

FORGING A STRONG REGIONAL PARTNERSHIP

The second largest confederation of trade unions in Italy has taken the lead in driving forward territorial approaches to the integration of members of the Roma and Sinti communities. Through the activities of its vocational training arm, it has engendered a constructive, inter-agency approach, which has made every effort to understand and the views and cultures of this community and to reflect them in the activities and training programmes that it has established.



The Region of Emilia Romagna is right at the top of the boot of Italy. It has had quite a lengthy experience of immigration as members of its Chinese, Indian and Moroccan communities have now been living

there for over 25 years. Then, refugees from the Yugoslavian conflict arrived in the 1990s to be followed by an influx of people from Romania, at the beginning of the new millennium. In the current situation, it is estimated that more than two thousand people of Roma or Sinti origin live in three permanent camps and a temporary camp that caters for workers from the local amusement park.

An EQUAL Development Partnership is trying to combat the social exclusion of these people and the discrimination that they face on the labour market. This DP is called "*Il lungo cammino dei Sinti e dei Rom: percorsi verso il lavoro*" (The long road of the Sinti and Roma: pathways to employment). Its activities respond to the Council's Recommendations on the implementation of Member States' employment policies^[1].

"The very first article of our constitution states that 'Italy is a democratic republic based on work' and so while we seek to serve our members we, as a Trade Union, are also concerned to ensure that everyone can exercise his or her fundamental right to have a job" says Nazario Ferrari, the DP Coordinator from IAL. IAL is the vocational training organisation of [CISL - Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori](#) which is the second largest Confederation of Trade Unions in Italy with 4.287.551 members, in 2005. CISL and IAL are structured at both district and regional level and so it is [IAL's regional presence in Emilia Romagna](#) that is leading the "Il lungo cammino" DP in close cooperation with four communes (Bologna, Parma, Piacenza and Reggio Emilia), the provincial administration of Piacenza and a Sinti organisation.



You can park and stay in the camps but they are not ideal environments in which to bring up children

IMPROVING ACCESS

The essential aims of the DP are to increase the access of Roma and Sinti to the network of services provided in the region and to assist them in accessing the labour market.

Advice and Counselling

The first stage in realising these aims was to create new "Sportelli Integati" or one-stop-shops in Parma, Piacenza and Reggio Emilia and to develop the existing information activities of the Employment Service of Bologna into a "sportello". This was done to integrate the public and private services in the fields of social work, training and employment and to bring them closer to the Roma and Sinti communities. In fact, in terms of physical proximity, two "sportelli" are actually

based in the Gypsy camps in Parma and Piacenza. The "sportelli" are able to offer detailed information and advice on many aspects that affect the everyday living and working conditions of Sinti and Roma such as housing, health, schools and services for children, employment opportunities and work permits. These contacts also help Roma and Sinti people to understand more about the complexity of Italian society and how to relate to, and interact with, its institutions, agencies, schools and political structures.

Individual Training



The DP's computer courses offer marketable skills and a window on a wider world

This opening up of the Roma and Sinti communities to other influences is also reflected in the second aspect of the project which is the development and implementation of personalised training programmes. One young man who is a member of the Introduction to Computers course, Alessandro Argentini, put it like this *"I want to be part of a wider world and through the web I can have a chance to find out lots of things and maybe even learning computers can help me find a job."* The creation of the training programmes start with an analysis of the individual's needs and then there a guidance session that begins to outline a programme that will result in an active search for employment. When it gets to that stage, each individual is accompanied through the process of registering for work at one of the local public

or private employment services and they are also supported in all aspects of job search and preparing for job interviews. Prior to that, individuals participate in on-going vocational counselling and various types of training to improve their literacy and numeracy or to improve their social, communication and IT skills. Finally, and very much in accordance with the hopes and expectations of these members of the Roma and Sinti communities regarding future jobs, more specific, training courses are organised. To date, courses have been offered in health and safety at work, knitwear, office cleaning, fashion, services, motor mechanics, rubbish collection and the production of artisanal goods.

The continued availability of counselling and support is a vital element in the project. Chiara Olivieri is 16 years of age but she hasn't completed her secondary school diploma and last year she enrolled on a hairdressing course that she didn't finish. She was helped by the project in preparing a CV and in going together to various owners of shops to discuss the possibilities of finding a job. Also, she has taken advantage of every chance to meet with her vocational counsellor, both formally and informally. Now she understands that *"it is very difficult to get some sort of a job without some sort of certificates. My counsellor has helped me see that my best plan is to go back and try to finish school and I also want to do a more advanced computer course here at the training centre, at the same time."*



Chiara who is now going back to finish her secondary school diploma

Practical Experience

The third phase of the project to be offered to beneficiaries is a "stage" or period of work experience for a flexible period of anything from six months to one year. "Il lungo cammino" is gradually building up a network of employers who are sympathetic to the idea of offering work experience opportunities. The DP calls these transition companies. They are enterprises that are profit-orientated but also aim to offer education and training within the workplace that will enable the Roma and Sinti to gain the vocational skills that will meet the company's needs or fill gaps in the local labour market.

Capitalising on Outcomes from EQUAL Round 1

All of this has been built on the experience of a previous EQUAL project called "[A kiste` ki Braval an U Iambsko drom-A Cavallo Del Vento Verso Il Lungo Cammino](#)" or, in English, Astride the Wind towards the Long Road. The current DP is using what has been learnt in this phase of experimentation to implement integrated strategies that will improve the social and economic conditions of gypsies and develop new approaches to vocational integration, especially, on-the-job training. In effect, much of what was learnt from the original DP is contained in one of the most important outcomes of its [Transnational Partnership](#) with the French DP "[Insertion Des Gitans par la Formation et le Travail](#)" (Integration of Gypsies through Training and Work). Copies of this booklet entitled "Sinti, Rom and Gitani in Europa: La Formazione e L'Inserimento Lavorativo" (Sinti, Roma, Gypsies in Europe: Training and Vocational Integration) are available in Italian from the contact address below.

