



IMPERFECT CITIZENSHIP

Research into patterns of racial discrimination against Roma and Sinti in Italy

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Discrimination is a non governmental organisation engaging in a range of activities aimed at combating anti-Romani racism and human rights abuse of Roma and Sinti in Italy.

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In memory of Pinuccia Scaramuzzetti

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INTRODUCTION

«If a Rom is nasty, all Roma are nasty. This means that everyone is equal before the law, except the Roma» (a Romanian Rom in Rome)

On the 27th of February 2004 during a debate in the Italian Lower Chamber concerning the demand for tougher controls on nomad camp inhabitants, Federico Bricolo, a Lega Nord MP, stated that: «While other criminal phenomena, which can be traced back to ethnic groups, to gangs of foreigners living in *our* cities, do not have a clear location, as far as the nomad camps are concerned, we know where and how many there are. Therefore they can easily be kept under control»¹. In his reply to Bricolo, the Under-secretary of State for Home Affairs, Maurizio Balocchi, assured his colleague about the Government's commitment «to the security of the citizens» and he brought the courtroom's attention to the fact that «checks and controls are carried out in nomad camps throughout the national territory. Moreover, wherever possible we are vigilant towards any possible violations of the Immigration Act, as foreseen by the Legislative Decree n.286, 1998, concerning the arrival and settlement of foreigners in Italy». However, the Under-Secretary reminded Bricolo that «a large number of families residing in nomad camps have been living in *our* country for several years and they have acquired Italian citizenship»²[italics added].

What emerges from this exchange between two members of the Government coalition is the very nature of the so-called “nomad camps”: places of social control, where allegedly dangerous people are segregated together in spaces which are often cramped, fenced in and isolated. The following question comes to mind: does the Government's commitment to the security of Italian citizens, also include Italian Roma and Sinti?

This is not merely a rhetorical question, given that, as this report demonstrates, many Roma and Sinti do not feel adequately protected by the State, to such an extent that when they fall victims of racist or discriminatory attacks, they consider filing a denouncement, a “useless” act. This is an alarming aspect, which not only highlights the lack of trust victims have towards institutions, but also reflects a certain resignation towards the abuses and tortures they are subjected to, to the extent that they consider them normal.

Having started off by quoting a dialogue between two members of the Centre Right, does not mean that the representatives of the Centre Left will do much better. As this report will widely document, prejudices, stereotypes and discriminatory practices towards the Roma and Sinti are frequently also found in the Administrations led by the Centre Left. Clough Marinaro's research on the situation of the Roma living in Rutelli's administered Rome, notes that, despite a well-intentioned initial approach, the policy of the city council was based on a set of prejudices and assumptions which viewed the Roma as ‘inherently nomadic, dishonest and incapable of functioning in a modern society’ (Clough Marinaro, 2003:203-04).

Nomadism, as has already been underlined in the ERRC report (2000) “Campland”, is often used as a form of cultural legitimation for marginalizing the Roma (see

¹ Chamber of Deputies, Svolgimento dell'interpellanza urgente n.2-00648 dell'On. Dussin, 27th of February 2003.

² Ibidem

Piasere, 1991; Marcetti, Mori, Solimano, 1994; Brunello, 1996; Colacicchi, 1998; Sigona, 2002; Marta, 2005)³.

In Regional Laws «in defence of Roma/Nomadic/Gypsy culture», the link between the protection of nomadism and the construction of camps is blatant, and almost presents itself as a relationship of cause and effect. Colacicchi writes (1995:11): “Regional Laws force them to live - because it can only be considered forced when, as generally occurs, every other space is denied to them - [...] in a condition of extreme hardship to which the definition of apartheid fits well” In the eyes of the legislator, the Roma/Nomad/Gypsy is often an abstract figure, based on stereotypical images. In Regional Laws, there emerges a lack of knowledge of the beneficiaries of the laws or of their needs. This is consequently reflected in the solutions planned by the legislator. Moreover, one also finds an inclination towards an a-historical image of the “gypsy” and the measures taken to preserve their “Culture”³ (Sigona, 2005a; 2005c). The vast majority of Regional Laws were discussed and approved of by regional councils during the ‘80s, and most of them are twenty years out of date. In the best of cases, they bring to light a reality that no longer exists, and has been profoundly changed by new migration flows starting from the ‘90s, and are therefore unable to respond to these new needs⁴.

Investigating human rights violations and racial - or racist discrimination, as Annamaria Riviera suggests calling it (2004) - against the Roma and Sinti in Italy is not an easy task for several reasons. Discussions on the rights of the Roma can certainly not be considered an everyday topic, particularly in relation to human rights. Institutions, NGOs and the Roma and Sinti themselves often show a lack of familiarity and, sometimes, even of confidence in the use of the existing legal tools for protecting individuals from human rights violations. Sometimes, the very recognition of an actual situation of discrimination is questioned. Wherever Roma and Sinti are concerned, rights disappear or become blurred. Several examples of this were collected during our visits to the field and will be reported in the following pages.

It must be pointed out however, that it was not only the Roma and Sinti who often were unaware of their rights and of the instruments for protecting them, but also many NGO activists, lawyers and civil servants showed a lack of awareness as well as a general scepticism towards the actual applicability of existing instruments for the protection of human rights.

Simoni’s analysis of “the silence of the jurists” (2003: 55) highlights the role of many Italian NGOs working with Roma, for whom the discourse on rights is not a priority. «‘Law’ and ‘Roma’ are two words that only walk hand in hand when NGOs have to

³ Over a century ago, in relation to nomadism, Adrian Colocci wrote “In the superior man, Nomadism enlarges the spirit, educates him to wider intuitions [...], in the inferior man, like the gypsy [...] it creates an instability of character,[...] it distances him from permanent work and facilitates greed for other peoples’ possessions and other peoples’ women [...]. In the inferior man, nomadism destroys every notion of homeland (1889:162).

³ Piasere (2005) has recently perspicaciously discussed the contrast and the relationship between the stereotypical image of the “gypsy”, with the reality of the nomad camps and the way in which the “gypsy problem” is dealt with in Verona.

⁴ One of the few exceptions is represented by the *Regione Toscana*, who has, in contrast, updated their regional laws several times. For an in depth discussion, see: Colacicchi, 1995; Tosi Cambini, 2006.

find a lawyer, possibly free of charge, to defend a 'gypsy' in trouble with the Law. Once the micro-emergency is over, they tend to operate by using instruments other than the Law, preferring social and political campaigning and only rarely attempting to find juridical remedies with general applicability that could be used to face the widespread anti-Roma attitudes in society».

In accordance with Riviera's description of discrimination of a racist nature in Italy, overall, during our research we also registered a general underestimation of the cases of discrimination and this is, in itself, a cultural and political factor to be taken into account when reading this analysis⁵. Although the living conditions of Roma and Sinti communities in Italy can vary a lot, the overall picture emerging from our fieldwork substantially confirms the concerns raised in the previous ERRC report on Italy (2000). One important addition is represented by the arrival of consistent migration influxes of Romanian Roma. Discrimination, as the report will show, takes different forms in different towns. However, the Roma's and Sinti's deep uneasiness towards institutions, which they do not see as reliable interlocutors for dialogue, support and protection, remains consistent.

Furthermore, we are witnessing a process of the local administrations' loss of responsibility, as more and more frequently, when it comes to issues concerning the Roma and the Sinti, they delegate the running of the services allocated to these communities, to the private/NGO sector. As a social worker told us during our round of interviews in Northern Italy: "If we had to address the Roma and Sinti problems through the ordinary mainstream welfare system, it would be too expensive". It often concerns an open delegation, which does not foresee any form of monitoring or evaluation of the results achieved, if not in strictly financial terms. This ends up producing the "medicalisation" of the beneficiaries of the interventions and the maintenance of their *status quo*, which is the very reason for the existence of the organisations in the first place. The competitions for falling contract offers, which allow the Municipalities to save money in these times of cuts to funding, certainly do not guarantee the quality of the services as a priority prerequisite for the allocation of the contracts. Other logics, sometimes even of an unfair and biased nature, guide the decisions made by Municipal Administrators. However, having said this, it should be recognised that the management of the Roma and Sinti is confronted by local Administrations in different ways. On one end of the spectrum we have a Municipality like Bolzano, which despite giving contracts for the camp management to associations in the private sector, still maintains an important role, particularly in the area concerning the allocation of social services. In other cases, however, delegation is clearer cut, to the extent of resulting in the example of the so called "global service" that runs the Olatello Camp in the District 5 of Florence⁶.

However, considering the scarce resources, the methods and the logic through which resources are distributed, it is realistic to affirm that, beyond all the rhetoric, instead of finding long-term solutions, what the private sector is being asked to do, is to manage the "gypsy problem" in a short-medium time span (Sigona, 2005a). To quote a coordinator of a Sinti camp in the North of Italy "Considering the funding available,

⁵ In the RAXEN report on the phenomenon of racism in Italy, Rivera (2004:3) notes that: «what makes the Italian context unusual, is the lack of systematic surveys, constant monitoring and consequently, qualitative and quantitative data on discrimination, violence and racist crimes».

⁶ The interference of the "global service" in many aspects of the lives of the camp inhabitants, was brought to light by some of the Roma living in the Olatello Camp in Florence.

the only thing that we are asked to do is to keep them quiet". Nomad camps seem to represent the *best* place to do this.

In conclusion to these introductory notes, two final considerations must be made: the first concerns the different types of discrimination and the second refers to a present day situation of serious hardship:

- One aspect which we have tried to highlight in the report concerns the role and responsibility of some local and national policies which, while not explicitly racist (though there are such examples), essentially produce the effects of discrimination. They involve measures elaborated and implemented without any consideration of their consequences on the *beneficiaries*. They are also weakened by the lack of political will to intervene and confront cases of extreme poverty, for fear of becoming a target of political attacks from opponents. They are policies that are founded on stereotypes with scarce knowledge of the actual people, and on the limited, if not nonexistent participation of the Roma in the decision making process that concerns them.
- On an almost daily basis, the news reports episodes involving Romanian Roma. Very often they give inaccurate information, and when they are not out rightly false, they offer sufficient ingredients to increase the level of social alarm. This alarm is subject to easy manipulation for political aims, particularly during electoral times. The people in these news stories often live in housing conditions of extreme hardship, they come to Italy with different migratory projects, they look for assistance, they live in the spaces of a reality which lies between what is dictated by Immigration Law and its actual application. In many Italian towns, the Romanian Roma are amongst the groups living in the worst conditions. They pay the price of being the last to arrive, they encounter Municipal Administrations who for years, have declared they are full to overflowing⁷, and that there are already too many Roma, and the town is unable to accommodate them. They have found nomad camps which are still full of refugees from the Balkan wars, or Sinti stuck in an eternal wait for living areas that are not the current cement parking lots, but areas provided with basic services. They have been met with deeply rooted prejudices and a racist and unjust Immigration Law, which renders people's rights precarious. They are exploited at work and constantly vulnerable to being blackmailed. Yet, despite the expulsions, the evictions, and the bulldozers that destroy the fragments of houses that they manage to put up, the Romanian Roma are and will remain an important presence in Italian towns. They are a presence destined to grow rather than diminish, particularly if one also takes into consideration Romania's future entry into the European Union.

⁷ This is the case in Pisa, which is involved in a reception project (*Le città sottili*) for the Roma from the Balkans who have been living in the area for years, but refuses to recognise the presence of the Romanian Roma of a more recent immigration, or offer them any prospects of reception. According to the association *Africa Insieme*, "saying the vase is full to overflowing", as the Mayor does, is to say the very least, a bizarre reply. Twenty people do not seem "too many", especially when none of them have asked us for money or special requests: what they want is a house, and for rent money and for the moment they are occupying an empty lodging which does not have prospects for any future use" (*Africa Insieme*, press statement, 12th May 2004).

After a brief introduction on the Roma and Sinti population in Italy, this report presents cases and testimonies of discrimination against Roma and Sinti in the areas of housing and nomad camps, education, access to employment and racism by institutional and non-institutional actors. Finally, it also briefly discusses the role of the Media, through some case examples,

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study does not claim to be exhaustive. The cases and testimonies which we have collected and included in the text are only fragments of what happens to the Roma and Sinti in Italy every day. What we have put together, is therefore a collection of fragments which we hope will offer a through provoking and useful working tool for all those people- students, researchers, activists, Roma, Sinti and Gadje (non-Roma) - who have the future of these maltreated and much discriminated against minorities, at heart.

