

# Local engagement for Roma inclusion

## Locality study Bologna (Italy), 2016

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## 1. Executive summary

The case study describes and assesses the implementation of the LERI research in Bologna, northern Italy. It describes the social and political context within which the research was carried out, and the positioning of Roma and Sinti communities in it. The research involved especially one office of the municipality, the NGO contracted to work in the three municipal Sinti settlements, and members of the local Roma-Sinti communities. Responding to the findings of an in-depth needs assessment conducted through a light PAR methodology (focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders), which identified the lack of Roma and Sinti spokespeople as one of the main factors behind the communities' marginalisation, the LERI intervention focused on strengthening their fundamental rights of the Sinti community to full social and political participation. The research contributed to the creation of an internship programme through which ten prospective Roma and Sinti mediators and spokespeople were trained in one policy area of their choice among housing, education and culture/communication.

**Keywords/Tags:** Right to participation, internship, spokesperson, cultural mediation, activism.

## 2. Description of the local context

### Roma and Sinti groups and communities

Bologna is the capital city of Emilia Romagna, a region in northern Italy. The seventh most populated city in Italy, Bologna has about 380,000 inhabitants living among the city's nine boroughs (Borgo Panigale, Navile, Porto, Reno, San Donato, Santo Stefano, San Vitale, Saragozza and Savena).

Due to its rich history and geographical position, Bologna boasts leadership in several different fields. For example, Bologna has an extensive programme of cultural activities and is also home to the oldest university in Europe, which makes it a favourite destination for thousands of students from all over Italy, as well as from other countries. Moreover, with a renowned history of activism and a strong progressive tradition, Bologna is widely perceived as one of the most inclusive and diverse cities in Italy. It is a place where civil society organisations, associations and cooperatives (dedicated to a variety of social, political and cultural concerns) have traditionally found a supportive environment for their activities: this, for example, has made Bologna a pioneering example of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) activism in Italy and one of the participants in the European Coalition of Cities Against Racism (ECCAR). Bologna is also a leading Italian city in economic terms, as well as an important transport hub for the roads and railways of northern Italy, and is home to the headquarters of several major industrial organisations.

Roma and Sinti people have been living in Bologna since the Middle Ages. They comprise very heterogeneous groups, with needs and cultural specificities that

vary according to their nationality. The Sinti population in Bologna is estimated to total roughly 250 people, all of whom are Italian citizens. The majority of Sinti live in three camps managed by the municipality (*aree sosta*). Originally designed as temporary solutions, such camps have become permanent over the years. They are fairly small settlements, one (in Borgo Panigale neighbourhood) hosting 110 people, and the other two (in Savena and Navile) accommodating 52 and 69 inhabitants, respectively.<sup>1</sup> Each camp is administered by the local council of the neighbourhood where it is located. A consortium of social cooperatives, *Consorzio Indaco*, managed most activities in the camps until January 2016, with social operators working in the field of education, functioning as mediators between the Sinti people and the local administration, and taking part in all projects concerning the Sinti community. From February 2016, neighbourhood councils severely cut the social/educational services in the camps, and only the activities in the camps of Navile and, partly, Savena were subcontracted to *Consorzio Indaco*. The decision was arguably related to the passage of the new regional law, approved in July 2015 to replace the regional law 47/1988 stating the norms for “nomad minorities” in Emilia-Romagna,<sup>2</sup> and the set of rules and regulations implementing it, according to which the neighbourhood councils had operated until then. The law no. 11/2015, *Norme per l’inclusione sociale di Rom e Sinti*, was set in place to eventually close all municipal camps of Emilia-Romagna, and find alternative housing solutions for the Sinti families currently inhabiting them (See next section for details on the law).

A few Sinti families have purchased small private areas of land and use these to accommodate mobile homes and semi-permanent structures. Most Sinti consider this to be the optimal situation to their housing needs, but there are conflicts with Italian laws regarding land use because these Sinti families have generally purchased agricultural land, which one is not permitted to build on, since this tends to be cheaper. The Italian authorities regard such homes as a violation of laws regarding land use. Residences on land that does not have approval for housing use therefore expose their inhabitants to risks of evacuation, regardless of whether the land was acquired legitimately.

Rom Abruzzesi are another Italian group. They identify themselves as Roma and, like the Sinti, they have lived in Italy for centuries. Although, as the name of the group indicates, they are mostly settled in the region of Abruzzo, they are scattered in other regions too; around 60 of them live in an authorised camp in Casalecchio di Reno, a town neighbouring Bologna.<sup>3</sup>

As for the non-Italian-national Roma, they are divided into two main groups: those who fled the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and those who have recently arrived from Romania. The former have had access to social housing and other welfare services since their arrival from the former Yugoslavia — for example, some families have benefitted from housing transition projects, while others set

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<sup>1</sup> Consorzio Indaco (2014), Report on Bologna camps. January-June 2014 (*Relazione semestrale aree sosta Bologna. Gennaio-giugno 2014*).

<sup>2</sup> Italy, 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.

<sup>3</sup> Italy, Osservatorio provinciale delle immigrazioni (Bologna Città Metropolitana), *La popolazione Sinta e Rom nei campi sosta in provincia di Bologna al 30 novembre 2009*. Available at: [www.cittametropolitana.bo.it/sanitasociale/Engine/RAServeFile.php/f/Documenti/ReportCampiSosta2009.pdf](http://www.cittametropolitana.bo.it/sanitasociale/Engine/RAServeFile.php/f/Documenti/ReportCampiSosta2009.pdf)

up the *Aven Amentza* association, an informal association promoting small cultural events (mostly concerts and dance shows).<sup>4</sup> Until 2014, the latter twenty seven families (from Romania) were assisted by the Azienda pubblica di Servizi alla Persona Città di Bologna (ASP), a non-profit public institution, 97% owned by the municipality, which provides welfare and integrated social services for adults in need and the elderly. From 2015, ASP has acted as the reference point of these Roma families, who can benefit from access to advice in case of special needs; however, no specific policy (like the educational support dedicated to them in the past) has been implemented, as this group of Roma is now considered autonomous and fully integrated.

The Roma people, who have recently arrived from Romania, still face extremely arduous conditions. Although no specific data exist for these Romanian Roma, given their high mobility and marginality, social operators have estimated this group to comprise about 100-150 people.<sup>5</sup> They usually live in unauthorised settlements on the outskirts of the city (where they erect shelters on the riverbanks and other hidden locations), in emergency/transition housing, or in occupied buildings. There were about twenty such unauthorised settlements at the time of the LERI research, none of which offered any type of facilities or services to inhabitants. Each settlement was inhabited by a few Roma families. Due to their illegality, these settlements are constantly being evicted by the municipal police and several evictions took place between May 2015 and April 2016.<sup>6</sup> At the end of 2015, an agreement was reached (between the Social Services Department and the Security Department of the municipality) that, from then on, no eviction would take place without previous contact with *La Piccola Carovana*, the social cooperative contracted by the Municipality in December 2014 to take care of the basic needs of Roma living in unauthorised settlements.

Existing policies, however, mostly cover Italian nationals, and the cooperation with the Security Department was mainly understood to provide a means through which the Social Services Department could identify particularly problematic cases.<sup>7</sup> The local authority has provided basic facilities like public toilets with showers and lavatories, and five containers (managed by *La Piccola Carovana*) to house the sick and the elderly during winter. However, due to the nationality of these people, their extreme marginality and low interest in permanently settling in the city (or, for that matter, in Italy), this group of non-Italian Roma was not really targeted by any policies beyond those providing basic care.

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<sup>4</sup> Community member/NGO representative, interview, 2 September 2015, male.

<sup>5</sup> NGO representative, interview, 11 March 2015, female.

