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Joint project: Newly Arrived Roma Challenge in Nordic and Baltic Countries

The project "Newly Arrived Roma Challenge in Nordic and Baltic Countries" is proposed to be accomplished as a part of the Central Baltic INTERREG IV A Programme (2007-2013). The project is positioned to the Priority 3: Attractive and dynamic societies.

Background of the project

The project was initiated by the City of Helsinki and the Helsinki Deaconess Institute. This is because since 2007 Helsinki has been watching the influx of Roma from East Europe and other travellers. Furthermore, there has been an increase of the number of asylum holders without apartment, and asylum seekers falling under the Dublin Regulation. Most Roma and travellers make their living by begging, peddling and performing. On the one hand, citizens of Helsinki feel embarrassed, suspicious and threatened if they meet travellers. This is especially because of the public disturbance or crime related to the phenomenon. On the other hand, citizens want to help beggars, but they do not know how to do it in a sustainable way.

Target group and geographical focus

The project's target group is travellers with the special emphasis on Roma from Romania. The newly arrived Roma represent different groups than the native Roma populations in Nordic and Baltic countries. However, there are certain overlapping issues, notably human rights and discrimination.

The geographic focus in Nordic and Baltic countries is primarily in the capital cities Helsinki, Tallinn, Riga, and Stockholm that represent different stages of destinations for travellers:

- **Helsinki:** There is a gradual increase of Roma, mostly from Romania, since 2007. About 50-80 Roma have settled on the streets: the majority of people begging or selling are women, while the men are mostly involved in playing music, seeking work or just hanging out idle. A base line study on the phenomenon was conducted in 2008 and acute humanitarian aid has been provided when necessary. There is a plan to create some advice and humanitarian services for travellers.
- **Riga:** There is a gradual increase of Roma from Romania who are a noticeable presence on the streets of Riga, where they engage in various small-scale activities, like selling flowers.
- **Tallinn:** So far there is practically no Roma visible on the streets of Tallinn. This is because Estonia is primarily a transit-country for travellers. However, Estonians consider the topic very important within the framework of the European Union and want to learn effective measures to prevent possible future problems.
- **Stockholm:** Since 2002 Roma asylum seekers and refugees started to come to Sweden from Romania and former Yugoslavia and Kosovo. In Sweden, they have been treated within the same framework than native Roma. This means that even the newly arrived Roma are provided services that integrate them into Swedish society.

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Project objectives

The project has four key objectives:

1. Safe and tolerant cities with a pleasant living environment
2. Travellers have sustainable living conditions and they recognise their rights and responsibilities
3. Joint regional approach according to which Nordic and Baltic countries manage the newly arrived Roma challenges
4. Travellers' home countries care for their citizens enough

Main activities of the project

The project has seven main activities:

1. **Gathering, analysing, and sharing information on Roma and Travellers:** In Helsinki, a baseline study has been already conducted, but a follow-up study is needed. In Riga, the situation is expected to be similar to Helsinki and thus, Riga may start to work out effective policies and programmes to deal with Roma from the basis of the results from Helsinki. In Tallinn, preventive measures are planned. The long-term experience on maintaining sustainable immigration policy in Sweden will be reflected. A joint target is the creation of a regional approach to travellers.
2. **Street work - Outreach work – Advice Services**
In Helsinki, there are plans to create travellers' services which create sustainable basis for contact with the travellers. Special attention is given to children and pregnant women to ensure their basic medical and social needs. Empowering activities are an important part of the services. Travellers are provided information on the rules of Finnish society and possibilities to find jobs, obtain health care and social support.
Inconvenience caused by travellers in the city will be minimised. Furthermore, criminality will be discussed openly. It should be made clear that zero tolerance toward criminality doesn't mean discriminating people. In Riga, simultaneous plans to create travellers' services may be carried out. The experiences from Sweden will be utilised in planning the services. In Tallinn, focus is on prevention.
3. **Sharing and modelling best practices**
Attempts will be made to model and share the best practices to manage Roma challenges. All project partners will participate an excursion to Stockholm in order to familiarise with the Swedish services for travellers. Project partners will conduct field trips and staff exchange.
European Union requires the member states to prepare national policy programmes for Roma affairs as well as address the cross-border impact of Roma discrimination. Finland has already progressed in preparing the national policy programme that promotes equality and participation of the Roma in all spheres of life. These experiences will be shared in the project.
4. **Education and Training**

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The results of the project will be disseminated among the project partners, among the stakeholders, and among the participating cities and societies through education and training.