The research took place in three stages: the first stage, between April and May 2005, saw us involved in the collection of material, interviews and the visits to the camps; the second stage was the compiling of a first version of the report in English and Italian. This version of the work was presented in Udine on a course entitled “Week of Roma Culture” at the end of September. On the basis of this preliminary report, the third stage involved a series of consultations and discussions, which led to the revision and the enrichment of this present version.

With the support of local contacts, several field visits were organised both in Roma and Sinti “nomad camps” as well as to private houses. The report is based on a broad range of sources: direct testimonies, interviews with key informants (Roma activists, NGOs, volunteers and local and Regional Authorities), newspaper articles, research reports and official documents. The cases presented in this report have been validated by using more than one testimony and numerous sources. Research visits were carried out in the following towns: Bologna, Bolzano, Brescia, Florence, Giugliano in Campania, Mantua, Milan, Naples, Padua, Pisa, Pistoia, Reggio Emilia, Rome, Turin, Venice and Verona.

THE ROMA AND SINTI POPULATION IN ITALY

The commonly used terms 'zingari' (equivalent to the English 'Gypsies') and 'nomadi' are heteronyms imposed on their addressees by outsiders who have the power to do so. They are still widely used terms, despite being generally considered misleading and derogatory (Marta, 1996; Colacicchi, 1998). These generic terms are used to refer to a number of groups and subgroups which Piasere has called 'a world of worlds'⁸ (Piasere, 1999). A further distinction can be made on legal grounds, between those with Italian citizenship and those without (as well as some legally stateless cases). Italian Roma and Sinti began to settle in Italy in the XV century. The Sinti mainly reached Italy overland from the North, while the Roma crossed the Adriatic Sea from the southern Balkan areas, settling in the southern part of the country (Karpati, 1969; Karpati, 1993; Viaggio, 1997; Piasere, 2004). The origin of the

⁸ The heteronym “gypsy” is an external construction that, in order to understand the fate of the Romani communities in Europe, cannot simply be ignored. Instead “it must be deconstructed and then reconstructed, incorporating into it the various and diverse communities and migrations” (Piasere, 2004:4).

Camminanti who historically settled mainly in the Noto valley in Sicily, is still subject to debate (Soravia, 1981; Sidoti, 2003).

In the absence of official statistics on the Roma and Sinti population in Italy, we have to rely on the estimated figures of approximately 120,000-150,000 Roma, Sinti and Camminanti currently living in Italy. The majority of which (approximately 60 per cent) are Italian citizens⁹. The Sinti almost all fall into this last group. A small percentage of the Sinti have an economic activity which necessitates an itinerant lifestyle. Almost all of the Italian Roma are sedentary. The remaining 40 percent is made up of foreign citizens who have come to Italy in various migration influxes. The most substantial of which, dates from the '90's, with the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the fall of the communist regimes. The foreigners belong to various groups and originate mostly from: Macedonia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Serbia and more recently, Romania (Piasere, 2005; Karpati, 1969, Brunello, 1996; Sigona, 2002; Lapov, 2005).

Amongst the foreign Roma, many of whom have fled from conflict areas or from conditions of extreme poverty, a substantial number periodically have problems with the renewal of their permit to stay documents. In certain cases, this involves expired documents or ones which have not been renewed, and in other cases they are people lacking any form of identity documentation. A growing number of Roma children born in Italy from foreign parents, have no documents, and only in some cases, have received the status of being legally stateless. These individuals face the suspension of their rights, and live in a legal limbo which affects many aspects of their lives.

At the moment, as already stated in the introduction, one of the most critical situations is found amongst the Romanian Roma communities (for example in Turin, Brescia, Naples, Bologna, Rome, Verona, Pisa and Florence). They live in alarming hygiene-health conditions and are constantly under the threat of expulsion, making them particularly vulnerable to racist attacks.

About one third of the Roma and Sinti population - including both Italian and foreign citizens - currently live in authorised or unauthorised camps in isolated areas, poorly connected to the towns and with precarious and inadequate services (Brunello, 1996; ERRC, 2000). A study carried out in 2001, shows that there were more than 18 thousand foreign Roma living in camps (Monasta, 2004a). Since then, the population has increased further, particularly due to the arrival of a significant number of Romanian Roma.

According to Solimano and Mori, the choice of location for the construction of the camps, reveals an attitude of *urban disapproval* whereby: 'Gypsies must be kept apart from the general population, and the general population does [its] best to keep its distance from them' (Solimano and Mori, 2000).

While most Sinti ask for authorised and equipped residential areas to live in in small groups, foreign Roma are ask for serious policies towards sustainable and dignified

⁹ It is legitimate to have doubts regarding the accuracy of these figures. In general one can say that they are the results of the sum of several estimates of the significant migration influxes carried out by various sources: administrators, academics, and activists. The current agreement is therefore, based on, more than anything else, an accumulation of assumptions. On the other hand, it is necessary to note that the same authorities have, on several occasions, including official ones, referred to similar figures. While this is not proof of their "objectivity", it nevertheless makes them socially and politically relevant data.

housing solutions, which can overcome the eternally precarious situation represented by the 'nomad camps'. They also seek policies that support employment and the regularisation of their legal status (Sigona, 2003; 2005a; Lapov, 2005; Marta, 2005).

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI, 2002), has expressed concern not only for the living conditions in the camps, but also 'for the fact that the segregation of Roma/Gypsies in Italy appears to reflect the general approach of the Italian Authorities, who tend to consider Roma as nomads who want to live in camps'. Similar concerns were previously expressed in 1999, by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD, 1999) which declared that 'in addition to a frequent lack of basic facilities, living in the camps not only leads to the Roma's physical segregation from Italian society, but their political, economic and cultural isolation as well'.

The label 'nomads', which according to Soravia, is a "a linguistic pharisaism dressed up in false democracy" (1996), is applied without distinction to the whole Roma and Sinti population, regardless of the fact that today, the number of them still leading an itinerant lifestyle, is very limited.

The conflict over the right term to adopt to refer to the numerous Roma and Sinti communities, is not merely an academic question, and it involves the rest of Europe. It has been widely debated in the communitarian institutions and in the Council of Europe, and it is strictly linked to the question of the recognition of the Roma as an ethnic-cultural minority and with their corresponding human rights and protection.

This is a debate whose effects can be also be found in the camps, as this testimonial collected in Florence clearly reflects:

Several reasons drove me to change my life: first, the fact of becoming a 'nomad', I mean from Rom to being labelled 'nomad' and 'zingaro' which brings many prejudices, mainly negative. I never thought of myself as a nomad in my home country, I didn't think of myself as a 'zingaro': dirty, tattered, thief. That is why I decided to be actively involved for Roma rights here in Italy. I want to show the Italians that there are also positive sides to us, that no 'zingaro' would call another Rom 'zingaro'.

LEGAL STATUS, CITIZENSHIP AND BUREAUCRACY

The question of citizenship and legal status is a crucial area of concern which covers a broad range of issues. For foreign Roma, personal documents and residence permits are a key priority. The constant threat of being expelled from Italy, the strict relationship between permits to stay and the work contract, the problematical or non recognition of marriages celebrated within the communities, the lack of a coherent and consistent practice in dealing with asylum claims, all pose a continuous burden on the everyday lives of foreign Roma. Italian Sinti, despite their Italian citizenship, which makes them more secure, also have to cope with legal and bureaucratic difficulties and obstacles, in particular with regards to marriage recognition and access to social support. What we came across in our research was a systematic attack on Roma and Sinti families, which starts with the non-recognition of marriage and ends up with children being taken away from their families by social workers, passing through many intermediate stages, including the denial of being granted meetings in prisons.

Many young Roma born in Italy, when they come of age at 18, are entitled (or should be) to claim Italian citizenship. In order to be granted citizenship, the applicant must submit a formal request (an expression of will) and attach a birth certificate and a residence certificate, which demonstrate the applicant has been a resident in Italy continuously for 18 years. For many young Roma, the proof of residence has proved to be an insurmountable obstacle, given that many camps, including those authorized ones, are not recognized as a legal residence, or have not been recognized as such for some, or many years.

Moreover, considering the precariousness that characterizes the lives of many Roma in Italy (we will later refer to one camp's regulation which deprives entire families of the legal residence if one member of the family commits an act against the regulation, or is simply accused of having done so), the permanent risk of evictions or forced migration because of racist attacks, it becomes evident how easily one can find oneself in the position of not being able to prove one's formal residence.

Authorized camps are often places where urban planning rules are applied very discretionally. For instance, while local planning offices seem to pay great attention to unauthorized extensions of caravans, shacks or containers, often sending local police forces to demolish these constructions, they appear much less interested in the fact that containers are not suitable living conditions for long periods of time and in understanding the needs of Roma families. Small and inadequate housing also has a negative consequence on access to legal rights. For instance, in order to be allowed to claim family reunion with someone living abroad, or to obtain a permit to stay, a person has to have proof of having an adequate (as defined by Law) annual income and an adequate living space (as defined by Law in minimum square meters per person).

The examples that follow, only illustrate some of the problems connected to the legal status, which the Roma and Sinti have to face on a daily basis.

In **Pisa**, E. D. expressed deep concern for his wife who lives in Macedonia. E. D. escaped from Skopje in the late 90s due to political persecution and he was recognised as a political refugee in Italy. Since then, he has tried to obtain family reunion but, because of the small dimensions of the container, allocated to him by the local Pisa Municipality, his request to the *Questura* (Police Headquarters) has always been rejected. Many Roma face similar problems when they try to ask for the *carta di soggiorno*, (permit to stay) which provides an indefinite leave to remain in Italy. However, again, according to the Immigration Act, in order to claim the permit to stay, the applicant needs to demonstrate adequate housing according to the parameters established in Regional Housing Laws. B.S. has lived in **Pisa** since 1991 and has had a regular residence permit since 1992. Since 2001 he has lived in an apartment provided by the Municipality on a temporary basis, while he is on the waiting list for a council house. The house is only 37 m² which, according to the Law, is not large enough for three people, and therefore his application for the permit to stay was rejected.

According to the Law, two families cannot be put on the residence register as living at the same address. In the camp in Via Vallenari in **Mestre**, which is largely inhabited by Harvati Roma with Italian citizenship, this has caused substantial discrimination towards the residents. In fact when the camp was only allocated two street numbers (19 and 19/A), this made it legally impossible for young couples to register as a

separate family. As a consequence, they end up forming very large families which, in bureaucratically speaking terms, results in a relatively high income and the families are therefore not entitled to claim social and economic support from the Municipality.

In **Brescia**, L.M. is 16 years old, his mother, whose family is originally from Kosovo was born in Italy 33 years ago, but she has a Yugoslav passport. L.M. has always lived in Italy, but by chance, he was born in Mitrovica during his mother's brief visit there to some relatives. His birth certificate went lost during the war, which means that currently L.M. lives in a legal limbo. The Serbian Consulate refuses to give him a passport, which is a requirement for obtaining a residence permit in Italy. The possibility of asking for a formal recognition of his statelessness was abandoned as, in order to claim this status, applicants must have, among other documents, a birth certificate.

In **Pisa**, I.A., 38 years old, faces a similar problem. She was born in Macedonia but her birth was not recorded at the registry office. She later moved to Serbia where she married following the Roma tradition. In 1992 she then fled to Germany and then to Italy. In 1998 she applied for the recognition of statelessness, but the claim was rejected due to the lack of a birth certificate. Since then she has been living in a legal limbo.

In **Naples**, cases of Roma children born in Italy and who are about to turn eighteen and therefore have the right to obtain Italian citizenship, are more and more frequent. However, proof of a continuous residence is a difficult obstacle to overcome, given that for years, the Municipality of Naples has refused to recognize the camp address as an official residence. One employee from the Municipality Citizenship Office expressed concern for a situation which has extremely serious consequences on the lives of the aspiring citizens and their families. According to this official, there are numerous such cases and the situation has been aggravated by a recent Circular Law issued by the Ministry of the Interior, which absolutely forbids Municipal officials to be in charge of evaluating and certifying documentation brought forward by individuals, and which also states their obligation to adhere to the procedures as established by the Law.

Another cause of what are often serious problems and misunderstandings, is the (lack of) recognition of marriages celebrated according to traditional Roma and Sinti customs. These are weddings, which due to the lack of any prior mutual agreement, are not recognized by the Italian State.

Given the additional lack of rules on these de facto marriages (which would at least allow for their recognition, in so much as recognizing them as permanent relationships), the problems that hit parents and children can reach extremely dramatic levels. In addition, if one adds the ongoing situation still found several years after the end of the war in Bosnia and Kosovo, whereby many Roma men and women have difficulty in retracing their documents from their respective countries of origin, then it is easy to realize how many difficult situations to solve, emerge on a daily basis.

