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## ***#IStayCamp. Health conditions, food deprivation and solidarity problems in the first days of the lockdown in the Roma Villages of Rome.***

*Carlo Stasolla & Tommaso Vitale*

Forthcoming, in [Metropolitics.org](https://www.metropolitics.org)

On March 9, 2020 the Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte, "in order to counteract and contain the spread of the Covid-19 virus," signed a decree of complete lockdown aimed at "avoiding any movement of individuals."<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the government recommended the application of stringent hygienic-sanitary measures throughout the country. Our NGO, "Associazione 21 luglio", began an applied research project aimed at understanding the impact of the measures in formal settlements in Rome. These settlements are inhabited by families that generally define themselves (and are identified by the local authorities) as belonging to varied Roma communities.<sup>2</sup>

We selected five formal mono-ethnic settlements of special emergency housing (so called Villages by the Rome administration) - within which, according to the census carried out by the Rome authorities in 2019, about 2,200 people live, including about 1,050 minors. Even if they were established by the city of Rome ([see Appendix 1](#)), they are not ordinary welfare shelters and they could be qualified as slums, as settlements characterized by poverty, poor housing, often located in hazardous areas, lack of standard utilities supply, exceptions to the urban planning standard setting, lack of green areas, frequent forced eviction. They are officially labelled 'Villages', but usually called 'Camps'. All of them are marked by overcrowding inside the housing units where, in some cases, 6 or 7 people live in deteriorated containers of 21 square meters.

In compliance with the regulations contained in the decree, we did not physically visit the settlements under study. We conducted telephone interviews with 24 people living in five Villages ([see Appendix 2](#)): the ones of Via Cesare Lombroso (181 people of Bosnian nationality, including 82 minors), Via Luigi Candoni (838 people, including 409 minors), Via dei Gordiani (260 people, 89 minors), Castel Romano (542 people, including 282 minors), Via di Salone (360 people, including 174 minors)<sup>3</sup>.

The interviews took place between March 14-17, 2020. This instant, remote methodology was made possible by the sustained contact with the Roma living in the Villages and the trust built up over time. Periodically, on a six-monthly basis, 21 Luglio's researchers visit the Roma Villages to observe and analyze the structural conditions of the settlements and the living conditions of the

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<sup>1</sup> The Decree of 9 March 2020 is published in the Official Gazette under the title "Further provisions implementing Decree Law No. 6 of 23 February 2020 on urgent measures for the containment and management of the epidemiological emergency by COVID-19, applicable throughout the country". The #IoRestoaCasa campaign is the result of a joint initiative of the Government, the Ministry of Health and Civil Protection.

<https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/2020/03/11/20A01605/sg>.

<sup>2</sup> This article is a summary of the report of the Association 21 luglio in Italian, which can be downloaded from the website <https://www.21luglio.org/iorestoacasa-e-loro-restano-nel-campo/>. To protect the identity of the inhabitants, their names have been replaced with their initials, gender, age, and citizenship. All of the interviewees consented to be interviewed for this research.

<sup>3</sup> See the report on the "State of implementation of interventions for the closure of Roma camps" of the Roma, Sinti and Caminanti Special Office of Roma Capitale of 24 September 2019, prot. QE/68633, in which is reported the "Synoptic picture of the population present in the Equipped Villages" carried out between 2018 and 2019 by the U.O.S.P.E. of the Local Police of Roma Capitale".

people through direct observation and interviews with the residents<sup>4</sup>. We identified several changes in the living conditions of the inhabitants as a result of the decree that were exacerbated by past and present housing and urban policies.

### ***Mobility***

In the two Villages of Via Luigi Candoni and Via di Salone, after the publication of the decree local police patrols have intensified. Police officers have been on horseback for some time at the entrance of the settlements. In some cases, the inhabitants feel the weight of contradictory restrictions that regulate hours when inhabitants may exit, and forbid the use of automobiles to leave (via Luigi Candoni) while also remaining observant of meter distance recommendations that apply inside cars (via di Salone). This last restriction makes it impossible for the driver to accompany other people who are not living together. Having been built far from the urbanized part of the city, the Salone 'Village' is more than 3 kilometers from a grocery store, and the road to the store from the 'Village' has no sidewalks and no public lighting. These factors effectively prevent some people from being able to leave the village, forcing them, where possible, to delegate someone to purchase basic necessities.

In the 'Village' of Castel Romano, law enforcement action seems to have recently escalated:

*"We have been told that we cannot go out more than once a day and they do not let us go out with the car to do our shopping. Often, it's my wife who goes shopping on foot, so the policemen make less fuss. In the end we eat less and save more money"* (D., man, 47, Romanian).

Many people interviewed expressed more concern about leaving the 'Village', which is perceived as protective. Upon exiting for necessities, almost all of them wear prevention devices that are often self-produced. These external protectants are then punctually removed outside of their homes, where the living spaces are extremely compressed, although perceived as safer than the outside.

