

Preventing and tackling bullying – good practice and policy

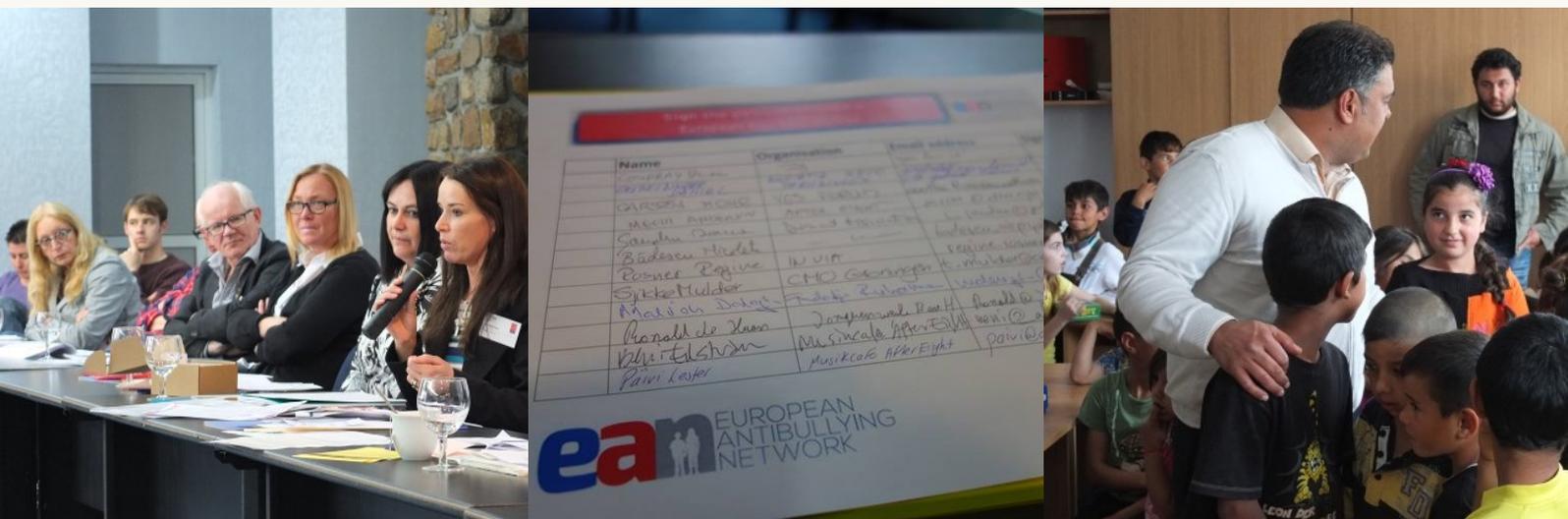
12 – 14 May 2014, Oradea, Romania

Report

Bullying as a highly prevalent phenomenon in the everyday life of many young people across Europe can have harmful effects on young people's development. Recent research shows that the effects of bullying in childhood may also last long into adulthood, depending on how victims deal with the trauma. Hence it is important to raise awareness among young people, parents, teachers and youth workers and to share good practice on prevention and intervention.

This conference "Preventing and tackling bullying among young people – good practice and policy" brought together 50 practitioners, NGOs and young people to share their experience on effective prevention strategies and approaches to prevent bullying behaviour and to promote inclusive strategies. The conference put a special focus on the complex topic of young Roma in Romania. The aim was to look at barriers to inclusion from the point of view of different stakeholders and also to highlight some enablers to help people overcome them. Furthermore the event strongly promoted the founding of the European Antibullying network and the campaign to establish a European Anti-bullying Day.

On the following pages you can read a summary of presentations given at the conference as well as a review of the field visit.



Summary of presentations

Bullying and social exclusion of young people in Romania - Ioana Sandru, Asociatia DIRECT

Ioana Sandru started with a video made by students, followed by an insight on bullying from her PhD. Bullying is a multidimensional phenomenon affecting many aspects of the social life. It can be spotted all around us in everyday life and it can be physical, verbal, social, and emotional. Bullying cannot be fitted within the limits of a normal peer conflict as it presents a power imbalance. Ioana stressed the importance of research on the phenomenon of bullying in Romania, as there is a lack of valid studies to analyse and describe the situation among young people.

To correct such a pervasive societal phenomenon often overlooked and misinterpreted as mere peer quarrel, a comprehensive approach is necessary, with the inclusion of all parties. In the prevention phase it is important to work with the parents. Throughout, a crucial role is held by teachers; the fact that most of them are not familiar with the concept or deny that bullying exists in their classrooms is worrisome. Thus Ioana stressed the need for increased awareness and education to prevent bullying in society.

Ways of addressing discrimination against Roma people - Salomea Popoviciu, Lecturer at Emanuel University of Oradea

Salomea Popoviciu started with a scene from the 'Chocolate' film, with which she illustrated three common discursive resources about Roma ethnics. She further developed and exemplified in an engaging and scientific-based manner each of the three: 'ideology of moral exclusion', 'the white man's burden' (gatekeeper of education and moral values), and 'difference as boundary'.

