/5), make a complaint (2/5), keep violence secret and hope that it will not happen again (1/5),

²⁸ Törmä, Tuokkola & Hurtig 2013, 22–23.

and seek for professional help (1/5). One of the young women said that it is hard to say – however she thought that she would give the man another change.

Women in the second age group told that they would leave the relationship (6/8), go to a friend (3/8) or family member (1/8), and make a complaint (1/8). As for the third age group, most women would leave the relationship (13/19). Individual respondents also chose the following options: keeping violence in secret and hoping that it would never happen again, seeking for professional help, asking the man not to do it again and giving another change, making a complaint, and calling to a SOS hotline.

In the opinion of young women violence could be stopped by breaking up (4/5), seeking for help (2/5), getting peer support (1/5) or support from a third person (1/5); seeing the reality from a new perspective might be helpful. One of the youngest women said that “pressure from the side of relatives does not help”. The women aged 31-45, also considered break up (3/8) as the best way to get rid of a violent relationship. One woman added that women should remember that “they deserved better than that”. Discussing problems openly was recommended by three women. One would seek for support of a strong friend, and another from God. In the third age group, breaking up remained on the top of the list (12/19). One woman thought that, otherwise, violence will not cease. Another commented, that if a relationship hurts a person mentally or physiologically, it is better to walk away. Five women felt that one should not try to deal with violence alone, but to seek for help: professional help is available whether it was therapy or a women’s shelter. Two respondents recommended talking. Only one woman thought that a couple should solve their problems by themselves. One woman of more than 46 years of age, reported having broken up because of violence.

In comparison, it seems that younger women have more options than their elders; the youngest interviewees chose more options than other women. For the older generation, leaving the relationship was often considered as the only solution to break free from a violent relationship. Also, younger women can think that men can change – thus giving another change might seem plausible.

Even though almost all interviewed women condemned violence altogether, it seems that, in practice, force is commonly tolerated among many Roma. Even if women wished for help, they may not know where to turn to. During the third age group discussion, the participants suspected that, especially for young women, the threshold of seeking help might be high. “And where can they go? It is probably to the majority population... A social worker or so”, as Rosita pondered. However, going to social workers makes some women afraid of losing their children, which was also mentioned during the discussion.

Also alarming, during the group discussion of third age group women, was that women felt that is now more violence than in their own youth. In their opinion, some Roma families have regressed and embraced old ways, which they considered as non-constructive, of handling things. The women thought that the increasing use of narcotics is partly behind the negative development.

I think that our generation has been safe from it (violence). But that earlier one, it has also been violent. (...) But it is only a few in our generation who knows, who has experienced it. Our generation was never hit. (Roosa, third age group)

The women further felt than in some “groups” (read: extended Roma families), physical abuse is present, and to certain extent, even tolerated. A man is expected to “keep her wife under control” in order to be respected by other Roma. The discussion group participants were concerned that some women accept violence and even think that their husbands do not like them, if they do not use force.

11.2. Women’s own relationships

In this section of the research, the interviewees were also asked about feelings that they experience or have experienced in their relationships. In the first age group, two women were currently in a relationship, and they both answered the question. In the second age group, six women had a relationship, but only three of them answered. As for the third age group, there were eight women who were in a relationship during the survey of which six responded to the given question. Number of women (who were in relationships) recognizing the following feelings are marked after the feeling in question by age groups.

Feeling	1st age group	2nd age group	3rd age group
Pride	2/2	1/6	1/8
Shame	1/2	1/6	0/8
Happiness	2/2	1/6	2/8
Sadness	2/2	0/6	0/8
Confidence	2/2	1/6	3/8
Blame	1/2	1/6	0/8
Satisfaction	2/2	1/6	3/8
Annoyance	2/2	1/6	0/8
Peace	2/2	1/6	2/8
Anger	1/2	0/6	0/8
Admiration	2/2	1/6	2/8
Fear	2/2	1/6	0/8
Enthusiasm	2/2	1/2	1/8
Mistrust	1/2	0/8	0/8
Respect	2/2	1/2	3/8
Resentment	1/2	1/6	1/8
Gratitude	2/2	2/6	1/8

Nervousness	2/2	2/6	1/8
Empathy	2/2	1/6	3/8

In sum, women felt more positive than negative feelings in their relationships. In the first age group, the reported scale of different feelings was wider than in other groups. It might be the case, that especially for the older generation it does not feel natural to speak about one's love life or relationships – it is not part of the Finnish Roma culture. If relationships are discussed, positive things are easier to bring out than negative ones. One must also keep in mind that there were quite many divorcees among the answerers; for them some negative feelings have surely be part of the relationships in the past. Regarding the youngest generation, discussing one's feelings seems more natural than for the older people, and also negative or difficult feelings were admitted.

