

STORIA MEMORIA



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## 1. Roma and Sinti in Italy

The current demographic situation of the Roma and Sinti communities in Italy is the direct consequence of the first arrivals in the 15th century and of migratory flows that affected our country from the late 19th century until the early 2000s.

As we have seen, the first documented appearance of communities identified as 'gens cingara' dates back to the 15th century, when the chronicles of the time report the presence in Bologna, Fermo and Jesi of groups heading for Rome in order to obtain papal indulgence. At the same time, other groups from Greece reached the coasts of southern Italy by sea. The initial curiosity about caravans from the East was soon replaced by an attitude of open hostility that would result in bans and expulsions reported until the 18th century.

The first migration to Italy took place at the end of the 19th century. In this period, Lombroso and many of his colleagues, in investigating the association between skull shape and the frequency of homicides, arrived at the scientific demonstration that the 'gypsies', in the company of the Sardinians, were the tip of the iceberg of the 'peoples-delinquents', whose atavism was linked to race. The development of this interpretation, writes historian Luca Bravi, 'led to only one consequential solution: the "gypsy plague" could not be solved by educational intervention; it could only be prevented, and sterilisation and the death penalty could be the only means to nip it in the bud. The 'gypsy asociality' was thus beginning to be bent towards hereditary interpretations'.<sup>1</sup>

Between the first and the second post-war period, about 7,000 Roma from Eastern Europe arrived, including Harvati, Kalderasha, Istrian and Slovenian Roma, who settled in different areas of the country (who managed to acquire Italian citizenship from 1975, thanks to the Treaty of Osimo). This period also saw the arrival in Italy of Sinti communities fleeing Nazi Germany. The German decree of 8 December 1938 on the 'Fight against the gypsy plague' argued that the 'gypsy question' should be tackled by focusing on the intrinsic characteristics of this 'race'. The 'gypsies' are Aryans, it is true, but contaminated with peoples of 'inferior races', which makes them subjects to be ghettoised, sterilised, deported and finally eliminated, in that genocide that the Roma and Sinti communities call Porrajmos (Devouring) or Samudaripen (All Dead).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bravi L., 2009, *Tra inclusione ed esclusione. Una storia sociale dell'educazione dei rom e dei sinti in Italia*, Unicopli, Trezzano sul Naviglio (MI).

<sup>2</sup> In international institutions, the term used to refer to the extermination of Roma and Sinti people is 'Porrajmos' or 'Porajmos', a word that means 'devouring' in Romanés and refers to the desecration of life. The term was proposed by Ian Hancock, a Roma professor at the University of Austin, Texas, precisely to refer to

In Italy, the concept of the racial inferiority of 'gypsies' was elaborated by race science linked to the figures of the physician and scientist Renato Semizzi and the anthropologist Guido Landra. The genocide of Roma and Sinti people in Nazi-Fascist Europe, which caused the death of at least 500,000 people belonging to these communities, was based on these theoretical foundations. Boiano, in the province of Campobasso; Agnone, in the province of Isernia; Tossicà, in the province of Teramo; Gonars, in the province of Udine; Prignano sulla Secchia, in the province of Modena; Berra, in the province of Ferrara are little-known places but with tragic names for so many Roma and Sinti families who had to be 'rounded up as quickly as possible and concentrated under strict surveillance in the most suitable locations in each province' in Italy since 11 September 1940.<sup>3</sup>

The lives of Italian Sinti and Roma families resumed with the end of the Second World War. Silence fell on the racial persecution suffered during fascism, just as the participation of Sinti and Roma people in the war of liberation was forgotten. Present in various partisan formations,<sup>4</sup> only a few people receive official recognition, many years after the end of the war.

In Northern Italy, inhabited mainly by Italian Sinti, families until the 1970s continued to carry out an itinerant work activity, that of travelling show business, as circus performers, carny and musicians. In Central and Southern Italy, inhabited mainly by Italian Roma, families progressively abandoned itinerant work activities, such as metal working, horse breeding and selling, and became part of the local working fabric.

Since the end of the 1960s, the Italian state has delegated the resolution of the problems experienced by Sinti and Roma families to an association - Opera Nomadi - founded in Bolzano in 1963, which assigned itself the function of representing the communities. In particular, on the issue of schools, the association's activities create the conditions for increasing marginalisation and discrimination of people belonging to the Sinti and Roma linguistic minority.

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the persecution and extermination during Nazi-Fascism. A few years after the introduction of the term Porrajmos, an intense debate has developed in the Roma and Sinti communities on the use of this term and on the most correct choice of words on the subject of extermination. Porrajmos is not used by all communities, as for some it also has the meaning of 'rape' and is considered a vulgar word that should not be uttered. Other terms used in communities to refer to genocide are: *Samudaripen* (all dead), *Baro Merape* (great extermination), *Sintegre Laidi* (suffering of the Sinti) or *KaliTraš* (black terror).

<sup>3</sup> This is the order for internment in special concentration camps by the Chief of Police, Arturo Bocchini, reported in Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Berini C., '25 April, Sinti and Roma partisans', U Velto  
<http://sucardrom.blogspot.com/2021/04/25-aprile-partigiani-sinti-e-rom.html>

The second major migration flow involves around 40,000 Roma from the former Yugoslavia. It began in the second half of the 1960s with the economic crisis in the former Yugoslavia caused by the financial reform promoted by Tito, which led to the closure of historic factories located in the most depressed areas of the country. Small groups of Bosnian Muslim Roma and Serbian Orthodox, who had been sedentary for centuries, deprived of work and fallen into a state of economic precariousness, left their villages for Italy, setting up small self-managed settlements, especially in Turin, Milan and Rome. This is a seasonal mobility involving a small number of people, mostly men. Since the end of the 1960s, the Italian state has delegated the resolution of the problems experienced by Sinti and Roma families to an association - Opera Nomadi - founded in Bolzano in 1963, which assigned itself the function of representing the communities. In particular, on the issue of schools, the association's activities create the conditions for increasing marginalisation and discrimination of people belonging to the Sinti and Roma linguistic minority.