In **Chiari**, near Brescia E.C., an Italian Sinti married according to the Roma tradition, told us that he wanted to go to the Municipality to register his family residence in the camp where he has been living since he was a child. However, the camp regulations do not allow new families to officially reside in the area. This, it is claimed, is due to the plan to gradually close down the camp. In order to make his situation more

bureaucratically acceptable in the eyes of the Municipality, E.C. also tried to get a legal recognition of his cohabitation by certifying this in front of a public officer at the Municipality. However, when he showed his certificate to a local policeman visiting the camp for a *routine* check, he was told: «to me this is nothing, you can use it to clean you're a***».

V.G., 25 years old and married with four children, is in prison for a short period for events which took place years ago when she was a child. Her one and a half year old daughter, who is also imprisoned with her, has a different surname from both her mother and the mother's partner (who is her husband according to their traditional Roma marriage). This is because neither of them were able to identify the child as their own when she was born in Yugoslavia, because neither of them had identity documents. Instead, the identification of the child was carried out by an aunt, in possession of regular documents, but who had a different surname to both the father and the mother. Given that the child may not be hers, The Court of Surveillance, in accordance with the Juvenile Court, decided to temporarily take the child away from the mother. The young imprisoned Roma is desperate; her husband, who does not have permission to have prison meetings with her because he is unable to prove he is married to her, is only able to receive news through the lawyer and cannot be close to his wife to comfort her. One lengthy and expensive solution could be reached via the aunt's testimony. She would have to be brought deliberately from Kosovo with the documentation translated by the Italian embassy in Belgrade.

G.J. has the same problem, with the aggravating circumstance that she is still without any identity documents. It will therefore be necessary to prove her parentage through a DNA exam. In the meantime, the Court has not granted the woman's request to be given her son, at least on a temporary basis. Furthermore, once the mother shortly comes out of prison, no one knows what will happen to her, as lacking a permit to stay, she could easily end up in a *Centro di Permanenza Temporanea* (temporary detention centres) or be expelled, without having been given back the child.

In more general terms, it must be said that imprisoned Roma often face insuperable obstacles when it comes to being granted prison meetings with their relatives (Colacicchi, 2002). These meetings are a prisoner's right and are ratified in the Prison Regulations. In such cases this right is not only denied to the prisoners, but also to their spouses and children, who cannot accept the sudden disappearance of one of their parents and face the impossibility of seeing them for sometimes lengthy periods of time. The management of the Sollicciano Prison in **Florence** has avoided these problems by accepting declarations which certify cohabitation. These are made by *ADM*, a volunteer association working with the Roma in the area. Elsewhere, the situation has been confronted by handing over the parental relations certifications to the *Carabinieri* (policemen), who in the majority of cases, do not have sufficient familiarity with the camps and do not have the time to carry out complex research. More often than not, the question is left unresolved.

Another critical area concerns the question of political asylum. This is strictly only related to foreign citizens. Claiming asylum in Italy can be difficult for everyone, but the Roma have met the additional obstacles of deeply rooted prejudices against them¹⁰. The lack of an Asylum Act and clear guidelines on asylum procedures, gives

¹⁰ See for example, Sigona's work (2004) on the reception of the Roma and Askalija from Kosovo, which appeared on *Italia Romani* 4

a large discretionary power to the *Questura* (Police Headquarters) (Zetter et al 2002; Sigona 2005b; ICS 2005). This can become an insuperable obstacle for asylum applicants, as the following testimony of a Romanian Rom in **Rome** shows: «'Where are you from?' the police officer asked, Romania, I said. 'Come back in a couple of days', he replied. I came back after two or three days and they sent me away again. Then I went back again and the same thing happened again. I didn't go back anymore». Similar episodes were reported in **Pisa**¹¹ by a volunteer from the association *Africa Insieme*, and in **Brescia**, by a member of the *Brescia Social Forum*, who told us that in order to submit an asylum application, applicants have to send a letter to the *Questura* for an appointment. It is then up to the *Questura* to send a written reply stating when to present yourself. However, this does not always happen. In other cases, when people went to their appointments, their submittals were refused and they were issued with an expulsion order.

The cases described also bring to light another question which deserves ample attention: the scarce coherence and the lack of co-ordination of the actions carried out by State agencies on a national and local level, and the real impact they have on people, in terms of forced migration, precariousness and insecurity¹².

THE RIGHT TO SCHOOLING

In 2000, responding to the concerns raised by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Ambassador Claudio Moreno, a member of the Italian delegation, referred to the efforts made by the Italian Government to provide educational courses designed to meet the Roma's special needs. Moreover he added that "about 4,000 Roma children from different nomad camps have already been integrated into the Italian school system" (CESCR, 2000).

In contrast to the Ambassador's statement, in the Concluding Observations of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (32nd Session) (CRC, 2003), the Committee expressed "deep concern about the difficult social situation [of Roma children] and their insufficient access to education and health services".

Although some efforts have been made in order to improve the Roma children's access to schooling, the situation continues to be extremely problematical, with significant regional and local differences in policy, practice and outcome.

The increase in the number of Roma children enrolled in schools, although relevant, must be seen together with other crucial elements such as attendance, class life and results obtained. Most of the time, a good level of attendance has not led to initiatives aimed at facilitating the children's participation in school activities. Teaching programmes have often failed to address the needs of Roma children and to value the richness brought by the new students to the class¹³. Rather than becoming a

¹¹ "Pisa, anti-immigration Police Headquarters. Threats, disappeared paperwork: here is the hard line. Even the Police are protesting". This is the title of the article by Tommaso Tintoro printed in // *Manifesto* (19th December 2003) which reconstructs the difficult events of the Immigration Office in the Pisa Police Headquarters.

¹² See Liza Schuster's discussion (2005) which confronts these themes in relation to the general conditions of migrants in Italy, highlighting the interaction between the flexibility of the legal status and the physical mobility of the people. For a reflection on the *governance* of the "gypsy problem", see Sigona, 2005a; for a discussion on the disputes born out of the question of communal spaces, particularly the case of Via Barzaghi in Milan, see Vitale, 2002.

¹³ For an in depth discussion, see Piasere, Saletti Salza, Tauber (2003), Sidoti (2004).

place where positive and equal relationships can be built between children and between pupils and teachers, school often becomes a place where Roma marginalisation is perpetuated and reinforced. The use of “cultural mediators” in some cities such as **Mantua**, have produced positive results, acting as a intermediary bridge between teachers and parents, though it must be said that these figures cannot resolve the substantial problems caused by the socio-economic marginalisation experienced by the Roma and the Sinti.

«Local Authorities’ initiatives, or their indifference, which relegate or leave the Roma living in cities in conditions of marginality, create and maintain a distance between the Roma and *Gadje* (non-Roma). This also creates the impossibility of developing a shared social space, in which Roma and non-Roma can build relationships based on reciprocal understanding and the sharing of the same realities, one of which could be school» (Bacchini and Ciccarelli, 2005).

Many schools have implemented initiatives which aim to promote Roma culture, though they very often end up presenting a stereotypical romantic version of Roma and Sinti culture. Furthermore, there is a lack of continuity due to sporadic and insufficient funding. The lack of adequate planning of the programme together with the absence of monitoring and an evaluation of the results, makes the situation even more problematical. As a consequence, many children abandon school during the school year and those who continue face various obstacles, not least the teachers’ prejudices.

Although there are some exceptions, the Roma children’s level of achievement tends to be lower than that of the other pupils. When asked about the reason for this, teachers and operators often mention vaguely defined cultural reasons.

On the day of our visit to the Sinti camp in **Bolzano** (April ^{1st} 2005) taking up the camp manager’s invitation, we visited the camp classroom where the special school for camp residents operates. This special school was officially introduced four years ago, as a temporary measure to improve the Sinti children’s school attendance and achievements. The classroom was a good size and fully equipped with didactic material. But, despite it was a normal school day, the classroom was empty and the chairs were turned upside down on the desks. When asked about the attendance, the teacher told us that pupils were taking a longer Easter break than what had been given. However, he wanted to make it clear that, «this is an exception, normally students attend our school, though they tend to come and go during the school hours”. This statement contrasted with what the camp manager and the camp educator had told us earlier, who both agreed that the attendance rate had been declining significantly since Christmas. Moreover, they added that often there are no students at all attending the lessons. According to some interviewees, no action has been taken to increase students’ attendance. A sense of inevitability and passive acceptance emerged out of the testimonies given by these social workers and private sector operators.

According to the ex-camp manager, “Due to their culture, the Sinti are not interested in school”. On more than one occasion, we were told their school attendance was very low because, unlike the Roma, the Sinti could not be forced to comply with schooling obligations, because they were already Italian citizens, and their secure legal status makes them less “manageable”.

Furthermore, according to some operators, the students' poor achievements were also due to the fact that, if the students did not pass their lower middle school exams, they would be exempt from taking the multiple choice part of their driving licence test. We only came across this theory in Bolzano.

From what we gathered, it therefore appears that both of the special school's stated aims (improving attendance and achievements) have not been met. Some questions remain unanswered (also because, despite numerous phone calls, we were unable to contact the man in charge of the Bolzano Provincial Education Office). How long is this 'temporary' special school still going to exist? Is there an evaluation system in place for results achieved? What is being done to improve them?

Perhaps, Piasere's caustic remarks on schooling initiatives are still valid. According to Piasere, schooling initiatives for Roma and Sinti children are guided by two overriding principles: keep them out of Italian schools until they are "civilized" and, at the same time, limit as much as possible, the time children spend with their parents (Piasere 1991: 206)¹⁴.

A significant number of Roma children whose parents arrived in Naples in the 90s were born in **Naples**. In recent years, some discontinuous and often badly planned efforts have been carried out to facilitate the enrolment and school attendance of primary school children. A recently published study looks at how the Roma children are perceived by their classmates and teachers (Bacchini and Ciccarelli, 2005)¹⁵. The results show that Roma children are largely *ignored* by their classmates. The teachers generally regard the Roma students as having less aptitude for learning and being poorly integrated within the class. They make no distinction between the individual students.

Researchers generally maintain that the failure of the educational experience appears to be the result of a lack of understanding of realities deeply entrenched in their reciprocal representations and prejudices and the inability to communicate beyond them. «What was written on a monthly sheet of paper attached to the door of each classroom is exemplar. The sheet listed names of all the pupils entitled to receive free refectory food: the full names of all Italian Neapolitan pupils were written down and, then separately the number of Roma pupils [none of their names were given]. In a class with three Roma and one disabled child, one could read: «+3 Rom and 1 H» (ibidem).

Under many aspects, the case of a primary school in **Scampia (Naples)**, which borders an un-authorized Roma camp, appears to be contradictory and paradoxical. More than a year ago, on several occasions, the Headmistress of the school, denounced (but in vain) the health conditions in her school. First she contacted the

¹⁴ By the end of 2005, the delocalised middle school class in the Sinti camp ceased to exist. Like other students in Bolzano, the pupils started to frequent the normal school. Both the teachers who used to teach lessons at the camp as well as the students and their parents, showed an initial and evident satisfaction towards the new scholastic course.

¹⁵ 133 people participated in this research (66 boys and 67 girls). These were pupils attending the third, fourth and fifth primary school classes (age range: 8-12; average age 9,9) in a school located in the northern outskirts of Naples, in an area characterized by high socio-environmental degradation and poor school attendance rates. The six classes in which research was carried out (2 per scholastic year) were attended by 18 Roma children (8 boys and 10 girls) who were equally distributed, while the remaining children were all Neapolitan. Twelve teachers, who had been teaching for more than one year in the six classes (2 per class) where the research was carried out, also participated.

Local Health Authorities (ASL), then the Provincial Education Office and finally, the Attorney General's Office. The situation being denounced concerned the unhealthy fumes in the school. These were caused by the nearby Roma camp, where for the past fifteen years, the Roma have been living in the same place without running water, electricity or hygiene services. The fumes came from wood stoves used to heat up water in the shacks. Furthermore, the absence of any regular rubbish collection, makes this area an open air rubbish dump, where the Roma are forced to burn the rubbish, so as not to risk becoming submerged by it. After various on-the-spot investigations and threats of school closure, the final hypothesis (suspended during the electoral period), was to build a 10 meter high wall (approximately), between the school and the camp. On the one hand, the wall had to avoid any illegal dumping, and on the other hand, it had to disperse any eventual fumes, above the school. The attitude of the Public Administration is emblematic. They plan projects within the emergency logic, and their actions are planned without any effective prospects for resolving the situation or improving the lives of the people involved. The children they aim to protect during the school hours, are the very same children who spend whole days in precarious social and hygiene-health conditions, which are damaging, both for their physical and mental wellbeing.