### ***Health orientation and prevention***

The coronavirus pandemic had its first outbreak in Italy on January 30, 2020 and since that date no health workers have visited these five Villages to illustrate the hygiene and health measures planned by Health Authorities. There is effectively no public health campaign in these Roma Villages.

In Via Salone, a resident notes:

*"No, no one has come to explain anything. We see what we have to do on television but we don't even know if we're doing it right"*. (H., female, 23, Bosnian).

However, some Villages have social characteristics that balance this lack of public health outreach. In Via Cesare Lombroso, the smallest camp, the inhabitants are part of a single extended family, so there is strong trust among the members about individual behavior. Parents recognize that their children are lucky in this sense, because they can play outdoors with their cousins and siblings.

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<sup>4</sup> For each settlement described here we are also able to provide *data* on children enrolled in school in the academic year 2019/20, which can be provided separately to those who are interested.

"No, we don't use tricks. We just shoot around freely. We can get out of the container. We stay at the camp all the time" (V., man, 30, Bosnian).

Another resident says,

"Nobody came. Nothing, nothing, nothing... We follow all the directions on the news" (M., woman, 35, Bosnian).

Conversely, in other reception facilities in the city of Rome, information sessions on COVID-19 and on the measures to be taken have been planned, as well as the distribution of a decalogue and handouts in different languages.

In Via Luigi Candoni, some families report that they have made masks, but they are only used outside for fear. Even in Via dei Gordiani, from the testimonies collected, no particular devices are used inside the 'Village'.

"In the family we bought some gloves but we do not use them inside the camp. We would like to have some masks but we didn't find them" (E., man, 38 years old, Bosnian).

Some residents have resorted to making masks with tissue.

In spite of these resilient measures, the lack of infrastructure and services in the Villages limits the efficacy against the disease.

"Water has little pressure and is not always there. Some people wash themselves, some people can't even wash themselves. Someone looked for masks in the pharmacy but they cost too much" (S., woman, 47, Bosnian, via Salone).

In Castel Romano there has been no access to running water for several months. For this reason:

"Once every 2 or 3 days a tanker comes to give us 2 tanks of water per container. We haven't had water for months, the municipality brings us water but it's not enough; but how do you wash, cook, shower and drink with so little water? It's a mess and nobody does anything about it, everybody knows how we are here and nobody does anything" (N., woman, 23 years old, Bosnian).

### ***Economic conditions and food deprivation***

The restrictions from the lockdown decree also impact the ability to carry out the usual work activity. In some cases, when resources are scarce, mutual aid from the solidarity of the community can supply basic residential needs. However, in times of contagion, where the fear of physical contact dominates, this solidarity is at risk.

In Via Cesare Lombroso, after the decree of March 9, 2020, economic conditions are dire:

"My wife goes out, but little. We don't have much money for shopping. Before I used to work to make removals but now I don't go out anymore" (G., man, 40 years old, stateless).

From the tone of her voice, a mother of four children, appears much more worried: "My husband used to do the flea market, you're moving... now we're staying put. Nobody's working at the moment. We are also afraid to go into the crowd" (M., woman, 35, Bosnian).

Her words are serious, when she reveals that her children are even more afraid now than after a very serious act of racist violence<sup>5</sup>:

*"It was February 11th and then February 29th, always February. Someone threw Molotov cocktails on the shack with us sleeping inside. The school documents, the clothes... everything was burnt, with the children traumatized. Now that there's this virus, my kids are even more terrified. But we don't go anywhere, nobody visits us, not even Health Authorities, Social Services, Police force: nobody..."*

In Via Castel Romano, some families support themselves from their 'Reddito di cittadinanza' (Citizenship Income)<sup>6</sup>. For others the situation is progressively deteriorating and there are those who are forced to go outside to feed their families.

*"We used to earn with the market but now it's closed. What are we going to do? To the families who now have nothing, we say 'Call the associations and have them bring you something to eat' ... We are human beings, we are abandoned and nobody helps us" (S., man, 55 years old, Bosnian).*

What's significant here is that there is not a public authority, but an association, to whom the 'Village' residents feel is accountable to them. However even these associations are not always seen as competent by the Roma (Boschetti, Vitale, 2011), especially in Rome (Clough Marinaro, Daniele, 2011; Maestri, Vitale 2017).

In Via di Salone, the majority of adults worked in sectors ranging from the collection of ferrous materials to the cleaning of the cellars and basements, or removals:

*"I used to work in a removal firm and lived from day to day. Now I don't have the daily money anymore and I don't even have food" (R., 24-year-old man, Italian).*

For some women, the family economy is supported by alms.

*"My husband is in jail and I can't go out and beg since there is this virus because I have 6 children between 2 and 12 years old and I can't leave them alone! But if I don't beg, how am I supposed to live?" (S..., woman, 47, Bosnian).*

### ***Fragility of internal forms of mutual aid***

In Via Luigi Candoni, after daily work disappeared, new forms of mutualistic solidarity action were developed among the Roma living there.