<sup>6</sup> 15 May 2015 ([www.comune.bologna.it/news/lungoreno-sgomberato-insediamento-abusivo-sotto-il-ponte-dellasse-attrezzato-bologna-vignola](http://www.comune.bologna.it/news/lungoreno-sgomberato-insediamento-abusivo-sotto-il-ponte-dellasse-attrezzato-bologna-vignola)); 17 June 2015 ([www.zic.it/lungoreno-ancora-uno-sgombero/](http://www.zic.it/lungoreno-ancora-uno-sgombero/)); 1 July 2015 ([www.comune.bologna.it/news/del-fonditore-sgomberate-sei-baracche-abusive-e-bonificata-larea-verde](http://www.comune.bologna.it/news/del-fonditore-sgomberate-sei-baracche-abusive-e-bonificata-larea-verde)); 6 July 2015 (<http://www.comune.bologna.it/news/sgomberato-insediamento-abusivo-sul-lungoreno>); 27 July 2015 ([www.comune.bologna.it/news/sgomberati-tre-insediamenti-abusivi-sul-lungoreno](http://www.comune.bologna.it/news/sgomberati-tre-insediamenti-abusivi-sul-lungoreno)); 14 August 2015 ([www.comune.bologna.it/news/lungoreno-nuovo-sgombero-di-una-tendopoli](http://www.comune.bologna.it/news/lungoreno-nuovo-sgombero-di-una-tendopoli)); 5 March 2016 ([www.zic.it/tre-sgomberi-nel-giro-di-pochi-giorni/](http://www.zic.it/tre-sgomberi-nel-giro-di-pochi-giorni/)); 24 March 2016 ([www.comune.bologna.it/news/riqualificazione-di-spazi-pubblici-occupati-abusivamente](http://www.comune.bologna.it/news/riqualificazione-di-spazi-pubblici-occupati-abusivamente)); 13 April 2016 ([www.comune.bologna.it/news/sgomberato-insediamento-abusivo-zona-lazzaretto](http://www.comune.bologna.it/news/sgomberato-insediamento-abusivo-zona-lazzaretto)); 15 April 2016 ([www.comune.bologna.it/news/sgomberata-casa-colonica-comunale-quarto-di-sopra](http://www.comune.bologna.it/news/sgomberata-casa-colonica-comunale-quarto-di-sopra)).

<sup>7</sup> Local authority representative, interview, 22 December 2015, female.

Italian and non-Italian Sinti and Roma perceive themselves as two very different groups. The former stress that their Italian nationality should grant them better treatment by local authorities and the general public, and end all forms of discrimination. Moreover, the Sinti usually equate 'Roma' with the Romanian Roma living in the unauthorised settlements on the outskirts of the city in order to picture themselves as better integrated in the social fabric, more respectful of the law, etc.

This demarcation was particularly evident during a demonstration organised by the Sinti on 16 May 2015 to advocate equal rights. The accent on the Sinti's Italian nationality was indeed the *fil rouge* of the demonstration. For example, several Italian flags were displayed, many people wore yellow bibs with the writing *Sinti italiani*, the march started to the tune of the Italian anthem, and all songs animating the demonstration belonged to the national pop repertoire. Slogans were also shouted in all north Italian dialects, as proof of the Sinti's sense of belonging to specific cities and localities.<sup>8</sup> When asked about their political affiliation, most people denied any specific political belonging, stressing instead their desire to enjoy full citizenship rights as members of the national community. Many also carried posters that quoted constitutional articles sanctioning Italy's commitment to equality and non-discrimination. Many Sinti participants in the march stressed the differences between Sinti and Roma, demonstrating a lack of knowledge about the Roma, and prejudices similar to those common within the vast majority of Italian society.<sup>9</sup> When questioned on this point, Sinti usually spoke of Roma (invariably equated with Romanian/East European Roma) as being a different group of people, who are less prone to integration and generally less respectful of civil life compared to the Sinti.

The division of communities along national lines, and the municipality's direct involvement in the management of the camps where most Sinti live, has traditionally led the local authority to consider the Sinti as the main target of inclusion policies and projects. It was within one such project (the EU co-funded 'Roma-Net', 2009-2013)<sup>10</sup> that the local administration introduced a process aimed at fostering the participation of the different groups residing on its territory, to support the National Strategy for the inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Camminanti communities.<sup>11</sup> In the framework of 'Roma-Net', a Local Action Plan (LAP) was designed to set out priorities and actions to tackle Roma exclusion and motivate more active Roma involvement. 'Roma-Net' also established a Local Support Group (LSG), bringing together a range of stakeholders including representatives and professionals working in public institutions, social workers, and members of local NGOs and cooperatives. The LSG met every three to four months for the duration of the project, but the meetings ceased after the project's end. The process of drafting the LAP involved three phases in order to consult with different groups of stakeholders (i.e. those relevant for social

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<sup>8</sup> Among the most common slogans were: "Viva i Sinti italiani!", "Sinti italiani per i diritti!", "Sinti e italiani popolo unico dal 1400!", "Italiani nell'animo!"

<sup>9</sup> Pew Research Centre (2015), <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/06/02/faith-in-european-project-reviving/>

<sup>10</sup> For details on the project, see <http://urbact.eu/roma-net>

<sup>11</sup> Italy, Ufficio Nazionale Anti-discriminazioni Razziali (2012), National strategy for the inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Camminanti communities - European Commission communication no. 173/2011. Available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma\\_italy\\_strategy\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_italy_strategy_en.pdf)

policies in general, as well as those dedicated specifically to Roma and/or Sinti). These groups of stakeholders consulted included:

- stakeholders that held a structured relationship with the local administration in the co-design and co-management of social interventions for Roma and Sinti were involved in the LSG;
- decision-makers and higher-level professional figures in the public institutions, who were invited to participate using the Delphi technique, in order to contribute to the evaluation of the strategies and their harmonisation with existing policies; and
- Roma and Sinti that were invited to participate in focus groups, aimed specifically at the evaluation of the existing strategies relating to them.

The project finally developed the LAP, as required by the National Strategy, and this was translated and readapted in the so called *Piano di Azione Locale* as approved by the city Council.<sup>12</sup> It is to this Plan that the local authority has decided to stick when dealing with the Roma and Sinti communities; the document has thus become a sort of guide-book for the policies and social integration actions to be undertaken by the local stakeholders. The LSG, in turn, should function as the working group which designs and looks after the implementation of such policies.

## Main issues identified via PAR

The LERI research began with a preparatory phase involving the production of a feasibility analysis and stakeholder analysis. This was followed by a participatory needs assessment phase, wherein the initial needs of the community identified in the initial phases of the research were then validated and adjusted after consultation and engagement of all relevant local stakeholders. The needs assessment carried out within the LERI research has shown that, although material conditions differentiate Italian Sinti from non-Italian Roma, there are also similarities in the problems facing these communities. These problems result from 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 incomes, general vulnerability and widespread anti-Roma feelings. People from both the Sinti and Roma communities initially found it hard to envision cross-cutting activities addressing joint interests and needs, and pushed for community-specific actions.<sup>13</sup> This tendency was also reflected in the position of some of the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) dealing with each community. For example, the social cooperative working in the unauthorised Roma settlements appeared to lack the kind of close cooperation with the local authority which the consortium working in the municipal Sinti camps had — an issue which hindered the full inclusion of the former in the LERI research.

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<sup>12</sup> Italy, Comune di Bologna (2013), Local Action Plan for the social inclusion of Roma and Sinti people (*Piano di Azione Locale per l'inclusione sociale delle persone Rom e Sinte*). Available at: [http://www.comune.bologna.it/media/files/pal\\_rom\\_e\\_sintidef.pdf](http://www.comune.bologna.it/media/files/pal_rom_e_sintidef.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Interviews with the representatives of *Associazione Sinti Italiani di Bologna* (Bologna, 14 March 2015) and *Aven Amentza* (Bologna, 2 September 2015); comments voiced by the Sinti people participating in the focus groups.

