



Guidelines for gender-sensitive actions supporting the schooling, empowerment and integration of Roma students

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THE PROJECT AND THE RESEARCH

The GUIDELINES FOR GENDER SENSITIVE-ACTIONS SUPPORTING THE SCHOOLING, EMPOWERMENT AND INTEGRATION OF ROMA STUDENTS were drawn up by the Association Spirit Romanesc (ASR)¹ within the Workstream 1 activities - *Ideas, practices and policies to support schooling, empowerment and integration among the students, of the Project Together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education (LUOGHI COMUNI) - JUST/2014/RDIS/AG/DISC/8170.*

<http://www.luoghicomuni.eu> ; www.facebook.com/ProgettoLuoghiComuni

The project *Together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education (LUOGHI COMUNI)* was coordinated by the Association *Bambini in Romania Onlus* and carried out in Bari, Milan and Rome in partnership with *Il Nuovo Fantarca*, *UPRE Roma* and *Association Spirit Romanesc*. This project have had 18 months length starting from March 2016 and it had the aim to promote the participation of the Roma, Sinti and Caminanti (from now on "Roma" or RSC) in their school paths, the integration of all children and teens and to promote the right to education. For this purpose, during the school year 2016/2017, video and theater workshops were organized with the students chosen by means of a selection of primary and secondary schools of first and second stage of the three cities, as well as the awareness-raising, the communication and the research activities, that involved hundreds of children and teens, their families and their friends, teachers, principals, Roma educators and mediators, social workers, experts and representatives of local authorities and national institutions.

The research activities, in particular, have been designed to define gender-sensitive ways to conduct together with the schools actions to support the schooling and the empowerment of the Roma minors and the integration among all students. The research results were used to define the contents of the Guidelines. During the first part of the research, 35 key-informants were interviewed, the most recent scientific literature and documentation at Italian and international level have been consulted and further enhanced (by focus

¹The Guidelines' content was prepared by *Simonetta Bormioli*, sociologist and Association Spirit Romanesc responsible for the project *Together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education (LUOGHI COMUNI)* research.

groups and in-depth interviews) and 5 best practices of the last 5 years have been analyzed (4 in Italy and one in Romania).

The second part of the activities (October 2016 - May 2017) was designed to observe the dynamics, the expectations, the planned and unforeseen effects of video and theatre workshops carried out in schools, thanks to the involvement - as research observers –of the Roma mediators and educators of the three teams: *Daniela Tomescu, Giuseppe Arrivo and Annarita Di Gioia* in Bari, *Valentina Schiappadini, Toni Deragnae Claudia Seljmovic* in Milan and *Ion Dumitru, Mihaela Ionica, Briseida Bocari and Niculina Danaila* in Rome. The ideas and suggestions gathered have integrated the findings from the first part of the research and represented the empirical basis for determining the Guidelines compass. The contents were then outlined, further analyzed, discussed and integrated thanks to the generous contribution of the participants from the three workshops organized in Rome, Milan and Bari between 25th May and 1st June 2017 (teachers and principals, educators and mediators, experts and researchers, operators of non-profit associations, representatives of the community, Roma associations and so on).

THE GUIDELINES

The GUIDELINES FOR GENDER-SENSITIVE ACTIONS SUPPORTING THE SCHOOLING, EMPOWERMENT AND INTEGRATION OF ROMA STUDENTS are addressed to operators, educators, school managers and teachers interested in implementing in our country inclusive education actions that are directed to all students, paying attention to Roma children and to gender dimension. This is an instrument that has no claim of being an exhaustive approach and that - starting from the experience of the *Project Together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education (LUOGHI COMUNI)* - is at least a complementary curricula to the currently support materials, manuals and registers of good practices which already existent. Therefore, it is mean to be a further critical tool for the already mentioned educational means in our country.

The GUIDELINES were elaborated around a few **attention points**, aspects that have proved crucial to the implementation of actions to support schooling, empowerment and integration of Roma students, identified by the research

activities described above. The attention points were divided into **four macro-areas** concerning: a) the intervention plans developed in collaboration with schools; b) carrying out the activities with children; c) counteracting discrimination; d) the RSC students' empowerment. Where possible, the attention points were illustrated by taking into account the gender dimension.

Before presenting the content, some aspects resulting from the project *Together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education (LUOGHI COMUNI)* should be pointed out: to achieve positive effects, each action and intervention must be related with the contextual characteristics and the actors present on the territory (including communities, groups and Roma families), avoiding the sweeping generalizations (the same solution does not fit in all situations); the condition of Roma minors in Italy is a very specific one (despite current interventions that manage to support almost only the families who live in conditions of greater social exclusion, for whom it is always useful to carry out an analysis of the incipient situation, also using the contribution of the children, the families and Roma representatives); the risk of cultural determinism is widespread and must be countered, because it enhances the stereotypes and the prejudices not only across society but also among the same Roma minors, determining the undesirable effect of hiding the real reasons for the obstacles encountered by the Roma children and the younger Roma in their paths of growth, emancipation and extrication from an unsustainable and undignified condition in a country like Italy.

Below it is illustrated the organization of the attention points in the four macro-areas. The GUIDELINES' content also includes some BOX - EXPERIENCES FROM WORKSHOPS, containing fragments of observations extracted directly from observation grids and interviews with educators and Roma mediators of the project *Together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education (LUOGHI COMUNI)*, as well as a number of insights into the details gathered in the windows named *RESEARCH RESULTS*.

SCHOOL-LEVEL INTERVENTIONS

- The determinants of schooling
- School commitment
- Staff training
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Territorial network

ACTIVITIES INVOLVING CHILDREN

- Students' well-being
- Groups' structure
- Pedagogic models
- Educators' expectations
- Peer education
- Personalized interventions

COUNTERACTING DISCRIMINATION

- Family relationships
- Multiple identities
- Knowledge and direct contact
- A gender perspective reading

THE RSC STUDENTS' EMPOWERMENT

- Self-esteem, self-image and self-efficiency
- Positive role models
- Active citizenship paths
- An intersectionality perspective

1. SCHOOL-LEVEL INTERVENTIONS

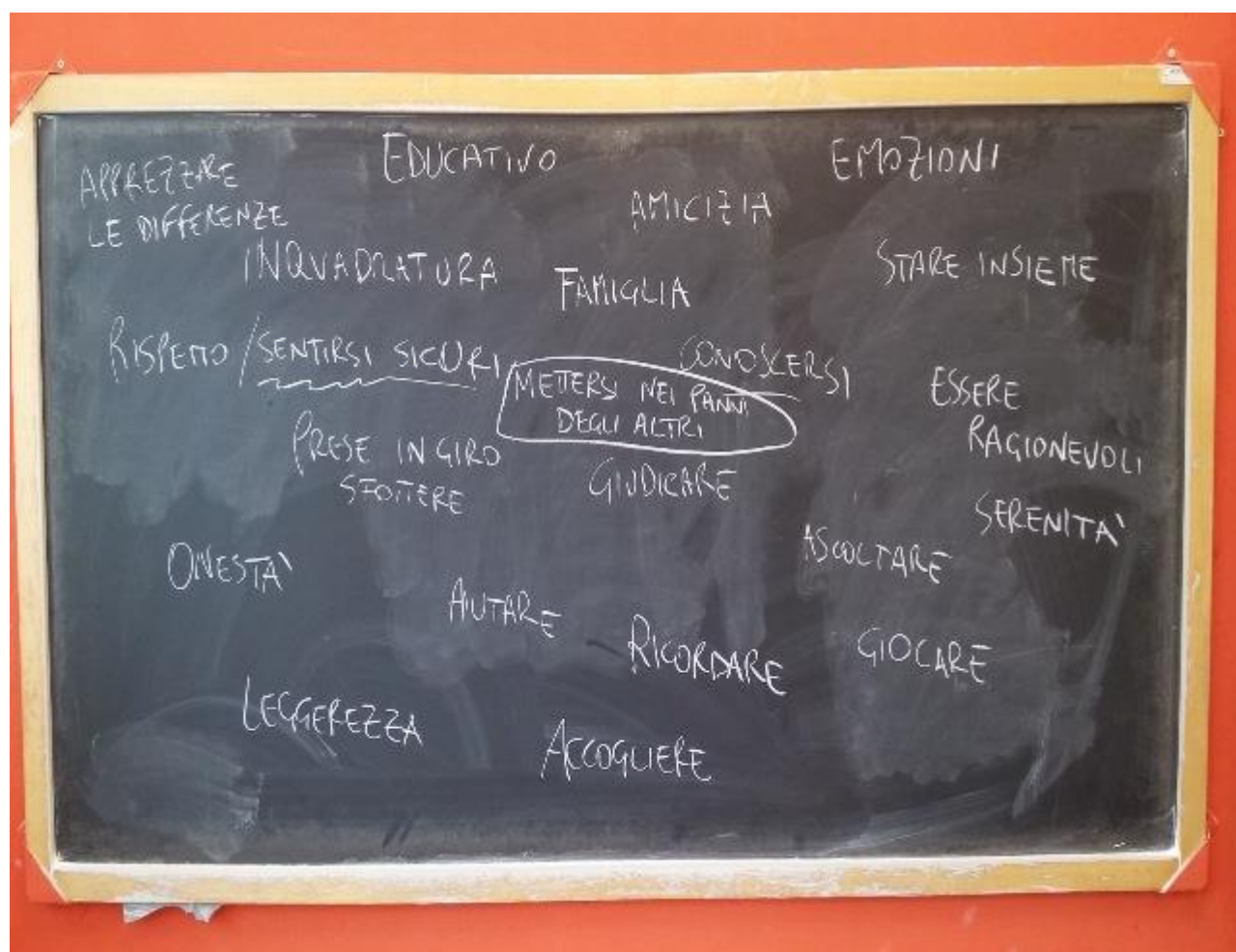


Photo: Together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education (LUOGHI COMUNI), Workshop in Bari

