



Civil society monitoring report
on implementation
of the national Roma integration strategy
in the Netherlands

*Assessing the progress
in four key policy areas
of the strategy*

Prepared by:
Roma Utrecht Foundation
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

FNV	<i>Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging</i> (Netherlands Trade Union Confederation)
FRA	EU Agency for Fundamental Rights
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRCP	National Roma Contact Point
NRIS	National Roma Integration Strategy
SCP	<i>Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau</i> (Netherlands Institute for Social Research)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dutch national authorities have developed a set of measures within the framework of the National Roma Integration Strategy (NRIS). Field research and long-term experience of (pro-)Roma civil society show that this set of measures is not successful; they even argue that the government's approach is damaging for the Roma community in the Netherlands because it is limited and highly problematic. The existing targeted initiatives focus on exploitation of children and criminality, instead of measures to improve the situation of Roma in education, employment, health and housing. In addition, antigypsyism is not being recognised as a problem and when it is being addressed by Roma NGOs, the efforts to fight the phenomenon are not supported by the authorities. Another cross-cutting issue – Roma participation is neither taken into account by the authorities. Most Roma who came here in the mid-1970s and also those who came here in the 1980s are dealing with statelessness. Being stateless or having an "unknown nationality" is an obstacle indeed not only for health care, but also for education, employment and housing. Stateless Roma have no right to vote. At local level, some (pro-)Roma NGOs are able to commit to advocacy and lobbying work. They as well are leading small-scale initiatives that tackle real problems such as access to education, employment, housing, health, and combating antigypsyism. However, these initiatives are not enough to bring any incremental change or sustainable solutions.

Employment

Access to employment is difficult for ethnic minorities and Roma face exclusion from employment, whether (highly) educated or not. The main obstacles are unequal opportunities and statelessness. Manifestations of antigypsyism in employment are not recognised by the authorities. There are no targeted measures and the mainstream measures, targeting everybody, even have negative impact on excluded people (example is the "Participation Law").

Ideas, such as micro-credits for starting a business, internships at companies, jobs with perspectives etc., suggested by Roma NGOs to improve the situation in employment, have not been supported by the authorities. The Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports administers the so-called "*Rechtsherstelgelden*" ("Repair money" fund from after the Second World War), which supports Roma NGOs to implement small-scale initiatives that bring some results in this area, mostly helping some young Roma individuals to get empowered for taking part in the labour market.

Housing and essential public services

Roma who came to the Netherlands in the 1970s by caravan were all obligated to live in houses at the beginning of the 1980s, otherwise they would not get a residence permit. Roma, like Sinti and Travellers, are now allowed to live in a caravan like their ancestors, should they want to.

Roma have access to housing like other citizens but are regularly discriminated on the housing market. In addition, high rents and arrears lead to evictions. In the set of measures of NRIS there is no specific attention for these issues.

A positive development happened in 2018 when the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations issued a new housing policy framework for Roma, Sinti and Travellers. The framework is directed at preventing discrimination against Roma in relation to adequate housing on trailer parks, ensuring their cultural rights and providing legal security in this area, but the implementation is to be assessed.

Impact of health care policies on Roma

Roma come across antigypsyist sentiments in health care. Moreover, there are other barriers to access healthcare, such as statelessness, lack of documents and economic situation of Roma. There are no specific policies targeting Roma and Sinti, no mention of the problems that they face in the field of health care and no proposed measures in the 'set of policy measures' document made in relation to the EU Roma Framework.

There is no special attention payed to the situation of Roma women. Roma sometimes organise themselves to address their issues, including health, which is the case of Roma women's organization *Romane Sheja* from the city of De Meern. Their activities are supported by the Government's so-called "*Rechtsherstelgelden*". However, civil society considers this being not enough and suggests the government puts more efforts into bringing about sustainable solutions, such as employing Roma mediators from within the communities.

Education

Although education is quite accessible, there are or have been locally different approaches. Some of these approaches are derived directly from the set of measures of NRIS whereas others are developed by municipalities themselves. Education is an important tool in access to employment and it is important that this is stimulated and supported. It appears that local plans for improvement of educational opportunities for Roma children are much more successful than the projects created through the national set of measures.

In the field of education there is less antigypsyism than in the other fields covered by this report. There are cases of antigypsyism, but in general teachers, school directors and school boards are willing to tackle antigypsyist ideas and negative stereotyping in consultation with Roma parents and Roma NGOs.

Roma children need more support in overcoming language deficiencies and other obstacles, in order to obtain "*Startqualificatie*", necessary to get an official diploma, even though there has been a visible improvement in access to primary and secondary education.

Good news is that the manual on the criminal approach to school absenteeism was amended in October 2012. The main factors contributing to the success are the following: attending pre-school, engaging school counsellors (also known as mediators or intermediaries who involve parents), and Roma pupils who have finished school themselves and act as mentors and role models. If children are stateless, extra support is required.

INTRODUCTION

It is necessary to shortly explain the history of the arrival of Roma in the Netherlands, which is essential for understanding the information in this report. Officially there is no ethnic registration in the Netherlands, so it is not possible to give an exact or official figure on the Roma population in the country; yet, the estimates speak about some 40,000 Roma people.¹ Roma and Sinti came from different countries at different times. Sinti and “old Dutch” Roma have been living in the Netherlands since the 15th century.² Nearly all Dutch Roma and Sinti were murdered in the Roma Holocaust.³ In the late 1950s and 1960s, Roma came from Greece, Italy and Spain to work here. In the 1970s Roma came from Eastern Europe via Italy and other countries by caravan to the Netherlands, followed by Roma who came in the 1980s from Poland (and other countries) and in the 1990s from Yugoslavia. When Europe got united and borders were opened for working and travelling, Roma from Romania and Bulgaria started to come in 2007 and the following years until now. This shows the diversity of the Roma community in the Netherlands. Sinti and Roma who came here in the 19th century and before are Dutch citizens and they do have Dutch passports. Roma who came after the Second World War are regularly affected by the issue of statelessness. However, all Roma and Sinti share the same history of the *Porajmos*, the Roma Holocaust, and experience antigypsyism in Dutch society on different levels.

The Netherlands does not have a special National Roma Integration Strategy, but instead a set of policy measures which has been developed by the Ministry of Justice and Security and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment.⁴ The national set of policy measures is neither mentioning problems that Roma face nor suggesting solutions. The document is mostly about listing mainstream policies and it reproduces racist discourse against Roma already in the introduction where it emphasises “combating socially unacceptable and criminal behaviour and exploitation of Roma children”.⁵

It is essential to explain how the Dutch set of policy measures was developed too. The local “Roma-project” called *Wisselgeld*⁶ of the municipality of Nieuwegein aimed at improving the situation of the Roma community. In theory this should have been a project which would improve the access to education and the access to work. Instead, in our opinion, it appeared to be a project with a lot of repressive measures focused on Roma families and it became the model for developing the national repressive system regarding Roma. A document written by the Police Academy, for example, is in fact a guide how to deal with Roma families who have “multiple problems”. The guide explicitly defines Roma as those who do not go to school and as criminals.⁷ The policy measures have been shown

¹ The European Union and Roma – Factsheet, The Netherlands, 2014, see: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/factsheet_netherlands_en.pdf.

