

# Academics Stand Against Poverty launches its first Eastern European Chapter in Romania

In a world where the inequality gap is extremely disproportionate, where 67 individuals own a fortune equivalent with 3.5 billion (half the planet's population) poorest people, where famine and poverty related diseases are killing more than 18 million people a year and where the global institutions, through policies, have the capacity and the moral obligation to eradicate poverty worldwide and offer universal respect for human rights, a group of prominent academics have united to find the policies that can adjust to solving the current problems.



ASAP Romania, May 25th, 2015

**Academics Stand Against Poverty (ASAP)** is a global organization focused on utilizing scholarship to influence policy and public attitudes to poverty. More than 150 academics, experts and researchers worldwide, are constantly working on a global institutional formula that can rapidly and through clear measures is designed to end world poverty. Because the status quo of the world institutions consists in policies that are rather pursuing the interests of the most affluent, the ASAP members are doing rigorous research to tackle the causes and give recommendations suitable for a just global society.

So far, many academics were debating essential global issues within conferences and in niche articles, with no actual success in reaching the ears of the policy makers, the civil society, or the general public, even though their research and possible solutions were very well thought. As a consequence, the global discourse on poverty was only sold to the public by the global institutions which were responsible to end poverty. Thus, the data on progress offered to the public by the UN or the World Bank was not really put under the question mark.

ASAP has been developed as an international platform that facilitates contact between North-South poverty focused academics and that helps academics pursue applied research and intervention projects, as well as campaigns on specific issues. In the five years of existence, it has extended in over 18 chapters in different corners of the world. ASAP Romania is one of the newest, representing the first Eastern-European chapter.

**The launch of ASAP Romania** took place on May 25th, 2015 at the Romanian Diplomatic Institute in Bucharest, with the financial and logistical support of the Centre for International Cooperation

and Development Studies (IDC) of the Faculty of Political Science, University of Bucharest. The event gathered over 100 academics, government officials, NGO representatives, development workers, students and other civil society actors to discuss current and urgent issues of international development, with a focus on systemic poverty.

The ASAP Romania launch was marked by the **Kapuscinski Development Lecture** held by **Thomas Pogge, Leitner Professor of International Affairs at Yale University and President of Academics Stand Against Poverty**, 'Development Goals - Brilliant Propaganda?' during which he emphasized the flaws within the Millennium Development Goals and how we should address them in the post-2015 development agenda.



speaking at the Kapuscinsky Development Lectures, May 25th, 2015

According to **Professor Pogge**, the main issue is that the development goals are merely a 'wishlist' that doesn't specify who is accountable for what, while too much effort is invested in trying to make us more successful than we really are in implementing the development goals.

With this occasion, Thomas Pogge has recommended to the responsible experts **three immediate actions necessary to improve the SDGs framework:**

*We should sharpen and specify the responsibilities of capable agents. Who are the agents that are undertaking this effort together and what is the division of labor among them? Who is supposed to do what?*

*We need a clearer outside independent measurement of success. So we need to have independent agents and agencies that monitor progress in particular dimensions and report independently to the world as to how we are doing.*

*We need to pay more attention to the systemic factors. Why is it that poverty persists? Why is it that inequality is rising in most countries? We have to change these mechanisms in order to stop increasing inequalities at the source, rather than counteracting them through development assistance.*

The second session of the launching event was the workshop called **Combating Poverty and Inequalities: New Perspectives for Romanian Academics & Practitioners** where Romanian and international experts have presented their theoretical and empirical work on issues of poverty. Speakers such as Ciprian Necula (Ministry of European Funds), Leslie Hawke (OvidiuRO), Cătălin Berescu, Grațian Mihăilescu, Dani Sandu, Doina Doroftei (MFA Romania) or Alexandru Ciorobea (**Together for Development**) have discussed issues of child poverty, youth poverty, living conditions in extreme poverty in Romania and Europe and its link to racial segregation, the problem of communities of Roma that have no identity cards or other official papers, therefore considered invisible and showed examples of successful actions that managed to ameliorate or even eradicate the extreme poverty in several communities. The discussions raised a high interest on behalf of the participants, who took the chance to ask insightful questions regarding the methodologies used in studies or the ground-experiences of the speakers.



