



# Mentoring as Support for Roma Women's Life Goals

National research report for Finland

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Deaconess  
Foundation



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***Mentoring as Support for Roma Women's Life Goals***  
**National research report for Finland**

**Drafted by Anca Enache, Maria Dorofte and Adriana Iordache (Helsinki Deaconess Institute Foundation 2025, within the framework of the project RomniMe co-funded by the EU CERV-2023-EQUAL programme)**

**FOREWORD**

As I embarked on my journey as the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, I travelled across Europe to listen to the lived experiences of Roma and Traveller communities, understand their current concerns, and gain insight into their local realities. I heard stories marked by resilience and resistance, narratives that reveal how multiple layers of discrimination, based on gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and other factors, create formidable barriers to thriving in life.

Everywhere I visited, Roma and Traveller women and girls stood out as powerful catalysts of change: the ones who inspire progress, drive energy, and are the architects of hope. Many of these women have joined forces and, together with civil society, lead the fight for justice and equality. Importantly, they foster community development, empowering others to claim their rights and supporting future generations to pursue their dreams and become leaders of change.

Investing in targeted support initiatives and building lasting trust are crucial steps in enabling women and young people to lead such change. In particular, initiatives that provide access to lifelong learning, employment opportunities, and support for overcoming everyday obstacles are essential for breaking the cycle of exclusion and poverty. Those working to build bridges - such as mentors, mediators and community workers, among others - play vital roles in this process by facilitating access to pathways for a better life. Many of these initiatives are driven by civil society organisations working courageously in very challenging circumstances. Their efforts must be supported.

During my visit to Finland in September 2024, I had the opportunity to learn about the important work undertaken by organisations like the Deaconess Foundation to promote and protect the human rights of some of the most marginalised Roma communities. At the Foundation's premises, I met Roma women who had travelled to Finland from Romania and Bulgaria. They spoke of the Foundation's initiatives as a lifeline. I was struck by how these initiatives extend beyond the provision of essential services: they strive to open pathways toward empowerment, participation, and self-determination, guided by an intersectional and individualised approach. This same spirit animates the research presented in this report, which focuses on the potential of targeted support mechanisms, such as mentoring programmes, to support Roma women in addressing their concerns in everyday life and achieving their life goals. It illustrates how trust, solidarity, and recognition of each person's inherent dignity can create genuine opportunities for inclusion and transformation - values that stand at the very heart of the human rights mission.

It is my sincere hope that the findings and recommendations in this report will inform and inspire future initiatives aimed at supporting Roma women and communities at large.

*Michael O'Flaherty*  
*Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights*

## Acknowledgments

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We would like to express our sincere appreciation to all project partners and collaborators who contributed their time, expertise, and insights throughout the research process.

Special thanks go to our colleagues from the Deaconess Foundation, Romni APS (Italy), L.I.D.E.R. (Bulgaria), and Sportsko Uciliste PESG (Croatia) for their valuable support in the preparation and review of this report, and to all those involved in data collection, proofreading, editing and coordination efforts.

We are also deeply grateful to the Roma communities and individuals who participated in the study and shared their experiences and perspectives. Their voices are at the heart of this work.

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# Contents

<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Needs assessment for the young Roma women .....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Demographic data.....	6
2.2 Family and social circumstances.....	7
2.3 Education and training.....	8
2.4 Employment and work experience.....	10
2.5 Healthcare and social protection .....	12
2.6 Discrimination and prejudices .....	13
2.7 Technical skills and access .....	16
2.8 Future plans and aspirations .....	19
2.9 Mentoring support .....	21
2.10 Conclusion .....	24
<b>3. Interviews with 10 individuals/organisations .....</b>	<b>25</b>
3.1 Respondent overview .....	25
3.2 Understanding of mentorship .....	25
3.3 Competencies and approach .....	26
3.4 Ethical considerations .....	27
3.5 Working with intersectionality .....	27
3.6 Training and support needs.....	28
3.7 Key takeaways .....	29
3.8 Conclusion .....	30
<b>4. Comparative analysis.....</b>	<b>31</b>
4.1 General insights .....	31
4.2 Appropriate match between mentor and mentee .....	31
4.3 Impact of mentorship upon the mentee .....	32
4.4 Quality of the mentoring relationship .....	33
4.5 Experience and satisfaction.....	35
4.6 Specific aspects regarding the three mentoring methods .....	36
4.7 Conclusion.....	38
<b>5. Conclusion .....</b>	<b>39</b>

# 1. Introduction

**The Roma ethnic minority is the largest in Europe, with an estimated 10 to 12 million, out of which about 10,000–12,000 Roma live in Finland.** Despite official recognition of their rights as Finnish and EU citizens, members of this group continue to be in a vulnerable situation and targets to discrimination and exclusion. In particular, Roma women are often victims of intersectional forms of discrimination as a result of their gender and ethnicity. This form of bias is even more prevalent for Roma women who also have a migrant background or another type of vulnerability, such as disability or sexual minority status.

**This research report addresses the topic of empowering young Roma women through mentorship and support programmes.**

It sets out to explore the situation of Roma women in Finland in terms of general characteristics, experiences of discrimination, employment status and life goals, and needs for mentoring and development. Next, it analyses the elements that lead to the most effective mentoring practices for young people and people belonging to minority groups, **evaluating the importance of trust, empathy, open communication, cultural sensitivity, and understanding of structural discrimination and inequality.** Finally, the last section of the report analyses three different mentoring methods, **One-to-One, Group Mentorship (Small Group), and Public Engagement (Large Group),** from a comparative perspective. The report is part of broader research on the mentoring needs of Roma women and the best mentoring strategies for addressing them in three European countries (Finland, Bulgaria, and Italy). The study was conducted by the Deaconess Foundation within the framework of the project *RomniME—Mentors for Young Roma Women's Empowerment*.

The information analysed in the report was collected through multiple surveys and interviews. For the first section, the data was collected in the period

of May–August 2024 through a self-administered online questionnaire, which contained 49 (closed and open) questions. The questionnaire was filled by **39 participants who self-identify as Roma women living in Finland.** The data was analysed through qualitative means (coded thematically and the main topics and representative quotes were selected for presentation) and quantitative means (descriptive statistics, such as frequencies and percentages). Meanwhile, section two of the report is based on qualitative data gathered in April–May 2025 from interviews with **10 professionals from the fields of mentoring, education, youth work, etc.** Some of the interviews were self-administered online, while others were conducted in person in Finnish and subsequently transcribed and translated into English. The information was then coded thematically and the most relevant themes and quotes were included in the report. Finally, the data for the third section was collected through a self-administered online questionnaire completed in April–May 2025 by **12 junior staff of the project, the project coordinator, and the project expert.** The questionnaire included a combination of closed and open-ended questions in order to capture both measurable and reflective insights. The information obtained was then coded thematically and the most relevant perspectives were presented.

The overall purpose of the research was twofold: the findings of the first stage of the research, on the situations, expectations, and mentoring needs of Roma women, were used in designing the mentoring programme organised within the project. By documenting the needs, the intervention could be framed in such a way as to best address them. Next, the most important elements and mentoring formats for mentoring Roma women were used in the development of a **Mentor Handbook and will guide future mentoring practices.**

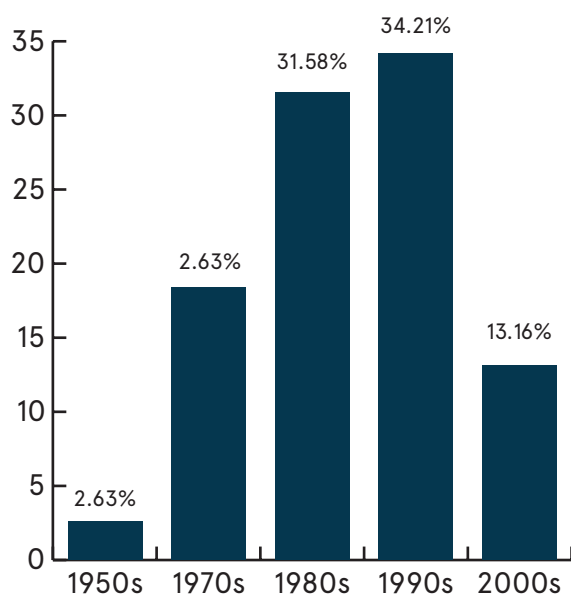
## 2. Needs assessment for the young Roma women

This section of the report explores the need for the personal and professional **development** of young Roma women in Finland, with the aim of providing targeted support through **mentorship**. Therefore, the study explores the demographic characteristics of these groups (age, location, education, family status), as well as their **employment status** and experiences, their access to **healthcare** services and potential barriers, their awareness of their rights, experiences of **discrimination**, need for legal assistance, digital skills, and future aspirations. The ultimate goal of this study is to determine the mentoring and development needs of the participants (the areas in which they are needed, the level of frequency, and the format of support), based on their **experiences, aspirations, and priorities**.

### 2.1 Demographic data

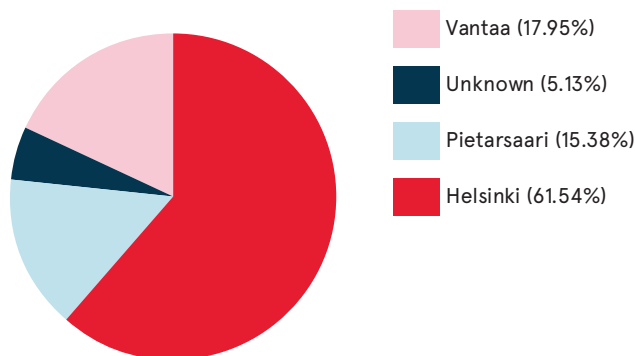
#### a. Age

Participants are aged between 16 and 70, with most being in their 30s and 40s (born in the 1980s and 1990s).



#### b. Location and migration background

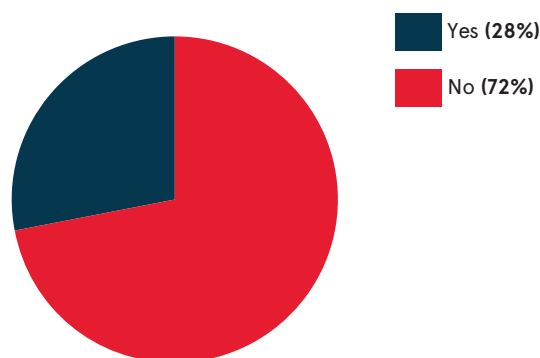
In which country, city or settlement, and community do you currently live? (e.g., city, village, Molise region, Blagoevgrad – city, Blagoevgrad – villages)



#### c. Location and migrant status

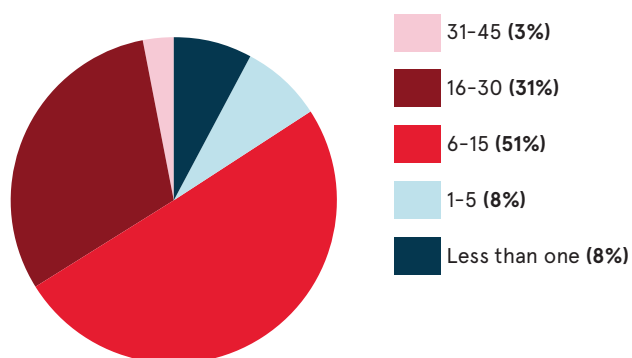
All participants currently live in Finland, primarily in Helsinki (over 61%) and Vantaa (almost 18%) or Pietarsaari (15%).

Were you born in this country?



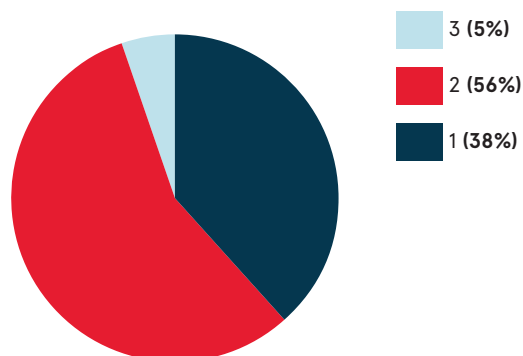
The overwhelming majority (72%) were born in another country; therefore, they have a migrant background.

**For how many years have you lived in this country?**



More than half of the respondents (51%) have lived in Finland for 6–15 years, while 31% have been in this country for 16–30 years. 8% have spent between 1–5 years in the country and another 8% less than one year. 3% have lived in Finland for more than 31 years.

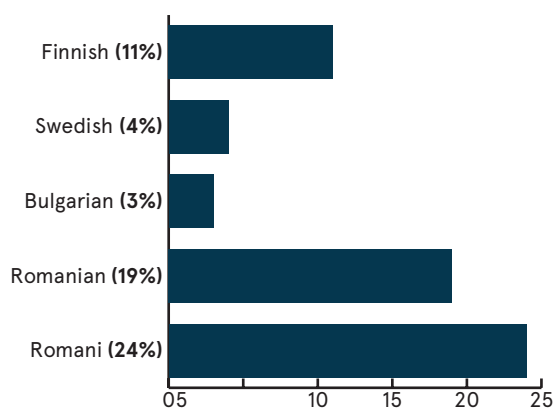
**How many languages do you speak at home?**



Often, respondents mentioned more than one language spoken at home (Romani generally being one of them). Only 38% speak one language, while 56% speak two languages and 5% three languages.

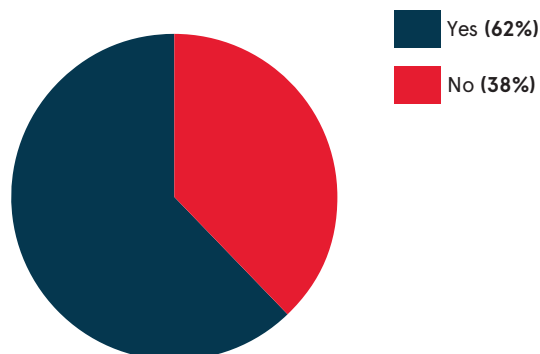
## 2.2 Family and social circumstances

### d. Language(s) spoken



Only a minority of participants speak Finnish at home (11 people), the most spoken languages being Romani (24 people) and Romanian (19 people). Other language spoken at home are Swedish and Bulgarian.