The focus groups carried on during the participatory needs assessment phase, however, led the participants to identify one major issue, common to all the different groups—namely the lack of spokespersons and mediators recognised by all stakeholders dealing with the social inclusion of Roma communities. Training of a few individuals, who could acquire theoretical and practical expertise on relevant policy areas (such as housing, education, and communication/culture), was perceived as an essential step towards overcoming the communities' exclusion from the designing of effective social inclusion policies. In the absence of a strong association that can mediate between the local authority and the communities (as is the case in Mantua), establishing these links was deemed fundamental for the successful implementation of the Municipality's Local Action Plan (LAP) in the near future. Section 4 details how this identified need was addressed through the LERI local intervention.

### **The political dimension**

After a long reorganisation process carried out within the municipality, the section of the local authority entrusted with the implementation of the LERI research was the Institute for social and community inclusion (*Istituzione per l'Inclusione Sociale e Comunitaria*) 'Don Paolo Serra Zanetti'. The office was established in 2007 as an autonomous department within the municipality to work towards the macro objective of promoting social inclusion. The Institute is responsible for the implementation of research, information, communication and awareness-raising activities, such as data analysis, seminars and conferences, cooperation with universities and other research institutions, and awareness campaigns. The Institute is also in charge of governing the work with Roma and Sinti communities, reporting to the Alderman for Education, Social Services and Social Inclusion.

At the regional level, the drafting and approval of a new law concerning the Roma and Sinti communities represented the main development during the period covered by LERI. This was a salient moment, since the new law engendered significant changes in the approach of the local authorities towards the Roma and Sinti communities. However slow, this process is bound to impact on the communities in more than one way, and will require that Roma and Sinti take on a proactive role that has rarely been expected from them in the past decades. The LERI research served, at this juncture, as an important tool to endorse the empowerment of individuals from the communities.

In June 2014, the Emilia-Romagna regional council drafted a bill to replace the above-mentioned regional law 47/1988, which was considered outdated. However, the draft bill did not find favour with the right-wing nationalist party Lega Nord. Instead of the micro-areas envisioned by the bill as housing solutions to replace the municipal camps, the latter party proposed to set up a "bulldozer fund" at the disposal of the region's mayors to dismantle the camps, and to create transit areas, for those Roma and Sinti people still leading a nomadic life, in which they would be allowed to stop for no more than two weeks. The overarching objective of the law envisioned by Lega Nord was to put an end to

the excess welfarism, widespread delinquency, and the alleged discrimination of the citizens of Emilia-Romagna.<sup>14</sup>

Despite Lega Nord's criticism, on 14 July 2015, the regional legislative assembly approved the passage of law no. 11/2015, *Norme per l'inclusione sociale di Rom e Sinti*, as drafted by the PD. The vice president of Regione Emilia-Romagna and welfare and housing policies councillor described the passing of this law as a necessary step. She stated that the current approach, which entailed continuous disbursement of public funds, could no longer go on; since 1988, the regional administration had spent 10 million EUR on the management of Roma and Sinti camps, and it was therefore necessary to put an end to such uncontrolled and unmonitored spending. Commenting on this, the Democratic Party member of the legislative assembly agreed that the new law would provide a way to foster social order and respect for the norms. Closing the camps was widely understood to be a measure to:

- ensure Roma and Sinti people took responsibility for their lives and financial needs;
- relieve local authorities of the burden of care; and
- promote a more 'just' approach towards the entire population, beyond special policies, which were now perceived as privileges.<sup>15</sup>

The law allocated €700,000 to Emilia-Romagna's city councils for the year 2015 to foster the transition from camps to micro-areas.<sup>16</sup>

Implementation of the regional law was slow, and the second half of 2015 was spent drafting the implementing regulation that sets out the parameters for the micro-areas. The regulation was finally approved on 25 January 2016, and concentrated on the necessary criteria for the construction of micro-areas, as well as developing alternative solutions to multi-familial camps for those families who do not wish to enter the ranking for social housing flats or wish to opt for the 'housing first' solution (where families would move to flats in the private housing market, which would be rented by a social cooperative, acting as the lease-holder, until the family is able to afford the rent and become autonomous). One major risk deriving from the project is that replacing medium-size multi-

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<sup>14</sup> 'Campi Rom, la Lega apre il fronte della riforma in Regione', *Estense.com*, 26 May 2015. Available at:

[www.estense.com/?p=462835](http://www.estense.com/?p=462835)

Badeschi, S. (2015), 'Un "fondo ruspe" per radere al suolo i campi rom', *Il Giornale*, 26 May 2015. Available at:

[www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/fondo-ruspe-radere-suolo-campi-rom-1133225.html](http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/fondo-ruspe-radere-suolo-campi-rom-1133225.html)

Sarto, V. (2015), 'Strappo in Regione tra Pd e Lega sulla legge per superare i campi rom', *Emilia Romagna 24News*, 15 June 2015. Available at: [www.emiliaromagna24news.it/strappo-in-regione-tra-pd-e-lega-sulla-legge-per-superare-i-campi-rom-23228/](http://www.emiliaromagna24news.it/strappo-in-regione-tra-pd-e-lega-sulla-legge-per-superare-i-campi-rom-23228/)

<sup>15</sup> Dall'Oca, A. (2015), 'Campi Rom e Sinti, in Emilia Romagna Pd e M5S votano per la chiusura. Contrari Lega Nord e Forza Italia', *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 14 July 2015. Available at:

[www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2015/07/14/campi-rom-e-sinti-emilia-romagna-pd-e-m5s-votano-per-la-chiusura-contrari-lega-e-forza-italia/1874942/](http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2015/07/14/campi-rom-e-sinti-emilia-romagna-pd-e-m5s-votano-per-la-chiusura-contrari-lega-e-forza-italia/1874942/)

<sup>16</sup> Italy, Regione Emilia-Romagna (2015), Norms for the social inclusion of Roma and Sinti people (*Norme per l'inclusione sociale di Rom e Sinti, Legge regionale 16 luglio 2015, n. 11*). The new law operates a simplification of the previous one, and is inspired by six principles: respect of Roma minorities' culture and freedom of choice; access to citizenship rights; support to families and groups willing to change their life conditions; adoption of 'non-ethnicised' approaches; medium- and long-term perspectives; support to the communities' leadership, representation and dialogue with local institutions. Available at: <http://sociale.regione.emilia-romagna.it/documentazione/norme/regionale/leggi/lr-11-2015>

familial camps with smaller micro-areas does not by itself introduce any significant change in the housing model envisioned for the Roma and Sinti.<sup>17</sup>

Another potential issue with the implementing regulation for the micro-areas concerns section 4 of the law, 'Norms on the relationship with the beneficiaries'. The law foresaw a number of rules and regulations, to which the Sinti families willing to move to micro-areas would be expected to conform. The rules have a very broad coverage and cover: urban-planning and construction aspects, regarding the formal characteristics of micro-areas, in addition to "aspects related to social inclusion and respect of duties and responsibilities towards society and institutions", which include:

- "commitment to the correct management of micro-areas (timely payment of bills, good relationships with neighbours, etc.);
- obligation to apprise the Municipality about any case of hospitality and enlargement of the family due to marriage or birth of children, and to request an authorization previous to any modification of the family unit;
- obligation to allow periodical controls by municipal officers to check on the correct management of micro-areas;
- fulfilment of school obligations of children below 18, and of every other obligation defined in agreement with Social Services".<sup>18</sup>

As is evident, the 'autonomy' aspects of the regional law are particularly concerned with public finance and have the ultimate goal of closing the municipal camps. This is based on an expectation that Sinti families become financially autonomous, and take care of all costs related to the everyday management of the micro-areas, thereby relieving the municipality from those expenses. At the same time, however, they are also required to conform to rules and regulations set by the local authority to ensure a supposedly 'correct' relationship between the Sinti and the rest of society — a set of obligations to which no other Italian citizen signing a lease would ever be asked to adhere.

