

Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion

(LERI) Project

Community Summary

Bologna, Italy

This community summary forms part of FRA's **Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion** (LERI) project. LERI is a qualitative action research project under [FRA's multi-annual Roma Programme](#). It was developed in response to the [European Commission's Communication on an EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020](#). LERI brings together local authorities and residents, in particular Roma, to investigate how they can best be involved in Roma integration actions, and identify which aspects of these actions work, which do not, and why. The aim of the project is to facilitate the engagement of all local stakeholders, including Roma, in joint efforts to enable Roma inclusion. The experience gained and the lessons learned during the process will help improve the design, implementation and monitoring of Roma integration policies and actions at the local level.

LERI is the first FRA project to test participatory action research methodology. By identifying the key factors that lead to the success or failure of local integration activities, the project is helping to improve the planning of effective integration programmes for the future. At the same time, facilitating engagement at local level empowers all those involved, building their capacity to participate as equal partners with local administrations and civil society, and enabling a shared understanding of which measures need to be taken and how their implementation can be monitored. The project is being carried out in 21 localities across 11 EU Member States (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and the United Kingdom).

LOCALITIES

Pavlikeni,	Bulgaria
Stara Zagora,	Bulgaria
Brno,	Czech Republic
Sokolov,	Czech Republic
Helsinki,	Finland
Jyväskylä,	Finland
Lille Metropole,	France
Strasbourg,	France
Aghia Varvara,	Greece
Megara,	Greece
Besence,	Hungary
Mátraverebély,	Hungary
Mantua,	Italy
Bologna,	Italy
Aiud,	Romania
Cluj-Napoca,	Romania
Hrabušice,	Slovakia
Rakytník,	Slovakia
Cordoba,	Spain
Madrid,	Spain
Medway,	UK

Bologna, Italy

Overview of the country context

Roma communities in Italy include a number of heterogeneous ethnic and linguistic groups composed of around 120-180,000 people, half of whom are Italian nationals. These groups speak a variety of languages, which often differ from city to city as they have been influenced over time by local dialects and vernaculars. No 'standard' Romani language is used.

Sinti and Roma are the two main populations, but several other small groups exist, such as the Sicilian Camminanti. The Italian colloquial term *zingari* (gypsies) generally refers to this composite group. Although it possesses a negative connotation it is nonetheless often used by the media and in public and political discourse.

Over the years, Italy has approached the issue of Roma integration in various ways, in some cases deliberately segregating Roma and Sinti people. Camps are the most evident example of the latter policies resulting in formalised segregated communities all over the country. They isolate Roma from the majority community and prevent them from participating fully in public life.^{1 2} Though still present, the connection between Roma and nomadism (from which the camps originated) is fading and this is also reflected in the Italian *National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Camminanti - 2012-2020*.³

Locality background information

Bologna is the capital city of Emilia Romagna, a region in northern Italy. The seventh most highly populated city in Italy, Bologna has about 385,000 inhabitants across nine boroughs (Borgo Panigale, Navile, Porto, Reno, San Donato,

Santo Stefano, San Vitale, Saragozza, Savena) each with its own Council.

Due to its rich history and geographical position, Bologna boasts leadership in several fields. According to the 2013 European Regional Growth Index, it is the second Italian city in terms of economic growth, an important highway and railway hub, and a site of several industries' headquarters. Moreover, with an extensive programme of cultural activities, a known history of activism and a strong progressive tradition, Bologna is widely recognised as one of the most inclusive and diverse cities in Italy.

Yet, the inclusion and active participation of Roma and Sinti people has only recently started to receive public attention. Within the municipality of Bologna, the following offices are responsible for coordinating work with Roma and Sinti: the Office for Vulnerable Adults and Social Inclusion (*Ufficio Adulti Vulnerabili ed Inclusione Sociale*) within the department for community wellbeing (*Benessere di Comunità*) and the Institution for Social and Community Inclusion (*Istituzione per l'Inclusione Sociale e Comunitaria*) Don Paolo Serra Zanetti. The latter is an autonomous office within the municipality, responsible for governance. Everyday work in the camps is contracted to social cooperatives (i.e. *Consorzio Indaco*).

The municipality developed and implemented a Local Action Plan (LAP) for the years 2013-2014 (in the frame of the Roma-Net project). A Local Support Group (*Gruppo Locale di Supporto, LSG*) was set up by the municipality to foster the implementation of the LAP, bringing together key stakeholders including Sinti people from the Savena camp and a Roma man from a camp in Casalecchio di Reno (a neighbouring municipality). The municipality is considering inviting the municipality of San Lazzaro and Casalecchio (as part of the Metropolitan

¹ European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) (2000), *Il paese dei campi. La segregazione razziale dei Rom in Italia*, National Report Series, available at: www.errc.org/article/il-paese-dei-campi/3881. (All hyperlinks were accessed on 23 February 2016).

