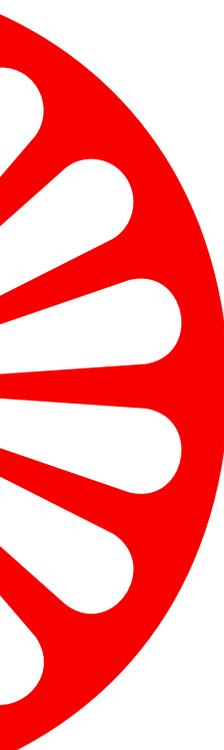




FIGHTING AGAINST ANTI-GYPSYISM  
THROUGH TRAINING OF  
PROFESSIONALS AND EMPOWERMENT  
OF ROMA COMMUNITIES

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## **ON THE ROAD TO INCLUSION**

An overview of Romani culture and instruments to fight discrimination and facilitate the inclusion of Roma and Sinti persons within local communities

This Training Package has been produced by the working group “Latcho Drom: Fighting against anti-gypsyism through training of professionals and empowerment of Roma communities” REC-AG-2018/REC-RDIS-DIS-AG-2018

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## FOREWORD

This handbook “On the road to inclusion – An overview of Romani culture and instruments to fight discrimination and facilitate the inclusion of Roma and Sinti persons within local communities” has been developed as part of the project “**Latcho Drom: Fighting against anti-gypsism through training of professionals and empowerment of Roma communities**” funded through the programme Rights, Equality and Citizenship (2014-2020) of the European Union REC-AG-2018/REC-RDIS-DIS-AG-2018.

The project started in August 2019, it is coordinated by the Association Community Pope John XXIII, in partnership with the Municipality of Rimini and the Center for the Study of Democracy in Bulgaria.

The purpose of the “Latcho Drom” project is to reduce discriminations against Roma and Sinti communities, facilitating their full social inclusion through a pilot pathway for the Roma and Sinti communities themselves, practitioners in the sector, the general population and local government.

The construction of this pilot pathway has been based on a survey of literature and legislation at European, national and local level in three Italian areas: Rimini, Cuneo and Turin, as well as on field research conducted through focus groups with major stakeholders: representatives of the Roma and Sinti communities, teachers, social workers, police forces.

The pilot phase started in March 2020, at the same time as the Covid-19 emergency, and is expected to be completed by the end of March 2022. The pilot pathway has been implemented in the areas of Rimini, Cuneo and Turin through the following activities.

### **In favour of the Roma and Sinti communities:**

#### **Workshops with children and teenagers**

Primary and secondary schools in the areas involved have been invited to take part in workshops to facilitate cultural exchange, disseminating knowledge and awareness about the culture, language and history of the Roma people.

#### **Measures aimed at ensuring school support and the right to education**

The project has ensured support through school and extracurricular activities for Roma/Sinti children and teenagers in primary and lower secondary schools, as well as support to their families to facilitate the involvement of parents in their children's education.

### **Employment and legal assistance**

The NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) rate among the young Roma/Sinti population remains very high. This project has implemented approaches aimed at supporting the latter in their progress from school to the job market, by helping develop their skills and supporting employment opportunities. Legal assistance has been guaranteed for anyone who might find it difficult to access service and obtain regular stay permits.

### **In favour of practitioners in the sector:**

#### **Training courses**

Two different levels of training have been provided: one for local government officials, such as social workers and municipal police forces, who might have to deal with cases involving anti-gypsyism, and the other intended for educators and teachers, to help them fight anti-gypsyism and stereotypes, encouraging full inclusion of Roma and Sinti persons within schools and educational settings.

This manual is intended as a Training Package aimed at professionals who are in contact with Roma and Sinti persons every day, most notably teachers and social workers; it is the result of training courses organised with the latter during the project.

Its objective is therefore to provide useful information and instruments for professionals, to make sure that they are able to promptly react to cases of discrimination against Roma and Sinti persons, facilitating their inclusion processes within local communities.

## CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>1. ABOUT THE ROMA</b>	<b>10</b>
1.1 Who is a Roma person and who is not?	10
1.2 The five main communities in the Roma world	10
1.2.1 Historical distribution of Romani language peoples in Europe	11
1.2.2 Who are the Roma in Italy?	12
1.2.2.1 The Roma in Italy: failed recognition as ethnic minority	13
<b>2. THE HISTORY OF THE ROMANI POPULATION</b>	<b>15</b>
2.1 Origins and arrival in Europe	15
2.2 From the second half of the sixteenth century to World War II	19
2.3 Porajmos	20
<b>3. THE ROMANI LANGUAGE</b>	<b>23</b>
3.1 Historical overview	24
3.1.1 The original Romani language from India to Greek-Byzantine territories	24
3.1.2 Standardising or codifying the Romani language	27
<b>4. ROMANI KRISS</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>5. ANTI-GYPSYISM: ORIGIN AND DIFFUSION</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>6. 6. INSTRUMENTS TO FACILITATE SOCIO-ECONOMICAL INCLUSION OF THE ROMA AND SINTI WITHIN LOCAL COMMUNITIES</b>	<b>33</b>
6.1 Regularizing the position of those who are not nationals yet	33
6.1.1 Citizens of non-EU countries	33
6.1.2 Citizens of EU countries	36
6.1.3 Stateless persons	39
6.2 The non-discrimination principle	40
6.2.1 Victim protection in Italy	41
6.2.1.1 The National Office against Racial Discrimination (UNAR)	42
6.2.1.2 The Observatory for Safety against Discriminatory Actions (OSCAD)	43
6.3 Cross-cultural mediation	44
6.3.1 Who is a Cross-cultural Mediator	45
6.3.2 The Code of Ethics for social and cross-cultural mediation in France	46
6.4 school as a social instrument in mainstream society and in Roma and Sinti communities	47
6.4.1 School attendance	49
6.4.2 Difficulties for a Roma student learning Italian	51
<b>CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>54</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The European project “Latcho Drom: Fighting against anti-gypsyism through training of professionals and empowerment of Roma communities” originated from the work done by the Community Pope John XXIII (APJ23) in favour of Roma and Sinti communities in Italy.

The meeting of APJ23 with the Roma people dates back to 1989, when some operators from the association came into contact with Roma families in the areas of Faenza, Forlì and Rimini. Throughout the 1990s – from 1993 to 2001 – some APJ23 volunteers lived in the temporary settlement camp in Via Portogallo in Rimini, which has recently been dismantled.

Today APJ23 operates in favour of the Roma population in Italy, mainly in the Emilia-Romagna, Piedmont and Veneto regions, through several projects:

1. “Buon Vicinato” [“Friendly Neighbourhood”]: welcoming Roma families near its centres, using trailers or RVs for housing;
2. Welcoming of children, adults and families within its centres.

The services on offer for families and individuals include the following:

- material assistance (hospitality in the association’s welcoming facilities, economic support, delivery of staple goods);
- legal assistance;
- search for housing;
- education and orientation to correct access to social and health service;s
- school support (finding texts and school materials, contribution to school fees, mediation and meetings between parents and teachers);
- accompaniment and support to parenting.

Based on this experience alongside Roma communities in Italy, APJ23 has chosen to implement the “Latcho Drom” project, with a view to an intervention which is systematic and targeted to professionals with whom it engages every day, to facilitate the socio-economic inclusion process of Roma and Sinti persons within local communities.

In this regard, specific training courses have been organised, mainly geared towards two groups:

- public administration officials (social workers, police forces);
- educators, teachers and school staff.

The courses lasted 15 hours and focused on various subjects. The first part was dedicated to aspects of Romani culture considered fundamental to

make sure that the professionals are able to distinguish possible specificities of the Roma culture from something which may be the sign of a social distress issue. The second part, on the other hand, was dedicated to an in-depth analysis of some useful tools for professionals to fight instances of discrimination and marginalisation, facilitating – on the contrary – social inclusion processes.

The courses were taught by experts and professionals of Italian and Roma origin: five of the eight teachers are from various Roma communities. APJ23 chose this approach in order to give the Roma themselves the possibility to talk about their culture.

The handbook **“On the road to inclusion – An overview of Romani culture and instruments to fight discrimination and facilitate the inclusion of Roma and Sinti persons in local communities”** sums up the contents of the training courses implemented, with a view to providing knowledge and concrete instruments for professionals to operate on a daily basis with Roma and Sinti communities, in terms of access to services, school inclusion and gradual social inclusion within the areas where they live.

The handbook is divided into six sections. The first four chapters cover various aspects of Romanipen, that is to say the Roma identity and culture. Chapter five is dedicated to the concept of anti-gypsyism, while chapter six is intended to provide practical tools which can be used by professionals, more specifically related to laws and regulations, intercultural mediation, and insights about the school inclusion of Roma children.

## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

### APJ23

Association Community Pope John XXIII

### UNAR

National Office against Racial Discrimination

### ANCI

National Association of Italian Cities

### ISTAT

Italian National Statistical Institute

### ECRI

European Commission against Racism and Intolerance

### EU

European Union

### T.U.

Consolidated Law with provisions concerning immigration and regulations about a foreign person's condition

### RSC

Rom, Sinti and Caminanti

### OSCAD

Observatory for Safety against Acts of Discrimination

### L1

First language or mother tongue

### L2

Second language

## 1. ABOUT THE ROMA

There is no single Roma people. The Romani population consists of five main communities, which – in turn – are divided into hundreds of groups and subgroups. These different groups, located across all the continents, speak a dialectal variant of “romaní chib” or Romani language. Each group has its own tradition, its cultural specificity, its own religious belief, its own dialect, its own ethics based on a set of binding moral rules. Each community thus represents a distinct social, cultural, religious and language community, which should not be confused with or assimilated to any other.

Each group and subgroup also has an ethnonym, that is to say a name which defines it and reflects the individual cultural system of that specific group. This name constitutes the first demarcation line between their world and the world of others.

### 1.1 Who is a Roma person and who is not?

Below is a list of the distinctive elements of members of the Roma population:

- all those who call themselves by that name;
- anyone who speaks Romanes (a language mainly of oral tradition which derives from Sanskrit, with a myriad dialects);
- anyone who feels represented by the same emblem, deriving from the Indian flag (blue background which represents the sky, green background which represents grass, the red chariot wheel also present in the Indian flag, referring to the idea of freedom and travel);
- anyone who feels represented by the national anthem “Gelem Gelem”.

### 1.2 The five main communities in the Roma world

There are no unified anthropological classification criteria: Romani communities are characterised based on their trades and activities, in the past or updated and restyled for present-day requirements, on the dialect used by the various families to communicate, on their regions of settlement or origin, on a patronym, or according to their religious belief. Talking about the Roma, one should always specify the group one is referring to: there are profound differences between one group and all others, although the latter are often confused and merged.