*"I don't work, I live with my son who doesn't work. His wife gives alms but can no longer do it. But we help each other, those who can help, give money on loan or do the shopping for others. Today you help me, tomorrow I help you" (D., man, 47, Romanian).*

Settlements are places where a different socialization takes place that values an insular community based on exchange and has profound effects on the behavior, attitudes and skills of individuals

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<sup>5</sup> On the violence to which the Roma in Rome are subjected, see the reports of the Association 21 Luglio <https://www.21luglio.org/cosa-facciamo/ricerca/>. See also Froio, et al. (2019).

<sup>6</sup> The so called "Reddito di cittadinanza" (Citizenship Income) is a measure of active labour policy and the fight against poverty, inequality and social exclusion in Italy. It is an economic support to supplement family incomes, and is associated with a path of occupational and social reintegration, which requires to sign a Labour Pact or a Pact for Social Inclusion. It was introduced from 6 March 2019. The benefit takes the name of Citizenship Pension if the household consists exclusively of one or more members aged 67 years or more.

(Cousin, et al., 2020). But the mutual aid that develops in settlements should not be idealized, both because it sometimes leads to forms of dependence and serious exploitation (Clough Marinaro, 2020), and because in the current situation of enormous scarcity of resources and deprivation of food, community solidarity is weakened. We know that solidarity in a community requires a form of common action and a virtuous relationship of exchange with external resources (Tosi, Vitale, 2019). In Via Gordiani they tell us:

*"All the elders in the camp lack the fundamental things. They live on alms and now they have nothing to live on. The elders, they have our community, but... now everyone thinks of themselves"* (E., man, 38 years old, Bosnian).

In Via Salone before the outbreak of the Covid-19 contagion, family solidarity and exchange of primary goods and food allowed some households, particularly those in poverty, to overcome the most difficult moments. But today this circuit has been partly interrupted because of the fear that the passage of goods could expose to the virus:

### ***The condition of the elderly***

Almost all 'Villages' have reported cases of families or elderly people who may be unable to secure basic necessities in the next few days. It is precisely the elderly, probably together with the children, who are paying the highest price. In Via Gordiani, a 65-year-old lady cannot leave her home because she has had numerous previous illnesses and liver surgery; she lives on subsistence and aid from charities. She has someone in the 'Village' who takes care of her, but lately the help has been reduced. She is in quite serious condition regarding her daily food needs; she is afraid of the pandemic and doesn't know how to defend herself from the risk of contagion:

*"We are abandoned, nobody tells us anything, we don't know how to do it. All the elders in the camp are like that!"* (D., woman, 65, Bosnian).

Also, according to the testimonies collected in Via Salone, the elderly are now marginalized within the marginalized Villages:

*"In the camp there are at least three old people living alone. They are always locked inside and we are also afraid to knock. But nobody even knows if they have food"* (D., woman, 43, Italian).

### ***Children and education***

In the interviews, there is little awareness among 'villagers' of the impact that the measures currently imposed by the decree could have on children. The suspension of school activities and the impossibility of using technological tools essential to follow distance education places children of school age in a state of serious isolation in relation to their peers and teachers. Almost all of the interviewees informed us about the difficulties to ensure adequate nutrition for babies and children under three years of age.

The tensions in intergenerational relations, already difficult in these settlements (Daniele, 2020) are palpable:

*"I have a 4-year-old girl and a 3-year-old girl. I keep them close to me. They lock themselves in the container all day or a few hours in front of the door. They look like little dogs on a leash. Then the older kids don't make it and you see them walking around in groups!"* (R., man, 28 years old, Italian).

## Policy Recommendations

The slogan "I stay at home," repeated with emphasis by politicians, actors and sportsmen in order to encourage the public to abide by the lockdown and prevent the spread of Covid-19, is countered by the suggestion of a resident of Via di Salone during an interview:

"*I stay at home? No. You stay at home. I'm staying in the camp. All the difference is here!*" (A. 28 years old, Italian, 'Village' of Via Salone, March 17, 2020).

This attitude could create even more segregating, marginalizing and ghettoizing conditions that affect almost 3,500 people in Rome's Villages, not to talk about what will happen in informal shantytowns in Rome as well as in the rest of Italy. This paper shows the importance of forms of applied research that can be carried out quickly by associations that have a daily relationship with the most vulnerable people, and develop capacities for solidarity action, deep listening, and 'mediation' (Vitale, 2019) to give *direct* voice to those directly concerned, even in pandemic emergency situations. Faced with the total absence of both public intervention by the municipality and health authorities and assistance from organizations previously present in the villages, food deprivation of households with young children has emerged as a priority among priorities. This applied research highlighted certain *potential lines of conflict* to be anticipated in order to carry out an emergency intervention (weakness of mutual aid relationships, competition for resources between families; strong persistence of stigma and racist prejudice against the Roma). We then designed a food aid program for three settlements (see [Appendix 3](#)). Coherently with what emerged from the survey, we have designed a special intervention to we can list urgent public policy recommendations<sup>7</sup>:

- To map the conditions of greatest fragility within shantytowns and deprived public shelters with the aim of guaranteeing the distribution of basic necessities, particularly to minors and the elderly;
- To guarantee adequate sanitary conditions within each individual shantytown, primarily by rapidly ensuring access to drinking water;
- To ensure the presence of health workers and cultural mediators within the settlements who can promote an information campaign aimed at illustrating the prevention measures recommended by Health Authorities and to distribute personal protective equipment to the inhabitants;
- To strengthen and coordinate a network of volunteers (Roma included) in order to monitor the hygienic and health conditions of those living in the shantytowns and to orient people with symptoms;
- To promote measures to safeguard the right to distance learning for pupils living in slums;
- To coordinate support and food supply actions for the needy;
- To systematically listen to people living in shantytowns in order to understand their needs in a precise way, and to enhance and mobilize their skills, with precise reports that allow for concreteness and timeliness;
- To prepare in advance, in case of a positive response to Covid-19 within the formal settlements, an adequate and timely intervention plan.

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<sup>7</sup> These policy recommendations probably go beyond the specific case of Rome Villages; thus refer to settlements and shantytowns in the following lines.

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## Appendix 1

### A short presentation of the five 'Roma Villages' in Rome

#### The 'Village' of Via Cesare Lombroso

The first works for the construction of the settlement located in the XIV Town Hall, in via Cesare Lombroso, 91, date back to the Spring of 1996. The following year the "camp" was inaugurated to accommodate 100 people grouped into 31 families. In 2005 the settlement was enlarged, undergoing renovation works. The shantytown of Lombroso is the oldest of today's "villages", the smallest - with a total area of just over one hectare - and, together with that of Gordiani, the closest to the centre of Rome. It consists of about fifty residential units, some caravans and several houses built with waste materials. In 2019, the Municipality of Rome recorded the presence of 181 people of Bosnian nationality, including 82 minors<sup>8</sup>. The inspections carried out by the Association 21 luglio show the absence of any form of maintenance of existing structures, the deterioration of living spaces, overcrowding of the area that often causes internal disputes. These circumstances are confirmed by the inhabitants themselves.

#### The 'Village' of Via Luigi Candoni

The settlement was founded in 1996 when, under the Mayor Francesco Rutelli, it was equipped to accommodate 79 families. Toilets and washrooms are installed and each family is assigned a pitch of about 50 square meters with electricity. In the summer of 2000 the settlement underwent an extension to accommodate some Bosnian families who had been evacuated from the historic informal "camp" of Casilino 700. In February 2010, with the closure of the historic settlement Casilino 900, for 21 Bosnian families, the Municipality of Rome placed containers in the last remaining spaces, thus weighing down an already particularly precarious situation for the inhabitants of the area. In the following years, the physiological increase in the number of inhabitants generated a series of inconveniences, tightening the internal relations between old and new residents, between people with Romanian citizenship and those of Bosnian origin. The current settlement is about one and a half hectares in size. Inside, about a hundred containers in poor condition accommodate 838 people, 409 of whom are minors<sup>9</sup>. About 2/3 of them are Romanian citizens and 1/3 are of Bosnian origin. With such numbers the "village" of Candoni became in 2019 the largest formal Italian settlement. The institutional abandonment has caused the structural conditions of the "village" to appear in a very bad state due to the absence of ordinary and extraordinary maintenance. There is a lack of maintenance of the housing units, occasional maintenance of the electrical system, presence of waste material not collected. The running water is officially drinkable, yet residents express doubts about it and do not use it.

#### The 'Village' of Via dei Gordiani

Following a fire that had destroyed a nearby informal settlement, in 2002 the Rome Administration committed itself to building a "village" equipped with containers, toilets and fencing. The area rises on I.A.C.P. (Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari) land in the Town Hall V in via dei Gordiani, 325 and is inhabited in 2019 by 260 people - including 89 minors - of Serbian and Bosnian nationality<sup>10</sup>. The structural conditions of the "village" appear to be in poor condition due to the absence of ordinary and extraordinary maintenance. There is a lack of maintenance of the housing units, clogging of the sewerage system, occasional maintenance of the electrical system, presence of waste material not always collected.

#### The 'Village' of Castel Romano

The "village" of Castel Romano was founded in September 2005, with the transfer of families from Vlasenica, the martyr city in the civil war in Bosnia, who had lived for years in the informal settlement of Vicolo Savini. In the area, located in the heart of the Decima Malafede Nature Reserve, 25 km from the Ring Road, the families initially live in tents provided by the Civil Protection. Then, with the arrival of the cold weather, the Municipality decides to install

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<sup>8</sup> See the report on the "State of implementation of interventions for the closure of Roma camps" of the Roma, Sinti and Caminanti Special Office of Roma Capitale of 24 September 2019, prot. QE/68633, in which is reported the "Synoptic picture of the population present in the Equipped Villages" carried out between 2018 and 2019 by the U.O.S.P.E. of the Local Police of Roma Capitale".