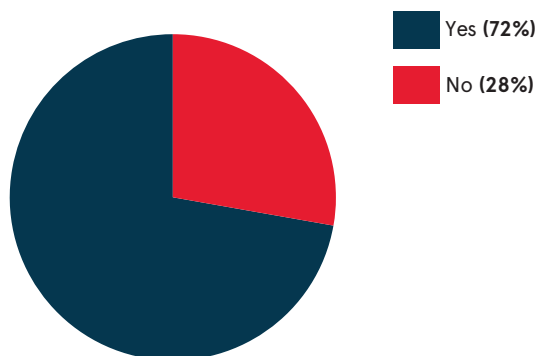
**Are you married?**



The majority of respondents are married (62%) and have children (72%). Those who are not married are either single (12%), widowed (5%), living in a consensual union (2%), or separated (2%). Some of the unmarried respondents did not mention their status.

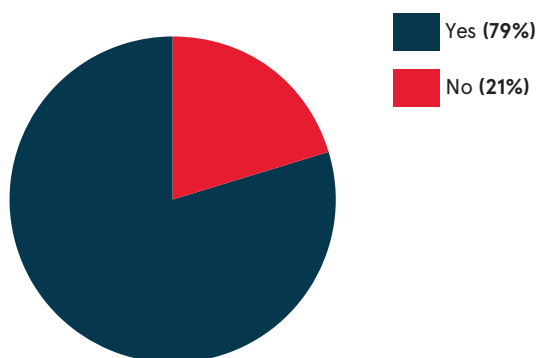


### Do you have children?



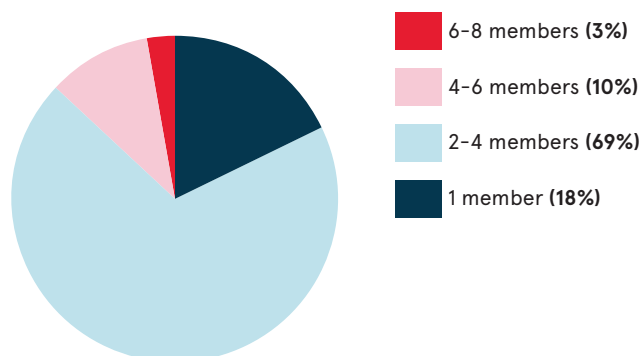
Moreover, the overwhelming majority of respondents currently live with their family (79%).

### Are you living with a family?



In terms of family size, most respondents (69%) live in a household with 2–4 members, while a small percentage live with 4–6 members (10%) or 6–8 members (3%). 18% of respondents live alone.

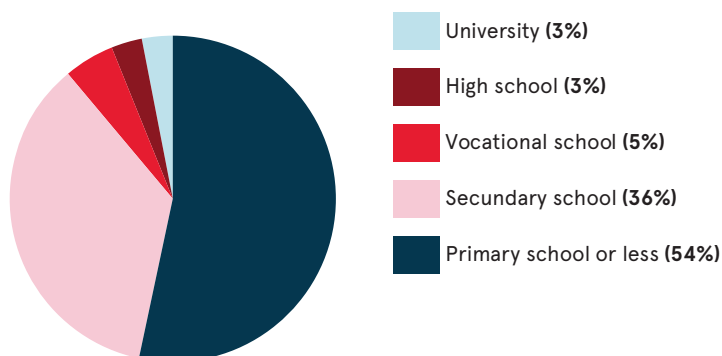
### How many members are in your families household (living together)?



## 2.3 Education and training

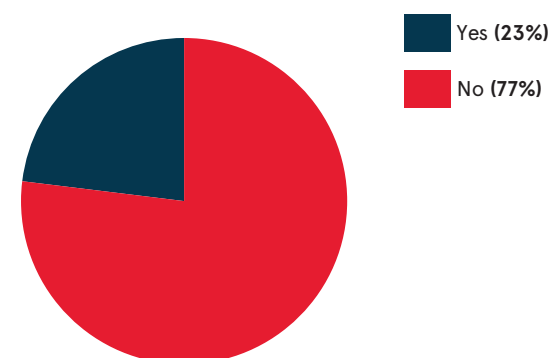
In terms of education, most respondents completed only primary school (4 years of study) or less—53%. Almost 36% completed secondary school (8 years of study) and a minority of them graduated from high school (2%), vocational school (5%), or university (2%).

### What is your level of education?



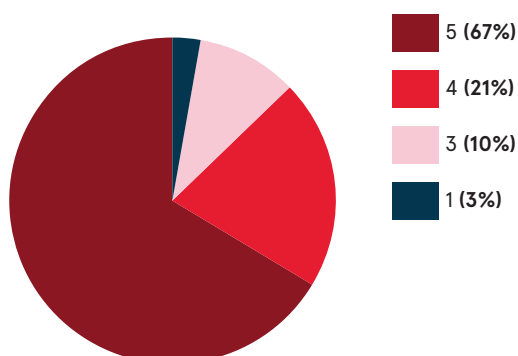
88% of respondents rate education as important or very important for their future.

### Are you currently attending any educational institution or training?



Meanwhile, 23% of the respondents are currently attending an educational or training programme.

How important would you rate education for your future on a scale from 1 (least important) to 5 (very important)



For many of the women participating in the study, the motivation to pursue an education is related to finding a better job, especially as an immigrant in Finland:

**Through education,  
I can open different  
doors in my life.**

*It would have helped me to find work if I would have accessed education and I would have known a foreign language (Finnish or English).*

For others, the benefits of **education** extend beyond finding a (better) **job** to practical aspects related to **everyday life**, such as being able to access different **services** and interact with **institutions**: to 'navigate life better' and 'know how to talk in a **hospital**, for example, or in school'. Finally, some respondents also stated that 'it's important to have **dreams** and **goals** that will make you **grow**.'

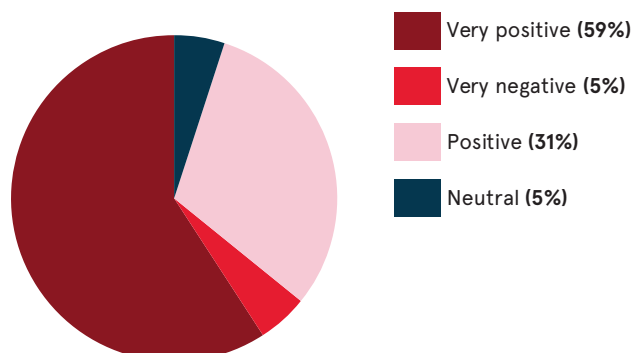
Respondents who did not rate education as very important for them reasoned that either the benefits of education would be limited, given their current situation, or the costs of education would be too high:

*I am not sure if getting more educated at this age will make my life better.*

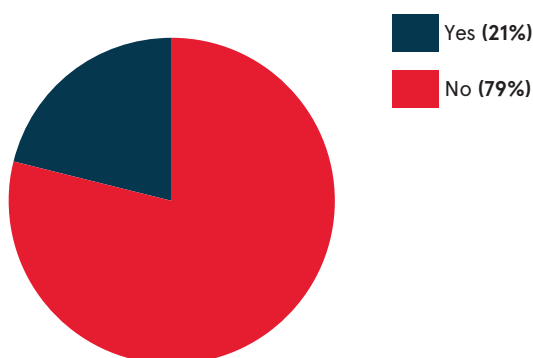
*At this age I have to make money to support my children and not learn, as it will not make my life any better.*

Meanwhile, 90% of respondents live in families that have a positive or very positive attitude towards educating women.

What is your family's attitude towards the education of women?



Have you had access to scholarships or financial aid for education?



An important factor that explains the limited educational attainment of many Roma women from the responding group despite their and their family's positive attitudes towards education is the lack of access to financial aid to support their studies. 79% declared that they did not have access to scholarships or financial aid.

Access to financial aid for education varied according to the age of the respondents and the period in which they were enrolled in education. Older respondents were significantly more likely to report not having access to financial aid, while younger respondents declared that it was available to them.

HAVE YOU HAD ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIPS OR FINANCIAL AID FOR EDUCATION?						
Decade Born	No (n)	No (%)	Yes (n)	Yes (%)	Total (n)	Total (%)
1950s	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	1	100%
1970s	5	71.4%	2	28.6%	7	100%
1980s	11	78.6%	3	21.4%	14	100%
1990s	13	100.0%	0	0.0%	13	100%
2000s	0	0.0%	3	100.0%	3	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>78.9%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>21.1%</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100%</b>

When asked about the type of training or education that they consider relevant to their development, many of the respondents expressed their interest in attending language classes, especially in the Finnish language, but also in English and Swedish (yet with significantly fewer respondents). At the same time, respondents are highly interested in vocational training, which can provide them with the necessary skills for finding a job.

**The occupations/skills of interest for the women participating in the survey include construction work, cleaning person, cake maker, medical nurse, and seamstress (sewing).**

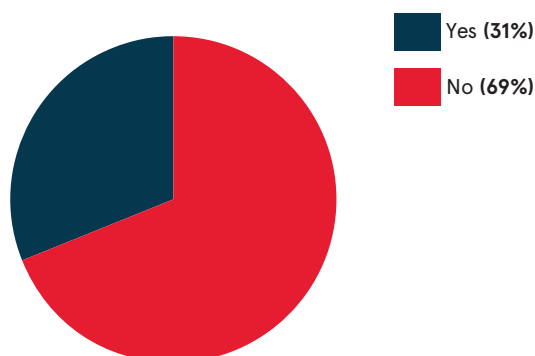
Some of the respondents also mentioned other, more general skills, like IT/computer skills and driving, or other educational areas, such as human rights, Roma affairs, or psychology.

## 2.4 Employment and work experience

**The overwhelming majority of respondents (69%) are not currently employed.**

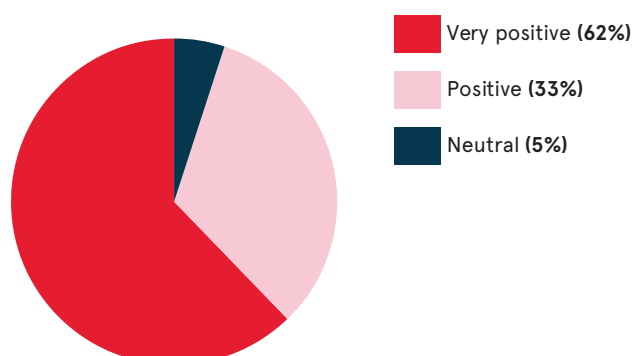
Among those employed, their occupations include: early childhood education teacher/working in kindergarten, working in a kitchen at school, cooking food in an electric grill, being a healthcare professional or practical nurse, and working in a Finnish Roma association. Some respondents state that they are happy (or at least satisfied) and that the working conditions are good, while a couple (2 respondents) expressed their dissatisfaction with the working conditions or the way in which they were treated

## Are you currently employed?



Nevertheless, respondents report a very supportive environment from their family when it comes to having a job. 95% of them state that their family has a positive or very positive attitude towards women's employment. The remaining 5% are neutral.

## What is your family's attitude towards the employment of women?



The main barriers to employment perceived by those surveyed include: **not speaking the local language** (at all or at the level sufficient for obtaining a job), **limited job skills** and **formal education**, the **absence of professional networks**, and **experiences of racism**:

*I don't speak the Swedish or Finnish languages and it is very difficult to find work like that.*

*The fact that I am Roma and I am uneducated, and also because I come from Romania.*

*Because I am Roma and I have gone to school for only four years.*

*I cannot find work, and I do not know anyone that could support me in finding it.*

*Racism, I usually make it all the way to the interview until they see that I'm Romani, that's it, that's the end of the journey.*

One of the respondents also mentioned the lack of documentation in Finland.

A minority of those surveyed also mentioned not being able to work, due to health reasons or old age (or age-based discrimination):

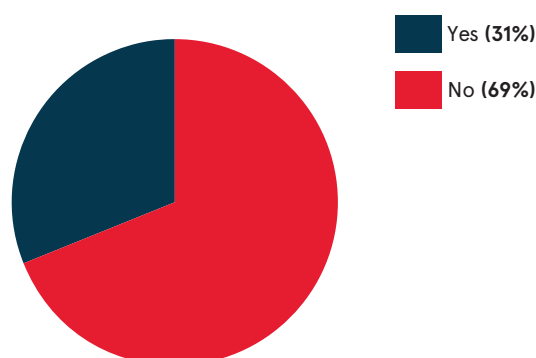
*[I cannot work] because I am sick (heaving health issues).*

*I am having health issues and waiting for the decision about the pension.*

*I also think it was difficult to get a job because of my age.*

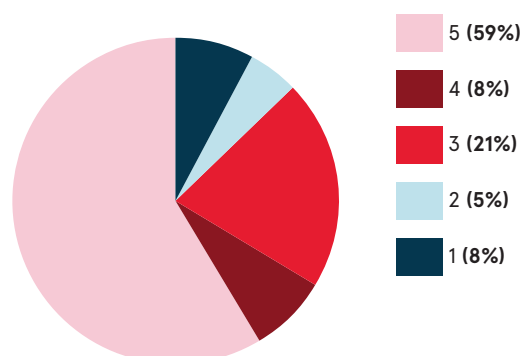
Limited employment skills are caused, among other things, by participants' limited access to training. The vast majority of respondents (69%) declared that they had never attended employment or professional training.

## Have you ever attended employment or professional training courses?



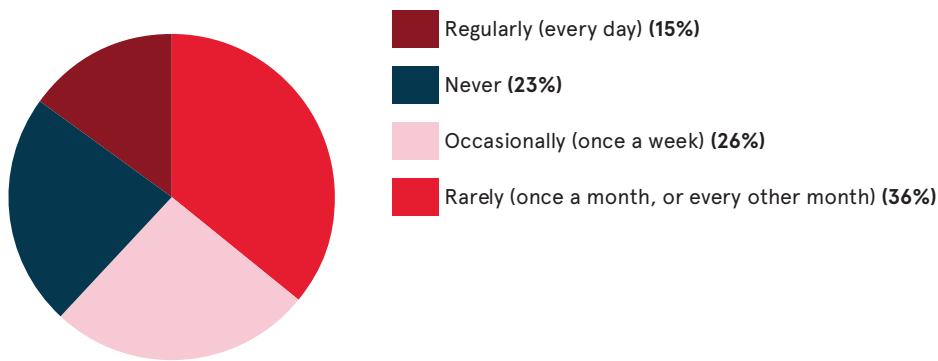
The majority of survey participants (67%) consider that the obstacles mentioned above have a significant or very significant impact upon their job search.