The Italian economic crisis of the 1970s hit travelling show business particularly hard, causing families to lose their source of income and creating situations of refusal by the municipalities, which no longer allowed mobile homes to park in public spaces and denied registration, limiting the enforceability of constitutional rights, such as the right to vote.

This is the beginning of increasingly blatant - even institutional - discrimination, which leads to criminal incidents in large cities. In 1974, for example, in the Roman neighbourhood of San Basilio, the mobile homes of some families were set on fire.

International institutions since the 1970s, starting with the United Nations and the Council of Europe, and finally the European Union, have repeatedly asked Italy to recognise the status of linguistic minorities for Italian Sinti and Roma people, and to combat anti-Gypsyism.<sup>5</sup> The dozens of resolutions and pronouncements, however, remain unheeded by the Italian parliament and various governments.<sup>6</sup>

The Italian state's response to the economic crisis centred on social assistance and the creation of rest areas in provincial capitals, which were institutionalised by regional laws in the 1980s.

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<sup>5</sup> Anti-Gypsyism is prejudice on racial or cultural grounds against Sinti and Roma, expressed in stigmatisation, hate speech, segregation, violence and various forms of discrimination, including institutional discrimination such as censuses.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Council of Europe Recommendation 1557/2002  
<https://file.asgi.it/raccomandazione.n.1557.2002.pdf>

The Yugoslav economic crisis spread after 1980 with the death of Tito, which marked the end of peaceful inter-ethnic coexistence in Bosnia, Serbia and Macedonia; the suburbs of many Italian cities became populated by Roma families, who left their homes with the idea of one day being able to return. The increase in the number of families in housing emergency pushes the institutions, starting with those in Rome (the capital has been the epicentre of this second migratory wave in recent years) to a securitarian course of violent evictions and forced removals.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, forms of institutional rejection and discrimination became pervasive in Italian society, particularly in northern Italy and metropolitan cities. Italian Sinti and Roma families became increasingly involved in commerce and catering, while many traditional activities remained active, such as travelling shows, metalworking, animal breeding and buying and selling.

In the 1990s in northern Italy, synthesised families began to move out of the so-called 'nomad camps', buying small properties where they could live together with their extended family (this movement suffered a setback in January 2005, with the entry into force of the Consolidation Act 380/2001, which sanctions these properties as building abuses and does not provide for the possibility of regularising existing positions - only the Emilia Romagna region issued a provision in 2015 to regularise the homes of synthesised families).

The Yugoslav economic crisis deepened with the war that started in Bosnia in 1992 and the Kosovo conflict at the turn of the century. With the end of the conflict that also broke out in Kosovo, the fragmentation of the now former Yugoslavia was completed in 1999. Bosnian, Montenegrin, Kosovar and Serbian Roma people began their exodus to the West. They do not flee, as in the two previous migration flows, to seek better living conditions while waiting to return to their homeland, but to save their lives.

According to the most quoted estimates, the 'Yugoslav Roma' who arrived in Italy from the 1970s to 1992 are said to be 35,000; another 10,000 are said to have arrived in the following years, during the war in Bosnia and Kosovo<sup>7</sup>. They are not perceived as foreign migrants or war refugees, but rather, in common parlance, as 'nomads'. Nomads by choice and by culture. They are 'almost outside the system', wrote the anthropologist Leonardo Piasere<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Brunello P. (ed.), 1996, 'L'urbanistica del disprezzo', Manifestolibri, Rome.

<sup>8</sup> Piasere L., 1996, 'Stranieri (e) nomadi', in Piero Brunello (ed.), *L'urbanistica del disprezzo*, Manifestolibri, Rome.

The third and most recent migration flow, which took place at the turn of the millennium, concerns Roma communities of Romanian nationality. It peaked with the end of Ceausescu's regime and was the direct consequence, as had happened in the former Yugoslavia, of a profound instability in Romania and a severe economic crisis that affected the country's poorest and most discriminated sections, who were forced to flee to the West.

In the 2000s, anti-Gypsyism became radicalised in Italy, leading communities to suffer hate campaigns and increasingly violent attacks, such as the pogroms against immigrant Roma families that occurred in Opera (MI) in December 2006, in Naples in May 2008 and in Turin in December 2011. In the meantime, the Italian Sinti and Roma communities themselves have been trying to organise themselves with associations and federations since 2007, in order to be increasingly protagonists of Italian social and political life.

Conventionally, historians indicate twenty-two Roma and Sinti communities in Italy: the Italian Roma, subdivided into five groups (Roma from Abruzzo, Roma from Celento, Roma from Basilicata, Roma from Apulia, Roma from Calabria); the Italian Sinti, comprising nine macro groups (Sinti from Piedmont, Sinti from Lombardy, Sinti from Mucina, Sinti from Emilia, Sinti from Veneto, Sinti from Marche, Sinti from Gàckanè, Sinti from Extremistria, Sinti from Kranària) the Balkan Roma of recent immigration, comprising at least 5 macro-groups and subdivided into those who arrived in our country at the turn of the two wars and those who arrived between 1960 and the second half of 1990 (Roma harvati, Roma kalderasha, Roma xoraxanè, Roma sikhanè, Roma arlija/shiptaira); the EU Roma of recent immigration, within which it is possible to identify the Romanian Roma and Bulgarian Roma.

## 2. The 'Land of Fields'

In the face of the migratory flows of Roma and Yugoslavian refugees, the 'nomad camp' increasingly became the main political administrative tool used by national and local governments in Italy to offer an immediate and emergency response to the dramatic housing conditions of these communities.

The first rest areas in Italy were created in the 1970s, mainly due to the will and intervention of the Opera Nomadi, which at the time promoted them on the basis of Circular No. 17 of the Ministry of the Interior of 11 October 1973, which asked municipalities to register people belonging to the Sinta minority in the municipal registry office. The first areas were established in Trento and Bolzano, but

then quickly spread throughout the country, in cities such as Udine, Mestre, Reggio Emilia, Pistoia, Turin, Bologna, Verona, Cuneo and Lucca.