When the women were asked what they would change in their relationships, age differences did not seem to affect their answers. Things that women hoped for the most were more time with their partners, as well as more respect and transparency in the relationship. A third age group woman said that “men should be more considerate and less egoistic”. Two of her peers hoped for shared hobbies and leisure activities. Yet another woman in the third age group said that “economic deprivation eats our relationship.” In the first age group, the other respondent told that “things would have been better for a longer time if I did not have depression”. As for the second age group, two women wished for less pressures and responsibility put on their shoulders. These women had but their husband, also children and other things to take care of.

Conclusion

To conclude, gender-based violence is present in the Finnish Roma community, which is alarming in itself. Fighting violence is difficult, for most women are not willing to speak about – many of them think that there is too much to lose if they open their mouth. The urgent need is to make not only Roma women, but the whole Roma community to communicate the problem and to condemn violence. Attitudinal changes between the Roma themselves is needed. The need for shelter homes is big, for it is often the only place a female victim can go to – they are much used by Roma women. Professional helpers were also mentioned by women – increasing women's know-how about available helping hands, and making them easier to access, is important. Helping lines, where women can call anonymously, are an example of a good practice.

12. Discrimination

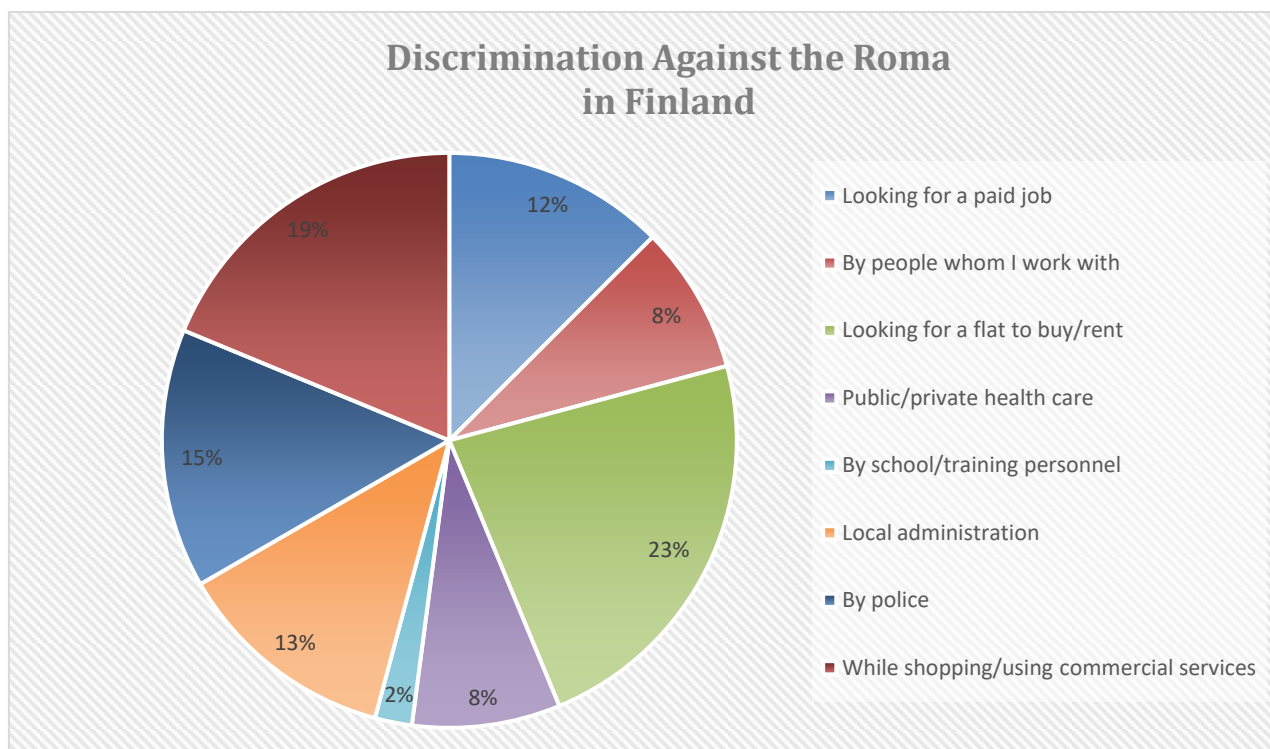
12.1. Forms of discrimination

In this section, the interviewees were questioned whether they had faced discrimination because of their ethnic background. More than 65% of all respondents replied in the affirmative, which is alarming. Among the five youngest women, four had faced discrimination. In the second age group, the number was two out of eight, and in the third age category thirteen out of nineteen.

Forms of discrimination are listed in the chart below. Here, the age groups are not divided but treated jointly. The chart shows that Roma women face discrimination most likely when they are either looking for a housing (23 %), using public commercial services (19 %), dealing with the police (15 %) and administrates (13 %), or looking for a paid job (12 %). Discrimination from the side of healthcare personnel and people whom Roma women worked with was equally common (8 %).

The women were further asked, whether they knew if there is a law in Finland that forbids ethnic-based discrimination. In the first age group, all of the women were aware of the existence of the law. Regarding both the second and third age groups, three of the women were not sure about the issue. Two women in both groups said they thought there is such a law. There was also one lady in both groups who did not know about the law.