## How would you rate the impact of these obstacles on your job pursuit (rate from 1 to 5, where 1 is the least impact and 5 is significant)?



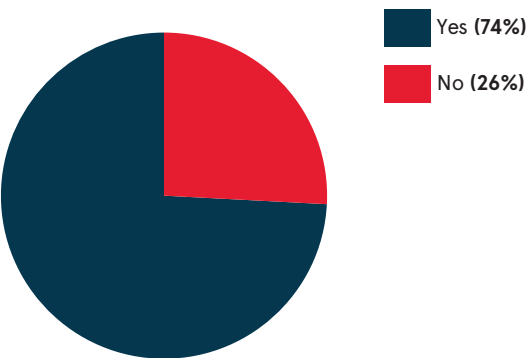
Despite the adversity, a significant portion of respondents (41%) are constantly searching for professional opportunities at least once a week, if not daily.

**How often do you search for jobs or employment opportunities?**

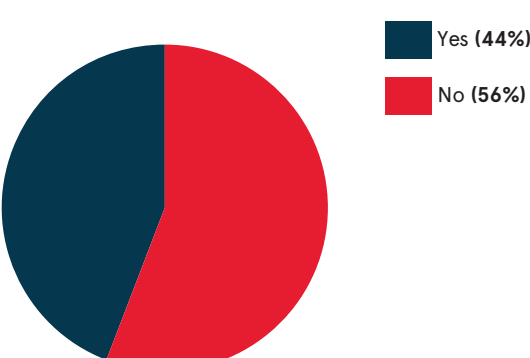


**2.5 Healthcare and social protection**

**Do you have access to adequate healthcare?**



**Do you regularly use healthcare services?**



74% of respondents declared that they have access to adequate healthcare services and 44% use them on a regular basis.

The main barrier for those who do not have access to adequate healthcare is often related to not knowing the local language:

*I do not know where to go and what to say because I don't have a common language with them.*

*[The main obstacle is the] language and I don't know where to go or if I have the right to go.*

*Language barrier, because I cannot talk directly by myself and have to be dependent on the translator.*

*In our city they speak two language[s], Finnish and Swedish. It is difficult since I speak Swedish but not Finnish.*

Often, the lack of language skills is compounded by the lack of digital skills, limited knowledge of the healthcare system, and/or not meeting the eligibility requirements:

*Language and I don't have a Kela card.*

*Basic computer knowledge to use the online system or to call over the phone to schedule a meeting with a healthcare professional.*

*We don't know how to access it.*

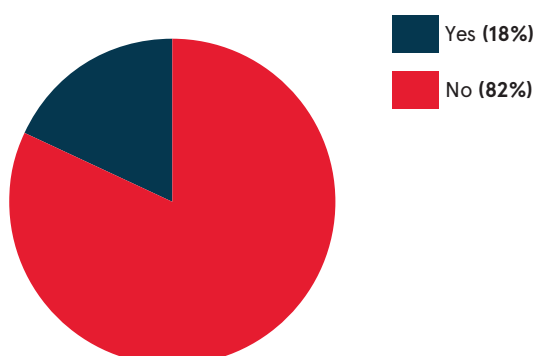
Some participants also mentioned systemic problems and discriminatory attitudes among healthcare professionals:

*The time to wait for a meeting with the doctor is very long and also there are no available translators when needed, and very quickly.*

*I think because healthcare professionals have a racist attitude when they see me, that I am not a Finnish person, but rather a migrant.*

The assessment regarding the impact of these barriers varies significantly among respondents. Some find these obstacles to have a low impact, others high or medium.

**Do you need specific healthcare services that are difficult for you to access?**

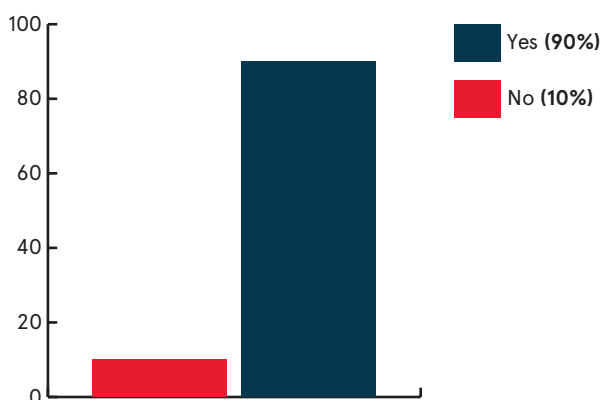


Meanwhile, a minority of respondents (18%) also declared that they need specific healthcare services that are difficult to obtain.

## 2.6 Discrimination and prejudices

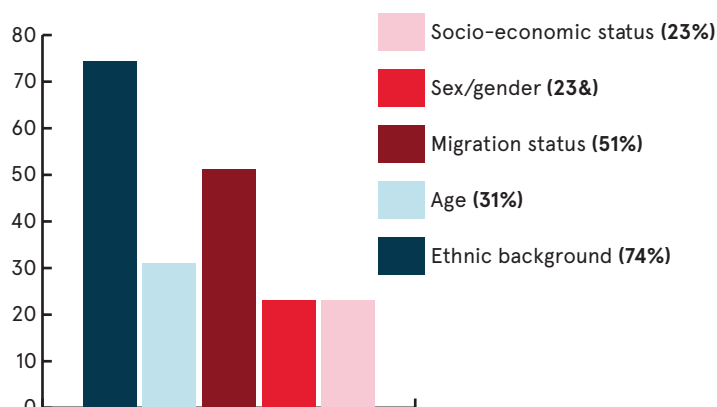
90% of respondents declared that they have experienced discrimination.

**Have you ever experienced discrimination?**



The discrimination ground that was mentioned most often by survey participants was ethnic background (74%), followed by migration status (51%). Age, gender, and socio-economic status were also cited by up to 31% of respondents. Many of the women surveyed mentioned more than one ground of discrimination (sometimes even five), which indicates that members of these groups are often subject to multiple or intersectional forms of discrimination.

**On what basis have you experienced discrimination? (%)**



When asked what measures could help combat discrimination against Roma women, participants provided different strategies, which could be summed up as education and inclusion. Some pointed out the need for increasing the awareness of the majority population regarding Roma culture and gender equality:

## Education to non-Roma people about our culture and history. More knowledge about Roma history and customs.

*Showing that men and women have the same power.*

Or simply educating the Finnish population so that they understand what members of the Roma minority in Finland are really like and how they feel:

*People [should] understand that we are not different from other women and that we should all be treated with respect, as we also respect Finnish people.*

*Finnish people [should] know and understand that being a Roma and coming from Romania is very difficult.*

*[To] get to know Roma women and see that they are [just like] all other women, capable of working and being mothers. We are very skilled at doing many things, even though we don't go to school for many years, we learn to do many things that are useful to any society.*

*Finnish people should understand diversity and that Roma migrant women are different and try to accept them and learn how to live together with them. Finnish people have prejudices and they tend to treat all people the same.*

Other participants mentioned the need for members of the Roma community to be more socially integrated:

*Building up their self-esteem and skills.*

*All women should access some type of employment, no matter their education level.*

*The community should support Roma women with access [to] and integration into Finnish society.*

*Trainings and support for Roma children [...]*

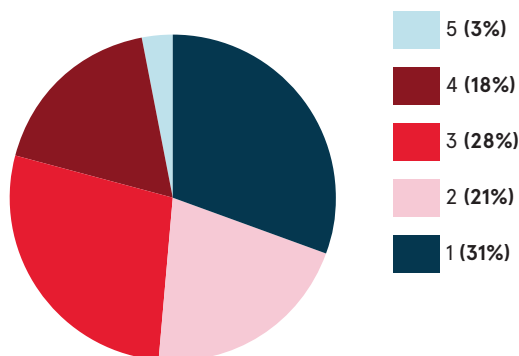
*Women work more than men. To convince employers to offer jobs.*

Finally, other respondents mentioned the need for additional support for Roma women, either from the state or from private networks:

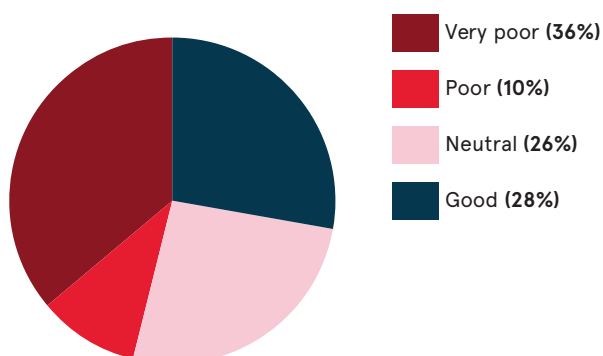
*To be supported by the Romanian state [so that] each child [would be able] to go to school and finish the mandatory years of education.*

*People should have more support. There should be people who trust you and tell you 'you can, you know', people who believe in you. To have more networks, going out with local people. For women to have the possibility to get out of the house and meet people.*

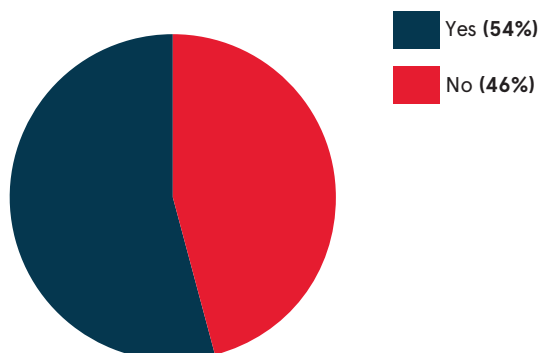
When asked about their ability to cope with prejudice, most respondents revealed that they have a limited capacity to do so: 31% very poorly, 21% poorly, and 28% neutral. Only 21% of the women surveyed are self-confident about their ability to stand up against prejudice.



**How do you cope with prejudices in society?**  
(rate from 1 to 5, where 1 is very poorly and 5 is very well)

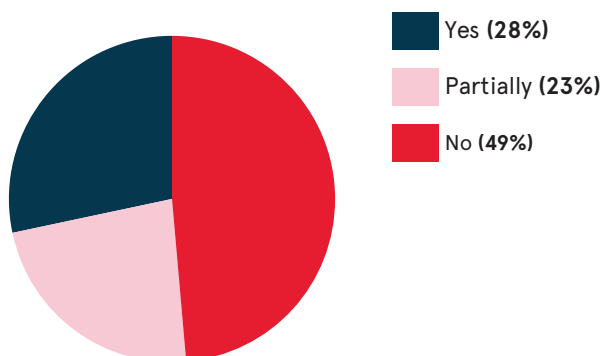


only partially aware, which shows that there is still need for training on this subject.



**How would you rate the current state of rights and opportunities for Roma women in your community?**

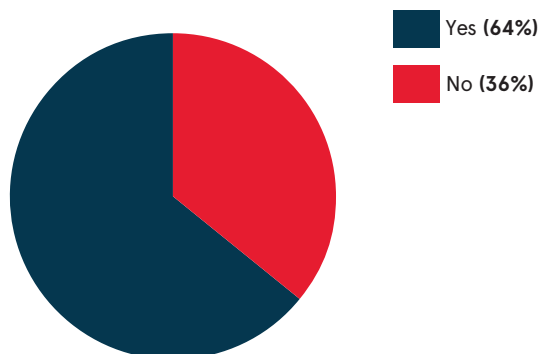
Fewer than half (46%) of survey participants consider that the rights and/or opportunities of Roma women from their community are poorly or very poorly respected.



**Are you aware of the laws that protect against discrimination?**

Meanwhile, 54% of participants are aware that the law can protect them from discrimination, but almost half (46%) are not, revealing another area in which this group needs training and support.

The age of the respondents was also a relevant factor, as younger women were more likely to be aware of their right to social protection than those born in the 1950s, 1970s, or even 1980s.



**Are you aware of your rights to social protection and how to use them?**

Almost half of the women surveyed (49%) are not aware of their right to social protection and another 23% are

**Do you feel you need legal assistance in case of discrimination?**

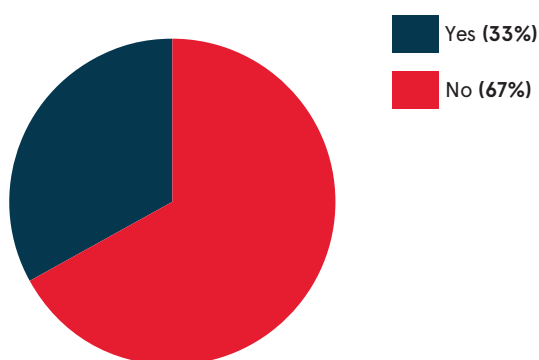
Beyond general knowledge of the law, 64% of the women surveyed identified a need for legal assistance in reporting discrimination.



ARE YOU AWARE OF YOUR RIGHTS TO SOCIAL PROTECTION AND HOW TO USE THEM?								
Decade Born	No (n)	No (%)	Partially (n)	Partially (%)	Yes (n)	Yes (%)	Total (n)	Total (%)
1950s	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%
1970s	6	85.7%	0	0.0%	1	14.3%	7	100.0%
1980s	9	64.3%	3	21.4%	2	14.3%	14	100.0%
1990s	3	23.1%	3	23.1%	7	53.8%	13	100.0%
2000s	0	0.0%	2	66.7%	1	33.3%	3	100.0%
Total	19	50.0%	8	21.1%	11	28.9%	38	100.0%

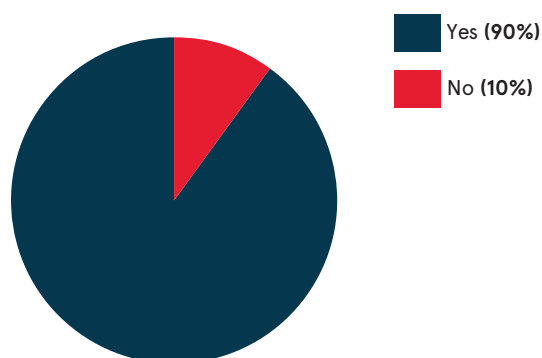
## 2.7 Technical skills and access

Do you have access to a personal computer or laptop?



