

## CHAPTER 10

# Exclusion and Inequality

Reetta Toivanen

University of Helsinki and Helsinki Institute of Sustainability Science

Magdalena Kmak

University of Helsinki and Åbo Akademi University

### Abstract

Within sustainability science, there are questions pertaining to how certain actions for guaranteeing a good life for one part of the population can even result in catastrophic consequences to another. The global holistic view that would address all inequalities and exclusions is one of the greatest challenges of today. In this chapter, we will elaborate on two central concepts of sustainability science that are particularly relevant to facing these challenges: inequality in access to power and exclusion from positions of power. These are both very visible acts of exclusion, often hidden in the very grain of society's structure in a manner that makes them almost impossible to study and change. Inequality and exclusion are cultural constructions of power, and it is important to see how these influence practical actions and institutional

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(hidden) practices. The practices locate certain individuals or groups of people in a more disadvantaged position than others and naturalize these inequalities with a set of actions and explanations. This chapter will present the operation of these practices with two concrete, situated examples of migrants with irregular status in the European Union and the Roma minority in Finland.

### **On the Terminology: What Are Exclusion and Inequality?**

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development defines inequality in the context of both wealth and income. In the Agenda, inequality is described as encompassing ‘inequalities in opportunities and outcomes relating to education, health, food security, employment, housing, health services, as well as in access to economic resources which also amount to failures to achieve internationally agreed human rights’ (UN Chief Executives Board for Coordination 2016: 10–11). These inequalities often affect various groups differently because of their members’ sex, age, ethnicity, disabilities, migrant/health/economic status, and so on. Therefore, the concept of inequality is intrinsically linked with both discrimination and exclusion, and is often considered to be the result of, or a contributing factor to, discriminatory or exclusionary practices (see UNDP 2013).

According to Hilary Silver (1994), one can identify three different but intertwined paradigms of exclusion: solidarity, specialization and group monopolies paradigms. For the solidarity paradigm, exclusion means the breakdown of social bonds between the individual and the society in a cultural and moral way rather than an economically interested fashion. It gives space for dualistic categories for ordering the world, defining, for example, the poor, the unemployed, and minorities as deviant outsiders. In the specialization paradigm, exclusion reflects discrimination. Socio-economic differentiation and divisions of labour only lead to discrimination and exclusion if individuals cannot move across boundaries. The third paradigm sees exclusion as a consequence of the formation of group monopolies. Powerful groups, often of distinctive cultural identities and institutions, restrict access

of outsiders to valued resources through a process of ‘social closure’. The excluded are often turned into what Jensen (2011: 65) refers to as ‘Others’, which indicates a symbolic degradation ‘as well as the processes of identity formation related to this degradation’. In consequence, *the other* is marginalized, and the superiority and the identity of the powerful affirmed (Gozdecka and Kmak 2018). The concept of exclusion is therefore inherently relational (Sen 2001). Being excluded is a matter of relational context in time and place. The exclusion must be understood in relation to the social order as a whole (Byrne 2005: 64).

Recent discussions on exclusion and inequality have become conceptualized in relation to vulnerability and resilience. For Martha Fineman (2017), vulnerability is a constant and universal condition of every subject, rather than affecting only those conceptualized as vulnerable populations or as being particularly vulnerable (see also Macioce 2018). Such an approach allows a shift from an individual-based perspective toward adopting structural arrangements that affect everyone. This contributes to resilience linked to resources (physical, human, social, ecological, and environmental) guaranteed by social structures and state institutions (Fineman 2017: 146).

Resilience is therefore also often used in relation to the concept of sustainability. However, an ongoing debate asks whether resilience and sustainability actually carry opposing connotations. Unlike Fineman (2017), who approaches resilience as a condition supported by political structures, political scientists David Chandler and Julian Reid (2016) have linked the conceptual development of using resilience in policy papers to a demand on ‘neoliberal subjects’, individuals who need to take responsibility for their own precariousness. They criticize the logic of resilience-talk because it specifically targets people in socio-economically vulnerable situations.