On 22 February 2016 the regional administration published its call for the disbursement of funds to Emilia-Romagna's municipalities wishing to close their multi-familial camps. The call allocated 1 million EUR for the realisation of new housing projects as an alternative to the camps.<sup>19</sup> The deadline for the submission of project proposals was initially set for 9 May 2016, but it was then extended. This decision was arguably related to the municipal elections in Bologna on 5 June, and might have reflected political concerns: for instance, it would have been possible for the city's administration not only to have gained the council's approval, but even to submit a project proposal dealing with the 'Roma issue' one month before the elections, which would risk incurring criticism from the media, the opposition parties and, ultimately, the electorate. The new

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<sup>17</sup> For an analysis and critique of the law, see Associazione 21 luglio (2015), Analysis and comments on Emilia-Romagna Regional Law no.11 of 16 July 2015, 'Norms for the social inclusion of Roma and Sinti people' (*Analisi e commenti relativi alla Legge Regione Emilia-Romagna n.11 del 16 luglio 2015 'Norme per l'inclusione sociale di Rom e Sinti'*). Available at: <http://www.21luglio.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Analisi-e-Commenti-relativi-alla-Legge-Regione-Emilia-2.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Italy, Regione Emilia-Romagna (2016), Regulation on the requisites of micro-areas, implementing Art. no. 3 of the Regional Law no. 11/2015 (*Direttiva sui requisiti delle microaree familiari in attuazione dell'Art. 3 L.R. 11/2015*), pp. 18-19.

<sup>19</sup> Italy, Regione Emilia-Romagna (2016), Decision of the Regional Council of 22 February 2016, no. 242 (*Deliberazione della Giunta regionale 22 febbraio 2016, n. 242*). Available at: <http://www.regione.emilia-romagna.it/notizie/2016/febbraio/rom-e-sinti-un-milione-per-soluzioni-abitative-alternative-ai-grandi-campi>

deadline for the municipalities of Emilia-Romagna to submit project proposals to the regional administration has been set for 30 July 2016.<sup>20</sup>

On 29 March 2016, the regional Strategy for the inclusion of Roma and Sinti was approved. The document reflected the European and national recommendations on the topic, and set the wider context within which the regional law no. 11/2015 would have to be implemented.<sup>21</sup>

Due to the slow progress with implementation, the regional law has not had any direct impact on the LERI research. The significance of the new law and the regional Strategy for the LERI research lay elsewhere, namely in the scenario these documents envision: aiming towards increasing autonomy of the Roma-Sinti communities. Such a scenario requires that the Roma and Sinti communities have representatives and mediators capable of furthering their needs and rights before the local authority, becoming the protagonists of their own inclusion. The shift from municipal camps to micro-areas or other housing solutions, with the resulting financial and psychological autonomy it will involve, will require that the communities develop the expertise and knowledge that has so far been provided by social workers or the NGOs working in the camps. From this point of view, the added value of LERI's participatory approach was grounded in the fact that the LERI local intervention focused precisely on this issue.

### 3. PAR methodology employed

The LERI research conceived the use of participatory action research (PAR) as its methodology. The aim was to involve all stakeholders in the different phases of the research, from the needs assessment to the definition of a small-scale intervention, its implementation and its monitoring. Three PAR cycles were planned. The first one was meant to verify the findings of the preparatory phase, and deciding about a possible local intervention; the second PAR cycle was dedicated to detailing the content, trainers and outcomes of a motivational training, organised as part of the local intervention; the third PAR cycle was devoted to monitoring the local intervention. All three cycles utilised non-structured interviews and focus groups. A light PAR approach was chosen, in light of stakeholders' experience, capacity and familiarity with PAR techniques, and because of time and budgetary constraints.

#### The 1<sup>st</sup> PAR Cycle

The first PAR cycle was meant to produce an in-depth participatory needs assessment. The cycle consisted of, on the one hand, interviews with key stakeholders and, on the other, of three focus groups with members of the Roma-Sinti communities. Interviews were chosen over other PAR techniques in order to establish close contact with the key stakeholders, let them express their views freely without being influenced by others, and dedicate all the time deemed necessary to collect their opinions. Time-wise, bilateral interviews are

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<sup>20</sup> Italy, Regione Emilia-Romagna (2016), Deliberation of the Regional Council of 2 May 2016, no. 641 (*Deliberazione della Giunta regionale 2 maggio 2016, n. 641*).

<sup>21</sup> Italy, Regione Emilia-Romagna (2016), Regional Strategy for the inclusion of Roma and Sinti (*Strategia regionale per l'inclusione di Rom e Sinti*).

considered more efficient when public offices are concerned, as they do not require the same amount of organization and the inevitable delays involved in scheduling wider meetings. Key stakeholders were selected on the basis of the stakeholder report and the preliminary needs assessment, which demonstrated (in the case of local authority representatives) the relevance of their position within the LA structure working on/with the Roma-Sinti communities; and (in the case of members of the communities) their previous participation in projects designed by the municipality, their position within their community, or their initiative (for instance, as founding members of local association). All interviews were held at the interviewees' respective work places or residences (in the case of the representatives of the two Roma and Sinti NGOs), and lasted for about two hours.

Carried out between March and September 2015, the interviews involved, firstly, the two local authority offices in charge of implementing actions and projects concerning the Roma-Sinti communities. The Office for Vulnerable Adults and Social Inclusion is part of the municipality's social services area (*Area Benessere di Comunità*) and is responsible – among other things – for the design and implementation of actions in social services, health and education of the Roma and Sinti communities. Such actions are meant to: ameliorate the socio-sanitary integration of the communities; foster their social inclusion; promote health and prevent drug/alcohol addiction and abuse;<sup>22</sup> provide training and work opportunities (with the objective of supporting at least one formally employed person per family); and promote housing autonomy (*autonomia abitativa*). The office also coordinates the interinstitutional table that, in cooperation with other sectors of the municipality, works on the axes planned for by the LAP. The other local authority office was the Institute 'Don Paolo Serra Zanetti' (*the Don Paolo Serra Zanetti social and community institute*), the branch in charge of the governance of all social inclusion projects concerning the Roma-Sinti communities, and which was entrusted of the implementation of the LERI research.

Secondly, interviews were conducted with the social cooperatives contracted by the Municipality to work, respectively, in the unauthorised settlements of Romanian Roma (*La Piccola Carovana*) and in the municipal Sinti camps where the Sinti live (*Open Group*). From December 2014, *La Piccola Carovana* has been responsible for the project *Città invisibili* (invisible cities). Through its operators, the social cooperative undertakes the following tasks:

- maps such settlements (which are naturally unstable, due to frequent police evictions and their inhabitants' high mobility);
- provides the people with basic necessities such as food and blankets;
- provides for the safety of vulnerable subjects, such as mothers and children, by transferring them to ad hoc structures (e.g. transition-housing flats and safe houses);
- monitors health conditions in the settlements, guiding people through the network of health and social services set up by the municipality; and

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<sup>22</sup> The EU co-funded project SRAP 'Addiction prevention within Roma and Sinti communities', carried out between July 2010 and June 2013, tackled precisely this issue.

- manages the provision and maintenance of public toilets with showers, lavatories and facilities for clothes washing built by the municipality for the inhabitants of unauthorised settlements.

The settlements are usually fairly small, consisting of about 6–15 adult members, who are primarily engaged in begging activities, and are scattered on the outskirts of the city where people had erected shelters or tents. Social operators face communication difficulties due to language problems and the diffidence manifested by Roma, who fear the operators' association with the local police involved in enacting evictions.

The social cooperative *Open Group* has managed since 2007 the three municipal Sinti camps, as the winner of the call for tender that is issued by the municipality on a bi- or triennial basis. In cooperation with the neighbourhood councils at each camp's location, *Open Group* has been responsible for the administration of the settlements. *Open Group* has been in charge of: mediating between Sinti families and the municipal social services; training the social operators working with the Sinti and Roma communities (Rupe formazione, 2009; a course on housing transition, 2010); providing research and training on housing issues (EU co-funded 'Transition Project', 2011); training Sinti and Roma mediators/peer operators (within the SRAP project, in 2013; providing financing training, through provincial funds, for three cultural mediators to work with Open Group's operators, in 2014; and providing mentoring on communication and new media, within the EU co-funded project Roma Matrix, 2013–2015).