The majority of respondents do not have access to a personal computer or laptop (67%), but 90% have access to an internet connection (on a smartphone).

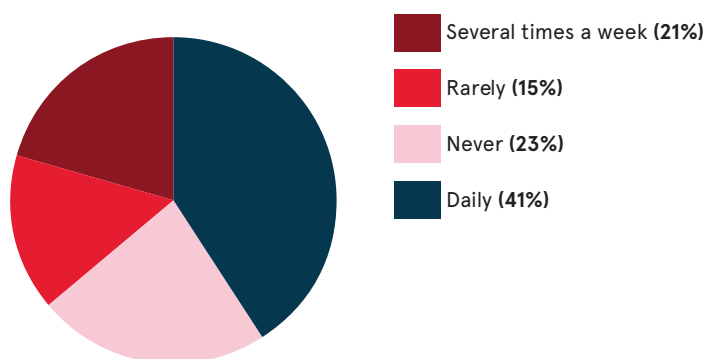
Do you have access to the Internet?



Younger respondents were more likely to have access to a personal computer or laptop.

DO YOU HAVE ACCESS TO A PERSONAL COMPUTER OR LAPTOP?						
Decade Born	No (n)	No (%)	Yes (n)	Yes (%)	Total (n)	Total (%)
1950s	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%
1970s	6	85.7%	1	14.3%	7	100.0%
1980s	10	71.4%	4	28.6%	14	100.0%
1990s	7	53.8%	6	46.2%	13	100.0%
2000s	1	33.3%	2	66.7%	3	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>65.8%</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>34.2%</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

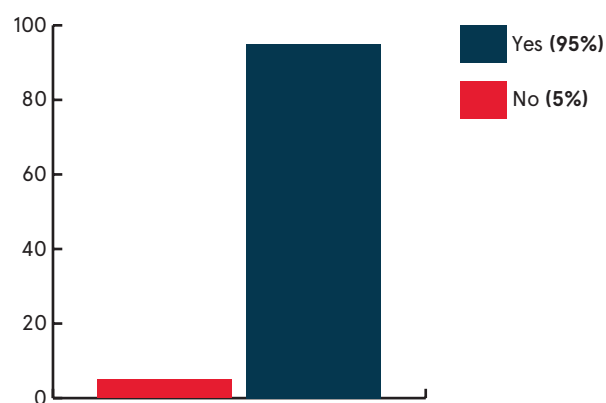
#### How often do you use the internet for learning or work?



41% of respondents use the internet every day, while 36% use it several times a week or more rarely. 23% never access the internet.

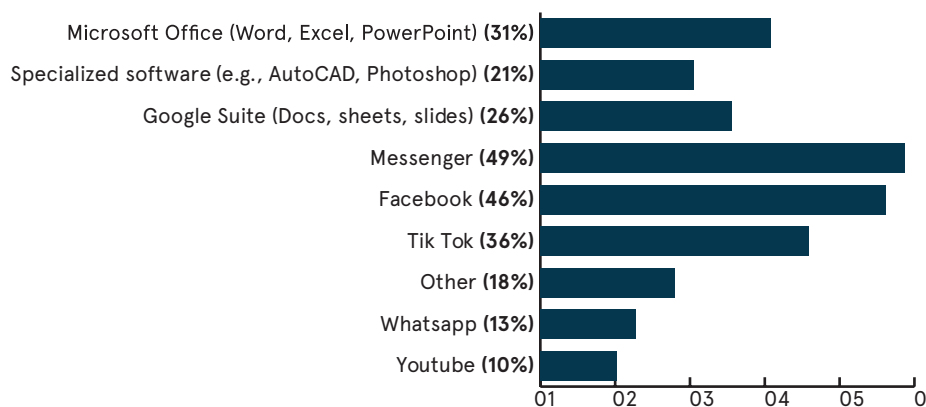
The most popular applications and digital tools among survey participants are: Messenger, Facebook, and TikTok, followed by Microsoft Office. Google Suite, specialised software, and others are also used, but more rarely. Respondents generally reported using a mix of such tools.

#### Do you use applications or digital tools? (%)



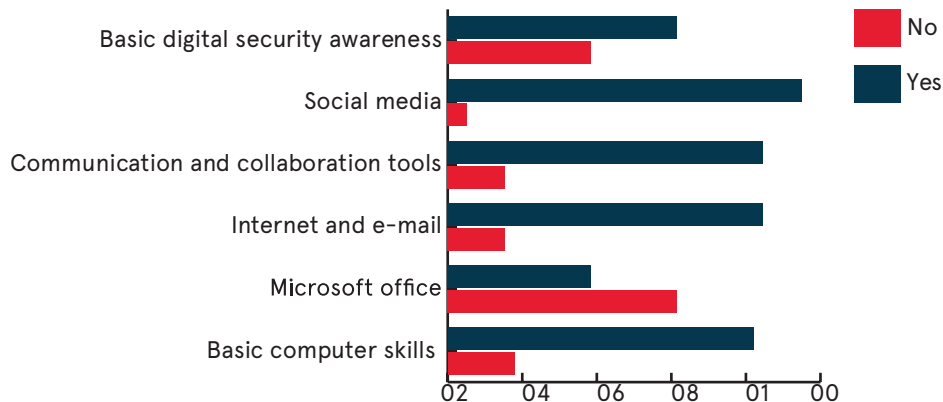
However, the majority of respondents (82%) consider that they need further training in basic computer skills, 85% in using communication tools and e-mail and 95% in social media. 62% wish to learn more about digital security and 38% about Microsoft Office.

### Which applications or digital tools do you use most frequently? (%)



However, the majority of respondents (82%) consider that they need further training in basic computer skills, 85% in using communication tools and e-mail and 95% in social media. 62% wish to learn more about digital security and 38% about Microsoft Office.

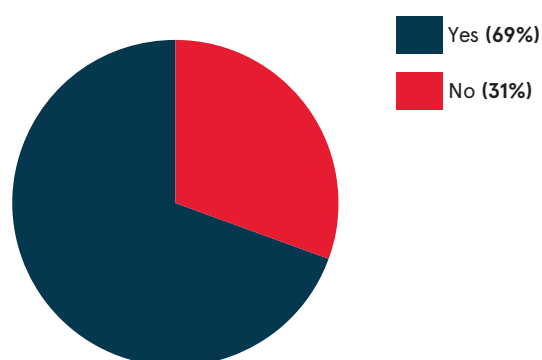
### For what digital skills do you need additional training?



Younger respondents were more likely to be interested in additional training on using Microsoft Office than their older counterparts. This could be because they might feel more confident in their digital skills and ability to master this programme or because they might perceive that they have higher chances in finding jobs that require such skills.

Do you need additional training in Microsoft Office?						
Decade Born	No (n)	No (%)	Yes (n)	Yes (%)	Total (n)	Total (%)
1950s	1	100.0%	0	0.0%	1	100.0%
1970s	5	71.4%	2	28.6%	7	100.0%
1980s	12	85.7%	2	14.3%	14	100.0%
1990s	6	46.2%	7	53.8%	13	100.0%
2000s	0	0.0%	3	100.0%	3	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>63.2%</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>36.8%</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Are you interested in online courses or training?

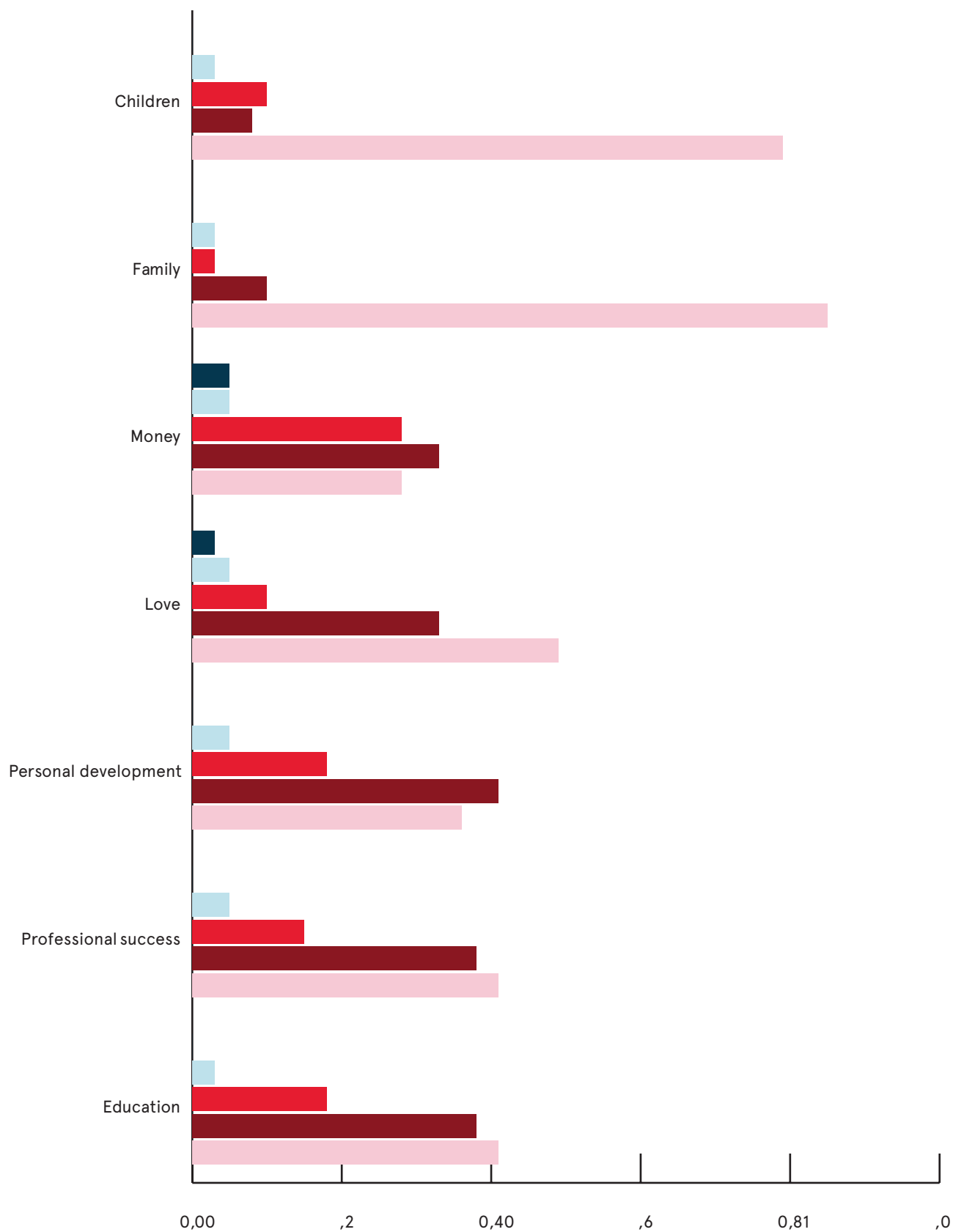


A large majority of the participants (69%) declared themselves interested in attending online courses or training.

## 2.8 Future plans and aspirations

When it comes to goals and priorities, children were ranked as important or extremely important by 87% of participants, family by 95%, and love by 82%. Career and money were also ranked important or very important, but to a slightly lesser extent: personal development—77%, professional success—79%, education—79%, and money—62%.

Rate the importance of the following long-term goals in life for you (1 – not important, 5 – extremely important)?



The life goals for most respondents relate to finding a (better) job, being healthy, living independently, and being able to provide for their family:

*To have a job and to continue having my family near me.*

*To have a house and have my children near me and also to have the basic needs of my children met.*

*To be financially independent so that I support my family, my children, and my grandchildren.*

*A job and for the children to attend school in Finland and to be able to learn.*

*To have my own place to live here, to have a job and bring my children here.*

*To have a stable income and be healthy with my family.*

Others expressed their desire to start a family and have children, while a minority stated their wish to pursue self-development objectives or learn specific skills:

*Find myself a career in what I love to do.*

*To take a computer course, to learn the language (Finnish language), to learn something.*

*To speak the English and Finnish languages.*

In terms of the specific steps to be followed in order to achieve these goals, some of the participants mentioned studying/pursuing an education, improving their foreign language abilities or other skills, extending their professional network, and finding a (better) job:

*To learn the Finnish language and find a job in Finland more easily.*

*To attend an English language course in order to be able to communicate and find a job.*

*To work and to get a job with a good salary and become a professional and get to know lots of knowledgeable things and also to get a driving license.*

*To connect with other people that might find me a job or refer me to a job.*

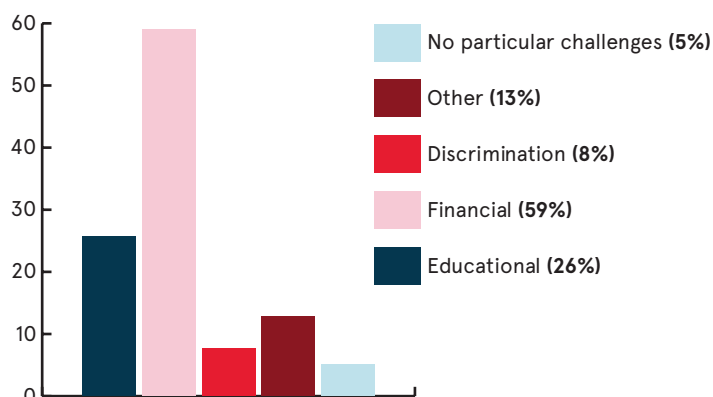
*Meet people and ask for job opportunities, and also make sure my children go to school.*

*To study and make time to study.*

It is noteworthy that some of the survey participants did not know what steps to follow in order to achieve their goals. Therefore, future training and mentoring programmes should address this topic.