ACCESS TO ADEQUATE HOUSING*

At the 6th meeting of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR, 2000), in response to issues raised in relation to the report prepared by the Government of Italy (particularly regarding the existence of camps in Italy, where Roma live far from mainstream society), Ambassador Moreno stated that there are no permanent camps in Italy and that "the Italian Authorities have recognised the need for temporary camps to give clandestine immigrants an opportunity to establish their identity, but is attempting to replace them with structures run by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the like". Many *temporary* camps, funded and managed by Local Authorities with the help of volunteer associations and NGOs, are more than ten years old. For years, they have been inhabited by people with regular permits to stay, and in many cases also Geneva Convention refugees. A generation of children has been born in these camps and the camp segregation is the only home they have known.

In his research on the health of foreign Roma children living in camps, Monsasta (2004b) highlights the impact of socio-environmental factors on their health. At the same time, he underlines the serious lack of epidemical research in this area, and raises serious doubts on the so-called genetic defects of "gypsies". Furthermore, the author underlines the importance and possible advantages of a participatory approach, which places the needs of the population in question, at the heart of the study. The issue of the Roma and Sinti's access to adequate housing, needs to consider the different needs and requests made by the distinct groups that make up the Roma and Sinti galaxy¹⁶.

* At the end of April 2006, the European Committee on Social Rights, aware of the housing situation of the Roma and Sinti in Italy, condemned Italy of a clear violation of article 31, regarding the right to adequate housing as stated by the European Social Carta.

¹⁶ This expression is borrowed from dell'Agnese and Vitale (2006).

Most foreign Roma still living in “nomad camps” simply ask for adequate housing solutions *in normal* houses, in either council or private houses. Yet, for various reasons, in both cases these solutions are often barred.

There is no uniformity on how “nomad camps” are managed by Municipalities. Every city runs the camps in different ways, often ignoring the Laws and guarantees that should legally be granted to ensure the dignity and security of the inhabitants. Shacks, containers or caravans situated in “nomad camps”, whether in regular, irregular or private areas, are often not recognised as private domiciles for registry office documentation purposes. This often has serious consequences, for example, on the possibility of renewing permits to stay. Furthermore, camps are places where rights are suspended and where, as we were told in many cities- the Police (State police, *Carabinieri*, Municipal police and Finance police) often enter the camps and the private houses of individual families, without explanations or search warrants.

Most of the Sinti ask for residential areas where they can live in family groups in mobile homes or self-made, one floor brick houses. These areas could be private or public, equipped with basic services such as a brick walled toilet and a kitchen space. In several regions, there are Laws establishing the construction criteria to be used. Some participatory projects for the construction of residential areas for Sinti and Harvati Roma, have been designed (i.e.Venezia, Mantua, Bolzano, Verona). However, few have been carried out.

For example, the Veneto Regional Law n. 54, 1989, states that Municipalities should urgently define the needs of the Roma and Sinti population living in the area, identify the sites and with regional financial support, construct the areas. Since 1989, very few Municipalities have applied the Law, or requested available funding. As a result, the large majority of Sinti families still live on irregular and precarious sites. In 2004, only two Municipalities requested funds: Vicenza and Paterno del Grappa (TV), for a total amount of 39,389 euros. The Municipality of Vicenza is the only one to have regularly requested funds.

Every year in “nomad camps” in Italy, children die from socio-environmental causes connected to camp living conditions: the cold, fires and accidents. In the camp in Florence alone, between 1988 and 2004, nine Roma children have died (Mustafa, 2004). Public interest towards the “nomad camps” only grows when these tragic incidents occur. Everyday camp life does not interest politicians or civil society. Giada died from the cold on January 24th, 2004 in the “nomad camp” of **Scafati** (Salerno). She was aged 24 days. Three days later, in camp n. 7 (there are 13) in **Giugliano in Campania** (Naples), Samir, a 19 day old new born baby died from respiratory problems. The tragic deaths of these two babies pushed the local Authorities in Giugliano in Campania to organize a public debate, held in the Town Hall, on the long neglected “Roma issue”. «I invite – a local counsellor declared - the whole City Council, the local Government, the Mayor, the Borough Council Clerk [...] the Opera Nomadi and the citizens to work towards the creation of a small citadel, such as the camps» (transcription of the City Council meeting, 11th February 2004, reported in Tarantino, 2005:12). The strategy that emerged out of the debate was twofold: a) find an area to temporarily move the camp residents; b) find an area to build a *citadel* or a village for the Roma. According to Tarantino, «even if one accepts that there is a difference between the logic of the camp and the “identification of serviced areas for the construction of villages [...]”, and if one temporarily ignores the fact that recent

history has been full of cases of temporary zones methodically transformed into permanent temporary zones¹⁷, it is possible to state that, either as a temporary or a long term solution, camps always end up being the solution» (2005: 13). Since the early '90s, the thirteen camps in Giugliano in C. have been hosting about 1000 inhabitants, mostly from Bosnia. The camps near Ponte Riccio are located in what is considered one of the biggest illegal garbage dumping sites in Europe, the heart of what is nowadays one of the most productive criminal businesses for organized crime (Esposito, 2005; Pilla, 2005; Legambiente, 2004). A recent epidemiological survey on the causes of mortality in the area, shows a significant increase in cancer mortality, with special reference to malignant neoplasm of the lung, pleura, larynx, bladder, liver and brain. Circulatory diseases and diabetes also are significantly above the average (Altavista et al, 2004). The only significant institutional initiative in these past years has been the "U Dar" project, coordinated by the Local Health Service (ASL Napoli 2). Their main objective has been the vaccination of children living in the camps, though the problems in the area appear to require a far more extensive and in depth action.

According to Legambiente (2004: 107), «The Roma living in the nomad camps in the area are used [by criminal gangs] to burn waste, and for carrying out a sort of passive vigilance of the dumping sites, in order to guarantee that the trucks can pass freely without undergoing any improbable controls». The Roma are used as «a *force de frappe* to dissuade possible visitors» (Cianciullo and Fontana, 1995). Over the last ten years, Local Authorities have had an ambiguous attitude towards the Roma living in the area. Their indifference has stirred suspicion and has sometimes been interpreted as their renouncement towards managing the area, in favour of criminal organizations which, as has previously been stated, have considerable economic interests in the area. As a Rom in Giugliano told us: «I have tried to have electricity for years, I have asked ENEL (the main Italian power provider) and the local government, but nothing happened. Then I asked a person I knew who comes here sometimes, after a few days I had the light on in my shack».

In Bolzano, where there is currently a Macedonian Roma camp, there once was a rubbish dump ground made up of rubble from the bombed city. Pesticides and old medicine were then added at a later stage. The dumping ground was then made safe through the implementation of a waterproof system and a drainage system. In order to verify the presence of toxic components in the ground- we asked the geological services - at the Office for the Protection of the Environment and Area of the Province of Bolzano -to look for and make a copy of the certificate proving the act of the reclamation of the land. In the past two years (2004-2005) four out of six newborn babies have been born with serious health conditions. Furthermore, one woman had an abortion and one of her babies died only a few days after birth. Out of a total of eight pregnancies, therefore, only two gave birth to children without serious health problems.

In **Verona**, 25 Italian Sinti families, currently living in a parking lot, are still waiting for a regular equipped site. In 1989, these families, who all lived in different parts of the city, were told by the Municipality to move to an area in Via Pasteur, where a site was going to be built according to the Regional Law 547/1989. This site was never completed and the project was abandoned once and for all in 1996. The families

¹⁷ For an in depth discussion, see Rahola (2003).

were then told to move to a different area, in Via Sogare, established for *giostrai* (Sinti and non-Sinti families working with merry-go-rounds in fairs). In June 2001 the Mayor, Michela Sironi, ordered the eviction of the Sinti families, claiming that they were not *giostrai*. After one year spent living in a parking lot in Via Montelungo, in 2002 the new Municipal council established they could go back to Via Sogare, in an area which is officially still a parking lot. Although since 2002, the area has had a civic number, which allows Sinti families to have a regular residence, this is still not an area adequately equipped in accordance with the regional parameters, both in terms of the size of the allotted spaces and the infrastructure. On the 7th of February 2005, two and a half years after the new council had been elected, four representatives of the Sinti community wrote a formal letter to the Mayor of Verona asking for: a) to sign a document stating that Sinti can officially live in Via Sogare until the Municipality defines new authorised areas according to the Regional Law b) together with the Sinti, discuss the alternatives and long-term solutions, and start officially identifying them c) to officially appoint a person in the Equal Opportunities Department to follow the issues concerning the rights of the Sinti minority. As of March 2006, the Administration has not made any formal commitments with the Sinti community.

In 1998, the Municipality of **Venice** set up a participative project which is planning a living area for a group of 50 families of Italian Sinti and Roma, currently living on municipal land. The project involves ETAM (a Municipality body of community social workers) and the Roma and Sinti community. A social worker from ETAM told us that the Sinti and Roma's participation in this project has been extremely positive. The project has been defined, the area has been found, as well as the funding, but as of April 2005, the construction work on the area had not yet been started. After seven years, this is having a strong disheartening effect on the Roma and Sinti community. Moreover, given the plan for the new area, for years the Municipality has left the old camp infrastructures without any significant maintenance. This has caused a rapid decline in the quality of life in an area, which currently hosts 200 people and only has four showers.

In **Bolzano**, a regular area for 128 Sinti (42 families) was completed in 1997. The area is located in the middle of a highway turning called *La Spaghetтата*, and borders the city rubbish incinerator. As two employees of the *Don Bosco* Social and Health District explained to us, although the Sinti are Italian citizens, the area still falls under the competence of the Municipal Social Services and is managed as a "first reception service". For this reason it is not self administered by the families, but has been given on contract, to an association (up till April 2005, *Alto Adige Senza Frontiere*). Most Sinti in Bolzano ask for small self-administered areas for families or small groups, as confirmed by A.T., a Sinti woman. Families are worried about the fact that an old toxic waste hill (*Collina Paquali*) located 200 meters from the camp, will soon be reclaimed. They do not know of any plan to move them, before or during the reclaim.

In Via Triboniano (**Milan**), 321 Romanian Roma and 45 Bosnian Roma live in a Municipal camp in self made shacks. The camp is heavily overcrowded and there are only a few toilets and showers available. However, the plan for a new camp of containers, which should officially be built in the same area in the next months, will not solve the problem of segregation or provide adequate housing. On the 8th of March 2006, the camp was almost entirely destroyed by a fire, leaving 350 people homeless.

In Via Campo Rizzuto (**Milan**), in an unauthorised settlement of Romanian Roma, P.N. told us he is waiting for a permit to stay and that he has a regular job, but cannot find adequate housing which would allow him to get his permit. At the moment he only has the receipt. He is willing to buy a house with a mortgage, but the bank will not give him one if he does not have a regular residence and an identity card.

In **Brescia**, in Via Girelli, 15 Romanian Roma families have been living in a private area in caravans, since January 2004. The owner of the land has allowed them to live there and has provided water and electricity connections. However, the Municipality does not recognise the settlement, and deliberately ignores it. No civic number has been assigned to the area and this deprives the families from having a regular residence and from renewing their permits to stay. There is no bus service for the children going to school, despite the families require one.

In the Municipal camp in Via Orzinuovi (**Brescia**), which hosts Serbian and Kosovar Roma, the same precarious housing conditions force the families to pay very high electricity and water bills. This is because the houses do not fit the same bill category as a “first house” (the house where they officially reside).

The camp in Castel Firmiano (**Bolzano**) was created in 1996 for 33 Macedonian Roma families. It currently shelters 26 families (110 people) living in unsafe self-made wooden shacks. In the summer of 2004, a fire, caused by a short circuit, burnt down three houses.

In **Bolzano**, the Roma are nearly all registered on the council housing list, but up until now, very few have been given one. The problem concerns their points on the pass list, given that formally, living in a camp is not recognised as being a condition of temporary emergency. Furthermore, up until today, the parameter of “overcrowded” housing has never been recognised in the evaluation of a housing request. This is because, although the little wooden houses are considered liveable (with a certificate of liveability it is possible to obtain a permit to stay from the *Questura*), they are not registered at the land-registry office. The Institute of Public Housing (*IPES*) does therefore not consider them “houses” in all effects.

In **Turin**, the Arrivore camp was dismantled in October 2004. Despite this, only 270 (30 families) out of the 350 Bosnian Roma living in Arrivore were transferred to the new village in Via Germagnano where 30 small houses were built to shelter the Bosnian families. These houses consist of just one room and were assigned to large families (of up to nine members). The walls, the floors and the roofs are not insulated. The room has one entrance door and two door windows and it is not possible to ventilate the room without completely opening the door window.