² Peter R. Rodrigues and Maaïke Matelski, *Monitor racism & the extreme right Roma and Sinti*, Anne Frank House / Leiden University, 2004, p. 12-14, available at: <https://annefrank.global.ssl.fastly.net/media/imagevault/DUZKP1xLO4SfWJAWSOFJ.pdf>

³ The Herinneringscentrum Kamp Westerbork website at: <https://www.kampwesterbork.nl/nl/museum/nieuws/detail.html?id=37982#/index>

⁴ The set of policy measures document is available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/netherlands_national_strategy_en.pdf

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 1

⁶ Project ‘*Wisselgeld*’ (literal translation ‘Small change’ in terms of money), *Intensieve begeleiding voor multiprobleemgezinnen met een Roma-achtergrond* [Intensive guidance for multi-problem families with a Roma background], Radar, commissioned by the municipality of Nieuwegein, 2008, see: <https://docplayer.nl/55202693-Wisselgeld-intensieve-begeleiding-voor-multiprobleemgezinnen-met-een-roma-achtergrond-zander-perspectief-valt-niets-te-coachen.html>

⁷ *Aanpak multi-problematiek bij gezinnen met een Roma-achtergrond* [Approach to multiple problems of families with a Roma-background], Boom Lemma uitgevers, Den Haag, 2013, available at:

by the Dutch National Roma Contact Point at EU level as the best practice of Roma Integration and are presented as protection measures for Roma children, to guard them from exploitation, while the critical civil society sees them as highly problematic as the measures embrace security instead of social inclusion and anti-racism or human rights approach, and look at Roma as criminals or as problematic families at best.⁸ A governmental report on Roma from 2017 mentions the following: "Another development is the completion of the pilot projects of the Programme of Combating Exploitation of Roma children (end 2016). These were carried out differently at each municipality. In those municipalities where a chain approach was already in existence before the experiments commenced, it was observed that this has been further reinforced and implemented as part of regular policy."⁹ On the other hand, the civil society informs about negative impact of the authorities' approach towards Roma: "A mother told us the following: 'The child protection services reported that we were *used people* and that we were not capable of bringing up our children. They said that we were not hygienic and that our children needed to be taken by them in order to give them a proper upbringing with foster parents. I think the foster parents wanted to keep my children. This is legal kidnapping.'" These children returned home with their mother after months of legal struggling. Roma Utrecht NGO has been supporting her during this time.

The "Roma project" has been taken over by a number of cities, which led to protests by Roma NGOs,¹⁰ but only in Utrecht the repressive measures targeting Roma families were prevented eventually because of the strong advocacy in combination with the local political will for inclusion and room for diversity.¹¹ The national programme itself has ended in 2017, but it has been decided that the national government wants to strengthen their line of policy.¹² Roma and pro-Roma activists are very worried about further developments.¹³ The government is strengthening their anti-trafficking action currently and the authorities visibly target Roma families, representing Roma families as those who traffic their own children.¹⁴ International organisations often use the same approach and are linked to the governmental projects.¹⁵ In addition, even though ethnic registration is officially forbidden

<https://hetccv.nl/onderwerpen/multiprobleemgezinnen-met-een-roma-achtergrond/documenten/aanpak-multiproblematiek-bij-gezinnen-met-een-roma-achtergrond/>

⁸ More about the problematic approach of the Dutch government can be read about in *2018 country report on minoritization of Roma* (project supported by the EU), which states that "Roma, Sinti and similar groups are represented as a threat against which strong repressive methods are necessary.", see: <https://ethos-europe.eu/sites/default/files/ethosd5.2netherlands.pdf>.

⁹ EU Reporting tool Roma NL over 2017 by the Ministry of Social Affairs/NRCP.

¹⁰ Article in newspaper Trouw, Rob Pietersen, 'Roma woedend op Van der Laan' [Roma furious with Van der Laan]; Mr Van der Laan was at that time the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment, 26 August 2009, <https://www.trouw.nl/home/roma-woedend-op-van-der-laan~afcdf28b/>.

¹¹ The municipality of Utrecht developed the antidiscrimination agenda 2016-2020 that also includes the position of local ethnic minorities like Roma, see: <https://www.utrecht.nl/fileadmin/uploads/documenten/zorg-en-onderwijs/samenleven-welzijn/2016-07-Utrechtse-antidiscriminatie-agenda-2016-2020.pdf>.

¹² Letter to the Parliament from the Ministry of Security and Justice, 4 April 2017, 'Completion Programme -Exploitation of Roma children', available at: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2017/04/04/tk-afronding-programma-aanpak-uitbuiting-roma-kinderen>.

¹³ Huub van Baar, 'Roma worden weer zigeunerboeven' [Roma are becoming gypsy crooks again], Trouw, 28 October 2013, available at: <https://www.trouw.nl/home/roma-worden-weer-zigeunerboeven~a9cec1ec/>.

¹⁴ The antigypsyist speech of Ms Meike Lommers, adviser of the Centre of Crime Prevention and Security, available at: <https://hetccv.nl/onderwerpen/mensenhandel/nieuws-detail/article/ccv-adviseur-meike-lommers-ik-ben-blij-met-het-actieplan-mensenhandel/>.

¹⁵ The Salvation Army was, for example, linked to the programme 'Approach to the exploitation of Roma children' by the Ministry of Security and Justice. Mr Hugo van Meeuwen, the Roma project leader said: "We find

since the Second World War, it has been proven that ethnic registration of Roma by several local authorities and the police is still taking place unofficially in certain municipalities.¹⁶

The data collected for this report have resulted from field research, consultation with civil society actors, interviews with various stakeholders and personal testimonies. The Roma Utrecht NGO has worked with the Roma women's NGO *Romane Sheja*, Hindustani Foundation Asha, Anne Frank House, *Médecins de Monde (Dokters van de Wereld)*, Amnesty International, Memorial Centre Westerbork, School Associations of Primary and Secondary Education, Universities of Applied Sciences, the Universities of Amsterdam, Leiden and Utrecht, DISOFO local health care provider and more. Existing data have been used not only as a reference, but also as a prequel in order to have evidence-based information. Roma Utrecht Foundation has set up two commissions, one on Employment and Housing and the other on Health Care and Education. The coordinator has collected all the data related to the Roma Civil Monitor. The core group exists of seven persons but in total it is a larger group.

it important to see these children as victims of exploitation and trafficking instead of small criminals. From a very early age they learned nothing but to steal and were pressured daily to meet the demands of the network", see: <https://www.legerdesheils.nl/actueel/uitgebuite-roma-kinderen-opgevangen-door-het-leger>.