Below is a list of the five main communities in the Roma world:

<b>Balkan Roma</b> (Slavs, Romanian and Bulgarian) and Italian Roma	<b>Italian Sinti</b>	<b>Manouches:</b> Roma who settled in the south of France	<b>Calè (or Kale):</b> Roma who settled in Spain, Portugal, North Africa and South America	<b>Romanichals or Romaniche:</b> Roma who settled in Britain, North America, Australia and South America
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### 1.2.1 Historical distribution of Romani language peoples in Europe

The Roma account for the largest ethnic minority group in Europe. According to Council of Europe estimates, their number amounts to between 10 and 12 million, of which approximately six million are citizens or residents of the European country where they live.

- Rom**  
Central-eastern Europe
- Sinti**  
France, Germany, Austria, Spain and northern Italy
- Manouches**  
France
- Kalé**  
Spain
- Romanichals**  
United Kingdom and Wales
- Romanisæl**  
Sweden and Norway



## 1.2.2

### Who are the Roma in Italy?

There is limited information regarding the presence of Roma and Sinti in Italy; there are no definite figures regarding their number, which means that there are no reliable socio-demographical or economic statistics about the Roma and Sinti communities living in the country. The limited statistical data available have been collected by universities, research centres, local government and volunteer organisations; in most cases, however, they refer to specific regions, which means that they cannot be regarded as a comprehensive and representative picture of the living conditions of Roma and Sinti communities in Italy.

Following a request by UNAR, in 2013 and 2014 ANCI and ISTAT carried out a survey to calculate the number of Sinti people living in settlements, in municipalities with more than 15,000 people. The said survey concluded that the Roma and Sinti people living in camps are approximately 30,000. However, not all the Roma and Sinti in our country live in settlements.

Data from the annual report of the Association “21 Luglio”, presented in October 2021, point to a drop in the number of Roma and Sinti living in formal and informal settlements, amounting to approximately 17,800, i.e. 0.03% of the Italian population. A total of 11,300 live in formal settlements, and 6,500 in an informal or micro-settlement. It has been estimated that, out of the total number of Roma and Sinti who live in an institutional camp, approximately 49% are Italian citizens, 41% are citizens of former Yugoslavia, 10% are Romanian citizens, and approximately 1,000 are persons at risk of being stateless. The number of persons living in Italian single-ethnicity settlements, between 2016 and 2021, has dropped by as many as 10,000 units, which is a decrease by 36.5% (by 37% in a formal settlement and 35% in an informal settlement).

Based on these figures, unconfirmed **estimates by the Council of Europe refer to a number of Roma persons amounting to approximately 180,000 units**; it is therefore fair to say that, currently, in our country **less than one Roma citizen out of ten can be identified as living in a “camp”**.

The Roma and Sinti people living in Italy can be divided into six large groups:

**1. Long-standing Roma settlers**, most of them living in central-southern Italy, descendants of the nomads who reached Italy starting from the 14th century. Most of them are Italian citizens, and they belong to one of the very first groups to arrive in the country. Having been here for a long time, they are relatively better inserted within the mainframe social

and economic context compared to other groups who migrated more recently. Depending on their settlement region, they are called Roma from Abruzzi, Calabria, etc.

- 2. Roma and Sinti people who - until the end of the 1960s - led a mainly nomadic life**, matching their occupation: they operate carousels, small amusement parks and travelling shows, or work in small-scale retail. Also based on their settlement regions, they are referred to as Sinti from Piedmont, Lombardy, Gachaknè (German), Estrekaria (Austrian).
- 3. Roma people who migrated from Eastern Europe after World War One**: their dialect is actually very strongly influenced by Slavic languages. Most of them tend to work mainly in steel, iron and copper processing or in trading; they are collectively referred to as Lovara, Churara and Kalderasa.
- 4. Slovenian, Harvati (Croatian) and Istrian Roma, who came to Italy during World War Two**, most of them having been deported to concentration camps in Italy from their country of origin. Today, they work in a variety of trades, mainly self-employed, in retail or separate waste collection.
- 5. Roma who migrated from the Balkans starting from the 1960s**: this group was sedentary, in their countries of origin, and only a very small part of it is still semi-nomadic, most of them showing a trend towards becoming sedentary. The Roma from Serbia are called Kaniara. The Lovara are people from Poland, while the Rudari are originally from Romania. The Khorakhanè are people from Bosnia, Montenegro and Kosovo.
- 6. Roma who migrated starting from the 1990s**, who are still coming into the country. Most of them are Romanian Roma and Bulgarian Roma, the number of which is difficult to estimate.

### 1.2.2.1

#### The Roma in Italy: failed recognition as ethnic minority

In Italian legislation, the general concept of minority is associated with linguistic specificity and is founded in Article 6 of the Constitution: “The Republic safeguards with appropriate rules all language minorities”. Law no. 482 of 15 December 1999, including “Regulations for protecting linguistic-historical minorities”, acknowledges and protects twelve language minorities: Albanian, Catalan, Germanic, Greek, Slovenian, Croatian, French, French-Provencal, Friulan, Ladin, Occitan and Sardinian (taking into account linguistic-historical criteria but, most importantly, the criterion of territoriality, in other words being located in a specific territory). Italian law thus protects all minorities which are considered to have “historically” contributed to the development of a territorially limited and identified area, becoming fully part of it, although keeping their identity, language and

traditions.

**The reasons for not considering the Roma and Sinti communities as recognised minorities have been officially attributed to the specificity of the communities themselves which, being considered nomadic and not sedentary, cannot be associated to a specific territory and, therefore, could not have been included among historical linguistic minorities.**

## 2. HISTORY OF THE ROMANI POPULATION

### 2.1

#### Origins and arrival in Europe

It is difficult to reconstruct the history of the Roma and Sinti people precisely, because there are very few documents available. To shed light on this complex subject, about which little is known, an international group of researchers has decided to pick up again the tied-up thread of this people's history, following it from its origin, by analysing the genetic heritage of people from Roma groups, using a sample of more than 10,000 individuals.

The authors of the work reached the same conclusions, identifying the origin of these "mysterious people". It consists of about eleven/twelve million people, scattered across several countries, forming a mosaic of languages, traditions and social structures, which can all be traced back to a clear common matrix.

The results of this survey have been published in the journal "Current Biology", a few days from another study published by researchers from the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology at Hyderabad, in India, presented by PLOS ONE. Following the pathways traced by a specific haplogroup of the chromosome Y (markers used to explore the ancestral ascendance on the paternal side), the authors of the work have identified **the origin of Roma and Sinti people in Western India**, which they left more than **1,500 years ago**.

More specifically, the Roma were called **Dom** which means "**men**" (the Indo-European root of this word is \*gdhom, from which the Latin homo 'man' and humus 'earth' are derived). They spoke a language which today is known as Romani, whose original substratum is connected with the ancient Indo-Aryan language spoken by Indo-European invaders of India.

In 350-500, the Dom left India, presumably due to incursions from people known as White Huns or Hephthalites and moved to Persia. Memory of this event has been passed on in the myth of Bahram Gur (a Persian king who lived during the first half of the 5th century) and by Indian minstrels.

**Persia** was the second large aggregation hub of the Roma, who spent many centuries there.



The Persian poet Fidursi concluded the "Book of Kings" mentioning the arrival of ten thousand "Iuri", and this quotation is still relevant as first written testimony of the arrival of a nomadic population, mainly from India, renowned as extremely talented musicians.

Arabian chronicles talk about Zott or Jat populations which – in the early 8th century – were settled along the course of the Tigris river and on the coasts of the Persian Gulf. Some of them were buffalo farmers, others raiders of riverside areas.

Around the middle of the 10th century, the Roma migrated to **Armenia** and to the **southern Caucasus** region, at the same time as the conflict between Arabs and Byzantines was taking place.

Most of the group probably left Armenia during the Byzantine-Georgian wars (1000-1045) or, at the latest, around the middle of the century, driven by the advance of Selgiukid Turks in 1071.

In front of the Selgiukid Turks, the Roma entered the **Byzantine Empire** and were first seen in Constantinople. From there, they started to travel through Thrace and the Chalkidiki peninsula to territories where Greek was spoken. Between the 12th and 15th century they spread **all over Greece**, in continental and insular regions, in areas divided between the emperor, the Venetians and the Crusaders: in Crete, Corfu, on the island of Euboea or Negroponte and in port towns of the Peloponnese, such as Modon, Coron and Nauplia.

Up to the 14th century, the Roma people who lived in the Greek-Byzantine area constituted a cultural and linguistic unit, characterised by a single religious faith and by a common language, even though it had been restyled and reorganised on new linguistic bases. Their “residence” in Greece, encouraged by a favourable geographical position, by economic prosperity and by relative political stability, lasted more than three centuries, to the extent of looking as if it would become permanent.

Unfortunately, however, between the 14th and 15th century the Byzantine Empire suffered a steep decline, brought on by the arrival of the Ottoman Turks. Between 1350 and 1500 the Greek-Balkan area was hit by a long-lasting conflict between Byzantines and Turks. As the latter gradually advanced and conquered more and more land, the Roma peoples – one after the other and in subsequent waves – started to flee. **The Turkish expansion caused the greatest ethnic earthquake in the Romani history, leading to the Roma Diaspora and to the laceration of Romani unity.**

The first to escape from the Turkish threat were Roma people from the south-east Balkan area (Eastern Turkey, Greek Macedonia, southern Bulgaria), which split from the unified Greek-Byzantine group, searching for safety in the North, in the Danube princedoms of Wallachia and Moldova, in Transylvania and Bessarabia, where most of them were reduced to slavery.

This separation led to **the formation of two mega-groups called**, according to a fitting definition by the British scholar Bernard Gilliath-Smith, “**Vlax Roma**” and “**non-Vlax Roma**”.

**The Vlax Roma or Wallachs (or Vlachs) (those who had escaped the Greek-Balkan area)** were in turn divided into two large groups:

1. the Roma who managed to escape in the 17th and 18th century, because of a form of slavery which was not yet institutionalised, who settled throughout the former Yugoslavia,
2. the Roma who were enslaved until their liberation in 1855-1856.

REFUGEE ROMA who fled in the 17th-18th century	SLAVE ROMA who migrated from Romania after 1855-1856	SLAVE ROMA who migrated from Romania after 1989
<p><b>SOUTHERN:</b> Gurbeti (Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia)</p> <p><b>XORAXANÈ:</b> Cergarja, Crna gora, Šiftarja (Bosnia, Kosovo and Montenegro)</p>	<p><b>DARSIKANÈ:</b> Kaniarja, Busnjarja, Mrcenarja, Mršari</p> <p><b>NORTHERN:</b> Kalderaš, Lovara, Curara</p> <p><b>KARAVLASI:</b> Rudari, Beaš, Lingurarja</p>	<p><b>RUMENIAN:</b> they include a myriad of groups whose names refer to their professions Vatراس, Lautari, Lejasi, Richinarja, Kortorara, Keramidarja, Bidinari, Zvancari</p>

**The non-Vlax Roma** include the Roma from the Balkan superstratum who did not flee. They had a different historical and language development compared to the Vlax Roma. Starting from a common unified base, the current ethno-language groups were finally formed.