The biggest challenges faced by participants in pursuing and achieving their goals are financial obstacles (59%), followed by their limited education (26%) and discrimination (8%). A remaining 13% faced other obstacles, while 5% did not face any particular

difficulty. Therefore, future development and mentoring programmes should support participants in continuing their education and address the financial situations of beneficiaries. Potential strategies include: incorporating financial literacy training into the programme, providing financial support for participants in the programme (for example, money for transportation, meals, etc.), and offering information about external support schemes that could be accessed by participants in order to achieve their goals.



## 2.9 Mentoring support

The mentorship needs of the women surveyed are numerous and diverse. They range from emotional support to educational and professional assistance, as well as all kinds of practical support for navigating everyday life as a migrant (knowing one's rights, accessing the healthcare system and social protection, even in-kind support when necessary).

*Emotional, to listen to me when I experience difficult moments in Finland.*

*Professional, to find a job in Finland and help me with translation when I need help here and cannot manage without the language.*

*Professional, if I have problems and issues, to listen to me and support me, also in health-related aspects.*

*Educational, professional, emotional. Support is very important. To say: 'I am with you, you are not alone, you can do it.' Human relations are very important and give options to do this and that.*

*To teach me what the laws are like in Finland and also to put me in contact with a social assistant from Kela.*

*Professional, emotional, to support me with money and food, to support me if I have issues in Finland.*

The participants' expectations from the mentorship programme are centred on assistance with navigating everyday life in Finland and accessing their rights and benefits, learning more about Finnish society, learning the local languages, and finding employment. Beyond that, they expressed the need for flexibility.

*To learn how to take care of things in Finland. All kinds of things, related to different authorities and employment.*

*[To] be supported so that I learn how Finnish society functions, as it is very different from Romania.*

*To listen to me and understand me and also to help me with papers and documents to be filled out in Finland.*

*To support me in learning to read and write, to translate for me, to fill out documents I need for different institutions, etc.*

*To help me get healthcare support.*

Another aspiration of the women surveyed is to improve their wellbeing and self-confidence, in addition to practical support:

**To support me emotionally and listen to me when I need it so I don't get depressed [...]**

*The programme should give self-confidence.*

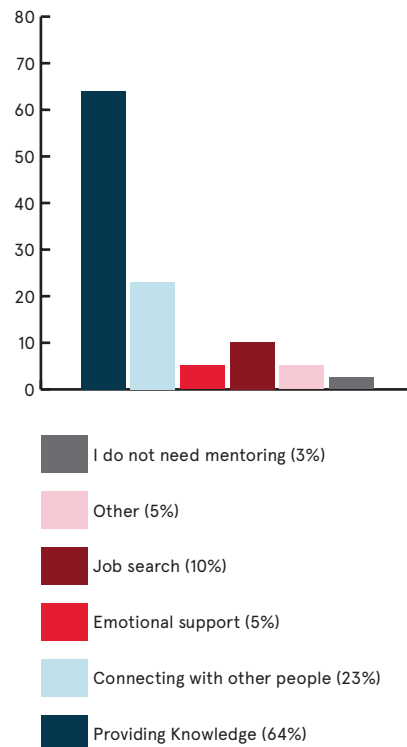
Last but not least, some participants expressed the need for flexibility in the mentoring programme:

*The programme should be flexible and answer the needs I have and [those that may] emerge.*

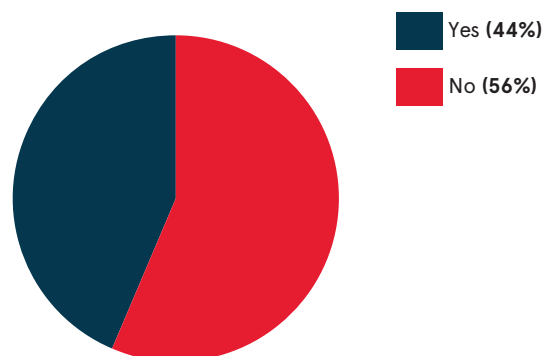
*We don't know all the needs beforehand.*

In terms of proportions, 64% of respondents consider that a mentorship programme would support them in achieving their life goals by providing knowledge (as mentioned above, regarding the local language, way of life, everyday aspects, finding a job, etc.), 23% mentioned that it would be beneficial by connecting them with other people (for job search, mutual support, etc.), 10% selected job search, and 5% emotional support.

## How do you think mentoring support and practical skills could help you achieve these goals? (%)



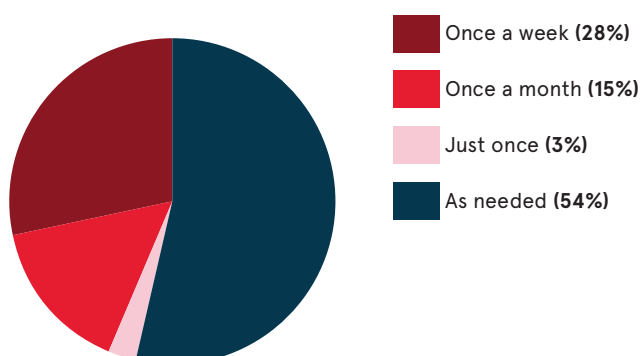
## Have you ever had a mentor or someone who provided you with support?



More than half of the respondents never had a mentorship experience, while 44% have had a mentor before.

In terms of the envisioned interaction with the mentor, the majority of respondents (54%) opt for a non-structured approach in which they would meet with the mentor as needed. Meanwhile, 28% would find it useful to meet once a week, 15% once a month, and 3% just once.

## How often would it be useful to meet with a mentor?



When asked about the changes and improvements they would like to see in the lives of Roma women in their community, most respondents referred to two main areas:

Supporting Roma women in having a better education, personal and professional development opportunities, and being independent:

*To study. To not have the life that we had, to marry young as we did. To have a normal life like the others. We marry early and that's why we don't have a good life.*

**To access education and learn things so that they can manage life better, and also foreign languages—to learn and to learn how to communicate better.**

*To access education, no forced marriages and also no getting married very young and for Roma women to decide about their lives, their education and work opportunities, and to be supported so they aren't dependent on their men and husbands.*

*To find them work, to support them in having a better life or having a social place where they can go and ask for support if they need it.*

*To find work and make money, to change Roma culture and traditions a bit and make them more modern.*

Fairer treatment for Roma women and less discrimination, especially in the labour market:

*For the majority population to change bad attitudes and racism towards Roma women and for Roma women to be supported and helped more.*

*For Roma women from different communities to be more accepted by the majority Finnish community, accepted in the labour market, not to be discriminated against, because Roma women are very powerful and women capable of working.*

*That Roma women will no longer be discriminated against and the majority population will not talk bad about them or even look at them in an ugly way. They experience racism every day and that should be avoided because such an attitude hurts us.*

*To be valued more in their communities where they live and to be valued equally to all the other women and treated with respect.*

*Not to be discriminated against in regard to their way of dressing, not to be discriminated against for their own mother tongue when they use it or do not know other, foreign languages, to access housing, and also to have the possibility to access knowledge and information so that they learn more.*

*The attitudes and behaviours of the majority population to change for the better regarding Roma migrants from Romania and Bulgaria [...]*

*To be accepted the way they are and not to be discriminated against, they want to work, and they should be treated equally in the labour market. They are not treated equally with Finnish people or Finnish women.*

*[That] they are no longer criminalised, discriminated against and people treat them in a racist way.*

A minority of respondents also expressed their wish to see Roma women being more connected and/or activists for their rights.

*[...] to create an even stronger, good connection with Finnish Roma so that they support us and teach us how things are in Finland and how to learn about our rights and how our lives would be better in Finland, to have regular gatherings and meetings in order to learn and talk about our current and daily problems, to try to diminish the discrimination and racism that comes from the majority population in Finland, and also to have the possibility to learn about regulations and laws (how things are over here) in Finland in different gatherings and regular meetings.*

*Women working and living more for themselves.*

**I want Roma women to have more courage to go after their dreams.**

*More brave women.*



## 2.10 Conclusion

**This explorative study based on an online survey completed by 39 respondents who self-identify as Roma women from Finland revealed their experiences of employment and accessing healthcare services, life goals and aspirations, and digital skills, as well as needs for mentoring and development.**

Many of the Roma women surveyed are adults in their 30s and 40s, but some are in their 20s and 50s. More than 60% are married and over 70% have children. The majority live in Helsinki, but some also reside in Vantaa and Pietarsaari. The majority of the women migrated to Finland, but their migration histories vary. Some have been coming to Finland for over ten years, while others arrived only a few years or months ago. Many are in Finland with adult family members and hope to be able to live together with their children in the future. Fewer than half of the women interviewed have a registered address and municipality of residence in Finland, and are therefore covered by the social security system.

**This legal status affects their access to social, economic, health, and educational rights.**

They often speak Romani and the language of the country they were born in (or just one of these languages) at home. They often do not speak the local language(s)—at least not at a proficient level—and tend to have a low level of education (90% attended classes up to primary or secondary school). This places them in a very vulnerable situation with very few employment opportunities and limited chances of social inclusion in the absence of support programmes. The main obstacles mentioned include language barriers, lack of knowledge about local bureaucratic procedures, limited financial resources, and discrimination. They often have a long experience with discrimination (mentioned by 90%),

often on multiple/intersecting grounds: ethnicity, migrant status, socio-economic status, age, and gender. Only 21% are confident in their ability to stand up against prejudice and discrimination.

**88% find education to be important for their future.**

Many wish to participate in future training programmes and for the next generations of Roma women and girls to have access to more education, employment opportunities, and independence. Most of the women would like to attend training for improving their language and vocational skills so that they can have access to (better) employment opportunities in the host country and access basic services (healthcare, etc.). The vast majority of participants also expressed interest in being part of a mentorship programme. Their expectations from such a programme include: support in understanding the local language, finding a (better) job, navigating everyday life in Finland, accessing healthcare services, accessing educational opportunities, networking, etc. The need for emotional support and flexibility was also expressed.

Overall, Roma women would like to see several major changes within their communities: additional support for improving their education and the pursuit of personal and professional development, opportunities, and independence; fairer treatment of Roma women and less discrimination, especially in the labour market but also in society in general, as well as more courage and initiatives coming from Roma women themselves.

# 3. Interviews with 10 individuals/organisations

This section of the report explores effective mentoring practices, competencies, and strategies for working with marginalised youth, particularly young Roma women. The findings will contribute to the development of a Mentor Handbook, providing valuable recommendations for future mentorship initiatives. It is based on the insights gathered from interviews with professionals involved in mentoring, education, youth work, etc.

## 3.1 Respondent overview

All the professionals interviewed have a background in mentoring, in positions such as work councillor, pastor, supervisor, job coach, project manager/coordinator in the NGO sector, social councillor, youth worker. Some of the mentors have experience in working with multiple minority groups, while others focused on just one group. The groups mentored by the respondents include: young people, immigrant women, Roma people, LGBTQI people, people with disabilities (including developmental disabilities), people with 'challenging life situations' or 'difficult socio-economic backgrounds', asylum seekers, refugees, homeless people, and the elderly. Their experience with mentoring ranges from being 'somewhat familiar with the practice' or performing an activity 'which has elements of mentoring in it' to it being 'constantly present in [their] work'. Some of them also had experience in being a mentee.

## 3.2 Understanding of mentorship

Mentoring is often seen by the respondents as a transfer of knowledge and a nurturing relationship between a more experienced person (the mentor) and a less experienced one (the mentee) from the perspective of professional development. It is important to note that it is not perceived as a unilateral but a mutual exchange:

*Mentoring is an activity based on equality, following the principle of 'person to person'. The mentor and the mentee are equally valuable participants in the interaction.*

The mentor is a 'support person', providing 'guiding and nurturing' to the mentee(d) 'in their spiritual and personal growth'. 'The mentor brings knowledge, expertise, and networks to the relationship.' Mentorship is an individualised process, it 'involves presence, encounters, joint reflection, and action'. It 'is not about providing ready-made answers or leading in a specific direction'.

In terms of structure, one of the respondents perceives mentoring as an organised process: 'a process with certain frameworks; meetings occur at specific intervals, goals are set, and progress is reviewed', while another considers that 'mentoring does not need to follow a specific, predetermined pattern'.

**The relationship between the mentor and the mentee is perceived as central to the mentoring process, enabling mutual growth and development.**

Trust and the confidentiality of the relationship between the two parties are also essential, as well as the 'chemistry' between the two people involved. Equality between the mentor and the mentee is also part of the mentorship process. These elements enable the two parties to have a deep connection and feel safe to share their knowledge:

*Building a relationship is extremely important in mentoring, as a trusting and open relationship enables deep learning, personal growth, and effective support, making mentoring meaningful and impactful.*

*Trust and equality are important values in mentoring. Trust in the mentor's expertise and confidentiality opens fruitful discussions. Trust is built when the mentee-mentor relationship is equal, and both are ready and willing to listen and share their own thoughts.*

*Effective mentorship involves deep, personalised engagement and mutual trust. Relationship-building is crucial as it fosters trust and openness, essential for meaningful mentorship. Mentoring is an activity based on equality, following the principle of 'person to person'. The mentor and the mentee are equally valuable participants in the interaction.*

### 3.3 Competencies and approach

Mentors must be aware of both structural discrimination and inequalities that may be experienced by their mentee(s), but not treat the mentees as objects of help.

