

Report of the Conference

The condition of Roma Precarity:

Is there future for “good practices”?



Organized by Justitia et Pax in The Hague, November 22, 2012




SASTIPEN

The conference organized by Justitia et Pax on Thursday November 22, 2012 was a part of a project called “Fighting the traditional and new anti-Roma stereotypes”, subsidised by the European Union and organised in cooperation with Roma-organisations from Bulgaria (Centre for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance Amalipe), and Romania (Roma Centre for Health Clinics Sastipen).

Introduction

The Roma are, estimated to comprise of 12 million persons, the biggest minority of Europe. They live in Romania, Bulgaria and the former USSR, but also all over Europe and of course in the Netherlands. Estimates of the number of Roma (and Sinti) in the Netherlands vary from around a few thousand to forty thousand. Discrimination and poverty are great problems for the Roma community. They barely have access to health care, education and adequate housing.

According to the Euro barometer Study (2008) the Netherlands is one of the three countries where higher than average proportions of respondents claim to have witnessed ethnic discrimination, and think that this is widespread in their country. Unlike Bulgaria and Romania where Roma have been living for centuries, in the Netherlands most of Roma are migrants and therefore experience all additional negative stereotypes assigned to migrants. In the Netherlands, where the rule of law, democracy and respect for fundamental rights are honored, often the Roma migrants have difficulty with regulation of their documents which is preventing them from using the same state of public services and from enjoying dignity and respect for their rights as the rest of the population.

According to the Roma in the Netherlands, this is principally due to their status of statelessness, or more often of “nationality unknown” status; many Roma do not possess a passport or even a residence permit, and are not being considered as citizens by the Dutch authorities. This means that they cannot fully participate in society and politics, creating a feeling of being ignored and left behind by the authorities. This often drags them into conflicts with local authorities, and contributes to the creation of distrust of Roma by the local communities and vice versa. In the Netherlands, a relative small group of Roma is in this poignant situation. Some families have been stateless for generations.

Word of welcome by Victor Scheffers, Director of Justitia et Pax

“I am greeting our guests from Romania and Bulgaria and I am especially happy to see old friends from Amalipe with whom we worked on a series of projects on social cohesion and diversity following the Council of Europe guidance. We worked together with Roma organizations in preparation for and during the World Conference against Racism and Xenophobia in Durban in 2001 where Roma managed to put their struggle for emancipation on the world agenda.

In the Mumbai Social Forum 2004 we invited Valeriu Nicolae, at that time director of the European Roma Information Office ERIO in Brussels, to share experiences in international lobby and advocacy with the Adivasi minority group. To let them see on the example of Roma how to put their striving on the international agenda.

This is to inform our Dutch audience about the origin of our collaboration. We, as Justitia et Pax Netherlands, are not a Roma organization.

We are a human rights organization which works on invitation of partners worldwide to assist



them in lobby and advocacy. We work on human rights and social justice at grass root level and international level as well with a wide range of partners. Minority rights is one of the themes that naturally falls in our realm of work.

Almost three years ago in Amsterdam we participated in a network organized by Doctors of the World about statelessness of Roma in the Netherlands. We were interested in the issue because it is an unresolved issue of human rights and social justice in our front yard. When the invitation from Amalipe --to join them as partner in a European project-- came along, we accepted and contributed by bringing in the issue of statelessness in the Netherlands. Since this issue is rather controversial in our country and was not very clear to us, we did a survey of all research already done on statelessness, in order to prepare an advocacy paper.

This paper we used as a starting point in a dialogue we are supporting between Roma network in the Netherlands and the decision makers in the Dutch Government. We believe in dialogue as the best instrument for policy influence. Saying that, it is important to mention to our foreign guests that the Netherlands does not have a “national Roma policy”. There is no ethnic registration in the Netherlands, which is understandable, since the consequences of such registration during the holocaust are very well known. Policies on welfare, education or health are made in the ministries but implemented by the municipalities. Municipalities have the liberty to create specific policies and to include specific target groups into various programs. If the Roma groups happen to be residing in the given municipalities and happen to need special policies for access to services, then they get included in various local programs.

This conference is about good practices and each of our organizations will present its own practices. This will lead us into a debate which refers to all good practices mentioned, not only our work on statelessness.

I hope that you will be inspired by the good practices, and that today’s discussion will contribute to our efforts to fight Roma stereotypes in our respective countries. Have an inspired meeting!”

Presentations

[Teodora Krumova](#) from Amalipe, Bulgaria introduced the project. Afterwards the three organizations: [Justitia et Pax Netherlands](#), “[Sastipen](#)” from Romania and “[Amalipe](#)” from Bulgaria presented the outcome of the project: the good practices for combating Roma discrimination in each respective context. More precisely overcoming the gap between the policies of State and local authorities towards Roma and the strivings for emancipation of the Roma community itself. Michelle Mila van Burik from [Dutch Institute for Roma Integration](#) and Orhan Galjus from [Radio Patrin](#) presented their projects in the Netherlands as good practices. Jagoda Paukovic, project coordinator from Justitia et Pax Netherlands presented the advocacy paper based on the research on statelessness. Justitia et Pax conducted a survey of all research recently done on the effect of statelessness on the group of Roma *de facto* stateless. The main question was if, indeed, this is the greatest obstacle towards their integration and full participation in society. Moreover, together with the Dutch Institute for Roma Integration, we have analysed what can be done in order to improve their situation and we are happy that we could present some positive results.