This population consists of two large sub-sets:

1. Roma from the southern Balkan peninsula who were conquered by the Turks and became part of the Ottoman Empire;

SOUTHERN BALKAN	NORTHERN BALKAN	CARPATHIAN-DANUBIAN	WESTERN EUROPEAN	SOUTHERN CENTRAL ITALIAN
Arlija	Harvati	Romungri	Sinti Manouches (northern-central)	Abruzzi
Erlides	Dolenjski	Slovak	Kale (Iberian)	Calabrian
Jerli	Slovenian	Moravian-Bohemian	Romanicels Kale (British)	Neapolitan
	Istrian	Burgenland	Tattare (Scandinavian)	Camminanti
		Bergitka	Kaale (Finnish)	
			Polska Xaladitka Lotfitka Sibirska (Russian-Baltic)	



At the end of the 14th century there was a massive exodus of South-Balkan Roma, who migrated from the Greek-Albanian coast to southern and central Italy by sea. Today they constitute the southern-central Roma people, which include two major groups: Abruzzi Roma, who have settled in the East-Central area (in Abruzzi, Molise, Apulia and Basilicata) and Calabrian Roma, in the South-Eastern part of Calabria and in Cilento.

Then there are Neapolitan Roma, who possibly arrived in Italy from Spain during the Spanish domination, and the Sicilian Camminanti, travelling knife-grinders from the Siracusa and Agrigento areas, who – according to some scholars – were of autochthonous origin, while others consider this population to be a remnant of the ancient Roma from Sicily, whose traces have been lost.

2. the Roma who, as the Turks advanced, fled to the Danube-Carpathian area, to north-central Europe and to northern Italy.

NORTH-CENTRAL	IBERIAN	BRITISH	SCANDINAVIAN	FINNICI	RUSSO-BALCANICI
Sinti	Kalé	Romanicéls	Tattare	Kaale	Polska
Manouches		Kale			Xaladitka
					Lotfitka
					Sibirska

## 2.2

### From the second half of the sixteenth century to World War II

In the second half of the sixteenth century, the large flows which had driven the Romani populations into Europe ceased. With few exceptions, there were no substantial movements for two centuries. At the time of their arrival in Europe, Romani populations were tolerated and welcomed by local populations; however, there was then a dramatic change in the relationships with the host peoples.

After the decline of the ascetic-charitable idealism of Early Christianity, in Europe, the construct of the culturally alien started to emerge, paving the way for modern racism.

Below is a list of some events to illustrate the **emerging of anti-gypsyism**:

- the decree issued by King Ferdinand of Aragon in 1492 condemned to exile the Romani populations, as well as Moors and Jews, living in the Kingdom of Spain;
- in 1500, the Diet of the Holy Roman Empire in decline accused the Romani populations of spying for the Turks, trying – unsuccessfully – to expel them from all Germanic territories;
- Christian churches, in the same way as Muslim Imams, kept Romani populations outside religious communities, even forbidding them from entering places of worship and threatening with excommunication or expulsion anyone who welcomed or helped them. This explains why, even though many of them are fervent Christians or Muslims, they prefer to worship independently of any religious or ecclesiastical authority;
- Between 1400 and 1660, in many countries of Eastern Europe (Romania, Russia, Bessarabia, Wallachia) Romani populations were taken slave (in

1654 Basil Lupul, prince of Moldova, drafted a code to regulate treatment and ownership of Roma slaves).

With Enlightenment theories, from the second half of the eighteenth century, some European monarchies chose new policies, with a tendency to assimilate, through coercion, the Roma with local populations. Forced sedentariness and mandatory abandoning of their habits and customs were the basis of the measures taken by Empress Maria Theresa of Austria, Federico II of Prussia and the Empress Catherine of Russia.

Similar vexations forced the Roma to curtail movements and to settle in limited regions. These measures, however, did not erase their identity, but they rather encouraged the formation of several ethno-linguistic groups, which still constitute the most ancient layer of Romani settlements in each European nation.

Naturalised Roma were named after the region that welcomed them: Sinti in Lombardy and Piedmont; Taic or Gackane Sinti (in Germany), Estrexaria Sinti (in Austria), Roma in Abruzzi, Harvati Roma (in Croatia), Rumungri (in Hungary), Slovensko Roma (in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia), Bergitka Roma (in Poland), Tattaren (in Sweden), Russka Roma (in Russia), Sibirska Rom (in Siberia), Lotvka Rom (in Lithuania), etc.

They were naturalised but still Roma, to the extent of becoming the first victims of Porajmos, the tragic persecution by Nazis and Fascists in the twentieth century.

## 2.3 The Porajmos

Porajmos, which literally means “being swallowed”, “huge devouring” or “devastation”, is the term in the Romani language used by Roma and Sinti to define **the racial persecution by Nazis and Fascists in Europe between 1934 and 1945**.

This is actually a very recent word: it was introduced, in the middle of the 1990s, by the Roma scholar and activist Ian Hancock, from a Romanichals family.

This murderous plan is also referred to, by the Roma and Sinti, using the word **Samudaripen**, which literally means “all killed”. The estimate of victims ranges between 220,000 and 500,000, accounting for about 25% of the whole Roma population settled in Europe between the two world wars. In other words, one Roma out of four who were alive before World War II fell victim to Nazi and Fascist persecutions.

In **Italy**, the word Porajmos is used with reference to the persecution

suffered by Sinti and Roma minorities during the Fascist period. Starting from the 1920s, there was a gradual radicalisation of the Fascist policy; four reference periods can be outlined:

- 1922-1938: rejections and forced removals of Roma and Sinti (or people presumed to be so) from the Italian territory;
- 1938-1940: ethnic cleansing ordered against all Sinti and Roma present in border regions, with their confinement in Sardinia;
- 1940-1943: order to arrest all Roma and Sinti (both Italian and foreign nationals) with the creation of specific Fascist concentration camps reserved for them in the Italian territory;
- 1943-1945: arrest of Sinti and Roma persons (both Italian and foreign nationals) by the Repubblica Sociale Italiana militia and their deporting to Nazi concentration camps.

In **Germany**, from 1933, civil rights were denied to Roma and Sinti persons, who were considered “repeat offenders and socially deviant”. The idea underlying the Roma genocide was to avoid “contamination of the pure Aryan race” with foreign blood. Roma and Sinti were actually regarded by Nazis as foreigners in Europe, due to their Asian origins. There was an escalation of official administrative actions in this regard, leading to extermination in concentration camps. In 1933 a law was passed to legalise eugenic sterilisation by injection or castration. In 1934 two laws passed in Nurnberg prohibited mixed marriages between Germans and Jewish, black or Roma persons. In March 1938, Roma and Sinti were denied the right to vote. The first official public statement including a reference to the final solution of the Roma question was expressed by Himmler who, in the same year, ordered to move the Office for “Gypsy affairs” from Munich to Berlin, centralising it.

The week between the 12th and 18th of June 1938 was intended for “gypsy epuration”, with hundreds of Roma and Sinti arrested and incarcerated throughout Germany and Austria. After the 4th of September, Roma and Sinti children were banned from attending schools. Roma and Sinti persons were incarcerated, because they were regarded as an intrinsic threat due to their “genetic line”, which made them a potential hazard for Aryan safety. This meant that they could be arrested regardless of having committed a criminal offence or not.

The first action directly related to genocide took place in January or February 1940, when 250 Roma children in the concentration camp at Buchenwald were used to test the Zyklon B gas, which was then used for mass killings in Auschwitz-Birkenau. During that year, Nazi Wetzell and Hecht statisticians estimated that “more than 100,000 Roma” had been

expected to be transferred to Poland, and were actually deported there between the 15th and 18th of May.

On the 16th of December 1942, Heinrich Himmler ordered the deportation of any Roma and Sinti living in Germany to the Auschwitz concentration camp. That is how “the final solution” started.

The **2nd of August 1944** is a symbolic date in Roma and Sinti history: it is when the Zigeunerlager (the Birkenau-Auschwitz camp section where Roma and Sinti families were detained) was liquidated. This section was supposed to be emptied on the 16th of May to make room for Jews deported from Hungary. On that date, the SS had surrounded the Zigeunerlager and, when the approximately 7,000 Roma and Sinti held there were ordered to leave, they had refused. This rebellion, the only one in a Nazi concentration camp, became a resistance symbol for Romani people, forcing the SS to avoid a clash. On the 2nd of August, however, 918 men were transferred to Buchenwald and 790 women to Ravensbrück. During the night, the last 4,300 survivors, according to the latest research, were killed in gas chambers. Italian Jews who witnessed that massacre said that silence suddenly fell in the lager.

Today **the victims of Porajmos are estimated at 500,000**. This is an approximated estimate of the genocide of Roma and Sinti, because it does not include the tens of thousands of men, women and children killed on the streets of territories occupied by Nazis, especially in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union. This, however, is a page in history which is seldom mentioned.

There is no mention of Porajmos even in Law no. 211 of 20th July 2000, which established the Memorial Day to be celebrated every 27th of January (being the day on which the Soviet Army entered the concentration camp of Auschwitz in 1945). This celebration was meant to commemorate the Jewish people extermination (Shoa), the racial laws, the persecution in Italy, any Italian who suffered political deportation, military incarceration and death. Therefore, in order to commemorate the Roma and Sinti victims of the Nazi-Fascist genocide, it was necessary to choose another date. The international agreement for **the European Holocaust Memorial Day for Sinti and Roma** selected the 2nd of August as memorial date of the killing of about 4,000 Roma and Sinti in the Birkenau-Auschwitz camp.

Celebrating the Porajmos is a step forward in terms of becoming acquainted with the fierce persecution, with the aim of ethnic cleansing, perpetrated by Nazis and Fascists and, more in general, of the discriminations Roma peoples have been victims of for many years.

### 3. THE ROMANI LANGUAGE

Romanés or romani chib, the language of Roma, is the travel language of a nomadic people which developed on the roads of India first, then in the middle East, and finally in Europe, and which changed after each new contact with the various local realities.

It was only during the second half of the 18th century that people realised that the Roma spoke a language of their own. This intuition was due to Stefano Valyi, a Hungarian student of theology at the University of Leiden in The Netherlands. The news – it was actually not a scientific discovery but rather a curiosity – was published in the Vienna Gazette in November 1763. In 1782 Johann Carl Christoph Rüdiger, a German professor at the University of Halle, published an article called “Von der Sprache und Herkunft der Zigeuner aus Indien” (The language and origin of Roma and Sinti from India) in a scientific journal.

In 1783 the German scholar Heinrich Moritz Gottlieb Grellmann published the text “Die Zigeuner. Ein historischer Versuch über die Lebensart und Verfassung, Sitten und Schicksale dieses Volkes in Europa, nebst ihrem Ursprünge” (Gypsies: a historical survey of the way of living and constitution, customs and fate of this people in Europe, as well as its origins). In this book he demonstrated the Indian origin of the Roma, combining language analysis with a historical overview and a description of their customs.

The Roma and Sinti have always been extremely diffident with regard to the gadjos (i.e. the non-Roma), which is why, in the past, they have tried to keep their language a “secret”.

