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3.3 An overview from Italy. Poorest of all... Roma children case study

Maria Teresa Tagliaventi

Following the economic crisis in 2008, poverty increased in Italy, drastically reducing the purchasing power of Italian families. In addition to the social groups that were traditionally at risk, some categories of the population that previously considered themselves to be safe were also affected, unable to satisfy their own primary needs.

The economic crisis has particularly affected families with children and adolescents. This text presents data on child poverty in Italy, related to the family and the territory. The rate of socio-economic development differs between the North and Centre of Italy and the South, causing structural differences in the living conditions of the resident population: in terms of child poverty, Italy is a country divided in two parts. As regards social policies, Italy has never had a systematic and organized plan to fight poverty. Only last year, the Italian Government introduced 'Citizenship Income', an instrument already active in other European countries. The social groups living in extreme poverty in Italy include Roma children. The conditions of children living in "camps" are extremely difficult. Most of their rights are systematically and institutionally violated, and the consequences of poverty affect many dimensions of their lives.

3.3.1 Main trends

3.3.1.1 Adult and family poverty

Official data on poverty in Italy are produced by ISTAT (the National Statistics Institute) and are based on the renewed Household Budget Survey, designed to measure and analyze expenditure behaviors of Italian households according to their main social, economic and territorial characteristics.

The official monetary measures refer to both relative and absolute concept of poverty. The estimate of absolute poverty defines as poor a household with a consumption expenditure lower or equal to the monetary value of a basket of goods and services considered as essential to avoid severe forms of social exclusion¹. Three areas of essential needs have been identified: (1) adequate food, (2) the

¹The monetary value of the basket of absolute poverty varies according to household member socio-demographic characteristics (number; age), geographical area of residence and municipality demographic size, so that there are many absolute poverty thresholds, not a single one.

availability of a suitably sized house, heated and equipped with main services, durable goods and accessories; and (3) the minimum availability of goods and services to dress, communicate, learn, move within the territory, educate oneself and maintain good health (ISTAT, 2018). The estimate of relative poverty is based on a poverty line (International Standard of Poverty Line - ISPL) defining as poor a household of two members with a consumption expenditure level lower or equal to the mean per-capita consumption expenditure.

The last estimate available, relating to 2017 (ISTAT, 2018) reports how 1 778 000 families (6.9 percent of resident families) were in a condition of absolute poverty in Italy, for a total of 5 058 000 individuals (8.4 percent of the whole population). This is the highest value recorded in the last 10 years, and the growing trend seems unstoppable. Relative poverty has also grown in the last 10 years and concerns, in 2017, 3 171 000 resident families (12.3 percent of all resident families) and 9 368 000 individuals (15.6 percent of the whole population). In 2017 poverty intensity was 24.1 percent.

In Italy, poverty is associated to some clearly defined socio-demographic characteristics. First of all, poverty is distributed very unevenly across the North, Centre and South of the country. Historically, Southern Italy has always recorded a much higher incidence of absolute and relative poverty than in the rest of the country, due to the disparities in the economic and production system and the lower levels of employment in the southern regions, as well as in the local welfare systems and regional policies supporting families and individuals with adequate programs and services. The last estimates of 2017 recorded a further increase in absolute and relative poverty in the south of the country, increasing the existing gap even further. Calabria (35.3 percent), Sicily (29 percent) and Campania (24.4 percent), regions of southern Italy, hold the primacy of relative poverty, while the regions with the lowest incidence are in the North: Val d'Aosta (4.4 percent), Emilia Romagna (4.6 percent), Trentino Alto Adige (4.9 percent) (ISTAT, 2018).

This increased poverty mostly concerns people aged under 35 and younger families with 4 or more members. Bearing witness to the central role of work and professional positions, while absolute and relative poverty is increasing among the unemployed and those looking for work, it is also true that having a job does not always protect people or allow them to escape from poverty. The 2017 estimates underline how absolute and relative poverty remained high even among blue collar families (ISTAT, 2018). This category of working poor has increased significantly since the economic crisis. The working class has returned to being dangerously close to the experience of poverty (Saraceno, 2015).