The recommendation that came out of this survey is that statelessness issue is not legally clearly described and its implementation is not transparent. In order to correct discrepancies a political decision is necessary. The dossiers should be dealt with individually by the Dutch



administration. It is only through intensive legal individual and legal counselling, and the benevolent attitude of the administration that (judicial) integration can be successful. Justice and Peace has through its research contributed in a positive way to this dialogue in the Netherlands.

Debate

The presentations were followed by the debate: “Why are the best practices so difficult to be transferred into sustainable policies?”

The main conclusion of the debate was that it is crucial to underline the importance of a dialogue between Roma organizations and governmental authorities. It is not only important to listen to each other’s arguments, but also that “both” parties consult each other in the creation of governmental policy and its implementation. It was also concluded that the Roma organizations have to act in network and address the authorities with the questions on specific issues that they regard as being of great concern. The policy makers to be contacted by the Roma spoke persons vary according to the issues which need to be addressed. Therefore it is not a question of two fronts, but rather of an integrated, open minded dialogue that leads to satisfying and sustainable solutions. Sustainability of good practices lies in the synergy of efforts made by the governmental authorities and Roma self-organizations together. Deyan Kolev from Amalipe summarized sustainability in a metaphor: “for flying a bird needs two wings – one is Roma civil society organizations and the other wing are governmental structures.”



The rest of the program for the delegations

Within the framework of the project: To Touch the Untouchable: combating traditional and new anti-Roma stereotypes”, financed by the European Commission within the Fundamental rights and citizenship Program, Justitia et Pax Netherlands has organized a four day program (from November 20 to November 23, 2012) for the delegations from Romania and Bulgaria. The objective of this program is to exchange on practices and policies on Roma in three respective countries.

Sastipen delegation consisted of Daniel Radulescu, President of Sastipen; George Radulescu, Program Coordinator; and Daniel Raducanu, Councillor of the Neamt Prefecture in Romania.

Amalipe delegation consisted of Deyan Kolev, President of Amalipe; Teodora Krumova, Project coordinator; and Gergana Daskalova, project administrator. In addition Amalipe delegation consisted of government policy makers from various sectors (health, social sector and education): Dafinka Samardjieva, Luba Pavlova, Milka Mihailova, Pepa Kaloyanova, Plamenka Angelova, and Roumyana Torosyan.

On Tuesday November 20, Sastipen delegation accompanied by Justitia et Pax staff visited [Trimbos Institute](#) in Utrecht where they exchange their practices on their health programs. The exchange went especially on models of work with drug users and disadvantaged youth

which both organizations work on. Ms. Ionela Petrea presented the Trimbos Institute and its very diverse program. Ms. Martha de Jonge, Scientific Expert on psychological health of the youth, presented her work with youth in the Netherlands and especially her research on Roma early marriages. Both Sastipen and Trimbos concluded to continue their contact and explore the possibilities for future cooperation.

On Wednesday November 21, Amalipe Delegation and Sastipen Delegation accompanied by Justitia et Pax staff and Michelle Mila van Burik, President of the Dutch Institute for Roma Integration, and Orhan Galjus, Director of Patrin Radio, visited the [Municipality of Utrecht](#). Ms. Marja Manders, Senior Policy Advisor and Project leader for Social Development

received the delegation and explained the policies that the Dutch municipalities have in relation to the excluded groups, like Roma. The important message that the delegation received is that there is no ethnic policy in the Netherlands and that the municipalities are free to develop the policy as creative as possible to meet the needs in each respective municipality. Policies are made according to issues and not according to groups. To meet the needs of Roma families in need of specific support, the so called “multi problems”



families, the municipality engages NGOs for service providing. Municipalities do not provide services themselves directly. Services are outsourced to the specialized ngo's which can provide tailor made programs for people such as some Roma families which have problems with full participation in Dutch society. In this way the Dutch policy is very different from the ones of Bulgaria and Romania where the municipalities are also service providers to the Roma communities and where there are specific Roma policies.

After the meeting with the Utrecht Municipality the delegation visited [Stade Foundation](#) which is financed by the municipality to provide tailor made support programs for the Roma families and children with problems with school attendance. Among other, Stade offers integrated mediation programs. MS. Kim ter Beke and Ms. Marga Veenstra prepared a presentation of the history of their institute's' involvement with Roma community living on the territory of the Utrecht Municipality and various kind of support which they offer. The support is mainly in relation of integrating Roma children in the mainstream education and supporting them to finish their compulsory education and beyond. The method consists of including mothers and children in taking interest in school and participate in school activities.

On Friday November 23 the delegation visited the [Anne Frank Foundation](#). Jan Erik Dubbelman presented various educational programs which Anne Frank Foundation developed for awareness building about discrimination and xenophobia. They presented the program which they developed with Roma in various Balkan countries. Their work with the youth was of special interest of Amalipe and they agreed to contact each other about possible cooperation. Ms. Karen Polak presented the special program on Roma Holocaust. After the presentation the delegation visited the Anne Frank House Museum.

In the evening Amalipe President Deyan Kolev gave a live interview for Radio Patrin about their work and the participation in the Conference in the Hague and the visit to the Netherlands.