

European Association for Education of Adults: EAEA Newsletter¹

Norway: Room for Roma learning, January 2010

Through the ages Roma have been known as gypsies. Now they would prefer to be called Roma. In Norway there are no more than around 500. Only a few have completed a lower secondary level education, and none have had any formal education beyond that. They now want to start learning to enable them to cope better in society.

If you read the papers in Norway, you can easily get the impression that there are often big disagreements and eternal conflicts between the various family clans within the Roma people. And to a certain extent this is true enough. Gypsies, or Roma as they now prefer to be called, are a colourful and emotionally charged people. They are in a difficult situation, as they want to preserve their distinctive quality, but at the same time be part of the wider community. In other words they are facing considerable challenges. Their needs are particularly high when it comes to formal and structural education.

Travelling people

Roma are also called the travelling people, and are a people without a country. They generally set out on their travels every year. In recent times it has become increasingly difficult for them to do this in practice. They meet resistance and bad feeling wherever they go and in many places they are refused entry to camp sites. They generally travel in groups of 25 - 30 and everyone in these groups is closely related. When they are on the move, the group's leader ensures that everyone receives a specific task. Responsibility for the children's education while they are out travelling would be one such task. Often it is the same people who

¹ Uz dozvolu Evropske asocijacije za obrazovanje odraslih – EAEA, časopis donosi izbor tekstova iz „EAEA Newsletter“.

are given these tasks year after year and as such they act as teachers within their environment.

Travelling is a very important part of their culture. On these travels they engage in trade to earn money. They form networks and it's how many young people meet their partners. They are also very preoccupied with religion and many of their meetings are closely connected with religious events.

There are two Roma organisations in Norway. Andreas Muller is 50 years old, and the vice-president of one of them; Norsk Romforening, the Norwegian Roma Association. We meet him at home with his wife, Marina, and his youngest daughter, Jamaica. He is friendly and obliging and is more than willing to talk about the Roma people's relationship with learning. It seems there isn't much to write home about:

Learning

"We have to start learning now", says Andreas. "It is difficult to be part of a modern society without being able to read and write. Many would like to get proper jobs, but it's not easy if you can't read or write. Like most other people, we want to be independent and have our own income. We want to own our own homes like everyone else. Not least we sorely need to know how to go about starting and running ordinary businesses in Norway. It's really important for us to deal with this, something needs to be done urgently about the level of education in our people," he says seriously. "Most Roma nowadays receive benefits from the state. When you have lived on benefits for a while, there is always a risk of not getting out of this system. We become social slaves," says Andreas. "It can't go on like that", he stresses.

Informal skills

Although they don't have any form of education to speak of, there's a lot they can do. When they are travelling around, they are involved in various forms of trade. For example they sell rugs and they sharpen knives and other tools. Roma women also sell their fortune telling services. They are therefore good at practical mental arithmetic. But if you give them a piece of paper and ask whether they can work out the same calculations on paper, they can't manage it.

The skills they possess are nurtured and passed on to coming generations, as they always have been. This may be through practical examples, through songs and music, and not least through stories.

Government training scheme

The City of Oslo started a training project for adult Roma supported by state funding in October 2007. The project leader, social anthropologist Cecilie Skjerdal, is using alternative educational methods in order to get away from the previous “clientification” of this racial group. The aim is to set up an educational scheme which will help this minority create respect for their traditions and bring its people and culture to the fore in a modern context.

In other words it’s a specifically designed educational scheme. The scheme is completely voluntary and is not linked to any form of quid pro quo. The participants meet a teacher who is used to working with illiterate people or people who are functionally illiterate. The target group is primarily young people, possibly with children of their own in primary and lower secondary school education. The scheme has been developed in collaboration with the Roma’s own organisations in Norway.

A steering group under the City of Oslo’s Department of Cultural Affairs and Education is supervising the process. They also support schools which have pupils with a Roma background. The adult education project for Roma is intended to be a complementary scheme. In the long term it is hoped that if parents have basic skills it will improve the ability of children in primary and lower secondary education to achieve. The action taken by the City of Oslo demonstrates the public commitment to helping maintain the Roma culture as a minority in Norway.

Europe to fight poverty and social exclusion (EY2010), January 2010

2010 is the European Year of combating poverty and social inclusion. You can take part in this! Almost 80 million Europeans live at risk of poverty, which means they face insecurity, and go without what most people often take for granted.

Living in poverty may result in a variety of problems, from not having enough money to spend on food and clothes to suffering poor housing conditions and even homelessness. Poverty also means having to cope with limited lifestyle choices that may lead to social exclusion.

Inspired by its founding principle of solidarity, the European Union has joined forces with its Member States to make 2010 the European Year For Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. The key objectives are to raise public awareness about these issues and renew the political commitment of the EU and its Member States to combat poverty and social exclusion.

The guiding principle of the 2010 Year is to give voice to the concerns of people who have to live with poverty and social exclusion, and to inspire every European citizen and other stakeholders to engage with these important issues.

