

GETTING OUT TO DREAM

The condition of Roma children living in inadequate housing in Rome



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ASSOCIAZIONE
21 LUGLIO
ONLUS

INTRODUCTION

The presence of Roma and Sinti in Italy is estimated by the Council of Europe at between 120.000 and 180.000 people, that is around 0,25% of the Italian population, one of the lowest percentages in the European continent. Around 50% has Italian citizenship and according to recent estimates, 60% of the total is younger than 18 years of age. Roma living in inadequate housing who are present on the national territory amount to around 35.000/40.000 people.

Life of a poor underage Roma in Italy

The living conditions of the around 20.000 underage Roma living in poverty in formal settlements (designed and managed by the authorities) or informal settlements (established spontaneously), mark deeply their present and compromise their future irreparably. Figures condemn them to a life that is marked since birth.

Nowadays, a Roma child who is born in a settlement has almost 0 chances of going to

university, while the likelihood that he/she will attend secondary education does not go beyond 1%. In 1 case out of 5, he/she will never go to school at all.

His/her life expectancy is on average 10 years lower than that of the rest of the population, while as an adult he/she will have 7 chances of out 10 of being discriminated owing to his/her ethnicity.



Valentina Faraone

In Italy, 20% of Roma living in inadequate housing, that is 7.500, live in the territory of the municipality of Rome; it is estimated that around 4100 minors live within these boundaries: 1350 aged between 0 and 6 and 2750 aged between 7 and

18.

Their life is marked by poverty, social exclusion, inadequate housing conditions, limited access to health-care, no access to preschool and low attendance rates in compulsory education. All

these factors hamper the full enjoyment of the rights of the child set forth by the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 20 November 1989, and ratified by Italy with law n. 176 of 5

September 1991.

Today, in Rome, 4100 Roma children of different nationalities, grow up among piles of waste, live in alarming health-hygienic conditions, without a proper place to study and play,

and a place where they can reasonably think of building a future founded on rights. As stated by the Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-moon, «**The one thing all children have in common is their rights. Every child has the right**

to survive and thrive, to be educated, to be free from violence and abuse, to participate and to be heard».

THE DREAM OF A HOME

In 2016 there are four types of accommodation in Rome for the 1650 Roma and Sinti families lacking adequate housing: two formal ones (institutional slums and gathering centers) and two informal ones (informal slums and micro-settlements)*.

I don't like to be here, it's dirty, from time to time a mouse passes by. The house is better than a camp