Since 1984, a number of regional legislators have been attempting to provide order and answers to the critical problems encountered with the presence of Roma and Sinti communities on their territory by issuing organic legislative texts on these minorities.<sup>9</sup>

The elements that unite the laws - and that also represent their structural limits in some cases - are: the need to safeguard the ethnic and cultural heritage of the Roma and Sinti; the improper linking of the problematic linked to the condition of recently immigrated Roma refugees with that of Sinti carry people, actresses of a seasonal commuting connected to the travelling show; the identification of the 'nomad camp' as the most suitable place to guarantee the identity of the Roma and Sinti communities, not - in the original intentions - a means of segregation, but a device for safeguarding the peculiarities of these ethnic groups.

All these aspects are based on the assumption, which has never been proven, that being Roma or Sinto necessarily equates to the practice of voluntary nomadism, which is the foundation of a cultural identity.

The use of 'nomad camps' reached its peak with the implementation of regional laws, through the creation of new formal settlements or the transformation of favela-like housing solutions, which were supposed to be temporary, into 'permanent' ones. Contrasts and conflicts led administrations

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<sup>9</sup> The regions and autonomous provinces that over the years have formulated ad hoc legislation to address the issue are:

1. Lazio Regional Law, 24 May 1985, No. 82, "Norms in favour of the Roma";
2. Sardinian Regional Law, 14 March 1988, No. 9, 'Protection of the ethnicity and culture of nomads';
3. Emilia Romagna Regional Law, 23 November 1988, No. 47, "Norms for nomadic minorities in Emilia Romagna";
4. Friuli Venezia Giulia Regional Law, 14 March 1988, No. 11, "Norms for the Protection of Roma Culture within the Territory of the Autonomous Region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia";
5. Lombardy Regional Law, 22 December 1989, No. 77, 'Action for the protection of populations belonging to traditionally nomadic and semi-nomadic ethnic groups';
6. Veneto Regional Law, 22 December 1989, No 54, "Interventions to protect the culture of Roma and Sinti";
7. Umbria Regional Law, 27 April 1990, No. 32, 'Measures to encourage the integration of nomads into society and to protect their identity and cultural heritage';
8. Piedmont Regional Law, 10 June 1993, No. 26, "Interventions in favour of the gypsy population";
9. Regional Law of Tuscany, 12 January 2000, No. 2, "Interventions for the Roma and Sinti peoples";
10. Provincial Law of the Autonomous Province of Trento, 29 October 2009, No. 12, "Measures to promote the integration of Sinti and Roma groups resident in the province of Trento".



to isolate these areas more and more from the rest of the city, employing fences and guards, and relocating them to the fringes of urban areas.

Within this framework, the creation of 'gypsy camps' is configured and justified as an attempt to respect a supposed cultural specificity of 'gypsies/nomads' and, at the same time, to 'educate' families in civic life, favouring the schooling of boys and girls, and the start-up of new jobs for adults. In Bergamo in 1993, a new 'nomad camp' with services and fencing was built with funding from the Lombardy Region. In the same year, the Municipality of Brescia built two 'nomad camps', capable of accommodating almost 400 people. In the following years, it was the turn of Genoa, Pisa, Florence, Rome and Turin.

The construction of such spaces - all characterised by their remoteness from the urban fabric, fencing, lack of services, and a policy of control - necessitates the creation of municipal structures and ad hoc offices to manage them. In some Italian metropolises, Nomad Offices and local policies parallel to those for the rest of the citizenry are being created.

In 2000, the European Roma Rights Centre published the report "Campland. The racial segregation of the Roma in Italy", where for the first time Italy is defined as the "country of the camps" because it is the one most involved, on a European scale, in the construction of mono-ethnic settlements. The report points out that "in Italy, stereotypes hostile to the Roma are widespread. Underlying the Italian government's actions towards the Roma is the influence that they are 'nomads'. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, ten Italian regions recommended laws for the 'protection of nomadic cultures' through the construction of segregated camps. These public actions reinforced the perception that all Roma and Sinti are nomads and can only live in camps isolated from the rest of Italian society. The result is that many Roma have actually been forced to live the romantic and repressive image of Italians; the Italian authorities claim that their desire to live in real homes is not genuine and thus relegate them to 'nomad camps'.<sup>10</sup>

In the 1990s, urban security and the fight against decay became predominant themes in the Italian public debate. Projects such as the Emilia-Romagna 'Safe Cities' focused on crime prevention through institutional, community and social strategies. In several Italian cities, ordinances are issued against window washers, illegal vendors and homeless people near stations. In 2007, following the murder of Giovanna Reggiani in Tor di Quinto, the mayor of Rome points the finger at the uncontrolled entry of

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<sup>10</sup> From the preface by Leonardo Piasere in Stasolla C., 2012, *Sulla pelle dei rom*, Edizioni Alegre, Rome.



Romanian Roma. In 2008, the Prime Ministerial Decree declaring a state of emergency for nomadic settlements in Campania, Lazio and Lombardy was issued. The ordinances appoint delegated commissioners to deal with the emergency. The state of emergency is extended until 2010 and is extended to Piedmont and Veneto. According to the ordinance, the presence of irregular non-EU citizens and nomads causes a situation of social alarm and insecurity. The ordinances define the tasks of the commissioners, including monitoring nomad camps, identifying the people present and taking measures for their removal or expulsion. They also aim to create new sites for authorised camps and to implement social and educational interventions. In 2008, the European Parliament criticised the ethnic census of Roma in Italy. On the whole, the 'nomad emergency' aggravates the precarious situation of those affected and fuels the idea that it is an administrative and security problem. In 2011, the Council of State declared the 'nomad emergency' decree illegitimate.

The limited availability of scientifically reliable socio-demographic and economic statistical information on the various Roma and Sinti communities is an obvious limitation in identifying specific problems and the most appropriate measures to take. By contrast, the picture is clearer in relation to those communities living in housing emergencies or in ethnically assigned spaces.