PARTNERSHIP AT EVERY LEVEL

There are five local authority members of the DP and both the political and executive heads of the services that are represented are very committed to establishing closer links between the social work activities, the training system and the public and private sector employment services. These five members are the Social Service Departments of the Communes of Parma, Piacenza and Bologna, the Immigration and Equal Opportunities Department of the Commune of Reggio Emilia and the Active Economy and Training and Employment Policies Department of the Administrative Province of Piacenza. In addition to providing social services, the Communes of Bologna, Plaisance, Reggio Emilia and Parma, provide camps in which travellers can park their trucks or caravans and stay for as long as they like.

The sixth partner in the project is Thèm Romano, an NGO managed by Sinti people themselves, which promotes the representation of Sinti and Roma in territorial, social and cultural initiatives. The seventh and lead partner is IAL which has worked for over five years in designing and running training courses for the Sinti people of the region.

The fact that the experience of Round 1 has stood the new DP in good stead is shown by the quantitative outcomes that have been achieved by all of the four "Sportelli":

- 230 vocational guidance interviews or sessions;
- 25 courses organised;
- These courses involved 161 people and lasted 8007 hours;
- 27 stages or work experience placements have taken place.

A Network of Proactive Partners

Whilst these seven partners form the board of the DP, this is not a closed or exclusive partnership. When the concept of the project was being developed, an attempt was made to map the skills and resources in the region that might be used to address the needs of Roma and Sinti people. It became clear that organisations such as Caritas, other trade unions and training centres and Opera Nomadi, which is a gadje organisation dedicated to helping Roma, had a contribution to make to the project. Similarly, the Provinces of Bologna and Emilia Romagna had a role to play, as their employment services could provide important reference points and more targeted activities for Roma and Sinti. All of these organisations and agencies now participate in what the DP calls its network and they are also members of the territorial committees that have been created to manage the activities generated by the work of each of the four centres or "sportelli." Nazario Ferrari is keen to point out that *"the board of the DP gives some general guidelines about how the project might be run in each of the four territories but it is very important that the work takes account of the local circumstances, the local resources and the local policies. This is why our territorial committees are so important."*

One initiative that has helped to set the tone of the project is the use of the skills and knowledge of a local university to open up debates about the Roma and Sinti cultures and, through this exchange of views and information, attempts are made to overcome some of the more traditional prejudices and stereotypes. Almost all of the partners in the DP and its wider network have had the opportunity to take part in such events and this has also created a more positive attitude towards inter-organisational collaboration.

On these interface issues, Thèm Romano, which has worked in Emilia Romagna for a long time, has become the key link between the gypsy and gadje communities. Vladimiro Torre, who is its President, explains that *"people from our community often find that doors to services and facilities are closed so I was happy to find in this project, reference points with official agencies and with trade unions."* He adds that *"my job is now going out to families and convincing them that it is a valid project for their children to be involved in."* However, Vladimiro is no longer alone in this job, as with money from EQUAL it has been possible to appoint a cultural mediator, who has a Roma or Sinti background, in each of the four operational areas. The task of these mediators is to make contact with Roma or Sinti people and explain what the DP has to offer and then to help, advise and support them in accessing the various services.

Overcoming Institutional Boundaries

The original intention was that there would be a team in each territory that would follow the social and vocational integration of individual members of the Roma and Sinti communities. This team was to be created by the cultural mediators operating with social workers from the social service departments and with training tutors from vocational training centres. However, according to Cecilia Vinentini, the DP's Transnational Coordinator, *"at the beginning this almost seemed to be 'Mission Impossible' and we were worried because the success of the project really hinged on the quality of collaboration between these three figures."* The DP recognised the problems with institutional boundaries, the fact that some people felt that they would have to give away some of their power and responsibilities and that, in some instances, there was potential for a clash between "professionals" and well-intentioned, but unqualified, amateurs. However, many of these difficulties were resolved by the insistence of the head of departments and local politicians on the need for cooperation and the fact that attitudes really began to change once the cultural mediators had had a chance to participate on a training course that had been specifically designed by IAL Bologna to prepare them for their new role.

The DP is hoping that the collaborative approach that it has nurtured will be taken forward after the end of the current EQUAL project. With a view to mainstreaming, it will use the Faculty of Economics of the University of Bologna to identify the strong points within each of the partner organisations. Through the application of a questionnaire to the staff of the "sportelli", to the public partners and to beneficiaries of the project, an attempt will be made to highlight what has really functioned well and to leave a written record to inspire and stimulate further developments. With all of the most important provinces and communes in the region being direct associated with the DP, it looks very likely that these developments won't be long in coming.

Three Important Conclusions from "Il lungo cammino dei Sinti e dei Rom: percorsi verso il lavoro"

1. Integration doesn't mean everyone having to be the same - there has to be mutual respect between the gypsy and gadje communities and recognition that everyone has the right to their own culture and way of working .
2. Roma and Sinti have many problems outside of training and employment and it would have been better if representatives of health and housing services had been involved from the beginning and then the DP could have offered a more immediate and complete response.
3. Even the most perfectly designed systems will not work without personal and professional commitment and cooperation and accepting your responsibility within an integrated approach can enhance your job performance and job satisfaction.

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[Link to EQUAL database description](#)