Families stated that this last winter they suffered from the cold more than when they were living in the shacks in Arrivore. About 30% of the wood stoves supplied had problems and had to be replaced. The Bosnian families that had been left out of the new village were moved to the *Aeroporto* camp. However, they were unable to stay there because they were rejected by the Serbian and Kosovar families living there. Two people with mental disorders who used to live in Arrivore were also left without a housing solution.

Scampia, a deprived borough in **Naples**, hosts a large community of Roma, who came mainly from Serbia and Bosnia in the 90s. They are accommodated in camps which have existed for more than fifteen years. In 1999, for two consecutive days, the

Roma living in Scampia were both verbally threatened and physically attacked by local residents armed with wooden clubs and gasoline. Commenting on the locals' reactions, one journalist wrote:

Their invectives all sound the same. No one seems to be ashamed or worried, no one seems to care when watching Roma children and elderly people getting into a car and running away¹⁸

In **Naples** in 2000, in response to the violent incendiary attacks the previous year, which forced hundreds of Roma to abandon the city, the Municipality of Naples built an equipped camp with the support of the some associations. The new camp was opened in a desolate and poorly connected area behind the Secondigliano prison (Sigona, 2002). The local government almost immediately realised that the 800 places available in the camp were not sufficient for all the Roma and promised to build new areas in the Province of Naples. Five years later, hundreds of Roma are still living in the borough in camps without running water and toilets. Where initiatives have been taken by self-organised Roma groups, these have not been valued, and have sometimes even been blocked by the Public Administration. The case of an unauthorised camp inhabited by Serbian Roma, provides an interesting example of this. This camp has the appearance of a small village and the houses are laid out in a circle, organised according to the established management of the shared communal camp space. Two years ago, some families in the camp (in possession of regular permits to stay), made a request to the company supplying electricity, asking for authorised electrical instalments to be made. The company told the family that they had to pay for the instalments themselves, for a total cost of more than three thousand euros. However, once the family obtained a document certifying their permanent and legal stay in the camp space allotted to them, the Municipality of Naples refused to testify their fifteen year stay. This therefore stalled a process which would have allowed them to start the procedure of legalisation, and would have put an end to a system of unauthorised electricity connections.

From 2004 onwards, new Roma, principally from Romania, started to arrive in Naples and "established" themselves in the centre of the city. In Fuorigrotta, a residential area, they became very visible and attracted Media attention. The new "emergency" as it was immediately labelled, superseded or "covered up" the situation in Scampia. These groups arrived mainly from Calarasi, a town with whom Naples has had a sort of "pact of solidarity" with since 2003. "The objectives of this collaboration are: the prevention of the immigration phenomenon of Roma families from Calarasi to Naples, their assisted repatriation and reintegration back into society in their country of origin"¹⁹. Up to the present day, testimonies in Naples told us that nothing of the sort has actually taken place, due to serious corruption problems in Romania. In the meantime, the city has responded to this new influx of people, by principally using the method of forced evictions and by putting up the approximately two hundred people in a single reception centre, in the abandoned "Deledda" school. This building had been closed down because it was unfit for use, a year before it was converted into a reception centre. The speed in which the transfer took place, gives rise to more than

¹⁸ Beneduce, T. (1999) "L'odio degli aggressori: "Sono delinquenti, avremmo dovuto bruciarli vivi", *Corriere del Mezzogiorno*, 20.6.1999.

¹⁹ For further details, see: http://www.mediterraneomarnero.it/chisiamo_it/chisiamo_it/commune.html (accessed 10th April 2006).

one doubt on the authorisation of the safety of the building. If such is the case, we find ourselves facing an ulterior example of the fact that wherever Roma are concerned, the Administrations find it legitimate to offer patch-up solutions which fall short of any regular “normal” (according to the regulations) housing standards, and mockingly present these solutions as acts of solidarity.

According to some volunteers, the reception centre guests have to submit to unjust regulations, which, among other things, foresee that all residents, including mothers with small children, must leave the building by 9 am and cannot return before 7 pm. Following the volunteers’ protests against the strict regulations, the man in charge of the centre told them that he and his colleague had “civilised” these people and he threateningly told a Roma boy to answer his question: “Tell them who taught you to use the toilet?” The Roma boy kept his glance firmly on the ground and answered “You did, you taught me how to”. We were also informed that there have been numerous cases of beatings and mistreatment towards the guests in the centre (including children) and some families could not stand it any longer and went back to living on the streets. The school has also systematically refused visits from individuals and humanitarian organisations.

Police raids and forced evictions

Indiscriminate checks carried out in “nomad camps” by police forces often without any judicial mandate, have become routine. As the Under-secretary of the State for Home Affairs, Maurizio Balocchi put it: « [police] already run checks and controls in nomad camps throughout the national territory» in order to guarantee «the security of our citizens»²⁰.

The *normality* of these actions is alarming, as is the implicit criminalisation of the Roma and Sinti people. Unfortunately, as the testimonies we have collected show, for some Roma and Sinti, these actions have become normal. While we were investigating an allegedly indiscriminate identification involving finger printing and photos being carried out in five Sinti camps in **Veneto**, C.G., a Sinti man, told us: «Well, you know, yes, they came here but they were kind. They said: ‘do you want to be identified here in the camp or do you want to come to the Police Headquarters?’, and we replied that it was better to do it here. So they took photos, identity documents and fingerprints of all the men in the camp at that moment». «Don’t you think that this action should be denounced publicly? » we asked. «Not sure” he said, “I told you they weren’t nasty and it’s better not to annoy them. We don’t have anything to hide... By the way, they didn’t even take all the fingerprints of all my fingers, just one». No written or verbal justification was given for this police operation. At the end of March 2006, a similar operation was carried out by *Carabinieri* in various Sinti camps in the Veneto. Once again the camp residents were given no justification.

A similar alarming acceptance of unlawful police behaviour has also been recorded in other cities. A testimony collected by a Romanian Rom in **Rome**, helps to develop this point. While G.S. was telling us about police raids in the camps, he said: «Yes, some of them come here and take our necklaces, gold rings, mobile phones *but at least they don’t beat us*» [italics added]. Another Romanian Roma interviewed in

²⁰ See reference in footnote n. 1

Rome, was much more critical: «We are terrorized by police forces, they always come early in the morning at 5-6 am, they break into our containers. Once they pointed a 12 year old boy with a gun, he was so scared that he peed his pants and his mum fainted. They had to call an ambulance to take her to the hospital».

In many cases, during police controls or evictions from irregular settlements, the formal procedures are not respected and shacks, caravans and personal belongings are destroyed.

The area of Via Girelli (**Brescia**) is private land. The owner allowed some Romanian Roma families to live on it in their caravans. The police operate monthly “normal routine controls” in the area, following an order issued by the *Questore* (Provincial Head of the Police). During the police operation which took place on the 21st of April 2005, four caravans were destroyed belonging to families who had temporarily left the camp that morning. A representative of the *Brescia Social Forum* informed us that these four families are all waiting for their interview as asylum seekers. On the 22nd of April, a representative of the company that owns the land, declared he did not know anything about this police operation and that he had read in the newspaper that some caravans had been destroyed. The company itself supplied new caravans to the Roma families. Mr. Galeazzi told us that the Head of Police had authorised his company to allow Roma families to live in the area, but that the Police would verify the situation on a regular basis. The person in charge of the last operation that took place on the 21st of April 2005, communicated to us by phone, that the caravans that had been destroyed, belonged to families who had left the Italian territory. When we asked her about the destruction of private property and private houses, she asked us if we had seen the caravans, stating that they could not be considered adequate housing anyway.

The operation which took place on the morning of the 17th of September 2004, in Via Girelli, **Brescia**, was reported to us by several Romanian Roma during our visit. According to F.I., the police arrived at 4:30 am with around twenty police cars and some mobile phones. More than one hundred agents took part in the operation. They banged noisily on the doors and entered almost all of the caravans, with their faces covered with bandanas and holding cudgels. The children were very scared and started crying. The adults were also scared. They were not looking for criminals, but just for people whose permits had expired. They took twenty people to the Police Headquarters. B.M., a 27 year old woman reported that at 4:30 am the police banged violently on the door and entered their caravan forcing her to move. She was eight months pregnant and did not want the police to enter the caravan. They pushed her aside and took the husband pulling him by the shirt. The lady told us that her husband had been taken away like a criminal. His permit to stay had expired several months ago, but had not been renewed because the area of Via Girelli is not recognised by the Municipality. M.M., a 25 year old woman, confirmed that there were more than one hundred agents. They entered almost all the caravans, creating a lot of confusion and scaring the children. While she was going to check out what was happening to her neighbours, a police agent wearing a uniform asked her where she was going. She replied she was looking for her brother. The agent said he did not care and that if it was for him, he would have burned them all.

On the 24th of September, according to a volunteer from the *Brescia Social Forum*, twenty five people left the area of Via Girelli, despite being in possession of regular

permit to stay documents. The residents had taken the decision because they could no longer live there with that sort of pressure and harassment from the police.

In **Turin** on the 9th of March 2005, the lawyer Gianluca Vitale recorded the testimony of C. C., a Romanian Roma, regarding the police operation that took place on the 15th of April 2004 at 4-5 a.m. in a settlement of 10-12 shacks near the Novotel and the river Stura. There were 72 people (of which 30 women, 7-8 small children and 10 others aged 11 to 14). All, except four people were asylum seekers. The Municipal Police, the *Carabinieri*, the State Police and the Finance Police conducted the operation. The four people without documents were taken to the Police Headquarter (two were expelled immediately, while the other two were given expulsion orders). A police officer is said to have told them that they had to leave the settlement, but did not say where else they could go. Around 8 am, the women started taking their belongings out of the shacks, but were only able to take some clothes. The men started looking for an alternative place to go. Prior to that morning, nobody had told them they could not live there. They went to the Municipal Foreign Office. At 2 pm while they were still at the office trying to find a solution, it started raining and three or four women went back to the camp to check out the situation. However, they were unable to enter as a bulldozer was destroying the shacks with all their personal belongings inside (radios, televisions, generators...). They asked why they could not live there until the Municipality had found them an alternative place. The shacks were systematically destroyed, and the caravans were moved by the bulldozer, so that the shacks could be destroyed, but in this way most of the caravans ended up being unusable. When asked by the Foreign Office personnel why they had destroyed the shacks, the Municipal Police officers said they were sorry but it was better this way as the place was unsafe for the children and infested with rats. The asylum seeking families were taken to an old school close to Caselle for five days, and were later given three tents by the Red Cross in Via Germagnano. Having seen how the situation had been dealt with, many families did not trust the Municipality's temporary offer, and after a period of absence, they returned to the settlement. The families who had accepted the Municipality's help, lived in the Red Cross tents for four months. After which, an employee from the Foreign Office told them they could no longer stay there and the tents were taken away from them. The families were also told they could go back to the settlement which they had been evicted from and buy the caravans. They did this and have been living there since September 2004.

In **Verona** in April 2003, the Social Services' Borough City Clerk of the Municipality of Verona granted seven Romanian Roma families and two Bosnian Roma families a municipal area for residential purposes. This area, situated in Strada La Rizza n.65 – was adjacent to another residential area previously granted to other Italian Roma families by the Municipality of Verona. After the settling of these family groups of Romanian nationality, and the instalment of electricity and water connections, in order to better control the inhabitants, the Municipality of Verona granted numbered caravans to the Roma families. After receiving reports on the structural state of decay of the area, on the 15th of March 2001, the Mayor of Verona issued an order addressed to all the “resident or inhabitant users”, which established:

“The immediate prohibition of using heating and electrical installations, which are not in line with the law or in accordance with the technical laws on usage, maintenance or tenancy regulations, due to their high number of defects and safety risks which do not follow the regulations on proper use. Until adequate safety measures in

accordance with the existing rules are not met; the disconnection and their detachment from public supplies, starting from the metres and the handing over of electrical lines not in accordance with the Laws on usage, maintenance and tenancy, and the eventual sealing off of the meters to stop the supply from the grid system in the nomad camps ...The closing and sealing of the drums, cylinders, containers of all types and dimensions containing gpl and used for the production of open flames, in all cases where they lack the security and protection requisites established by the regulations, and in particular for the protection of the settlement and its inhabitants from the risk of explosions and fires, located in the municipal area of strada La Rizza, 65. In the case of the impossibility of closure or sealing, the removal and confiscation of the drums, cylinders, and all types and sizes of containers of gpl used for the production of open flames...”