In this regard, we can identify three housing macro-types: open-air settlements; community centres; mono-ethnic Public Housing areas.

Outdoor settlements:

### *Formal settlements*

These are settlements designed, built and managed by public institutions. Referred to in common parlance as 'nomad camps' or 'rest areas', they are almost always built outside the urban fabric, fenced off, with often insufficient primary services. They consist of containers, caravans or shacks. They exist in 74 municipalities and 14 regions. There are 111 of them, inhabited by 12,200 people. In many cases, these settlements can be defined as real 'shantytowns'.

### *Informal settlements*

These are spontaneous settlements, inhabited mainly by EU citizens. Given their fragmentation and the transience of those living in them, it is impossible to define their number. The estimated number of inhabitants is around 5,000.

## *Microareas*

Inhabited almost entirely by sinte Italians, they are small public or private areas where one or more extended families reside. The approximately 50 micro-areas on public areas in Italy are located in 7 Italian regions, geographically located in the Centre-North. Emilia-Romagna is the Region with the highest number of them (about 30 microareas, inhabited by about 720 persons).

## *Collection centres*

These are indoor shelters reserved exclusively for people identified as Roma. In the past, this type of housing was particularly used in the city of Rome. They exist today in the municipalities of Brescia and Naples, and are inhabited by more than 300 people.

## Single-ethnic Public Housing Areas

These are neighbourhoods located in peripheral areas and with a strong mono-ethnic character, sometimes real Public Residential Buildings built specifically to be reserved for people identified as Roma and Sinti. They are located in 6 municipalities and 4 regions, and are inhabited by approximately 1,000 people.

## **Micro-areas**

Micro-areas represent, especially for people belonging to the Sinta minority, a valid alternative housing solution to the nomad camp or other types of housing. It is a solution that makes it possible to overcome the problems that have arisen with the recent town planning regulations, which consider mobile homes or caravans to be real estate for all intents and purposes, effectively prohibiting their location on agricultural land, which, due to their affordability, were hitherto the preferred choice of Sinti families wishing to own their own land.

The micro-area allows residents to maintain a community lifestyle in relation to the extended family, and meets the needs of those who have travelling shows as a job. Single-family houses are built on it that can accommodate no more than five/six nuclei, eliminating the situations of extreme degradation and forced cohabitation of the camps and providing larger and more liveable living spaces.

However, micro-areas need constant and careful monitoring, as within a few years they may turn out to be no longer adequate structures for acceptable living standards, due to the growth of resident families or the exhaustion of traditional work activities.

Emilia Romagna is the region that in recent years has mostly followed the suggestions of the National Strategy 2012-2020 in relation to the creation of microareas, and favoured the development of this housing solution on its territory by passing Regional Law no. 11/2015 (which recognises microareas as being in the 'public interest') and issuing a Directive on the technical requirements to be provided for.

### 3. The National Strategy for Roma and Sinti Inclusion

The serious condition of social exclusion of the Roma and Sinti communities in Italy and in Europe prompted the European Commission to request member states, in its Communication no. 173 of 4 April 2011, to draw up and implement national strategies aimed at their inclusion.

In view of the inactivity of the Italian government, the Roma and Sinti Together Federation organised the largest national demonstration ever held in Italy in Rome in October 2011, calling for the establishment of a technical table to define the Italian National Strategy<sup>11</sup>.

On 11 November 2011, the Italian government set up the National Contact Point (NCP) at the National Office for Anti-Racial Discrimination (UNAR), which is responsible for drafting the National Strategy, approved in February 2012. The ratified Strategy provides for a governance structure, system actions (both coordinated by the National Contact Point) and guidelines on four axes of intervention (education, work, health and housing), which constitute the proposals made to local authorities, as the entities responsible for the inclusion of Roma and Sinti people in the territories. As also noted by various international monitoring bodies, the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Travellers suffers from delays and does not always, at the local level, translate into tangible improvements for Roma and Sinti communities.<sup>12</sup>

When it expires in 2020, implementing the recommendation of the Council of the European Union of 12 March 2021, in the spring of 2022 the Italian government presents the 'National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Sinti (2021-2030)'.

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<sup>11</sup> The Kroll Ketane event, <http://comitatoromsinti.blogspot.com/2011/11/tutti-uniti-aderisci-anche-tu.html>

<sup>12</sup> On the positions taken by various international bodies with regard to the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti, see the various Annual Reports edited by Associazione 21 luglio from 2015 to 2021 at [www.21luglio.org](http://www.21luglio.org).

The new National Strategy consists of a series of interconnected sections. The first chapter, "A New Frame of Reference", is dedicated to identifying the main critical issues that emerged in the previous strategic framework, defining the principles and national priorities of the new Strategy, and presenting the current condition of Roma and Sinti people in Italy. The second chapter is dedicated to the new processes of "Governance and Participation", with particular attention to the role of the National Platform and the Community Forum. The third chapter, "Thematic Areas", illustrates the six main axes on which the framework of the new National Strategy is built (anti-Gypsyism, education, employment, housing, health, cultural promotion). For each axis, the objectives set by the EU Council Recommendation of 12 March 2021 on equality, inclusion and participation of Roma and Sinti people (2021/C 93/01) are presented, as well as a summary framework to highlight critical points and strengths, and the measures in reference to the topics covered, accompanied by appropriate indicators. The fourth chapter is devoted to cross-cutting 'Intervention Processes', such as empowerment and participation, on the legal recognition of minority status. A specific section is devoted to the topic of monitoring and evaluation.