² See also Associazione 21 luglio (2014), *Rapporto annuale 2014*, available at: www.21luglio.org/wp-

content/uploads/2015/04/Rapporto-annuale-Associazione-21-luglio.pdf

³ Ufficio Nazionale Antidiscriminazioni Razziali (UNAR) (2011), *Strategia nazionale per l'inclusione dei Rom, dei Sinti e dei Camminanti*, available at: www.ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_italy_strategy_it.pdf

area of Bologna) to also join the LSG. Four coordinating roundtables for the social inclusion of Roma and Sinti people have been established, bringing together key stakeholders dealing respectively with education, employment, housing and anti-discrimination.

The *Consorzio Indaco* took part in all projects together with the Sinti and Roma communities (such as the EU-cofunded projects [SRAP](#), [Roma Matrix](#) and [Roma-Net](#)).

Roma and Sinti people settled in Bologna during the Middle Ages and they compose a very heterogeneous group. The needs of particular components differ significantly, depending mainly on their nationality. The Sinti population in Bologna consists of Italian nationals. There are three camps managed by the municipality through local Councils and cooperatives in Bologna, which house the majority (about 230 people) of the Sinti residents in the city.

Originally designed as temporary solutions, the camps eventually became permanent. The settlement in Borgo Panigale neighbourhood hosts 110 people while those in Savena and Navile have 52 and 69 inhabitants, respectively.⁴ Each camp is administered by the Council of the neighbourhood where it is located. These Councils operate according to a set of rules and regulations⁵ established in 2002 to implement the regional law 47/1988.⁶ This law has been replaced in July 2015 by a new regional legislation (11/2015) in line with the NRIS and EU recommendations⁷. A consortium of NGOs and associations (*Consorzio Indaco*) manages the social services in the camps with operators working in the field of education, functioning as

mediators between Sinti people and the local administration.



Entry gate to the camp of Savena.

Seventeen joint families (40 people) live in mobile homes on small private areas, located outside the city.⁸ Although many Sinti consider this as the optimal situation, the law regards such homes as a violation of the "purpose of use" of these plots of land.⁹ The Sinti have generally bought agricultural/non-building land, as it is cheaper than land designated for the purpose of building. This puts them at risk of eviction, regardless of how legitimately they have acquired those lands. Very few Sinti families live in unauthorised settlements or in private areas owned by other people subletting the land. No precise data is available on the number of Sinti people living in social housing apartments, emergency temporary housing, or other private housing solutions.

Compared to Sinti, Roma are a much less homogenous group, as far as nationality is concerned. Non-Italian Roma are divided into two main groups coming either from

⁴ Consorzio Indaco, Interview

⁵ Bologna Municipality (*Comune di Bologna*) (2002), Regulations disciplining the access and stay and the criteria for the management of the trailer courts for nomads (*Regolamento per la disciplina dell'accesso e della permanenza e dei criteri per la gestione delle aree sosta per nomadi*), available at: www.comune.bologna.it/media/files/regolamento_per_la_disciplina_dellaccesso_e_dei_criteri_per_la_gestione_delle_aree_sosta_per_nomadi.pdf

⁶ Regione Emilia-Romagna (1988), LR 47/1988, Rules for nomad minorities in Emilia-Romagna (*Norme per le minoranze nomadi in Emilia-Romagna*), 23 November 1988, available at: [http://sociale.regione.emilia-](http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/documentazione/norme/regionale/leggi/precedenti-il-1990/l.r.-n.-47-del-23-novembre-1988)

[romagna.it/documentazione/norme/regionale/leggi/precedenti-il-1990/l.r.-n.-47-del-23-novembre-1988](http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/documentazione/norme/regionale/leggi/precedenti-il-1990/l.r.-n.-47-del-23-novembre-1988)

⁷ Regione Emilia-Romagna (2015), LR 11/2015, Norms for the social inclusion of Roma and Sinti people (Norme per l'inclusione sociale di Rom e Sinti), 16 July 2015, available at

<http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/documentazione/norme/regionale/leggi/lr-11-2015>

⁸ URBACT and Municipality of Bologna (2012), Local action plan for the municipality of Bologna, Codici Social Research Agency, available at:

http://urbact.eu/sites/default/files/import/Projects/Roma_Net/documents_media/The_Local_Action_Plan_of_the_Municipality_of_Bologna.pdf

⁹ Associazione Sinti Italiani di Bologna, Interview.

countries of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia or from Romania. The former have been in the city since the mid '90s and have had access to social housing and other welfare services. However, many left Bologna and returned to their countries of origin or moved abroad. The latter, however, continue to face extremely arduous conditions. Romanian Roma are relatively new in Bologna and some still commute from Italy to Romania or other countries where they have family. Although no exact data exist on Romanian Roma, given their high mobility and marginality, social operators estimate that this group counts between 100-200 people.¹⁰ They usually live in unauthorised settlements at the outskirts of the city, erecting shelters on the riverbanks and other hidden locations, or occupying old abandoned construction sites. There are about twenty such areas, which do not offer any type of facilities and they are inhabited by few families. Since December 2014, *La Piccola Carovana* (a member of the Consortium Indaco), was contracted by the municipality to tend to the basic needs of people living in such settlements, particularly their health conditions. The municipality has also built public toilets with showers, lavatories and facilities for washing laundry, which are also managed by *La Piccola Carovana*.