The Mayor's order was carried out on the 18th of March 2004, with the removal of wooden shacks and the interruption of the electrical supply. On the 30th of June 2004, a fire blazed through the area, causing the destruction of caravans and shacks.

Following the fire, on the 5th of July 2004, the Mayor of Verona issued an urgent order for the immediate eviction of the area due to the situation of imminent crisis. This order was carried out by the State Police on the 8th of July 2004 at 5.45 am. In an open letter sent to the Prefect of Naples, the “Citizens’ Committee for Roma Rights” denounced the “dramatic sequence of forced evictions from the Roma shacks (Romanian and ex-Yugoslav Roma)”²¹ that were taking place in the Province of **Naples**. In **Pascarola** (Caivano), on the 7th of March 2006, eighteen families of Montenegrin Roma were left homeless on the streets, after their shacks were demolished. As often occurs, these measures are adopted without foreseeing any alternatives for the residents. The letter also states that other evictions have been carried out in Parco Verde in **Caivano**, harming a group of Romanian Roma and in **Gianturco** and **Poggioreale**. The letter states “ We maintain that as these repressive measures, are perfectly useless from a practical point of view [...], and in addition, require an enormous amount of public money, are therefore only used in the logic of electoral consent and manipulate those less fortunate people in our society. It is therefore no coincidence that these evictions (or threats of evictions) take place right in the middle of the pre-electoral period”.

Camp regulations

Sinti and Roma living in authorised camps have to follow specific regulations set by Municipal offices. These regulations are sometimes strictly applied and other times not. The violations of these regulations foresee sanctions of various types. An eviction order is the most serious one and in some cases it is not only applied to the individual responsible for the violation, but to the whole family. This seems an unjust and disproportionate extension of punishment. Furthermore, in general, it is necessary to note that camp regulations are often stricter than public housing regulations.

Expulsion from an area also brings about the loss of one's official residence in the registry office, producing a chain effect for the families concerned. These families find themselves homeless, without work and face the impossibility of sending their

²¹ The complete letter is available online on the website: “Romano Lil” and can be accessed at: <http://romanolil.blog.tiscali.it/th2478291/>

children to school. For Sinti families who lose their right to live in a Municipal area, it is extremely difficult for them to find an alternative place to legally stay in the Municipal territory, even if in many cases, they have been living in the area for generations. For foreign Roma, expulsion from the camp can make it impossible for them to renew their permit to stay. In the section that follows, we include some examples of camp regulations. This is an important and under researched area, which requires- and we hope to be able to do so in the near future- a systematic study. As well as examining the list of regulations, the study should also look at their application and their consequences on the lives of the camp inhabitants.

The Municipality of Turin

In October 2004, the Municipality of Turin, approved the new regulations for the equipped stopping areas for Roma and Sinti. The Council of Management for the area does not include any representatives from the resident families and is made up of: the Director of the Social Services Division, the head of the Municipal Police, the representative of the Foreign and Nomad Sector, the representative of the Foreign Group of the Municipal Police, the person in charge of the Foreign and Nomads Sector, the person in charge of the Foreign Group of the Municipal Police and the person in charge of the Social Services for the 4th, 6th and 10th town districts, where the stopping areas are located.

Article 3 (Organisation and Functions), Clause 2, clearly shows the Municipality's *bellicose* attitude. It states that the Foreign Group of the Municipal Police, exert an "assiduous vigilance of the adherence to the Laws and Rules of the current Regulations, carrying out a permanent presence in the area".

Article 6 states that the authorisation for a family to live in an area lasts for one year and the renewal needs to be approved by the Council of Management. Article 7 states that the authorisation can be revoked, and that one member, or the whole family can be expelled from the area, thereby losing their house and residency, for example, in the case of:

- -the repeated non-fulfilment of one's children's school attendance, as prescribed by Law;
- -the lighting of fires to burn garbage, noxious material or those capable of generating smoke or dangerous situations;
- -the lack of surveillance of minors from those responsible for parental care;
- -the use of the assigned space for illegal purposes;
- -the repeated refusal to accept employment offers.

An eviction order gives the person or the family 48 hours to leave the area. The regulations also state that once a family has received an eviction order they will not have the requisites to be admitted to another area in the town.

In two documented cases, four Roma from the *Aeroporto* camp and one Sinto from the *Via Lega* camp, were given eviction orders due to judicial proceedings against these people, **without having waited for the final judgement**. In this way, the Municipality had *issued a sentence*, before the judicial authorities in charge of emitting the penalty had expressed their final judgment. Furthermore, it is necessary to note that the eviction gave the Municipality the power to give a single person

(based on unclear legal grounds) and consequently his whole family, an ulterior penalty, in addition to that already foreseen by the national legal system, for the violation in question.

In four documented cases, families in Via Germagnano were given fines of 320 euros for hosting relatives without authorisation. The reports state that the fines were given because the police authorities were not informed within the provided terms of 48 hours (Art. 7, clause 1, Leg. Decree 286/98). Although, in theory this decree can be applied to all citizens (anyone who hosts people in their homes must declare their presence to the Police Authorities), this regulation does not appear to be as frequently applied to other citizens living in Turin as it is to the Roma and Sinti.

The Municipality of Brescia

The regulations of the Municipality of Brescia are called “Regolamento Aree per Nomadi” (Regulations for Nomad Areas), despite the fact that the Sinti and the Roma living in the “Nomad Areas” are not nomads. The Regulations were approved in July 1996. Article 1. states that they were established for Italian and foreign nomad citizens living in the camps in Via Borgosatollo, Via Chiappa (closed in 2003), and Via Orzinuovi.

Authorisations for stopping are granted for one year. The renewal is subject to the regular payment of rent and other costs. A family can be permanently evicted from the area:

- If a member of the family is sentenced for a criminal offence;
- If a member of the family causes or participates in fights inside or outside the structures;
- If the family gives hospitality to unauthorised people;
- If a member of the family continues to allow children to beg, after being officially warned by the Municipal police;
- If the family continues to not respect the schooling obligations, after being warned by the School Institutions;
- If a family member has repeatedly left women and children in a clear state of neglect.

An example of the serious consequences these regulations can have, is that a person who is sentenced for a crime, will not only not be given domiciliary arrests (in cases where the person has the right to request it), but this person’s family will be left without a place to live.

If a relative leaves a woman or a child in a state of neglect, due to regulations such as these, they risk being put on the road by the local institutions. Therefore, instead of being given family support, they are punished.

According to a social worker in **Brescia**, the regulations are not always applied *strictu sensu* and an actual eviction does not always follow an infraction of the rules. However, in case of an infraction, a formal procedure is automatically started and, even if the eviction is not carried out, the bureaucratic procedure goes on and it may lead to the official cancellation of the residence. The consequences are very serious,

because the renewal of the permit to stay, as has previously been stated several times, depends on the residence.

The Municipality of Chiari

The “Municipal Regulations for the Functioning of the Via Roccafranca Nomad Camp” sets the rules for a group of five sedentary Italian Sinti families. The Municipal camp was built for them in 1992. The new Regulations came into force in February 2005. The town council, elected in April 2004 and held by a Northern League Mayor, has repeatedly officially stated that he intends to dismantle the camp.

Article 1 (Rules of behaviour) establishes that if a member of the family behaves in a way that can cause social alarm, as well as the actions which can be brought before the Judicial Authorities, the Municipal Authorities can decide to revoke the house assignment adopting a **judgement without any right to appeal**. The list of prohibitions included in the Regulations set by the Municipality of Chiari, is incredibly long and detailed. Among those defined in Article 6, the following are mentioned:

- to give hospitality to people who are not members of the authorised family;
- to leave garbage of any sort outside the proper storage places;
- to leave the camp for more than 15 days without informing the Municipal Authority.

Article 7 states that if the family contravenes the National Law in terms of the children’s obligatory school attendance, the whole family will be immediately evicted from the camp and the case will be reported to the Judicial Authorities.

Article 11 and 12 define the cases in which a family can be evicted. For example, if a member of an authorised family acts in violation of the Regulations and/or in violation of Criminal Law, the verified violation of such norms, involves the immediate eviction from the camp with unquestionable judgement by the Municipal Authorities. Any intentional damage caused to the camp’s infrastructures results in the payment of the damages and a written call, which will in turn, effect the renewal of the permission to stay in the area.

DISCRIMINATION IN ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

For foreigners, housing, residency and work are three crucial and inextricably related requisites, and as established by the Bossi-Fini Immigration Law, the possibility of obtaining a permit to stay strictly depends on them. It is for this reason, therefore that the Municipality of Brescia’s lack of recognition of the private land in Via Girelli as a living area for the families residing there with a regular permit to stay, has consequently, resulted in the impossibility of proving their permanent residence when renewing their permit.

On the other hand, having an address immediately recognizable as a “nomad camp”, as is the case of Giugliano in Campania, where Bosnian Roma live in “Via del Campo Nomadi n...”, can invite discrimination, and be detrimental for those Roma looking for employment. Since October 2004, the residents of the camp in Castel Firmiano in **Bolzano**, have had “Campo Nomadi” or “Campo Rom” stamped on their permits to stay. In October 2004, the camp was finally allocated a civic number and a *normal* address appeared on the permits. The fear of being identified as “gypsies” is clearly

shown in the following episode, reported to us during our visit to Bolzano. In 2004 a fire caused by a short circuit destroyed several wooden shacks, attracting the attention of several TV channels which came to the camp. Many Roma, fearing they might lose their jobs if their employers recognised them as “gypsies”, very carefully avoided appearing on screen.

The permit to stay granted for political asylum cases, does not allow a person to work. During the period between the request and the decision, a person may be maintained by the State, however this only occurs in a limited number of asylum seeker cases. The decision process, at least up until the decentralised system of Commissions examining the cases was introduced, could take more than two years. While waiting for the decision, the asylum seeker could obtain a *borsa lavoro* (work scholarship): a one year non-renewable contract. This means that, given the average time necessary for obtaining a decision on an individual case, the asylum seeker is expected to survive for a year without any income. F.S. is an asylum seeker, working with a *borsa lavoro* in **Turin**. When we visited him in April 2005, he was living in a 4m² shack near the river, with five family members. He earned 300 euros a month for his work. The end of the annual contract worried him a lot, as losing even that minimal income would force him into black labour.

In June 2002, the new Municipal Regulations introduced in Turin, established that for “extra communitarian nomad citizens”, the *borsa lavoro* could not be assigned for a period exceeding that conceded on the permit to stay, and that it had to be suspended during the period of the renewal process. According to Giorgio Sasso, a representative of the *Ufficio della CGIL Immigrati* (Trade Union Office for Migrants) this is an explicit form of discrimination towards the Foreign Roma, which has only been removed towards the end of 2004. In terms of the fall-out and the relations with the companies, as of April 2005, the consequences of these regulations have not yet been overcome.

In **Bologna** following the forced eviction which took place along the Lungo Reno on the 19th September 2005, a group of Romanian Roma occupied a building called Ferrhotel, situated in Via Casarini. In March 2005, the group was permanently evicted from the building. The families in possession of regular permits to stay were transferred to Villa Salus, an old nursing home. During the transfer, most of the families were forced to leave behind their personal belongings at the Ferrhotel, as confirmed to us by N.B and C.C who currently live in Villa Salus. One volunteer defined the methods of the transfer as “inhumane”, with people being escorted by a line of *Carabinieri*, as if they were delinquents²² In the weeks following the transfer, with the help of some Italian volunteers and two lawyers, those people without regular documents- mostly black labour workers-who were tired of putting up with the conditions their employers imposed on them because they were working illegally, started to collect documentation on their employers and the treatment they had inflicted on them. These people asked the Mayor of Bologna, Sergio Cofferati, if he would grant them a Social Protection permit to stay, following Article 18 of the Legislative Decree of the 25th of July 1998, n.286. This article establishes that a permit to stay can be requested, if, in the event of police operations, investigations, or in the cases of local Authorities’ social services assistance interventions, “violent

²² For a report of the transfer see the article by the “*Redattore Sociale*” on the website “Immigrati a Bologna” available at: http://www.immigratibologna.it/news_completa.asp?id_ntz=202

situations of severe exploitation towards a foreigner” are ascertained, and there are “serious and concrete dangers for his/her safety, as a consequence of the attempt to evade the conditions of an association dedicated to any of the above-mentioned crimes or of statements given during the preliminary investigations or trials”. On the 9th of March 2005, a preliminary report of all the cases, without including the workers’ names, was given by the lawyers to the deputy Mayor, Adriana Scaramuzzino. This was in order to start off a negotiation and to assure that the workers would be given clear guarantees. About 60 workers decided to testify against more than 40 businesses. This event is bound up with the transfer from Ferrhotel: those people without regular permit to stay documents, were in fact, not admitted to Villa Salus, and, in the absence of other alternatives, decided to return to the Lungo Reno.