## **Recognition of the minority**

Sinti and Roma associations formed the Roma and Sinti Together Committee in 2007, later becoming a federation. They supported the inclusion of the Sinti and Roma linguistic minority in Law 482/1999. Subsequently, the Roma and Sinti Together Federation proposed a law for the protection and equal opportunities of the Roma and Sinti historical-linguistic minority. The proposal received the support of most Italian Sinti and Roma associations, as well as intellectuals and politicians. The aim of the bill is to ensure the recognition of the historical-linguistic minority of Roma and Sinti, in accordance with Articles 3 and 6 of the Italian Constitution, which enshrine equality and the protection of linguistic minorities. This aims to counter discrimination and prejudice that hinder the social and economic integration of Roma and Sinti communities. Currently, the protection of the Roma and Sinti minority requires further legislative definition since the existing law recognises other historical linguistic minorities, but not the specificity of the Romani language. Achieving minority status for the Roma and Sinti would help recognise the persecution they have suffered and promote a rapprochement between institutions, society and the Roma and Sinti communities, working together to overcome the conditions of social and economic hardship that afflict these populations.

## 4. Policies to overcome 'nomad camps'

The Sinti and Roma communities, the main Sinti and Roma associations and federations, and most of the associations working for their protection, have for years been calling for the overcoming of the logic of nomad camps, heterogeneous settlements of people often lacking any kinship or affinity, forced to live on the fringes of urban centres, in conditions of severe social degradation. It is estimated that almost 20,000 people in our country reside in camps, sometimes equipped and regular areas but very often irregular settlements lacking any primary services, most of them located in large cities.

Set up as an emergency and with the aim of temporarily accommodating people in transit, particularly for work needs, the camps soon proved to be inadequate for the needs of the families living there, and turned into a place of degradation and isolation from which people strongly desired to break free. The same need has increasingly matured in the local authorities themselves, who see in the nomad camp structure a condition of isolation that reduces the possibility of social and economic inclusion of the Sinti and Roma communities.

There have been many successful cases in which families and individuals have been able to leave the nomad camps for relocation in alternative and dignified housing solutions, but these experiences still represent a non-systematic reality and are difficult to implement due to the complexity of the actions that allow this transition. In order to succeed in this direction, it is necessary to design interventions that involve institutional and non-institutional actors, guaranteeing the connection between project proposals and local policies while respecting the fundamental rights and dignity of the persons concerned. Experience has shown that it is only when these prerogatives are respected that the process of leaving the nomad camp is successfully completed.

There is a wide spectrum of different solutions that can be considered to achieve the general objective of overcoming nomadic camps: support for the purchase or rental of private homes, self-building accompanied by social integration projects, the rental of disused publicly-owned cottages/huts, the structuring of rest areas for itinerant groups, the regularisation of the presence of caravans in agricultural areas owned by Roma or Sinti families, or the creation of micro-areas. Generally speaking, in order to strengthen the effectiveness of these solutions, which are all equally valid, a number of relevant conditions must however be considered: firstly, the overcoming of an 'emergency' approach, the reaffirmation of the centrality of the individual and therefore a flexible approach that assesses the specificities and uniqueness of the various solutions, the provision of

targeted interventions on the territory and the constant monitoring of interventions. Only with these assumptions in mind is it possible to guarantee the success of policies that lead to the gradual overcoming of nomad camps for successful alternative housing solutions.

It is certainly not easy to overcome a Roma slum through inclusive pathways. There are many reasons why this type of process is difficult to initiate: the lack of awareness of the issue within the administrative machine, the lack of adequate funds, the potential conflicts that certain interventions can trigger, prejudices against Roma people, and the problems linked to the social fragility of the majority of families living in them.

Despite these difficulties, in recent years more and more Italian municipalities have begun to reflect internally on the need to overcome the Roma settlements on their territory, and to measure themselves with interventions implemented for this purpose. Out of 111 mono-ethnic settlements still present on the territory, in 2022 as many as 26 were at an advanced stage of overcoming them through inclusive paths.

## 5. Girls and children in Roma slums

REYN (Romany Early Years Network), a leading European advocacy network promoting Roma children's access to quality early childhood development services, reports that across Europe, Roma children face disproportionate difficulties in the early years and beyond. The first years of life are crucial in determining the rest. Early childhood development is therefore crucial to ensure that Roma children have every opportunity to fulfil their full and unique potential and grow up in good health and well-being. However, there are barriers that make this difficult to achieve.

There are several studies investigating the psychological and social repercussions of living in a Roma slum marked by degradation, marginality and exclusion. Inner discomfort is constructed due to numerous factors, including the social context and the so-called social determinants of health: lack of income, discrimination, social exclusion, cultural deprivation and inadequate living space are all factors that impact on psychological well-being. They are all part of the lives of Roma people in housing emergency placed in camps.

According to various researches conducted within Italian Roma shantytowns,<sup>13</sup> the living conditions of the and approximately 7,000 Roma minors living in poverty in Italy in a formal (planned and

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<sup>13</sup> 21 July Association, *Going out to dream*, Rome, 2016.

managed by institutions) or informal (spontaneously created) settlement not only strongly marks their present, but also irreparably compromises their future. One or one Roma child born today in a 'nomad camp' will have close to a 0 chance of entering university, while the chances of attending high school will not exceed 1%. In 1 in 5 cases, they will never start school. Their life expectancy will be on average about 10 years lower than the rest of the population, while when they grow up they will have a 7 in 10 chance of feeling discriminated against because of their ethnicity.