Thirdly, interviews were held with two members of the communities, among the founders of the two existing Roma-Sinti associations, *Associazione Sinti Italiani di Bologna*, and *Aven Amentza*. The interview with the representative of the former, a Sinti evangelical pastor, lives in the municipal camp located in Savena neighbourhood, of the three Sinti settlements the one with the best conditions. Renovated through the years, the camp comprises five micro areas, and hosts about 60 people in total, as well as housing an officially recognised evangelical church, where the interviewee is the pastor. At the time when the interview was conducted, he was considered to be a contact point by all public servants, due to his participation in the LSG, and in the design of the bill to repeal the regional law no. 47/1988 in July 2014. The interviewee described the projects that had, over time, concerned the Sinti community (i.e. EU co-funded projects, courses, etc.), lamenting the lack of direct involvement of Sinti people, the short-lived effects of most activities and the scarcity of employment opportunities afterwards for the people trained within the various projects. In his opinion, the community generally perceived the projects dedicated to the 'Roma and Sinti issue' as top-down initiatives that were not considered meaningful to Sinti people's lives, and were detached from their real needs.

The latter interviewee is a founding member of the Romanian Roma association *Aven Amentza* (All together!). It was founded in 2008 by Romanian Roma who initially lived in unauthorised settlements and occupied buildings, but have then been involved in housing transition projects, before finally moving into rented flats. *Aven Amentza* has taken part in a number of cultural events over the past few years, especially those centred on the promotion of Romani folklore and music, but was dormant at the time of the interview. Due to work commitments, none of its members were able to find the time to participate in the focus groups.

As a second step of the first PAR cycle, three focus groups were organised with Roma and Sinti people. Focus groups were deemed the most appropriate way of involving the Roma and Sinti communities for they had already been utilised in the past and were thus familiar to some of the participants. In general, focus groups—involving a small number of people—make for an informal environment, further facilitated in this instance by the fact that most participants knew or were related to each other, and felt able to bring children along. The small size of the groups allowed for everyone's opinion to be encouraged and heard, and for laying the groundwork for a relationship based on mutual trust. Moreover, focus group discussions are especially suited to research with communities unfamiliar with the written language, as is the case for the Roma-Sinti communities in this context. The LA's involvement in the focus groups consisted of helping with the organisation (i.e. providing the venue) and taking part in the meetings. Discussions, however, mostly involved people from the communities, with civil servants leaving as much space as possible for the Roma and Sinti participants to express their views. An outline was prepared by the field expert prior to the events, which aimed to guide the focus group discussions; the structure, however, was left fluid so as to accommodate all of the participants' opinions, comments and questions. Generally, the local LERI field expert started each discussion by introducing herself, the LERI research and the FRA; participants were then invited to introduce themselves, before starting the actual discussion.

Focus groups had already been used during the needs assessment phase and had resulted in the identification of core issues and the development of the LAP. Efforts in this phase were therefore mainly devoted to: involving a broad and diverse group of individuals from the Roma and Sinti community; gathering a general overview on the relevant policy areas in order to register eventual changes with respect to the previous needs assessment; and investigating the lack of Roma and Sinti representatives and mediators. This was an issue overarching all others, which was identified during both the previous needs assessment and the bilateral meetings/interviews. The focus groups endeavoured to both expand knowledge on this issue, and explore people's interest in the LERI research and ideas about the local intervention.

The focus groups provided opportunities to get in touch with people who had never, or only very briefly and infrequently, taken part in similar projects in the past. This supported the aim of involving a broader and more diverse range of individuals from the Roma and Sinti communities than was usually the case (noteworthy, for instance, was the presence of people from the Navile camp, whose inhabitants rarely displayed significant levels of participation and were often considered by social operators and cooperatives to be the least active among the Sinti). Roma and Sinti participants in the focus groups were selected and invited by *Open Group* and public assistance service (*Azienda Pubblica Servizi alla Persona - ASP*) operators on the basis of their willingness to take part in the project and general initiative. Participants included: people from two of the Bologna municipal camps (Sinti people from the third municipal camp, Borgo Panigale, were also invited, but none chose to participate); and non-Italian Roma residing in Bologna since the mid-1990s. However, it was decided not to involve any of the non-Italian Roma living in the unauthorised settlements in the focus groups. This was due to *La Piccola Carovana's* hesitation about involving them, due to language issues; difficulties of ensuring people had a correct understanding of the project and its context; fear of generating expectations that

they would receive concrete help; and their unfamiliarity with formal environments.

On 28 July, 20 August and 1 October 2015 (15.30–17.00), three focus groups with Roma and Sinti people were organised. Seven Sinti people from the municipal camps of Navile and Savena participated in the first focus group (four men and three women, aged 25–50), and six participated in the second (two men and four women, aged 25–50). A further seven people participated in the third focus group including: four Sinti women (three from Savena and one living in a rented flat, aged 25–50) and three non-Italian Roma (two men and one woman, aged 20–30). As for non-Roma stakeholders, focus groups were attended by the staff of the Institute 'Don Paolo Serra Zanetti', *Open Group*, *La Piccola Carovana* and ASP.

## The 2<sup>nd</sup> PAR cycle

The second PAR cycle was carried on during the implementation of the local intervention. It involved working with the group of prospective mediators to discuss and agree details regarding the content of a one-day training open to all interns and devoted to activism. Discussion between the LERI field expert, local authority representatives and *Open Group* led to the decision of proposing the Roma Association *21 luglio* as the most suitable to provide training in Roma activism, due to its long experience in the field. On 19 May 2016, one focus group was organised to discuss this, in which eight interns took part (two being absent due to family engagements). The proposal submitted by *21 luglio* envisioned one and a half days of training with three trainers; due to budgetary constraints, and to the participants' perception that the themes to be dealt with by one of the trainers would be similar to some of those covered during the general training of April, it was decided to ask Association *21 luglio* to provide a one-day training. It was within this focus group that a Sinti man who had taken part in the LERI research since the beginning, said: "I want to thank all of you for involving us this much. This has been really gratifying. It's not been like it was on other occasions in the past; this time it's been *different*".<sup>23</sup>

## The 3<sup>rd</sup> PAR cycle:

Finally, LERI ensured the participatory monitoring and evaluation of the local intervention, devoting to this the third PAR cycle. This involved, firstly, structured interviews with the Roma and Sinti participants after the one-week training, aimed at collecting their opinions and assessing their interest in enrolling in the internship programme. All interviewees appreciated the one-week training, which they found interesting and informative. According to a Sinti young woman, the training was a very meaningful occasion: "I've learnt aspects of my own culture that I did not know, which even my parents have never told me about".<sup>24</sup> A Sinti Evangelical minister paralleled the process inaugurated by the LERI to the situation of Sinti Evangelicals in the early 1990s, when that faith was still mostly unknown within the communities, and the first ministers were accused of betraying Sinti's tradition and culture. "Slowly, people started to understand and to follow us", remembered the pastor. "Now many people listen

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<sup>23</sup> Community member, focus group, 19 May 2016, male.

<sup>24</sup> Community member, interview, 8 April 2016, female.

to what I say, and trust me”, he added, stressing his eagerness to act as a role model within the community to promote a more direct engagement of its members. “I have begun [this experience] with enthusiasm, and I expect it to be very meaningful. I hope that others will follow in my steps, and I’ll do my best to make it happen, I am really keen on it. I want to show them that there are ways out, and that if one works hard many things can be achieved”.<sup>25</sup> As a result of the meeting, eight of the participants expressed their interest to enrol in the internship programme (supported by the LERI intervention).

Secondly, two focus groups were held after the beginning of the internships to monitor the experience and collect impressions from the participants. The first was held on 1 July 2016, and 6 of the interns took part, the others being absent due to family engagements. The most interesting outcome of the meeting were the suggestions emerged about the internships on communication. The interns working in this area expressed the desire to learn more communication techniques than those currently covered by their trainer at the municipality’s office *Flash Giovani*, where they were mostly working on video making: “It is essential that we learn how to transmit our own views”, said one of them.<sup>26</sup> They asked whether additional workshops could be organised at some other venue, where they could learn about radio broadcasting and social media, as further means through which they could spread news and knowledge on Sinti culture. The suggestion was very positively welcomed, and the group decided to ask *Radio Città del Capo* (*Open Group’s* radio focusing on social communication) to design a programme to meet the interns’ request.