Alena Dorobea, Doina Doroftei, Andrei Poama, Leslie Hawke, Gratian Mihailescu, Ciprian Necula @ Romanian Diplomatic Institute

Besides putting an urgent global debate on the table of the Romanian experts and academics, the innovative aspect of the launch of ASAP Romania consists in giving those who work on poverty-related issues the opportunity to increase their impact through ASAP's international network which encourages them to collaborate with other academics, enables them to effectively outreach to policy-makers and broader public audiences and helps them to pursue applied research and intervention projects.

The event was also an online success online. The lecture of Professor Thomas Pogge had a rating equivalent to that of a prime time news journal in Romania, one of the European countries with the highest number of TV viewers. In total, the Kapuscinski lecture reached more than 200.000 people from over 60 countries.

Needless to say, the whole event was an opportunity to get engaged with global debates, issues and solutions, meet new people, create new partnerships, but also to reconnect with fellow colleagues in a pleasant and constructive atmosphere.

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In order to find out more about **Academics Stand Against Poverty (ASAP) & ASAP Romania** and their activities, visit:

[www.academicsstand.org](http://www.academicsstand.org)

[www.facebook.com/AcademicsStandAgainstPoverty](https://www.facebook.com/AcademicsStandAgainstPoverty)

[www.facebook.com/ASAPRomania](https://www.facebook.com/ASAPRomania)

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## **Academics Stand Against Poverty - Romania**



### **What is ASAP-Romania?**

ASAP Romania is an initiative of Academics Stand Against Poverty (ASAP), an international network helping scholars and students enhance their impact on global poverty. It does so by promoting collaboration amongst poverty-focused academics, by helping them reach out to broader audiences on issues of poverty, and by helping them turn their expertise into impact through specific intervention projects as well as campaigns on specific issues.



ASAP's president, **Prof. Thomas Pogge** of **Yale University**, announced the initiative of building **the Romanian Chapter** during his visit at **the 2014 Romanian Development Camp**, where he gave two lectures regarding the role of academia in combating global poverty and how to track progress against deprivations.

***How is ASAP distinctive from other poverty-focused organizations?***

First and foremost, among ASAP's members are internationally recognized experts who are contributing with rigorous reviews on the work on poverty, trying to bring the research and the solutions proposed at the academic levels outside the ivory tower and have a real impact. Second, its network is extended globally, including numerous universities and academics, especially promoting North-South collaboration among its members, with a strong focus on creating opportunities for those who face barriers to full participation in the global academic dialogue.

ASAP is headed by Prof. Thomas Pogge (Yale University) along with the board of directors. The advisory board includes prominent academics such as Prof. Peter Singer (Princeton), Prof. Paul Collier (Oxford), Prof. Ha-Joon Chang (Cambridge), Prof. Sabina Alkire (Oxford), Branko Milanovic (CUNY, formerly a leading economist at the World Bank) and many other experts working in the field of poverty.

***Why Romania?***



ASAP constantly aims to develop its network by opening chapters in parts of the world that it did not cover before. Eastern Europe represents such a region, and Romania is a country presenting two important characteristics for this choice. First, Romania is one of the European countries most affected by poverty and where action is urgently needed. Second, Romanian academics should be able to participate with their work in the global academic dialogue and increase their impact on



poverty eradication.

### ***How can Romanian scholars contribute to ASAP's mission?***

The overarching aim of ASAP is to contribute to the eradication of severe poverty worldwide and to ensure that poverty policy and development efforts are guided by rigorous empirical and normative scholarship. ASAP's ultimate concern is for people, not for countries, thus it focuses on poor people from both affluent and less-affluent countries.

ASAP Romania is on the path of developing the first chapter in Eastern Europe which will be involved in ASAP's international projects as well as develop local/regional related projects. In this context, we invite Romanian academics and experts whose work is focused on poverty to get involved or to become members, and to participate in our Global Colleagues Project. ASAP's members are eager to share their expertise in public debates and policy dialogues where they have the opportunity to be heard and to work with their peers around the world.

### ***Who else is contributing to this mission?***

ASAP has Chapters launched or in development in Austria, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, India, Italy, Germany, Mexico, Oceania, Romania, Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States and West Africa. In total, more than 1,200 ASAP members work and study in universities, research centers and NGOs worldwide.

### ***In the context of the upcoming SDGs, how could academics enhance their positive impact on poverty? / Could you give a concrete example of ASAP's work regarding the SDGs?***

In 2012 at Yale University, ASAP has launched the Institutional Reform Goals project, a research and advocacy project that aims for the reform of supranational institutional rules and practices that are worsening poverty globally.

