

## Out of Sight: The Problem with Roma formal camps in Rome and Milan

More than 4000 Romani people live in formal camps in Milan and Rome. These segregated settlements are constructed and authorised by the authorities. Municipalities are supposed to ensure that the camps are built in areas beneficial to the Romani community: areas that avoid urban marginalisation; those which facilitate access to education, health and social services. In practice, these camps are often isolated and segregated, making it extremely difficult for Roma to access their basic rights to education, employment and healthcare.

Some formal camps were built or renovated under the State of Emergency, which was found unlawful. The Italian government itself stated that an emergency response to Roma is not helpful, in its National Strategy on Roma Inclusion. Many municipal authorities in Italy still place Roma in segregated camps and intend to build more camps for Roma, despite the decision on the State of Emergency from the Cassation Court, and the political commitment in the National Strategy.

New research from the ERRC reveals a number of problems with formal camps. This short factsheet previews some of the findings.

## How many Roma live in formal camps?

In Rome eight formal camps host **3.680 Roma** (including 1.960 children). The first camp Salviati - now a semiformal camp - was opened in 1994. The last one, La Barbuta, was opened in June 2012.

In Milan seven formal camps host **630 Roma** (including 205 children). The first one, Bonfadini, was opened in 1987 and the most recent one, Impastato, in 2005.

## What research did the ERRC do?

The ERRC conducted research in six formal camps in Rome and Milan from November 2012 to February 2013. Our researcher conducted in-depth qualitative research, talking to Roma in each camp (with an equal representation of men and women), NGOs managing camps, independent experts and activists, municipal authorities and experts on social housing. The results of the research from formal camps Camping River, Castel Romano and Gordiani in Rome and Chiesa Rossa, Idro and Martirano in Milan give rise to significant concerns.

## What problems did the research find?

### Isolated location

Formal camps in Rome are generally located in unsafe areas close to incinerators, airports runway and aquifers, or in the middle of agriculture fields where there are no any other settlements. Fire protection systems, security systems and sewers are not adequate. The isolated locations lead to many other problems.

Of the three camps visited in Rome only GORDIANI is located centrally and well connected to public services. The other two camps are out of Rome. CAMPING RIVER camp is located in an area without any public transport within walking distance. Roma generally use their cars or pay an illegal minibus in order to go to

Prima Porta train station. CASTEL ROMANO is located in the XII Municipality of Rome, in via Pontina highway, out of the ring road that encircles Rome, 20 km from Rome and 5 km from the small town of Pomezia. Via Pontina is a state highway without footpaths. The nearest bus stop is about 4 km from the camp.

In Milan, only the camp IDRO is in the city. MARTIRANO is located in Milan's zone seven, completely isolated from the district. The closest bus stop is 1 km from the camp and one has to walk through fields, without light at night. CHIESA ROSSA is located in the middle of rice fields. Roma have to walk through fields for 15 to 20 minutes to get to public transport.

## Education

Romani children in formal camps find it very difficult to access education because of inadequate housing conditions, low security of tenure, and fear of forced evictions (which take place if adults do not respect the rules of the camp, adversely affecting their children). Overcrowded homes with poor infrastructure generally do not offer sufficient space and light for students to do their homework.

**Rome:** In the CAMPING RIVER and CASTEL ROMANO camps, buses for children attending high school are not provided, only for those in primary school, even though there is no public transport available from the camps. This means that Romani high school students are more likely to drop out of school.

**Milan:** In the CHIESA ROSSA and MARTIRANO camps, at least six Romani school age children are not enrolled in compulsory education. According to the preliminary findings of ERRC research, schools seem to treat absenteeism of Romani students differently from other students. Non-Romani children are allowed to be absent for 42 days before any action is taken, while for Romani children this is almost double - 80 days in one school year.

## Employment

The number of Roma saying that they are unemployed is up to four to five times more than the number of non-Roma saying the same in Italy, according to the European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights (FRA). Prejudice and negative stereotypes towards Roma, both those who have Italian citizenship and foreign migrants, form a key structural obstacle to employment. The isolated nature of many of the formal camps makes it even harder to find and keep employment. Roma have to give the camp as their address when looking for jobs, making it obvious to their potential employers what their ethnicity is, and providing an additional barrier.