The second focus group was held on 29 July 2016. Seven interns took part, the others being absent due to personal reasons. One of the interns working on housing, the youngest of the whole group, communicated his decision to drop out of the programme. “I can’t say I didn’t like the job, as I went there only once”, he replied when questioned on the reasons for his decision; “I simply didn’t feel like going, I’m just not interested”.<sup>27</sup> *Open Group* operators suggested that he propose some alternatives, as for instance reducing the weekly working hours, or working jointly with another intern, but he was adamant about his decision. The other interns said to be satisfied with the work they had been doing. One Sinti man—also working on housing—said to find it difficult to reconcile his work schedule with family commitments, and finally agreed to reduce his weekly hours to ten (two days, 9 am to 2 pm). The Romanian Roma man doing his internship with *La Piccola Carovana* said that he expected the work to be “of a higher level”. “I have already done this type of job in the past, I thought it would be different”. However, he was glad to report that he had felt useful, and that the NGO operators had listened to his advice.<sup>28</sup>

The focus group was also an opportunity to discuss the proposal of *Radio Città del Capo*. The proposal was accepted, and the extra training for the interns working on communication was organised as follows. It consisted of two sections (the first from September to December 2016, and the second planned for May 2017), and resulted in the establishment of a dedicated news room, which

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<sup>25</sup> Community member, interview, 8 April 2016, male.

<sup>26</sup> Community member, focus group, 1 July 2016, male.

<sup>27</sup> Community member, focus group, 29 July 2016, male.

<sup>28</sup> Community member, focus group, 29 July 2016, male.

utilised two media tools: radio and Facebook. The interns were trained in the basics of journalism and coordinated by two professional journalists. Content production went hand in hand with training, and the interns were encouraged to start their work from their own life stories, before interviewing their friends and relatives. Some space was devoted to communicate about the larger internship programme and to illustrate the various initiatives and events organised within the research. While the radio allowed the interns to experience interviewing and audio recording techniques, managing the Facebook page gave them the chance to learn about the professional use of social media.<sup>29</sup>

- First section (September-December 2016): 12 meetings of 3 hours each.
- The first 4 meetings were devoted to the basics of journalistic writing, radio broadcasting and social media.
- In the next 8 meetings, as many 20-mins radio broadcasts were designed, through live as well as non-live recording.
- Second section (May 2017): 6 days of 6 hours each.
- The group worked as a real news room, realising the last 4 radio broadcasts and managing the Facebook page more autonomously.

An additional parallel PAR cycle was initially envisioned, based on photovoice, to produce photos and narratives on Roma-Sinti youngsters' perspectives on the communities' housing conditions and hopes for housing solutions beyond the camps. However, this PAR cycle was finally not implemented. This was mainly due to the hesitation expressed by the local authority officers, according to whom the moment was not appropriate to delve into people's feelings about the closure of the camps. Despite the fact that the closure of the first camp (in Navile neighbourhood) was approaching, alternative housing solutions had not yet been envisioned for some of the camps' inhabitants, and worry and discontent loomed large among them. At this juncture, devoting further attention to the subject was considered potentially dangerous, and the local authority officers feared that it could overlap with the on-going mediation process carried on by the social workers, generating confusion and destabilising the already very fragile equilibrium.

### **Main challenges and needs identified**

The interviews and focus groups organised during the PAR needs assessment revealed that most people from the Roma and Sinti communities had no previous experience of any form of participation, knew very little (if anything) about the policies and projects carried out by the local authorities, and nurtured a deep-rooted sense of distrust and disillusionment about their actual effectiveness. Most people shared the views voiced by the representative of the Association *Sinti Italiani di Bologna*, according to whom "Sinti people are the employers of social cooperatives operators".<sup>30</sup> Among the Sinti in particular, a number of factors hindered people's direct participation in the focus groups, the most prominent being the very low level of literacy within the community, a generalised sense of distrust and fear of the world outside the camps (people possess extremely scant knowledge of the relevant mechanisms), and a self-victimising view of themselves as powerless. Some of these views are likely to have been induced

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/Gruppo-libero-sinti-e-non-636438073199899/?fref=ts>

<sup>30</sup> Community member, interview, 14 March 2015, male.

by decades of top-down welfare-like policies (as a Roma man from a camp in Casalecchio suggested during the LSG meeting: “Do you want to integrate Roma and Sinti people? Find a job for them within the companies managed by the municipality. How hard can this be?”).<sup>31</sup>

When invited to imagine desired work conditions, several participants envisioned self-employment and private enterprise as a viable solution. What made them consider this as a desired, autonomous alternative to a ‘hostile’ job market was the idea of working “all together and among ourselves”, as one young man said, in a protective work environment that was ideally detached from the non-Sinti world, and free from its discriminatory practices. Another young man summarised that: “Finding a job is too hard for the Sinti. We can only manage if the employer is a family member”.<sup>32</sup> However, only the spokesperson of the Association *Sinti Italiani* seemed to possess any knowledge of the costs and responsibilities involved in setting up an autonomous business, and declared that this solution was likely to be “unsuitable for the Sinti, who do not have the skills necessary to take care of all this”.<sup>33</sup> According to a Sinti woman, the low levels of participation were not only due to the disillusionment of people from the communities, but also a lack of communication, clear explanations, and explicit invitations to meetings and tables. She suggested that she and other people may have liked to have participated in previous projects/activities, but were never invited to do so. She came to know about these focus groups from a relative, and decided to take part even though she had not received any explicit request to do so by *Open Group’s* operators.<sup>34</sup>

Despite all of these factors, people from the communities recognised that their direct involvement and interest in designing the policies designed for their social inclusion could significantly ameliorate their situation. Participants in the focus groups also agreed that the lack of representation and spokespersons formally recognised by the institutions working on Roma and Sinti issues was a significant barrier to the sharing of information and to the communities’ needs actually being addressed by the local authority’s policies.

Professionals working on these topics within the local administration and NGOs shared similar views, alleging Roma and Sinti ‘passivity’. Civil servants generally wished for an increase in the communities’ empowerment as a way to enable people to feel responsible for their own lives, and reduce the associated costs for local authorities. The NGOs and cooperatives that were engaged in social work within the communities suggested that a more formal and stable involvement of community leaders would help to make their work more effective.<sup>35</sup>

Overall, the participatory needs assessment showed that Roma and Sinti communities’ lack of spokespersons and mediators was an issue acknowledged by the local authority, NGOs and the communities themselves. The need for the local authority to have a list of Roma and Sinti people willing to participate in

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<sup>31</sup> Community member, LSG meeting, 8 October 2015, male.

<sup>32</sup> Community member, focus group, 28 July 2015, male.

<sup>33</sup> Community member, focus group, 28 July 2015, male.

<sup>34</sup> Community member, focus group, 28 July 2015, female.

<sup>35</sup> NGO representative, interview, 13 March 2015, female; NGO representative, interview, 11 March 2015, female; Local authority representative, interview, 11 March 2015, female; Local authority representative, 11 March 2015, female.

existing and prospective projects and activities aimed at fostering the communities' social inclusion was initially voiced by the municipality during the FRA's local visit, in mid July 2015. Ideas for the LERI local intervention built on that suggestion, as well as on the concerns expressed by both NGOs working in the camps and people from the communities who participated in the focus groups, who agreed that the Bolognese Roma and Sinti people's lack of representatives was a serious hindrance to their participation and inclusion. It was thus decided to link the LERI intervention into another project, which was just about to be implemented, and through this synergy build an internship programme, which would allow 10 interested members of the Roma and Sinti communities to acquire expertise and become mediators in one of the policy areas envisioned by the LAP: employment, housing, education, or communication/culture. In order to be able to decide which would be most interesting to them, prospective interns participated in a one-week general training touching upon all fields.