<sup>9</sup> See the report on "State of implementation...".

<sup>10</sup> See the report on "State of implementation...".

about a hundred containers which are replaced the following year by prefabricated housing modules. On 21 February 2007 the area was enlarged with the arrival of 150 people from the clearing of Tor Pagnotta. Three years later, in February 2010, the settlement saw the arrival of families from the closure of Casilino 900 and in July of the same year, Bosnian families from the "camp" of La Martora arrived. Until 2017 the area, with its 1,062 inhabitants, was the most populous institutional shantytown in the capital. The censuses carried out by the Municipal Police show a significant outflow of inhabitants. In December 2018 the Municipality of Rome census "734 people divided into 5 different areas (M, K, D, F, ex Tor Pagnotta) which constitute real autonomous camps"<sup>11</sup>. In the census carried out by the Local Police itself in June 2019, the presence of 542 people was noted, 282 of whom were minors. Area M, with 323 presences, appears the most numerous, followed by area K (111 presences), area F (87 presences), the former Tor Pagnotta area (16 presences) and area D (5 presences)<sup>12</sup>. The overall state of abandonment is evident as soon as one glimpses the settlement from the Pontina fast road. The housing structures are severely deteriorated and devoid of ordinary maintenance. The inhabitants have been complaining for years about the lack of drinking water, the intermittent maintenance of the electrical system that leads to frequent disconnections, problems related to the precarious conditions of the sewerage system.

### **The shantytown of Via di Salone**

The settlement was established in the second half of 1997 with the relocation of Roma families from the area located in the Acqua Vergine area and in the land near the Prenestina station. In 2006 a "Village of solidarity" was built in a nearby area for the reception of 600 people. The settlement includes 138 containers for the reception of families from Bosnia, Montenegro, Serbia and Romania. The "village" is currently housing units in poor condition and, at certain times of the year, hygienic and sanitary conditions are dramatic. From the inspections carried out by the Association 21 luglio, the state of abandonment of the settlement is evident and the only presence of the institution is captured by the local police force present 24 hours a day at its entrance. If in the past years in the "camp" of Salone was concentrated a presence of more than 1,000 units, it has decreased significantly in the last two years. Considering the difficult living conditions those who have been able to move elsewhere. In summer 2019 there were 360 people present, including 174 minors<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> See Special descriptive and performance specifications - Open procedure for the "Social inclusion project for Roma, Sinti and Caminanti people and overcoming the equipped village 'Village' of Castel Romano".

<sup>12</sup> Polizia Roma Capitale, Note of 27 June 2019, prot. N.186162, Subject: Presence survey activities at the Villaggio della Solidarietà di Castel Romano.

<sup>13</sup> See the report on "State of Implementation...".

## Appendix 2

### Interview protocol

- Warmly greetings, taking information on state of health of the person, its family and its relatives known by interviewers
- Leaving floor to discuss any topic and request the interviewees wish to raise
- Answering questions from the interviewee related to interviewer's health
- Presenting the scope of the call (applied research, advocacy, understanding most urgent needs)
- Issues related to how the person does the shopping, gets fresh food
- Issues related to nutrition, availability of specific products for young children and infants (milk powder, diapers, baby food)
- Matters relating to the purchase of medicines
- Issues related to the community climate within the 'Village', possible lines of conflict, feeling of belonging, protection or instead of insecurity and anxiety related to internal life
- More specific questions related to whether and how the person manages to get out of the camp, whether or not it has access to public transport, and the feeling of safety or insecurity in the streets outside the 'Village'.
- Questions relating to the presence or absence of the local police, police checks, sanctioning related to the lockdown
- Issues related to medical examinations, the presence of paid or voluntary medical and nursing staff in the 'Village', pandemic-specific forms of health guidance, the availability of masks and soaps
- Questions relating to work, saving, sources of income and the possible maintenance of an economic activity
- Issues relating to loans, mutual aid, exchange of goods and resources, or –on the contrary- possibly usury practices
- Issues related to the distance schooling of children, the availability of a computer and internet connection, and time spent on homework
- Issues relating to the specific condition of older people and possible cases of people without strong family ties.

### Appendix 3

#### From research to intervention. What we have learned in the research and how we have translated it into design principles

Faced with the total absence of both public intervention by the municipality and health authorities and assistance from organizations previously present in the villages, food deprivation of households with young children has emerged as a priority among priorities. After carrying out the survey by telephone, the intervention of a volunteer pediatrician who accompanied our operators to the villages confirmed the malnutrition of many children, particularly infants and young children. The applied research, the most important results of which we have summarized here, highlighted certain *potential lines of conflict* to be anticipated in order to carry out an emergency intervention (weakness of mutual aid relationships, competition for resources between families; strong persistence of stigma and racist prejudice against the Roma).