¹⁶ Dutch municipality of Ede has long-term engaged into Roma ethnic registration and creation of illegal databases. On website websitevoordepolitie.nl/ for years there has been an interview with a leading police inspector who talks about 'Roma crime that should be fought'. He also presents family trees of 'Roma clans' to make the 'problem' transparent.

EMPLOYMENT

Improving access to labour market and effectiveness of employment services

Research shows that despite their educational background (high or low educated), ethnic minorities are more likely to be unemployed.¹⁷ There are no specific data about the situation of Roma and Sinti on the labour market, even though the data are available for some other ethnic minorities or people of different origin.¹⁸ Some data however can be considered relevant, especially those talking about 'persons of non-Western background' or 'non-Western migrants'. *Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau* (SCP) report in 2016 shows that, despite high levels of education, improvement in educational performances and better Dutch language proficiency, non-Western migrants still face unequal opportunities in the labour market.¹⁹ The unemployment rate among people with a vocational education diploma was 6.2% among native Dutch people while it was 11.5% among people with a non-Western migrant background in 2015. The same report also underlines youth unemployment among ethnic minorities which is three times higher (15.2%) than among native Dutch youth (5.6%). The average unemployment rate for youth with a non-Western background was 22%, while it is 9% for native Dutch youth.

Youngsters themselves do find jobs via employment offices (temporary work) but always have to hide their identity because from experience they learned that once the employer and the staff know that they are Roma, they do not get their contract renewed or they are being fired for no reason. One young girl who worked in a shop told us the following: "I worked in a shop after schooltime which was great. My employer and colleagues thought I was Spanish. Then one day my mother and aunt came to see me in the shop, they were so proud of me working there. After their visit I was summoned to the office. I was told that I did not do my job properly and that my contract would be finished. I never had a problem before, so my guess is that when they met my mother and aunt, they could see from the way they looked like that they were Roma, so then I got fired." There seems to be a pattern of incidents experienced by youngsters. One youngster has set up an own organisation, *Romane Shave*, to address this.

The Dutch labour market is very complex. Mainstream government policies are strongly influenced by neo-liberalism and the labour market depends on many different job agencies. The demand is limited since there are mostly job openings for temporary and highly qualified staff. In practice it is almost impossible to get a steady job.

Roma who came here in the 1950s and 1960s from Spain, Italy and Greece never mentioned that they were Roma. Roma who came in the 1970s and 1980s experience the most obstacles in accessing the labour market or when they want to set up a business. They always have identified themselves as Roma, they came travelling by caravan and fled the countries behind the Iron Curtain. They were stateless (mostly *de facto*) people and some of them got the Dutch nationality because of the General Pardon. Nevertheless, many of them, including children, were forgotten in the General Pardon and until today, more than 40 years later, they remain stateless and/or with an ID with unknown nationality. This status is being inherited till at least the third generation. Employers who

¹⁷ https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/binaries/rijksoverheid/documenten/rapporten/2018/11/16/rapport-verdere-integratie-op-de-arbeidsmarkt-via/116850_Rapport_Integratie_WEB.pdf

¹⁸ See for example the data used for the European Network Against Racism Shadow Report at: https://www.enar-eu.org/IMG/pdf/shadowreport_2016x2017_long_final_lowres.pdf

¹⁹ Huijnk, W. and Andriessen, I. *Integratie in zicht? De integratie van migranten in Nederland op acht terreinen nader bekeken*. 2016. The Hague: The Netherlands Institute for Social Research.

see an ID with stateless or unknown nationality would never employ them. They cannot get a bank loan for starting up a business or buying a house either.

Fight against discrimination in employment and antigypsyism at workplace

Numerous employment agencies and employers are discriminating against ethnic minorities.²⁰ According to the recent survey of the Radar, a local antidiscrimination agency in the Netherlands, in almost half of the cases (47%) it appears that intermediaries from employment agencies discriminate based on ethnicity.²¹ In 2018, the government decided that the job agencies could be fined if they do not implement anti-discrimination policies.²² ²³ The issue is that racial discrimination in employment in the Netherlands is being denied on a large-scale. It is so subtle and hidden that addressing racial discrimination in work relations is practically impossible. Where people of other ethnic minorities face severe exclusion and threats, Roma face extreme exclusion due to rooted antigypsyism.

In Dutch society there is a general dislike of Roma, Sinti and Travellers with a nomadic background.²⁴ Roma who came here in the 1990s and who did not have a nomadic background also find themselves targeted by antigypsyism. This happens when they have good diplomas for accessing the labour market too.

Employers are reluctant to hire someone who has an ID which says "nationality unknown" or which says "stateless", based on a lot of personal testimonies. Employers do not look at the CVs and capacities of the people because they do not trust people with this legal status. The exact figure of Roma who are affected by statelessness for over 40 years is not known. Newcomers in general do have a passport from their country in which they were born, like Romania or Bulgaria, but they face antigypsyism and stereotypes for being Eastern Europeans as well, so they experience double discrimination.

Discrimination against Roma is being detected and documented by local Roma organisations and activist researchers in the Netherlands.²⁵ The antidiscrimination services do not have the knowledge to tackle this and they are not equipped to handle this. In every larger municipality there is an antidiscrimination bureau. Its task is to address every kind of discrimination. Antigypsyism is not explicitly recognised as a discrimination ground. Therefore, addressing antigypsyism needs to be handled by Roma NGOs and communities themselves. The antidiscrimination bureaus have no other mandate but to file complaints that then can only be registered.

There is no national strategy to combat racial discrimination in the labour market. The Minister of Social Affairs and Employment developed an action plan against discrimination in the labour market but it does not address ethnic minorities specifically. Victims of racial

²⁰ Newspaper de Volkskrant, Dion Mebius, 30 January 2019, see: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/columns-opinie/beboet-discriminatie-op-de-werkvloer-zwaar~b905e674/>

²¹ https://radar.nl/read/discriminatie_factsheets.

²² Read more on the official website of the Government at: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/gelijke-behandeling-op-het-werk/nieuws/2018/11/22/meer-mogelijkheden-voor-aanpak-discriminatie-op-arbeidsmarkt>.