The situation was likewise as regards with organizations helping people who suffer from discrimination. All the young women were aware of the existence of such organizations. In the second age group, six women knew, and two did not know, about them. Among the oldest women, all but three women were informed about helping organizations.



When discrimination was discussed in groups, both younger and older women agreed that hidden discrimination against the Roma in Finland has become more common than before. By this, the women

referred to situations in which prejudices are not openly expressed, but become evident in other, often subtle, ways. “They do it so cunningly, that you do not even notice it”, as one of the youngest ladies stated. Roosa, representing the third age group, said the following:

Today, I have noticed that there is a lot of hidden racism. It is like, they don't give you a change to caught them. And you cannot defend yourself. They do it in such a fine and underhand way so that they will not get caught.

Roosa's peer Mirella, in turn, said:

I have seen this hidden racism a lot. (...) I have been doing a lot of cooperation with administrates. There is never a negative response from their side. Rather it goes that they say: “well, let's see”. But then I understand that, there is no action. And then I understand, it (discrimination) is there.

12.2. Roma and media

Regarding media, it was considered as mostly discriminative towards the Roma. No one of the respondents felt that the image of the Roma, presented in TV, newspapers and journals, was fully “correct”. In all age groups, there was only one person who said that the image was “sometimes correct”.

In most cases, media was found guilty of exaggerating by generalizing and playing with stereotypes – this was the opinion of four women in the first age group, six women in the second age group, and ten women in the third age group. Three women (one in the second, and two in the third age group) said that “the Roma are ridiculed and made fun of”. Distortion of facts was also seen as a problem by one woman in the second age group and six women in the third age group. One of the oldest ladies felt that all this is because of racist attitudes of media staff.

Especially sitcoms were seen in a negative light. One of the women, aged 31-45, and felt that the quality of humor in sitcoms is bad. She pointed out that media often ignores the fact that there are different individuals among the Roma. One woman in third age category was worried that people have begun to believe in stereotypes. One of the young ladies said that the Roma are often portrayed as criminals or bad people. This imagery has been repeated in Finnish media for a quite a long time. Focusing on negativity when it comes to the Roma was considered as one of the faults of mass media by women representing all age categories (20 % of the youngest, 12.5 % of the middle-aged, and 15.8 % of the oldest women). However, there seemed to be a more favorable climate for documentaries and information programs: two women representing the youngest and oldest age groups felt that it is good when the Roma can speak for themselves. One of the youngest ladies suggested that the Roma should create their own shows and find ways to make bullying embarrassing.