Her research on contextualizing the image of the Romanian Roma revealed that studies on the Roma community, published in academic journals, focused to a great extent on inadequate parenting practices, discrimination, lack of education, and school participation. The picture painted by academic literature is saturated with negative connotations, portraying the Romanian Roma as people with a criminal predisposition, unwilling to integrate in the society, among others. Moreover, she presented two rather disturbing examples of hate speech towards Roma from the Romanian on-line community.



Although in the so-called WEIRD (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic) countries, political correctness deters hate speech as violent as in the Romanian examples, 'new racism' reveals that discourse about Roma ethnics is more extreme if not taken at face value. Research has shown that majority group members who attempt to express negative views against minority groups are careful to construct and present these views in such a way that their public image remains intact. That can be achieved by positioning prejudiced talk within commonly accepted discourses, like meritocracy.

Finally, Salomea pointed out what works against discrimination. She mentioned measures that promote well-being and inclusion, and also corrective measures that prevent exclusion. But in order to have the desired impact, there needs to be a group of motivated individuals that advocate for change.

History and culture of Roma people. The situation of young Roma in Romania - Ionel Cordovan, Romani language teacher in Ineu

Ionel Cordovan started with a couple of the questions he aimed to answer during his presentation: who are the Roma people and how did they get to Europe? Despite some initial erroneous theories placing Roma people in Egypt or as descendants of Cain or Ham, son of Noah, finally it was discovered that they originated in India, wherefrom several migration waves started in the 3rd century.

The etymology of the words 'zigeuner', 'tzigan', 'tigan', 'zingari' is not certain, but it is assumed to originate from the Greek 'athinganoi', meaning '(the) untouchables'. As these words do not exist in the Romani language, they identify themselves as 'rrom', coming from 'dom', which means a simple man from community.



In Romania, the first documentation of Roma presence dates back to the 14th century. Until their liberation in 1856, Roma people lived in slavery and they could not leave the property of their owners (the boyars and orthodox monasteries). During this period they were not able to develop or to create a better life for themselves as they did not benefit from education, among other shortcomings. Moreover, Roma slaves were settled in the outskirts of towns and villages, segregation which continued after the abolition of slavery, thus maintaining or even increasing their marginalisation. Another hit to the Roma population came during the Holocaust.

Starting with 1959 several Roma intellectuals started international-level collaboration and several organisations were founded. The most important one was created in 1978, the International Romani Union, actively fighting for the rights of the Roma people. There were established an International Roma Day, a Roma hymn and flag. Also, the self-appellation of "Roma" rather than gypsy was adopted and a standardised international alphabet of Romani language with Latin characters.

In the traditional Roma family the man, as the head of the family, takes all the important decisions with the advice of the elders, whom are highly respected. While the women have a lower status, the children are valued.

Ionel Cordovan ended with two remarks: firstly, the future well-being of the Roma population is highly dependent on education. Secondly, an informed understanding of the Roma people is necessary in order draw pertinent conclusions and be able to provide adequate assistance.