#### 4. The local interventions - goals, partners, process and results

In mid 2015, the municipality received formal approval of a project proposal it had submitted to UNAR, the National Office against Racial Discriminations (*Ufficio Nazionale Anti-discriminazioni razziali*).<sup>36</sup> The project *Fuori tutti!* (All out!) was devised by the municipality in partnership with *Open Group* and aims to help address housing issues, by designing programmes to train camp and micro-area administrators. The results of the LERI needs assessment suggested that there were likely to be synergies between *Fuori tutti!* and the LERI research, and opportunities for LERI to expand the scope of the *Fuori tutti!* project to develop a wider training programme encompassing relevant policy areas covered under the local action plan (i.e. housing, education, communication/culture and employment). The research would be able to involve interested individuals from the Roma and Sinti communities, and help to establish a team of mediators, each with specific expertise. It was also felt that LERI could provide space for discussion with experienced activists, whose stories and engagement could inspire the team of prospective mediators in Bologna, supporting their empowerment and self-confidence, and countering the sense of powerlessness and self-victimising views shared by many within the communities. Finally, LERI would ensure the participatory monitoring and evaluation for the intervention. Besides *Fuori tutti!* and LERI, it was decided that a third small project would join the synergy: *For Roma, with Roma*, the twining project co-funded by the DG Justice of the European Commission. As the project was designed to support communication activities to combat prejudices and discrimination against the Roma population, *For Roma, with Roma* was deemed suited to cover some of the costs of the internships on communication.<sup>37</sup>

Besides responding to widely acknowledged needs, focusing the LERI local intervention on the development of a team of cultural mediators and representatives seemed a good way to build on previous actions implemented by

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<sup>36</sup> National Office against Racial Discriminations (Ufficio Nazionale Anti-discriminazioni razziali) <http://www.unar.it/unar/portal/?lang=it>

<sup>37</sup> For details on the project, see [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/for-roma-with-roma/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/for-roma-with-roma/index_en.htm)

the local authority. Steps had already been taken in Bologna, albeit tentatively, to use capacity building of Roma and Sinti people as a means to increasingly involve them in decision-making processes. One such example was the EU co-funded *Roma-Net* project, which involved the training of peer operators, while the proposed actions did not sound entirely new to both the Roma and Sinti communities and to the non-Roma stakeholders. The LERI thus aimed to build on this, respecting the locality's timing and needs, while at the same time expanding the scope for local experiences and making it more systematic and more stimulating for all actors.

In October 2015, ideas for the local intervention started to take shape. A first hypothesis, developed within focus group discussions and shared with the LSG on 8 October, envisioned the establishment of five internships relating to housing (four funded by the UNAR project, plus one covered by the LERI research), two relating to employment (covered by the European Social Fund), one relating to education (covered by the LERI research), and four relating to communication/culture (three funded by the UNAR project, plus one covered by the LERI research). The LERI research would also cover training on a cross-cutting topic (activism) to complete the training programme for the prospective Roma and Sinti mediators. The LERI research thus expanded the scope of the UNAR project, providing additional internships and covering a policy area (education) not envisioned by the UNAR project. Also, the LERI research allowed for the organisation of training in activism, meeting stakeholders' interest.

As detailed in the next section, constructing the synergy between the three projects and shaping the training programme was far from easy, especially due to the time and budgetary constraints. However, after a series of readjustments and changes, the intervention was finally defined as follows:

- 4 internships in the field of communication/culture (1 of which covered by the LERI fund);
- 5 internships in the field of housing (1 of which covered by the LERI research);
- 1 internship in the field of education (covered by the LERI research).

The two initially planned internships on employment proved difficult to be implemented, and the idea was finally dropped. Due to family commitments, the two Sinti young women who had shown interest in these internships would have needed a much more flexible working schedules than those envisioned by the internships covered by the ESF, and faced with the impossibility to adapt working hours with their family duties, decided to give up (in one case) or to shift to another policy area. Far from being an isolated case, this example speaks volumes of an attitude widespread within the Sinti community: especially (though not exclusively) for the women, family is always a top priority, and work is invariably perceived as an extra duty, to which people are willing to commit only if it does not force them to overlook the needs of their family members. This must be taken into account when designing programmes targeting the Sinti community, especially if aiming at women's involvement: lack of flexibility in the time schedule is very likely to result in people's choice to withdraw from a programme.

Internships were based on the model developed by the UNAR project, and consisted of:

- fifteen hours of general training aimed at familiarising prospective interns with the policy areas on which they would work (five meetings of three hours each, *formazione in aula*), addressing the whole team of interns (4-8 April 2016);
- forty hours of specific training (*formazione in situazione*), addressing the sub-groups working in each of the policy areas, delivered by professionals from the organisations employing the trainees, and/or by civil servants from the municipality's relevant offices;
- work at the host organisations (4–6 months, starting from May 2016, according to the organisation's needs and capacity).

In the case of all internships, both training and work were reimbursed (3.10 EUR per hour) by the LERI research.

The LERI research covered the costs of three of these internships (one per each policy area). It also covered the costs for a one-day meeting cross-cutting all policy areas, which provided prospective mediators with motivational training on the broad topic of Roma and Sinti activism (21 June 2016). This training event was meant to provide a space for discussion and sharing experiences among 'expert' activists and the trainees from Bologna's communities. As the low level of literacy of the Roma and Sinti communities in Bologna did not allow for coverage of topics like project management or fund-raising techniques, it was decided that training on activism was arguably the type of training from which Roma and Sinti people could benefit most.

Although internships were initially scheduled to start in December 2015, interns did not formally sign their contracts until May 2016. The delay was mainly due to the difficulty in finding organisations willing to host the interns. For instance, according to the initial plans the interns working in the field of communication were expected to be employed by agencies focusing on social communication. However, at the meeting organised on 23 November 2015 with journalists representing the selected communication agencies (one radio and three newspapers: *Radio Città del Capo*, *Bandiera Gialla*, *Redattore Sociale*, *Piazza Grande*), many perplexities arose on the possibility of hosting the Roma and Sinti interns. Although interested in the project, the journalists, representing the communication agencies initially selected to host the interns were concerned about time and resource requirements: all said that their organisations were too small, under staffed and constantly facing financial constraints, and were thus prone to hire only highly skilled, graduate interns. Due to the fast pace of the work within their agencies, it was felt that it would be impossible for any of them to host interns that might need constant scrutiny and care. However, all journalists said they would be happy to cooperate, but only for a limited amount of time—i.e. organising specific workshops.

It was thus decided to investigate the availability of *Flash Giovani*, the municipality's website/communication agency focusing on young people, to act as the host organisation. As the director of the Institute for social inclusion is also responsible for the *Flash Giovani* team, it was hoped that the latter would respond positively to the invitation and cooperate in the implementation of the

intervention. At the meeting scheduled on 11 December 2015, the representative of *Flash Giovani* said that they were interested in hosting the communication interns, and shared some ideas on the activities in which they could be included (i.e. a weekly TV broadcast, of which some of the episodes could be designed by the interns and focus on topics of their choice). However, *Flash Giovani* stated that it would find it difficult to host the interns for another few months, given their schedule and previous engagement with other interns. The representative promised to discuss the idea with her staff and get back to the *Institute* with a tentative schedule for the internships by the end of December 2015. In fact, *Flash Giovani* did not respond for another month, stating that the office was understaffed, and thus unable to host the interns for the requested amount of time. These issues meant that it was necessary to seek alternatives for the interns working on communication.

At the end of January 2016, there was another setback, which further slowed the implementation of the local intervention. *Open Group* operators who had been working in the municipal Sinti camps for the past two years (under a contract signed between the municipality and the consortium of which the cooperative is part, *Consorzio Indaco*)<sup>38</sup> were told that the agreement would not be extended, and from the following week they would no longer be working in the camps of Navile, Savena and Borgo Panigale neighbourhoods. No one had been previously informed about this decision—neither the cooperative, nor the Sinti families. The neighbourhood councils' decision to cut the social/educational services in the camps was very serious, especially as it came at a time when the implementation of the regional law on housing would require more efforts than ever to support the Sinti families during their transition from the camps to other housing solutions.