²³ Newspaper de Volkskrant, Dion Mebius, 30 January 2018, see: <https://www.volkskrant.nl/nieuws-achtergrond/radar-laet-zien-discriminatie-bij-uitzendbureaus-is-hardnekkig-als-onkruid-hoe-los-je-zoiets-op~be4e21bf/>

²⁴ Huub van Baar, *The Secularization of the Roma in Europe*, 2019, available at: <http://www.huubvanbaar.nl/>

²⁵ *Stichting Roma Capelle, Nederlandse Roma Vereniging, Stichting Roma Utrecht, Romane Sheja, Romane Shave.*

discrimination can get very frustrated about the impossibility of building a case against a racist employer or a racist colleague and feel that their voice is not being heard. Only very limited amount of published data can be considered relevant and again only in relation to non-Western migrants: "[A] quarter of the migrants from Central and Eastern Europe reported discrimination in the workplace. This group identifies discrimination in working conditions in particular: 15% of employed migrants from Central and Eastern Europe experienced discrimination in this area in the past year, especially in relation to the pay gap."²⁶

Dutch antidiscrimination services are predominately "white" and lack a multicultural vision. Our voluntary advocacy work has repeatedly suggested two ideas: the antidiscrimination services should hire people of Roma background professionally or local Roma organisations should receive funding and facilities in order to do the job.

In response to the suggestions and the ideas from local Roma NGOs for improvement and for chances to equal access the significant answer received from the Dutch NRCP that "Roma will never get a paid job" and that "Roma should not expect paid jobs when applying for projects and facilities".²⁷

Employment alternatives in areas with limited primary labour market demand

Alternatives have been suggested by local Roma organisations, like the access to micro-credit financing in order to start a small business. Not one suggestion until now has been taken into account.²⁸ Roma grassroots organisations have applied for projects at the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sports which administers the so-called "*Rechtsherstelgelden*" ("Repair money" from after the Second World War) specifically meant for Roma and Sinti. The means should be available until 2025. In this framework, the only topic with respect to employment is the theme "creating of employment", which in this case means that one could attend a course, but no real job perspective is created. After a lot of obstruction by this same ministry, which was unwilling to finance the activities of local Roma organisations, and after protests of these organisations, finally, a number of local projects were funded and these are working well for Roma in the cities. Roma NGOs developed local projects in which they themselves are volunteers because only activities are being funded and not the hours and the work of these Roma volunteers. There is inequality in the case of funding, because if an ethnically Dutch person is involved in a project, then he or she does get fully paid for their time and effort. This inequality must be solved too.

However, Roma youngsters are being supported by local Roma NGOs in their studies and at finding a job, or to do a course or training, as institutions like employment services fail to do so. One specific support is through internships in local NGOs. Roma activism is essential in achieving goals like better and equal access to employment because now real results are visible regarding Roma participation in employment. One young woman who did an internship at one of the grassroots organisations said: "It felt safe at the Roma NGO, they offered me an internship in order to help finish my studies. My teachers at school were surprised that this was possible, they did not know the organisation, so they came to make acquaintance. I accomplished all the tasks successfully and got my diploma!

²⁶ Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau. *Ervaren discriminatie in Nederland*. 2014. Available at: https://www.scp.nl/Publicaties/Alle_publicaties/Publicaties_2014/Ervaren_discriminatie_in_Nederland.

²⁷ Meeting of Roma Utrecht Foundation and the Ministry of Social Affairs/Director Integration/NRCP, The Hague, 09 January 2019.

²⁸ Report of the meeting with the Ministry of Welfare, Health and Sports, De Bilt, 30 March 2015.

Everyone was proud of me, especially my parents who supported me all the way.” Another example is that Roma women and youth have set up their own organisations and then applied for the “Repair Money”.²⁹

The available employment services are not supporting Roma adequately while looking for a job. The Dutch ‘Participation Law’ does not contribute in a positive sense. In this law it is stated that all people who receive social benefits are obligated to do voluntary work.³⁰ As the unemployment rate is high among Roma, they are likely to be affected by this measure. The consequence is that people have to do voluntary work at a very low level (for example folding boxes or producing clothes pegs) which does not help in gaining more skills and/or an actual paid job. Netherlands’ largest union FNV is very active in combating this matter, which is seen as work with no pay.³¹ Reputation of the volunteers is being damaged, they are seen as people who are mentally ill, who cannot do anything in any sector of the labour market and who are not capable of setting up an own enterprise. Another negative impact of the Participation Law is that people who do unpaid work do not have right to pension.

²⁹ *Romane Sheja* (Roma women’s organisation) and *Romane Shave* (Roma youth organisation), Roma Media Group (Roma youth organisation)

³⁰ <https://www.apeldoordirect.nl/politiek/rekenkamer-rekent-af-met-participatiewet-hoe-helpt-dit-mij-aan-werk-20180127/>

³¹ Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging, se: <https://www.fnv.nl/over-fnv/ons-werk/acties-campagnes/echtebanen/campagne-kkeeb/stop-werken-zonder-loon/>.

HOUSING AND ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES

Addressing mobile Roma's needs

Roma have been confronted with dispersal policy for more than 40 years. This line of policy was very rigorous in the 1970s.³² The Roma families who came to the Netherlands in the mid-1970s resided on wasteland. They got a place to stay with their caravans (not in quarters), but then they were forced to live in houses, otherwise they would not get a residence permit. Joint families were broken up and families were dispersed. This step to "integration" was in fact the step to assimilation.

Even though this cultural heritage is now fully accepted within the human rights regulations, the lack of political will is not helping to properly maintain the current sites and/or to create new ones. In 1999 the Dutch Caravan Act had been abolished³³ and the caravans became houses without wheels. It is legally forbidden to lead a nomadic existence in the Netherlands so Roma and also Irish Travellers are regularly targeted by the police even if they are not "travelling around". Ethnic profiling is one of the main features within this approach.

In national housing policies there is no specific approach regarding Roma, except for those who wish to live or return to living in a caravan. Therefore, it is now allowed to live in a caravan, but the authorities often exclude Roma people by saying that they are not Dutch Travellers with historical rights. Moreover, the caravan sites are generally being maintained by a consultancy bureau.³⁴ This bureau was requested to take up this responsibility because authorities did not want to communicate directly with the residents of caravan sites. Dutch Travellers organised a petition in 2016 to express their complaints about the bureau.³⁵

Still, there has been a new development in a positive sense. In July 2018, the Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations issued a new housing policy framework for Roma, Sinti and Travellers.³⁶ The framework is directed at preventing discrimination against Roma, ensuring their cultural rights and providing legal security in the area of housing. It provides guidelines for municipal authorities in charge of housing policies at the local level that effectively limit their power to shape housing policy regarding Roma. It requires municipalities to give Roma more space to live according to their own cultural identity and to ensure their opportunity to acquire a place to live on a trailer park within a reasonable time. Municipalities are not allowed anymore to pursue an 'extinction policy', a policy that would eventually put an end to 'trailer parks'. The new policy framework represents an important step forward as in the past decades many municipalities were very reluctant to provide adequate housing on trailer parks or even pursued an 'extinction policy', aiming instead to make Roma settle in more regular housing. The 'extinction policy' was challenged before the national equality body, the Netherlands Institute for Human Rights (NIHR) and the Ombudsman by (pro-) Roma advocacy organisations.