The determinants of schooling

To increase the attendance of Roma students and to improve the quality of the learning path, avoiding to exacerbate the differences and discrimination, it is appropriate that interventions supporting the schooling must be conducted with an explicit but not exclusive target and in line with the approach based on children's and adolescents' rights. It is also important that Roma minors - along with their families and groups - to be considered individuals with capacity, resources and energy to be valued in the medium and long term and not just as a problem to be solved in the immediate future.

In this perspective, it becomes incrementally obvious that the programmes which respond to inclusive education aims cannot be conducted as isolated actions. As established by the *National Strategy for the Inclusions of the RSC (NSIRSC)* from 2012 and recalled in the *Fourth National Action Plan on the Rights and Development of the Child (2016)*, their success depends largely on the adoption of an **integrated approach** underpinning the various actions planned and implemented, starting from taking into account all the general needs of the whole family.

In Italy, despite the actions carried out for many years with enormous amount of resources and the existence of limits on the principles of non-discrimination and the "best interests of the child", the attendance at school by Roma children and teens has decreased over time, especially for those that in the "country of camps" live in emergency housing. The reasons are largely due to the effects of incremental segregation and anti-Gypsyism, but also depend on other factors, ranging from the precariousness of the housing conditions to the expulsions that foster

BOX 1 – EXPERIENCES FROM WORKSHOPS

In Bari *"the E.'s mother stopped sending her to school, complaining on the lack of economic aid (...)E. told us that she wanted to continue to attend, without referring to her mother's statements...but then she has stopped"* – (theater)

In Bari *"the little girls often do not go to school because they do not have a snack or clean clothes. The teachers and operators offer some help, bringim them clothes, that sometimes serve as fuel for heating... all these cause many school absences because they often get ill (...)other little girls in the camp near the school would like to come but they cannot, because the parents are constantly delaying the enrolling, often because they do not have the necessary documents, such as the Italian fiscal code number"* - (theater)

In Milan *"A., who is 15 years old and has just arrived from Romania, does not speak Italian and still does not go to school. For A., the workshop was the only opportunity to socialize and meet other non-Roma children"* - (video)

the physical, psychological and material discomfort of children; from the material and social deprivation conditions to their health effects; from the uncertain legal status to the sense of discomfort and inadequacy determined by symbolic violence addressed daily against them; from the parents' disappointment regarding the completion of study paths to the low capacity of operators of institutions to understand the real skills and needs of Roma minors.

All in all, these factors - which do not depend on the will of the families - influence the educational opportunities of Roma children as **determinants of schooling**, which should be intelligently undertaken, with an explicit but not exclusive target and an integrated approach. Among these, there are included the *early childhood education and care* (ECEC) interventions with preschooling activities, that besides preparing children and their parents for the transition to primary school, are able to set the first equitable bases for their growth and development path ("*a good start in life*"). The involvement of children in educational and care paths, indeed, has a real positive impact on them, both from the point of view of healthcare and well-being, as well as the development of cognitive, emotional and relational skills, with all the wave effects that concern their families and society as a whole.

RESEARCH RESULTS

➔ The *Policy Centre for Roma and Minorities* of **Bucharest** coordinates **community-organized** interventions aimed to practice the forms of active citizenship to support the schooling of Roma and non-Roma students conducted together with the schools of the *Ferentari* neighborhood through the *Alternative Education Club Programme* (AEC). Weekly, neighborhood residents attend meetings that are organized and carried out by the *Mothers' Club*, made up of more than twenty mothers of the children involved in the AEC Programme. These meetings serve to find solutions to possible problems with the representatives of local authorities and health, social and educational institutions. Between 2013 and 2014, the *Mothers' Club* has managed to compel local authorities to build the only park in the area of *Aleea Livezilor* and to enforce security in the School no. 136. In April 2016, the *Club* was involved in a campaign which aimed to stop the eviction of 200 families from the ghetto area on *Iacob Andrei Street*.

➔ The *National Project for the inclusion and integration of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti children* is an experimental programme active in 13 Italian cities and conducted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) under the supervision of the Istituto degli Innocenti of Florence, which joined in the third year, in the school year 2015/2016. In addition to the activities carried out in

some schools, interventions have been planned in the students' domestic contexts aimed to **promote the children's general well-being in relation to their families**. In this direction, in **Naples** and **Venice**, for example, there were carried out activities to strengthen Roma families' access to the socio-sanitary services (the regularization of their residence and sanitary situation, managing situations of extreme social vulnerability, home-based interventions, medical and dental visits in the settlements and at the surgeries involved, meetings on the topic of health and so on). Prior to the experimentation of the „National Project“, the Municipality of **Venice** accompanied the schooling of Roma children with measures concerning housing, for example, by carrying out mediating activities to facilitate the access of some Roma families to public housing.

➔ At international level, to support the right to inclusive and non-discriminatory education of Roma children and to support the experts, the operators and the professionals working in the field of early childhood development, the **network REYN (Romani Early Years Network)** has been active for some years². In Italy, the network REYN has been coordinated since 2016 by the Association 21 luglio³ and it promotes training actions, advocacy interventions and the exchange of operational materials and good practices.

² <http://www.issa.nl/reyn> - <https://reynitaliablog.wordpress.com/info/>

³ <http://www.21luglio.org/21luglio/nasce-reyn-italia-una-rete-per-la-prima-infanzia-rom/>

School commitment

This point of attention refers to the volition and the **commitment of schools** to plan and carry out, together with other organizations, interventions to support the schooling and integration of the students. The formal decision and the support of the governing bodies are of extraordinary importance to motivate all the staff, to clarify the roles and functions of the entities and the organizations involved, to forward teachers collaboration with educators and mediators, to solve controversies, to find solutions to the difficulties and provide the necessary facilities (classrooms, spaces and tools for teaching and group work) for carrying out the activities. Moreover, the **sense of isolation** -often perceived by the teachers and educators responsible for supporting programmes addressed to students belonging to minority groups or foreigners- can be overcome due to a clear definition of the interests and commitment of the school as a whole.

In addition to the formal commitment, there is necessary to **carry further** both the **actions** and the **educators** involved. The placement of the interventions and their transversality with regard to the training plan, the composition of the classes and the mixed groups, the actions countering the forms of abuse, discrimination or self-isolation of the students, the stage of receiving and integrating the students, sharing of methodologies and didactic tools, the focus on the growth and the learning path of each child, are all factors that become effective only if implemented continuously by educators and operators, in concordance to the view that the school shares.

BOX 2 – EXPERIENCES FROM WORKSHOPS

In Bari *“the school head and the teachers of C. who stopped attending the elementary school because he suffered from an unclear trauma - went to the camp to talk to his family, trying to figure out what had happened to him and to convince him to go back to school. But C. has not returned”- (theater)*

In Rome, in time the relationships and the behaviour of children improved especially because the protagonists related to them, *“... but there is still much work to do, we planted only a seed...” - (theater)*

In Milan, the overlap of the various school of some students' engagements did not allow them to participate in all the workshops activities, making their presence even more discontinuous. In mid-February, new elements emerged but *“ a balance had to be achieved between the participants on the one hand, who needed time in order to adapt themselves and new elements on the other hand.” - (theater)*

Despite preliminary meetings, the workshop staff encountered numerous difficulties from some teachers who *“do not show obvious resistance but limit themselves to carry out strictly as much as they were required, delegating everything they could to the project operators”, “tolerate and ignore the opposing and disturbing behaviour of the students without intervening, sometimes even laughing ”. “we had great difficulties despite the meetings due to different visions regarding the working methodology ...all this required a*

The clear definition of the aims and results to be achieved is crucial in order to prevent the manifestations of intolerance, obstruction that is more or less masked and to prevent the inappropriate interventions sometimes carried out by the school staff themselves during the activities. The commitment formalization is also necessary to limit the tendency to delegate the responsibilities to others: by head teachers and teachers toward the operators and the mediators of the associations, or by the administrative staff towards the operators (especially in regard of relations with Roma families).