### **How Are the Concepts of Exclusion and Inequality Central to Sustainability Science?**

Equality and non-discrimination are intrinsically linked to sustainability science. Combating inequality became one of the most

important aspects of the Agenda 2030, which is sometimes even referred to as an ‘agenda for equality’ (UN 2015). One of its main goals is to develop programmes to promote institutions, laws, policies, and actions to combat discrimination based on race, sex, language, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, caste, Indigenous status, health status, migrant status, minority status, or other grounds, and to advance equal access to justice (UN 2015). However, the Agenda Goals have been criticized by scientists with regard to both their ability to challenge existing inequalities and their position on the main conceptual understanding of sustainability science—which is usually understood as emphasizing governance and management.

Some scholars blame Agenda 2030 for not challenging the positions of powerful actors such as big countries, international financial institutions, transnational corporations, and even international NGOs that have produced and reproduced inequalities in income, wealth, and power at national and global levels, causing the very problems the Sustainable Development Goals are trying to solve (Esquivel and Sweetman 2016; Struckmann 2018: 19).

Criticism of governance as a main form of operation within sustainability science refers to the possible adaptation of these concepts of equality and non-discrimination to the methods of neoliberal governance (Lawrence 2017). According to Lawrence, under the idea of sustainable development, we see a shift from protection toward governance, and ‘as we move toward a world in which individual and collective behaviour is governed by efficient expert management, older institutions such as popular democracy and equality become obsolete’ (2017: 80).

### **Situating Exclusion and Inequality**

In the following sections, we will illustrate the criticism mentioned above using two case studies: management of so-called irregular migration in the European Union and the case of the continuous exclusion and unequal position of the Roma minority in Finland. These two examples illustrate the problematic logic of sustainability

as equality by showing how certain actions for guaranteeing a good life for one group can result in catastrophic consequences for another.

### **Migrants with Irregular Status in the European Union**

Following the initial endorsement of refugee rights after World War II, support for them decreased. It became obvious that the scope of protection that the Western World would need to provide, based on the definition of a refugee from the 1951 Refugee Convention, clearly exceeded its willingness to do so (Dauvergne 2016; see however Mayblin 2018). For that reason, states needed to ‘ensure that asylum seekers do not arrive in the first place, because once a person is on national territory, policy options dwindle’ (2016: 45). Various efforts were therefore undertaken across the West to discourage asylum seekers’ attempts to seek protection on their own, to effectively manage their flows, or, more recently, to suspend the right to apply for asylum—in contravention of the Refugee Convention. In the European Union, this was manifested in continuous externalization of migration and refugee protection—for instance, in new legal institutions of the refugee procedure, such as the concept of a safe third country (Recast Procedures Directive); through *ad hoc* solutions such as the EU–Turkey agreement (European Council 2016); building walls, closing borders, pushbacks and hot returns (The Guardian 2020a, The Guardian 2020b) and the prioritization of border procedures and expulsions (The New Pact on Migration and Asylum); or the reconceptualization of those seeking protection as bogus asylum seekers or ‘illegal’ migrants (Anderson 2012; Kmak 2015; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). These ‘illegal’ or irregular migrants then became securitized (Kostakopoulou 2000; Guild 2009) and most recently considered to be a threat to ‘our European way of life’ (von der Leyen 2019).

Threat and danger, however—unlike real human beings—can be governed and managed through various preventive measures.

The most recent effect of such a management-based approach to irregular migration in the EU is the crisis in the refugee camps in the Greek islands as a result of the EU–Turkey agreement. The official reason for the agreement was to end irregular migration from Turkey to the EU by breaking up ‘the business model of the smugglers and to offer migrants an alternative to putting their lives at risk’ (European Council 2016). In the agreement, the management of arrivals was in principle based on the fulfilment of the refugee criteria: all irregular migrants arriving in Greece from Turkey who did not fulfil these criteria would be returned, and genuine refugees would be brought instead, based on the UN criteria of vulnerability (European Council 2016). The agreement was signed, disregarding the human rights situation in Turkey. In addition, the agreement was broken in March 2020 by President Erdogan who ‘opened doors’ to the EU, leading Greece to close its border with Turkey (The Guardian 2020a) in violation of its international legal obligations. In practice, the deal, in combination with legal changes in Greece (Law No. 4375) as well as insufficient material conditions and lack of expert staff (European Court of Auditors 2017), effectively limited the asylum seekers’ rights—in particular their access to a fair refugee procedure in Greece—or resulted in returns to Turkey (Amnesty International 2017). The deal also resulted in a humanitarian crisis in the camps on Greek islands, the culmination of which was the fire in the overcrowded Moria camp, which held 12,000 refugees despite its 3000 persons’ capacity (Médecins Sans Frontiers 2020).