### ***Why should we care about systemic reform?***

A systemic reform of global institutions is a focal point in the debate regarding the post-2015 development agenda. Given the time-sensitive nature of this debate and official deliberations on the subject, IRG's **short-term** focus is on the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This means our objective is to ensure that the emerging SDGs are made as good as they can realistically be. Like many other civil society organizations, we call for the inclusion of meaningful language, in the new development goals, on issues such as human rights and inequality reduction. Our focus, however, is to advocate for the strongest possible emphasis on accountability, and on systemic reforms of global institutions. We will intervene in the ongoing post-2015 debates through a variety of methods, such as producing and circulating original, research-based policy briefs articulating our objectives, and organizing awareness-raising campaigns with collaborating institutions.

Such an undertaking was already successfully carried out combining the efforts of ASAP's global network. More than 50 experts signed an open letter to Ban Ki-moon, UN's Secretary General, asking him to push for the inclusion of specific policies in the SDGs that would stop tax abuse, a practice that severely affects developing countries and increases global poverty. The letter circulated in a petition campaign, where ASAP Romania made an important contribution toward raising the symbolic number of 2015 signatures. This shows a rising interest on behalf of Romanian citizens to have a voice in the global decision-making.

Moving into the **longer term**, we have identified ten focus areas in which the reform of global rules and practices could have a major impact on human development and poverty eradication: (1) **illicit financial flows**, (2) **international resource and borrowing privileges**, (3) **intellectual property law**, (4) **democratization and accountability**, (5) **international labor standards**, (6) **international trade**, (7) **environmental sustainability and climate change**, (8) **global migration**, (9) **the arms trade**, and (10) **debt**.

For each of our focus areas, we will:

Articulate politically feasible institutional reform **goals and illustrative targets** to be presented through research-backed policy papers.

Work to build a broad coalition of academics and civil society members to support our call for new **institutional reform goals**.

Promote these **institutional reform goals** widely (as a first step, by engaging with and intervening in the post-MDG debate).

ASAP's IRG project is ambitious and unique. While other NGOs are campaigning in many of the 10 areas we have identified, very few understand them as systematically interrelated.

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## **Issues of Global Justice: How is the Global Arms Trade Violating the Human Rights?**

After centuries of moral discussions on issues as war and peace, a new wave of thinking in the international relations became the main focus of concern. Once the interdependence between states and actors in the international arena strengthened accompanied by the erosion of sovereignty, and after witnessing the horrendous crimes of the WWII, new standards began to develop in the moral thinking, in the sense that equal treatment for human beings was expected to be guaranteed for everyone on the planet.

This development considers minimum standards at the institutional level that aim to be implemented everywhere in the world for every citizen in and outside the country. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is such a standard, upon the majority of the world states adhered. The European Union (EU) and the United Nations (UN) along with other international organizations were invested with a part of the national sovereignty of the member states in order to take more equitable measures of governance, create supranational institutions and limit the powers of the individual states. Other global developments such as worldwide protests, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), technological developments, transnational labor, climate change, biodiversity, and trade required the need to open new ethical measures and discussions in order to keep track of the ethics of the new paradigm; these discussions reflect a struggle for Global Justice everywhere in the world. Issues such as poverty, inequality, extended injustices and the responsibility of governments, corporations and individuals are brought to the table in academic debates, a proper ground of creating equitable principles.

Human rights are now of great importance, being regarded by many advocates as universal and inalienable, yet despite their wide acceptance, many injustices and violations are still taking place under the same institutional architecture in which some others are doing more than well. The 67 richest people are as wealthy as the world's poorest 3.5 billion,<sup>[1]</sup> 1,020 million<sup>[2]</sup> people are chronically undernourished, and 2.5 billion<sup>[3]</sup> lack access to basic sanitation, while 2,000 million do not have access to essential drugs<sup>[4]</sup>. 18 million<sup>[5]</sup> die annually from poverty related causes, half of them being children under the age of 5.