Education still plays a role in the fight against poverty, which tends to be concentrated among people with low levels of education. In 2017, 10.7 percent of poor families were represented by a person with no higher than primary school education, compared to 3.6 percent of families represented by a person with a high school diploma. ISTAT data for 2017 also confirm the difficulties for foreign families: the incidence of poverty reached 34 percent, with significant differences across the territory (29.3 percent in the Centre, 59.6 percent in the South). The increase in poverty affects a higher percentage of foreign families than Italian families. The risk of absolute poverty for foreign families continues to be six times higher than that for Italian families (ISTAT 2018).

3.3.1.2 Child and adolescent poverty

Children and adolescents are most vulnerable to situations of poverty and social exclusion, and in Italy represent the highest risk category. Child poverty is linked to families. With an equal number of family members, the presence of children drastically increases the incidence of poverty, and the highest incidence of poverty is recorded among couples with children. Among families with children, the risk of poverty increases significantly with the birth of a second child, and is highest in families with more than 3 children (ISTAT, 2018).

In 2017, the incidence of absolute poverty among children was 12.1 percent (1 million 208 thousand). This amounts to 10.5 percent among families where there is at least one child, and remains more widespread in those with 3 or more children (20.9 percent).

The conditions of the under-age population have been critical for some years: the incidence of poverty has not fallen below 10 percent since 2014. Considering a longer period of time, the growth of absolute poverty is more marked among families with four, five or more members. For those with 4 members, the incidence increases, for example, from 2.2 percent in 2005 to 10.2 percent in 2017; for those with 5 members and more, from 6.3 percent (in 2005) to 17.8 percent.

Again in 2017, ISTAT estimated that there are 2,156 million children (21.5 percent) in relative poverty. Also in this case, relative poverty affects families with 3 or more children (27.1 percent), couples with 2 children (18.8 percent), single parent families (15.3 percent) and couples with one child (14.2 percent). Considering the individual age groups in Italy, the group most exposed to poverty is up to 17 years old (Table 3.3.1).

Table 3.3.1 Absolute poverty incidence by individuals by sex and age class. Year 2017 (percentage values)

Sex	2017
Male	8,8
Female	8,0
Age class	
Until 17 years	12,1
18 - 34 years	10,4
35 - 64 years	8,1
65 years and over	4,6

Source: ISTAT 2019

It is hard for children to escape conditions of poverty. The vast majority of studies and research underline scenarios of low mobility in Italian society; according to recent comparative analyses, Italy is among those countries with a strong direct influence of family origins on the employment success of their children (Bernardi and Ballarino, 2016; Ballarino et al., 2016).

A recent research project entitled “Istruzione, reddito e cittadinanza” (“Education, income and citizenship”) by Cannari and D’Alessio (2018), promoted by Bankitalia and conducted mainly through an analysis of economic indicators, underlines how the economic conditions of families in relation of education, income and wealth remain constant through the generations, and indicates the importance of background conditions in explaining the success of Italians. The research examines the variability in levels of education, income and wealth over the last 90 years in a sample of parents and children (observed in different periods of time), also considering the extended family. The economic success of individuals is determined by the education, income and wealth of their family. This trend has been increasing since 2006.

Data underline how Italy has low inter-generational mobility, but what is even more worrying is that they offer a picture of a society which has become less mobile in recent years. The high persistence of situations of poverty is therefore linked to the inability of the Italian system to break the vicious circle of social disadvantage characterized by a strong heredity of risk from generation to generation.

The different rates of development in all the socio-economic fields between the North and Centre of Italy compared to the South has caused structural differences in the living conditions of the resident population: in terms of child poverty, Italy seems to be a country divided in two. Although in the

last 15 years child poverty has increased even in the most developed part of Italy, the largest number of poor children and adolescents live in the South (ISTAT 2018).

3.3.1.3 Educational poverty and children's well-being

Economic poverty is linked to educational poverty, a term used increasingly in Italy in the current debates on child and adolescent poverty. The term indicates how lack of income is also closely linked to access to opportunities, and therefore to the possibility to actively participate in the economic and social life of a community. Child poverty has different causes and effects compared to poverty in general. For children, poverty is the lack of opportunities to learn, develop one's own abilities, enjoy relationships with others, play, practice sports and have holidays (Save the Children, 2018). Children with economic poverty have less chance of exercising their rights.