12.3. Consequences of discrimination on the Roma community

The women of the first age group felt that discrimination leads to alienation from society (4/5) and marginalization (2/5). One of the respondents felt that discrimination makes the Roma community to look inside, and another pointed out that due to negative attitudes towards the Roma, “the Roma do not want to act in the society in the same way as others.” What is more, the attitudes of the Roma towards the majority population will worsen.

In the second age group, opinions were alike. One of the eight respondents felt that discrimination results in marginalization which, in turn, causes mental suffering and the feeling of losing one’s fundamental security. Another respondent told that discrimination creates stress, because the Roma have to take a defensive position. Prejudices between the Roma and the majority population can also grow stronger, as was the opinion of two respondents. One woman replied to the question that “the results are there for everyone to see”, and another thought that discrimination influences the Roma community “in all possible ways”

The women in the third age category, out of whom over 68 % had faced discrimination, had a lot to say on its possible consequences, which were all considered as negative. Four women saw discrimination as a factor that leads to alienation from the society and majority population. Two women felt that discrimination makes everyday life more difficult. Discrimination had effects both on the public and private life sectors. Comments, prejudices and attitudes, such as “they are only gypsies” or “gypsies are not trustworthy”, wound and hurt. Six women felt that discrimination leads to shame, fear, and passivation. As one woman said: “No matter how honest you are, you are not trusted upon”. Negative experiences and fears make some Roma to avoid situations where they can face discrimination. Another woman thought that discrimination leads to marginalization and social exclusion from health services and education. This kind of negative cycle can, according to three other interviewees, build up resistance and prejudices of the Roma towards the majority population. One of the women also noted, that in a negative atmosphere with weak prospects, drugs and harmful relationships often come into play.

The interviewed women were asked their opinions about how to reduce discrimination against the Roma in their (Finnish) society. In all age groups, the respondents saw the possibilities of telling about the Roma culture with the means of open interaction and education, in the spirit of mutual respect and equality. Most women thought that increasing openness, communication and interaction between the Roma and the majority population, as well as providing people with information about the Roma culture, would benefit everyone. As one of the young women said, making the Roma culture known and visible to the rest of Finns, it will become “normal”. Also, bringing up positive things would be a good

idea according to three third age group women. In shaping the imagery of the Roma, the role of media must not be underestimated.

Visibility and societal participation of the Roma themselves was also considered important: the Roma should stand for themselves. As the younger women seemed to have a bit more positive expectations about the power of giving information, the oldest women also felt that the “behavior of the Roma themselves” from the part of the Roma, and “seeing the Roma as individuals” from the part of the majority population should meet. As if these women were to say that, yes, some of the Roma do fail to meet the expectations of the majority population, but some of them really try their best to acquire their place in the society. A deep experience of inequality breaks through their answers, although also positivity and glimpses of hope can be heard.

Conclusion

Concerning discrimination, it is almost everywhere and thus challenging to tackle. Discrimination also seems to be more and more hidden and more difficult to trace. Increasing openness is important, and media has a big role here. Providing the media with positive examples has proved working related to many issues, so why not Roma? Also, as some women pointed out, discussing Roma culture openly and increasing awareness of their history, lifestyle and customs in schools, hospitals etc., will lead to a situation where Roma is considered as “normal”. Activity of Roma themselves is much needed here. Also, the more the Roma educate themselves, the more they will have tools to stand for their rights and prove prejudices wrong.

13. Positivity

The women who took part in the survey had many reasons mentioned to feel positive about. On the top of the lists, regardless of age, were family, spouse, and children. Also good health and friends were mentioned by several women. Things that the interviewed women felt positive about are classified in the following table.

<i>What do you feel positive about?</i>	<i>1st age group (n=5)</i>	<i>2nd age group (n=8)</i>	<i>3rd age group (n=19)</i>
home/housing	4	3	2
family	2	3	7
spouse, children	2	3	7
friends	1	3	4
school/education	2	1	2
job / working life	2		3
health	3	2	8

economic situation	2	1	
overall well-being			4
faith, congregation	1	1	3
safety, security	1		
other	3	5	9

Roma women have faith in a better tomorrow. Advances that women could see in their own lives, in the Roma community, as well as in the larger society, feed their hopes for a brighter and more tolerant future. Several women told that they felt happy and proud for their success in their studies and work. It is important for Roma women to believe in themselves and focus on their succeeding rather than negative experiences. There is much potentiality in the communality and cooperation of perseverant Roma women.