We then designed a food aid program for three settlements (two Villages included in the study: Castel Romano and Salone) and one informal which, in the study, was reported to us as one of the most disadvantaged contexts in Rome (the shantytown of Tor Cervara).

The concrete intervention is focused on the fight against food deprivation for children 0 to 3 years old. We decided to develop this intervention to be able to guarantee a "universal" intervention for all families with young children in all three contexts, without having to select on the basis of reported differences in savings and labor income, consequently to reduce risks of exasperated competition, and avoid any form of "patronage" and intermediation in access to food aid. Certain methodological elements characterized our intervention.

1. First of all, we wanted to reconcile the need for personalization of the intervention (both in the distribution methods and in the content of the concrete aid provided) with the need for categorization and standardization necessary to guarantee the economic and organizational sustainability of the intervention<sup>14</sup>.
  - a. We visited the three chosen villages/slums and had a face-to-face interview with all the mothers who have a child of the chosen age. We filled out a personalized form with them to find out their specific needs (intolerances, prescriptions or particular deficiencies), and drew up a list of 150 beneficiaries.
  - b. With the participation of a volunteer pediatrician, based on the new survey, we have designed a typology composed of 5 types of baby packs (differentiated according to the size of the baby and the dietary needs for baby food and semolina, and according to the need or not for powdered milk).
2. Then, we wanted to articulate concrete help in this very difficult phase with the fight against anti-Gypsyism and Romaphobia, to overcome stereotypes and build bonds of mutual knowledge (or friendship, in the sense that Roma often use this term, see Pasta, Vitale 2018).
  - a. We considered it unnecessary to launch a general call for undifferentiated fund-raising to help Roma living in slums, also highlighting the abandonment and lack of public intervention.
  - b. Through our website, we have launched an appeal to the citizens of Rome to buy the products needed for baby parcels.
  - c. We have favored the purchase of foodstuffs and consumer goods rather than sending money by bank transfer, convinced that this would strengthen solidarity (the extension of the quantity of foodstuffs purchased).
  - d. The message and the request for help emphasize the dimension of food deprivation of children 0/3 years old and not ethnicity, according to a principle of our association. However, we underline the fact that these are children living in "slums".

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<sup>14</sup> On the tension between these two requirements and the need to develop conventions to manage it in a generative way, we refer to Vitale (2009); Association 21 Luglio (2015; 2016); see also Breviglieri, et al (2003).

- e. Once a week, we go with our volunteers to collect the foodstuffs purchased directly from the families of the donors. We try to ensure that the families of the donors keep their commitment for two months.
  - f. The goods are stored in the community center "Polo Ex Fienile" that we manage in a peripheral and marginal area of Rome, Tor Bella Monaca<sup>15</sup>. The parcels are packed there once a week on Saturday mornings in the open air in the garden of the community center by a group of well-spaced volunteers (divided into five groups, one for each type of baby food aid-package), in order to give maximum visibility to the preparation of the parcels.
  - g. In order to avoid "wars between the poor" and the reinforcement of widespread stereotypes<sup>16</sup>, we decided to extend the aid through baby parcels also to 21 poor mothers living in the neighborhood. In order to avoid any feeling of humiliation, these mothers are involved in the preparation of the food parcels on Saturday morning. The number of children helped in the neighborhood could increase considerably in the coming weeks.
  - h. Through short videos, messages, drawings, we have begun to encourage contacts and distance exchanges between mothers who give, mothers who receive and mothers who pack parcels, with the effect of creating a certain sense of common belonging, which is not self-evident and which we know needs to be organized in order to develop (Vitale, 2020).
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    - a. Parcels are delivered once a week.
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    - c. There has never been any tension in the distribution of aid, nor any problems of overcrowding in the ranks. No families reported problems with subtraction after the distribution.
    - d. During the first few weeks, the distribution of the baby parcels was only guaranteed by the association's operators, who maintain a long-term relationship of trust and knowledge with the beneficiaries. Later, we will introduce additional volunteers to make the operators' commitment less tiring and to extend contacts and "friendships".
  4. Finally, in addition to intervention to combat food deprivation, in view of what has emerged from empirical research, we felt it necessary to add other interventions, both relational and political, in the area of human rights advocacy:
    - a. We have created whatsapp groups through which we keep in touch with mothers to give them advice, listen to their discomforts, bring relief in difficult times, send activities to do with their children during the hours spent at home.
    - b. We have activated a service that allows to listen to fairy tales in Italian and Romanes (*Romani chib*): "Tales on the phone". In every baby aid package, we also put a flyer that presents this service to point out the importance of play and fantasy even in this phase of lockdown, and the opportunity of relationships beyond material help.
    - c. We have provided children with some internet access so that they can connect to platforms designed by schools.
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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.21luglio.org/tag/tor-bella-monaca/>

<sup>16</sup> In France too, the CNCDH survey showed a widespread stereotype: a representation of the Roma as "*parasites*" taking advantage of the welfare system, opportunists, privileged recipients of public aid, to the detriment of the unemployed French, "privileged in their access to social housing and social assistance". Mayer et al. (2019, p. 155) observe that this is "a set of tenacious and long-standing prejudices, very much structured by the feeling of living *less well than a few years ago*".