³² Policy of the former Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Social Work, which has existed from 1965 until 1982.

³³ *Woonwagenwet 1968*, this Dutch Caravan Act helped to improve the environment of caravan sites but in fact it also eventually led to the so-called 'extinction policy'.

³⁴ See: www.nijbod.nl

³⁵ Link to the petition against Nijbod at: <https://petities.nl/petitions/weg-met-nijbod-consultancy-by>

³⁶ *Beleidskader Gemeentelijk woonwagen- en standplaatsenbeleid*, see: www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/rapporten/2018/07/02/beleidskader-gemeentelijk-woonwagen-enstandplaatsenbeleid

Improving access to secure and affordable housing

All local inhabitants have access to basic amenities like water and electricity. In the Netherlands there are no informal neighbourhoods as these are legally not allowed, all buildings and their function are registered. Roma, depending on the income, either apply for social housing or rent a house or a flat. In a number of cases, tenancy leads to financial problems due to high rents.

Despite the large size of the social rental sector in the Netherlands, housing affordability problems have increased strongly in recent years. This is due to the fact that rent levels have grown much more than incomes of tenants. Average income in the rented sector has gone down between 2000 and 2014, whereas average rent have increased by about 45% in the same period.³⁷ Particularly in 2012, 2013 and 2014, rent levels increased considerably because landlords had to earn extra money in order to be able to pay for the Landlord Levy.³⁸

The housing associations were offered the possibility to carry through annual rent increases with a rate above inflation (particularly for households with a somewhat higher income, as shown above). However, in exchange for this, they had to pay a levy to the government, based on the cadastral value of their real estate in the regulated rental sector. The landlord levy not only applies to social rental landlords but also to private rental landlords that own more than ten dwellings in the regulated rental segment. The revenue for the treasury as a result of this levy amounts to 1.7 billion EUR in 2017

As a result of this development, the average rent to income ratio has increased from 21.3% in 2009 to 26.7% in 2015. The total housing costs (including: rent, local taxes, gas, water and electricity) to income ratio increased from 31,4% to 36,0% in the same time period. These ratios are even higher for tenants with a low income.

The introduction of the new Housing Law can be seen as a positive development. After many years of scandals within the social rental sector and political discussion within the parliament, the housing associations had lost a large part of their legitimacy and credibility. They needed a stricter regulatory framework.

However, there are also two new housing policies that seem to ignore the current housing market and socio-economic situation, and may actually have a counterproductive effect. This concerns the above-mentioned Landlord Levy and the strict housing allocation rules called "*passend toewijzen*" ('fair housing allocation'). This new measure came into force on 1 January 2016 and implies that the households with the lowest incomes should be housed in the cheapest segments of the social rental dwelling stock in order to limit the government's expenses on housing allowances.³⁹

These two measures reinforce the process of "residualisation" (i. e. increasing concentration of lower income groups in a shrinking social rental sector) that is already under way. This process has negative effects on the Dutch housing system because it leads

³⁷ Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken en Koninkrijksrelaties 2016.

³⁸ See Priemus 2014.

³⁹ More than 95% of the vacant social rental dwellings with a rent below 586.86 EUR (for one or two person households) or 628.76 EUR (for households consisting of three or more persons) should be allocated to households that are entitled to receive a housing allowance.

to a growing shortage of social rental dwellings, unaffordability of rental housing and increased chances of spatial segregation and problem accumulation.⁴⁰

Fight against residential segregation, discrimination and other forms of antigypsyism in housing

Evictions

Due to poverty, Roma families are vulnerable to rent arrears, which eventually lead to eviction. The main risk after the eviction is the fear of the children being taken away because the parents have no roof over their heads. Families have nowhere to go unless their extended family helps them to accommodate. They are being suggested to go to so-called "sleep-inns" which are meant for homeless people and people who are addicted on drugs; this is absolutely not suitable for the families. Even though at the EU level, the Netherlands is far from the worst, it experienced an increase in the number of evictions of more than 10% between 2010 and 2013.

The evictions are happening mostly because of arrears. It is interesting that the indicators often refer to the social housing. The legal proceedings start after three months of arrears, according to the policy.⁴¹ There is a denial of systematic causes of evictions; it is still viewed as an individual responsibility. There are no data on how many Roma are being evicted, but it is known that 42% of those evicted from social housing were born in another country, including 22% outside of the European Union. The requirement for a pre-litigation negotiation stage is a condition before evictions in many EU countries, but not in the Netherlands. Loan institutions may unilaterally initiate a debt restructuring procedure, that might be useful in instances where households can no longer meet debt repayments, but there is no information if Roma are affected by this measure positively.

After approximately two months of rent arrears in the Netherlands, tenants are sent a written demand from the Housing Association's department for debt collection, and a request (usually in writing) to contact the department to make a payment arrangement. The Housing Association usually offers their tenant a repayment, after which, in most cases, the lease is met 'at the last minute'. If the tenant fails to comply during a period of approximately three months, the Housing Association hands the case over to the bailiff.

Discrimination in access to housing

Antigypsyism in housing is not being addressed in the Dutch set of measures for Roma.⁴² Research was conducted by *De Groene Amsterdammer* in order to test the hypothesis that people whose names do not sound Dutch are being discriminated against when it comes to renting a house. They decided to apply for 250 rental properties under the names of 'Jaap' and 'Rachid', and record the responses when asking if the property was still available. 116 responses for Rachid came through, in comparison to 162 for Jaap.⁴³ Roma are discriminated against too. This for example was visible when a family went to the housing office to apply for a social house, whereas when the staff learnt that they were

⁴⁰ Joris Hoekstra, *Reregulation and Residualization in Dutch social Housing: a critical Evaluation of new Policies*, available at: <https://blog.bouw-instituut.nl/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/05/The-Dutch-social-rental-sector-Special-Issue-paper-Joris-Hoekstra-March-2017.pdf>

⁴¹ <https://www.feantsa.org/download/housing-exclusion-in-europe-evictions-chapter7026448962775795966.pdf>

⁴² Country fiche of the National Roma Contact Point, Netherlands, Reporting year 2017

⁴³ <https://www.groene.nl/artikel/rachid-is-ook-gewoon-een-nette-jongen>

Roma, they were rejected for the house. There are many more examples which Roma families testified. The complaints are being documented by local Roma organisations.⁴⁴

Roma have the possibility to access social housing, but there have been a number of complaints of people on discrimination regarding the allotment of housing. There have also been several cases where a family with six children got a house meant for four people, so then four family members could not register themselves on the address which has led to homelessness and the cease of work or benefits. Another case was that a family who was just settled in their home were told by the housing corporation that should they have more than four visitors, this would be marked as nuisance and the police would be at their doorstep.