Economic poverty therefore brings a chain of individual disadvantages, which have life-long effects, in terms of a higher risk of school dropout, lower access to higher education and opportunities for entering the job market and, generally, a lower quality of life. This creates a risk of regenerating social inequalities: poor children are more likely to become adults with few opportunities, in turn generating families in conditions of poverty.

It is not by chance that the OECD Pisa surveys report how the skills of 15-year olds are strictly linked to their social class and geographical residence. In Italy, students with low performance are concentrated above all in families with more disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and the majority of them live in the South (OECD 2017).

In a recent study Save the Children (2018) used a range of indicators to define the Educational Poverty Index (EPI). The indicators used concern: children between 0 and 2 years with no access to public early childhood educational services; primary and middle school classes without full-time services; pupils who do not use the canteen service; school drop-out rate; children aged between 6 and 17 who have not been to a theatre, visited a museum, exhibition, monument or archaeological site, or attended a concert within the last year; children aged between 6 and 17 who do not practice a sport continuously; children aged between 6 and 17 who have not read books; children aged between 6 and 17 who don't use the Internet. The Educational Poverty Index derives from the arithmetical average of the scores in each of the selected indicators, standardized to a reference value for Italy of 100. The data used are taken from institutional and official sources. In the scale, the southern regions are in first place: Campania, Sicily, Calabria, Puglia, Molise have a high educational poverty index. The Northern regions of Friuli Venezia Giulia, Lombardy, Piedmont and Emilia Romagna have the lowest EPI.

Referring to children's well-being, one of the most complete studies was published in 2011 by the National Center of Documentation and Analysis on children and adolescents, edited by Belotti and Moretti. In this research, called "Italy minors. Maps of indicators on the condition and inequalities in the well-being of children and young people", Belotti and Moretti produced a map of social indicators on children's conditions. The purpose was to standardize the large variety of information sources, selecting from among the available but often incoherent data. The authors reduced the set of information into 9 observation dimensions, 39 sub dimensions and 337 indicators and limited the mapping only to the measures (at European, national and regional level) that referred to children's lives. They excluded those referring to parents or community life, considering only the indicators referring to children as primary observation units. The authors include – when available – subjective indicators (taken from direct surveys of children where children have expressed their own point of view) to reduce the "institutional" effect deriving from the exclusive use of social statistics. At regional level, the six dimensions considered are: Relations and links; Material and cultural deprivation; Health; School inclusion; Safety and danger; Availability and use of services. The results of the research show that Italy is divided into 4 areas based on the average of the positions occupied in the individual dimensions of children's well-being. Children's well-being differs from region to region.

The data available lead to a number of considerations: 1) the evident lack of uniformity at territorial level in the access to children's rights. Almost all regions in the Centre and North fall within the first two groups of well-being, while the southern regions lie at the bottom of the table; 2) the existence of criticalities and weaknesses in all regions, as no region always lies in the same position when analyzing individual dimensions of well-being, i.e. the regions tend to occupy different positions according to the dimension in question; 3) severe criticalities in the living conditions of children living in Sicily and Campania, which require concrete and immediate interventions which can no longer be postponed. Sicily and Campania always occupy the bottom positions in the tables referring to the six dimensions considered, and this means that in these regions children's rights are systematically violated in all fields.

3.3.1.4 Children's point of view

A survey with an innovative approach was conducted in Italy by the 'Albero della Vita' Foundation and Zancan Foundation (2015). In line with the most recent international debates, which consider children as social actors able to give meaning to their experiences and as active participants in the construction of knowledge (James, Jenks and Prout 2002; Qvortrup 2004), this study was part of a

broader analysis about the perception of poverty by children and adolescents living in families suffering severe economic hardship, resident in metropolitan areas in northern and southern Italy.

The pilot study, conducted using qualitative instruments, involved 56 children aged between 6 and 17 years old, mainly with Italian citizenship (88 percent). The aim was to verify the children's general well-being, considering the following areas: relations with themselves, family life, relations with friends, relations with people in general, school/work experiences, how they spend their leisure time, their homes, things they own generally, health condition, how much they feel safe, the area they live in.