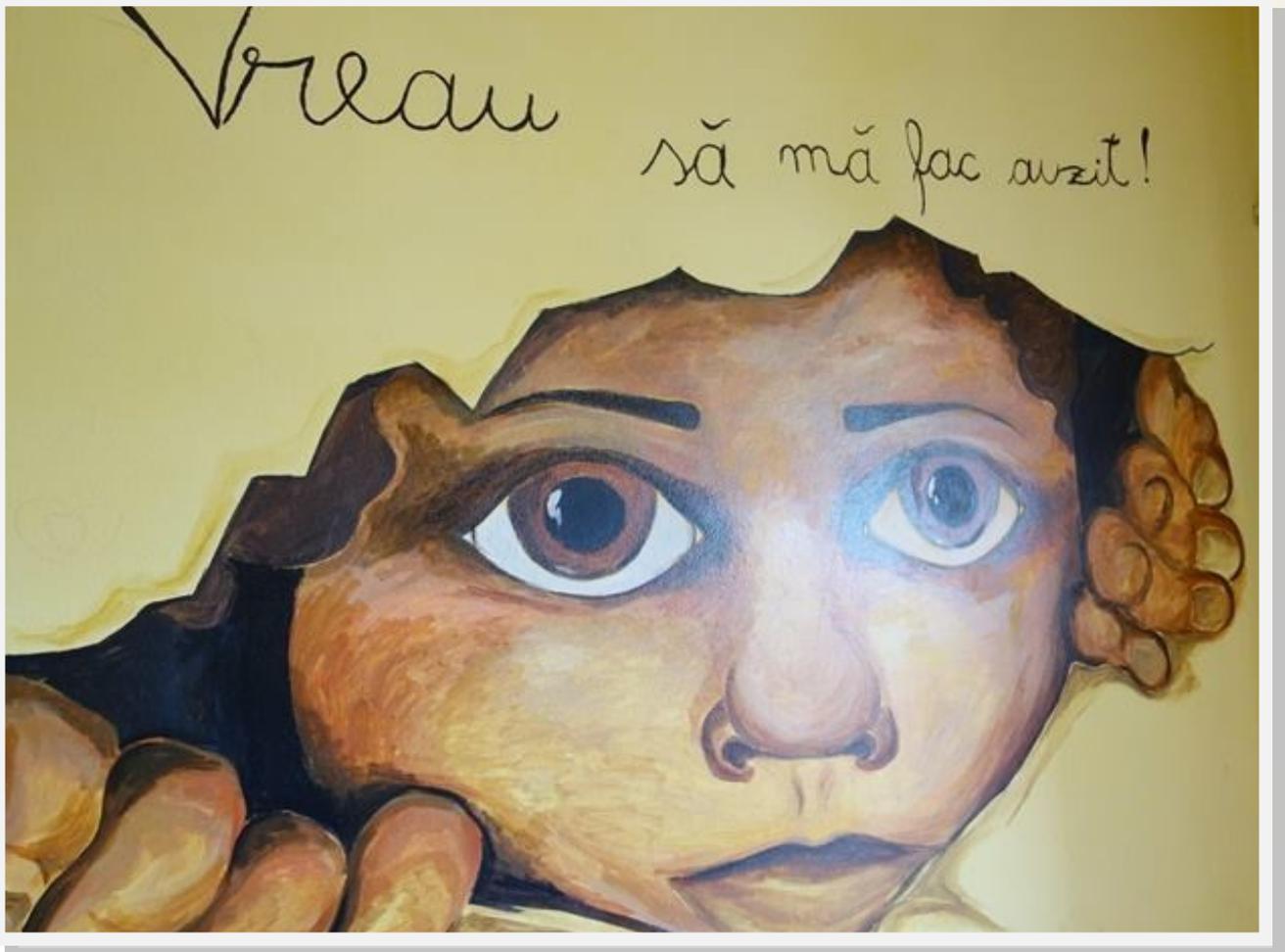
Introduction of good practice of Ruhama Foundation - Marian Daragiu, Ruhama Foundation and field trip

Marian Daragiu spoke about the progress made in the last 6 years, in the Roma community in Telechiu, which a World Bank research placed 2nd amongst the most deprived Roma settlements in Romania.

He showed photos from the time when the community did not have drinking and washing water, proper houses or electricity. During the field trip to the community, the members of YES Forum were able to see the progress made, as now most of the families have brick houses with electricity and some even with running water.

Furthermore he emphasised the need to gain the trust of the community in order to have a fruitful collaboration, offering some anecdotes from when Ruhama foundation first started working in Telechiu.

During the field trip, the members have visited the community centre built in the middle of the settlement, and were presented the various programmes involving the children and mothers. In different ways, the projects aim to increase school attendance of Roma children. It was encouraging to find out that the ones whose mothers were involved in a project have a higher school attendance, and that in fact all the projects have a successful track record.



"I want to make myself heard!"

'Anti-bullying to raise awareness of and provide solutions to bullying behaviour – empowerment of young people, parents and professionals working with young people'

During the last day of the conference, 3 young Roma presented their stories as part of the panel. Also, Elisabeth Hartl from Caritas Graz presented the donor's point of view.

The three youngsters talked about the discrimination faced because of their ethnicity, the challenges they had to overcome, but also the factors that helped them get to university.

Being discriminated against and bullied by some of her teachers and classmates affected Mona Stănescu's self-confidence and her interest in school slowly waned. Moda Monica mentioned as well being refused the entitled recognition in school because she is Roma. In all this time, their parents had a crucial role, either in restoring the shattered self-confidence or encouraging and helping them to continue their studies at university level. Mona is currently a student in the social work department at Emanuel University in Oradea and at the political science faculty at Oradea University, and Monica is a law student at Oradea University.



Joszeff Varga emphasised the role of his parents as well. He also mentioned that without a tutoring project for Roma youth wishing to go to medical school and the university tuition-free spots for Roma, he would not have been able to become a medical student at Oradea University.

They are all the first in their families to continue their studies so far, and feel very happy and proud to be role models for younger Roma children in their families and communities.

Elisabeth Hartl from Caritas Graz confirmed the necessity of role models for young Roma. She also mentioned that although education is essential in improving the situation of Roma people, a comprehensive approach is needed in order to make a real change. As Roma people lack the professional network the majority population has, just graduating is not enough to get them a job. Moreover, there is always the danger of being discriminated.

Besides the crucial role parents have, she mentioned that the role teachers, other students, and parents of the majority children hold are also very important. Involving the non-Roma community, having positive legislation, and eliminating segregation proved to have positive effects.