This Year also aims to challenge stereotypes and collective perceptions of poverty. By harnessing the EU's principles of solidarity and partnership, 2010 represents a clarion call to tackle the causes of poverty head-on in a bid to ensure everyone can play a full and active role in society.

Civil society organisations and social partners will join participating countries and the European Commission to run a series of activities throughout 2010.

Two European-level conferences will take place in January and December; an art initiative will build a bridge between people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and the creative world; while special training days will give the media and decision-makers fresh insight into these complex subjects.

National and local events will take place in every EU Member State, plus Norway and Iceland. Activities will include awareness raising campaigns, workshops and information seminars in schools. Films, magazines and other information material will be produced to help people understand how poverty and social exclusion affect their communities, and for those directly affected, increase awareness of their rights.

Along with public figures, people who have experienced poverty will act as campaign ambassadors, which will help to raise visibility and credibility for the Year's activities and invite others to get involved.

Participation through volunteering (Europa.eu), February 2010

EU Conference „participation through volunteering“ December 16 2009. Conclusions of the panel debate

The European Year 2011 is a political initiative of the European Commission responding to a strong will of European civil society organizations to highlight a very significant potential volunteering represents as well as to mark the 10th anniversary of the International Year of Volunteering organized by the United Nations in 2001. The European Year will raise awareness of the importance of volunteering, promote recognition of volunteers, support debate and exchange of practices in order to improve the policy framework of volunteering and create better conditions for voluntary activities in the EU.

The EU conference „participation through volunteering“, that took place last 16 December 2009, provided an opportunity to debate the issue of civic participation through volunteering and the difference it can make in Europe. This

conference, which brought together practitioners, policy makers and academics, marked the beginning of the mobilization of citizens towards the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship 2011.

The panel debate was composed of Dame Elisabeth Hoodless (President of Volunteering in Europe), Ms Mary Davis (Chair of the task force on Active citizenship and managing director Special Olympics Europe/Asia), Ms Eva Hambach (president of the European Volunteer Centre), Mr Janusz Marszalek (President of the town twinning group of the Council of European municipalities and regions and mayor of Oswiecim), Mr Charles Duff (Chief operating officer, Coffey International Development) and Ms Lesley Hustinx (researcher at the Catholic University of Leuven). The panel was chaired by Mr. Pierre Mairesse (Director for Youth, Culture and Citizenship, Directorate-General Education and Culture, European Commission).

Conclusions drawn from the panel debate on volunteering and the European Year of Volunteering 2011

1. The first characteristic of volunteering is its universal applicability, free of discrimination. It contributes to the personal fulfilment and dignity of volunteers. Volunteering is a 'win-win' activity, benefiting the volunteer and enhancing solidarity in society, social inclusion and mutual understanding between cultures and generations.
2. Volunteering is a unique, varied and complex human activity that needs to be better known and analysed. The rich diversity of volunteering in Europe should not be jeopardised, nor should it hamper the full appreciation of volunteering.
3. Volunteering is entirely in line with the values of the European Union, such as solidarity, social cohesion, peace,...
4. It would be useful to measure the social and economic impact of volunteering on European society, in terms of GDP and general well-being.
5. Volunteering has changed significantly in recent years but should not become a substitute for paid work just like civil society cannot substitute the public authorities. The European Year of Volunteering should provide an opportunity to reflect on the line between these two concepts.
6. Volunteering has an educational role and is a modern tool for the acquisition of certain skills and experiences required in the job market.

7. Numerous obstacles to volunteering remain in European society and should be the focus of more attention during the European Year of Volunteering.
8. In a complex society, long unable to solve certain problems, the time has come to privilege partnerships between public authorities (local, regional, national, European), civil society and the private sector.
9. The European Union can provide added value by bringing together civil society stakeholders active in volunteering while supporting the networking of these associations and platforms.
10. The European Year of Volunteering should have long-term impact on European and national policies which can directly or indirectly promote (or sometimes hinder) voluntary engagement and on European programmes for citizens.

Some concrete proposals from civil society:

1. Designation of monthly themes;
2. Support for research on volunteering;
3. Meetings between business and volunteers (marketplace model);
4. Organisation of a competition to find the 'best' volunteers;
5. Development of a model of volunteering within the European Institutions;
6. Creation of synergies with the United Nations;
7. Use of local radio networks and local networks;

EAEA responds to the EU2020 paper, February 2010

The suggested EU strategy outline for the coming decade has been on a wide round of consultation. EAEA has contributed its statement on the paper.

The EAEA supports the priorities identified in the paper, including basic growth, opportunity and social cohesion on knowledge and innovation; empowering people in inclusive societies through the acquisition of new skills and the fostering of creativity and innovation; and a more efficient consumption on non-renewable energy and resources to meet environmental goals.

If this ambitious plan is to be successful, there are some key issues that needs to be addressed. EAEA suggests a few of them in its statement (see at: http://www.eaea.org/doc/pub/2020_EAEA.pdf)