

Beyond the Camp

Achieving the definitive overcoming of mono-ethnic settlements in Italy

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In line with its mission, Association 21 luglio ETS, moves along two interdependent strands: the denunciation of discrimination and the promotion of human rights, particularly the rights of children and adolescents in conditions of hardship and vulnerability present in contexts of severe housing segregation. To address this second strand, Associazione 21 luglio ETS has been working since its foundation in 2010 on projects aimed at promoting the social rights of children and adolescents living in difficult and vulnerable conditions at "Roma camps". The association has decided to resort to systemic thinking in order to effectively read, interpret and change the reality of the "Roma camp system", which in Italy - the only case in Europe - has been imprisoning tens of thousands of people in a vicious circle of poverty and exclusion for decades. In recent years, Associazione 21 luglio, has maintained the conviction that the "Roma camp", represents a "mental space" that pervades collective thinking even more or just as much as it is a "physical space". To address this, Associazione 21 luglio has worked with a multidisciplinary team that has intervened on different actors such as media operators, public opinion, teachers, policy-makers, Roma and Sinti communities. Gaining accountability over the years, the Association is currently the national contact point of the REYN (Network for Roma Early Childhood) network, formed by professionals and para-professionals working closely with Roma communities in the field of early childhood development, and is also the national coordinator of the Roma Civil Monitor (RCM) 2021-2025 initiative, promoted by the European Commission within

DG Just in 28 European countries. In Europe, Italy is recognised as the country most committed to implementing the "Roma camp system", a parallel architectural housing system aimed at concentrating and segregating Roma communities in emergency outdoor housing based on their ethnicity. The "Roma camp system" originated in the 1980s, with the first arrival in Italy of Roma families from the former Republic of Yugoslavia who were fleeing the first signs of the profound civil war that would go on to shake the entire area in the following years. This mass migration was incorrectly understood by policymakers to be a consequence of the culture's a culture wrongly prescribed "nomadic" heritage. At the beginning of the 1990s, a number of administrators started building open-air mono-ethnic settlements, all with the same characteristics. They were far from the city, fenced in, and often had insufficient services and were located in unhealthy areas that were not fit for housing. Despite the decades-long spread of the phenomenon linked to the "camp system", a blanket of opacity, often supported by a lack of transparency on the part of public authorities and representatives of the Third Sector, has always prevented any possibility of transformative intervention. In recent years, dedicated mapping and research activities by Associazione 21 luglio have filled this gap by shining a spotlight on the condition of Roma and Sint who are in housing emergencies and on the policies addressed to them. They have done this through reports presented annually from 2015 to 2021 at the Senate of the Republic. On 7 April 2022, the Associazione 21 luglio launched a highly innovative project in

the Nassirya Room of the Senate: "The Country of the Camps", a website that gathers information, in real-time, on the so-called "camp system". In Italy, there are currently 45 "Roma camps" inhabited by about 7,100 people and 67 Sinti camps inhabited by about 4,800 people. Various research carried out by the Associazione 21 luglio shows how being born and living in a mono-ethnic and overcrowded settlement strongly affects one's inner well-being and influences that of one's family. The settlement's distance from the rest of the city represents a symbolic, as well as physical barrier, discouraging external relations by reducing exogenous stimuli and making the space phagocytic towards the families living there, negatively impacting an individual's possibility of leaving the settlement. The highest price is certainly paid by children, whose life inside a settlement can quickly break the dream of a future different from that of their parents. In relation to the "camp system", Associazione 21 luglio has, since its inception, distinguished itself in the Italian association scene by being the only one to independently, clearly and explicitly pursue two general objectives: the end of the construction of new "Roma camps" in Italy and the beginning of actions towards overcoming them. The first goal was achieved in 2018 with the construction of the last settlement realised to date in Italy. In the following years, thanks to the push of Associazione 21 luglio, the national context was favourable to actions towards the definitive overcoming of the "Roma camps". The collaboration between the **Nando and Elsa Peretti Foundation** and Associazione 21 Luglio ETS began in 2014 with a project centred on empowering Roma children through art education in two camps in Rome. It is a project that is still ongoing today. Even during COVID-19, the NaEPF stood by the association and awarded an extraordinary emergency grant to distribute food and primary necessities to children living in some of the places with the highest poverty index in the city of Rome: the camps of Tor Bella Monaca district, and the slums of Castel Romano, Tor Cervara and Salone in Roma. In 2023 the NaEPF has granted a three-year program support to the "Beyond the Camp" project.

The "Beyond the Camp" project aims to involve, in different forms and ways, at least 32 of the 64 Italian municipalities where there are still "Roma camps" that are inhabited by approximately 4 million people who will be the indirect beneficiaries of the actions. The innovative character of the project lies in its participatory approach. The model devised and proposed by the 21 luglio Association, inspired by

the Community Organising methodology, relies on the direct involvement of the settlements' inhabitants all stages of the process. They will be called upon, in a climate of trust, to express opinions, bring in requests and propose solutions; to define, together and as a territorial community, intervention strategies, timeframes and the most effective modes of action for overcoming the settlement.