In 2008, researcher Sabrina Tosi Cambini published 'La zingara rapitrice', a text that investigates alleged attempted kidnappings in Italy by ethnic Roma women between 1986 and 2007.<sup>14</sup> The cases are identified and analysed starting from the Ansa archive and arriving at the consultation of court files, adopting other perspectives (ethnographic, legal anthropology and ethnomethodology) in addition to the legal one. In view of the numerous cases reported by the press agencies, the results are surprising: in the period under consideration, none of the results of Cambini's investigation corresponds to an abduction of the child that actually took place; always we are faced with an alleged attempted abduction, or rather, an account of an attempted abduction. 'Yet,' the researcher concludes, 'the stereotype "Gypsies steal children" is much more powerful than any other'.<sup>15</sup>

Two years later, in 2010, Carlotta Saletti Salza's work "From protection to genocide? Le adozioni dei minori rom e sinti in Italia" (From protection to genocide? The adoptions of Roma and Sinti minors in Italy) was published two years later in 2010. It tackles the issue of child abduction in a mirror-image manner, starting from a question: "How true is the perception among Roma communities that their children are victims of removal by institutions?". The period considered is similar to that of the previous research: 1985-2005. Overall, there are 258 Roma and Sinti children declared adoptable registered in the seven Juvenile Courts where the research was carried out. Overall, the text highlights the ease with which Roma children living in a settlement are considered deprived and mistreated by inadequate parents. Many social workers interviewed also believe that the 'Roma culture' is in itself detrimental to the child's development. As a consequence, the protective intervention carried out in many contexts coincides with the removal of the child from the family as the only possible condition for bringing him or her up.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Tosi Cambini S., 2008, *La zingara rapitrice. Tales, denunciations, sentences (1986-2007)*, CISU, Rome.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Saletti Salza C., *Dalla tutela al genocidio? Le adozioni dei minori rom e sinti in Italia*, CISU, Rome.

In light of these data, the 21 July Association deemed it appropriate to carry out a similar research<sup>17</sup> on Roma minors declared adoptable in the Lazio Region, at the Juvenile Court of Rome<sup>7</sup>. The empirical survey was carried out between November 2012 and May 2013, while data processing and the drafting of the text were completed in July 2013. Coinciding with the data collection, in-depth interviews were conducted with the following figures: lawyers, public prosecutors, judges, social workers, hospital social workers, managers of 'family homes', privileged observers, social mediators. Quantitative data show that between 2006 and 2012, 6% of Roma minors were reported to the Juvenile Court, compared to 0.1% of non-Roma minors. During the same period, 1% of Roma minors underwent adoptability proceedings, compared to 0.1% of non-Roma minors. Adoptability judgments concern 1% of Roma minors and 0.08% of non-Roma minors. Despite the fact that Roma minors make up 0.35% of the minor population in Lazio, the number of declarations of adoptability is surprisingly high, indicating that a Roma child is much more likely to be reported, subjected to an adoptability procedure and declared adoptable than a non-Roma child.

The analysis highlights the ambivalence of adoption when it involves spaces and terms marked by social, cultural, political or geographical distances. Social exclusion-oriented policies towards the Roma in Rome contribute to creating a caesura between this community and the rest of society. As a result, the adoptions of Roma children, although formally domestic, re-propose similar dynamics to those of international adoptions, with the migration of Roma children to non-Roma Italian families, representatives of the majority society.

The quantitative analysis shows that Roma minors are reported to the competent authorities to a much higher extent than non-Roma minors. Moreover, once adoptability procedures are opened, Roma minors have less chance of actually being declared adoptable than non-Roma minors. This indicates unequal treatment and potential discrimination against Roma children.

The research highlights the presence of lack of knowledge and prejudice towards Roma on the part of professionals working in the field of adoption. The interviews also reveal a lack of awareness on the part of judges about the significant presence of Roma children in the cases they handle. A widespread culturalist approach on the part of professionals is emphasised, which tends to stereotype Roma as criminals, beggars or exploiters of their children.

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<sup>17</sup> 21 July Association, *My mother was Roma*, Rome, 2013.



Furthermore, it is emphasised that the precarious living conditions of the Roma are attributed to their culture and the alleged will of their parents, ignoring the role of social policies in the destitution and housing degradation in which many Roma families live. Local policies, instead of addressing socio-economic hardship, seem to exacerbate it. The inadequate conditions of Roma 'camps' infringe children's rights, but instead of addressing the structural causes, there is a tendency to remove children from families deemed culturally unsuitable.

The research also highlights the lack of mutual trust between Roma and social service workers, the presence of defaults and negligence on the part of social services, and limited access to legal rights. It suggests the need for a mediation service between the Juvenile Court and the Roma, as well as greater awareness of social services about diversity within the Roma community and the role of local policies

The reflections that emerged indicate the need for a mediation service between the Juvenile Court, the Roma and social services to raise awareness of rights and promote the active participation of these communities in building inclusive policies and sustainable solutions.

## **6. School and Roma children in the slums**

In implementation of the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union of 12 March 2021, Italy presented the "National Strategy for Roma and Sinti Equality, Inclusion and Participation (2021-2030), a strategic, non-binding document to respond to the so-called "Roma and Sinti issue" in our country. An entire chapter of the document is dedicated to 'Access to quality inclusive general education and educational proposals'.

"School," reads the document, "is an instrument for public education aimed at everyone, but it is also the institution through which processes of building one's own identity and recognising one's own social role are activated; the conflict that has long been active towards the Roma and Sinti has preserved in communities the image of a school understood as 'the school of others'. The school institution remains, however, above all the place where Roma and Sinti children can meet their peers. It is therefore essential to consider the image of the school that has settled in the memory of the older generations and the condition of life at school that characterises the younger generations today, in order to identify the fundamental elements for building a positive experience, because it is inclusive and respectful of everyone's identity. From this point of view, knowing and recognising the painful aspects of schooling experienced by the Roma and Sinti can make it possible to deconstruct a

negative memory of schooling and concretely support the current process of education at the community level and not only as a pathway for the success of an individual, ensuring the prevention and elimination of any form of segregation in education".<sup>18</sup>

"The latest disaggregated data available on the schooling of Roma and Sinti date back to the school year 2014/2015, after which the nationwide survey was discontinued also with reference to privacy protection guidelines and the difficulties and risks related to the rules for ethnic-based registration.[...] Considering the difficulties just described, the few and outdated surveys available confirm, however, the inadequate level of education as one of the main causes of the precarious living conditions of Roma and Sinti communities"<sup>19</sup>

The theories on what hinders the relationship between Roma people and schools can also be extended to those who were born and lived in Italy, to second-generation foreigners whose parents are of EU or non-EU origin. The problem, in fact, is not the schooling of the Roma as Roma, the problem is that the school fails to adapt to the needs of the various realities that exist regardless of what is written on the identity card, if any.