14. Reflections

The last part of the questionnaire was titled as “reflections”. In this section, the interviewees were asked to think of things that they would like to change either in their own lives or in the Finnish Roma community. In addition, they were questioned how these goals could be reached. The interviewed women were also given a free word.

The youngest women wished for personal things, such as finding permanent job (2/5), becoming a better spouse and mother (1/5), being able to develop spiritually (1/5), and getting rid of depression (1/5). One woman hoped for equality with the majority population. Only two of those who wished for improvement in their personal lives, named means of getting there: time, talking, living in the present moment, and reaching out for one’s dreams.

In the second age group, only three out of eight women told about their dreams. One of them wished for health and a job. Another lady hoped to get a house of her own, and the third woman wanted to get rid of her debts.

As for the third age group, there was not particular thing that would have popped out of the data. Most of the wishes, however, were linked to the quality everyday life. There were women who wished for a job (4/19), economic security (3/19), and possibilities for vocational training (2/19). Two of the women hoped that they were healthier. One of the women dreamt of moving house. There were also a two women, who wished to be able to realize themselves better and have more time for their own hobbies and relationships. Equality and better attitudes towards the Roma were also mentioned, both once. Two women said that they were happy with their lives and they wished for “nothing more”. Regarding employment and getting more time for themselves, being more active (3/19) was considered as the best

means. Distributing information, enhancing tolerance, as well as paying attention to one's own behavior, were seen as ways to integration and better equality.

It is interesting that in both the youngest and oldest age categories, several women saw education, working life, and societal activity as important areas for improvement. All of these are areas, where the Roma are seen as a part of the society. The women of the second age category, however, did not bring these issues up in the interviews. Their responds were more tightly linked with the internal affairs of the Roma community. Such issues as gender roles, clothing, and mutual conflicts between the Roma, seemed to be of more interest to them. Women's position and mutual conflicts, however, were also mentioned in other women's answers.

<i>How would you change the (Finnish) Roma community?</i>	1st age group (n=5)	2nd age group (n=8)	3rd age group (n=19)
more education	3		3
more participation in working life	2		1
more societal activity	1		3
mutual conflicts – more interaction between the Roma	1	2	3
more respect for individuals	1		
better interaction and integration	1		2
more tolerance towards the Roma	1		2
not forgetting one's cultural heritage	1		
questioning gender roles, women's position	1	1	2
clothing		1	2
own attitudes		1	
changes in everyday life		1	4

CONCLUSION

The Finnish Roma community has traveled a long journey. For over centuries, the Roma lived in the country as a minority that was not given a chance to speak on their own behalf. During the past decades, however, the physical living conditions and societal rights of the Finnish Roma have improved considerably. Nowadays, the Finnish Roma have organizations and associations, run by active and competent personalities with a wide range of know-how, promoting Roma equality and participation. There is much to feel positive about; this became evident also from the interviews taken for this study. The results of the present research on different areas of Roma women's lives indicate, however, that the overall picture is still far away from an ideal one.

In the opinion of the majority of interviewed women, the biggest issues yet to be tackled are related to general attitudes towards the Roma, as well as education and employment. Discrimination exists and is encountered both on public and individual spheres of Roma women's life. The women told that they face preoccupation almost everywhere they go, from shops, restaurants and public events to hospitals and offices. In addition, because of deep and persistent prejudices towards the Roma, it is often very challenging for them to find a housing or a paid job. This is alarming; dependency on the state support network will not progress much the Roma affair. Some women highlighted their conclusion that the Roma must find ways to stand for themselves. To strive for a better future for the Finnish Roma, external actions are not sufficient, but much depends on their own attitudes and motivation. The fact that an increasing number of Roma finish school and graduate with professional qualifications, is a huge step to the right direction. Programs, helping Roma to get informed about their rights and options, and facilitating employers and Roma to communicate and find common interests, are welcome.