**Rome:** Most Roma living in the three formal camps surveyed are unemployed. According to data from the NGOs managing the camps, in CAMPING RIVER, just 20 out of 280 Roma of working age have formal jobs. In GORDIANI, just 22 out of 93 Roma of working age are formally employed. Data on employment in the camp Castel Romano is not available.

**Milan:** There are 112 Roma of working age in the CHIESA ROSSA camp, and just six of them have a formal job, in MARTIRANO only three out of 34 Roma of working age are formally employed. Data on employment in the IDRO camp is not available.

## Health

Prejudices, lack of knowledge and communication barriers affect the health of Roma who, in general, have poorer health than non-Roma in Italy. Overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions seriously endanger the health conditions of those living in camps. In the formal camps the ERRC researched, NGOs confirmed that alcohol, drug and psychological problems are quite widespread. According to an NGO managing one of the three camps in Milan, drug and alcohol problems are caused by "segregation, frustration of attempts at integration and self-segregation."

**Rome:** The CAMPING RIVER and CASTEL ROMANO camps are far away from hospitals and healthcare centres. “The ambulance takes two hours to get here,” reported one Romani person living in CAMPING RIVER. Some Roma report they are refused entry to hospital or services. Many Roma in CASTEL ROMANO and GORDIANI are de facto stateless. They do not have identity cards and health cards and therefore cannot access health care.

**Milan:** One family of MARTIRANO told the ERRC they have psychological problems because of the situation of the camp. In summer 2011, they were evicted from their home “I had a home of 100 square metres. My home was provided with everything. You can imagine the shock for my two children. For my children to live here is a big shock because they lived in house. Sometimes they cry. If I ask them to draw something they always draw our house.”

## **Low Security of Tenure**

Roma visited in **formal camps** in Rome and Milan have no firm rental agreements which leads to lack of security of tenure, the basic problem from which many violations of the housing rights of Roma derive.

**Rome:** Roma have to submit a written application to receive a place in Rome’s formal camps, however there is no deadline for when the applicant should receive an answer.

**Milan:** In order to get a place in a Milan formal camp a written application addressed to relevant authorities should be submitted. There is a deadline of 30 days one should receive the decision.

The “tenants” in camps of both towns do not receive a contract, but an “agreement” is signed (“Verbale di consegna”). The “agreement” lists conditions the tenants have to respect; in case “tenants” do not respect the conditions, they lose the right to stay in the camp. However, it is not clear if the whole family or only the signatory will face the consequences of eviction. The “agreement” does not specify the duration of the stay and possible procedures for re-application.

The conditions are stricter than for regular social housing in Rome, e.g., tenants have to guarantee the children’s school attendance and maintain the requirements that allow the issuance of a residence permit.

In camp CAMPING RIVER the NGO managing the camp requires from each person older than 16 years to accept in writing their own internal, very strict regulations on entering the camp and receiving visitors.

## **What about social housing?**

Formal camps have much greater restrictions and limitations than social housing. Roma in Rome and Milan face a number of challenges when it comes to accessing social housing. Some of these barriers are relevant for anyone trying to obtain social housing but some barriers only affect Roma living in formal camps, or have an impact on them more frequently. For example, social housing in Rome is allocated with a points-based system. In February 2013, Romani families who live in formal camps in Rome were told by Rome’s authorities they cannot receive the points they need to give them a concrete chance to access social housing, as they are already living in ‘permanent structures’.

Many Roma are denied legal access to social housing in Rome and Milan due to a lack of personal documentation. Many Roma who have personal documents may not have appropriate documentation for their current place of residence, which can also pose a barrier to accessing social housing, as some social housing is only available to registered residents of a given municipality. This often means the only available housing for many Roma in Rome and Milan is in camps, where conditions and circumstances are much worse than in social housing. The ERRC’s full research report will look more closely at the differences between formal camps and social housing.