5. Cross-border information sharing among state authorities

Authorities need to know the number, circumstances and modes of operation of Roma sojourning in project countries. Thus, networks will be created in order to ensure information sharing 1) among authorities and travellers, 2) among project countries, and 3) between project countries and travellers' home countries. There is no evidence on human trafficking among the newly arrived Roma, but the phenomenon will be kept on eye.

6. Creating joint-European contacts

First, contacts with organisations such as the European Roma and Travellers Forum will be created. The Roma communities themselves have to be included in the project, at least in consultative role. Finland has been a European pioneer in encouraging the Roma to participate in the handling of matters that concern them. The Roma are the best experts when it comes to these matters, so they must have the right to take part in decision-making that affects them. In Finland, there are positive experiences with the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs, in which representatives of the Roma and administration have cooperated for over fifty years. This experience will be utilised in the project.

Second, the circumstances of the Roma home country has to be known to plan measures facilitating the return to home. Thus, co-operation with travellers' home countries will be created, eg. assistance in solving the problems in the home country, notably Romania. Contacts with the Romanian authorities will be established. Furthermore, cooperation will be regularised with Romanian Embassies, international aid organisations and bilateral friendship and trade associations.

7. Challenging discrimination

Roma and travellers meet widespread discrimination all over the Europe. Especially Roma face discrimination to a far greater extent than other ethnic groups, and as to the messages from around Europe, the attitudes are likely to harden. Anti-Roma prejudice remains high, people are characterised by social exclusion, and protection from the police and the courts may be inadequate. In some countries, global financial crisis is used as a pretext for not meeting the commitments towards Roma. The negative stigma must not be strengthened any further. Thus the project will raise awareness among public, policy makers, business, academia, media, and NGOs.

Project partners

Lead Partner: Helsinki Deaconess Institute (Helsinki, Finland)

Project Partners:

- City of Helsinki (Helsinki, Finland)
- Jaan Tõnisson Institute (Tallinn, Estonia)
- Latvian Human Rights Center (Riga, Latvia)
- City of Stockholm (Stockholm, Sweden)

Lead partner and project partners represent different countries (Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Sweden) and perspectives on the phenomenon (security, social work, human rights) thus forming a complementary cross-border consortium.

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Helsinki Deaconess Institute

Helsinki Deaconess Institute is an established non-profit organisation in Finland directing services at supporting the most excluded people. The HDI foundation was established in 1867. Today, it is a place of employment for 1500 people and the total sum of balance sheet of EUR 117 million. The hospital and medical centre operations have been differentiated into limited companies, while the activities of the foundation encompass services for special groups (suffering from illnesses, drug abuse, mental problems, HIV/AIDS, disability, homelessness) and education for special groups (for example immigrants and refugees). As to Roma question, Helsinki Deaconess Institute has carried out a Rom po drom – the Roma on the road Project (2008-2009) initiated by the City of Helsinki. The responsibilities of the Helsinki Deaconess Institute in the project have included gathering information, planning measures to be taken concerning people living in the streets in Helsinki, and giving acute humanitarian aid. In the present project, Helsinki Deaconess Institute will participate in carrying out the following activities:

Action 1: From the basis of its baseline study, Helsinki Deaconess Institute will carry out a follow-up documentation and analysis. It will participate actively in the development of the joint regional approach on the Roma challenge.

Action 2: Helsinki Deaconess Institute will develop its street project based on earlier experiences from Helsinki, Stockholm and elsewhere. Special emphasis is on recognising the best practices in outreach work and creating advice services for travellers.

Action 3: Helsinki Deaconess Institute will participate in modelling the best practices to manage Roma challenges. It will participate and arrange field trips and personnel exchange with the project partners.

Action 4: Helsinki Deaconess Institute will organise seminars and training sessions together with the project partners.