Stefano Sbrulli

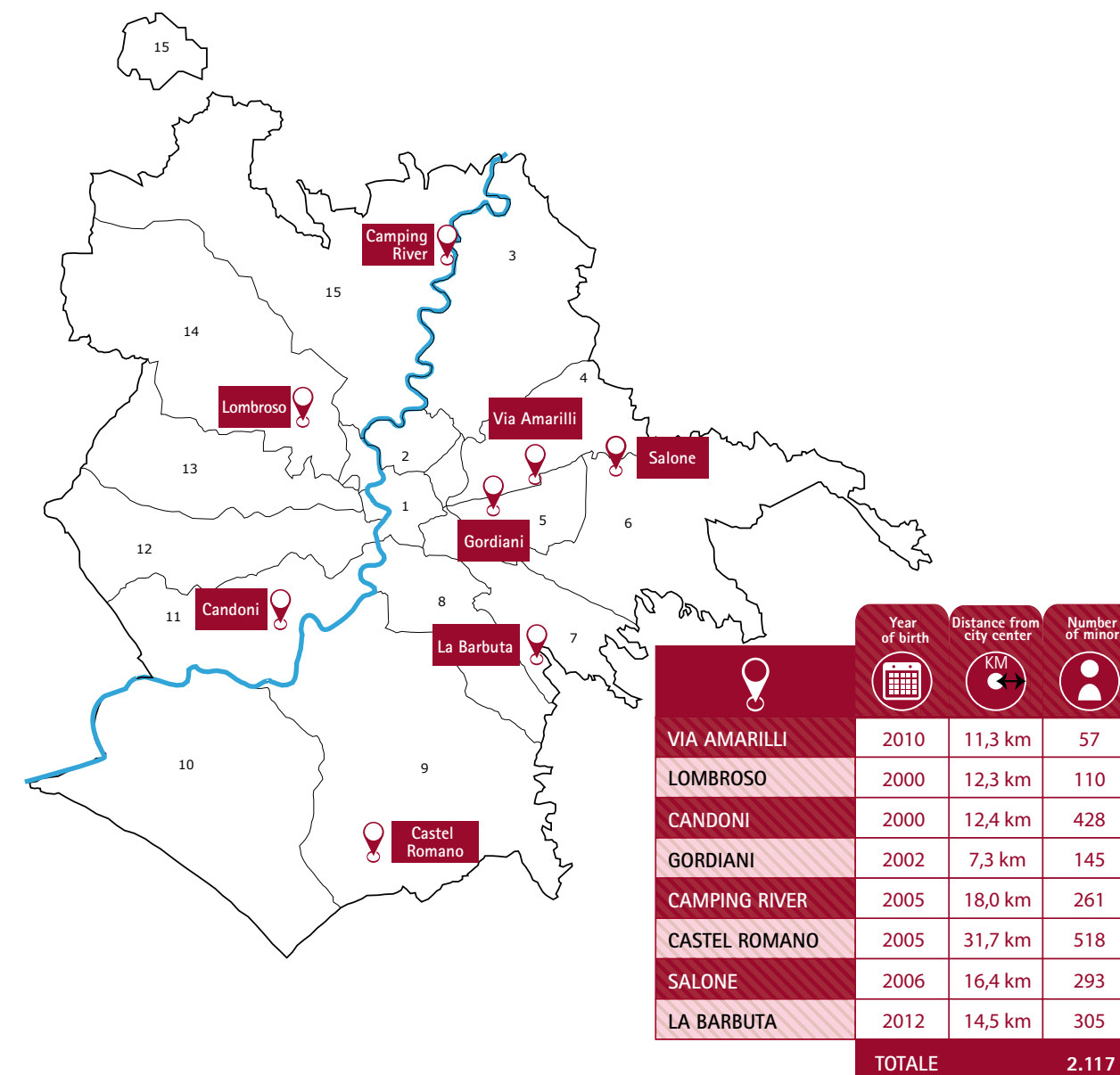
The 6 institutional slums are characterized by a general state of neglect, by the lack of ordinary and extraordinary maintenance interventions, by a dramatic and constant deterioration of the hygienic/sanitary conditions, by inadequate, asphyxiating and overcrowded dwellings and by significantly deteriorated housing units. The conditions of the slums are below the minimum levels set by international standards on adequate housing. The only gathering center, the one in *via Amarilli*, accommodates family units based on ethnicity and it also fails to satisfy the minimum requirements set by national and regional laws, as well as by international standards.

I have a friend at school and I wanted to invite her at my place, but I can't, here everything is dirty, it is a mess



Stefano Sbrulli

MAP OF THE FORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN ROME, 2016



Beside the 6 institutional slums indicated on the map, there are more settlements inhabited exclusively by Roma communities; these are referred to by the authorities as "tolerated camps". The main ones are those in *via del Foro Italico*, *di via della Monachina* and *di via Salviati*. In addition, according to estimates, in the capital city, there are also more

than a hundred micro-settlements, all lacking minimum services and with sometimes dramatic living conditions; these are inhabited primarily by EU Roma coming from Romania who, over the past years, have been the victims of several forced evictions. They are often located in hidden and dangerous areas (close to the Tiber river, among the bamboo trees along the

highways, or in the proximity of waste dumps). The shacks are built using plastic covers, cardboard and camping tents in rather bad shape.

* For more information and background on the meaning and the characteristics of the housing solutions in place in Rome for Roma and Sinti communities, please see Associazione 21 luglio 2015 Annual Report

THE DREAM OF NOT SEING YOUR HOME DESTROYED

Over the past years, the only response that the Roman authorities offered to the families who live in the informal settlements of Rome has been forced evictions. These evictions have been constantly accompanied by the arbitrary destruction of personal property and had as consequences, the loss of personal belongings, the sudden disruption of social relations, the interruption of access to services and schooling, making families even more vulnerable.