Health of the Roma population seems to have increased; however, it is difficult to find research data on the topic. Women who took part in this study told about the matter on the basis of their own experiences and touch. Most of them associated good health with healthy nutrition and physical activity. Which was positive, many of them also practiced what they knew was good for their health. Whereas it was not appropriate for women to mind about themselves in the past, it has become increasingly common for them to do so. Women want to feel good, as one of the interviewees stated. The ongoing generational change concerning attitudes towards health and wellbeing, touches deep questions related to one's identity, societal role and worth as a Roma woman. Regarding healthcare services, most women wished for shorter waiting times, easier access to a doctor, and Finnish-speaking staff – commonly shared hopes by not just Roma, but Finns in general.

Gender-based violence was also discussed, and its presence was not denied. Although most of the interviewed women had no personal experiences of violence, they agreed on the problem. The women assumed that it is not easy to seek for help, even if the violence was harsh and continuous. Fear of possible family disputes and the possibility losing one's children, combined with women's commonly

low self-esteem were seen as the major reasons for hiding violence from other Roma. Shelter homes are often only places a woman can go to. However, there are just a few of them in Finland.

Generational change in the Finnish Roma community is related to several aspects of their lives. The large socioeconomic changes, which begun in the mid-1900s, have influenced the Roma in many ways. Urbanization, changes in working life and requirements for education have pushed the Roma to find new ways of adapting to the surrounding world. While some aspects of the development have been embraced by most Roma, advances also raise challenging questions. How can the Roma protect their identity and culture in the changing world? Can some traditions, such as the national costume, be abandoned without losing one's Roma identity? What lies in the core of a "real" Roma in the first place, and who has the right to decide for it? Naturally, as the present study focuses on Roma women, the interviewees actively brought up changes touching women's own lives. Women's empowerment was considered as a good thing by all age groups.

However, a few women also discussed the tendency of some young women to resist changes more than their elders. One of the third age group women stated that her children had difficulties in accepting her minding her own wellbeing. In a way, possible resistance can be explained by the challenging identity game that today's Roma have to play. Especially the youngest generation lies in a demanding situation in between different cultural influences and pressures; their homes, schools and friends may represent radically different ideals and values. This may lead into "strictness" typical of adolescence; a person wants his/her identity and principles chart to be clear. Even if finding a sound position both in the Roma community and in the Finnish society would not be an unproblematic thing to do, it is the future hope of most interviewed women. The women wished that also their daughters and granddaughters would educate themselves and find a job that made them satisfied and independent. As for their personal lives, they wished for happiness, healthy relationships, stable families, and happiness – wishes that most mothers, regardless of their backgrounds, have in their hearts.

To work for the better for the Roma, effective cooperation of administrations, Roma organizations as well as individual Roma, is much needed. Openness, visibility, and informing the majority population about the characteristics of the Roma culture will, in the opinion of interviewed women, the breaking up prejudices and seeing Roma as "normal". Attitudinal changes are not to be underestimated, for in today's Finland, those seem to be the major obstacles that hinder the Roma population from reclaiming their freedoms and legal rights.

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APPENDICES

Appendice I: Semi-structured interview

ROMA WOMEN RESEARCH INTERVIEW

Autonomous Region:

Province/ District:

Interview number:

Date:

Interviewer:

Instructions:

1. The *guidelines* don't have to be read. It is a support to lead the interview in the right way.

2. Interviewer must show the interview and explain the objectives of it to the person before start. It is necessary to let her know that she is not forced to respond to a question if she doesn't want.

SD: SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

SD.P01. When were you born?

SD.P02. Where did you born?

SD.P03. Actually, do you have a partner?

SD.P04. What's your marital status?

Guidelines
Single
Only officially married
Only married by the Roma tradition
Officially married & married by the Roma tradition
Widow
Separated
Divorcee

SD.P05. Please tell us, how many years have you been in your relationship, including the courtship.

SD.P06. Do you have any children? If yes, how many?

SD.P07. How old were you when you had your first child?

SD.P08. How much, approximately, do you earn per month?

SD.P.09. Do you get any financial aid? Which one?