On the 18th of March, newspapers (*L’Unità*, *La Repubblica*) published the Mayor’s statements: “Recognition and Legalization for all those people who request a permit, on the condition that they clearly name their “bosses” and the companies that make use of black labour, in accordance to the Law”.

On the 21st of March 2005, at 8 am, the Municipal police and the *Carabinieri* carried out an eviction order signed by the Mayor, for the entire camp along the Lungo Reno.

The majority of the inhabitants were the same illegal workers who were waiting to negotiate with the Municipality. Others were asylum seekers with wives and children. Bulldozers destroyed 15 shacks and the people’s personal belongings. The Mayor assumed responsibility for the action and affirmed that there were no women and children living in the camp (*La Repubblica*, 22nd March 2005). The same day, a delegation of Romanian workers met the Deputy Mayor: the Municipality made an effort to help women and children, but no help was given to those without a permit to stay. Furthermore, the Mayor declared that he would only accept individual denouncements which gave the names and surnames of the employees and not general statements made against the phenomenon of black labour (*La Repubblica*, 22nd March, 2005). The workers answered that that individual denouncements would make them more vulnerable and they were ready to give all the names, the moment they received guarantees from the Municipality.

As confirmed by C.D, as a consequence of the newspaper articles and the lack of protection, some workers lost their jobs, while others were unable to find work because employers were afraid of them. Furthermore, in April 2005, the Municipality did not allow the Romanian Roma living in Villa Salus to register their residence there, making it difficult for them to renew their permits to stay.

In **Florence**, A.B., a 16 year old Kosovor Roma looked for a temporary summer job in vain. Despite studying in a prestigious hotel management school in Florence, he told us that whenever he approached someone asking for a job, as soon as they found out he was a ‘gypsy’ (very often just by looking at the address on his identity document) they found excuses not to employ him.

In the south of Italy, the situation is even more dramatic. In **Naples** there is a high unemployment rate (27% for young people aged 15-34 in 2004) and this inevitably also affects the local Roma, especially considering the lack of adequate initiatives aimed at increasing Roma employment. As a consequence, almost all Roma are officially unemployed. The few exceptions work for local NGOs (e.g. as drivers for the school bus that takes Roma children to school).

THE ROMA, THE “GYPSY” AND THE LAW

This section collects together testimonies and case studies related to acts of violence and discrimination perpetrated by institutional and non-institutional actors. In the final part, we provide two examples of xenophobic campaigns carried out by political parties, one of which, the Lega Nord, is currently (March 2006) part of the Government Coalition. For the cases included, we have mainly relied on testimonies collected directly in the field and from what the Media has reported.

An initial general reflection needs to be made regarding the figure of the “gypsy” in relation to the administration of the Law. As Simoni (2005) has underlined, the modern judicial systems, show a difficulty in guaranteeing the respect of the rules of Law and the principles of equality before the Law, when it come to dealing with “gypsies” or those perceived as such. In her analysis of the *debolezza* (weakness) of the Roma in the Italian judicial system, the Magistrate Silvia Governatori (2000) underlines how “gypsy” stereotypes influence judges and their decisions, just as it occurs amongst the majority of the Italian population. Stereotypes - socially accepted truths lacking foundations - are formed by the judges’ sentences and this results in their ulterior reinforcement in society. According to Governatori, stereotypes can have an influence on the judges’ decisions in different moments of the trial, both as a parameter for the evaluation of events and both through the principle that all Roma act in the same way, or for example, that all Roma mothers exploit their children for begging.

Abusive treatment by police and other state actors

During a police operation carried out in the private area of Via Girelli in **Brescia** on the 5th of February 2005, a Roma woman, M.M, was brought to the police headquarters against her will, in order to verify where her son, who she had given birth to six months earlier, was. The woman was withheld in the Police Headquarters for four hours, leaving her other two and a half year old son unattended, until a volunteer brought a copy of the document proving her son was in hospital, to the Police Headquarters. The very same document had been shown in vain, by M.M to an agent during the operation in the camp.

In the town of **Aosta**, on the 11th of December 2004, according to her testimony, G.S. was at the railway station with her son when the *Carabinieri* approached her and took the child from her. The mother reacted and was given a strong push and the child was taken away from her. Not knowing where her son had been brought, she was in despair. She went to the First Aid department of the Hospital of Aosta to look for him. However being in a state of agitation, she was hospitalised herself and then, as can be read in the hospital chart, given a sedative. The woman went back to the hospital on the 12th and the 13th of December, she was desperate and sad and suffered from the same reactions as the previous occasion. Once again she was hospitalised and sedated. In the documents of the Juvenile Court of Turin, who decided to issue a temporary order granting the custody of the child to the Social Services, Marshal La Neve justifies the necessity of temporary custody, stating that the child had pneumonia and respiratory difficulties. The child was returned to the mother after one week.

In **Brescia** in April 2004, C.V. a 32 year old Romanian Roma woman was begging at a traffic light, around midday. She was stopped by the Municipal Police and taken to

the Headquarters. She was told to sit down and an agent took a gun out of his holster and pointed it to the woman's head. She started crying. She clearly remembers that he told her he was going to kill her. Later he gave her a fine and released her.

On the 29th of April 2005 at 4.15 pm in **Padua**, three Romanian Roma (two women and one man) were stopped outside the Padua central railway station, by two agents in plainclothes (most probably State Policemen) and two *Carabinieri* in uniform. As stated in the article, which reported the police's version of the facts, published by *Il Gazzettino di Padova*, on the 1st of May 2005, the agents had thought the Roma were dealing drugs and carrying cocaine ovules. The agents had said the same thing to the witnesses who had asked what was going on. The *Gazzettino* article also states that one woman started shouting and taking her clothes off, and then hit the agents and threw herself on the floor. S.F., a student at the Venice University, took pictures with her mobile phone and denounced the facts to a local radio station (*Radio Sherwood*). She declared that the agents kicked the three Roma women while they were searching them after having publicly stripped the two women in search of drugs²³. S.F. also declared that when she arrived on the scene, one of the Roma women was already on the floor, and the agents were putting handcuffs on her. However, another witness, who arrived on the scene before S.F., affirmed that the woman had been held by the arms and the legs, while her skirt was pulled up and the agents pressed on her stomach and even searched for the ovules in her most intimate parts. It must be pointed out that all the agents carrying out the search were males. Numerous people witnessed the facts and are prepared to confirm this version. S.F. also reported the treatment inflicted on the Roma woman, who was held while one of the agents in plainclothes held her by the neck and started pulling at her shirt to look underneath. At that point the woman tried to free herself and in doing so she lost her shirt and ended up half naked on the asphalt, holding on only by her arms. In the meantime, the man, who does not appear in the photos, found himself against a wall, stared at by one of the *Carabinieri*. All this took place in a public place, at the Padua central railway station in broad daylight. The three Roma were brought to the Police Headquarters. Two of them were released immediately, while one woman was released after 24 hours. She was accused of resistance to Public Authority and appeared in Court on the 12th of May 2005. Despite the testimonies of several witnesses and the photos shown to the judge, she was judged guilty in first instance.

As reported by the newspaper article in the *Gazzettino*, the police had officially declared that not a trace of drugs had been found on the three Roma. The Roma woman who we met in Padua not long after the event, had bad bruises on her neck, arms and legs.

Despite the fact that in Italy, begging is not a crime, the Regulations of the Municipal Police in **Brescia** establish that it is prohibited to "carry out any form of harassing begging or which causes any hindrance or danger to the traffic or pedestrians". Despite these limitations, this Regulation has been used to fine women who were simply begging. Fines issued to women in 2004, made no mention of any reference to situations of exploitation, risk, danger or hindrance to the traffic.

In a video interview filmed by L.B. on the 22nd of May 2004, E.D., a 17 year old Roma, declared that on the 10th of May 2004, some traffic wardens in Brescia

²³ <http://www.meltingpot.org/articolo5294.html>

stopped him while he was begging. After telling him to return to his own country, they made him get into their car and brought him outside town. Seeing that they were not going in the direction of the camp, E.D asked them where they were going. They replied that it was the right road and jokingly told him that they would leave him outside town without his clothes on to see how he would get back. They left him in the hills 15 km outside Brescia. E.D did not know where he was, but he was able to see Brescia and the name of the road, which was Via Panoramica. He was very scared and started to run, but his nose started bleeding. A woman asked him what had happened and offered to call someone at the camp. Two days later, the same two traffic wardens stopped his sister-in-law. When he saw that they wanted to take her away, in order not to leave her alone, he offered to accompany her, but the traffic wardens replied that they would bring her to the camp and that if he did not believe them, he could take down their number plate. Instead of bringing her to the camp, they brought her to the Traffic Warden Headquarters and released her only after her husband came to get her.

Violence by non-state actors

In **Ercolano (Naples)**, on the night of the 29th of January 2005, a group of ten people, aged between 17 and 25, set fire to an encampment where 27 Romanian Roma were sleeping. The action, according to the police, was premeditated as the ten were found in possession of Molotov bombs, rockets and a can which had contained the 32 litres of petrol used to light the fire. No one was injured but, as a police officer said – «this is a worrying episode of racist hatred»²⁴.

In **Lugagnano (Verona)** in the Province of Verona, on the night of the 15th of June 2004, at 11.30 pm, a Roma family of eight (parents and six children) who were temporarily living in supermarket parking lot, were victims of a racist attack carried out with two firebombs. One of the bombs exploded, and the heat of the flame reached a seven year old girl who was sitting outside a caravan with her parents. The girl, who was immediately taken to hospital, was given a 20 days prognosis. Five other children were sleeping inside the caravan and the firebomb could have easily inflicted far more serious consequences.

The police identified five young men who admitted responsibility. They explained that the action was in response to a discussion that had taken place that afternoon at the shopping centre, between one of them and a twelve year old Rom boy who had accidentally hit him. Despite the fact that the five young men admitted they had planned the attack, that they had fabricated three fire-bombs (two of which were used), that they had driven to the place where the Roma family lived and had thrown the bombs, the title of the local newspaper (*L'Arena*, June 17th 2004) still stated that racism was not a motivating element, but that it involved a quarrel for futile motives. The investigators did include racism as the aggravating motive in the charges. Regarding the attack, the *Arena* article of the 16th of June reports: “the investigators consider [the action] to be a boy’s prank or in any case linked with a personal issue with that family”. In an article from the 17th of June, the five young men are described as “youths from respectable family homes, with permanent jobs and without problems”.

²⁴ Reported in *Repubblica*, Naples, 30th January 2005.

Xenophobic political campaigns

In December 2004, three years after the start of the trial, six members of the Lega Nord party of Verona were judged guilty - in first instance - of instigation to racial hatred against a part of the Sinti community. In September 2001, the Lega Nord party had organised the campaign "FOR THE SECURITY OF THE CITIZENS – NO GYPSIES IN OUR TOWN – IMMEDIATE EVICTION", "Saturday 15th September – SIGN TO SEND THE GYPSIES AWAY". This campaign was initially publicised in a press conference and later, carried out with thousands of posters put up all around town. Members of the Lega Nord party were interviewed by the press and stated that "the Sinti nomads have to be driven away from the Municipal territory: the only solution is a permanent eviction order" (*L'Arena*, 2nd August 2001) and that "The presence of the Sinti is a matter of serious concern for the citizens in the area" (*L'Arena*, 2nd August 2001). "We know perfectly well what happens when gypsies are in town: in the best hypothesis they are on the streets begging, and in the neighbouring areas robberies and crimes increase [...] Our towns have to be unwelcoming towards people bringing criminality and parents who force their under aged children to beg at traffic lights, because they don't want to work" (*L'Arena*, 24th of August 2001). On several occasions it was insinuated that thefts increased in areas where Sinti live, that they do not pay taxes and that citizens need to be protected from these people. This campaign included a petition against illegal "nomad camps" and against the construction of new ones. Throughout the trial, the Lega Nord's defence had been that the real objective of the campaign was the collection of signatures against the creation of new camps. When the six members of the Lega Nord were declared guilty, the Minister of Justice, Roberto Castelli, a member of the condemned party, publicly declared to the Press that felt solidarity towards the six people, as they were only carrying out a campaign against illegality.

When the sentence for instigation to racial hatred against the Sinti community was published, the Press gave very little space to the news and it was completely ignored by the national television. On several occasions it was stated that the six had been judged guilty for the petition they had organised against un-authorized camps, and not for instigation to racism.