RESEARCH RESULTS

- ➔ The AEC Programme of **Bucharest** noticed the first results after a year since the debut of the activities but the changes of a structural nature –such as strengthening the relations of the Roma community with the local authorities, greater effectiveness of interdisciplinary work between schools, the municipalities and the organizations from the third sector – were observed after more than six years! The organization of moments of encounter during the sports, artistic, or cultural events, has eventually contributed to change of the perception of the resident population of the area regarding the Roma people.
- ➔ Within *The National Project for the inclusion and integration of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti children*, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies, **in Naples**, together with the *Dedalus Social Cooperative*, needed more than a year to build trust relationships and facilitate mutual knowledge with the families of Roma students from the schools involved in the Project.
- ➔ The *Promociona Programme* conducted in **Spain** by the *Gypsy Secretariat Foundation* includes collaboration with primary and secondary school teachers among the social main pillars to its implementation. In order to have consensus and create a favourable environment, schools are required to sign up for the commitment to coordinate the activities of the Programme (regarding tutors' interventions, the definition of the *Personalized Intervention Plan*, monitoring the progress of Roma students and the involvement of their families). The *Promociona Programme* started in 2008/2009 to facilitate the schooling of Roma pupils aged between 12 and 16 years of the public schools. In the academic year 2014-2015, the Programme covered 373 schools, 1067 families and 1276 Roma pupils: boys and girls.

Staff training

A precondition for the successful outcome of inclusive education interventions conducted together with the schools is represented by the **operators' training**, which must cover specific roles and functions, both in range and in different ways: from the heads teachers to the teachers, from the other educators to the mediators, from the school collaborators to the institute's administration including, as far as possible, also referents of the key stakeholder network from the territories involved.

Besides sharing the same language, information, knowledge, support and useful tools, the training activities contribute to create a context of common meaning for all those who accelerate the conduct of activities, facilitate the process of problem solving, reduce potential conflicts and prepare the staff around the overall goals and objectives estimated. The training actions also respond to the need for professional updating of content and tools for inclusive schooling that has been expressed by many teachers in our country. These interventions are therefore indispensable in order to allow the educators and the teachers, continuous contact with students, to be able to mediate and positively solve (meaning creating critical reflection opportunities and therefore growth for children and teens) any "difficult" and/or conflicting situations, even with the families.

In the same way, a good preparation avoids reactions that are sometimes incompatible with the principles of inclusive education, practiced by teachers and educators for reasons of anxiety or lack of information and knowledge. For this purpose, some good European practices have attempted to consolidate the full capacity of the teachers to support learning in multicultural environments using the mentoring tool.

According to the initiatives, the experimental programmes and the specific interventions to support Roma students' integration and empowerment in schools in Italy and Europe, the contents of the training activities addressed to all staff involved concern:

- modern and intercultural Pedagogy (principles and methodology);
- the psychological development of the children and teens, even from a gender perspective and in relation to the presence of minority groups (paying attention to the factors inside school that affect the school experiences such as, the emotional relationships between teachers and pupils, the role of expectations, the values instilled in a child's behaviour and so on);

- dynamic relationships and the group psychology (discriminatory and segregation behaviour, bullying, hostility, forms of self-isolation, etc.);
- evaluating and monitoring tools within inclusive education interventions;
- managing the relationships with Roma families;
- elements of Roma history, language and culture, or other minorities and nationalities represented in school.

RESEARCH RESULTS

➔ In **Venice**, within *The National Project for the inclusion and integration of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti children*, teachers' trainings were held through the academic year, in order to: consolidate teachers' knowledge regarding *cooperative learning* methodology; to further analyze the topics on intercultural context analysis; to plan workshops aimed to the development of the transversal (non-curricular) skills of the children in the classes involved; to conduct the evaluation activities and redesign the ongoing activities; to create class-based reflection spaces on inclusive practices and intercultural activities achievable with schools.

➔ In **Florence**, the C.A.T. Cooperative carries out systematic training activities for educators and school operators both through the informal interventions conducted via daily interaction – that allow to impart knowledge "in pills" to the principals, the teachers and other educators – and by organizing ad hoc meetings with the teachers (from several schools or belonging to a specific institute) on contents that can relate to the Roma as a polythetic category, the history and Romani language, the public policies of interest for Roma, stereotypes and anti-Gypsyism, the educational relationship within the Roma families and the approach with the school.

➔ To be integrated into the staff that carried out the activities with the schools, the *Alternative Education Club Programme* educators of the *Policy Centre for Roma and Minorities* of **Bucharest** are required to pursue an eight- month internship!

Monitoring and evaluation

The continuous verification of the teaching activities and the learning paths, the ongoing monitoring and evaluation are other important attention points for students' inclusive education paths that are carried out in schools locations or together with schools. Recent researches demonstrated that the prompt interventions carried out on time to fill any possible students' gaps have a significant impact on the entire development process, especially for the minors that live in social discomfort conditions or encounter difficulties (for example, linguistic ones for immigrants). Moreover, several public actors are appealed to actively involve the same pupils in the periodic verification of school experience, so that even partial progresses can increase the confidence in their ability to continue their studies. These opinions are considered very important to increase the passion and the performance of Roma students and the motivation of their parents.

The possible practical solutions range from the establishment of multidisciplinary teams providing ongoing support to the activities (as in the case of the *National Programme* of the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policies), to the use of technical tools available to the teachers or operators involved in the educational activities, in order to record - and then to monitor and evaluate - the changes, the progress or the difficulties encountered by Roma students. The real possibility to measure and quantify the actions is, within this framework, a key requirement for monitoring and evaluating the process and its outcome.

RESEARCH RESULTS

- ➔ In order to acquire the point of view of the direct beneficiaries through the activities of monitoring and evaluation of the *AEC Programme* of schooling, the *Policy Centre for Roma and Minorities* of **Bucharest** has set up an informal commission composed of the Roma children's parents that evaluate periodically the results achieved and the actions carried out with the children and adolescents of the district of *Ferentari* from the various organizations involved.
- ➔ The *Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)* of the **United Kingdom** has developed, with discreet success, activities for the inclusion and educational integration of the Roma, Gypsy and Traveller students starting from the second half of the year 2000. The teachers and operators from the schools involved were required to record the progress of the

Roma students (through special technical tools) so that they can be signalled and discussed together, in recognition of their improvement in order to increase their motivation, to raise their self-esteem and promote the positive exploitation of all their potential. The DSCF also notes the importance of periodically updating the children's families so that they can encourage and support their children in their educational path.

Territorial network

The presence of a **key-actors network on the territory**, who share the same vision and interests, models of good practice, knowledge and, above all, resources to be uniformly integrated, coordinated and easy to approach, is an indispensable instrument to the success of the interventions in supporting inclusive schooling. A single school or a single organizations that perform educational or recreational activities with children do not have, indeed, all the necessary resources and cannot show enough professionalism for taking into account all of Roma students' general needs and (if necessary) of their families, which is only possible through the involvement of all the public services at the territorial level (municipal or communal), in addition to those offered by the private and the third sector.

The establishment of local networks –therefore- favours the constant dialogue between the public and the private sectors and between the various private entities. Above all, this initiative leads to new patterns of intervention (which can never be apply in the same way in different contexts) according to the territorial reality, taking into account the specificities of the environment in which the actions take place and the characteristics of the students involved and their families. Beside school, others institution that are able to provide a stable form, a stable mechanism of collaboration that serves to manage all the social and socio-educational interventions, the local network may also include local authorities, policy-makers of education, social policies and health, the representatives of civil society organizations and RSC communities, the female and migrant associations and so on. There is a special interest in sport inclusion, recreational and cultural associations that allow Roma students to have access to equal rights and together with their peers to share opportunities that are usually denied them (cinema, gym, swimming pool) and which mark the differences and the discrimination in everyday life.