In support of this reflection, it is useful to mention Pierre Bourdieu and his habitus theory (1979). He elaborated this concept to describe the position of the individual within society and the concretisation of this position through behaviour, tastes, habits. The individual is placed in society through a so-called overall capital, which is the sum of economic capital (what the individual possesses in financial terms) and cultural capital (educational qualifications). The higher the overall capital, the more dominant the person or group of persons will be or will be. These capitals, in turn, are distinguished according to how they were acquired: there is inherited cultural capital and there is individual capital, the same goes for economic capital. For our discourse, cultural capital is relevant, and the difference between inherited and individual capital is of particular interest.

A child born into a context in which the cultural capital is already high thanks to the educational qualifications of one or both parents will inevitably be easier to attain the aforementioned qualifications because he or she will already have acquired a status that will have to be maintained. Conversely, an individual born into a family in which cultural capital is low or even non-existent will have to achieve by his or her own efforts the status to which he or she eventually aspires and will then be an individual capital.

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<sup>18</sup> UNAR, National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Sinti (2021-2030), 2021.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

Within the same culture there are subcultures that act to the same extent, this is the case with 'social classes'. When a pupil enters school, cultural capital will count for little, teachers will take it for granted that the child or young person will already be more or less schooled, and the habitus of the family of origin will not be taken into account, whereas it is very important for education. Roma, foreigners, children of unschooled individuals have a common problem: they do not possess the habitus, which in these cases should be provided by the school so that it really is a social lift.

The extreme isolation of the shantytowns and the resulting limited mobility, together with a lack of knowledge and availability of early childhood education services, leads to very low attendance by Roma children living in the shantytowns at pre-schools and kindergartens. This does not facilitate the entry of boys and girls into primary school and makes it difficult for Roma children to enter. Turning instead to secondary schools, the delicate socio-economic situation of many families also produces high rates of working minors. Young people drop out of school prematurely in search of immediate earnings, as they do not perceive education as a worthwhile investment in their future, and interventions by schools and social services are often late and have little impact. Starting from successful experiences in the contexts of urban fragility in Eastern Europe, it could be useful to initiate school mediation work in order to promptly intervene on the "lack of communication between teachers, students and their respective families, the difficulties in managing the relationships and dynamics between these subjects, as well as the inadequacy of institutions in understanding youth problems"<sup>20</sup> ; figures active in all educational and welfare services and agencies. In general, the school mediator "acts as an agent of the community in relation to the school, represents the community in the school and the school in the community"<sup>21</sup> . The creation of professional pools, mobile teams in the territories, capable of acting in the various welfare poles, between schools, associations, town halls, social services and other institutions, proves useful and urgent. It would be useful to envisage specific figures with the role of guarantors of the right of access to education, capable of coordinating, mediating with the institutions at the various levels and promoting the overcoming of any obstacle in accessing the right to education for minors.

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<sup>20</sup> [https://cipesalute.org/cedo/allegati/3032\\_manuale\\_just\\_metodi.pdf](https://cipesalute.org/cedo/allegati/3032_manuale_just_metodi.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.partidaromilor.ro/ce-este-mediatorul-scolar-si-cum-se-poate-obtine-calificarea/>

## Last bench

"Ultimo banco" (Last Stand) is a research conducted by the 21 July Association, aimed at analysing schooling projects for Roma minors in the city of Rome from 1993 to 2015. The research analyses the results of the reflections expressed on the subject by parents, adolescents and pre-adolescents living in the Roman slums, the teaching staff and non-Roma classmates who share classrooms with the recipients of the 'Schooling Projects': all useful voices to understand the reason why, despite the huge human and economic resources allocated, the schooling policy implemented by the Rome municipality is struggling to take off.

The common thread that accompanies the classroom experience of Roma girls and boys from the camps is the sense of inadequacy: for the gaps in their education; for the housing exclusion experienced and perceived; for the impression of being irreducibly 'different'. "We are not the same. We are gypsies, you are not. Why? Because you live in a nice house, we live in a container. You don't have people fighting, you live beautifully. We are always here. Sometimes we go out but then we always come back here, where everything is dirty".<sup>22</sup>

## 7. Early marriages

In 2017, Association 21 July published the research 'I am not of age' in which data was collected on marriages that took place in the period 2014-2016 at 8 different locations, out of a total population of 3003 people. There were 71 marriages found out of a total of 142 individuals who got married: almost 50% got married before they turned 18. Among those who married while still minors, 72% of the cases saw nuptials between the ages of 16 and 17; in 28% of the cases, the contracting parties were between 12 and 15 years old. Gender has a strong influence on the precociousness of marriage: 72% are female and 22% male. In particular, one girl in two marries between the ages of 16 and 17 and one girl in five between the ages of 13 and 15. The rate of early marriages observed in the slums is 77%.

Production theory and demographic behaviour provide an interpretative framework. Marriage and fertility choices can be seen as decisions oriented towards maximising individual utility in relation to various socio-economic factors, such as personal tastes, relative prices, opportunity costs, budgetary

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<sup>22</sup> UNAR, National Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma and Sinti (2021-2030), 2021.

constraints and time constraints. In the slum context, time constraints are more flexible and the opportunity cost of having children is favourable. Low-income families tend to have more children, allocating a low average expenditure for each, while high-income families tend to have fewer children, but with a higher average expenditure to ensure a better quality of life. Social pressure and group conditioning play a significant role in marriage choices. The girls interviewed experience the influence of the reference group on their choice to marry young, fearing that they will feel lonely or different from others if they remain single. Long-time dating before marriage can be subject to criticism and social stigmatisation. Personal reputation is more influenced by private aspects of life, such as marriage, fertility and virginity, than by public aspects, such as education or work. Marriage is considered a passage to adulthood and a symbol of social prestige. The value of virginity is such that early marriages may be a useful solution where there is a strong parental fear that children will experience intimacy outside the nuptial framework, and thus constitute a response to the urge to circumscribe their children's sexuality within marriage. In this sense, forced marriage constitutes, among other things, a parental strategy to ensure that their daughters' virginity is lost in a space considered safe and socially acceptable. For the same reason, there are cases of parents preferring that their children, once they have entered puberty, no longer attend school, for fear that in the school context (probably perceived as a space belonging to the majority society and little controllable) they will experience premarital sexual experiences. Girls with a lower level of education are more exposed to early marriages. Socio-economic conditions, such as unemployment and lack of opportunities, influence the choice of marriage as an alternative to the lack of future prospects. The school experience is often frustrating and perceived as having little bearing on personal ambitions; therefore, marriage becomes a way of investing one's energy and time in building a family rather than in education.

