



# **Local Engagement for Roma Inclusion**

## **(LERI) Project**

# **Community Summary**

**Mantua, 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

## Mantua, 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.<sup>1</sup> 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*.<sup>2</sup>

### Locality background information

Mantua is one of 12 provinces in the Lombardy Region (North Italy). It is one of the wealthiest cities in Italy and a well-known tourist attraction. Its economy is primarily focused on processing and shipping of agricultural products.

With a population of 48,000, the size of the city makes the 300 Sinti living in the area one of the highest concentrations in Italian municipalities (0.6%). The Sinti population is highly homogenous and stable.

The Sinti have lived in the city since the end of World War II. Most were traditionally nomadic but settled down in the early seventies. During the eighties, there was an inflow of Sinti from Veneto and subsequently from former Yugoslavia and Romania, however, today they represent a small fraction of the overall Sinti population (around 5%).

Although Sinti are perceived to live only in the municipal camp located on Via Learco Guerra, in reality they represent only two-thirds of the actual Sinti population. Some families live in houses and a few Sinti families live on their own private (agricultural) lands. However, these lands, though legitimately acquired, cannot be legally used as a place of residence. By placing mobile houses and even permanent structures on the land, the inhabitants find themselves at risk of eviction. Overall, the level of spatial segregation in Mantua is high, and so is the political tension around these issues. However, at the neighbourhood level, problems of cohabitation do not exist.

As reiterated by the National Strategy for Roma inclusion, most Sinti are socially and economically deprived and do not have equal access to private or public services. The level of educational attainment is low as is the percentage of children who regularly attend school. This is in part caused by the lack of parental engagement and in part a result of the spatial segregation, which in turn leads to social segregation and impacts the educational performance.

Dialogue between the local administrations (both the municipality and the province) and the Sinti community, represented by members of large Sinti

<sup>1</sup> 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](http://www.errc.org/article/il-paese-dei-campi/3881) (All hyperlinks were accessed on 23 February 2016); see also Associazione 21 luglio (2014), *Rapporto annuale 2014*, available at: [www.21luglio.org/wp-](http://www.21luglio.org/wp-)

[content/uploads/2015/04/Rapporto-annuale-Associazione-21-luglio.pdf](http://content/uploads/2015/04/Rapporto-annuale-Associazione-21-luglio.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> 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](http://www.ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_italy_strategy_it.pdf)

families and Sucar Drom in the past years, has resulted in the adoption of the first Italian local plan for Sinti inclusion (“MEN SINTI Strategy”) in 2012. Sucar Drom played an important role in the development of the local plan, as they had already actively contributed to the design of the National Roma Integration Strategy. Other organisations (i.e. Caritas, Solco, and Articolo 3) are also active on the ground and contribute to a more comprehensive approach to Roma inclusion.

### **Objectives and thematic focus of the LERI project**

During the analysis carried out in the first phase of LERI and based on information received through interviews with primary stakeholders (public administrators, civil servants, local experts and Sinti activists), the thematic areas of education, limited access to formal employment, housing segregation, the risk of eviction and expropriation (for those living on agricultural lands) and the lack of cultural recognition and anti-discrimination policies were identified as priority issues. Local stakeholders agreed to tackle two of these issues during the LERI pilot phase (May - November 2014).

The municipality has assessed the possibility of providing access to public housing to interested Sinti families. The Province of Mantua and the municipality were invited to look into the issue of scrap metal trade and explored possible solutions to regulate the activities of Sinti trading in scrap metal. Although this business is the main source of income for local Sinti families, it has been run informally for decades and constant changes in the legal framework hinders its sustainability and legality.



*Local councillor, representatives of Sucar Drom and Sinti community discussing in the municipal run camp.*

### **Activities implemented and actors involved in the needs assessment phase**

The activities oriented towards social housing and employment were accompanied by a participatory action research (PAR) needs assessment phase based on a three-wave approach in order to identify and understand the problems facing the Sinti community.

In the first wave, Delphi questionnaires designed on the basis of a SWOT analysis were distributed to 52 local stakeholders. The focus was on five identified dimensions: housing, education, labour, health and culture. The aim of this questionnaire was primarily to collect various opinions of relevant non-Sinti local actors as well as the level of agreement on certain issues among Sinti community members.

The second wave consisted of five focus groups with members of the Sinti community discussing the five identified dimensions (housing, education, labour, health and culture). Sucar Drom played a key role in the organisation, ensuring Sinti participation.

Two focus groups were organised with Sinti men (one on housing and labour and one on education, health and culture) and two other focus groups were held with Sinti women. A fifth focus group took place with young Sinti on housing conditions and education.

The participation of Sinti as key local actors enabled LERI to collect their opinions on the identified five dimensions of the integration process directly.

The third wave consisted of a consensus-building workshop focused on three dimensions (housing, labour and education). The consensus-building workshop sought to meet all stakeholders' interests and points of view, simultaneously.

During the workshop a group of professionals with expertise in group facilitation used various methods to raise awareness on the identified three dimensions (housing, labour and education).

The implementation phase will focus on activities that will emerge from the PAR needs assessment and in particular from the consensus-building workshop.

### **Expected outcomes of the participatory action research**

LERI is expected to facilitate increased Sinti participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of local level inclusion actions. It will also provide a platform and methodology through which the Sinti community, civil society and relevant local authorities can better cooperate on issues related to Roma and Sinti inclusion.

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