In order to enhance the network, it is necessary to delegate the guidance and coordination responsibilities that can be taken by the school and the organizations which carried out the activities of the schooling inclusion and the integration among students. From this perspective, inclusive education follows the line of the educational system adopted by the school on the territory, with initiatives and activities not only for students but also for developing a real sense of citizenship, as an authentic civic centre able to implement the training courses and workshops for students and adults, prior and subsequently to the school activities, support measures for the most vulnerable people and projects for the inclusion and integration of foreign communities (including the Roma students' parents). Opening up to other key actors

in the area represents a good opportunity for planning and applying an educational pattern adjusted to each and every personal, cultural and psychological needs. These educational manners serve to overcome stereotypes and to fight against violence and bullying, gender and homophobic behaviour, starting from school.

It is therefore necessary to delineate the resources and the time needed to devote to the construction of this component of actions to support inclusive schooling and student integration in schools. The coordination and periodic meetings are fundamental, in fact, in not affecting the interventions, creating disorientation and discontinuity between the different paths that are started.

RESEARCH RESULTS

- ➔ The social and community level is one of the three pillars at which level the interventions are aimed to improve the performance and success of the Roma children's school path within the *Promociona Programme* in **Spain**. The individual level regards students and their families, the intermediate one is implemented through the group interventions within the *Promociona classes*, while the third level, the social and community level, foresees an intense work with the key-actors of the closest environment to children, their families and schools, being aware of their influence, even indirectly, on the educational process of the children.
- ➔ A working group on inclusive school policies in **Antwerp** (Belgium) has recently defined the steps needed to enhance the key-actors networks at local level by developing collaborative practices. The steps concern: to identify and to involve all relevant key-actors; to define the commitment and the common understanding of the problem, even from different points of view, by all key-actors; to clearly delegate the responsibilities, recognition and respect of each key-actor, the engagement from the beginning and effective communication; to change the attitudes of the whole group (to work together in a cohesive way and not as a juxtaposition of independent organizations), which in the school involves a change of attitudes by the entire educational staff; to prepare a formal network, with clearly defined roles and structures (through the definition of contractual relations); to create a central point of coordination, monitoring and evaluation, enabling continuous verifications, adaptations and changes; the acceptance of the possible contradictions between the key-actors, due to their different points of view, which need to be resolved to avoid leaving grey areas by discussing the problems together to reach a mutual agreement; to examine the good practices, to learn from the research, the analysis and the data collection; to define a common strategy and action plan; the acknowledgment that time is instrumental in making changes.

2. ACTIVITIES INVOLVING CHILDREN



Photo: *Together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education (LUOGHI COMUNI)*, Workshop in Rome

Students' well-being

ANY activity aimed at involving students in growth and learning paths is based on the children's well-being, children that need to feel comfortable in a **welcoming environment** facilitated by the teachers, educators and operators, from the structures and tools available, as well as from the classmates and peers. From this point of view, teachers and educators are not always able to understand the needs of the Roma minors: for this end, the **inclusion of Roma mediators** is extremely useful in the schools or organizations staffs which conduct the interventions with schools. It is frequent, in fact, that purely linguistic difficulties are interpreted as a delay in the cognitive development of the Roma children and that the schools strive to acquire the support interventions of the teachers which, in fact, result ineffective and inappropriate, further accentuating the sense of alienation, the difficulties and the differences.

Also, the structure of the classes (mixed, uniform, work groups) contributes to the pupils' well-being. The experiences carried out through the workshops of the project *together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education (LUOGHI COMUNI)* confirm that children should be able to choose independently what activities to follow and should not be forced by teachers to join the groups. In the same way, it is contrary to the purposes of inclusive education to form mixed groups or even entire classes composed predominantly of children or teens with special educational needs or considered, for one reason or another, "more problematic" and difficult to manage (as unfortunately, however, it sometimes seems to happen).

Students belonging to minorities or foreigners' groups, especially if included in classes or activities in other moments than at the beginning, often experience with extreme **malaise** their presence at school, caused by the linguistic difficulties because they feel unprepared or inadequate or due to the age difference compared with their

BOX 3 – EXPERIENCES FROM WORKSHOPS

In Milan „the children selected by the school at the beginning of the activities have created a lot of confusion, there was great chaos and it was difficult to keep the threshold of attention high to work in the group (...) in December we held individual interviews with the children to make a selection of the participants in the activities (...) the situation has improved since January "- (theater)

In Rome „the Roma children forced to participate showed much resistance, did not come in time, were constantly asking 'when it finished'...it is very difficult to work together "- (video)

In Bari “ the Roma children were included in a 'difficult' class, so it is very complicated to carry out the activities“ - (theater)

classmates, because they are isolated and kept away or - especially for Roma students whose families are subject to more social vulnerability - caused by the forms of discrimination and hostility they are often subject to. It is therefore indispensable that educators and operators be able to take appropriate action to handle the anxiety, fear, shame and embarrassment of these minors, to limit the negative impacts on learning and the emotional and relational development of individuals and to reduce their negative reactions (In terms of aggression and conflict or, on the contrary, frustration and indifference).

To promote the children's well-being in multicultural environments, the international best practices suggest: to plan awareness-raising activities and teachers and educators' training; to use informal settings; to foster interaction on equal terms between students and to enhance all their skills; also to involve the children's parents in some of the moments and spaces dedicated within the educational paths or activities school conducted.

RESEARCH RESULTS

- ➔ To transform the children into the real protagonists of the activities and permit them to make choices in **Bucharest**, within the AEC (*Alternative Education Club*) Programme, the staff proposed to the children various opportunities (sports, artistic, recreational and remedial) that had been identified on the basis of the needs and demand analysis previously conducted. Hence, the children chose the ones that were more responsive to their interests, desires, attitudes and abilities. The activities addressed to the students, furthermore were designed to build, around them, personalized paths for the recovery and the development of skills, competences, motivations and sociability.
- ➔ The experimentation promoted by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies regarding the school integration of the RSC students in a pilot group of Italian schools, based its foundation on the children **protagonist**, paying attention to their psychic and physical well-being, their needs and relationships, rights and potentials, assuming the intercultural perspective through the involvement of both the school context and the family and social context of each child.

Groups' structure

Numerous studies⁴ have demonstrated for many years now that the **mixed composition of children's groups, heterogeneous** in point of their ability, skills, experiences and provenance (including ethnicity) has positive effects on school outcomes, on the one hand, and on the cohesion of the class or group, creating a sense of positive interdependence, on the other hand. The working methods conducted through mixed groups are particularly effective for the students coming from different backgrounds, especially for those with a lower socio-economic status or who are more exposed to the risk of social exclusion.

BOX 4 – EXPERIENCES FROM WORKSHOPS

In Milan „the older high school students reassure the younger Roma children when they have to talk to other people in the group the older ones always tend to accompany the younger ones " - video

Within the mixed groups - where the students are called upon to pursue common goals and individual responsibilities – there are observed good peer interactions and a rise in the self-esteem levels, with positive effects on the behaviour, learning, motivation and the desire to be protagonists, as well as on the values and the attitudes regarding mutual respect, solidarity and acceptance of diversity.

RESEARCH RESULTS



The methodological indication concerning the structure of mixed working groups was designed in Italy by the *National Project for the inclusion and integration of Roma, Sinti and Caminanti children* that has experienced its own interventions within schools starting from the "**class group**", paying attention not to reproduce the subdivisions on an ethnic basis in the workshop activities or outside the school curriculum, in order not to highlight the cultural differences that may be discriminatory. In 2013, Dedalus

⁴ Among these, it should be pointed out the results of the experimentation conducted in Spain in over 150 schools of the CREA (*The Center of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities*) of Barcelona, that through the methodology of the *School as a learning community* has included in the working groups even the students' families, with implications that had an impact not only on the skill acquisition, but also on the learning and motivational behaviour.

Cooperative Social has conducted in **Naples**, for example, the narrative, interactive and multimedia intercultural workshops in the primary schools of the Giannurco and Poggioreale districts of Naples 4th. For each class group, six two-hour meetings were organized, promoting group work instead of frontal teaching, and addressed issues related to diversity, other cultures, and more generally to the opening to the other "different from myself".

➔ In **Spain**, the *Centre of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities* of the University of Barcelona⁵ has experimented on the methodology of interactive and heterogeneous working groups from the point of view of the composition (in terms of gender, cultural background, participation level and eventual special needs) to improve the school outcomes and the social cohesion of the classes. The groups have carried out different activities for brief periods, also thanks to the help of the outside assistance from family members, the volunteers, the support teachers. The experimentation has demonstrated that this approach has two essential strengths: children learn through interaction with peers, who are different in their cognitive and learning skills, while the adult inclusion represents an important motivational and supportive factor.