In 2013 there were 54 forced evictions in Rome, which involved around 1.250 people, including 690 children. In 2014

the number of forced evictions was 34, with 1.150 people affected, among which 630 children. In 2015 Associazione 21 luglio recorded 80 forced evictions (+135% compared to 2014), with 1.470 people affected of which 810 children.



Forced evictions

Not all evictions carried out with the use of force are considered forced evictions. An eviction that is justifiable on objective grounds, which is implemented in full respect of people's dignity and of international standards, even when force is used – as long as this is necessary and proportionate – can be considered legitimate, and

does not violate the prohibition of forced evictions.

The **United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** stated that evictions can be carried out only as a last resort, once all other alternatives have been explored, and only once procedural protections have

been put in place such as: a genuine and effective consultation with the people affected, an adequate and reasonable notices, the provision of adequate alternative housing, the prohibition of rendering homeless all persons affected by the eviction.

THE DREAM OF GOING TO SCHOOL



Andrei: «I don't want my children to stay here. If they stay here I am sure that they will have problems when they grow up. My children don't have a future here»

Valentina Faraone

The Roma child and the school in Rome

In the timeframe going from the school-year 2009-2010 to the school-year 2014-2015, it appears that on average:

- Among the Roma children enrolled in school, **one out of five never showed up in class.**
- Of the around 1.800 enrolled in school, only 198 attended classes regularly. **Nine children out of ten did not attend regularly;** based on the law currently in force, this fact may prevent them from being admitted to the end of the year grading meeting, which implies that they would automatically fail the year.
- **One Roma child out of two** is behind in school and attends a class that does not match his/her age.

THE DREAM OF BEING IN GOOD HEALTH

For a Roma child, living in a settlement in the city of Rome – either formal or informal – implies having a greater chance, compared to a child born in a conventional house, to be born under-weight, to get sick from respiratory diseases, to be the victim of poisoning, burnt and domestic accidents. Alcoholism and drug addictions are widespread among teenagers; "poverty diseases" such as tuberculosis, scabies and pediculosis as well as vi, mychotic and sexual infections are on the rise. The location of some settlements on unhealthy sites, characterized by acoustic and environmental pollution, and placed close to waste dumps and incinerators, or on areas at high hydro-geological risk, aggravates the condition of Roma children and exposes them to further health hazards.

Spatial marginalization and the inability to benefit from a social network external to the institution of the "camp", is something that affects severely the psychic health of the Roma children. A sense of passiveness towards life, a sense of void and resignation, an unexpressed rage, are common especially among teenagers; there is also a total adhesion to the role that society and policies offer to them, an absolute representation of the only role that appears to be possible, the one of "different" and problematic children, who depend from others and who are deprived from the possibility of dreaming of a different future.

My classmates wouldn't even be next to me. They talked, laughed. I was on my own, I did not say a words for hours

In the school year 2014-2015, 1.186 Roma children living in the formal settlements of the Italian capital were included in the *Project for Roma Education* implemented by the Municipality of Rome and aimed at promoting access to compulsory education. Around 30,3% of them never went to school while only 12,30% attended school regularly, that is at least 75% of the time. None of them appear to have regularly attended secondary education. During the same school-year, 70,5% of Roma children were older than their classmates.

Marinela: «My children are nervous here, they slam doors, they act weird, aggressive. Mind here doesn't work properly.»

OBSTACLE COURSE



For Roma juveniles, who are born in authorized or informal settlements in Rome today, life already seems to be marked by an existence where the first right shattered is the right to dream. Dream of a different home, dream of playing and breathing clean air, dream of becoming a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher and dreaming of fully realizing their own potential; a lifespan marked by an "obstacle course", where the risk of plummeting is always just around the corner: being removed from their family, live the first three years of their life behind the bars of a prison, adolescent marriage, remain in their native country afar from their parents.