As a matter of fact, Romanes is the main factor of unity and identity of Roma and Sinti peoples, an instrument for internal cohesion and a way of protecting themselves against the hostile world of the gadjos: “*Maskar gadjo leskeri chib hili Romeskeri zaralipe*”, meaning that “among the gadjos, language is the real strength of the Roma”.

In the eighteenth century, the assimilation policies of Charles III in Spain and of Maria Theresa in Austria saw in the prohibition of using their own language a fundamental instrument in the plan for their ethnic annihilation. The German Roma and Sinti have never forgotten that, during the Nazi regime, Robert Ritter and Eva Justin tried to learn to speak Romani to facilitate access to their communities and deport them to concentration camps. Starting in the 1960s, a new awareness of national conscience started to develop, fostered by the need to affirm their culture and, as a consequence, to harness their language.

As a result, there was an outstanding production of books on language and grammar, of dictionaries, of conversation handbooks, in particular by Roma activists and intellectuals. It is fair to say that every ethnic-linguistic group (at least one hundred in total) has its own grammar and vocabulary.

The Romani language activity is expressed through an extraordinary prac-

tice involving the translation of the greatest masterpieces of European and world literature into the various Roma dialects: for example the myth of Gilgamesh, the Iliad, the Odyssey, Aesop's Fables, parts of Dante's Divine Comedy, Medea by Euripides, Shakespeare's Hamlet, the Gypsy Ballads by Federico García Lorca and, of course, the Indian poem of Ramayana, as well as children literature, including for example "O tikno princo" (The Little Prince) by Saint-Exupéry and many others. In this regard, although with the added value of religious apostolate, it is worth mentioning the numerous translations of the Bible or parts of it, by a number of Roma and gadjo scholars.

In 1836 the Gospel of Luke was translated into a Sinti dialect by C. Frenkel, a German seminary student from Friedrichslohra in Thuringia.

In 2005 the complete translation of the Koran was published, while its first full translation into the kalderas dialect dates to 2008.

This noble and very ancient Indo-European language (phuraní i patjivalí) is spoken by more than 15 million people worldwide, by about 12 million in Europe and by approximately 180,000 in Italy where, unfortunately, it has no legal recognition.

### 3.1 Historical overview

The history of the Romani language can be divided into three phases:

1. **Antiquity**, when all Roma belonged to the same population and spoke the same language (from India to the Byzantine Empire);
2. **the modern age**, when, following the Balkan diaspora, a large number of ethno-linguistic groups were formed with diversified cultural and linguistic characteristics;
3. **the contemporary age**, when the Roma - being aware of their ethnic, cultural and language unity - initiated a unification and standardisation movement of their language.

#### 3.1.1 The original Romani language from India to the Greek-Byzantine territories

The history of the Roma started over one thousand years ago in the Indian region. They spoke a language, known today as Romani, whose original substratum is connected to the ancient Indo-Aryan spoken by European invaders of India.

Other language layers later overlapped on this basic substratum, derived from several dialects from various geographical areas throughout India:

- Hindi in Rajasthan;

- Dardic languages in Panjab and Kashmir;
- Sindhi;
- Awadhi;
- Braj in Uttar Pradesh

India served the function of shaping the cultural heritage and basic language substratum. A corpus of about 700 terms constitutes the common part of current Roma dialects.

Words indicating the following are of Indian origin:

#### Body parts

*nakh* (nose), *khan* (ear), *jakh* (eye), *vast* (hand), *muj* (mouth);

#### Family connections

*dat* (father), *daj* (mother), *phral* (brother), *phen* (sister), *chavo* (son);

#### Common animals

*balo* (pig), *ciriklo* (bird), *guruv* (ox); *bakri* (sheep);

#### Weather elements

*kham* (sun), *brišin* (rain), *barval* (wind), *jiv* (snow);

#### Food

*pani* (water), *maro* (bread), *mol* (wine), *kiral* (cheese), *mas* (meat);

#### Everyday actions

*xa* (eat), *pi* (drink), *ga* (go), *sov* (sleep), *merav* (die);

#### Numbers

*jek* (one), *duj* (two), *trin* (three), *štar* (four), *pang* (five), *šov* (six), etc.

In Persia, the second Roma aggregation hub, the Romani language acquired new phonetic and lexical elements which were added to the already varied Indian linguistic legacy.

From a phonetic standpoint the sound z, not known in Indo-Aryan languages, was added to some words borrowed from Iranian, such as *zor* (strength), *zen* (saddle), *zet* (oil), *buzno* (he-goat).

More than one hundred words were added to the lexis, including:

*gukel* (meat), *kermo* (worm), *pušum* (flea), *ambrol* (pear), *angustrí* (ring), *veš* (forest), *phur* (bridge), *parumél* (butterfly), *bezeh* (sin), *armán* (curse, swearing), *dusman* (enemy, evil man), *khangeri* (church), *baxt* (luck), to mention but a few.

Also the **Armenian language** strongly influenced Romani.

The main phonetic innovation was the devoicing of **aspirated voiced consonants** such as gh, dh, bh. Examples of this are *kham* (sun); *thuv* (smoke); *phen* (sister).

Approximately forty words of Armenian, Curd or Ossetian origin were added to Romani in the following areas:

#### Family connections

*bori* (daughter in law), *xanamik* (daughter in law);

#### Transport

*vurdon* (caravan), *grašt* (horse), *goro* (mule);

#### Clothing

*holevjá* (trousers), *tali* (jacket), *kocak* (button);

#### Food

*dudum* (pumpkin, melon), *xomer* (pasta);

#### Metallurgy

*bov* (kiln, furnace), *arcic* (zinc, tin), *tover* (axe);

#### Magic and religion

*vogi* (soul), *Patragi* (Easter), *momeli* (candle), *cokani* (witch).

The **influence of the Greek-Byzantine** language on Romani was huge, and it concerned not just several innovative aspects, because it covered the whole phonetic, grammatical and lexical system. In phonetics, the most significant phenomenon was the shift of the **cerebral > r**, which meant that all those who called themselves Doma until then, were then known as Rrom or Rom.

The **sound f**, unknown until then, was introduced through loans from Greek, including *foro* (city), *lišin* (castle), etc...

The lexis of **Greek** origin includes more than two hundred words, which have become part of all European dialects:

*drom* (road), *kokalo* (bone), *coxa* (skirt), *zumin* (soup), *kurko* (party), *talassi* (wave), apart from words related to metallurgy, for example *xarxúma* (copper), *molivi* (lead), *amoni* (anvil), *sviri* (hammer), *karfi* (nail), *klidí* (key), *kakávi* (cauldron), *pétalo* (horseshoe); the numbers, etc.

Greece is where the Romani language conventionally originated.

All of the earlier language elements, from India and the Middle East, merged

harmoniously into a new Romani, to which the Greek structuring gave homogeneity and unity.

This is what constitutes the common linguistic legacy, which is commonly referred to as original Romani. This common original background is found, more or less unaltered, in all dialects which subsequently originated from the Balkan diaspora.

The only differences are of a phonetic type and concern exclusively the aspect of pronunciation.

A paradigmatic example is the **word \*dives (day)**, which was originally in common among all Roma, while today it can be found in many dialectal variants: *dives*, *diveh*, *dive*, *devesë*, *dí*, *gives*, *giveh*, *ges*, *gis*, *ges*, *zis* to mention but a few.

This is, in actual fact, a noteworthy characteristic because it constitutes one – possibly the main – marker of dialectal differences, thus constituting a formidable clue which can help identify a specific dialect.

Between 1350 and 1500 **the Turkish expansion in the Greek-Balkan area caused a real diaspora of the Romani people**. The Romani dialect ended up being contaminated by the Balkan diaspora leading to the **formation of European ethno-linguistic groups**.

The division into the two mega-groups known as “Vlax Roma” and “non-Vlax Roma” corresponds, on a language level, to the origin of two linguistic superstrata:

- the ‘O’ superstratum (non-Vlax Roma)
- the ‘E’ superstratum (Vlax Roma)

thus defined respectively by the -o and -e vocalism in the first person singular of the present indicative of the verb to be *som/sem* (I am) and of the past indicative of verbs *phirdóm/phirdém* (I have walked).

Over and above any apparent fragmentation, the **Vlax-Roma** constitute a culturally and linguistically highly homogeneous mega-group characterised, from a language perspective, by the strong influence of the Romanian language.

Within the non-Vlax group, the **Southern Balkan Roma** make up the most archaic and conservative group, that is to say the one closest to the original Romani language, influenced by Turkish in several of its dialects. The **Carpathian-Danube group** is characterised by a Hungarian influence in its language. Within the **Western-European group**, the Sinti and Manouches speak different dialects, all of them – however – influenced by German. The Kalè speak kalò, a para-Romani dialect with a limited Romani lexicon and a Spanish grammatical structure. The Romanicels speak Anglo-Romani, a sort of mixed jargon consisting of a Roma lexis, phonetically anglicised, but declined into English grammatical and syntactic structures. The Tattare

speak a Scando-Romani dialect, by now reduced to a jargon. The Kaale speak kalò-finés which includes loanwords from German, Swedish elements and a substantial Finnish contribution. The central-southern Italic groups, finally, speak a very archaic Romani, strongly influenced by regional dialects, which make it unintelligible by other Roma persons.

### 3.1.2 Standardising or codifying the Romani language

The language unity which – as we have seen – characterised Roma culture in the Greek-Byzantine area and which was broken down after the diaspora, today has become an objective to be achieved. The current instances to which Roma are called with national and international associations, the movements claiming their rights, the development of a written Romani literature, have all led to urgently feeling a need for standardisation of the Romani language, that is to say the establishing of a common language which can go beyond dialectal fragmentation.

This is a fundamentally important aspect, not just or not merely for communication purposes. The language pluralism of Roma, in itself, does not hinder mutual communication. Roma persons, even though they belong to different language groups (apart from exceptional cases) can communicate one with the other because most of them are familiar with the others' dialectal variants. There are mainly political and cultural factors behind this.

The Roma need a single, national official language. They need a Romani which is the language of the Roma people (rather than the Romani variants spoken in Roma communities): an instrument both for domestic unity and identity and for wider political-cultural recognition outside.

There are currently three main alphabets:

1. the alphabet created by Marcel Courthiade and officially adopted by the International Romani Union (IV World Romano Kongreso Roma Conference in April 1990 in Warsaw);
2. the anglicised alphabet;
3. the Pan-Vlax alphabet, according to Ian Hancock's definition.

The first step towards the creation of a single official national language would be the creation of a unified and standardised writing system, a single and shared Romani alphabet.

## 4. THE ROMANI KRISS

One of the fundamental and distinctive – as well as best preserved – expressions of Romani culture is the kris (aka kriss or romani kriss) which means, at the same time, tribunal, moral standards and a legal system regulating every aspect of social life. In the Romani communities, where kris is still in force, it becomes binding and defines the rights and duties of its own members. The Romani kriss is also a set of laws expressed through unwritten customs and habits as well as through moral codes dictated by the phure (aka rom pativale or pativaleroma), that is to say, those men who enjoy great prestige and consideration within their community.