*Important qualities and areas of expertise for mentors include understanding structural discrimination, recognising minority stress, and identifying one's own position and background.*

*At the core of mentoring is striving for an equal encounter, recognising both one's own areas for development and the strengths and resources of both parties.*

**'Saving minorities' is certainly a bad starting point. It is important to start from the same starting line, both as equal human beings.**

Therefore, empathy, cultural sensitivity, and reflexivity are perceived as crucial by the professionals interviewed. Other important values to be held by the mentor include openness, patience, respect, self-awareness, the ability to listen, and strong communication skills. This is particularly relevant 'when individuals from different backgrounds come together' because they foster a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment for the mentee. It must be kept in mind that:

*It may be difficult for the mentee to open up to a stranger, as they have to explain so much, for example, the experiences of living as a Roma.*

At the same time, the mentor must be aware of the mentee's individual goals and needs, as well as knowledgeable in the professional field relevant to the mentee:

*It is important to understand the other person's situation and needs. Goals should come from the mentee, not be imposed externally.*

*It is important for someone who wants to become a mentor to know about the subject matter (e.g., job search, studies, relationships) they are mentoring about and to have life experience in that area.*

Last but not least, the mentor must be willing to meet new people and have the courage to overcome various barriers (such as cultural, linguistic, etc.) if necessary. One interviewee notes that 'when an immigrant background is involved, additional challenges such as language barriers and immigration policies come into play.'

In terms of mentoring strategies and activities used, interviewees mentioned Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed and activities focused on recognising strengths and setting goals, such as the GROW-model:

*Goals: What do you want to achieve? Where are you now in relation to this goal? What are your current skills and experiences? Reality: Where are you now in relation to your goal? Options: What are the possible ways to achieve your goal? What are some possible ways to achieve your goal? What are your options? Will: What will you do, and when? Which options are you most interested in pursuing? What specific steps will you take, and by when?*

However, it must be kept in mind that the needs of the mentee can vary significantly and that each mentoring relationship is different.

**Therefore, 'sheer openness, building through discussions' and a 'relationship-based approach' are important.**

Providing guidance, encouragement, and support in coping with disappointments is also significant.

Experts often recommend a mix between individual and group mentorship, depending on the context and the specific needs of the mentee. They point out the strengths of each of the two options:

*Individual mentoring offers personalised guidance and support tailored to the mentee's needs and goals. Group mentoring, on the other hand, utilises a wider range of perspectives and experiences, promoting community and collaboration. Both have their advantages.*

*Group mentoring works well because it provides mentees with both the 'external' perspective from the mentor and peer support. Peer support discussions also bring up perspectives that the mentor might not necessarily ask about or emphasise.*

*Individual mentoring supports the individual but does not eliminate the need for experiences of peer support and belonging, which are experienced differently in a group. However, individual mentoring can provide a safe space for everyone, regardless of how easy it is to be in a group, etc.*

Interactive and experiential learning methods, such as storytelling, roleplaying, or community service projects, are also perceived as effective in mentorship.

### 3.4 Ethical considerations

An important ethical issue in the mentorship relationship is that of defining the scope of mentoring from the beginning and establishing boundaries in order to avoid disappointments and easily mitigate potential conflicts or misunderstandings that may arise. It also helps to prevent overdependence on the mentee. Establishing boundaries includes addressing aspects such as the purpose of mentorship and the responsibility of the mentor, the availability of the mentor, etc.

*At the beginning, clear expectations and boundaries should be agreed upon so that both parties know what to expect from the mentoring relationship [...] to keep the relationship professional and purposeful.*

*The relationship should not become too personal; the roles and responsibilities of the mentor and the mentee should be clearly defined at the start and possibly redefined along the way.*

*The mentor can also set boundaries for how, in which channels, and when they communicate with the mentee and are available.*

Mentors should support and encourage the mentee, supporting their development, autonomy, and empowerment. They should listen and nurture the relationship; not judge the mentee or assume a superior position, especially when the mentee is part of an ethnic or racial minority.

*The mentor supports the mentee in recognising and utilising their strengths, encouraging independent thinking and decision-making.*

*Providing feedback, noticing the good, and giving constructive feedback when necessary creates a good foundation. Showing that you hear and see the other person.*

**Understanding minority issues is crucial. It is also important to avoid creating a 'white saviour' dynamic or objectification.**

An important element of the mentor-mentee relationship is respect for each other's decisions and boundaries and being a good listener. The mentor should provide guidance and support to the mentee, but also respect the mentee's decisions and autonomy. Such decisions may also be influenced by their culture.

*Think about the advice you give, don't pressure in any direction. Be ready to hear non-verbal messages as well.*

*Respecting the other person's life situation; it is easy to feel like you need to fix everything, but you don't. Solve together the issues that the other*

*person brings to the table—not the whole package. Respect for the other person's path and choices, listening to them. Cultural sensitivity; for example, respecting parents vs daring to say no.*

Having an open discussion also implies that the mentor should be able to address challenging issues that may arise:

*If something happens in the mentoring relationship, it is good to talk about it openly. Mentoring should also be a safe space to practise, for example, interaction skills.*

Last but not least, fostering a safe and encouraging environment also requires confidentiality so that both parties can trust each other and have an open discussion.

*Confidentiality; you can be open and trust the other person when you share something. As a coordinator, one should always tell the young people (mentees) that they won't tell the mentors anything they don't want to be shared. Taking photos for social media always with permission. Sharing information with outsiders only as agreed.*

### 3.5 Working with intersectionality

Having an intersectional approach implies identifying and understanding the different identities of an individual (ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, age, ability, migrant status, etc.) and how their intersection affects that person's experiences and position in society. Integrating intersectionality in the mentoring approach starts with educating oneself and understanding the power dynamic determined by the different positions occupied in society by members of minority groups. This involves continuous growth by the mentor, being exposed to different life experiences, and being self-aware. Stereotypes are also to be avoided by understanding the unique characteristics of an individual, beyond those of the groups that s/he belongs to.

*Understanding [intersectionality] requires education and raising awareness (trainings, workshops, etc.). [...] It is also crucial to understand each individual's unique backgrounds and experiences and provide support that truly addresses their specific needs, not the stereotypical needs of a particular group.*

*Encourage mentors, when necessary, to increase their awareness beyond their own bubble/thinking.*

Self-reflection and openness are also essential to incorporating an intersectional approach:

*Professionals should reflect on their own biases, the impact of systemic inequalities, and the importance of continuous learning and self-reflection.*

*Professionals should continuously reflect on their own attitudes and prejudices and consciously work to dismantle them. It is also important to be able to disagree and handle disagreements constructively;*

*this requires openness to different perspectives and a willingness to understand others' experiences and views.*

Addressing intersectionality may also involve making certain adaptations, taking into consideration the situation of the mentee:

*Different backgrounds can affect participation opportunities [...] Considering accessibility, using clear language, and various forms of participation (remote, in person) automatically can support the participation of different people in various situations.*

While structural inequalities must be taken into account, the mentor and coordinator should respect the dignity and autonomy of those belonging to minority or vulnerable groups, encourage their autonomy, and avoid stereotyping or displaying pity:

*One should be careful not to make generalisations in their own mind.*

*In mentoring discussions, it is worth remembering and being aware that situations vary, and one solution does not work the same way for everyone.*

*In our work we encounter people who are not working or studying—in a weaker economic situation—and this is taken into account [...] We know the reality in which we operate, but we do not treat anyone as pitiful; we respect the participant's own will.*

**Understanding and adequately integrating intersectionality into the mentoring process is an important step in preventing tensions in the relationship and avoiding conflict.**

This also includes taking into account previous experiences of discrimination and trauma and avoiding reinforcing them:

*Understanding one's own background is important; power dynamics easily build up by themselves and without being noticed. Understanding trauma backgrounds is important. As a mentor, you should not choose a mentee based on what pleases you. Raise young people to accept diversity.*

*We do not want to reinforce the experience of being a minority within a minority, but rather we meet as individuals. One should not assume anything, but act sensitively in all these areas.*

### 3.6 Training and support needs

In order to work effectively with people from marginalised groups, respondents consider that mentors should receive training regarding general aspects of mentoring, as well as on specific aspects related to working with these groups, such as cultural sensitivity, communication, diversity, and even trauma:

*Basic training in mentoring is the starting point; the fundamental principles of mentoring, roles, and responsibilities. In addition to this, training could include interaction skills (communication, listening, confidentiality), cultural competence (diversity, sensitivity, different backgrounds and experiences).*

*Knowledge about cultural sensitivity and, more broadly, the importance of meaningful encounters in building trust is essential.*

**Trauma-informed training is essential.**

In addition to training, most respondents recommend that mentors receive ongoing support and guidance from peer networks and have access to guidelines.

*Support structures and operations: It is important to have clear goals and expectations, regular monitoring and evaluation, the necessary resources and tools (guides, handbooks, digital support), a sense of community, and networking.*

*Mentoring is also about sharing networks, and good relationships with relevant actors help spread information and direct the mentee to services they may benefit from. It also makes it easier for the mentor to manage their own well-being [...], knowing that they don't have to know everything themselves, but can rely on the support of other actors.*

Therefore, an effective preparatory process should include training, guidelines, and a support network:

*Our standard practice includes an initial training session, ready-made materials to support mentoring, a joint midterm meeting for mentors, and a final celebration. In addition, an employee is available to the mentors if they have questions or concerns related to their mentoring. This model has worked well.*

Some respondents point out that 'mentors don't necessarily need a lot of formal training', but they should be able to access the relevant information and resources when necessary.



The motivation and general competence of the mentor and the match between the mentor and the mentee are also very important in the preparatory stage. The mentor's motivation can also be enhanced during training:

*Mentoring works best when the right people are selected, individuals who are already quite competent. It's important to get a sense of the person and their motivation; these factors are more important than training when it comes to matching mentors and finding suitable candidates. Therefore, those doing the matching need to have a good understanding of people.*

*Training should be preparatory and motivating. It's important that participants are willing to commit and don't drop out in the middle of the process.*

Finally, some also think that the mentees should receive training and support in understanding more about mentoring and improving their communication skills.

## 3.7 Key takeaways

The most important insights and recommendations from the interviews for the Mentor Handbook and future mentorship strategies are the following:

### a. Mentoring Approach:

- Mentoring should be an individualised process that is mentee-driven, focusing on their goals and needs.
- Both individual and group mentoring have their advantages: individual mentoring provides personalised guidance and support tailored to the mentee's needs and goals, while also fostering a safe space for the mentee. Meanwhile, group mentoring offers a wider range of perspectives and experiences and fosters community and collaboration, as well as peer support.
- Useful strategies in mentoring include: Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, activities focused on recognising strengths and setting goals, such as the GROW-model.
- Interactive and experiential learning methods, such as storytelling, roleplaying, or community service projects, are also effective in mentorship.

### b. Building Trust and Relationships:

- Establishing mutual trust and open communication while fostering personalised engagement and an equal standing is essential in the mentoring relationship.
- Establishing clear boundaries from the beginning and defining the purpose of mentorship and the responsibilities of the mentor is also very important in order to avoid conflicts.
- Confidentiality, openness to discussion, and the ability of the mentor to address challenging issues are also necessary to maintain trust and create a safe space.

### c. Mentor Competencies:

- Being aware of the mentee's individual goals and needs.
- Being knowledgeable about the professional field relevant to the mentee and having access to networks and resources/support.
- Being motivated.
- Having a strong awareness of discrimination, intersectionality, empathy, and cultural sensitivity is essential.
- Having strong communication skills and the ability to address challenging issues that may arise in a sensitive manner.

### d. Ethical Considerations and Intersectionality:

- Understanding the power dynamic in society and the structural discrimination experienced by various minority groups is important. Continuous self-reflection and education on systemic inequalities and biases is necessary.
- Recognising and addressing the unique backgrounds and experiences of mentees.
- Encouraging and supporting the development of the mentee while promoting their autonomy and respecting their decisions. Not judging.
- Never assuming a superior position, especially when the mentee is part of an ethnic or racial minority ('white saviour' approach); promote equality and diversity. Not displaying pity.
- Respecting the dignity and privacy of the mentee.
- When necessary, making practical adaptations in order to ease the participation of the mentee, taking into consideration their specific situation (for example, holding meetings at specific times and places or online).

### e. Training and Support for Mentoring:

- Selecting competent and motivated people as mentors and making a good match with the mentee.
- Offering mentors basic training in mentoring principles (boundaries, confidentiality, communication, trust, etc.), as well as specific aspects related to working with minority groups, such as cultural sensitivity, diversity, discrimination, intersectionality, and even trauma.
- Providing the mentor with ongoing support, peer networks, and access to resources. Making sure that mentors have access to the necessary information and resources when necessary.
- Boosting the motivation of the mentor during the preparatory process.
- Informing mentees about the purpose and scope of the mentoring process.

#### f. Challenges:

- Addressing language barriers, immigration policies, and trauma backgrounds.
- Ensuring mentors do not impose their own experiences and expectations on mentees.
- Avoiding power imbalances and the 'saviour' mentality in the relationship.
- Addressing intersectionality without reinforcing marginalisation or stereotypes.
- Mentors may feel overwhelmed or 'empty-handed' when not knowing how to help or not having the necessary guidelines/training, especially in complex life situations.

## 3.8 Conclusion

The interviews provided valuable insights into effective mentoring practices, emphasising the importance of trust, empathy, open communication, cultural sensitivity, and understanding of structural discrimination and inequality. Focusing on supporting the mentee in reaching their goals while respecting their autonomy is key to the mentoring process. Important recommendations include maintaining confidentiality, setting clear boundaries, and fostering an equal, open relationship.

**The intersectional approach and continuous self-reflection are crucial to understanding the experience and unique backgrounds of mentees who are part of multiple minority groups.**

Training and support structures, including peer networks and ongoing education, are essential for mentors. In terms of structure, both individual and group mentoring have their advantages, the first offering personalised guidance and fostering a safe space, while the second offers a wider range of perspectives and experiences.

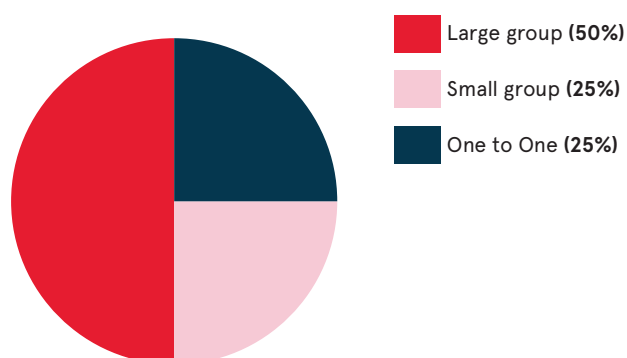
These insights will significantly influence the development of mentoring practices, tools, and resources, ensuring impactful and inclusive mentorship for marginalised youth, particularly young Roma women.