⁵ <http://creaub.info>

Pedagogic models

Many European experiences conducted in the recent years in schools (from UK to Ireland, from Romania to Spain), have demonstrated the common features regarding **innovative pedagogic models** used to manage the diversity and the educational inclusion more flexibly. The basis of these models is the child's well-being (from the point of view of rights, needs, potentiality and access to resources) co-protagonist in the activities thanks to his participation. To this purpose, there are adopted creative teaching methods that promote the cooperative and dialogic learning, overcoming the traditional forms of frontal teaching, and creating situations where students are involved in egalitarian dialogue. These working methods allow the development of different abilities of the children, including those relational and social ones, and to enhance those acquired by the Roma minors in different contexts other than school, which are hardly recognized and deployed in the educational paths. From this perspective, the **informal educational activities** occupy an important place (sports, arts, cultural and recreational in general), that use universal language and therefore are naturally integrated into the student development and learning path through a shared design of all the organizations involved.

BOX 5 – EXPERIENCES FROM WORKSHOPS

In Milan, the educators and the operators of the video workshops have paid attention to enhance the knowing how to do skills, in addition to the cognitive ones, of the Roma children who had linguistic and communication difficulties because they had just came to our country „A., 15 years old, does not speak Italian, but with great sensitivity was involved by the director in the most practical technical activities and video making. This has contributed greatly to reducing the initial tension and finding an active role for all the participants” (video)

In Bari “,while I accompany them to school, the Roma children looked at everything, starting from streets, they race to pick the shortest one...express all the desire to leave the camp for at least a part of the day and to see what happens out in an egalitarian perspective...they seem to express a need for learning as minors who have small chances of sharing spaces with other children who do not live in the camp”– (theater)

RESEARCH RESULTS

➔ Starting from an experiment conducted in a primary school in Fauglia, in the province of Pisa which applied a pedagogical intuition of Mario Orsi of the very first years of 2000), since 2012, the Region of Tuscany has been

disseminating an interesting innovative educational project called "**Schools without schoolbags**" by means of a selection of nursery, primary, and secondary schools. The watchwords of the project are responsibility, community and hospitality. The project proposes a model of collective learning, where students are studying on common tables, help one another, the teachers are not in a position of imposing authority and the material for learning is self-produced. To disseminate the educational proposal according to this work method, there was established the *National Network of Schools without schoolbags* and there were drafted specific „Guidelines for the spaces and the furnishings of the primary school and kindergartens”⁶.

➔ In **Italy**, the *National Project for the inclusion and integration of the RSC children* has adopted the methodologies of *cooperative learning and learning by doing*, considered the most suitable tools for transforming the school practices into real inclusion measures for Roma students and their families within the academic world. „The cooperative learning methodology underpins a concept of school as a learning community, based on collaboration and the ability of improving the quality of the training interventions and the relationships between all the subjects inside or outside the school (...)in which collaboration is encouraged, the personal growth and the teamwork are emphasized to achieve higher-level goals. (...)”⁶. The *learning by doing* methodology is mainly used within the workshop activities to develop the children's transversal skills related to the emotional, relational and expressive sphere as reference elements to the curricular learning and to enable self-improvement.

➔ The teaching methodologies adopted by the schools involved in the activities promoted by the Municipality of **Venice** to foster the inclusion and the integration of children, including Roma minors, have envisaged – among other things – the use of cooperative learning, learning by doing, narrative method, philosophy for children and the carrying out of group activities.

⁶ The Istituto degli Innocenti, *Quaderno del progetto nazionale per l'inclusione e l'integrazione dei bambini rom, sinti e caminanti. Riferimenti metodologici e indicazioni operative per la realizzazione delle attività*, Edizione aggiornata a dicembre 2015, Firenze, 2015

Educators' expectations

As demonstrated by the numerous studies over the last few years, the teachers' and educators' expectations toward students' learning and behaviour have tremendous reliance on the motivation, the choices and the performance of the students, especially those who find themselves belonging to a minority (gender, ethnicity, religious belief, sexual orientation or other).

This dynamic is truly worrying if we consider that the knowledge about the Roma is very limited and that the prejudgments about the abilities and willingness to learn of the Roma children are still widespread and shared by teachers and educators. In some cases, these beliefs lead to the requirement for the intervention of the support teachers and to the discovery of a different ability of Roma children who have special educational needs (the percentage of Roma students who are in schools in this situation is extraordinarily high compared to that of other students, especially in Southern Italy). In other cases, however, the progress of Roma students is measured with the parallel didactic paths than those conducted in the class, that allow them to be admitted to the next class even in the absence of the minimum conditions requested for their classmates. Vice versa, in schools it is not considered the fact that the Roma culture is predominantly oral and that this has significant consequences on the structure of the cognitive processes, the expanding of knowledge and on the Roma children world's vision in general.

BOX 6 – EXPERIENCES FROM WORKSHOPS

In Milan “the children showed great satisfaction for the recognition that has been symbolically attributed to them by a cardboard medal saying 'I was very good', which seemed totally unexpected, as if they were not accustomed to being appreciated and needed the confirmation that 'then I can be good too'” –(theater)

Finally, it is important to point out that on the long term, tolerating gaps in the basic skills of the Roma children, often justified in the name of presumed primordial cultural differences, causes frustration, humiliation and the sense of inadequacy, demotivates and leads them to decrease their school attendance or to drop-out their studies path (particularly in the transition between primary and secondary school of first stage). Given the tendency of the Roma children to not fully exploit their capacities and potential based on the conviction that they cannot do something different with regard to what is predefined by stereotypes and prejudices, the educators and the teachers have the enormous responsibility to prevent these prejudices and beliefs,

raising from the very first classes of the school the level of expectation for all the students, including the Roma, and creating opportunities for the recognition and the positive exploitation of the different abilities of all students.

Peer education

Individuals presenting the same characteristics such as gender, age, social status, nationality, ethnicity or others and who also share common goals, interests and motivations constitute a *peer group*. Particularly among the adolescents, the peers represent an important socializing agent that allows children to challenge themselves through school competitions, to confront each other, to transfer information, and to outline accepted and shared behaviour patterns.

Since 1999 in Italy, the MIUR has started experimenting, together with others, on the methodological tool for the **peer education**, already used in the '60s and '70s in healthcare and with a preventive purpose in the Anglo-Saxon countries and the United States. Fifteen years later, the *Recommendations for the Integration of Foreign Students and the Interculture* of MIUR (2015) suggested introducing the *peer education* tool to foster the integration of foreign students in schools, especially those recently graduated. As noticed above, by favouring the involvement of the teenagers compared to adults, the educational relationship that allows the transfer of knowledge, information, experiences and emotions between the persons who belong to the same group or of equal cultural or social level produces effects of mutual influence. This tool is considered to be particularly effective in the innovative pedagogical models based on cooperative learning.

Within this framework, furthermore, the peer education promotes the transfer of **life skills**, namely, the basic skills that the individual needs to manage the relationship with their surrounding environment (it refers to the ability to make decisions, to solve problems, to practice forms of critical thinking, to manage emotions and interpersonal relationships, to communicate effectively, to develop multi-minded thinking capacity, to be aware of their own self). Acquiring life skills is crucial to inclusive education, as it is an incentive for children to build up their own identity, to increase their self-esteem and confidence in their abilities, to intervene in the reduction of anxiety, to favour the relationship between the actors of the educational paths with a final result that also concerns the reduction in school drop-out and absenteeism.

BOX 7 – EXPERIENCES FROM WORKSHOPS

In Milan only "D., A.'s 20-year-old cousin, aged 15 - who does not speak Italian and still does not go to school because he has just arrived from Romania - convinced him and his family to attend the video workshop and to enroll in school to attend it the next year" - (video)

In Bari "the Roma children who attend the theatre workshop observe with great interest how others behave, paying attention to prevalent rules and orientations so as to try to adapt them to their behaviour, also in terms of relational expressions and affection towards the educator, that then they attempt to emulate." - (theater)

Personalized interventions

By colligating the traditional educational paths and the activities carried out with innovative pedagogical methods, the good practices indicate that often, to fill the gaps or the specific needs of each child, the **personalized interventions** are needed. These initiatives are indispensable measures to re-establish a condition for equal social, cultural and educational opportunities for Roma children in the educational and training path. As much as possible, these actions, to be included in the school curriculum or outside, should be addressed to the whole class or may be directed to small groups of students. In some cases, in Europe, in order to respond to the needs of each child, it was used the *mentoring method* (conducted by outside school educators belonging to the organizations involved in inclusive education paths), considered to be particularly successful in identifying individual needs, fostering the acquisition of *life-skills* and contributing to the harmonious development of the person.