In conclusion, the socio-economic motivations linked to early marriage are closely intertwined with the value attributed to virginity, social conditioning and the search for stability and prestige within disadvantaged communities. Understanding these motivations is crucial for developing strategies and interventions to counter this practice and promote more positive alternatives for the future of the girls and boys involved.



## 8. Documentary regularisation and the right to health

Non-EU citizens have the right to reside throughout the national territory if they hold a residence permit. Each residence permit allows them to carry out the activities permitted by law and inherent to the reason for which it is issued.<sup>23</sup>

EU citizens, three months after entering Italy, have the right to reside if they are employed or self-employed in Italy or are enrolled at a public or private educational establishment to follow a course of study or vocational training, provided that they have sufficient resources for themselves and their family members and comprehensive health insurance in Italy.

The legality of a foreign national, whether non-EU or EU citizen, remains an empty letter if it is not accompanied by civil registration.

The function of the registry office is to detect the stable presence of persons in a given territory and thus to enable planning by territorial authorities at both local and state level in the distribution of service resources, and to enable persons who register to access certain types of rights and duties. Registry registration is a right and a duty of each family member responsible for himself and for the persons over whom he exercises parental authority.

The rights that derive from civil registration and thus from obtaining residence in a given municipality are, for example, linked to access to social welfare services such as bonuses, exemptions and economic benefits, even those materially provided by Inps, a national body, are requested from the municipality of residence. ISEE, which is required to access many socio-economic benefits, is also linked to residence.

Residence is also a prerequisite for the issuance of an identity card. In practice, the identity card is used to do a multitude of things such as, for example, make a contract for the connection of household utilities, apply for access to public housing or open any kind of current account. In addition, a certain prolonged period of residence is necessary to be able to apply for Italian citizenship.

Regularly residing citizens who have their habitual abode in the territory of the municipality are obliged to apply for registration in the registry office for themselves and for any dependent family members. If the declarant is in possession of a permit or residency card indicating a different home

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<sup>23</sup> For detailed information on the possible procedures for obtaining residence permits, please consult the following websites: <https://www.asgi.it>, <https://www.portaleimmigrazione.it>, <https://www.meltingpot.org/tag/permesso-di-soggiorno/>.

address from the one in which he is requesting residency, he will be invited to ask the Public Security Authority for an update, but it is not compulsory, for the purposes of registration, to request in advance a change of address from the Public Security Authority.

Remember that in practice even registration with the Health Service depends on civil registration with some exceptions:

Non-EU citizens and applicants for international protection are entitled to registration with the Health Service even in the absence of registered residence, but in many regions the computer systems linked to registration with the Health Service require the entry of registered residence.

The D.P.C.M. of 12 January 2017 provided for compulsory enrolment in the National Health Service for all foreign minors (EU and non-EU) present on the territory and regardless of the legality of their stay. This recognition was achieved with Article 63, paragraph 4, which states 'Foreign minors present on the national territory who are not in compliance with the rules on entry and residence, are enrolled in the National Health Service and benefit from health care on equal terms with Italian citizens'. By registering with the Health Service, all minors, regular, irregular and unaccompanied minors, have the right to a freely chosen paediatrician or general practitioner, as recipients of the broadest protection measures in relation to their natural vulnerability.

EU citizens residing in Italy but without an employment contract and who therefore do not have access to compulsory registration with the Health Service can have access to voluntary registration, which provides for the payment of an annual sum. Voluntary registration guarantees equal treatment and full equality of rights and duties with respect to Italian citizens with regard to the obligation to participate in expenditure (co-payment) and health care. As an alternative to voluntary registration, there is an obligation to take out an insurance policy against the risk of illness, accident and maternity.

EU citizens present in Italy for more than 3 months and not in compliance with residence regulations have the right to access outpatient and hospital treatment, urgent or in any case essential, even if continuous for illness and injury, as well as services aimed at safeguarding individual and collective



health through the issuance of the ENI (European Non-Enrolled) code by ASLs, Hospital Authorities, University Polyclinics and IRCCSs<sup>24</sup> .

Non-EU citizens without a residence permit have the right of access to outpatient and hospital treatment, whether urgent or in any case essential, even if continuous for illness and injury, as well as to services aimed at safeguarding individual and collective health through the issuance of the STP code (temporarily present foreigner) by ASLs, hospitals, university polyclinics and IRCCSs<sup>25</sup> .

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<sup>24</sup> For specific information on individual cases, please refer to the website of the NIHMP - National Institute for Health Promotion of Migrant Populations and the Fight against Poverty-related Diseases: [http://wiki.inmp.it/wiki/index.php/Il\\_diritto\\_alla\\_salute\\_e\\_il\\_suo\\_esercizio](http://wiki.inmp.it/wiki/index.php/Il_diritto_alla_salute_e_il_suo_esercizio).

<sup>25</sup> For specific information on individual cases, please refer to the website of the NIHMP - National Institute for Health Promotion of Migrant Populations and the Fight against Poverty-related Diseases: [http://wiki.inmp.it/wiki/index.php/Il\\_diritto\\_alla\\_salute\\_e\\_il\\_suo\\_esercizio](http://wiki.inmp.it/wiki/index.php/Il_diritto_alla_salute_e_il_suo_esercizio).