

# From antiziganism to Roma rights in Sweden

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## Historical “heritage”

Current Roma population in Sweden is estimated at 50 000;

The first historical record relating to the presence – 1512;

Historical experience of the Roma in Sweden does not differ from their experience in other European countries;

Characterised by antiziganism (anti-gypsism) – hostility, discrimination, prejudice and systematic limitation of human rights

## Historical “heritage”

Examples from the more recent history:

- ❖ Swedish borders were closed for Roma between 1914 – 1954;
- ❖ Couple of weeks dwelling rule in most municipalities
  - ❖ They could not be registered to vote;
  - ❖ Their children could not attend school;
  - ❖ They were denied child allowance;
- ❖ Sterilization law (1943 – 1976) affected Roma more badly than other ethnic groups;

# Historical “heritage”

## Consequences:

- ❖ Vast majority of adult Roma (80%) are unemployed;
- ❖ Most of their children do not complete primary school;
  - ❖ Small proportion of them attend secondary school;
  - ❖ Even fewer attend university;
- ❖ Their living standard is much below the average, leading to:
  - ❖ Health problems and
  - ❖ Lower life expectancy compared with the majority population;
- ❖ Roma are still most discriminated group in Sweden:

## Roma as a National Minority in Sweden

February 2000 – Sweden ratified:

***Framework Convention for the Protection of National minorities***, and the  
***European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages***

Minority groups in Sweden:

Sami, Finns, Torne Valley Finns; Roma and Jews

By this act Sweden has committed itself to promote political, economic, social and cultural equality between Roma and the rest of the population

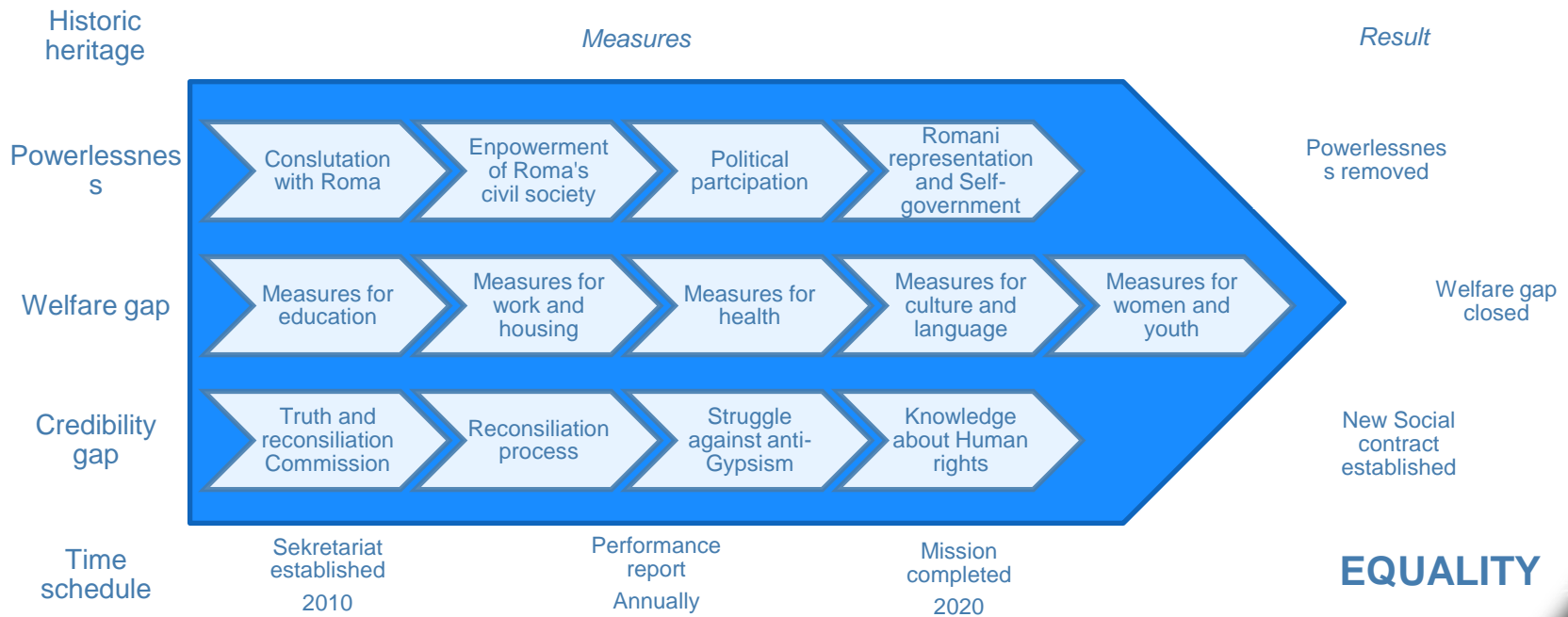
## Policy measures since then

- ❖ 2002 – The Council for Roma Issues (an advisory body to the Government);
  - ❖ Representatives of Roma national organizations;
  - ❖ Representatives of Government offices;
  - ❖ Ombudsman for ethnic discrimination; The Integration Board;
  - ❖ The Living History Forum;
  - ❖ Swedish Association of Local and Regional Authorities;
- ❖ The Council for Roma Issues was 2006 replaced by Delegation for Roma Issues;
- ❖ The Delegation's work resulted in **“the New strategy for Roma in Sweden** (Roma's rights (SOU 2010:55)