To prevent the personalized interventions from being an additional reason for discrimination and stigmatization, even the activities aimed at filling the knowledge gaps can never consist of isolated actions, but should be integrated into a comprehensive framework to support the overall development of the personal and motivational skills of the children. For this purpose, teachers and educators are required to act with the necessary caution and professionalism, ensuring continuous vigilance on the ethical aspect of the teaching activities.

BOX 8 – EXPERIENCES FROM WORKSHOPS

The linguistic difficulties and the limited schooling of a part of the Roma students involved in the project *Together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education (LUOGHI COMUNI)* workshops were faced in different ways: In Rome, the educators have created the opportunities for further improving the Italian language that have been addressed to all foreign students participating in the activities; in Milan it was especially enhanced the figure of the young Roma mediators, who facilitated communication between different types of Romani, raising great curiosity and interest among all high school students; in Bari, there were directly involved Roma children who grew up in Italy, in order to mediate among newly arrived companions until it was no longer needed.

RESEARCH RESULTS

→ The CAT Cooperative works with the schools of **Florence** and addresses the needs of the Roma students with support interventions and remedial schooling,

socialization/school integration or reinforcement of specific skills mainly conducted at school with the entire class group. Based on the teachers' request, after a month of observation in the classroom for the children for whom personalized interventions were required, the CAT cooperative operators prepared a *Personalized Educational Plan*, a reference point that was used to periodically check the school progress of students, to be shared with the teachers and the students. Only when it is strictly necessary, the personalized interventions are carried out outside the school in order to re-integrate the student into the class group as soon as possible.

➔ Within the *Promociona Classes*, the Spanish Promociona Programme has provided **personalized tutoring** actions for the RSC students, conducted by other Roma students who - in addition - arise motivation, self-esteem, and develop relationship with the environment of the tutored students, make suggestions and guidance on the modalities, the timetables and the rules needed in order to activate the personal study plan.

3. COUNTERACTING DISCRIMINATION



Photo: Together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education (LUOGHI COMUNI), Workshop in Bari

Family relationships

Numerous studies have shown that the **positive relationships of the children with their parents concerning education** have had positive effects on their performances, behaviour and motivation to continue their studies. According to the UK *Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)*, for a child of between 7 and 16, the involvement of a parent in the academic activities is more important than other factors such as the background or the level of education in his family. Moreover, the Spanish *Promociona Programme* intervenes in the families to strengthen the parents' role as key-actors for the children's academic achievement, by working on organizing space and time for study, the development of autonomy and responsibilities, limits, rules and expectations of the family members. In some European countries, the Roma families have been directly involved in school activities, both in teaching and on other occasions, in order to encourage their acceptance from the part of the families of the school, to embody positive models, to enrich the patrimony value of the institute or even to offer them (and to the other parents including) recreational and educational opportunities (for example, through the organization of seminars and language courses).

So that the positive relationship between parents and pupils could be effective, it is imperative for the Roma families to be recognized as the **primary socialization agents** by various interlocutors. The construction of dialogue and trustful relationships between the school, actors involved in the development of children and their families, is based, in fact, on the possibility of Roma families to decide upon and to move independently and especially on the **recognition of their respective roles and responsibilities**. It is important, therefore, that reception in schools does not concern only children, but it also should be extended to their families, trying to overcome from the beginning, the linguistic, administrative and the bureaucratic difficulties encountered often by the Roma parents in this path, especially if they are illiterate or to very low schooling levels and inclusion conditions (the online school enrolment, for example, is a major difficulty for some families who, in the most complicated situations – such as for reasons of legal status or the lack of documents- in front of the obstacles, do not know how to overcome them and thus decide not to enrol the children). In these cases, the role of the Roma mediators is crucial within the families since it facilitates the access to the procedures in order to support the administration (the first interface with the Roma parents), as well as the teachers and the school principals (some Italian virtuous municipalities, such as Pavia, have recently activated the figure of the Roma mediator in their schools). To foster the contact and the mutual knowledge, within the framework of the good practices, there were created

meeting opportunities between school and families, ranging from interviews with teachers on students assessments to celebration of anniversaries and sharing of recreational, cultural and sports activities among the school communities, the families and the students. Everyday practice shows that building stable relationships with families, based on mutual respect requires continuity and a large investment of energy and resources, volition, dedication and a real interest from all the organizations involved.

RESEARCH RESULTS

- ➔ To facilitate the dialogue between the Roma families and the schools, in **Spain** the *Gypsy Secretariat Foundation* has drawn up a manual illustrating the methodological tools to be used in a progressive engagement path, structured in successive stages as follows: a context analysis activity (diagnosis) and its presentation to the family of the *Promociona Programme*, the involvement of the parents and other family members in some path activities, the drawing up of a personalized Working Plan with counseling and tutoring interventions also for families, the implementation of what is stipulated in the Working Plan and, finally, the participation in monitoring and evaluation of the intervention at three different levels: individual, group, and the social and community on.
- ➔ To achieve success, in the schools of Scampia, **Naples**, the *Association Chi rom e...chi no* has worked for many years by positively exploiting the local resources, to spread the culture of respect for differences and minorities through proximity and mutual knowledge, both in the context of life and work. By encouraging the involvement of Italian, foreign and Roma women, in 2010 there was created *The Kumpania – Intercultural Gastronomic Path*⁷, a social enterprise that, besides offering multicultural gastronomy services, also carries out educational, training, recreational and cultural activities addressed to the children and adults in the area.
- ➔ The *Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre* of **Dublin** (Ireland)⁸ encouraged the Traveller parents to join the *Families Learning Classes* (for the literacy activities and the acquisition of basic arithmetic knowledge) and thus be able to support the children's schooling. In the same way, the *CREA (The Centre of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities)* of the University of **Barcelona** (Spain) has promoted the creation of open Literary Circles for students and their parents, so that the last ones could improve their knowledge and be put in the position of having a dialogue with their children, helping them do their homework and, above all, increasing their expectations about their academic potential. Both of these initiatives have been quite successful even with the less literate Roma people.

⁷ The web address of the enterprise Kumpania is <http://chiku.it/kumpania/>

⁸ The web site of the *Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre* is <http://www.paveepoint.ie/>

Multiple identities

The national model for reception and integration in schools of minors with non-Italian citizenship is based on some main principles that include universalism, comprehensive education, interculturality and the central position in a social group. In this perspective, the inclusive schooling aims to promote the integration of all students and to positively present the differences that characterize them. The **multiple identities** of children and teens, starting from the linguistic ones, are therefore understood as enrichment elements and not as elements for defining odds. From these approaches, by pedagogy and intercultural teaching, schools are invited to include these activities (even transversally to them) actions and interventions that facilitate dialogue, relationship and recognition of the different identities, experiences and the children and teens' sense of belonging to a group.

As for Roma students, the international best practices propose to introduce within the educational path of opportunities for the recognition and the promotion of **Romanipé** (Roma identity and culture), through a structurally organized, but not episodic or random programming of various activities having the same goal. In some cases, reference is made to the presentation, the further analysis and discussing elements of **Roma history, language and culture** (as well as of other nationalities represented by students in the schools), in others cases, different typologies of didactic intervention are proposed to deal with the different aspects of multiculturalism more indirectly (through play, narration, artistic expression, etc.).

Multi-annual experiences have highlighted that the multiple identities of all the children, including the Roma, are an important tool for enhancing their protagonist (together

BOX 9 – EXPERIENCES FROM WORKSHOPS

In Rome, the theater workshop activities have been carried out within a unique path structure in phases regarding a selection of World Days of the United Nations. Within this framework, the students of the school, together with parents and the teaching body, on January 27, also celebrated the anniversary of the genocide of the Roma *Porrajmos* – (theater).

During the events on the occasion of the Holocaust Memorial Day, in the schools of Milan, Rome and Bari, the book *Else's Story: The story of how a little girl survived Auschwitz* (written by Michail Krausnick, illustrated by Lucas Ruegenberg and translated by UPRE Roma) was presented to the teachers and the educators, published under the auspices of the Project *Together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education* (LUOGHI COMUNI). This is an educational tool accompanied by work sheets that can be used in primary and secondary schools of first stage to include teaching, information and activities related to the Porrajmos.

<http://www.luoghicomuni.eu/blog/2017/03/10/la-storia-di-else-la-bambina-che-sopravvisse-ad-auschwitz>

with the others), from the knowledge of their roots to strengthen their sense of belonging and self-esteem and thus breaking the vicious cycle of adaptation to the stereotypes that have negative effects on the relationships, expectations and, ultimately, on school outcomes. Certainly the characteristics of this kind of actions should be commensurate with the climate of the context that each and every school operates and also with the characteristics of the Roma children living there to avoid the effects of exacerbation of stigma and accentuation of the sense of alienation of the Roma minors.