Overall, the research shows a positive attitude to their own experience of poverty. 50 percent of the children and adolescents considered themselves to be quite happy, one in 5 (22 percent) expressed an intermediate level (neither positive nor negative), and only 2 percent of the cases indicated a highly negative position. The research demonstrated a positive relationship between the number of personal and professional resources the parents declared they use to meet the needs of their children (for example, spending time with them, direct support to educational activities, parental responsibility exercised in different ways...) and the level of happiness expressed by their children.

The sample was generally satisfied in terms of relationships in the family and more critical in terms of relations with other people generally. A high degree of satisfaction was also expressed concerning the things the interviewees owned, and only 14.6 percent expressed negative opinions. Substantially, living with little does not have the same discriminatory meaning it holds for adults. Two critical aspects emerged in relation to the area where they live and the home they live in. Almost one child in 4 reported problems in these areas. The children interviewed were found to be well aware of the difficulties in the family, and know how to identify and circumscribe them: the health of a parent, conflicts between their mother and father, their home, work, not always having something to eat. They are also aware that they receive aid and support from associations, individuals, teachers, relatives.

What is striking in this research is not only the different ways children and adults experience and perceive poverty, but also the children's desire to contribute directly, where possible, to overcoming the difficulties in the family in their own way: studying and getting good grades at school, helping their parents with the household chores, making an effort and offering to do any jobs they can. Children not only represent a precious source of knowledge on the key issues of day-to-day life, but also show how they can be "generative" even when the family is going through difficult times. The issue of resilience clearly emerges, understood as the capacity to respond actively and positively to adversity. According to other international research (Andresen and Meiland, 2019), this study

underlines the importance of the quality of parental relationships on children's wellbeing and ability to overcome the potential deleterious effects of poverty on their transitions to adolescence and adulthood.

3.3.1.5 Welfare state and children's well-being

Poverty and social exclusion of children and their families questions the welfare system and focuses on clear issues of social justice, intergenerational equity and access to social protection measures. Until the late 1990s, Italy had no effective family policies – that usually take the form of tax deductions, payment reductions, money transfers and the provision of services – which were able to tackle the issue of poverty (Saraceno and Naldini 2007). In the late 1990s, poverty in large families was fought partially by the introduction of two new institutions: family allowance for families with at least 3 children aged under 18 and maternity benefit for mothers without other forms of insurance cover (Saraceno and Naldini 2007). Another form of compensation for child maintenance costs comes in the form of tax deductions for families with dependent children. Various research works have confirmed how, while they do limit poverty, these mechanisms do not actually lift these families out of poverty (Saraceno 2015). Decree-Law 112/2008 established the 'ordinary purchasing card': an economic benefit of 40 euros per month, topped up every two months onto an electronic payment card. The purchasing card is issued to the elderly and families with children aged under 3, who meet specific economic requirements that place them in the 'absolute need' bracket.

Significant progress was made with the Stability Law of 2016, which, for the first time, provided for structural funding to fight poverty and promoted a subsequent delegated law to establish a single measure for fighting poverty. Law No 33 of 15 March 2017, 'on regulations for fighting poverty, reviewing services and the system of social services and intervention' thus introduced the 'Inclusion Income' (REI). The REI is the first national measure to fight poverty. The beneficiaries must meet requirements relating to income, citizenship and residence and, until 1 July 2018, requirements relating to the family (a child, disabled person, pregnant woman or unemployed person aged over 55 in the family group). From 1 July 2018, the family requirements were repealed and the measure became universal. This amendment also reflects on the distribution of the number of members in the family nucleus: since July 2018 the modal class is that with only one member (previously it was three members) and represents 41 percent of the distribution (Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri and other, 2017; Save the Children, 2019)

On 17 January 2019 the Council of Ministers approved the decree-Law on Citizenship Income which replaced the REI. With reference to households, the amount of Citizenship Income allocated to single adults is higher than that allocated in proportion to families with underage children. So many questions have been raised over the implementation of Citizenship income. At the moment, it is not possible to envisage the impact of this instrument in fighting poverty. Yet poverty is not only fought by specific policies: the issue of social and educational policies and support to parenthood must become part of the debate.

The data emerging from the previous studies should be used to guide social policies and actions for children and adolescents towards the most critical areas where inequalities are evident, also in terms of poverty and educational services.