The prognoses for the governance of migration in the future, in the context of climate change, point toward an intensification of the current approach of the management of threat rather than the protection of human rights (Bettini 2013: 68). According to Bettini, the current discourse on climate-related migration emphasizes the inevitability and apocalyptic proportions of such migration, in light of which, the basic focus on human rights protection does not seem proportional. Existing studies often do not take into consideration that any possible climate-related migration will depend not only on the changes in the natural environment

of migrants' home countries, but also on the responses of the authorities (and to reactions to these changed responses) that might even limit the scope of migration with the effective programmes of early warnings, social and economic support, and overall preparedness. However, the dominant discourses that induce fear by painting a picture of an unstoppable flood of migration can cause the introduction of hasty or non-democratic solutions, and can also lead to denial or paralysis, or even to reactive behaviour. In consequence, climate migration may be treated as Business-As-Usual (Bettini 2013: 68), mobilizing similarly exclusionary and unsustainable responses as those introduced so far.

### **Roma Minority in Finland**

The situation of the Roma peoples in Finland demonstrates another situated case study of exclusion and inequality. It illustrates what Lukes (2005) called invisible power. Invisibility here means that power takes such forms that it does not need to be openly executed but is hidden in the structures of society and influences people's self-perception and strategies (Bourdieu 1977). The term 'discrimination' here would distract from the situation where there is no obvious intent to discriminate. The act of discrimination is so tightly built into normal thinking and behaviour that people may not be aware of it. That is how exclusion works and how inequality is created, and their impact on a sustainable future for all human beings is significant.

In order to understand the situation of Roma peoples today, one must understand the length and severity of racism against Roma people, which could be compared to the experiences of people of colour in the USA (Tervonen et al. 2005). According to historical records, Roma immigrated through Sweden and the Baltic countries to Finland around 500 years ago. The history of discrimination against Roma in the Kingdom of Sweden, to which Finland belonged until 1809, is long: up until the 1750s, Roma who were found loitering could be hanged, and they could be convicted merely on the grounds of leading a nomadic lifestyle. The period

when Finland was a Grand Duchy of Russia was characterized by strong assimilation efforts directed at all the different nationalities residing in Finland, including Roma (Pulma 2006: 460). According to Camilla Nordberg (2007: 57), Roma were considered to be not only a social problem but also a national problem: their language and culture were foreign. The oldest organization serving Roma, Romano Missio, was founded as early as 1906 by non-Roma to 'help and guide Roma people' toward assimilation.

When Finland became independent in 1917, all population groups became Finnish citizens, including all Roma people who resided in the country. Various efforts were undertaken to assimilate the Roma population (through educating Roma to give up their 'curious habits' and 'become normal') (Komiteamietintö 1900: 3); for example, children were taken into custody to learn a Finnish lifestyle. The effects were paradoxical: the Roma became an even more closed community. Research conducted on Roma was undertaken mainly by non-Roma and all the expertise guiding the efforts to domesticate 'the wild Roma' ignored the knowledge of the Roma people themselves. An Advisory Board on Gypsy Issues (later Advisory Board for Roma) was established in 1956, which also including several persons of Roma background. From its beginning, its working agenda was clearly defined from a majority perspective (Söderman 2006: 11). After World War II, the socio-economic situation of Roma was poor: their housing and educational rights in particular were non-existent (Pulma 2006). Organizations were founded to improve the living conditions of Roma but without paying heed to their actual needs.

Since the 1970s there has been a shift in Roma politics, and Roma have become more involved in Roma organizations and in different state committees, which have tried to 'solve the Roma problem' (Toivanen 2020). Various efforts have been undertaken first to force and then to persuade the Roma to send their children to school and keep them there. Particularly in the field of housing, there have been programmes since the 1970s to guarantee equal housing rights to Roma people and also to address their cultural needs. Despite their own participation, Roma as a people have

remained on the margins of Finnish society, their existence entangled with exclusion, low education, cultural change and alienation (Helakorpi and Stenroos, forthcoming).