Action 5: Helsinki Deaconess Institute will disseminate the results of the project to the relevant educational institutions such as Helsinki Diakonia College and Diaconia University of Applied Sciences.

Action 6: Helsinki Deaconess Institute will create contacts with European organisations, local Roma communities, international aid organisations, bilateral friendship and trade associations, such as Finland – Romania Association, the Romanian Embassy in Finland, and authorities in travellers' home countries.

Action 7: Helsinki Deaconess Institute will increase the human rights of travellers through the share of information, education, and cooperation. It will produce information and knowledge on Roma, use advocacy to change attitudes and policies, and empower travellers to know their rights and responsibilities.

City of Helsinki

City of Helsinki is the largest actor in social affairs and health in the metropolitan region. As such, it is a most influential actor in the case of travellers, too. The Emergency Service of Helsinki City Social Welfare Department takes care of the matters related to child protection and other social welfare emergencies. Accordingly, the Safety and Preparedness Co-ordinating Division is responsible for general co-ordination of the City's safety issues and deals daily with the travellers. In the present project, City of Helsinki will participate in carrying out the following activities:

Action 1: City of Helsinki will participate actively in the development of the joint regional approach on the Roma challenge.

Action 2: City of Helsinki will participate in developing travellers' services.

Action 4: City of Helsinki will support organisation of seminars and training sessions by providing facilities, networks, and know-how.

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Action 5: City of Helsinki will coordinate stakeholder networks in order to improve know-how in the project, encourage stakeholders' participation, and disseminate results of the project. It will promote networking 1) between authorities and travellers, 2) among project countries, and 3) between project countries and travellers' home countries.

Jaan Tõnisson Institute

Main focus on prevention

Latvian Human Rights Center

Main focus on human rights

City of Stockholm

Main focus on innovations

Time schedule

The project will be carried out in April 1, 2010 to March 31, 2013.

Planning of the project

The project has been planned in the following occasions:

- the Project Management Group meetings of the Rom po drom Project in spring 2009; the City of Helsinki and the Helsinki Deaconess Institute representatives
- the development day of the Rom po drom Project on March 24, 2009; the City of Helsinki and the Helsinki Deaconess Institute representatives
- the Seminar on Free Movement on March 25-27, 2009; the City of Helsinki and the Helsinki Deaconess Institute representatives
- the project meeting in Helsinki on June 8, 2009; the City of Helsinki, the Helsinki Deaconess Institute, and the Jaan Tõnisson Institute representatives
- the project meeting in Tallinn on July 23, 2009; the Helsinki Deaconess Institute and the Jaan Tõnisson Institute representatives
- the project meeting in Riga on Summer 2009; the Jaan Tõnisson Institute and the Latvian Human Rights Center representatives
- all project partners have contacted their local Interreg IV A secretariats
- all project partners have registered to their local Interreg IV A seminars to be held in September 8-29, 2009
- e-mail discussions between all project partners during summer 2009
- a joint meeting of all project partners will be held on September 30, 2009 in Helsinki

Results of the project

1. Citizens will feel safe and secure as they have accurate knowledge on the presence of travellers and the risks related to the travellers are minimised. Project partners have an established network. The newly arrived Roma challenge is managed through the same model in all project countries and thus, the

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differences between project countries will be diminished. Joint cooperation is facilitated by the common cultural and political background in all project countries.

2. Living conditions of the travellers will improve. Travellers know their rights and responsibilities when moving in Nordic and Baltic countries. Movement may even diminish as the countries treat travellers in a constant manner and the travellers receive accurate information on the living conditions in project countries.
3. Nordic and Baltic countries will have a joint regional approach to manage travellers challenge in general and the newly arrived Roma challenge in particular. The approach will be applicable to other cross-border issues or other European countries where the travellers challenge is even more burden than in Nordic and Baltic countries. The project will strengthen cooperation between cities, regions and countries to address common issues.
4. Travellers' home countries will be supported to care for their citizens. Cooperation will bring the old and new member states of the European Union closer to each other and diminish national differences.

In operational level, project will generate intermediate and final reports of the project, several reports on travellers to different target groups (eg academia, business, policy-makers, NGOs), information and advocacy materials, and a range of educational and training materials.