In Italy, the referred legislative scenario on social policies changed from 2000 onwards. Amendments to Title V of Part II of the Constitution, introduced by Constitutional Law No. 3 of 18 October 2001, and the application of Law No. 328/00 “Framework Law for the implementation of an integrated system of social services and interventions” changed the programming, management of funds and some responsibilities of the State, Regions and local authorities. In relation to this new programming, it should be underlined that the Regions are now responsible for some key issues concerning children and adolescence, including some specific social services, while other issues (protection of health, education and training) fall under joint State-Regional responsibility. The State in any case acts as guarantor, with a guidance and steering role, expressed in the exclusive function of ‘determining the essential levels of civil and social services which must be guaranteed across the whole national territory’. These levels should guarantee equal opportunities for citizens, whatever their place of residence.

It is worth underlining that 19 years on, Italy has not yet defined the essential levels of social services (“LIVEAS”) and that this situation, along with the changes in programming, management of funds and responsibilities, has led to the diversification of child and adolescent policies from region to region. Today in Italy, some regions have autonomously dealt with the issue of children and adolescents, defining essential service levels in individual areas, while others still have trouble in dealing with these issues, and others again have placed interventions for children very low on their agendas (Tagliaventi, 2011).

Thus, within the range of personal services available it seems that there are two “Italies”: the ratio of social spending for children is one to ten, between the region that spends the least and the one that spends the most. According to ISTAT (2019), with reference to municipal spending for social services, there are important geographical differences: per capita expenditure ranged from 22 euros

in Calabria, to 517 in the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, where more services were available to citizens. The South benefited from only 10 percent of the resources for social welfare services, despite its resident population representing 23 percent of the total.

Moreover, since 2006 the National Fund for Social Policies, established by Law 328, has been progressively reduced, leaving the regions with the task of increasing funding through their own taxation, according to the principle of federalism. Regions with a stronger economy, mainly located in the north, therefore have more resources at their disposal than regions in the south, where the incidence of poverty is higher.

3.3.2 Poorest of all... Roma children case study

The social groups in extreme poverty in Italy certainly include Roma children and adolescents. Gypsy communities actually living in Italy are characterized by the heterogeneity of groups, dialects and specific linguistic varieties and cultures. Generally we use the terms Roma, Sinti (Italian Roma Community) and Travelers. In this text Roma is used to mean all these communities. There is no official census of the Roma population in Italy, and therefore it is very difficult to obtain precise data. The data we can refer to are approximate estimates from both official sources (Ministry of the Interior), and third sector associations/non-profit organizations.

According to the Senate of the Republic, (2011) there are approximately 140 000 Roma and Sinti; this figure has also been confirmed by some NGOs. In Italy, individuals belonging to the Roma, Sinti and Travelers populations represent around 0.2 percent of the population, one of the lowest in Europe. The Roma communities are characterized by a high percentage of children (60 percent of the Roma population is believed to be under 18). Overall, there is thought to be around 70 000 children, and if we consider the hypotheses of numerous NGOs, over 40 000 should be in compulsory education.

The Roma population in Italy today can be divided into historical, sedentary Roma and immigrant Roma, mostly from Eastern Europe. Among the historical Roma, around 80 percent are Italian citizens. The largest, economically active and socially integrated group of historical Roma are the Abruzzo Roma, living in Central and Southern Italy (Senate of the Republic 2011). Last century, the first large influx of Roma to Italy took place in the 1970s, from Yugoslavia, while the second wave came in the 1990s. This concerned between 30 000 and 35 000 people from Bosnia, Kosovo, Romania, Albania and Poland, for the most part Romanian Roma. This immigration reached its peak in the early 2000s, culminating in 2005-2006 when the phenomenon stabilized.

As regards legal status, Roma and Sinti with Italian nationality count for approximately half of those in the country. Of the foreign nationals, 50 percent are from former Yugoslavia and the remainder from Romania, with minority groups from Bulgaria and Poland. Among the Roma population in Italy, there are three categories of subjects with different rights: Italian citizens, European Union member state nationals and non-EU citizens. In addition to these, there are stateless persons and refugees. Although they have foreign nationality, many young people were born and raised in Italy.