Romanian nationals mostly belong to Roma Abruzzesi, a group of around 60 people that is settled in an authorised camp in Casalecchio di Reno, which is not always part of the activities planned by the Bologna Municipality for other groups (e.g. the Sinti) living on its territory.¹¹



Unauthorised Roma settlement (Prati di Caprara, August 2014).

Sinti and especially Romanian Roma have diverse challenges and needs. Spatial segregation, low levels of education and socio-political participation, scarce knowledge of (and trust in) public institutions, limited access to formal employment, lack of cultural recognition, low income, general vulnerability and widespread anti-Roma feelings are common issues for both communities. However, Romanian Roma are mostly affected by challenges related to more basic needs, such as severe poverty, illiteracy and constant threats of expulsion by the local police. These factors make them extremely vulnerable, facing worse challenges than Italian Sinti settled in the municipal camps. Compared to the Roma, the Sinti community has improved its living conditions, especially through the efforts of the local administration.

Objectives and thematic focus of the LERI project

Although two Sinti and one Roma attend meetings of the LAP, both communities face a lack of representation or spokespersons formally recognised by the institutions working on these issues. Professionals working on this within the local administration and NGOs including the representative of the *Associazione Sinti Italiani di Bologna* agree on the need for a more formal and stable involvement of community spokespersons as cultural

¹⁰ Cooperativa *La Piccola Carovana*, Interview.

¹¹ Osservatorio provinciale delle Immigrazioni (2009), *La popolazione Sinta e Rom nei campi sosta in provincial di Bologna al 30 novembre 2009*,

available at:

www.cittametropolitana.bo.it/sanitasociale/Engine/RServeFile.php/f/Documenti/ReportCampiSosta2009.pdf

mediators between public institutions and the community itself.¹²

The local administration has worked in this direction with the Sinti community since 2009 through the Roma-Net and Roma MATRIX projects. These projects implemented a training course for peer operators, a mentoring course on communication strategies, and professional internships for young Sinti mediators. Such activities have paved the way for greater direct participation of Sinti people in many activities and policies and they are considered a success. However, such efforts have not resulted in long-lasting effects. When projects end, Sinti people who were involved and trained, often return to their previous conditions, perceiving their sporadic involvement as not having a 'real' impact on their living conditions and status.¹³ Representation is scarce even within the LSG in which neither Romanian Roma nor Sinti from camps other than Savena participate.

LERI has the potential to serve as a means to tackle this situation. Within its framework, the meaningful participation of Roma and Sinti communities could be improved by fostering their participation in the LSG and in the implementation of the LAP. LERI could focus on one of the four thematic areas identified by the LAP, namely employment, which is seen as the most urgent issue within the communities.

Activities implemented and actors involved in the needs assessment phase

A needs assessment was organised in the context of and building upon the participatory work developed by the Roma-Net project for the production of the LAP. LERI included the members of the Sinti communities who took part in the focus groups within the Roma-Net project together with the trained peer operators and cultural mediators in order to organise two focus groups. One group was aimed at spreading information among the communities on the work and objective of

the LAP and fostering direct participation in the LSG, while the other focused on employment.

The first focus group included the following stakeholders: civil servants of Bologna Municipality (in particular, from the Institute for Social and Community Inclusion Don Paolo Serra Zanetti (*Istituzione per l'inclusione sociale e comunitaria*) and the Department for Vulnerable Adults and Social Inclusion (*Ufficio Adulti Vulnerabili e Inclusione Sociale*)), mediators from Consorzio Indaco (like *La Piccola Carovana*), members of the *Associazione Sinti Italiani di Bologna*, Sinti and Roma who already participate in the LSG, and finally, trained Sinti and Roma peer operators and mediators. The second focus group involved: members of the communities that took part in the focus groups in the framework of the Roma-Net project, young Sinti and Roma men and women who have completed formal training or education and are currently unemployed as well as mediators from Cooperatives and NGOs.

Participation of women from Roma or Sinti communities living in municipal camps other than Savena was especially fostered.

Expected outcomes of the participatory action research

Activities within LERI are expected to strengthen the existing LSG by fostering Sinti and Roma participation in the group, making the communities more acquainted with its functions and building their confidence and interest to take part in the group, helping to make the LSG a working mechanism through regular meetings and specific objectives that tackle one of the areas envisioned by the LAP (i.e. employment) and designing an intervention aimed at strengthening young people's access to formal employment.

¹² Istituzione per l'inclusione sociale e comunitaria Don Paolo Serra Zanetti (2013), *Roma MATRIX Newsletter*, Settembre 2013, Roma MATRIX, available at:

www.comune.bologna.it/media/files/d0.9_roma_matrix_newsletter_1_ita_10112013_1.pdf

¹³ Associazione Sinti Italiani di Bologna, Interview.

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