The kriss is one of the most important eastern legacies in Romani cultural cosmology. The preservation of this ancient institution is expressed in quite a number of forms within the various communities and, in some cases, it may be known by another name, using a word from the local dialect. Nevertheless, its functions remain unvaried: regulating relationships within one social group, on the one hand, and cultural defence system in respect of the outside world, on the other. This institution is at the same time legal, social and cultural. It has managed to survive through the ages and in all circumstances within such a paradigmatic population as the Romani. The romani kriss is more than a legal system: it is also an expression of ethnic belonging and, at the same time, a clear intention to accept and share specific moral rules.

One of the main functions of the kriss is self-protection and to prevent assimilation with mainstream society. This need to establish rules for themselves, as safeguard from the outside world in order not to be supplanted, has allowed the Romani population to preserve its *romanipè* (identity).

The romani kriss has its own rules and procedures, which are guaranteed by the elders in the group and by its most influential members. The possible sanctions, systems and mechanisms to assess the seriousness of any offence and the krisnitori (judges) differ depending on the communities. The compensation for the injured party, as regards the most serious penalties, may involve the guilty person being sent away from the group or having to pay substantial sums of money. To sum up, the sanctions vary depending on the seriousness of the offences, on the customs and habits of a specific community and on the judging board. Each Romani community is independent, active and dynamic in the choice of the rules to apply for each dispute or collective life situation, because each community has its own set of moral rules. This set of laws characterises each individual community and automatically excludes the members of others who do not acknowledge the latter.

## 5. ANTI-GYPSYISM: ORIGIN AND DIFFUSION



*“In the case of Gypsies, the age of criminal responsibility should start on the day they are born, because being born is actually their worst crime”*

**Miroslaw Sladek**

(politician from the Czech Republic)

*“Anti-gypsyism is a particularly persistent, violent, recurrent and commonplace form of racism, [...] it is a specific form of racism, an ideology founded on racial superiority, a form of de-humanisation and institutional racism nurtured by historical discrimination, which is expressed – among others – through violence, hate speech, exploitation, stigmatisation and through the most blatant forms of discrimination”.*

**ECRI**

European Commission  
against Racism and Intolerance

We are faced here with a specific form of racism which publicly reveals its face through episodes of violence, hate speech, exploitation and discrimination, but also through speeches and presentations by politicians and academics, housing and spatial segregation, widespread stigmatising and socio-economic exclusion.

This form of racism also includes a biological component and leads to de-humanising Roma persons, who are seen as morally unworthy of having human rights.

According to a research published in 2015 by the Pew Research Center, the Romani population is among the most hated ethnic minorities in Europe. **Italy appears to be the European country which hates Roma and Sinti the most, although these two groups have been present in our country since the 15th century.**

Here are some percentage data to show how serious the situation is: **86% of the Italian population hates Roma and Sinti persons**, followed by the French with 60%, the Poles with 48%, the British with 37%, the Spanish with 35% and the Germans with 34%.

Italians are by far the population which sees the Romani people most unfavourably, even though their presence in Italy ranks among the most limited in Europe.

**The Roma account for 0.25% of the Italian population, which means**

**approximately 180,000 people, of which less than 20,000 live in “travelling camps”.** Nevertheless it is mainly the misfits, those who live in the infamous settlements, who are most visible on the media and are considered as representing the whole complex Romani world which, in itself, is actually extremely multifaceted, the same as Italian society.

Since 2005, the European Parliament has been using the word anti-gypsyism in its reports and decisions, referring to anti-gypsyism as a deep-rooted cause of social exclusion and discrimination experienced by Roma and Sinti persons.

**STEREOTYPE > PREJUDICE > DISCRIMINATION**

- **Stereotype** is a mental shortcut to encapsulate persons or things within predetermined categories. It is a rigid, inflexible assessment referring to concepts which have never been learnt directly, but are mediated by common sense. It is associated with the cognitive part.

- **Prejudice** refers to any a priori negative assessment of a person or group. It is associated with the emotional element, creating interferences which facilitate acceptance or rejection.

- Stereotypes and prejudice lead to **discrimination**

Gli stereotipi diffusi sui ROM:

**THIEVES**

**NOMADS**

**LAYABOUTS**

**DIRTY**

**INTRINSICALLY  
TENDING TO CRIME,  
WHICH IS IN THEIR  
DNA**

**BEGGARS**

**CHILD SNATCHERS**

**SORCERERS**

**UNEDUCATED**

**ALWAYS INVOLVED  
IN ILLICIT  
ACTIVITIES**

Roma persons are indiscriminately associated with degradation, neglect, crime, community hazards, being unfit parents, socially inept, consciously rejecting rules, as well as having a “genetically” ingrained attitude to

delinquency and failure to integrate.

Just like any other stereotype, these concepts are indiscriminately applied to the fact of being Roma itself.

Discrimination against the Roma and Sinti/anti-gypsyism is a multifaceted phenomenon which seems to be widely accepted socially and politically. It is a fundamental hindrance to the inclusion of Roma and Sinti within mainstream society, as well as hindering the achievement of equal rights and opportunities and socio-economic involvement.



### HATE SPEECH

According to UNAR data, cases of discrimination against Roma and Sinti persons on social media and in social networks are extremely abundant, which makes the *Romani* minority one of the most vulnerable to hate speech online. In 2019, during just one month spent by UNAR analysing and monitoring hate speech contents, with regard to “*hate topic*” on Roma and Sinti persons, a total of 779 conversations/posts with potentially discriminatory contents were reported on major social media (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram). The most widely used hate words in these posts involve using the word “gypsy”, with a negative and disparaging connotation, when referring to Roma and Sinti persons, as well as the persistence of a stereotyped negative image whereby they are associated with all sorts of offences, most notably theft (the latter being the keyword appearing most frequently in a total of approximately 7,000 conversations where reference is made to Roma persons). One conclusion is that the fluid and dynamic world of the Internet and of social media confirms the following data: anti-gypsyism as a form of racism and intolerance is not limited to the most extremist and biased sections in our society. On the contrary, it seeps transversally among citizens (in urban or rural areas, regardless of age group, gender, income and class) and on a variety of discussion platforms.

## 6. INSTRUMENTS TO FACILITATE SOCIO-ECONOMIC INCLUSION OF THE ROMA AND SINTI WITHIN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

### 6.1

#### Regularizing the position of those who are not nationals yet

*In order to enable appropriate actions, which are aimed at full inclusion, it is essential - first and foremost - to start from the issue of identity documents and of the regularity of stay permits* (which is essential in order to get a job, to have a registered permanent address and access to services).

There are two important steps to start from:

1. Identifying the country of nationality and acquiring the relevant document issued by the proper foreign authorities (passport or identity card of a EU country);
2. defining the regulations applicable to the person's stay.

There are three possible scenarios in this regard:

1. Citizens of non-EU countries
2. Citizens of EU countries
3. Stateless persons

#### 6.1.1

##### Citizens of non-EU countries

The Stay Permit for citizens of non-EU countries is issued by the Questura police office; there are two possible pathways for acquiring nationality:

1. issuing of a Stay Permit for family reasons, if living with a spouse or relatives of Italian citizens up the second degree (parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren, brothers and sisters, also unilateral), because these persons cannot be expelled from the country (pursuant to Art. 19 (2) Legislative Decree 286/98 and Art. 28 DPR-Presidential Decree 394/99)
2. issuing of a Stay Permit for family reasons as parent who is not living with an Italian minor, unless they have been denied parental authority (Art. 30 (2)(d) Consolidated Law on Immigration)

The limits for issuing a stay permit to citizens of non-EU countries are related to:

- possession of a passport (required by most Questura police offices)
- assessing whether the person constitutes a threat to society.

The types of Stay Permits which may be issued are temporary and they are divided into the following categories:

- **Stay Permit for pregnant women** (up to six months after childbirth), extended to the husband living with the pregnant woman or – if the child is already born – to the father, even if the parents are not married (Art. 19 (2)(D) Consolidated Law on Immigration);
- **Stay Permit for medical care (Art. 19 (2)(d-bis) Consolidated Law on Immigration):** *foreigners suffering from serious psycho-physical conditions or affected by serious pathologies (ascertained based on the relevant paperwork issued by a public health facility or by a doctor registered with the National Health Service), which could seriously prejudice the health of the persons in question, if the latter were to return to the country where they were born or come from. In these cases, the Questore issues a stay permit for medical care, for the duration mentioned in the relevant health certificate, in any case for no more than one year, renewable as long as the duly certified conditions of the earlier period persist, valid only in the country and with the possibility of being converted into a stay permit for work reasons;*
- **Stay Permit for “child assistance” issued by the Family Court pursuant to Art. 31 (3) Lgs. Decree 286/98:** *“The Family Court, if there are serious reasons associated with the psycho-physical development, and taking into account the age and health condition of a child resident in the Italian territory, may allow the family member to enter or stay in the country, for a specified length of time, possibly derogating from other provisions in this consolidated legal text. The said authorisation is revoked if the reasons which have led to its issuing no longer apply, or if the family member’s activities should be considered incompatible with the child’s needs or with staying in Italy”.* This type of document makes it possible to work and can be converted into a stay permit for work reasons.

It is important to note that it is possible to convert the stay permit (if allowed) into a permit for work reasons.

This can be done provided that the following conditions are met:

- employment contract or getting a VAT code;
- passport;
- no prior criminal records (Art. 4 (3)).

No foreigners are allowed into Italy if they have been sentenced, even if

the judgement is not final, including instances of out-of-court settlement, for any crime mentioned in Article 380, (1) and (2), of the Code of Penal Procedure, i.e. those related to narcotics, sexual freedom, facilitating illegal immigration into Italy or illegal migration to other countries, or for crimes connected to recruiting people for prostitution, exploiting prostitution, or using children for illicit activities. Foreigners are not allowed into Italy also if they have been sentenced, with an irrevocable judgement, for one of the offences associated with violating copyright.

Article 380 of the Code of Penal Procedure (CPP) refers to:

- e) any theft-related crime with the aggravating circumstances mentioned in Article 4 of Law 8th August 1977, no. 533, or any of the aggravating circumstances mentioned in Article 625 (1), sections 2), first instance, 3) and 5), as well as 7 bis) of the Penal Code (if the guilty party inflicts violence on things; if the guilty party bears arms or narcotics without using them; if the crime is committed by three or more persons; if the crime is committed on metal components or other materials stolen from infrastructures intended for the delivery of power, transport services, telecommunications or other public utilities, managed both by public entities or private individuals through a public concession), unless – in the latter cases – the mitigating factor can be applied according to Article 62 (1)(4), of the Penal code (6);
- e-bis) any theft-related crime mentioned in Article 624 bis of the Penal Code (theft with breaking and entering or bag-snatching);
- f) any robbery-related crime mentioned in Article 628 of the Penal Code, and extortion according to Article 629 of the Penal Code;
- f-bis) receiving and handling stolen goods, with the aggravating circumstances mentioned in Article 648 (1) (2) of the Penal Code.