On the 13th of February 2005 the Lega Nord party organised a national demonstration in Verona against the Public Minister, Guido Papalia, the Public Prosecutor in the trial. At the end of the demonstration, a tombstone inscribed with the Public Minister's name, was placed in the central square of Verona. On this occasion, Borghezio, a Member of the European Parliament and of the Lega Nord party, announced from the stage, that what the Lega aims for is a "white and Christian Europe".

In **Bolzano** in March 2005, just before the Administrative elections, two right wing political parties, Lega Nord and Unitalia, launched a campaign against the "gypsies". On leaflets and on posters, the local party Unitalia - Movimento Iniziativa Sociale wrote: "*STOP GIVING HOUSES TO GYPSIES AND EXTRACOMMUNITARIANS – WE ARE FIRST!*" The *Lega Nord – Alto Adige – Sudtirolo* published a four paged leaflet which stated: "Stop welfare! We cannot afford to assist gypsies and extra communitarians [...] As far as the gypsies are concerned, some time ago the local

left wing parties and the Catholic-communists decided it was a good idea to maintain them so that they would lose their thieving habits and to persuade them to work and to adopt a more civilized way of life [...] “Many years ago a somewhat naïve Caritas [...] wanted to make us believe that with love and the appropriate social manoeuvres it would have been possible to introduce the gypsies to a respectable life in society, made up of work and honesty. These social manoeuvres consisted mainly in giving them lots of money to prevent them from stealing and especially from sending their children to steal or beg (and from beating them till they drew blood, if in the evening, they had not returned home full of money)”.

ROMA AND SINTI REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA

A mixture of ignorance and opportunism feeds the process that makes Roma and Sinti overexposed in the Media. The public reads and watches news which talk about the criminal exploits of the “nomads” and “gypsies”, some politicians and some political parties exploit people’s fears and sometimes the police forces act knowing perfectly well that they will not be judged for abuse of power against such weak citizens with such a bad reputation. The coverage and emphasis given by the Media to the nomads’ alleged criminal behaviour, is entirely disproportionate when compared to the crimes and behaviour of non-Roma and Sinti²⁵.

In such a context, racist attacks towards Roma and Sinti are often justified or considered less serious. Those responsible are often considered to be “respectable youths” and the tone of the reports, tend to be ambiguous.

The fight against racism and the many forms it manifests itself in, tends to lose its strength when the people being discriminated against are Roma or Sinti. If the same attitude and language were used towards other groups, the Media and political parties would adopt a much clearer condemnation towards these actions and words.

In our opinion, the following episode- which is just one of the many that could have been included- demonstrates this attitude particularly well. In the town of **Lecco**, on the 4th of February 2005, two Romanian Roma women were accused of wanting to kidnap a little boy. The mother of the child stated that she was walking along the road when she was approached by a woman and a Roma girl who tried to steal her seven month old child from the pram. The mother of the child said she heard them saying “*prendi bimbo, prendi bimbo*” (“take child, take child”). A third woman was waiting at the end of the road. The mother was scared and started shouting, she took her son in her arms and kicked the “nomad” to distance her. The three women were identified and arrested that same day near Caritas, where they had gone to look for some clothes. The three *kidnappers* were immediately brought in front of a judge and they were assigned a lawyer. One of the women was under age and therefore could not be brought to trial right away. The two women, being in possession of clear records, had two options: declare themselves innocent and go to prison until the circumstances had been defined, thereby risking an eventual heavy sentence; or admit their guilt, reach an agreement, be charged with eight months and be set free immediately. This is a possible negotiation if one has a clear record. The women choose the second option.

For an entire week, newspapers and the television gave coverage to the political campaign against the judge who had judged the case and the “system” that had set

²⁵ For an in depth discussion, see: Tavani, 2005.

the two women free. The President of the Italian Chamber, Pierferdinando Casini, declared: "I think we are in need of the judges' clear evaluation of the dangerousness of certain decisions for society" (*Il Messaggero*, 8th February 2005:8). The Lega Nord stuck up thousands of posters in Lombardy for the campaign "Hands off our children". Antonio Marziale, President of the Child Rights Observatory said: "We cannot pretend nothing has happened, this concerns a dangerous and unacceptable measure. If the magistracy has adopted it, this means that the legislative system is farcical²⁶. He then added that institutions should intervene guaranteeing the immediate expulsion of the two women and give the third member of the group, the underage girl to the custody of the social services. In the *Corriere della Sera* (7th February 2005) Gaspare Barbiellini Amidei wrote: "On few occasions has a sentence done so much harm to a magistracy. When the application of a sentence disturbs the general public, only the enemies of the Law benefit" He added: "What's more we cannot reduce people's fear, when at every traffic light in town one witnesses the exploitation of very young beggars, being carried or held by the hand by women who may also be exploited in their own way. We never know if they are their own children, or if they are rented or taken from who knows where".

With the Media and most of the politicians taking it for granted that the Roma women wanted to kidnap the child, it is obvious that the public opinion was also set against the decision to release the two women. At this point, the Minister of Justice, the engineer, Roberto Castelli declared: "The power of the judges comes from the people. For this reason they should sentence according to people's opinions" (*Repubblica*, 8th of February 2005). The President of the Lombardy Region, Roberto Formigoni, also publicly expressed his opinion: "The immediate release from prison of the two nomads is baffling. People do not accept these solutions" (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 8th February 2005). The Vice President, Beccalossi said: "We need zero tolerance and exemplary punishments for those who cowardly use under age to commit crimes that often involve children as the victims. For victims I intend our children, but also the nomad children introduced into delinquency" (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 8th of February 2005).

On the 15th of February the under age girl was also judged by the Juvenile Tribunal, but they did not find any element which could prove her guilty, not even the threatening words spoken to the woman and her child. The Public Prosecutor of the Juvenile Tribunal declared: "The context in which the event happened, the fact that the words "take child" repeated twice, were spoken in Italian and not in Romanès - the language normally spoken amongst the Roma; that the young nomad child who stretched out her hands towards the pram was holding a glass in her hands for begging, that the gypsies did not run away immediately after the event but were found shortly after at the Caritas refectory next to the same church, together with a child of only six months, makes us think of a sort of threat but nothing more" (*yahoo news*, 17th February 2005). Nobody has yet thought it just to apologise to the three Roma women for what had been said against them, or for not having offered the women any adequate legal support.

In September 2004 in **Mazzara del Vallo**, a three year old girl called Denise Pipitone suddenly disappeared. Several investigation tracks have been followed. In Milan in October 2004, a private guard saw a child resembling Denise, together with some

²⁶ <http://www.tgfin.mediaset.it/cronaca/articoli/articolo241988.shtml>

“nomads” and took some pictures with his mobile phone. Following this episode, with the help of Romanian Roma the Milan police investigated and identified the child: he was a boy, the son of a couple living in one of the camps in Milan. As is required for investigation purposes, in October, this news was not given to the newspapers. Despite this, in March 2005, national newspapers reported the news that Denise’s mother was sure the child in the photo was her daughter. Once again the nomad camps in Italy were searched, including the one in Verona. This national Media campaign followed hot on the heels of the case of the three Romanian Roma from Lecco, accused of having kidnapped a child.

On the 21st of April in **Milan**, following the news given by newspapers and television (*La Nazione, Il Giornale, Repubblica, Il Manifesto*), at around 5.30 pm three allegedly Roma men, entered the Institute for Ill-treated Children (Centro Bambini Maltrattati - CBM) in Via Spadini and “kidnapped” a seven year old Romanian Rom. According to the head of the *Squadra Mobile* of Milan (State Police) Vittorio Rizzi, “the child was granted in custody to the centre and for the past couple of months had started talking about his life, showing trust towards the educators and had started his rehabilitation” (*Il Manifesto*, 23rd April 2005). On the 23rd of April, *Repubblica* published an article reporting: “Stefan had only just started opening up, after two months of silence and shyness, he was talking. He was telling the educators and psychologists about the violence suffered within his family, his father, his mother and his two sisters, in the shack where he had been living for a year, in the Roma *favela* behind the Maggiore Cemetery”.

Most of the national newspapers and television news took it for granted that the boy had suffered from violence inflicted by family members, and that the kidnappers had wanted the child for their presumed *trafficking*. The police had taken the child six months earlier, while he was resting under a tree. The parents had not been allowed to see him. He had been taken to a centre in Lodi and transferred to Milan after six months. On the 28th of April, Stefan was found by the *Squadra Mobile* in the house of a person who had come forward, offering herself as a mediator. Despite the newspapers headlines: “End of the nightmare” (*Il Corriere della Sera*, 29th April 2005), the child appeared serene and united with his family.

On the 5th of May, the Juvenile Tribunal established that Stefan had to go back to the CBM centre, but that he could see his parents regularly. This decision was taken following the request of the child himself “to reassure the mother and father about the good living conditions” (ANSA, 6th May 2005). The family lawyer, Stefano Cozzetto, said “The meetings have been re-established because it was the child’s will to see his parents and because he did not charge the parents with either sexual or any other sort of accusations” (AGI, kataweb, 6th May 2005). On the 6th of April the *Tg3* news (RAI3, 2.20 pm) reported that the judges had decided that the child would stay in the Centre and that the family members would be able to see him for only a few hours a month.

The stories of Lecco, Stefan and Denise have all been part of Media campaigns which have presented facts in an inaccurate light, using alarmist tones. One point ties all these events together; the absence of the Roma’s voice. The “nomad’s” version of the facts, is always considered superfluous or false.

CONCLUSION

The pattern of discriminations that emerges out of this work is inevitably partial and incomplete. Many cities and sometimes entire regions are missing. This is not because in those areas the situation for the Roma and the Sinti is any better, but because, due to the limited resources available to us, we were unable to do more. In the little time available for our field research, we were not able to visit or get in contact with local testimonies who could have provided first hand information.

This report should be seen as the first of a series of investigations into the various forms of discrimination Roma and Sinti are victims of. *Osservazione* has set itself three aims: to carry out monitoring on discrimination on a national and local level; and from these initiatives, gather together a growing and widespread network of groups, associations, and individuals who can contribute to the collection of testimonial cases of discrimination and; promote the direct participation of Roma and Sinti in the fight against discrimination. The intention is to create a widespread grassroots system of monitoring and action against discrimination, and to spread the knowledge of existing legal instruments, as well as an awareness of rights and the creation of trust in the possibility of seeing them protected.

As has been documented in the numerous cases included here, Roma and Sinti are subjected to discrimination in many areas, in many ways and by many different groups as well as institutions²⁷ In this last case we are confronted with cases of both blatant episodes of discrimination and abuse of a racist nature, as well as more subtle forms of discrimination. These are often hidden behind “neutral” bureaucratic practices, as well as behind non-action or public policies which present themselves as respectful of minority rights, but, in practice, exclude and marginalise the Roma and Sinti.

“Nomad camps”, for reasons previously stated in the text, are areas par-excellence where residents’ rights are suspended, where the discretion of those in power becomes the rule, where the normality of abuses and injustices are so blatant, widespread and deep rooted that they almost become invisible in the eyes of the victims. Although they are accepted as part of their daily lives, nevertheless, as the testimonies we have included show, feelings of intolerability towards these injustices, continue to live on in many people.

Is it legitimate to talk about institutional racism? If by this definition we mean the process that manifests itself in all the social systems which are unable to adequately deal with national and or ethnic-cultural groups and which have not adopted significant reforms to guarantee equality before the Law or equality of opportunities²⁸, then it becomes evident that we find ourselves facing widespread and deeply rooted practices of institutional racism.

Among the consequences of the context which has been outlined, it is necessary to recall the widespread mistrust the Roma and Sinti feel towards Administrations and Authorities. When these do not act in a discriminatory manner, they nevertheless act

²⁷ This conclusion is in line with what has already been highlighted in a previous ERRC report (2000) and is confirmed by Rivera (2003, 2004), who underlines how Roma and Sinti, together with Jews and non EU immigrants (particularly of Islamic faith), are amongst the most vulnerable people for racist attacks.

²⁸ This definition had been adopted from that proposed in the report on childhood and adolescence in Italy, published by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers et al. (2000).

in an incoherent, discontinuous and contradictory way. Most of the time there is an absence of any genuine will to listen to these minorities, as well as a lack of areas and structures capable of acting as a “bridge” to facilitate and promote this dialogue.

In public politics Roma and Sinti are almost always absent. There is a lack of any form of their real involvement in decision making processes that concern them. What can be seen, in the best of cases, is a simulacrum of participation, where decisions are made by other people elsewhere. In the worst cases, we find Roma and Sinti being used like scarecrows to mobilize so-called “respectable” and often racist electorates.

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