# 4. Comparative analysis

This section analyses comparatively the strengths and weaknesses of the three mentorship methods used within the project with the aim of evaluating the mentoring formats, namely, one-to-one, small group, and public/large group mentoring. The data for this analysis was collected through an online survey among junior staff working on the project.

## 4.1 General insights

The distribution of the mentorship methods employed within the project was the following: 4 one-to-one mentoring relationships, 4 small groups, and 4 big groups. Overall, the mentoring programme engaged 15 mentors and 15 mentees. The distribution of the responses provided by the professionals in this survey is the following: 25% (3 responses)—individual/one-to-one mentoring, 50% (6 responses)—small group, and 25% (3 responses)—large group.



In terms of time and location, the mentoring programme took place between September 2024 and April 2025 in Helsinki, Finland (except for two cases in which the mentor and the mentee met online due to living in different cities). Some of the meetings took place in a restaurant, a public library, or the office of the Deaconess Foundation.

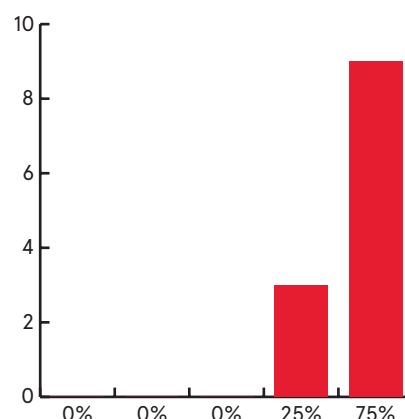
The average mentoring session was about 2 hours, with the shortest lasting 45 minutes and the longest 3–4 hours. Most of the mentors were project coordinators or experts working in the NGO sector, generally working with and supporting Roma women. The mentees were young or older Roma women, generally with low

education. In terms of occupation, the mentees were either attending school, unemployed, taking care of children full time, or employed. The few who were employed were engaged in selling the street magazine or working as a cleaning person or activist for Roma rights.

## 4.2 Appropriate match between mentor and mentee

The vast majority of respondents (75%) consider that the match between the mentor and the mentee was very appropriate, with only 3 respondents rating the match as appropriate. Out of these three, one referred to the one-to-one method, while the other two referred to the small group method. Yet the number of respondents is too low to draw relevant conclusions.

**How would you rate the appropriateness of the match between mentor and mentee?**



Almost all respondents stated that the initial setting/context of the mentoring match had a positive effect upon the mentoring activity.

No relevant differences were noted among the three mentoring methods in terms of these general parameters.



The suggestions for improving the matching process included the following:

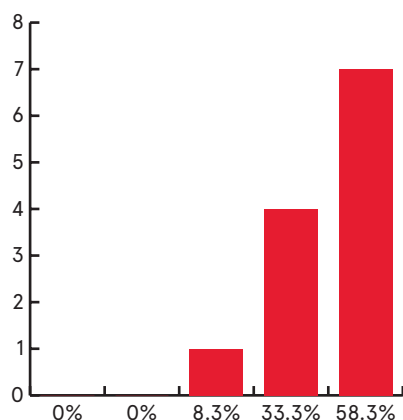
- more planning regarding the subjects to be addressed—One-to-one method
- scheduling the meeting at a certain time of the day when more mentees can participate (not early in the morning)—Small group
- tailoring the matching process more to the mentees' needs by considering diverse pairing criteria, conducting pre-matching assessments of mentees' goals and mentor/s expertise, involving both parties in the selection process, facilitating initial meet-and-greet sessions, providing clear matching guidelines, and monitoring and adjusting matches—Large group
- having additional opportunities to listen to music and dance, as well as having access to a kitchen and cooking together instead of bringing ready-made food—Small groups

Some respondents stated that there was nothing to improve as the mentor and mentee(s) had known each other previously and even established a trust relationship (one-to-one and small groups).

## 4.3 Impact of mentorship upon the mentee

Overall, the mentoring programme had a significant impact upon the development of the mentees, with insufficient responses to draw conclusions regarding potential differences in the impact of the different mentoring methods.

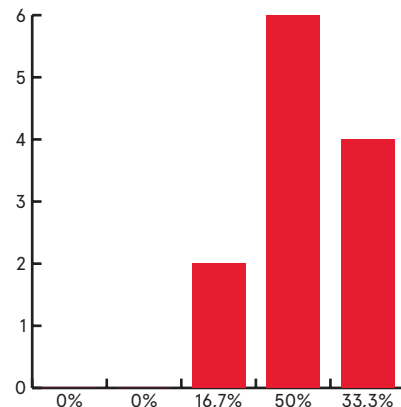
**To what extent did the mentee show increased confidence, motivation, or initiative?**



The majority of respondents (58%) consider that the mentorship programme has increased the confidence, motivation, and initiative of participants to a great

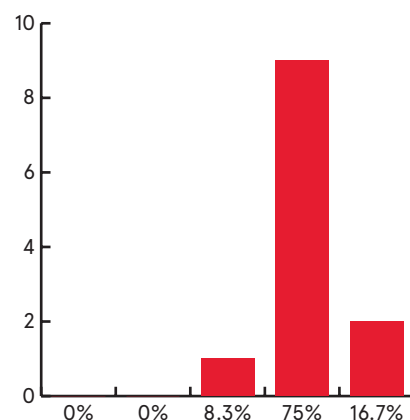
extent, while another 33% (4 respondents, referring to the individual and small group methods) think that the programme did so to a significant extent. Only one respondent (referring to the small group method) rated the impact of the mentorship programme as average. No correlation with the mentorship method could be found.

**Did the mentee express any new goals or aspirations?**



The mentorship programme was effective in terms of inspiring the mentees to express new goals and aspirations (very effective according to 50% and effective according to 33%). Only 16% (2 respondents) rated the programme as average in this regard. While no relevant correlation can be established with the mentoring methods, given the small sample, it appears that the one-to-one method was more likely to favour the expression of new goals and aspirations.

**Overall, how would you rate the mentee's development due to the mentoring?**



Mentees experienced significant (16.7%) or great (75%) development as a result of the mentoring programme,

according to respondents. Just one respondent (8%) ranked the impact of the programme as average, in terms of the development of the mentee. No mentoring method appears to be superior to the others in terms of development.

The following positive changes were experienced by mentees:

#### a. One-to-one method

- Improved confidence regarding pursuing/continuing education or employment
- Enhanced confidence by feeling that they are not alone and can obtain support in relation to public authorities in Finland

#### b. Small group method

- Enhanced confidence by feeling that they can obtain support in relation to public authorities in Finland
- Increased determination to pay off debt
- Improved self-esteem and confidence in expressing their thoughts and ideas
- Increased pride regarding the Roma flag and the International Romani Day
- Enhanced motivation to talk with other Roma women within the community about the importance of voting and improved capacity to address this subject (or other sensitive or apparently not relevant subjects) with other Roma women from their community
- Greater understanding of societal/structural discrimination and its impact upon individuals' lives beyond personal responsibility
- Improved hope and wellbeing, as well as a temporary escape from their day-to-day challenges

#### c. Large group method

- Positive changes in confidence, skills, networking, and personal growth
- Increased confidence and improved communication skills

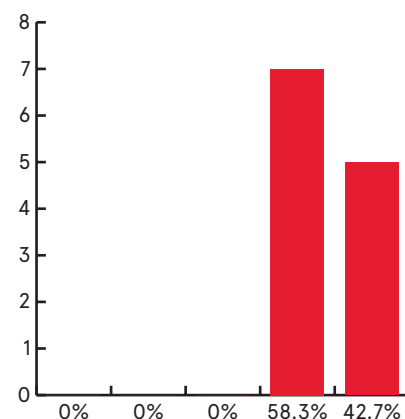
While the actual changes experienced by mentees are also shaped by their initial goals and aspirations, as well as by external factors that are not related to the mentorship programme, a pattern could be observed in terms of the different types of impact that the three mentoring methods had. One-to-one and sometimes small group mentoring were more likely to provide tailored individual support, resulting in the improved confidence of the mentee in pursuing individual goals related to education or employment, as well as the improved confidence that they are not alone. Meanwhile, both small group and large group methods focused more on building the mentee's communication skills, public speaking, and self-esteem within the group. Also, such methods were successful in enhancing the

participants' ethnic pride as Roma and awareness of structural discrimination and their position in society as Roma women.

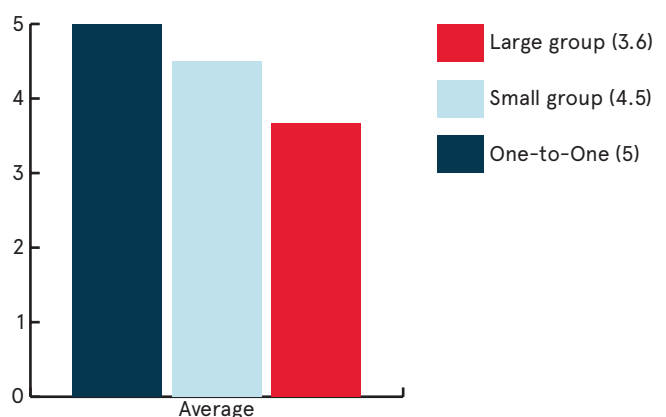
## 4.4 Quality of the mentoring relationship

The level of trust between the mentor and the mentee was high (58%) or very high (42%), according to respondents, with no difference between the three mentorship methods.

### How would you rate the level of trust between mentor and mentee?



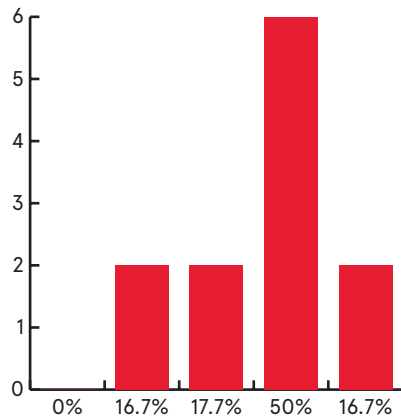
### Ability of mentee to express themselves freely and openly



The survey revealed that mentees participating in one-to-one mentoring had a very good chance of expressing themselves freely and openly (average of 5 out of 5), followed by participants in small groups (average of 4.5) and participants in large groups (average of 3.67). Therefore, the findings confirm the hypothesis that

individual mentoring, followed by small group mentoring, is more likely than other methods to foster a safe space and encourage mentees to express themselves freely.

### Were identity-related issues (e.g. gender, ethnicity, discrimination) acknowledged and discussed?



Aspects related to gender, ethnicity, and discrimination were discussed sometimes (about 32%), more often (50%), or very often (17%), depending on the occasion and the interest of the participants. For example, some of the mentors organised meetings for Roma Day or on the day of the Romanian presidential election, which led to a discussion about the political situation and its impact upon Roma communities and individuals, while other meetings had other focuses. No connection could be established between the mentoring method and the likelihood of addressing topics related to discrimination.

In terms of the ways in which the mentoring relationship has evolved, the general consensus among respondents is that following the initial meeting(s):

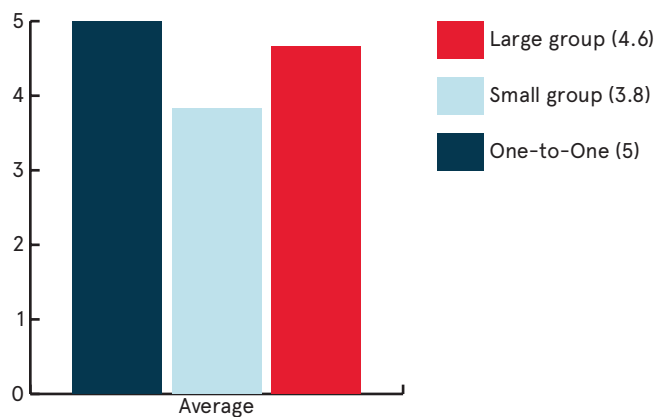
- Mentors and mentees took time to understand each other's backgrounds, interests, and goals as they shared their stories and experiences. Over time both parties gain a better understanding regarding the needs of the other and how the mentor can support the mentee.
- Mentors and mentees identified creative ways to mitigate the limited English and Finnish language skills of some of the Romanian Roma migrants.
- The mentees' trust increased, which also increased their commitment to the project and willingness to open up
- The relationship grew into a friendship and mentors and mentees shared personal struggles and successes in life
- The connection deepened, 'moving from surface-level topics to more personal and professional challenges'. Mentees started to 'open up about their aspirations and fears, while mentors offered

guidance, support, and practical advice'.

- The mentoring relationship evolved, 'involving even more trust-based dialogue, mutual understanding, and collaboration, as well as meeting more often'
- Mentees became more proactive as their confidence grew, while mentors embraced more of a 'supportive and facilitative role'
- The relationship became more pleasant and friendly, as both sides were more relaxed

No different pattern in the evolution of the mentorship relationship was identified in connection with the form of mentoring.

### How would you rate the ease of organizing and implementing the mentoring program?



While most respondents find the mentoring programme to be easy or very easy to organise, the small group method was less likely to be seen as easy to organise (with an average of 3.8%, as opposed to 5% or 4.7% attributed to the other methods). This could be due to the need for small groups to identify both general topics of relevance to all participants while also addressing some specific issues, whereas the other methods might focus on just one aspect: individual needs or a topic of general interest. In any case, this aspect is worth further research.

The majority of respondents find the mentoring methods to be easily replicable in their context, with no relevant difference between the three mentorship formats.