As an issue of Global Justice, this paper is analyzing the global arms trade that is responsible of grave violations of human rights, but also has consequences and implications in causing poverty and preventing the international development to take place properly. I will use an institutional approach to human rights and the arms trade, rather than an interactional approach (actions between individuals). The research question is whether the citizens of the affluent countries are in any way responsible for the catastrophic effects that arms



trade has upon the most vulnerable and how this situation can be changed. I will take a further step to connect the decisions that the governments of the affluent countries take when they impose unjust international standards upon the poorest countries to the extent of the idea that they represent the citizens' (of the affluent ones) acceptance of such impositions.

Moreover, the responsibility is seen as a negative duty not to harm which is more stringent and powerful than the positive duty of helping or protecting someone's rights. The arms trade is a good example of this distinction from the perspective of the participants in the global institutional architecture.

The approach of this paper is shaped by the non-ideal theory which focuses on the question of what makes the actual system unjust, rather than the ideal theory concerned with the question, what a perfectly ideal system should look like; starting with the current institutional order and what can be modified in order to fulfill the minimum standard of the basic rights for everyone.



The aim and scope of this work is to understand the paradigm shift brought by the phenomenon of globalization as a starting point for finding pragmatic solutions for this important change that is continuously taking place based on philosophical moral arguments. The idea of Global Justice is to help address avoidable current global issues in such

a manner that the following evolutions in alleviating world poverty and human rights violations to be aligned with today world's needs. The SDGs that are about to be implemented starting with 2015, for example, are aimed to respond to the failures of the previous actions in this respect, are an example of some Global Justice efforts.

The significance of this approach is to address an issue of Global Justice that is insufficiently studied, which only gained more importance in the last decade, namely the global arms trade and the unjust system that governs it. Undertaking this direction of study is crucial because the global arms trade is tightly linked with systemic poverty.

To make a short overview, I will further summarize the structure and I will explain why I chose this specific order of the chapters.

Chapter 1 starts with the first three articles of the UDHR, which, as the reader will notice throughout the paper, are not fulfilled for a large part of the world's population in the context of arms trade, through direct or indirect effects of this global activity. It continues with a historical and a literature review of human rights and several ways of understanding them from a philosophical perspective. I used Gewirth's theory of Principle Absolute, Pogge's alternative understanding of human rights from the moral cosmopolitanism perspective and Rawls' approach of a minimum set of rights in the interaction between states.

Chapter 2 is explaining why and how the global arms trade is responsible for human rights violations, addressing a structural problem that is caused by the very rules meant to prevent a malfunctioning of this sector. The International Law (IL) is not properly built to prevent genocides, atrocities and civil wars - I will explain why in a detailed analysis of the loopholes in the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), and also why the preemptory customary law of *jus cogens* fails to be respected. The negative duty approach is helping us to determine why IL is not suitable when it comes to arms trade because it is mostly based on the positive duty - the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

Chapter 3 explains the concept of responsibility and makes the transition from the idea of states' responsibility alone to the responsibility of citizens from affluent countries in facilitating grave human rights violations, by contributing through votes, taxes and tacit acceptance of the unjust system that is governing the circulation of arms around the world.

Chapter 4 shows the horrific fear that vulnerable people and societies are constantly living with and why it is of great importance to eliminate it as soon as possible, so the personal and social development of the affected ones can start taking place.

Read more: [Issues of Global Justice\\_Diana VELICA](#)

[1] Moreno, "The 67 People As Wealthy As The World's Poorest 3.5 Billion"

[2] FAO, "1.02 Billion People Hungry" in Pogge, 2010, p. 11

[3] WHO and UNICEF, 2013, p. 5 in Pogge, 2010, p. 11

[4] Fogarty International Center, "Strategic Plan" in Pogge, 2010, p. 11

[5] 'In 2004, there were about 59 million human deaths. The main causes highly correlated with poverty were (with death tolls in thousands): diarrhea (2,163) and malnutrition (487), perinatal (3,180) and maternal conditions (527), childhood diseases (847 - measles accounting for about half), tuberculosis (1,464), malaria (889), meningitis (340), hepatitis (159), tropical diseases (152), respiratory infections (4,259 - mainly pneumonia), HIV/AIDS (2,040) and sexually transmitted diseases (128) (WHO, Global Burden of Disease, table A1, pp. 54-9). To be sure, some deaths from these causes would still have occurred even in the absence of poverty. But these are greatly outnumbered by the contribution that poverty makes to deaths from globally common causes such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, traffic accidents, and violence. It is likely then that rather more than one third of all human lives are substantially shortened by severe poverty.' (Pogge, 2010, p. 205, n. 10)

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