FORCED REMOVAL

Roma juveniles who live in an authorized or informal settlement in Rome have from 30 to 40 times the probability of being removed from their families and be declared adoptable than a non-Roma minor.

In a case study conducted by Associazione 21 luglio, aimed at

defining the presence of Roma juveniles in the cases faced by the Court of Rome from 2006 to 2012, the question was posed: According to the population living in Lazio Region, how many Roma minors are being adopted? Based on an average population density of 3800 Roma minors living in Lazio Region, during

said period, 3,1% were declared adoptable, a percentage 40 times higher than that of non-Roma juveniles, equivalent to 0,08%. If the Lazio population of juveniles were exclusively Roma minors, the juveniles up for adoption would, in the 7-year period, be 33,102 instead of 916



EARLY MARRIAGE

Early marriage, namely marriage involving children and adolescents, is a very widespread practice in many parts of the world that is common in populations and communities that live the same conditions of poverty, illiteracy and social stress. Examples can be found in the Indian region of Rajasthan, Niger, Bangladesh, rural areas of Albania, Romania

and Bulgaria. Cases of early marriage among adolescents have also been found in some Roma communities originating from Romania and Kosovo living in authorized and informal settlements in Rome. Under the general indifference of social workers and mediators, this forbidden practice by Italian law is ignored in the name of an alleged "Roma cultural

tradition".

Early marriage has strong physical, intellectual, psychological and emotional repercussions among the adolescents involved: educational paths are interrupted and sound personal growth, in a delicate phase of existence, is compromised.



"WHITE ORPHANS"

Over the past 20 years approximately 4 million people have emigrated to Italy for reasons related to the difficult social and economic conditions in their country of origin. According to recent studies conducted by UNICEF, the number of "white orphans", or rather, children who have remained in Romania whose parents have immigrated abroad, entrusted to their grandparents, relatives or to the control of their neighbours are roughly 350.000 between Roma and non-Roma.

Until 2010 the Roma families that emigrated from Romania settled

in informal settlements in Rome with their children. Repeated forced evictions and increasingly difficult living conditions – along with the inability to ensure continuity of their education and the fear of having their children taken away by social institutions – have resulted in the Roma parents leaving their children in their country of origin. The effects of this separation have particularly negative impact on Roma children who find themselves in a critical vulnerable condition.

Various studies have shown that "white orphans" live the risk of

being overloaded with domestic tasks, physical and psychological vulnerability, difficulties in acquiring ethical and moral competence, early sexual life along with the high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. Particularly in the period of early childhood, the lack of a nurturing mother figure has a major impact on nutrition, health and hygiene conditions and psycho-physical development of the child. Among "white orphan" adolescents, the cases of depression that at times result in a suicide attempt appear to be above average.



BEHIND THE BARS

In recent years in Italy, an average of 40 children, aged from 0 to 3, have lived their lives as "detainees" with their mothers. In March 2016, there were 38 mothers with 41 children (0-3 years) in Italian prisons.

According to Law 62/2011, mothers can serve their sentence with their children until the child is 6 years old, no longer until 3, but not in prison. The aim of the law is to facilitate the access of mothers to alternative provisional measures. The conviction should be served in Attenuated Custody Institute for Mothers (ICAM), colourful locations, without bars,

suitable for children. Yet there are only four structures (Turin "Lorusso e Cutugno", Milan "San Vittore", Venice "Giudecca" and Cagliari) in Italy and the purpose of the law risks to remain incomplete also in Rome.

In September 2016, there were 12 children with their mothers, 10 of which Roma, in the Rebibbia Prison in Rome.

Prison often is incompatible with the child's needs of socialization and psychophysical development. The children are affected by overcrowding and lack of space, situations that not only influence

negatively their overall growth, so much as to condition the development of emotional and cognitive sphere, but also frequently provoke restlessness, sleep difficulties, poor appetite, apathy and an tendency to cry. Prison rules, times, rhythms inevitably create situations of stress and tension that can also affect the mother – child relationship. Nevertheless, the imprisoned mothers in Rebibbia's nursery section are committed to giving their children the best care and serenity possible in a setting that, as time passes, has been furnished with games, colourful walls and a small library.

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