A number of families do not receive adequate support when they have debt problems and eviction from their homes, because social workers who are supposed to inform and support these families are reluctant to take action. It has been observed regularly by volunteers of local Roma organisations who supported the families at their request during meetings and appointments with social workers that there is a lot of prejudice amongst them and complaints had been filed against them about antigypsyism. One case for example has been that a Roma family wanted to exchange their house with a Dutch family (it is allowed to exchange houses if someone wants to move for example to another part of the city); when the employee of the housing corporation heard that a Roma family was involved, immediately it was said that it was not possible, even though everything was according to the rules. Via advocacy of a local Roma NGO the exchange could take place eventually.

The housing system is accessible for everyone who is legally in the Netherlands. The governmental policies are executing a general policy, so that every citizen with a residence permit has a certain right to social housing. Depending on their income, people can get housing benefits.⁴⁵ These benefits are inclusive and effective. Nevertheless, reading and writing problems could be a specific barrier to fill out the digital forms necessary for applying to housing benefits and also there is the lack of information. In these cases, Roma youngsters who went to school help their parents and family members by filling out the forms and/or there is information and help provided by local Roma NGOs.

⁴⁴ Information and documentation available via Roma Utrecht Foundation (romatutrecht@gmail.com).

⁴⁵ Website of the Dutch Tax Authorities on housing benefits:
<https://www.belastingdienst.nl/wps/wcm/connect/nl/toeslagen/content/kan-ik-huurtoeslag-krijgen>

IMPACT OF HEALTH CARE POLICIES ON ROMA

There is no statistical information available on the health of Roma, and qualitative information is limited and outdated. Improving healthcare for Roma has not been addressed in policy. The Netherlands set of policy measures for Roma do not even mention important issues in accessing health care, such as statelessness and exclusion. It only states relevant mainstream policies, acts and similar. Mainstream policy regarding health care is too general and does not have a significant effect in practice.

Ensuring equal access to public health care services

All legal residents and everyone who pays taxes in the Netherlands is entitled to health care and required to take out health insurance.⁴⁶ However, people who are stateless *de facto* face more problems in accessing (good) health care as their ID indicates 'stateless' or 'unknown nationality'. Next to their ID they have an alien's passport, this is a (travel) document which is especially for people who do not have a nationality but are legally in the country. Still these people remain *de facto* stateless. Employees in the health system and also doctors in several cases deny treatment because they are not familiar with these terms and they think immediately that these persons are illegal or undocumented hence they are being sent away.

There has been a recorded case when a man needed to tear his own tooth out because the dentist denied him treatment due to his legal status.⁴⁷ The dentist said to this man that he is not categorised as an illegal refugee or as an illegal asylum seeker so medical help could not be provided. Roma do not have any state protection here as they are not recognised as a national minority. The national minority status of Dutch Roma and Sinti had been taken away by the Minister of Integration and Immigration in 2004.⁴⁸ This action made the weak legal position of Roma who came from other countries even weaker.

The socioeconomic position of Roma in the Netherlands has not been good for decades, which has its effects also on health until today.⁴⁹ Stress due to their excluded situation, limited awareness of the health care system in the Netherlands, statelessness, lack adequate documentation, not being able to afford treatments and racial discrimination are cited in a 2012 report of the Fundamental Rights Agency as aspects influencing the health status of Roma.⁵⁰ Roma coming across the open borders of Europe to do seasonal work are characterised as criminal families, gangs and trouble makers which is being subscribed to their ethnicity.⁵¹

Only local projects made possible via the support of the post-war repair money managed by the Ministry of Health Care, Welfare and Sports can help in certain situations, but there is no structural funding and not meant for salaries. Examples of activities are those of Roma women's organisation *Romane Sheja* from the city of De Meern, like meetings with educational themes on health, workshops on healthy cooking and sports like fitness for

⁴⁶ The Healthcare Insurance Act (*Zorgverzekeringswet*), available at: www.rijksoverheid.nl under Het Nederlandse Zorgstelsel (Dutch Health Care System)

⁴⁷ Dokters van de Wereld and Triana, *Stateloos maakt radeloos*, 2010.

⁴⁸ *Eerste Kamer der Staten Generaal*, 1 December 2004, available at: <https://www.eerstekamer.nl/nieuws/20041201/friezen-enige-nationale-minderheid>

⁴⁹ *Movisie*, 1 March 2017, available at: <https://www.kis.nl/vraag-en-antwoord/hoe-de-maatschappelijke-positie-van-roma-en-sinti-nederland>

⁵⁰ <http://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/situation-of-roma-2012-nl-v1-1.pdf>

⁵¹ For example, see the article at: <https://www.nu.nl/binnenland/3578212/nederlanders-onderschatten-gevaar-roma-bendes.html>

women and girls. Mediators from Roma organisations are all volunteers and they do this work because the relevance of their role is visible, and people feel better supported. These mediators, for example, accompany people at their request to the doctor's and to a specialist. Elderly people appreciate this support because often there are language barriers.

Fight against discrimination and antigypsyism in health care

Antigypsyism is being addressed through several activities by local Roma organisations,⁵² for example organising meetings with health professionals in order to discuss equal access to health care, but until now there is no follow-up by other organisations or institutions.

When a person of Roma descent is in the hospital then often the staff calls the security or the police to escort the family to the patient. There is no legal ground to do this, but it is a common practice because it concerns Roma. This is clearly a manifestation of antigypsyism because this is not being done with any other communities. This is all linked to the system of repression on Roma and causes humiliation. There have been many complaints by visitors to the hospital staff about this treatment, but none of these have been taken seriously. This is not acknowledged as a pattern of unequal and unlawful treatment.

Still, local Roma organisations have set up their own working groups and in these working groups issues like statelessness and antigypsyism are being noted by documenting the complaints and gathering information. Next to this, there has been dialogue with some municipalities in order to solve problems in access to health, but this is done at incidental basis. One positive example is that a very sick lady who could not walk the stairs anymore finally received help from the municipality and adjustments were made in her house so she could stay and live there with her family.

Addressing needs of the most vulnerable groups among Roma

The first Roma women's organisation called *Romane Sheja* was set up in the Netherlands, which has instated office hours for women and girls and organises activities in the field of health care and health issues. Roma men have encouraged their women and their daughters into starting this organisation because they also feel that it is important for women to have their own place. In health care policies on Roma it has not been taken into account that women do not always want a male doctor, but for women of other cultures this has already been made possible, hence our suggestion is that Roma women and girls should also have this choice.