Another limit to a Stay Permit being issued is being a person who is considered dangerous (pursuant to Art. 13 (2)(C) – Lgs. Decree 286/98) or who belongs to one of the categories listed in Articles 1, 4 and 16 of Legislative Decree 6th September 2011, no. 159:

- a. anyone who, on the basis of factual elements, can be regarded as habitually engaging in criminal trafficking;
- b. anyone who, considering their behaviour and lifestyle, could be considered – based on factual elements – as living, even in part, using proceeds from criminal activities;
- c. anyone who, considering their behaviour, could be considered – based on factual elements – as being engaged in committing offences which could damage or jeopardise the physical or moral integrity of minors,

health, safety or disturbing the peace.

Another possibility for **becoming regularised Italian nationals can be to acquire citizenship by birth**. In order to do this, one of the following conditions needs to be met:

- being the son/daughter of Italian nationals;
- having been adopted by an Italian citizen while still a minor;
- being born in Italy and son/daughter of stateless persons;
- being born in Italy and having lived there until coming of age (Art. 4 (2) Law 91/92): *“Any foreigner born in Italy, who has resided there legally without interruptions until coming of age, can become a national if they declare that they wish to acquire Italian citizenship within one year from the said date”*.

An important reference in this regard is Art. 33 of Law Decree no. 69 of 21.06.2013, converted into Law no. 98 of 2013: *“any foreigner or stateless person, born on Italian soil, wishing to acquire Italian citizenship shall not be held responsible for any failures attributable to their parents or to Public Administration offices. More specifically, any person concerned can show possession of the relevant requirements by submitting the appropriate paperwork, for example school or medical certificates, attesting to their having resided in Italy since they were born”*.

### 6.1.2 Citizens of EU countries

All citizens of the European Union are entitled to travel into and stay in Italy or in another Member State, different from the one of which they are nationals, following different procedures, depending on whether they are staying for a period of time longer or shorter than three months.

The said right to travel and stay can be limited only for reasons related to public order and safety in the country, as well as for imperative reasons of public safety.

In these instances, a removal measure can be adopted, which can be issued also by terminating the conditions which allow for the right to stay in the country.

Similar provisions also apply to family members who may be accompanying or joining the EU citizens, most notably:

- a spouse;
- anyone who has registered a civil-law partnership with the European Union citizen, based on the legislation of a Member State, which the hosting

Member State considers the same as marriage;

- direct offspring who are younger than 21 or dependant, and those of the spouse or partner;
- dependent parents or grandparents, and those of the spouse or partner.

Moreover, notwithstanding the right to free movement and stay of the person concerned, according to national regulations, the transfer and stay of the following persons is facilitated by law:

- any other family member, regardless of their citizenship, if they are dependent or live together, in the country of origin, with the EU citizen entitled to the main stay permit, or if serious health reasons make it necessary for the said EU citizen to assist them personally;
- anyone who is in a registered civil-law partnership with the EU citizen, as duly attested by official papers.

European Union citizens are entitled to stay in the country **for a period of no more than three months** without being subject to any specific condition or formality, other than possession of an identity document valid for travelling abroad.

Also foreign family members of a European Union citizen are allowed to travel and stay in Italy without any specific formality; however, they need to have a valid passport, or – if applicable – an entry visa, unless they already have a valid “stay permit for a family member of a European Union citizen”.

Any European Union citizen is entitled to stay in Italy for more than three months, under the following conditions:

- they should be employed or free-lance workers in the country;
- they should prove that they have economic resources available, for them and their family members, allowing not to be dependent on social welfare from the Government during their stay, as well as a health insurance, or any equivalent coverage against all risks throughout the country;
- they should be registered with a state-run or legally recognised private school to follow a course of studies or professional training, and have economic resources available, for them and their family members, allowing not to be dependent on social welfare from the Government during their stay, as well as a health insurance, or any equivalent coverage against all risks throughout the country;
- they should be a family member who accompanies or joins a European Union citizen entitled to stay for more than three months.

The European Union citizen or their family member, depending on the length of their stay, can register their presence in the country with a police office. If the person concerned has not signed the statement in person, it is assumed that they have been staying for more than three months, unless there is evidence to the contrary.

As a consequence, the said person:

- if they are planning to stay for less than three months, they are not obliged to register their presence, because the right to stay for less than three months can be exercised without any formality;
- if no such statement has been signed, they are in any case allowed to prove that they have been in Italy for less than three months;
- failing such evidence, it is assumed they have been in the country longer than three months;
- for a statement of residence in the country, they should fill out the relevant paperwork;
- if they plan to stay longer than three months, they just need to apply with the registry office.

Any European Union citizen who intends to stay in Italy for longer than three months needs to apply to the Registry Office in their municipality of residence.

For the said registration, apart from the documentations required for Italian nationals, they need to submit paperwork attesting to the following:

- if they are staying for work reasons: their profession;
- if they are not working, during their stay, or if they are staying for study or training reasons: they should prove that they have sufficient economic resources for their stay, based on the annual amount of benefits received in respect of the number of dependent family members, possibly through a self-certification; they should be holders of a health insurance policy to cover health expenses; if they are staying for study reasons, they need to have papers showing that they are enrolled in a state-run or legally recognised private school;
- in the case of a family member of a citizen of a EU Member State, who is not however independently entitled to stay: they should have papers proving that they are a family member or a dependent relative (self-certification is also possible).

The Municipality issues a certificate to the person concerned attesting that an application has been lodged with the Registry Office.

Any family members of the EU citizen who do not have an independent

right to stay in the country shall submit:

- a valid proof of identity or passport, as well as an entry visa, if the latter is required;
- a document attesting to their position as family members and, if required, as dependent relative;
- the application with the Registry Office by the family member who is a EU citizen.

Any EU citizens who have applied for a stay permit before the 1st April 2007 may apply to the Registry Office with the receipt issued by the Questura or by Poste Italiane and with a self-certification of the requirements, according to the new regulations.

Any citizen of the EU who has stayed legally and continuously in the country for five years acquires **the right to permanent stay**.

Following a request by the person concerned, the Municipality of residence issues a certificate attesting to that position.

A foreign family member of the EU citizen acquires the right to permanent stay in the country if they have lived together legally and continuously for five years; in this case they may apply for a permanent stay permit.

The right to permanent stay is forfeited in any case if the person is away from the country for more than two years consecutively.

The right to permanent stay can be acquired by EU citizens, and by their respective family members, in the case of self-employed workers or employees, earlier than the ordinary term of five years, under specific circumstances such as retirements, inability to work on a permanent basis, working in another Member State.

The application for a permanent stay permit may be addressed directly to the person's local Questura (Police Headquarters). As an alternative, it is possible to send the application from a post office, using the relevant form, filled out by the person concerned, or asking the municipality or any patronato (aid office) to compile the paperwork, which shall be sent, in any case, via the said post offices.

### **6.1.3 Stateless persons**

The position of a person who is considered **STATELESS** is very different. The definition of the latter is "*a person who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law*" (Art. 1 of the New York Convention of 28th September 1954 relating to the status of stateless persons, ratified

and executed in Italy with Law 1st February 1962, no. 306).

Mention is made of original or subsequent statelessness, respectively when someone has been stateless since birth, or when they have lost their previous nationality without owning or acquiring the citizenship of another country, of their own free will or following an action by the proper public authorities.

Recognition of Statelessness can be either an administrative or a judicial procedure.

Pending conclusion of the proceedings, a permit is issued for “pending recognition as stateless person”, only if the applicant already had a Stay Permit. Once the stateless person status has been acknowledged, a stateless person Stay Permit is issued (the stateless person, in any case, is considered a foreigner according to Art. 1 of Lgs. Decree 286/98).

## 6.2 The non-discrimination principle

The Romani population is the most numerous ethnic-linguistic minority in Europe, but it is also the most discriminated. And yet the non-discrimination principle is extensively mentioned in several Italian and foreign conventions and regulations. At international level, these include the following:

1. Universal Statement of Human Rights, adopted on 10th December 1948 by the General Assembly of the United Nations.
2. European Convention for the safeguarding of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), drafted and adopted by the Council of Europe, signed in Rome on 4th November 1950, which entered into force on 3rd September 1953 (in Italy on 10th October 1955).
3. Additional Protocol no. 12 to ECHR, adopted by the Council of Europe on 4th November 2000, which entered into force on 1st April 2005.
4. International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 21st December 1965, which entered into force on 4th January 1969.
5. The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, also known as Charter of Nice, which entered into force with the Treaty of Lisbon on 1st December 2009.

As regards Italian regulations, a fundamental role with regard to equal treatment is defined in Art. 3 of the Constitution, which stipulates as follows: *“All citizens are equal in terms of social dignity and before the law, with no distinction of gender, race, language, religion, political opinions, individual*

*or social conditions. It is the task of the Republic to remove any hindrances of an economic or social nature which – by limiting de facto the equality and freedom of citizens – prevent the full development of their human personality, as well as the active involvement of all workers in the country’s political, economic and social organisation”.*

In terms of ordinary legislation, Legislative Decree 25th July 1998, no. 286 (Consolidated Law on Immigration) is a real milestone on the matter. Its purpose is to regulate immigration and introduce standards on a foreign person’s conditions for entering the country, staying there, as well as on the procedures for issuing a stay permit and for the removal from the country of any foreign national who is staying in the country illegally.

The general non-discrimination clause is contained in Art. 43 (1) Lgs. D. 286/98, where discrimination is defined as *“any action which – directly or indirectly – is leading to a separation, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, skin colour, parentage, national or ethnic origin, personal beliefs and religious practices, and whose purpose or effect is to destroy or jeopardise the recognition, enjoyment or exercise – under equal conditions – of one’s human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social and cultural fields, as well as in any other sphere of public life”.*

Art. 44 of the Consolidated Law also provides for what is known as special civil action against racial discrimination, subsequently implemented and expanded through legislative decrees 215/2003 and 216/2003, implementing Directives 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC respectively.

As already mentioned, these decrees play a central role in terms of anti-discrimination law, having given new fundamental impulse to the acknowledgement and development of the non-discrimination principle.

Legislative Decree 215/2003, implementing and expanding the provisions of Art. 44 of the Consolidated Law on Immigration, also provides for a specific civil action against discrimination, which can be started by anyone who considers they have been affected by a discriminatory action, regardless of whether by private individuals or by the public administration. A complaint needs to be lodged with the clerk’s office of the Court with jurisdiction over the municipality where the applicant resides; it also attenuates the burden of the proof on the part of anyone considering themselves victims of the said discriminatory action, who can also use statistical data.

Legislative Decree 216/2003, implementing Directive 2000/78/EC, aims at establishing equal treatment among individuals, regardless of religious affiliation, personal beliefs, disabilities, age and sexual orientation, in terms of employment and working conditions. The decree expressly refers to the concepts of direct or indirect discrimination, harassment and order to discriminate already mentioned in Legislative Decree 215 of 2003, specifically in respect of the instrument for judicial protection against discrimination.