# New national strategy for Roma in Sweden

- ❖ Three main goals:
  - ❖ To close the welfare divide between Roma and mainstream society;
  - ❖ To reduce the power deficit of Roma, and
  - ❖ To bridge the confidence gap and build Roma trust in state institutions and mainstream society as whole;
- ❖ The first precondition for this is to recognize that: **Deprivation among the Roma is not a consequence of their own way of life, low education, and lack of awareness of their rights, but is an obvious result of the longstanding and pervasive discrimination their community has lived with in their contact with mainstream society.**
- ❖ Four prerequisites:
  - ❖ Recognition of Roma as a National minority;
  - ❖ Change the focus from patron-client relationship;
  - ❖ Include Roma themselves in all parts of the process;
  - ❖ Awareness that the situation requires long-term policy measures

# Swedish National Strategy for Roma



SOU 2010:55



# Measures for education

- ❖ Actual situation - **High level of truancy**;
  - ❖ In Malmö only 450 out of 1000 Roma children (7-15) regularly attend school;
  - ❖ Only 50 out of 1000 continue their education at high schools;
- ❖ The dominant explanation patterns are:
  - ❖ A week study tradition among Roma's older generation;
  - ❖ The Romani language has no written tradition;
  - ❖ The Roma feel inferior in contact with majority students in schools;
  - ❖ The Roma students have none of their own as role models;
  - ❖ Roma avoid education and the labor market because of fear of assimilation etc...;

What is happening here is that many teachers are inclined to reason:  
*"We do not care anymore, because it is meaningless, they wouldn't come anyway".*

There are very few teachers that look at the problem from the other side and think:

*"Perhaps they don't come, because we don't care".*

Olgaç (2006:120)

# Measures for education

- ❖ Actual situation - **Contacts between school and parents:**
  - ❖ Here again, many teachers do not make contact with parents, because they presume that parents do not care about either the school or their kids.
  - ❖ There are very few of teachers who reason that perhaps parents do not show sufficient interest in their children's schooling just because of the fact that they are very seldom contacted by the school.
- ❖ Actual situation - **Roma's history, language and culture are more or less completely absent** from both the curriculum and the school environment, even though schools are obliged, to actively contribute and promote knowledge about minority cultures through the general curriculum.
- ❖ Actual situation – **Ability grouping** – low level of expectations resulting in low quality of teaching and consequently low level of results
- ❖ Actual situation – **Mobbing and abusive treatment** that Roma children are still present;
- ❖ **All this results in high levels of truancy and low motivation among Roma students.**

(Olgaç, 2006)

# Measures for education

- ❖ **Mother tongue** - of crucial importance for the development of children's identity, general knowledge and as a learning tool in all areas of education (*Skolverket 2002*)
- ❖ In reality mother tongue is often marginalised in Swedish schools:
  - ❖ Lack of qualified teachers;
  - ❖ Lack of awareness that Romani Chib has several dialects, which requires different kinds of teachers;
  - ❖ There is only one bilingual school class in the country;
  - ❖ Practice of offering study guidance in native language is hardly existing in Swedish schools.

# Measures for education

## ❖ Adult education

- ❖ Preconditions for successful adult education (knowledge based on different adult education projects carried out during the last decade):
  - ❖ Strong anchor in the Roma community;
  - ❖ Roma projects leader;
  - ❖ Selection of participants according to their engagement rather than education background;
  - ❖ Effective support for solving social problems;
  - ❖ Strongly committed teachers;
  - ❖ Decent economy during the study period and after training;
  - ❖ Project assistants with Roma cultural background;
  - ❖ Support from family, especially for woman, are also needed;

# Measures for education

- ❖ Higher education:
- ❖ Mother tongue learning requires competent teachers, which in its turn necessitates including the Romani Chib and Romani history and culture in the academic curriculum and as an academic research field.
- ❖ Example 1: Linköping University 2006 got a grant in order to establish and develop higher education programs in the Romani Chib. The result was two 7,5 courses , one in the Romani Chib and the other Roma culture.
- ❖ Example 2: at Uppsala University there is currently a 7,5 course in Roma culture, and
- ❖ Example 3: at Södertörn University a 7,5 course in Roma history.

# Measures for culture and language

## ❖ Romani Chib in Sweden

- ❖ Historically the Roma people and their language has been viewed in rather simplistic way. They were divided in “Tattare” (travellers) and “Swedish, Finish and non-Nordic Gypsies”
- ❖ This approach ignores all historical complexity and cultural variety and richness of the Roma language and culture.
- ❖ Consequently this slow down or even prevent all work on promotion of the Roma culture – publishing grammars, textbooks, exercise books, teacher guides etc.

# Measures for culture and language

## ❖ Measures needed:

- ❖ The language care measures need to be suited to each Roma group's current needs. Heterogeneity among groups requires a different but similar treatment.
- ❖ courses in media production
- ❖ increased funding for Roma media: increased broadcasting time and dedicated editorial staff
- ❖ increased funding for magazines and newspapers
- ❖ production of Romani teaching materials for all levels from preschool to adults and of different types;
- ❖ earmarked funds for publishing of Romany literature - for all ages - and support for cooperation with the International Writers Association (IRWA)
- ❖ coordination of advice and recommendations to the libraries in terms of purchasing of this literature

(Bijvoet and Fraurud, 2007:27).

# Measures for culture and language

## ❖ Finally and perhaps most importantly:

Roma language and Roma culture should be more visible in the mainstream culture and education. Majority population should get more opportunity to learn more about the minorities cultures in general, an Roma culture in particular in text books within subjects such history, literature, art, social studies and religion studies.

(Bijvoet and Fraurud, 2007:27).