- e. We have reinforced the pressure and advocacy aspects with an appeal to Mayor Virginia Raggi and Prefect Pantalone for urgent measures to protect the right to health and school continuity<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.21luglio.org/iorestoacasa-e-loro-restano-nel-campo/>

## Appendix 1

### A short presentation of the five 'Roma Villages' in Rome

#### The 'Village' of Via Cesare Lombroso

The first works for the construction of the settlement located in the XIV Town Hall, in via Cesare Lombroso, 91, date back to the Spring of 1996. The following year the "camp" was inaugurated to accommodate 100 people grouped into 31 families. In 2005 the settlement was enlarged, undergoing renovation works. The shantytown of Lombroso is the oldest of today's "villages", the smallest - with a total area of just over one hectare - and, together with that of Gordiani, the closest to the centre of Rome. It consists of about fifty residential units, some caravans and several houses built with waste materials. In 2019, the Municipality of Rome recorded the presence of 181 people of Bosnian nationality, including 82 minors<sup>1</sup>. The inspections carried out by the Association 21 luglio show the absence of any form of maintenance of existing structures, the deterioration of living spaces, overcrowding of the area that often causes internal disputes. These circumstances are confirmed by the inhabitants themselves.

#### The 'Village' of Via Luigi Candoni

The settlement was founded in 1996 when, under the Mayor Francesco Rutelli, it was equipped to accommodate 79 families. Toilets and washrooms are installed and each family is assigned a pitch of about 50 square meters with electricity. In the summer of 2000 the settlement underwent an extension to accommodate some Bosnian families who had been evacuated from the historic informal "camp" of Casilino 700. In February 2010, with the closure of the historic settlement Casilino 900, for 21 Bosnian families, the Municipality of Rome placed containers in the last remaining spaces, thus weighing down an already particularly precarious situation for the inhabitants of the area. In the following years, the physiological increase in the number of inhabitants generated a series of inconveniences, tightening the internal relations between old and new residents, between people with Romanian citizenship and those of Bosnian origin. The current settlement is about one and a half hectares in size. Inside, about a hundred containers in poor condition accommodate 838 people, 409 of whom are minors<sup>2</sup>. About 2/3 of them are Romanian citizens and 1/3 are of Bosnian origin. With such numbers the "village" of Candoni became in 2019 the largest formal Italian settlement. The institutional abandonment has caused the structural conditions of the "village" to appear in a very bad state due to the absence of ordinary and extraordinary maintenance. There is a lack of maintenance of the housing units, occasional maintenance of the electrical system, presence of waste material not collected. The running water is officially drinkable, yet residents express doubts about it and do not use it.

#### The 'Village' of Via dei Gordiani

Following a fire that had destroyed a nearby informal settlement, in 2002 the Rome Administration committed itself to building a "village" equipped with containers, toilets and fencing. The area rises on I.A.C.P. (Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari) land in the Town Hall V in via dei Gordiani, 325 and is inhabited in 2019 by 260 people - including 89 minors - of Serbian and Bosnian nationality<sup>3</sup>. The structural conditions of the "village" appear to be in poor condition due to the absence of ordinary and extraordinary maintenance. There is a lack of maintenance of the housing units, clogging of the sewerage system, occasional maintenance of the electrical system, presence of waste material not always collected.

#### The 'Village' of Castel Romano

The "village" of Castel Romano was founded in September 2005, with the transfer of families from Vlasenica, the martyr city in the civil war in Bosnia, who had lived for years in the informal settlement of Vicolo Savini. In the area, located in the heart of the Decima Malafede Nature Reserve, 25 km from the Ring Road, the families initially live in tents provided by the Civil Protection. Then, with the arrival of the cold weather, the Municipality decides to install

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<sup>1</sup> See the report on the "State of implementation of interventions for the closure of Roma camps" of the Roma, Sinti and Caminanti Special Office of Roma Capitale of 24 September 2019, prot. QE/68633, in which is reported the "Synoptic picture of the population present in the Equipped Villages" carried out between 2018 and 2019 by the U.O.S.P.E. of the Local Police of Roma Capitale".

<sup>2</sup> See the report on "State of implementation...".