Photo: Together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education (LUOGHI COMUNI)

Knowledge and direct contact

Through **knowledge and direct contact** ensured between children, families, parents, workers of the public and private services, and so on, it is possible to counteract effectively the discrimination and to reveal the groundlessness of the current stereotypes regarding the Roma. This methodological approach applies to both adults, who are generally more hesitant to change their opinions consolidated over time, and to children and teens, who have greater mental flexibility and are less influenced by prejudices.

The direct contact between the last ones, in particular, allows overcoming the forms of relational segregation which are often addressed to Roma students in schools and in other contexts, having a crucial impact on self-image, self-esteem, expectations, and development of their *life skills*. Enhancing the natural need for knowledge and open-mindedness of all children and teens, the direct personal experiences enable to understand and "touch by hands" the inconsistency of the prejudices and the distorted representations according to which sometimes - even in classrooms, in schools - emotional and spatial, physical and metaphorical barriers are raised against the same children.

BOX 10 – EXPERIENCES FROM WORKSHOPS

In Bari "the girls from the classes did not show any resistance in allowing their Roma companions sit over their blankets, who had not brought with them for the relaxation activities...during the last meetings they sought their company and asked them to share the blanket" – (theater)

In Milan," the high school girls showed great interest and curiosity, it was the first opportunity to see and meet the RSC community (...) they were very surprised to see the log cabins of the Chiesa Rossa Village where T. and J. Live. In turn, T. and J. were very proud to show their homes (...) T. said she could never live in an apartment like the one of the high school student where they shot some scenes of the video" – (video)

RESEARCH RESULTS

- ➔ The female students from the Psycho-Pedagogical High School Vittorio Gassman of **Rome**, in 2012 have participated in a dance workshop together with Roma little girls and teenage girls from the Association *Zingare Spericolate*, which was enormously successful, both among the girls and the teachers. The activities have also envisaged „short" clips, designed and realized by workshops participants together with experts and

technicians within the camp equipped from the Cesare Lombroso, the residence of the girls (*Chejà Celen*, "girls who dance") of the association. During the filming, the proximity, the physical contact, hospitality and sharing creative work have brought together all the participants to the point that, on the one hand, the workshop was requested by the female students and carried out in school the following year, and on the other hand, some Roma teenagers from Cesare Lombroso camp chose to enrol in high school.

A gender perspective reading

The children and teens' education based on eliminating the differences and enhancing the respect for oneself and others, needs to be integrated by the **gender pedagogy** in order to include the planning and the conduct of all the activities aimed towards children's growth and learning path, as well as the dimension regarding the experience, the roles and the gender relationships. In school, the absence of this key reading on the dynamics of personal and collective development is very dangerous because neutrality is only a word that does not necessarily substantiate in real life. Its lack has an ambivalent effect: on the one hand, it is associated - mostly nowadays - to predefined gender models and roles (in fact removing the perspective of equal opportunities) while, on the other hand, it does not allow to capture all the dynamics of the reality, especially those that have to do with the power relations. Reading from the gender perspective is very important in order to better understand the condition of the young Roma women who face a deep malaise in Italy, undergo acutely significant transformations that have direct effects on themselves, their families and their children, or on the same Romanipé.

The Roma girls and the young teenage Roma women (even those most vulnerable socially) are already practicing gradual forms of emancipation: at school they study better and more, aspire to choose freely what to do, in some cases they have already assumed the roles of social or work responsibility, choose their own companions and design family planning, limit the number of children postponing the date of the prospective wedding event, and so on. For this very reason, some of these girls (generalizations are not possible!) are in a difficult position, at the crossroad between the responsibilities towards their own family and their community (which offers identity, sense belonging and security) on the one hand and, on the other, the opportunities offered by the school itself, which - in the end - should lead to opening up of new perspectives.

The *Ten Common Basic Principles of the Roma Inclusion* 2009 by the Council of Europe, that has inspired the European countries to outline their National Strategies for the inclusion of the RSC, includes the „awareness of the gender dimension“. Adopting this perspective, in fact, in the long run, should facilitate Roma women

BOX 11 – EXPERIENCES FROM WORKSHOPS

In Milan R. told C., a Roma mediator, *“that she wants to be like her, free to do the work she likes even though she is a young Roma girl”* - (video)

In Milan the theme of the identity and gender roles has been addressed indirectly to the children in the video workshop thanks to a narrative technique- used in the writing of the subject- of exchanging bags containing the clothes of the two protagonists („a child who boxes in the gym and a girl who dances) - (video)

empowerment, in order to allow them to make informed decisions, to choose autonomously, to pursue their own interests and aspirations without facing the impositions from society and their family and to exercise their rights.

RESEARCH RESULTS

➔ The recent European studies revealed that the debates in academic and public policy sphere on **arranged or early marriages** or **intra-family violence** among Roma is often permitted by the cultural prejudice that, despite good intentions, risks to be to their disadvantage and to consolidate stereotypes and prejudices. The statements on the spread of these practices and the fate of subordination of the Roma girls to the family and the domestic responsibilities are only partly due to a reality that is in change and has its own characteristics in each country. In this context, even the expectations regarding the marriage of the young Roma girls, especially those living in the segregated camps and mono-ethnic settlements, in the absence of other concrete opportunities, should not be interpreted only in terms of tradition and culture, but rather as one of the outcomes of the conditions of marginalization and segregation regarding the personal lives as a part of the Roma in Italy.

➔ To encourage the entrance and the attendance at school of the immigrant Roma girls aged 11 to 18, the *Municipality of Manchester* (United Kingdom) developed a specific “*Manchester Roma Girls*” approach, which supported them to pay residential visits in schools, conducted between 2009 and 2013, which has had positive effects on the enrolment and the school experience of the Roma girls attending them.

➔ The *Trebnje Centre for Education and Culture* of **Trebnje**, in Slovenia, within the framework of the *MS4ROW - A mentoring system for Roma teenage girls and women on their vocational and educational path* project has developed on the basis of the results of a ten-month experiment, a mentoring model (available online also in English) for the Roma young girls and teenagers. The mentoring activities were designed and experimented on to motivate and support the Roma girls in their educational and vocational path so that they could acquire life skills and functional competences instrumental in entering the labour market. The young Roma girls were flanked by female mentors who built with them a relationship of mutual trust, monitored their progress and encouraged them to continue their studies or vocational paths, helping them to formulate personal life plans providing advice and the necessary information.

➔ To break the gender distribution of the role models -representing that children can choose whatever they want, regardless of whether they are male or female- both the Association *Chi rom....chi no* of **Naples**, and The Policy Centre for Roma and Minorities of **Bucharest**, have gathered mixed and female football teams that have been very successful among the girls and the children involved in the activities at Scampia (Naples) and Ferentari (Bucharest).

4. THE RSC STUDENTS' EMPOWERMENT



Photo: *Together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education (LUOGHI COMUNI)*, Workshop in Bari

Self-esteem, self-image and self-efficiency

To reduce the sense of inadequacy and to counteract low self-esteem of the Roma students, good practices and current studies propose to include in the pattern of the activities addressed to all children the interventions in self-esteem, self-efficiency (namely the conviction that one can successfully emulate the behaviour required to produce the outcomes) and self-image. On the basis of their own self-efficiency, in fact, people decide what challenges to undertake, how much energy to devote and how long to persevere despite any obstacles. The self-image of the Roma children risks to be diminished even at school, because of the perceived difference between the values and the norms of the majority and those inherent to their own identity. The perception of this difference is strengthened by discrimination and in some cases it leads to hostile episodes from peers, thus becoming a source of stress, disorientation, and sometimes aggression.

Within this framework, self-esteem interventions, self-image and self-efficiency of Roma students – to be carried out within the mixed and personalized groups – proves positive outcomes regarding:

- motivation;
- school performance;
- behaviour;
- attitude to co-operate;
- to undermine the sense of inadequacy, passivity and indifference;
- to counteract the tendency to adjust behaviour and school-based performance on the basis of prejudices;
- to fully exploit their potential despite the

BOX 12 - ESPERIENZE DAI LABORATORI

In Bari „the Roma children seem to need to be supported through the interaction with the operators (...) with us they have a more meaningful relationship compared to the classmates, that renders their status different and which they tend to emphasize” –(theater)

In Milan, „R. (who is 12 years old) asked me what being an educator or mediator means, because she would like to study to have a job so she could help the others and especially the Roma” – (video)

In Rome „...they were very excited when they heard that I personally know Santino Spinelli but then they fell into dejection, as if to say 'after all, we are as we are, we are Roma, there is nothing to do'” – (theater)

In Milan, at the end of the activities „ we witnessed the behavioural change of a child, who in the end was finally relaxed and smiling, while at the beginning, as he did not know the Italian language, was introvert and timorous” – (video)

In Bari „I was very impressed by C.'s vivacity, which I had never seen before: she and her brother changed, they became more agile and active; also F. is more present, speaks, writes and communicates; even though the workshop activities ended, they are more willing to go to school, which is now perceived not only as a duty but also as a place to make new friends and feel comfortable, breaking away from the usual daily life of the camp” – (video)

objective difficulties (the unequal access to opportunities and resources, the housing emergencies, the lack of concrete prospects, the discrimination, and so on) and the subjective ones (anxiety, fear, shame and the sense of inadequacy);

- to develop ambitious aspirations about the future, countering the sense of resignation over a destiny perceived as ineluctable.