Guidelines
One-time social benefit
Permanent social benefit
Child support benefit

Single mother support benefit
Special needs person benefit
Note: to be adapted per country

ED: EDUCATION

- ED.P.01. What means education for you?
- ED.P.02. Did you go to school? If you did, could you tell us your last finished level?
- ED.P.03. Did you get any training?
- ED.P.04. Which training would you like to get? What could help you to get it?
- ED.P.05. What would you improve about the current education?
- ED.P.06. Are you satisfied with education staffs' attitude?
- ED.P.07. If today you had the chance to study, what would you study?

EM: EMPLOYMENT

- EM.P.01. Currently, are you working? What's your job?
- EM.P.02. What means for you to have a quality job?
- EM.P.03. Which job have been the best for you? Why?
- EM.P.04. Is easy for you to get a job?
- EM.P.05. If you could choose, what job would you like to have? What could help you to get it?
- EM.P.06. What would you improve of the current employment that is being offered?

HE: HEALTH

- HE.P.01. What means for you to have a quality health?
- HE.P.02. How you take care of your health?
- HE.P.03. How you could take better care of your health?
- HE.P.04. Do you find easy to get health services?
- HE.P.05. Would you like to change anything in regards to the health services you are getting or you need?
- HE.P.06. Are you satisfied with health staffs' attitude?

EX: EXPECTATIVES

- EX.P.01. What goals do you have? What would you like to achieve? Why?
- EX.P.02. What could help you to reach it?

EX.P.03. What about your daughter or granddaughter?

- What studies would you like for them to achieve? Why? What could facilitate it?
- What job would you like for them? Why? What could facilitate it?
- What you wish for their personal life? Why? What would facilitate that to happen?

GE: GENERATIONAL CHANGE

GE.P.01. What improvements do you perceive comparing your generation with preceding generations?

GE.P.02. What can you do that women from preceding generations couldn't in the past?

GE.P.03. What have improved on gender equality field?

GE.P.04. Thinking on the women you meet or have met, who would be a model role for you? A person you would like to be like. Why you look up her? What she has that you like?

GV: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

GV.P.01. What means gender-based violence for you?

GV.P.02. What feelings do you usually experience with your partner?

Guidelines	
Pride	Shame
Happiness	Sadness
Confidence	Blame
Satisfaction	Annoyance
Peace	Anger
Admiration	Fear
Enthusiasm	Mistrust
Respect	Resentment
Gratitude	Hostility
Empathy	Nervousness

GV.P.03. What things would you like to change in your love relationship to improve it?

GV.P.04. Do you consider that a Roma woman who is suffering gender-based violence could abandon her partner? Why?

GV.P.05. If you lived a gender-based violence, what would you do?

Guidelines
Hide it and hope it is not going to happen again

Go to a family member, who?
Go to a friend
Search professional help
Leave the relationship
Ask him not to do it again, give him another chance
Lodge a complaint
Call to a helpline

GV.P.06. What could help a woman who is suffering gender-based violence to stop it?

DI: DISCRIMINATION

DI.P.01. In the past 12 months (or since you have been in the country) have you personally felt discriminated against because you are a Roma (for non-Roma)? Could you share some of these experiences?

Guide line
Looking for paid work
By people who you work for or work with
Looking for a house or apartment to rent or buy
By people working in public or private health services
By people working in a school or in training
By people who work in the local administration
By people who work as police or similar

DI.P.02. What do you think, is there a law in your country that forbids discrimination against ethnic minority people when applying for a job?

DI.P.03. Do you know of any organisation in your country that can offer support or advice to people who have been discriminated against?

DI.P.04. Do you think Mass Media have offered a real image of Roma community? (on the news, reality shows, comedy...). Why?

DI.P.05. What possible consequences discrimination could have on the Roma community?

DI.P.06. What could help to reduce the discrimination to Roma within our society?

PO: POSITIVE

PO.P.01. Thinking on your life, what makes you feel satisfied?

PO.P.02. Please, tell us any experience where you have improved a difficult or complex situation. How did you achieve it?

RE: REFLECTION

RE.P.01. What would you like to change from your life to improve it?

RE.P.02. What would help you to try improve that?

RE.P.03. What would you change of your community, your closer reality, to improve it?

RE.P.04. We are finishing the interview; would you like to add a final reflection or conclusion?