<sup>3</sup> See the report on "State of implementation...".

about a hundred containers which are replaced the following year by prefabricated housing modules. On 21 February 2007 the area was enlarged with the arrival of 150 people from the clearing of Tor Pagnotta. Three years later, in February 2010, the settlement saw the arrival of families from the closure of Casilino 900 and in July of the same year, Bosnian families from the "camp" of La Martora arrived. Until 2017 the area, with its 1,062 inhabitants, was the most populous institutional shantytown in the capital. The censuses carried out by the Municipal Police show a significant outflow of inhabitants. In December 2018 the Municipality of Rome census "734 people divided into 5 different areas (M, K, D, F, ex Tor Pagnotta) which constitute real autonomous camps"<sup>4</sup>. In the census carried out by the Local Police itself in June 2019, the presence of 542 people was noted, 282 of whom were minors. Area M, with 323 presences, appears the most numerous, followed by area K (111 presences), area F (87 presences), the former Tor Pagnotta area (16 presences) and area D (5 presences)<sup>5</sup>. The overall state of abandonment is evident as soon as one glimpses the settlement from the Pontina fast road. The housing structures are severely deteriorated and devoid of ordinary maintenance. The inhabitants have been complaining for years about the lack of drinking water, the intermittent maintenance of the electrical system that leads to frequent disconnections, problems related to the precarious conditions of the sewerage system.

### **The shantytown of Via di Salone**

The settlement was established in the second half of 1997 with the relocation of Roma families from the area located in the Acqua Vergine area and in the land near the Prenestina station. In 2006 a "Village of solidarity" was built in a nearby area for the reception of 600 people. The settlement includes 138 containers for the reception of families from Bosnia, Montenegro, Serbia and Romania. The "village" is currently housing units in poor condition and, at certain times of the year, hygienic and sanitary conditions are dramatic. From the inspections carried out by the Association 21 luglio, the state of abandonment of the settlement is evident and the only presence of the institution is captured by the local police force present 24 hours a day at its entrance. If in the past years in the "camp" of Salone was concentrated a presence of more than 1,000 units, it has decreased significantly in the last two years. Considering the difficult living conditions those who have been able to move elsewhere. In summer 2019 there were 360 people present, including 174 minors<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> See Special descriptive and performance specifications - Open procedure for the "Social inclusion project for Roma, Sinti and Caminanti people and overcoming the equipped village 'Village' of Castel Romano".

<sup>5</sup> Polizia Roma Capitale, Note of 27 June 2019, prot. N.186162, Subject: Presence survey activities at the Villaggio della Solidarietà di Castel Romano.

<sup>6</sup> See the report on "State of Implementation...".



## Appendix 2

### Interview protocol

- Warmly greetings, taking information on state of health of the person, its family and its relatives known by interviewers
- Leaving floor to discuss any topic and request the interviewees wish to raise
- Answering questions from the interviewee related to interviewer's health
- Presenting the scope of the call (applied research, advocacy, understanding most urgent needs)
- Issues related to how the person does the shopping, gets fresh food
- Issues related to nutrition, availability of specific products for young children and infants (milk powder, diapers, baby food)
- Matters relating to the purchase of medicines
- Issues related to the community climate within the 'Village', possible lines of conflict, feeling of belonging, protection or instead of insecurity and anxiety related to internal life
- More specific questions related to whether and how the person manages to get out of the camp, whether or not it has access to public transport, and the feeling of safety or insecurity in the streets outside the 'Village'.
- Questions relating to the presence or absence of the local police, police checks, sanctioning related to the lockdown
- Issues related to medical examinations, the presence of paid or voluntary medical and nursing staff in the 'Village', pandemic-specific forms of health guidance, the availability of masks and soaps
- Questions relating to work, saving, sources of income and the possible maintenance of an economic activity
- Issues relating to loans, mutual aid, exchange of goods and resources, or –on the contrary- possibly usury practices
- Issues related to the distance schooling of children, the availability of a computer and internet connection, and time spent on homework
- Issues relating to the specific condition of older people and possible cases of people without strong family ties.

### Appendix 3

#### From research to intervention. What we have learned in the research and how we have translated it into design principles

Faced with the total absence of both public intervention by the municipality and health authorities and assistance from organizations previously present in the villages, food deprivation of households with young children has emerged as a priority among priorities. After carrying out the survey by telephone, the intervention of a volunteer pediatrician who accompanied our operators to the villages confirmed the malnutrition of many children, particularly infants and young children. The applied research, the most important results of which we have summarized here, highlighted certain *potential lines of conflict* to be anticipated in order to carry out an emergency intervention (weakness of mutual aid relationships, competition for resources between families; strong persistence of stigma and racist prejudice against the Roma).

We then designed a food aid program for three settlements (two Villages included in the study: Castel Romano and Salone) and one informal which, in the study, was reported to us as one of the most disadvantaged contexts in Rome (the shantytown of Tor Cervara).

The concrete intervention is focused on the fight against food deprivation for children 0 to 3 years old. We decided to develop this intervention to be able to guarantee a "universal" intervention for all families with young children in all three contexts, without having to select on the basis of reported differences in savings and labor income, consequently to reduce risks of exasperated competition, and avoid any form of "patronage" and intermediation in access to food aid. Certain methodological elements characterized our intervention.

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