Having abandoned nomadic life styles years ago (only a minority of the population is still nomadic) the Roma and Sinti communities live in many different settings. It is estimated that around 40 000 people currently live in highly precarious conditions in camps. 'Roma camps' were created by local governments under the misconception that the Roma are nomadic people. In Italy the Roma camps increased in the 1980s and 1990s to respond to the populations coming from former Yugoslavia, before and after the war. Initially they were set up as temporary sites, but later became permanent (Bravi, 2009; European Roma Rights Center, 2000).

For at least thirty years, the 'Roma camp' has been the main housing policy model for Roma and Sinti in Italy. The different types of 'camps' are the result of the diversity existing among local political frameworks, and – where regional laws exist to protect the Roma – the 'gypsy' prototype the legislators had in mind (Bravi and Sigona 2006).

There are different types of camps, but in almost all cases people live in precarious conditions. The different types of camps include:

- 1) Authorized 'camps', in locations established by the local authority (municipality). Generally they are equipped with electricity and water. They may or may not have washing facilities. They run from well-kept camps, regulated by the municipal administration and co-managed by the families, to camps with only basic services that offer scarcely adequate living conditions
- 2) Unauthorized 'camps', occupied illegally where the families autonomously build huts and manage the area. These camps are sometimes very large, and after a few years they are cleared by force by the local administration. They are authentic ghettos, without the minimum infrastructure necessary to live (sewers, gas, electricity, running water) and with the typical problems of segregation (school evasion, illegal economy, unemployment, high levels of social problems).

There are also a whole series of other living conditions, such as land rented to Roma where huts are built without permission, or plots owned by Roma families which do not have planning permission but which are used to build huts and various other constructions.

Together with the radicalization of marginalization and social distress, these places have led to a heavy fracture between their inhabitants and the urban societies in which they are located, and strong feeling of hostility. Unlike inclusive policies, Italy is the only country in Europe to promote a system of ghettos, organized and supported publicly.

Generally, both authorized and unauthorized camps are places of segregation. Life in the camps affects life opportunities: life expectancy is around 50 for men and slightly more for women, around two thirds that of the average Italian life expectancy.

The younger populations suffer the disadvantages of their communities most dramatically, and the possibility to exercise their rights has worsened. The possibility to monitor the condition of children living in authorized settlements has led to the collection of data by local governments that confirm their lower birth weight, shorter life expectancy, higher infant mortality and greater spread of chronic and infectious diseases such as bronchitis, intestinal infections and tonsillitis. There is also low vaccination coverage and increased exposure to the risk of infectious and sexually transmitted diseases (Centro Nazionale di documentazione, 2014).

3.3.2.1 The right to education

Education and training are the areas where children's social exclusion is most evident. Many difficulties are highlighted in the school context: low levels of enrollment, high levels of early school leaving, many cases of school failure, racism and discrimination. The inadequate level of average education among the citizens of Roma origin is considered an important determinant for their poor living conditions and the difficult access to the labor market.

The low number of Roma pupils in schools is confirmed by the number registered in school year 2014/15. According to the report of Miur and Ismu (2016), in the academic year 2014/15, the total number of Roma pupils was 12 437, with an increase of +780 pupils on the previous year. The report highlights the increase in enrolments in kindergartens and secondary schools (the highest in the historical series of the last eight years) but also the sharp drop in enrolments recorded in the transition from primary to secondary school. It also confirms the low presence of pupils in secondary schools. In this case the total number of students registered in secondary schools is alarming: only 248 Roma adolescents in whole of Italy. This number does not include students enrolled in vocational training courses.

The data may be underestimated due to methodological problems, but also due to the fact that Roma families do not always declare that they belong to Roma communities, afraid that their children will

be the target of prejudice and discrimination (Miur and Fondazione Ismu 2015). In any case, the gap between 23 437 registered students and the 40 000 (that should be in compulsory schooling) is so large that it is clear that a significant number of Roma children are not registered in schools. Moreover from school year 2007/08 to 2012/13 the number of registrations at all school levels (preschool, primary school, middle and secondary school) fell progressively.