Appendice II: Focus Group script

ROMA WOMEN RESEARCH

FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

Autonomous Region:

Province/ District:

Date:

Facilitator:

Viewer 1:

Viewer 2:

Instructions:

1. Groups should be composed by 3 - 7 Roma women. They must be natural groups, groups which exist in the reality, you shouldn't form a group with women who usually don't spend time together.
2. Place should be selected according to the country's context, where women will feel more comfortable to open themselves.
3. Women must be sitting down in circle.
4. The focus group must not take longer than 2 hours. You could divide the topics among different women groups.
5. You must offer water and coffee if possible for all the participants.
6. Women should have a label with their names.
7. The facilitator should ask permission to record as audio the whole debate. If women don't want to be recorded, the 2 viewers should take notes of the important points and once finished the focus groups women must write down their conclusions regarding each topic presented (education, health...).
8. The facilitator must explain the objectives of this research to the women and also explain how important is their participation to achieve them; explain that is important to have a participative attitude.
9. You should start with a dynamic of personal presentation in order to offer a relax atmosphere.
10. All women must share their point of view in each question presented.
11. Before move to the next question, women must reach a consensus analyzing the positive and negative points of each opinion.

The objective of this research is to get an inside of the Roma Women situation and propose future actions for the key national stakeholders.

The objective of the focus group is to gather Roma women opinions and their analysis regarding different vital aspects, aiming to use this information for the future design of innovative strategies to foster the socio-economic development and social cohesion.

GE: GENERATIONAL CHANGE

GE.P.01. What improvements do you perceive comparing your generation with preceding generations? (age getting married, age getting pregnant, nº children, belong to the labour market, study, new expectations...).

GE.P.02. What can you do that women from preceding generations couldn't in the past?

GE.P.03. What will you change from the current situation in order to improve Roma women's lives?

GE.P.04. What have improved on gender equality field? Which things need to change in this field? How we could reach it? (proposals).

ED: EDUCATION

ED.P.01. Why do you think Roma women leave their studies?

ED.P.02. What do you think could help Roma women in order to continue studying/ getting trained?

ED.P.03. Are you satisfied with education staffs' attitude?

ED.P.04. What means education for you?

ED.P.05. What would you improve about the current education?

EM: EMPLOYMENT

EM.P.01. Is easy for you to get a job?

EM.P.02. What would you improve of the current employment that is being offered?

- Salaries
- Flexibility
- Working hours

EM.P.03. How will affect your lives to have a quality job?

EM.P.04. What factors you think will help a Roma woman to obtain a job? (inner and outer factors)

EM.P.05. If you could choose, what job would you like to have?

HE: HEALTH

HE.P.01. How you take care of your health?

HE.P.02. What means for you to have a quality health?

HE.P.03. How you could take better care of your health?

HE.P.04. Do you find easy to get health services?

HE.P.05. Are you satisfied with health staffs' attitude?

HE.P.06. Would you like to change anything in regards to the health services you are getting or you need?

GV: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

GV.P.01. What means gender-based violence for you?

GV.P.02. Why do you think it happens?

GV.P.03. Do you think these cases could be justified for any reason? (Give some examples).

GV.P.04. How do you think a Roma woman should behave when she is suffering this kind of mistreatment? What advice would you give her?

GV.P.05. What stops a woman from defending herself against this kind of violence? What could help her to stop it?

GV.P.06. Would you denounce this situation if you are suffering it? What stops a Roma woman from denouncing that? What would help to overcome these obstacles?

GV.P.07. What could be done in order to prevent these cases? (Inner and outer factors).

DI: DISCRIMINATION

DI.P.01. Do you think Roma women are discriminated nowadays? In what situations?

Guide line
Looking for paid work
By people who you work for or work with
Looking for a house or apartment to rent or buy
By people working in public or private health services
By people working in a school or in training
By people who work in the local administration
By people who work as police or similar

DI.P.02. Why do you think there is discrimination against Roma community?

DI.P.03. Do you think Mass Media offer a real image of Roma community? (on the news, reality shows, comedy...). Why?

DI.P.04. What possible consequences of discrimination could have on the Roma community?

DI.P.05. What could help to reduce the discrimination to Roma within our society?

- From Roma community
- From non-Roma community