Stateless (*de facto*) people face more problems in health care issues. International medical organisations have tried their best to bring more security and to address this issue at the highest level together with Roma organisations, but there has not been enough political will to do something about it. Roma organisations have always lacked funding and facilities to take on the issue thoroughly. Travel costs and time investment regarding this matter had to be paid by volunteers themselves. Roma advocacy however remains necessary to keep addressing this matter.

⁵² Information on activities available via Roma Utrecht Foundation (romautrecht@gmail.com).

EDUCATION

The Netherlands is said to be among the leaders in reducing early school leaving. The Netherlands has a relatively low percentage of dropouts (8.2%) and the European target (8%) has almost been achieved. In the 2001/2002 school year, some 71,000 young people dropped out of school prematurely, by 2017 that number has fallen by more than 48,000 to 22,948 young people: about two-thirds fewer. In 2016, the government achieved the then target of 25,000 early school-leavers.⁵³ There are no data if or to what extent Roma children are part of that statistics.

The areas of focus of the ministry programme of Social Affairs and Security and Justice "Aanpak uitbuiting Roma kinderen" (2011-2016) included decreasing school absenteeism as a priority when it comes to education of Roma. However, the civil society criticises the program because of its harmful and stigmatising approach and rhetoric ('overrepresentation in crime', 'lack of development opportunities within families', 'experimental gardens that in cooperation with the national police were mainly focused on getting a clearer picture of the problem and experimenting with innovative approaches' etc.). When it comes to education, the government claims success in decreasing absenteeism: "In Ede, for example, in the last forty years all Roma girls over the age of twelve had absolute absenteeism (they did not go to school at all). With effect from the 2016-2017 school year, there is no longer an absolute absence. One of the instruments that has contributed to this is the penalty order developed in Nieuwegein and Ede."⁵⁴ One can also see from the quote that the measures for Roma inclusion are as problematic as is the narrative.

In the Netherlands, compulsory education is from the age of 5 until the age of 16.⁵⁵ Education is accessible for the children who are legally in the country and also for the ones who are in the process of waiting for the decision to get a resident permit.

Roma children often do not speak Dutch at home. As a result, they start education with a language deficiency. They (mostly) can speak Dutch, but might have difficulties in reading and writing.

Improving quality of education until the end of compulsory schooling

Dutch educational policies, compared to all the other fields (employment, health, housing and fighting antigypsyism), are inclusive of targeted measures. For example, it is important to know that the schools with four or more pupils of Roma and Sinti background can receive extra funding.⁵⁶ Moreover, there are measures developed for preventing early school leaving, which is a problem that Roma children face. Schools and municipalities are responsible for preventing early school leaving. A specific list of measures can be found on the Government website.⁵⁷ The manual on the criminal approach to school absenteeism was amended in October 2012.⁵⁸

⁵³ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/vsv/nieuws/2017/02/21/opnieuw-minder-jongeren-voortijdig-van-school>

⁵⁴ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/documenten/kamerstukken/2017/04/04/tk-afroding-programma-aanpak-uitbuiting-roma-kinderen>

⁵⁵ Read more about compulsory education at the Government website at: <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/leerplicht/leerplicht-en-kwalificatieplicht>

⁵⁶ Read the regulation at: <http://www.owrs.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Stcrt-2017-17224.pdf>

⁵⁷ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/vsv/minder-voortijdig-schoolverlaters>

⁵⁸ https://www.ingrado.nl/assets/uploads/Handleiding_strafrechtelijke_aanpak_schoolverzuim_2012.pdf

Participation in and completion of primary education is getting better; most children go to school, according to the researchers of the Inclusion Monitor.⁵⁹

As mentioned, early school leaving is still a problem. There are, however, major differences between municipalities: Nieuwegein and Ede report high school dropout rates while Capelle aan de IJssel has no signs of school dropout specifically among Roma. Most Roma and Sinti and researchers, however, agree that participation in education must be improved, especially higher education.⁶⁰

At national, regional and local levels, different approaches were developed in order to make sure that all Roma children enrol into primary school. This has worked out very well and the children are attending primary school.⁶¹

The main factors contributing to these approaches are the following: attending pre-school, engaging school counsellors (also known as mediators or intermediaries who involve parents), and Roma pupils who have finished school themselves and act as mentors and role models. In addition, actively working on a safe school environment with attention to diversity is important. If children are stateless, extra support is required.

Local Roma NGOs in Capelle aan den IJssel, Lelystad and Utrecht, for example, organise tutoring and after-school study sessions for the children. These volunteer projects have been made possible via the mentioned "Repair money" from after the Second World War.⁶² For example, in Utrecht, the enrolment of Roma children is not an issue, schools and the municipality are encouraging and stimulating Roma children in their school career. Local Roma NGOs are informing the parents about the importance of parental involvement and parental participation, so a number of mothers and fathers are helping in the schools voluntarily in the interest of their children. They are helping organising activities around Christmas and Easter for example, sports activities, supporting the teachers when the children have swimming classes and going to the library.

Small-scale initiatives can be well-arranged, and the results are measurable. One good example is organising classes to support children with their homework. This is being organised for primary and secondary school, for children from about 8 years old. Reading and writing classes are being organised as well. Talent-development is essential and needs attention as well. Parental involvement really helps to improve the educational level of the children. This kind of network can be set up with members of the Roma community at local level. The best practices, which already exist in several cities, can be used as examples for developing similar initiatives, and of course by taking into account the local situation. Local homework classes are set up by Roma organisations in Capelle aan den IJssel, Lelystad and Utrecht.

Support of secondary and higher education particularly for professions with high labour market demand

Participation in secondary education is also increasing. There are also more and more young people going to secondary schools and slowly more and more Roma and Sinti youngsters are going to higher education and are completing it. Roma children are likely to finish their secondary school. However, the level of qualification that they behold from the school often does not apply to the so-called "*Startqualification*", which is necessary to

⁵⁹ https://hetccv.nl/fileadmin/Bestanden/Onderwerpen/Multiprobleem_gezin/monitor-sociale-inclusie.pdf

⁶⁰ See: '*Education key to integration Roma and Sinti*', available at: <https://www.kis.nl/artikel/onderwijs-sleutel-tot-integratie-roma-en-sinti>

⁶¹ <https://www.kis.nl/artikel/onderwijs-sleutel-tot-integratie-roma-en-sinti>

⁶² <https://www.dus-i.nl/subsidies/verbetering-participatie-en-emancipatie-sinti-en-roma>

get an official diploma.⁶³ Parents are generally not well-informed about this matter, so this is an area to further be improved.