The Roma are recognized as a language minority in the Finnish Constitution (1999/731: Article 17) together with the Sámi and other language minorities as one of the groups to be protected under the minority rights clauses. Finland has acknowledged the status of Roma as a national minority—for example, in the explanation to the Framework Convention on National Minorities (Council of Europe 1995; Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2010). The Roma are represented in the governmental structures through the Advisory Body for Roma Affairs (RONK) and have their own centre at the National Board for Education for Roma education matters. Still, the RONK can be regarded as an organization that is motivated by majority interests to get Roma representation ‘settled’, to find a body ‘to talk to’ (Toivanen 2015). In addition, several Roma NGOs are active in different societal and cultural fields in Finland, especially those motivated by religious grounds. The policies on Roma issues underline the need to reach *similar standards* as the majority population has; they claim *sameness* rights, rights for equal opportunity.

The Finnish majority rules over the framework and premises for minorities’ identity claims, and sets the limits regarding what they can ask for (Toivanen 2015). There is a profound discrepancy between what the Finnish government says it is doing in the field of minority rights and the reality of how these groups are treated. Regardless of all the educational programmes, which have been in place since the 1970s, the marginalization of Roma has not diminished. A study on the education of Roma children in Finland concluded that, despite positive progress in the past years, the Roma still skip preschool education, are placed in special education or drop out of school more often than average pupils (Opetushallitus 2011).

Insults and verbal abuse in public places often target people who are considered different from the majority population, including Roma people. According to a survey on hate speech and harassment by the Finnish Ministry of Justice (2016), Roma respondents

said that they face discriminatory attitudes and insults when interacting with officials—for example, in the social services. The respondents also experienced being baselessly followed or stopped by security guards when shopping, which they found to be humiliating and fostered mistrust toward officials (Finnish Ministry of Justice report, 2016/7). According to a study by the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman, over 53 percent of the Roma respondents have experienced discrimination within the past five years while seeking employment. The study indicates that Roma women face more discrimination than men, and some participants felt that one reason for this might be the traditional dresses worn by the women. Besides being subjected to continuous discrimination in the streets, the prejudices of the majority population and the weaker economic position of the Roma make it hard for them to find accommodation as well. This applies to both the private housing market as well as the housing offered by the state or the city. Almost 49 percent of the respondents say they have been discriminated against based on their ethnicity when applying for a state-supported apartment, whereas the figure is 54.7 percent in the private housing market (Finnish Non-Discrimination Ombudsman 2014).

Why the Finnish Roma people have remained so marginalized is often explained by cultural distinction and strangeness. The Finnish public narrative is that Roma want to keep to themselves. It is certainly true that the Roma have ‘kept to themselves,’ but less due to cultural reasons. Finnish policies have been highly ambiguous: on the one side, there are policies that strive for equal opportunity and cultural neutrality but also, on the other, policies stressing the cultural difference of Roma, explaining how and why they have to be treated differently in day-care, school, or the workplace. Either way, the Roma have been only marginally a part of revising the policies (see Stenroos 2020).

In 1991, Charles Tilly posed a question that many others have kept asking for years before and after: Why do subordinates comply, why do they not continually resist? (Tilly 1991). Why would, for example, the Roma people accept the amount of

discrimination against them without taking to the streets and protesting against the injustices? Why do they not make both the out-group and in-group discrimination public? Steven Lukes (1974/2005) commented that people may not know their 'true interests'. This is what Lukes has called the third dimension of power, which is the power 'to prevent people, to what-ever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things' (Lukes 1974/2005: 24). The 'real interests' of minorities such as the Finnish Roma remain untouched in state politics. Recognizing their needs and guaranteeing them rights to both equality and difference is ever-more difficult when the only places to be politically active are official bodies, with persons who are quite assimilated to 'Finnish thinking' (Toivanen 2010). If the answer to the problems of exclusion and inequality is that there should be more minority participation, then the participation cannot be defined from the majority's hegemonic perspective (Toivanen 2010). A sustainable future for all requires a careful analysis of whose interests guide society.

## Conclusions

The examples presented above illustrate the two aspects of inequality and exclusion: visible and hidden acts of exclusion and discrimination. Whereas exclusion from human rights of irregular migrants and asylum seekers is often discernible, exclusion can also remain hidden in the very grain of society's structure in a manner that makes it almost impossible to study and change, such as in the case of the Roma in Finland. Accounting for and countering inequalities and exclusions poses one of the greatest challenges of today and remains at the core of sustainability science. In particular, political, economic, social, and cultural forms of exclusion, as illustrated in the discussed examples, constitutes an effective obstacle for implementation of Sustainable Development Goals.

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