## 6.2.1 Victim protection in Italy

On 10th July 2014 the Italian National Forensic Board approved the regulation regarding the solidarity fund for judicial protection of victims of discrimination, thus implementing the agreement signed on 30th December 2013, establishing an institutional partnership between National Forensic Board and the National Office against Racial Discrimination (UNAR), in order to ensure the effectiveness of the constitutional right to protection in a particularly sensitive area such as discrimination. The Solidarity Fund allows for advances on legal expenses due for judicial or administrative proceedings by individuals/citizens who consider themselves victims of discriminatory actions.

The following categories are entitled to the benefits of the Fund:

- a. victims of discrimination by reason of race, ethnic origin, religion, personal beliefs, age, disabilities, sexual orientation and gender identity, pursuant to the regulations in force, who are not entitled to payment of legal assistance by the Government in a civil, administrative, accounting or tributary action, for failing to meet the conditions in Art. 76 of the Consolidated Law on court expenses, Presidential Decree 20th May 2002 no. 115 and Art. 92, in the case of a criminal court case;
- b. Trade Associations authorised to appear in court by Art. 5 of Legislative Decree 215/2003;
- c. Trade Unions, Associations and Organisations representing the right or interest which has been infringed according to Art. 5, Legislative Decree 216/2003;
- d. Associations and Organisations referred to in Art. 4, Law 67/2006.

### 6.2.1.1 The National Office against Racial Discrimination (UNAR)

UNAR is the section of the Equal Opportunities Department, appointed by the Presidency Office of the Council of Ministers, in charge of guaranteeing the right to equal treatment for everyone, regardless of ethnic or racial origin, age, religious creed, sexual orientation, gender identity, or being a person with disabilities.

The Office was established in 2003 (Lgs. D. no. 215/2003) following a Community Directive (no. 2000/43/EC), which stipulates that each Member State shall set up an organisation especially dedicated to counteracting any form of discrimination.

More specifically, UNAR deals with monitoring causes and situations related

to any type of discrimination, studying possible solutions, promoting a culture of respect of human rights and equal opportunities, providing concrete assistance to victims.

More specifically, UNAR deals with the following aspects:

- collecting reports and providing concrete assistance to victims of discrimination through its Contact Center (free phone 800901010);
- investigating possible discrimination phenomena, respecting the prerogatives of the judiciary authority;
- issuing recommendations and opinions with regard to the discrimination cases reported, possibly to be submitted in open court;
- carrying out studies, research and training activities on causes, forms and possible solutions in respect of any discriminatory actions;
- informing Parliament and Government by means of two annual reports regarding any progress and hindrances in respect of the anti-discrimination actions in Italy;
- promoting a culture based on respecting human rights and equal opportunities through awareness raising, communication campaigns, and positive action projects;
- drafting action strategy proposals targeted to specific discrimination areas, aimed at guaranteeing the effective social integration of the stakeholders.

Moreover, UNAR is the organisation in charge of drafting and monitoring the implementation of the **National Strategy for including Roma, Sinti and Caminanti (RSC)**, whose goal is to guide a concrete action to include Roma, Sinti and Caminanti, thus implementing the Communication of the European Commission no. 173 of 4th April 2011, where Member States were encouraged to draft national strategies to include the Romani population. The new National Strategy (2021-2030), currently under publication, is implementing the Recommendation of the Council of the European Union of 12th March 2021 (201/C 93/01). This Strategy has been drafted by UNAR, following a consultation process with civil society and with the associations active in the area of Roma and Sinti inclusion, which include the Association Community Pope John XXIII. The RSC and sector associations have joined forces in the Roma, Sinti and Caminanti National Platform, a branch of the European Roma Platform promoted by the European Union as an instrument for dialogue between UNAR, associations, central and local public administrations involved in the Strategy.

### 6.2.1.2 The Observatory for Safety against Discriminatory Actions (OSCAD)

OSCAD is part of the Department for Public Safety – Central Directorate of the Criminal Police; it has been set up in order to make it easier for persons belonging to minority groups to fully enjoy the right to equality before the law and protection against discrimination. More specifically, OSCAD:

- liaises with associations representing any interests jeopardised by various types of discrimination and with other public or private institutions, engaged in counteracting discriminations. More specifically, close contacts have been established with UNAR by signing, on 7th April 2011, an agreement protocol aimed at outlining the contents of the collaboration relationship between the two organisations, in order to optimise its process;
- receives reports of discriminatory actions, pertaining to the sphere of safety, from institutions, trade associations and individuals, in order to effectively monitor discriminatory actions by reason of ethnic or racial origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, disabilities, etc.
- enables, in the light of the reports received, targeted actions at local level, by the State Police and by Arma dei Carabinieri;
- follows the progress of reports regarding discriminatory actions filed directly with police force offices;
- recommends suitable measures for preventing and fighting discrimination.

### 6.3 Cross-cultural mediation

M.Cohen-Emerique (a French psychologist, expert in Intercultural Social Communication) defines cross-cultural mediation as *“a way of gradually taking a distance from oneself, which requires more than mere knowledge of the two cultures involved, as well as true tolerance of cultural diversity”*.

Cohen thus highlights three aspects of cultural mediation: being able to take a distance from oneself, within a process of social integration, in search of positive social dynamics.

Cross-cultural mediation thus takes the shape of actions to facilitate positive interaction between immigrants and service networks, allowing for a reduction of prejudice and forms of discrimination through the promotion of original interaction procedures within a society in transformation.

According to one of the most reputed scholars in the area of mediation,

the philosopher Jean-Fançois Six, president of the “Centre Nationale de la Médiation” in Paris, a definition of mediation needs to take into account four types of mediation, the first two of which are intended to establish or consolidate a relationship (bond), while the other two are aimed at dealing with conflict:

- creative mediation: its purpose is to establish bonds which did not exist before between persons or groups, in a way which will be beneficial for both;
- renewing mediation: with a view to enhancing bonds which existed between persons or groups, but which had become looser or inconsequential;
- preventive mediation: its purpose is to anticipate a conflict brewing between persons or groups, and is able to prevent it from actually breaking out;
- curative mediation: the one aimed at responding to an existing conflict by helping persons or groups involved in them to find a solution, on their own for themselves.

All these forms of mediation are intended to establish a communication, non-existing or perturbed, between individuals or groups: mediation, by its own nature, is relational.

This definition also refers to the mode of mediation: any intromission by a third party between these groups or individuals shall be allowed freely by the latter and shall be carried out in such a way that the said persons or individuals are able to decide for themselves and to determine bonds or solutions.

#### 6.3.1 Who is a cross-cultural mediator

There are many figures in the community who serve as cultural and cross-cultural mediators: social workers, teachers, doctors, the clergy, members of religious orders, people in charge of work sectors, judges.

Over the past 25 years, in Italy, the cross-cultural mediator as a professional figure has developed into someone who operates to facilitate the interaction, partnership and living together in multicultural settings, both among citizens of various origins or culture and with public institutions.

In Italy, there is no unified regulatory framework to define the professional profile, qualification, job description and contractual position of the Cross-cultural Mediator. The situation varies from one region to another, sometimes even from one municipality to another. Over time, however, the experience, the exchange of various experiences and good practice, has led to a fairly clear definition of a Cross-cultural Mediator’s role.

The Cross-cultural Mediator constitutes a “bridge” between immigrant citizens and the local communities, with a threefold function in support of both parties:

- removing cultural and language barriers;
- promoting a culture of welcoming and socio-economic integration at local level;
- knowledge and practice of rights and duties in force in Italy, more specifically as regards the provision of public and private services.

### **6.3.2 The Code of Ethics for social and cross-cultural mediation in France**

The Code of Ethics for social and intercultural mediation was drafted in 2006 in the province of Seine-Saint-Denis in France, allowing for recognition of the mediator as a professional figure, outlining their action thresholds and rules of conduct.

Social mediation is defined as *“a process for creating and repairing the social and regulation bond in respect of everyday conflicts”*. On the other hand, cross-culturalism entails *“giving more consideration to the interaction between groups, individuals and identity”*. This type of mediation specifically safeguards the concept of identity. In particular it refers to the view which individuals or groups have of themselves, that is to say, the set of characteristics, shared or otherwise, which make us similar to some and different from others.

This Code of Ethics defines the objectives of social and cross-cultural mediation, in a context of migration and multi-culturalism, most notably:

- informing and making persons aware of their rights;
- in the reverse process, encouraging institutions to listen and take into account the individual person;
- helping individuals to make themselves recognised and known, based on their identity, as an individual, with their own personal history, specific gifts and competences;
- informing people about the operation, requirements and constraints of institutions.

This charter includes five pivotal principles, necessary to ensure an effective mediation process:

1. Importance of consensus between the parties and making sure that no external influences are exerted on both or one of them;
2. Informing both parties about the role and function of the mediator, who

is not there to judge, nor has the power to provide services, but rather has the task of facilitating access to the latter;

3. Impartiality of the mediator who is not a mere interpreter, but rather a third party who helps mutual understanding of the various points of view;
4. Respect and equality between the parties, thus allowing the most fragile to have the same instruments to achieve equality;
5. Independence and no manipulation or conditioning by institutions or politicians in respect of the mediator.

What qualities should a cross-cultural mediator have in order to perform the role required and legitimise it?

As already mentioned, a cross-cultural mediator needs to serve as a third and impartial party. However, they also need to have qualities of confidentiality and good proximity. The latter refers to the trust relationship which can be established, especially in cases where the mediator shares the cultural background of the user, without however expressing any opinion or belief in order to avoid conditioning or manipulations.

Mediators intervene in various areas of daily life, dealing with a variety of issues related to the fields of health, education, justice, employment, housing. These principles, however, remain the same even when applied to different sectors.

### **6.4 School as a social instrument in mainstream society and in Roma and Sinti communities**

The relationship between Roma people and the school world is not easy and it is characterised by the search for a balance between welcoming and conflict. In the same way as one cannot speak of one Roma culture, but rather of several Roma cultures, it should be noted that each family has its own history; any type of generalisation is thus best avoided. Talking about conflict and welcoming thus differs from one school to another and among children; there are no cut-and-dried answers or recipes.

Learning is extremely different for Roma students, in comparison to the education standards of non-Roma students; more specifically, only a minimal part of the former reaches upper secondary education.

For some of them, specifically as regards writing and reading, the results fail to match the expected outcome if compared to the duration of their

schooling; the expected objectives are not even reached in terms of basic education.

**What could the criticalities be?** Is it a matter of **identity**? Is it a matter of learning? Is it associated with **otherness**? Or possibly with **language**?

Any attempt at searching for a unified ethnicity in terms of genetic factors (the shared Indian origin) or common language (Romani) is bound to fail for three simple reasons:

- over the centuries, the Roma have mingled with other populations to an incalculable extent, in some cases even acquiring the latter's somatic traits;
- several Roma groups no longer speak the Romani language, but rather a creolised version of the latter used by mainstream society (e.g. Spanish Gitanos);
- not even nomadism should be considered as a distinctive trait, because the majority of Roma is currently sedentary.

Could it be an issue related to otherness? One should analyse the problematic relationship with mainstream society in combination with the sense of not belonging, of otherness in respect of "our culture and society".