Table 3.3.2 Roma pupils in the Italian school system by school. School Years 2007/08- 2014/15

School years	Preschool	Primary school	Middle school	Secondary school	Total
2007/08	2061	6801	3299	181	12342
2008/09	2171	7005	3467	195	12838
2009/10	1952	6628	3359	150	12089
2010/11	2054	6764	3401	158	12377
2011/12	1942	6416	3407	134	11899
2012/13	1906	6253	3215	107	11481
2013/14	1887	6132	3464	174	11657
2014/15	2179	6441	3569	248	12437
Var % 2007/08- 2014/15	5,7	-5,3	8,2	37	0,8
Var % 2014/15. 2013/14	15,5	5,0	3,0	42,5	6,7

Source: Miur and Fondazione ISMU, (2016)

Another problem with Roma children is their effective presence in the classroom. There is no national data on this matter, but the monitoring performed by local municipalities in agreement with the educational institutions – presented in the reports of the ‘National Project for inclusion and integration of Roma children’ funded by the Ministry of Social Policy – demonstrates a much higher percentage of absences than the average figures for the other students in the class they attend (Centro Nazionale di documentazione, 2016).

Early school leaving and the difficulties in attending school are caused significantly by material poverty and housing conditions. The conditions of children living in ‘camps’ are particularly difficult: they are often far from schools with no transport, and are places of segregation where there are no adequate spaces to study. Moreover, the frequent phenomena of evictions from camps almost always interrupt the school attendance of these children.

These difficulties are exacerbated by the widespread, deep-rooted prejudices against the Roma community as well as the lack of correspondence between the purpose of schooling and the expectations of the families.

While education is an investment and a fundamental resource both for individuals and for the whole society, it is also true that all children (Roma and not) develop different motivations and

orientations towards school according to their personal situation, their social, economic and cultural position, as well as exogenous conditions such as the local environment or social opportunities (Besozzi, 2006).

For Roma children, this lack of correspondence between academic objectives and motivations, on one side, and individual and family expectations, on the other, means that the families tend not to encourage their children to attend school. Often a lack of mutual familiarity between school and the Roma community, and among teachers and parents, leads to a lack of support for the different perspectives, producing distorted representations by both parties. Often, the school organization, approach to teaching and teaching methods and institutional racism also hinder the adequate inclusion of children from different contexts, thus causing disorientation, marginalization and discrimination (Tagliaventi, 2017).

In 2011, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child stated its opinion on the social inclusion of Roma children in Italy, responding to the 2009 Report drafted by Italy on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Committee expressed its concern for the low number of children in primary and secondary schools and hoped for an action plan for the social integration of the Roma communities, specifically referring to the health and schooling of children.

In the same year, a new phase concerning public policies addressed to Roma and Sinti was opened with the government's initiative to set up an inter-ministerial table for the implementation of the Communication of the European Commission 173/2011, that led to the National Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma, Sinti and Travelers 2012/2020, adopted by the Council of Ministers on 24/2/2012 and approved on 22/5/2012. National coordination was entrusted to the National Anti-Racial Discrimination Office (UNAR) of the Presidency of the Council (UNAR 2012).

The Strategy, based on human rights and a gender perspective, is developed through strong inter-ministerial coordination, regional tables and municipal inclusion plans. The planned interventions are organized in four axes: Education, Work, Health and Housing. The Strategy is currently largely inapplicable, and few permanent and systematic measures have been activated in the four axes.

3.3.2.2 Conclusion

As explained, Italy is currently in a static situation in terms of its fight against poverty. While waiting for Citizenship Income to be implemented, it is still not clear how it should be applied. The political forces in government are constantly questioning this instrument, and there is generally great confusion over it. The Italian people have got used to the lack of policies to fight poverty,

which does not seem to produce much indignation. Italian families continue to replace the welfare state, supporting their weakest members. In the meantime, child poverty is worsening every year. The combination of territoriality and familiarity with poverty has particularly serious consequences. Concerning children, the situation of Roma children is the most dramatic. The Italian Government is currently engaged in closing the camps, often without identifying alternative living solutions. The prospects are not bright. In recent years, action has not been taken to increase services to manage the economic crisis experienced by many families, but rather to greatly limit them, as such services are considered a cost that is no longer sustainable and a barrier to economic growth.

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