

## **Street begging and inter-administrative co-operation**

Free movement of people is acknowledged as a fundamental right for EU citizens.

Free movement of workers entitles EU citizens to look for a job in another country and to work there without needing a work permit. Free movement of persons between the Member States of the EU is one of the basic aims of the Union.

As a Union citizen, you are free to enter Finland and reside in Finland for a maximum period of three months without registering your right of residence. EU citizens are usually obliged to register themselves in the local police station if they intend to stay longer. An EU citizen needs to have sufficient funds for his or her own and family members' residence.

The expansion of the European Union has been mainly a success story. However, integration has brought along side effects visible in the cityscape of European cities. Besides ordinary pedestrians, beggars are roving in the streets. For their part, the European Union endeavour to give directions in the matter, but in practice these problems must be solved on the city level.

In recent years, particularly since summer 2007, foreign beggars have started appearing in the centres of Finnish biggest cities. Street begging is partly connected with the enlargement of the European Union on 1 January 2007, and with the right of free movement. Street beggars are, as a rule, Roma people from Romania. At the same time, a number of undesirable developments related to street begging have increased in Finland. Such developments include beggars 'aggressively' selling junk, selling of flowers on the streets and disturbing busking.

How to face and solve these side effects of free mobility?

The Ministry of the Interior set up on 4 April 2008 a working group to assess the national need to harmonise the actions of authorities in dealing with beggars. The working group was set up based on the proposal made by the Helsinki City Board to the Government concerning the introduction of necessary measures to harmonise the practices of authorities in dealing with beggars.

The working group inter alia assessed the need to make proposals for harmonising at national level the actions of authorities in dealing with beggars, and to establish which authorities need to be given instructions.

The working group's main conclusions and proposals for measures were:

- It is necessary to issue uniform instructions throughout the country. The key target groups are social welfare and health authorities, the police and the authorities responsible for immigration matters. Each authority can e.g. make use of the guidelines outlined in the working group report when issuing instructions for their own sector.

- It was proposed that no amendments be made to the Public Order Act. If begging is disturbing, the police can intervene in this kind of activity.

- It is important to create clear and uniform guidelines across the sectors so that the provisions on information exchange can be applied consistently in practice. The working group proposes that social welfare and health authorities and the police set up a working group to identify the problems related to information exchange, and to introduce practices on the basis of the existing legislation. If necessary, the group should also propose legislative amendments.

- Efforts must be made to improve the knowledge of authorities concerning legislation on information exchange.
- Authorities must be more active in informing foreigners of the obligation to register their right of residence.
- Steps must be taken to ensure that Finnish missions abroad can provide general information about the need for the European Health Insurance Card and about job opportunities and working conditions in Finland.
- Efforts should be made at EU level to tackle problems related to the discrimination of Roma people and the great number of problems caused by poverty.
- Finnish authorities will continue dialogue both with Romanian authorities at the Romanian mission in Finland and with the authorities responsible for child welfare in Romania.
- Campaigns about health insurance and the eligibility for social security should be organised across the EU.
- There is no reason to create a separate system for the temporary accommodation of minors, covering only begging EU citizens. It is not justified to use reception centres for asylum seekers or group homes or family group homes for unaccompanied minors for this purpose. If the need for welfare services is mainly due to inadequate housing conditions or to a poor financial situation, the municipality of residence is primarily responsible for providing adequate housing and/or income support.
- Child welfare is a social service to which all children residing in Finland are entitled. The responsibility for the welfare of foreign children rests with their municipality of residence if they have no domicile in Finland.
- As regards child welfare, the powers of Finnish authorities are limited to providing immediate assistance. If the need for welfare services continues, assistance should be sought from the authorities of the person's home country, or in practice from a diplomatic or consular mission of that country.
- If there are any signs of coercion, the status of beggars should be considered from the viewpoint of human trafficking. Also, the necessary measures should be taken to refer these people to the support network for victims of human trafficking.