Would it be appropriate to refer to a language issue with regard to learning? It should be noted that no standardised language exists. There are many Romani dialects and a number of phonetic variants in a context of heterogeneity of morphosyntactic variants.

Any reflection on Roma children needs to take into account their culture of origin in addition to the culture of the country they live in and where they fail to find common roots and traditions. Combining the two cultures, for these kids, requires an additional effort in terms of their **identity construction process**. In their culture of origin, they find a sense of belonging, recognition, identity, tradition, stability and safety. The "other" culture is perceived as distant, different, something else and new, thus involving change and risk.

In this situation, what are the possible choices (or the unavoidable experiences) as part of the identity construction process?

It is possible that one might encounter deep cultural resistance, i.e. an exclusive reference to a person's original culture and ethnic identity, which results in closely encapsulated communities, where any exchange/discussion with "the other" is limited to a bare minimum. Such cultural resistance may lead, on the one hand, to strengthening the child's identity, but entails the risk of developing strong ethno-centricity.

On the other hand, there may be a wish to assimilate by fully adhering to the identity proposal of the other society. Among the risks this choice entails, there is the possibility that the child might disregard important

dimensions of the self as well as potential conflicts with the family of origin. The eventual advantages of this choice include the possibility that the latter might encourage their wish to learn and their constant wish to meet otherness.

In both cases, there is a constant dimension of marginality: boys and girls with a confused identity who remain on the margins of their original culture and on the fringes of the culture of the country they live in, unable to present a true alternative identity response, balancing affection for the family and wish for emancipation, with multiple reference values which require integration in order to achieve harmonisation.

### 6.4.1 School attendance

There is no prototypical Roma student (just as there is no prototypical Italian, Chinese, Pakistani student, and so on). Each culture different from the mainstream has specificities, although it would be wrong to superficially let bias take the upper hand. Some cultural specificities may become problematic, but not for everyone and forever. For example, skipping school or dropping out are a problem, not a specificity of Roma students.

There are several complexity elements which make school attendance hard for Roma students:

- commitment by the child/teenager to redefine their cultural identity;
- parents who are illiterate or insufficiently functionally literate, who tend to mistrust school and the possibilities it offers;
- discrimination and mutual prejudice;
- substantial freedom of choice which is being left to the child;
- difficulties within the school, more specifically at lower secondary education level, where most of the children drop out, feeling lost and disoriented;
- economic and housing instability of some Roma families;
- in some cases a migratory background.

Another element to be taken into account is the heterogeneous linguistic competence. Teachers may come across children who are illiterate (with an exclusive dominance of oral tradition), insufficiently literate (both in respect of L1, which preserves exclusively oral characteristics, and subsequently of L2), or literate (with extremely diverging competences between L1 and L2).

### What could the possible working approach be?

An example of this is the National Roma, Sinti and Caminanti Project promoted by the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry for Social Policies, Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education, coordinated by “Istituto degli Innocenti” in Florence, with the objective of promoting a concept of school which is open and multicultural, by restyling school organisation and through interaction with families on a regular basis.

The project entails selecting and employing two practitioners in each of the schools involved. One of them is expected to mainly work inside the school, needs to have teaching experiences at local level and in terms of supporting educational pathways for RSC minors, as well as the ability to promote didactic activities using the method known as cooperative learning. The other practitioner is expected to work mainly on the field, needs to have prior relational experiences with Roma, Sinti and Caminanti children and families, as well as first-hand knowledge of social-school and health networks providing services to RSC children and families. The importance of fieldwork, especially if the housing context is not conducive to school presence/attendance, is due to the bridging role performed by these practitioners, which involves crossing spatial and symbolic boundaries, establishing a relationship with the family, always the primary educational agency. Their action should focus on the child’s schooling, aimed at promoting educational as well as social integration.

Together with the reference teacher chosen by the school, the action by the practitioners has the objective of highlighting the centrality of school as the main context for socialising and inclusion of all minors. In this regard, the practitioners should create a welcoming context, first and foremost by harnessing the competences and value system of each pupil, promoting positive relationships between Roma and non-Roma students, as well as between Roma students and teachers.

A second useful element on which it might be possible to work is the language channel, with a view to harnessing linguistic otherness and raising actual awareness of that otherness, considering how damaging it may be in an educational setting.

The ability or inability to write affect the child’s forms of expression and thinking. Oral thought has its own language, and those who are not used to processing thoughts using the written form are unable to “study”, they can just learn from what they hear and experience.

The Romani language is exclusively associated with oral thought, and this influences a variety of aspects. The use of verb tenses is widely different between the Romani and Italian languages: the decisive factor in the choice of tenses is the search for attention by the listener. Indeed, the narration of a thought entrusted exclusively to orality typically takes place in front

of an audience which needs to be continuously involved and stimulated to listen. This is why, in the way Roma persons speak, there are elements of redundancy and theatricality. More specifically, the narrator uses past tenses in order to define a situation of the past (this is essential because it must appear that the event actually occurred); the imperfect tense will be used to set the stage and the perfect tense to report occurrences. On the other hand, the present tense will be used in the most dramatic and captivating moments, sometimes even told in the future tense, for example to give warnings.

In conclusion, school needs to make the most of the orality of Roma children. This can be done by shaping, conceptualising and memorising it in forms which can be reproduced. An excellent tool in this regard is storytelling, a narrative structure which corresponds to our way of thinking. More specifically, storytelling can help promote language learning, by encouraging a child to utter sounds and sentences in a language which is different from their own in a reassuring, familiar, almost playful setting, which might help them overcome any psychological resistance. The shared narrative experience and role playing allow the child to delve into a symbolic universe within which they can search for and grasp meanings, acquiring them not by studying but rather through learning. The starting point is the idea that, even if they cannot write, they can tell a personal story of their own, guided by their teachers.



#### **A CASE STUDY. My favourite word (object – feeling)**

The pupil produces descriptive and expressive texts, at first orally (it is possible to stop the exercise after this phase), then in writing, in an original way (any spelling or syntax-grammar mistakes shall not be taken into account).

SCHEDULED TIME: 4 hours.

METHOD: guided storytelling based on four phases suggested by the teacher.

Question one: Where shall I start? Any story, indeed, has its own background: an apparently quiet day can turn into a real nightmare.

Question two: is my favourite item the sole protagonist, or are there other characters in the story? What role will they play?

Question three: the story is like a journey: how shall it continue? What challenges will your hero face?

Question four: how shall the story end?

Remember: a happy ending is not mandatory!

## 6.4.2

### Difficulties for a Roma student learning Italian

Below is a list of the difficulties which teachers in our working group have encountered as part of the acquisition process of Italian by students of Roma ethnic origin:

- The use of prepositions, which are always difficult to learn, sometimes reflects the characteristics of the Romani language. The interference is due to the structure of the verb which in Italian can select a different grammatical relationship. The verb “ask”, for example, in Romani is associated with the ablative form, which expresses cause or provenance. Native speakers of Romani will thus tend to say “I’ll ask from him” rather than “I’ll ask him”.
- The typical possessive form, which resembles the Saxon genitive, leads genitive to behaving like an adjective placed in front of a noun: e.g. *romekocher* “the man’s house”. As a consequence, native speakers of Romani tend to construct sentences in the same way in Italian, using propositions as follows: she is of Maria the daughter; the birthday of my sister the child.
- Romani has a complex system of personal pronouns, which – however – do not exist in the enclitic form placed in front of the verb, but after the verb instead: es. diklem tu (seen you).
- The lack of auxiliaries makes the construction of past tenses especially difficult. Auxiliary verbs are often dropped, leading to the following types of sentence construction: yesterday sold roses, yesterday gone swimming pool.
- The adverb is placed before the verb (well he did; fast he ran; to us never you come).
- In a second phase, when auxiliaries start to be used, the verbs “be” and “have” are often confused. An excessive use of the auxiliary verb “be” can be noted, probably due to hyper-correction.
- The shift from block letters to cursive is a very critical phase, from a writing-motion standpoint, most notably in terms of the relationship children will have with writing as they grow up. In this regard, mention should be made of the theory supported by Pratelli (1995) whereby a limited ability to draw graphemes often causes difficult or delayed learning to write. As a matter of fact, it can negatively affect also the learning of spelling and grammar. (M. Pratelli, *Disgrafia e recupero delle difficoltà grafo-motorie [Dysgraphia and restoration of writing-motion difficulties]*, published by Centro Studi Erickson, Trento, 1995)
- Greater use of parataxis compared to hypotaxis: in actual fact, communication based on orality is essentially paratactic because the interest, in that case, is focused on communication pragmatics rather than on syntactic needs, or on the correct formal organisation of speech.



## MATERIALS TO FACILITATE LEARNING ITALIAN

### Exercises on the use of articles

[http://www.lezionidiitaliano.altervista.org/esercizi\\_gli\\_articoli/esercizi\\_gli\\_articoli.php](http://www.lezionidiitaliano.altervista.org/esercizi_gli_articoli/esercizi_gli_articoli.php)

### Exercises for improving the organisation of words into sentences

<https://www.bancadelleemozioni.it/lettere/riordina/scrivi0.html>

[http://www.ciaomaestra.it/public/01/riordina\\_frase\\_invalsi2.pdf](http://www.ciaomaestra.it/public/01/riordina_frase_invalsi2.pdf)

[http://www.ciaomaestra.it/public/01/riordina\\_parole.pdf](http://www.ciaomaestra.it/public/01/riordina_parole.pdf)

### Exercises on the use of verb tenses

[http://www.risorsediattiche.net/scuola\\_primaria/italiano\\_verbi/italiano\\_verbi.php](http://www.risorsediattiche.net/scuola_primaria/italiano_verbi/italiano_verbi.php)

<http://www.italianonline.it/esercizi.html>

### Exercises on punctuation

<http://www.robortosconocchini.it/discipline-italiano/1467-la-punteggiatura-schede-didattiche.html>

## CONCLUSIONS

The training activity carried out through the project “Latcho Drom: Fighting against anti-gypsyism through training of professionals and empowerment of Roma communities” has allowed for a discussion among various professionals, social workers, teachers and educators, who – for work reasons – deal every day with Roma or Sinti persons in Italy. This action has allowed for an overview of training needs and requirements in respect of these professionals, for whom this handbook is intended.

This manual has been designed as a simple support instrument for professionals, a short text which is user-friendly and practical, with no expectation of providing a comprehensive answer. For this reason, the choice was made to provide a basic background with regard to the Romani culture and some information about available instruments in Italy to facilitate social inclusion processes in local communities, which any professional can then individually explore in greater detail.

Any requests for clarifications or insights may be sent to the lecturers of the training courses, who remain available also after the end of the project. You can write an e-mail to the address **[latchodrom@apg23.org](mailto:latchodrom@apg23.org)**.

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**You may be an illegal alien in one land or in all regions, but you cannot be an illegal alien worldwide, all the more so in Europe**

*Giovanni Maria Flick*  
Constitutional expert, Italian Minister for Justice between 1996 and 1998



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**LATCH**  **DR**  **M**

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