

**Comments by the Government of Finland on the
“Memorandum on the human rights of Roma in Finland”
by Michael O’Flaherty, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights,
following his visit to Finland from 23 to 26 September 2024**

General comment

Finland remains committed to our membership of the Council of Europe and to the Council’s mission to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law. Finland attaches great importance to the institution of the Commissioner for Human Rights. Therefore, the visit to Finland of the Commissioner for Human Rights from 23 to 26 September 2024 was highly valued. We welcome the Commissioner’s initiative to publish a Memorandum on the human rights of Roma in Finland, and the opportunity to submit comments regarding the Memorandum. We look forward to continuing the constructive dialogue with the Commissioner for Human Rights and the wider organization.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland

The Commissioner's report is a good reflection of Finland's position in relation to the management of Roma affairs and the position of this group, especially from the human rights perspective.

It should be noted that no separate funds have been allocated from the state budget for the implementation of the Roma Policy Programme, but there are other means of funding in Finland, including central government funding (STEA), which enable the implementation of the programme in question relatively effectively.

Another thing worth noting is that the Commissioner was able to meet a very small number of representatives of Roma organizations during his visit, which is why the descriptions received are not necessarily representative of the entire Roma population in Finland.

The Ministry of the Interior of Finland

The Ministry of the Interior’s Police Department regrets that the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights did not meet up with representatives of the police nor Ministry’s Police Department during the country visit in Finland from 23 to 26 September 2024, which could have clarified some of the issues outlined in the memorandum. The police take all the recommendations by the Council of Europe very seriously.

The Police Department suggests deletion of Recommendations 16-17 and modification of Recommendation 20.

The events and recommendations referred to in the Recommendations refer to KURI1 operation from 2013-15. The police has taken significant measures to prevent any ethnic profiling and to improve police-Roma -relations since the lessons-learnt of KURI1. This includes the full implementation of the recommendations issued by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman which are also monitored by the legality control both by the police and the Ministry. The measures taken include, amongst others, the ban on ethnic profiling issued by the National Police Board, significant obligatory training, the implementation of Strategy on Preventive Police Work, the police work at the National Advisory Board of Romani Affairs and

its sub-Boards and the police – Roma -cooperation on a Handbook regarding non-discrimination and co-operation. The measures taken by the police are detailed in below. Through issuing permits to private security guards, the police is able to monitor the responsible behavior also in the private sector.

As a conclusion, the Police Department considers the following:

- 1) Recommendations 16-17 should be deleted as they do not reflect correctly the present situation. If Recommendations do not reflect correctly on the present situation, this will reflect falsely on the future reporting rounds instead of positively contributing to the development of the situation;
- 2) The Recommendation 20 should be modified as follows:

20. The Commissioner recommends that the authorities **continue efforts to** prevent and combat ethnic profiling and improve relations between the authorities ~~the police and Roma, including through full consideration of the relevant recommendations provided by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman.~~

Additional Information

The Ministry wishes to draw the Commissioners attention to all the actions that have been taken in this field.

Ethnic profiling

The ban on ethnic profiling has been included in all police policy directives issued by the National Police Board and has been incorporated in the curricula of the police basic and continuation training. The new human rights focused curriculum was introduced in 2022. The police introduced its Ethical Code in 2019 and the set values were reinforced in 2023 followed by a service-wide discussion; the Ethical Code and the values are included in the annual Result and Target Discussion. Specific in-service training sessions on the ban of ethnic profiling have been arranged around the country and two compulsory online courses for all police officers (on the ban of ethnic profiling) have been introduced already a few years ago. Furthermore, the Police-Roma handbook introduced in 2021 includes in-depth analysis on the ban.

Police and Roma cooperation

The police have a long tradition of cooperation with different ethnic and religious minorities and Finland's Strategy on Preventive Police Work 2019–2023 (extended to 2024) reinforced and structured this cooperation. Accordingly, one of the policy priorities has been to increase interaction with minority groups and develop expertise in issues specific to these group. This has been implemented nation-wide through the structured preventive police units and coordinated by the National Police Board through the national network on police preventive work. Locally the police are actively involved and represented in various bodies dealing with minority issues and cooperate with associations representing specific minorities as well as with religious communities to gain trust and ensure the rights of these minorities.

The police are represented in the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs and in its Sub-Boards. The police drafted in cooperation with the Roma community the Handbook on Police-Roma cooperation called Police and Rome - Questions about non-discrimination and Cooperation. All this is incorporated in the police training and representatives of the Roma minority are frequently used as guest lecturers at the Police University College. There has also been a special project to recruit more minority representatives, including Roma, into the police and the outcome of the project has now been fully incorporated into the recruitment system.

On the request by the National Advisory Board on Romani Affairs, the police have put an extra effort to separately classify hate crimes against Roma individuals in its annual report on hate crimes reported to the police. The Police University's annual Hate Crime Report gives time information on the development of hate crimes in Finland.

Recommendations by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman

The police have fulfilled all the recommendations set by the Ombudsman concerning the clearance of the KURI1 operation by the police. The KURI1 operation by the Helsinki Police Department between 2013 and 2015 was seen as ethnic profiling by the Ombudsman and the National Police Board accept the interpretation and had in fact given a written remark to the Helsinki PD prior to the interference by the Ombudsman.

However, little attention has been given to the background and reason of the operation, which was the hostility and violent acts including shootings between different Roma families and individuals in public places. The police were obliged to protect Roma from other Roma and take targeted measures to end the violent circle. Since then there has been several similar violent circles flared up and the police have along the years arranged several meetings with the Roma community to put an end to this.

Last year (2024) one sixth of the aggravated violence cases in Finland in a public place was carried out by a Roma against another one. Root causes are the negative norms within the community, like vendetta, honor related violence and discriminative "avoiding obligation". The police will continue its preventive work with the Roma community and give all its support to the community in order for them to dismantle these norms. However, for the society to be able to address such problems, multi-service preventive work is necessary as the police alone is not able to meet these challenges.