



Dynamo International and the Roma

About Dynamo International

Dynamo International coordinates the International Network of Street Social Workers who work on the ground with people (children, young people, adults) living in street situations. The Network is currently made up of over 40 national platforms of street workers from countries of both the North and South.

A real Network of solidarity, it is recognised as a European Anti-Poverty Network. It promotes sharing of practices, training, speaking out by grassroots workers, challenging political powers and other organisations in combating exclusion and inequality.

Dynamo International's position

Over the past two years, street workers from about fifteen countries have been working together on studying the Roma issue based on their practical experience. We can learn a lot from this investigation conducted by members of the Italian, Greek and Romanian platforms of the International Network of Street Social Workers.

We insist on the importance of not pushing the Roma people "to the sidelines", but to make them people "in their own right".

The general perception we have of the Roma is mistaken. We perceive them to be nomadic, and this is far from always being the case. Often, they do not choose to move, but rather they are made to move.

As part of their daily work, street workers do not try to assimilate, integrate or bring the Roma to something that would supposedly be better for them (along the lines of modern colonialism) but to give them assistance in all helpful and necessary procedures, better knowledge of their rights, the tools to understand their situation and speak for themselves by themselves.

Street workers are often the only people to be in direct contact with the Roma community. In some cases, they are the first and last link in the chain of education and social assistance. They must not take the place of institutions, in spite of their deficiencies, they must remain intermediaries.

The job of street workers involves providing a listening ear and support, which brings

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with it varying demands, different ways of searching for solutions according to the needs of the people in specific situations, with their own individual backgrounds and needs. It is precisely these specificities that must be taken into consideration. With regards to housing, for example, it is essential to involve these populations in the process. **Ghettoisation is, in any case, not the solution the Roma want: just as they value their culture and family-based organisation, they also value being a part of society and living amongst others.**

Housing policies are, in reality, often social isolation policies in the majority of European States. In spite of the standards in place, the Member States' commitment to combating discrimination would appear to be inefficient. Furthermore, the Roma do not seem to be aware of the provisions in force that concern them.

Too often, public opinion, politicians and the media contribute to conveying a negative, stereotyped and superficial image of the Roma, their customs and their culture, labelling them as "eternal scapegoats": choosing to live in poverty (poverty as cultural characteristic), being criminals (genetic or cultural explanations occasionally put forward), being parasites (lazy by nature) and being nomadic. However, poverty, exclusion and discrimination are all daily realities for the Roma who, sometimes, have no other choice than to develop survival strategies. These strategies are therefore not cultural characteristics. Far from being aware of this fact, and riding a populist wave, for many it would be good form if these people could keep as low a profile as possible.

If we manage to break down negative stereotypes (they do not respect the law, they do not want to integrate, etc.), joint consideration and discussion becomes possible. Street workers, political leaders and, in particular, the Roma populations must work together in order to tackle the social, ethical, legal and political challenges. Together they will be able, insofar as possible, to make a difference.

Edwin de Boevé

Director of Dynamo International

General Coordinator of the International Network of Street Workers

Contact:

Dynamo International

Rue de l'étoile, 22

B-1180 Brussel

Tél.: +32 (0)2 378 44 22

Fax: +32(0)378 44 21

E-mail: dynamo-int@travail-de-rue.netWebsite: www.travail-de-rue.net