RESEARCH RESULTS

➔ The *Gypsy Secretariat Foundation (Spain)* recommends identifying the micro-objectives in the learning path of the young Roma, to be able to report even the faint progresses to their parents and to engage them to counteract the sense of inadequacy, shame and the relational discomfort of the children related to school performance.

➔ The integration programme for the Roma pupils conducted in schools by the *Department for children, schools and families (DCSF)* in the **United Kingdom** required from the educators and the teachers to accurately track the progress of the Roma students and to make it available for their families.

Positive role models

The inclusion of the Roma mediators in the groups that carry out activities in schools (also stipulated by the *Fourth National plan of actions and interventions to protect the rights of individuals in childhood of 2016*) or the reference to positive Roma models represent an extremely important facilitator for all the students, especially for Roma children and the younger Roma, both born and raised in Italy and those who arrived later. As **positive models**, the Roma mediators of the project *Together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education (LUOGHI COMUNI)*, for example, have been the living proof of the fact that it is possible to achieve the results and to fulfil their own aspirations "despite everything".

Unfortunately, the **poor transparency** of the integrated Roma, who are an active part in society, in the world of work and in everyday life, as well as those who have prestigious roles or responsibilities in the economic, political, social and the cultural dimension of our country, reinforces the sense of alienation caused by the discrimination and the segregation of the rejecting society.

In the project *Together against discrimination and for the promotion of the right to education (LUOGHI COMUNI)*, the presence in schools and workshops of the Roma mediators – young qualified women and men, committed and passionate, involved in the activities based on their abilities and not just because they are Roma – has not only been able to demolish the mistrust and the oppressive behaviour initially triggered by children in schools (including the Roma), but also contributed to create a climate of trust and mutual respect with cascading effects that concerned self-perception, self-esteem, motivation, interest in the activities, solidarity and a collaboration spirit.

BOX 13 – EXPERIENCES FROM WORKSHOPS

In Rome "the initial mistrust of S. disappeared when he heard me speak in Romani", while „S. and D. began to deal with great respect when they found out that he was a university Roma who personally knew Santino Spinelli " –(theater)

The mediator C. wrote that in Milan "the Roma children were amazed, they did not think I could be a Roma girl" - (video)

In Milan „the Roma girls from the theater workshop considered the female mediator, not just an important point of reference and an interlocutor to trust, but above all an element of identification thinking of their future" – (theater)

In Bari „the Roma children establish links between themselves and all the more with the female mediator who represents a reference point for them, they always follow her physically, without realizing it and sometimes it is noticed the will to emulate her, as if it was a key to interpreting the context and the existent relationships and to participate more serenely and effectively in the activities" – (video)

RESEARCH RESULTS

- ➔ In **Bucharest**, the *Alternative Education Club* has involved as volunteers the Roma children who had participated in the previous years in the project's activities, embodying the witnesses of the change in their schooling and in their life path by means of having positively benefited from the AEC experience. This choice was dictated by the conviction that their presentation as positive reference models would raise the Roma children's level of aspiration about their future. For the same reasons, also the *Roma Academic Club* (an association of Roma university students) involved its own associates as educators in the kindergarten and the elementary schools of **Murska Sobota** (in Slovenia).
- ➔ To inspire the young Roma to pursue their personal, work and study interests and to provide them with tools to counter stereotypes and widespread prejudices in society, in December 2015, the ERIO (*European Roma Information Office*) edited a publication⁹ that presents the real and concrete stories of some characters embodying the **successful Roma reference models** at the European political, institutional, cultural, economic and social level.
- ➔ The project *ROM-UP!* Coordinated by the Spanish *Romani Association of Women Drom Kotar Mestipem*, starting from the results of the **project INCLUDED** and further studying eleven successful experiences selected from 22 good practices, has identified a type of six successful educational actions that include the presence of the Roma role models in schools (the *Roma school models*, not only through the involvement of the family members, but also by the inclusion of the Roma in the school staff among educators, social workers and volunteers).

⁹ ERIO, *Modelli di riferimento rom*, Brussels, 2015

Active citizenship paths

The actions carried out by school in cooperation with other educational, recreational and cultural organizations are not only aimed to transfer knowledge but also and above all to design personalized training paths within which each student can express their potential and develop the necessary tools to dispose of **self awareness in their social interaction** and to construct an adequate representation of reality.

This aim can be achieved by introducing **paths to active citizenship** within the educational interventions promoted by schools and other organizations, addressed to all children in order to participate in the civic life of the country starting from the recognition of their duties but above all having knowledge and demanding their own rights in particular and human rights in general.

This is a particularly important aspect for the Roma students as well, given the discrimination and segregation they are subject to, in view of the lack of recognition of the Roma as a minority in our country, due to the low presence of the Roma (especially women) in the public consultative and decision-making bodies, bodies that - from national to local level - intervene in defining the actions, the measures and the policies that concern them (even indirectly).

There is no coincidence that The *Ten Common Basic Principles of the Roma Inclusion* 2009 by the Council of Europe includes (at article no. 10) the topic on the "Active participation of the Roma".

An intersectionality perspective

The condition of a part of the Roma women in Italy seems to be particularly complex because groups are often based on a patriarchal culture. In addition to performing domestic work and child-care, women in fact are the actors of important economic and social functions (by contributing to the family's subsistence and, whenever possible, by working). At the same time they are also subject to double discrimination: within communities, where they do not always enjoy the same opportunities as men (especially the younger ones) and outside, where they are more discriminated than men regarding their access to work, services, institutions, and rights¹⁰.

There is a feeling of deep instability among women (for example, when making important decisions for themselves and their children), that in some cases determines internally true scars. The young Roma girls, in particular, are called on the one hand to meet the expectations of their families and at the same time they face many changes that also affect the sense of belonging to their own group or community.

Precisely the gender relationships, the marriage and the family planning are mistakenly interpreted only as cultural phenomena¹¹ and not just as the result of adaptation to historical and social circumstances characterized by exclusion and discrimination. At European level, for example, it is largely widespread that the Roma families are less inclined to support their girls to continue their studies, so that at a certain age they could marry and take care of home and of offspring. Nevertheless, girls (especially in Italy) within the limits of their conditions and possibilities, are showing themselves more emancipated, pointing out they did not want to resign themselves to a destiny of subordination, and to make their own choices and decisions.

In the last years, the changes in the female component of the traditionally structured Roma world have also involved older women, who occasionally exercise roles that once were the exclusive prerogatives of men – (for example, exercising the function of Community justice through the Kriss-) to the point that in 2015 the *Ad Hoc*

BOX 14 - EXPERIENCES FROM WORKSHOPS

In Milan "R. attended less the workshop activities... also because she had to take care of her brothers at home, as her mother started attending a professional course" – (video)

¹⁰ As emerges from the analysis of the gender data of the latest qualitative survey of RSC populations conducted in Italy in 2011 (ERRC 2014, FRA 2014)

¹¹ Cahrom, 2015, *Thematic report on early and child marriages*

Committee of Expert on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM) of the Council of Europe¹² declared that "it is time to dispel the myth of the subordination of Roma women within families".

For a better understanding of the situation of the Roma women without the risk of cultural determinism and above all, to support the agency of young people in their educational paths, nowadays the feminist associations (including Roma ones), have proposed to assume the **methodological perspective of transnationality**. This approach regards the multiple discrimination that Roma women are subject to, not only in cumulative terms (for reasons of ethnicity, gender, class and social position, nationality, sexual orientation or others designed to create the marginal and the discriminatory models) but also as a result of their interactions. The interaction between the accumulation of multiple discrimination and the outcome of their connections creates, in fact, a ground for discrimination *sui generis* completely independent of the triggering conditions of vulnerability which represents an additional dimension of **disempowerment** that is indispensable to recognize in order to be able to intervene in it effectively also within the educational paths.

¹² Cahrom, *Thematic report on early and child marriages*, 2015

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