Local Roma organisations, with permission of the parents, are working with the youngsters providing them support and information on possibilities for professions with high labour market demand. At the moment, there are a number of jobs in the IT sectors, health care and education. There is currently a mismatch because of the following main reasons:

1. the lack of the demanded level of qualification,
2. employers prefer ethnically Dutch staff,
3. the negative image of Roma in society, which is supported by media reports and political influence,
4. the issue of statelessness amongst Roma.

Sometimes youngsters are offered an internship in the Roma organisations, but both youngsters and NGOs prefer an internship or a place, in order to complete vocational training, in companies, organisations and schools, which helps them develop their practical experience, for their CV and in order to make acquaintance with different people so that they can build their own network. The local Roma organisations do also provide follow-up and are observing the developments after their internships and trainings. Still, the link between education and work is not self-evident due to racism on the labour market.⁶⁴

Fight against discrimination and antigypsyism in education

In some cities there are even more difficulties in the secondary education. In these cities the tension between municipality, schools, project leaders and/or consultants and Roma, result in repressive set of measures at local level, as it is the situation in Lelystad. Under the heading of creating opportunities and offering perspective for Roma children it is an unofficial surveillance system. Roma parents testified that their children were taken out of the classroom, during a regular class, in order to fill out document entitled *"It is my life. Increasing future prospects for Roma youth in Lelystad"* for which the source of information has been derived from the documentation from the Netherlands Institute for Care and Welfare (NIZW) / National Knowledge Network for Disabled People (LKNG).⁶⁵ The children were asked questions like:

"What means of transport do you use?"

"Do your parents and your grandparents have a job?"

"At what age do your family members get married and where are they going to live?"

"At what age do they have children?"

Such and even more personal questions were asked the children, questions which are totally irrelevant to their educational opportunities and perspectives. The local Roma NGO which provide educational classes for the children are regularly blocked in their work by the Lelystad municipality and the project leader of the local "Roma Project".

⁶³ <https://www.rijksoverheid.nl/onderwerpen/leerplicht/vraag-en-antwoord/waarom-moet-ik-een-startkwalificatie-hebben>

⁶⁴ *'Nederlandse ex-crimineel eerder op sollicitatiegesprek dan migrant zonder strafblad'* [Dutch ex-convict is invited for a job interview before a migrant without a criminal record], newspaper AD, available at: <https://joop.bnnvara.nl/nieuws/werkgevers-prefereren-autochtone-ex-crimineel-migrant-zonder-strafblad>

⁶⁵ <http://www.owrs.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Het-is-mijn-leven-werkboek-Roma-JPW.pdf>

In schools in Nieuwegein quota were maintained by schools in order to prevent “too many Roma children”. In an episode of documentary series called “*Premtime*” it was mentioned that, for example, if there were to be two Roma children in a school, then the policy was that this does not go up to four or five.⁶⁶

Discrimination and segregation are very subtle and not always explicit. Hidden and indirect discrimination are more difficult to address. In 2018, segregation in schools has increased which has had a devastating effect on disadvantaged children. Especially children from lower socio-economic environments and “late bloomers” (children who come to a Dutch school at a later age because of migration for example) are the victims of the current education system. It starts with preschool education. It focuses on children with and without language deficits, with and without a migration background, with and without a disorder.⁶⁷ Roma children are extremely vulnerable in this case as it is likely that they will have even less opportunities and perspectives to successfully finish their education. Still, it is possible to overcome all these issues, it needs a lot of perseverance and finances to study.

⁶⁶ <https://www.uitzendinggemist.net/aflevering/18993/Premtime.html>

⁶⁷ <https://www.trouw.nl/samenleving/onderwijsraad-segregatie-op-scholen-neemt-toe~adaf379a/>

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Government should update the policy measures for Roma, in cooperation with Roma organisations; the policy measures should be developed taking into consideration the current problems of Roma in all fields covered by the Roma Civil Monitor reports. The updated set of policy measures should have clear timeframe, targets and measurable indicators.

Employment

2. Targeted employment measures for Roma with measurable indicators need to be developed in the next set of policy measures for improving the situation of Roma in consultation with the civil society and Roma, and the government should dedicate budget for implementation of such programmes. These measures need to address unequal access to employment, statelessness and antigypsyism. Concrete initiatives should be planned, such as micro-credits for starting a business, internships and jobs with perspectives in all sectors etc.
3. Antigypsyism in the recruitment process, by the employment authorities and by potential employers, as well as discrimination at work place needs to be recognised and addressed by both relevant authorities at all levels and by local Roma and mainstream activists. Active Roma NGOs should always be consulted and involved. The government should increase financial support for local Roma NGO initiatives; their work should be rewarded, as their capacity for voluntary work has been overused.
4. EU funding meant for the improvement of the situation in the field of work, like the European Social Fund, should be made accessible for small NGOs.

Housing and essential public services

5. Equal rights to the housing market should be realised; Roma NGOs should be partners in local housing developments.
6. The right to live in a caravan should be brought into practice. Families should be allowed to live together if they want to and not be disrupted.
7. Equal access to housing and antigypsyism in housing market should be addressed in the post-2020 strategy and addressed through targeted measures.

Impact of health care policies on Roma

8. Concrete measures should be identified to improve the health situation of Roma, to address main issues such as women's health care and barriers in accessing healthcare (statelessness and its effect on health care, antigypsyism in health care etc.), and develop specific indicators to measure the success of these measures.
9. It is essential that Government commits budget and resources to meaningful initiatives, such as enabling the good work of mediators from within the Roma community, who understand Roma culture and history, because then the access to health care would be easier and of better quality for Roma.
10. Equal access to health care and antigypsyism in health institutions should be addressed in the post-2020 strategy.

Education

11. Roma and pro-Roma civil society actors should be involved in development of a non-stigmatising approach to designing and implementing educational measures for Roma children, including the local 'Roma projects'.

12. The government should develop measures that would help Roma children to overcome language difficulties from their early stage of education process; measures should be continued to prevent early school leaving by focusing on the municipalities where early school leaving is still a problem; it is also necessary to use promising practices regarding the cooperation among the relevant stakeholders at the local level, to be in good contact with teachers and school directors in order to pave the way for Roma children so that they are offered more chances and opportunities; Roma parents and children should participate in all stages of the program design and implementation too.
13. The government should conduct an independent study to discover if and to what extent the increasing school segregation affects disadvantaged children, including Roma.
14. Equal access to education and antigypsyism in education should be addressed in the next set of policy measures for Roma and the direct funding for Roma and pro-Roma NGOs should be enabled in order to help small Roma organisations to implement their programmes; Roma and pro-Roma advocates in the Netherlands need a significant support in regards to self-organisation and empowerment.

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