The logistical barriers reported did not depend on the method of mentoring. They were the following:

- Difficulty in coordinating due to busy schedules (especially in the case of mentors)
- Difficulties with participants' ability to reach the venue, due to distance and transportation issues, which led to small delays and slightly impacted overall attendance and engagement
- Organising the meeting at a time when it was

difficult for participants to arrive (early in the morning)

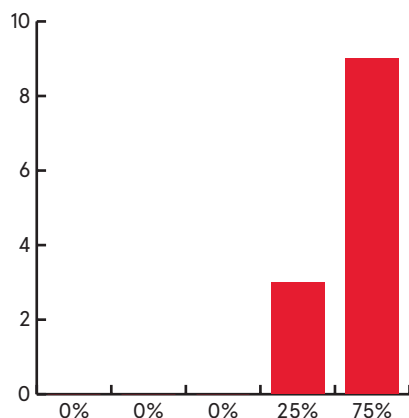
- Participants lacking the money to pay for transportation within the city
- Health and family issues preventing the mentee's participation

In terms of the factors that facilitated or hampered a certain mentoring method, the responses varied depending on the method and ranged from emphasising the importance of fostering a relaxed environment to questions of structure, communication, and personal motivation. The findings will be further discussed in the comparative section below.

## 4.5 Experience and satisfaction

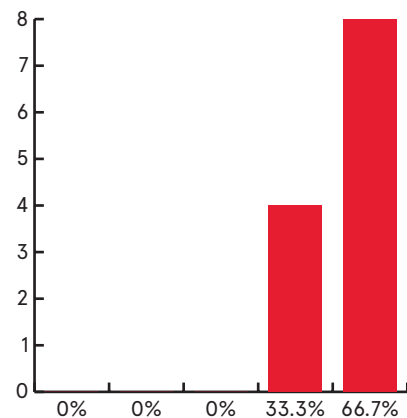
Participants' satisfaction with the mentoring experience was high (25%) or very high (75), according to respondents.

**How satisfied were the participants with the overall mentoring experience?**



The mentoring programme has met their expectation to a large (33%) or very large extent (67%). All the respondents think that participants are very likely (58%) or likely (42%) to recommend the programme to others. No difference in the level of satisfaction was identified with regard to the different mentoring formats.

**To what extent did the method meet participants' expectations?**



The recommendations for improvement of the mentoring programme included the following:

- More personalised matching, as to cater better to the needs and interests of the mentees
- Providing training for facilitators on 'cultural competence and handling sensitive topics', as well as pre-event materials for participants to feel more prepared
- Better planning, guidelines, and structures for and by the mentor, clearer goal-setting from the beginning, as well as greater flexibility in scheduling, in order to ensure focused and productive mentoring sessions
- The small group format is 'effective in fostering intimate and meaningful discussions'. 'Flag Raising Ceremony'—having a 'symbolic act to promote unity and respect' (especially for group mentoring).
- Incorporating interactive methods, 'such as roleplaying or storytelling, to engage participants'
- Adjusting the schedule 'to allow more time for deeper discussions and reflections'. In particular, mentees should have more space to discuss their points of view.
- Expanding the discussion topic in order 'to cover a broader range of ethnic identities and related issues'
- Organising mentoring sessions focused on practical matters, 'such as paying bills and applying for benefits digitally'
- Budgeting time for 'entertainment activities, such as listening to music, socialising, and dancing' and other relaxed activities

- 'Implementing follow-up sessions or resources to support ongoing learning and reflection' for continued growth and support

These suggestions were formulated mostly in connection to the group methods, but they are equally applicable to all methods.

## 4.6 Specific aspects regarding the three mentoring methods

### a. One-to-one method

Strengths and weaknesses

The main strengths of this method are the following:

- Facilitates the formation/consolidation of a strong bond between the mentor and the mentee, taking the form of a friendship with trust and mutual respect
- Allows for personalised learning and guidance, focusing on the individual needs and objectives of the mentee
- Improves the confidence of the mentee to pursue their personal goals, such as continuing education or seeking employment
- Enhances the confidence of the mentee and their feeling that they can obtain support in relation to public authorities
- Creates the feeling of a safe space in which the mentee feels more comfortable with discussing sensitive issues
- Allows for flexibility in the planning of sessions, according to the availability of the mentor and the mentee.
- The main weaknesses are the following:
  - Is more likely than other methods to lack a determined structure, objectives, and planning
  - Meetings are more likely to be held online in order to limit participation costs (time, money, etc.), which in turn is less likely to encourage open discussion
  - The mentee lacks a comparative/broader perspective regarding the experiences of other people from the same group (e.g., Roma women, young people, etc.)
  - Does not encourage community bonding, collective action, and networking
  - The scheduling of meetings is more likely to be unpredictable and not time efficient for the mentor

Supporting and hampering factors

Factors which support the success of this method include:

- Strong commitment from mentors
- The mentor and the mentee having previously developed a relationship based on trust
- Online communication, which allows for more flexibility in communication, especially given the travel costs and busy schedules of both mentors and mentees

Factors which hamper this method:

- Online communication, as it does not always encourage participants to open up and express themselves freely, especially in the absence of a previous relationship
- Lack of adequate structure and planning

### b. Group mentoring—small group

Strengths and weaknesses

The main strengths of this method are the following:

- Fosters a discussion space in which mentees and mentors are exposed to diverse perspectives and engage in peer learning and mutual support
- Fosters a greater understanding of societal/structural discrimination and its impact upon individuals' lives beyond personal responsibility
- Improves mentees' self-esteem and confidence in expressing their thoughts and ideas
- Increases mentees' pride as a (minority) group (for example, Roma pride)
- Enhances the mentees' motivation to talk with other members of their group/community and their awareness of common/societal issues/struggles
- Allows mentees to socialise with each other and engage in recreational activities and improves their wellbeing, offering a temporary escape from their day-to-day challenges
- Greater time efficiency for the mentor and predictability of sessions for both parties

The main weaknesses are the following:

- Is less likely than the one-to-one method to build a strong bond between the mentor and the mentee
- Has a limited ability to provide personalised learning and guidance, often not focusing on the individual needs and objectives of the mentee
- Provides limited individual support and guidance in practical matters
- Is less likely than the one-to-one method to create the feeling of a safe space in which the mentee feels comfortable with discussing sensitive issues
- Is less flexible in planning than the one-to-one method

Supporting and hampering factors

Factors which support the success of this method include:

- Careful planning, skilled facilitation, and a supportive environment, which foster mutual understanding and respect among participants
- Free food attracts participants and the restaurant atmosphere, which is more relaxed, makes it easier for participants to open up and share their experiences
- Strong commitment from mentors and clear communication structures
- Deaconess Foundation's previous connection with the mentees and its support throughout the mentoring process
- The personal motivation of the mentee in finding a mentor and a friend

Factors which hamper this method:

- Limited time availability and mentors' varying engagement levels, which can impact the consistency and effectiveness of the programme
- The lack of a common language
- Limited budget for organising activities for the group

Strengths and weaknesses

### **c. Group mentoring—large group**

The main strengths of this method are the following

- Improves the confidence and communication skills of mentees
- Provides great opportunities for networking and personal growth by exposing mentees to a wide range of ideas
- Fosters a discussion space in which mentees and mentors are exposed to a wide range of perspectives and engage in peer learning
- Fosters a strong understanding of societal/structural discrimination and its impact upon individuals' lives beyond personal responsibility
- Improves mentees' self-esteem and confidence in expressing their thoughts and ideas in public
- Fosters a sense of community and increases mentees' pride as a (minority) group (for example, Roma pride)

- Enhances the mentees' motivation to talk with other members of their group/community and their awareness of common/societal issues/struggles
- Allows mentees to socialise with each other and engage in recreational activities and improves their wellbeing, offering a temporary escape from their day-to-day challenges
- Great time efficiency for the mentor and predictability of sessions for both parties

The main weaknesses are the following:

- Does not build a strong bond between the mentor and the mentee
- Does not provide personalised learning and guidance, focusing on the individual needs and objectives of the mentee
- Cannot provide individual support and guidance in practical matters
- Has a limited ability to create the feeling of a safe space in which the mentees feel comfortable with discussing sensitive issues
- Is not more flexible in planning than the one-to-one method

Supporting and hampering factors

Factors which support the success of this method include:

- Careful planning and skilled facilitation
- Strong commitment from mentors and clear communication structures
- High level of participant commitment, a supportive environment, effective facilitation, and a structured approach
- Relaxed and open environment, a joyful atmosphere that allows participants to open up and build trust

Factors which hamper this method:

- Logistical barriers (such as distance to the venue, participants' lack of money for transportation, etc.)
- Diverse backgrounds among participants and the emotional impact of the topics discussed
- The lack of a common language



## 4.7 Conclusion

Overall, the mentoring methods employed in the programme were successful in increasing the participants' skills and supporting their personal growth, providing personalised guidance and support, and increasing their motivation to pursue their personal goals, especially in relation to education and employment. Both mentors and mentees benefited from the experience and strong relationships based on mutual trust, respect, and open communication were established. Mentees benefited from networking, peer learning, and different perspectives in a familiar atmosphere, fostering group solidarity and awareness of structural discrimination.

**All three mentoring methods work well for first-time and long-term mentees and data does not point to significant differences in terms of urban/rural settings.**

One-to-one mentoring is particularly effective in career development, planning studies, skill enhancement, and personal growth and can be a practical method because it is more likely to be held online, thus being very time and cost efficient. The small group method proved effective for mentees who needed structured support and clear guidance. It also worked well in urban settings where access to resources and consistent meeting opportunities were more readily available. Mentees who had specific goals tended to benefit the most, especially when the programme included strong institutional support, such as training and clear expectations. This method is most effective in contexts that prioritise cultural understanding/awareness and inclusion and for profiles that benefit from exploring and expressing their ethnic identities. On the other hand, this method was less effective in rural areas where logistical challenges made regular contact harder. Finally, large group mentoring is most effective in contexts that prioritise collaborative learning, cultural understanding, and personal development within a structured environment.

It is particularly beneficial for profiles that can leverage peer interactions and diverse perspectives to enhance their growth and skills.

However, participants in the programme also faced a number of challenges, including: varying levels of mentee readiness; time constraints; the need for clearer goal-setting at the beginning; uneven participation levels; irregular check-ins (which led to loss of focus and progress); scheduling conflicts; lack of training (some mentors felt unprepared); difficulties in communicating with mentees who have limited English and Finnish language skills; emotional impact; the need for mentees' different backgrounds to be addressed (in group mentoring); difficulties in managing group dynamics; ensuring equal participation; and addressing individual needs within a group setting. These challenges represent important avenues for improvement.

The effectiveness of the mentoring programme can be further enhanced by: providing mentors and mentees with clear guidelines and expectations from the beginning of the programme; offering training, guidance, and continuous support for mentors on effective mentoring techniques and communication skills; ensuring a diverse pool of mentors with different backgrounds and forms of expertise to match various mentee needs, as well as a good matching process; setting a clearer structure and guidance for group discussions; ensuring flexibility to address individual needs within the group; diversifying mentoring activities; extending discussion time; gathering feedback and monitoring impact; optimising group dynamics; providing translation when necessary; and additional resources for leisure activities.

**This explorative** study on the needs and expectations of Roma women revealed that those who have a migrant background (70% of the participants to this study) have limited knowledge of the local language(s). They generally have a low level of education (90% attended classes up to primary or secondary school) and thus have very few employment opportunities and chances of social inclusion. They face numerous challenges in Finland, such as language barriers, lack of knowledge about local procedures, limited financial resources, and discrimination.

# 5. Conclusion

**Discrimination has been experienced by 90%, often on multiple/intersecting grounds. In terms of needs and aspirations, 88% of the women believe education to be important and are interested in attending some form of training, especially to improve their language or vocational skills.**

Their aspirations often involve finding a (better) job, being able to bring their family along, and being more socially integrated. The motivation to participate in a mentorship programme involves obtaining support in finding a (better) job, navigating everyday life in Finland, accessing healthcare services, understanding the local language, accessing education opportunities, networking, etc. Last but not least, they seek emotional support and understanding. In order to achieve significant and sustainable impact, mentoring programmes addressed to Roma women should focus on supporting the mentees in reaching their goals while respecting their autonomy and values/aspirations.

Elements such as trust, empathy, open communication, cultural sensitivity, and understanding of structural discrimination and intersectionality are essential both in planning the programme and during mentorship.

Mentors should seek to educate themselves about these aspects and engage in continuous self-reflection. The confidentiality of the mentoring relationship is also crucial in order to foster a safe environment and create or reinforce trust. Meanwhile, mentors should also set clear boundaries and strive to build an equal and open relationship with the mentee. Training and support networks are essential for mentors.

In terms of structure, both individual and group mentoring have their advantages and weak points. One-to-one mentoring is particularly effective in reaching individual goals related to education, skill enhancement, career development, and personal growth and can be easily held online. The small group method proved effective for mentees who needed structured support and clear guidance. Mentees who had specific goals tended to benefit the most, especially when the programme included strong institutional support, such as training and clear expectations. This method can be successfully used in contexts that prioritise cultural understanding/awareness and inclusion and for mentees who benefit from exploring and expressing their ethnic identities. However, the method was less

effective in rural areas where logistical challenges made regular contact more difficult. The last method, large group mentoring, was most effective in settings that prioritise collaborative learning, cultural understanding, and personal development within the framework of a structured programme. It is especially useful for participants who can reach their development objective by being exposed to multiple perspectives and through community engagement.

The main challenges that appeared in the mentoring programme were the following: busy schedules and time constraints; varying levels of mentee readiness; the need for clearer goal-setting at the beginning; uneven participation levels; irregular check-ins; lack of training for some mentors; difficulties in communicating due to limited language skills; emotional impact; difficulties of addressing mentees' different backgrounds and individual needs in group mentoring; difficulties in managing group dynamics; and ensuring equal participation in group mentoring. The design of future mentoring programmes and the training/information provided to mentors (such as the Mentor Handbook) should include strategies for addressing these challenges.

Recommendations for maximising the impact of mentorship for Roma women include: providing mentors and mentees with clear guidelines and prospects from the onset; training mentors and offering guidance and continuous support on mentoring techniques, migrant trauma and discrimination, and communication skills; gathering a diverse pool of mentors with different backgrounds and forms of expertise in order to adequately address the needs of mentees; ensuring a good matching process between the mentor and mentee(s); providing translation when necessary; setting a clear structure and guidelines for group discussions while also offering flexibility for addressing individual needs; including diverse mentoring activities and fun/leisure activities in the programme; allowing sufficient time for discussion; collecting feedback; monitoring impact; and managing group dynamics.



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