On 5 February 2016, after several days of general confusion, the council of Navile neighbourhood published a new tender notice, allocating a maximum of 21,230 EUR for the social/educational services in its camp for one year (March 2016-Feb 2017). *Open Group* sent its proposal and, after being awarded the contract, was able to restart working in Navile camp from March 2016. As Navile will be the first camp to be closed, this was particularly important. The Savena neighbourhood allocated only 5,000 EUR for 2016, which will restrict the support available to its inhabitants, although it is worth noting that the council of Savena neighbourhood defined its decision to cut the funding as 'experimental'. It decided to focus on: 'overcoming' the educational services so far granted to all the camp's inhabitants, and provide them only to the most needy families; monitoring and signalling risk cases involving children; and providing social secretariat services to the families followed by the Social Services. At the time of writing, the situation of Borgo Panigale was still unclear, but the neighbourhood's council allocated 24,000 EUR for the management of its camp—It is assumed that Borgo Panigale might therefore act as Navile, and publish its own invitation to tender.

All of these developments and delays have obviously impacted on the implementation of the LERI research. For the entire month of February 2016,

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<sup>38</sup> The contract covered the period November 2013-October 2015, and was further extended up to January 2016. <http://atti.comune.bologna.it/atti/determine.nsf/dettaglio.xsp?documentId=454E5DAAF4D80CC9C1257EE6004EDE50&action=openDocument&SessionID=E8F2TZ51Y1>

*Open Group* did not know whether it would continue to work in the camp of Navile, which was a huge demotivating factor. The same held true for the camps of Savena and Borgo Panigale; as none of the operators had worked there in 2016, it was almost impossible to involve people from those areas. Only one person from Savena continued to follow the work related to the local intervention, and signed the internship contract, while all others who had participated in the focus groups and contributed to designing the local intervention dropped out, due to the absence of social operators functioning as motivators. On the contrary, people from Navile, who could count on *Open Group's* operators for constant reminders and updates, continued to be involved in the project, and ended up constituting the majority of the interns.

*Open Group's* essential role was confirmed also by the fact that it functioned as the hosting organisation for most internships. Due to the difficulties in finding host organisations, it was finally decided that the social cooperative would act as host organisation for all four interns working on communication, three of those working on housing, and the one working on education. These interns signed their contracts in May 2016. The two other interns working on housing signed their contract a bit later; one was hosted by *Piazza Grande* to work in one of the association's shelter houses, the other by *La Piccola Carovana* to work as cultural mediator within the project 'Città invisibili' dedicated to the Romanian Roma dwelling in unauthorised settlements.

The latter interns are Romanian Roma, as is the young woman also working on housing in the Sinti camp where *Open Group* operates. Interns working on communication are Sinti young men (one from the camp in Savena neighbourhood, the others from the camp in Navile); the young woman working on education is also a Sinti from the Navile camp. No selection was needed, as the number of people who showed an interest in participating in the training did not exceed the number of available places.

## 5. Analysis, discussion, lessons learned

The design and identification of the local intervention have shown that for actions on Roma inclusion to work, they must: be small, feasible and easy to understand and explain to people from the communities; provide immediate concrete benefits/outcomes (e.g. salary, future professional opportunities, formal recognition, or solutions to practical issues); require limited engagement, while simultaneously being open to future possible developments; be 'endorsed' by, or involve, non-Roma actors who people from the communities can trust and build a strong personal relationship with the local authority.

The main challenge for the project has been the local actors' lack of familiarity with a truly participatory approach to identifying and dealing with issues concerning Roma and Sinti communities. A deep-rooted tradition of top-down interventions cannot be set aside within just a few months, and people – both Roma and non-Roma – have found it difficult to imagine a completely different approach to problems. More importantly, Roma and Sinti people were generally unaware of the political and technical aspects behind the policies designed for them, lacked the means to understand such mechanisms, and were therefore unable to interact effectively with the local authority. Institutional actors, for their part, did not invest much effort to change the way in which they

communicate, and make themselves understood, to the Roma and Sinti communities. The practical, down-to-earth needs of people from the communities constantly clashed with the priorities and reasoning of institutional actors.

Trust was another major issue, closely linked to the above-mentioned points, and especially in the first phase of the research. The lack of previous experiences of close and equal cooperation meant that there was a lack of trust between the local authority and the Roma and Sinti communities. Most people from the communities automatically perceived any project involving the local authority, such as the LERI, as being designed and controlled by the local authority, and this was enough for them to consider it – in all likelihood – non-effective. Naturally, this means that their commitment to any project is unlikely to be very high, and most people from the communities would rather not spend much of their time, at least initially, on the planned activities.

The focus group proved to be an effective technique to help overcome these challenges. Conducted with a conversational approach, and involving a small number of people, focus groups allowed for the creation of a friendly and informal atmosphere, which enabled all participants to voice their opinions and ask questions. The brevity of the discussions was much appreciated, as people were rarely keen to spend more than an hour and a half in meetings. As mentioned above, Roma and Sinti people were initially involved in the focus groups through NGOs, although some participants had heard about them by word of mouth. Young women brought their children along, and this was considered another factor which contributed to the overall informality of the sessions.

A large number of meetings proved necessary for the practical definition of the local intervention in late 2015 and early 2016, which also caused issues for stakeholders. For example, *Open Group* repeatedly raised the issue of reimbursement for its operators' working time. These costs were partially covered by the UNAR project, but for several months *Open Group* operators took part in the meetings without any reimbursement, waiting for UNAR and the municipality to sign the agreement that would lead to the disbursement of funds. Although the UNAR project received formal approval, its implementation was delayed by budgeting issues and bureaucratic processes, and only in late December 2015 was the agreement finally signed. After that, the disbursement of funds to *Open Group* by the municipality took additional months, with the cooperative seeing its needs constantly overlooked by the local authority, and seeming to look to the LERI research for a solution. For LERI, linking the local intervention to an existing project co-designed by the municipality and *Open Group* was fundamental, as it ensured the NGO's engagement in the LERI activities. In the absence of such a motivating factor, it would have been impossible for *Open Group* to take on such an active role, and no concrete result would have been achieved. An important lesson thus concerns the reimbursement of the working time of non-institutional actors involved in a research like LERI: since the contribution of NGOs is fundamental for a project aiming at the full involvement of hard-to-reach communities, funds must be allocated to value and ensure the participation of such stakeholders.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

As is evident from the previous pages, timing was a major issue. It was difficult to reconcile the LA's pace with the time-frame of the LERI research, as the former is structurally used to devoting large amounts of time to projects, including small practical steps, while the latter's objectives and limited time-frame required a much faster pace. A large number of meetings were necessary to ensure the progress of the project, and the number of stakeholders also contributed to the slow pace of decision-making and practical implementation. Such a structural slowness, however questionable, is a *de facto* characteristic of the Italian context, which should not be overlooked when designing projects that entail the participation of a local authority.

The main recommendation would therefore concern the time-frame of projects envisioning a participatory approach and the involvement of a large number of stakeholders with different working habits, pace and background. The diversity of actors like local authorities, Roma and Sinti communities and NGOs should not be overlooked. In the Italian context, such a diversity especially concerns the level of familiarity with truly participative approaches, which are still a novelty for many of the stakeholders, and the level of mutual understanding. The extremely low literacy and limited experience of formal contexts of people from the communities are a serious obstacle to their full involvement by the local authorities, which in most cases find it easier to exclude them from decision-making processes. Non-institutional, external figures (such as field experts within the LERI research network) are therefore needed to constantly support, facilitate and endorse participatory approaches; in the absence of these figures, participatory approaches are very likely to be overlooked, as they do not yet come as 'natural' in an Italian institutional context which often still considers them as a novelty. In order for these approaches to become an integral part of policy designing, and for truly meaningful results to be observed, systematic and multiannual actions should be put in place.

## 7. Additional information

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