Comune di Collegno (Collegno Municipality, Turin – Italy) would like to join a European strategic partnership applying to the REC-RDIS-DISC-AG-2016 call (deadline 21/03/17). The beneficiaries of the project should be Roma communities, whose welfare and integration are one of the main priorities of the call.

Collegno

Collegno is a town situated on a wide floodplain at the edge of Val di Susa, not far from the Alps (Piedmont, North West Italy). A part of the broad institutional structure of the Metropolitan City of Turin, its territory counts seven neighborhoods and a rural village and hosts about 50,000 inhabitants (49,674 by 31.12.2016). The urbanized and today most densely inhabited areas were built in the 1950's-'60s, alongside the so called Corso Francia. At present, there is no break in continuity between Collegno and the near territory of the city of Turin, to which it is connected by road, railway and underground transportation.

The Roma Community of Collegno

Since 1973, the Municipality has decided to take responsibility for and deal with the Roma families living in the town. In fact, dedicated areas have been allocated for the stay of this community and along the years many Roma families have positively reacted to such attention deciding to “settle down”.

In 1997, with a significant financial commitment and a very innovative approach at the time (the Roma community was in charge of a co-funding quota), the Municipality built a new rest area equipped to host the 29 traveler families allowed to stay in the former trailer park. Such an operation addressed the structural shortcomings of the former trailer park and brought a tangible improvement of the Roma families housing conditions.

These conditions have enabled the Municipality to deliver a variety of social interventions, which focused on to the socio-educational integration of minors mainly.

The Municipality has also promoted initiatives aiming to foster a progressive integration of the travelling population into the local community by continuously carrying out mutual knowledge and peaceful coexistence operations. In order to do so, the management of the gypsy trailer park has been assigned to a socio-educational cooperative that delivers both administrative operations and ordinary maintenance as well as promotional actions of the many cultural initiatives.

In the last years, some families have moved from the gypsy trailer park to housing units made available by the Municipality and situated in working-class neighborhoods across the town.

Most of the children currently living in the gypsy trailer park, as well as many of their parents, were born in Collegno.

In the current school year, about 40 Roma minors -some of which mentally or physically disabled- do attend the local state schools, from kindergartens to high schools. School attendance, however, is still problematic and discontinuous. Discontinuity increases with the aging of children and it has proved necessary to report some cases to Juvenile Courts. Such problems of attendance are very often linked with distance and mobility difficulties.
Current Challenges

For Collegno the greatest challenge is overcoming the “gypsy trailer park” approach and fostering a full housing, educational and working integration for the settled Roma. By doing so, the economic burden of the services currently provided would decrease and cultural stereotypes, deeply rooted in both Roma and Italians, may be effectively countered. Such stereotypes, in fact, heavily influence and limit policy-making schemes.

A recent analysis carried out by Collegno Municipality, with the support and advice of ÉFA for this REC call, has pointed out the following highlights:

Strengths:

- Numerous cases of Roma community members who have emerged from the structural isolation of the gypsy trailer park and relocated to new housing units made available by the Municipality and situated in working-class neighborhoods across the town.
- The willingness of Roma women to leave the gypsy trailer park and start working permanently.
- The widespread practice of Roma children to attend school and after-school activities promoted by local state schools and education institutions.
- The skills, experience and passion of the teachers promoting integration paths at local schools.
- Scope for the enlargement of the network of services provided by both the municipality and other public institutions.

Weaknesses:

- The still existing decoupling of Roma culture from local culture with widespread unemployment and presence of illegal practices.
- Deep-rooted prejudices both in Roma and non-Roma communities.
- High percentage of people with disabilities, also among the young Roma.
- The isolation of both Roma and local youngsters, due to the missing interlink between the experiences at school and the social life out of school.
- The lack of mediation among the youth, their families and education institutions.

Opportunities:

- A positive political context with goals that foster the transition from “emergency” to systemic policies (i.e. a new gypsy trailer park purposely built as a temporary, non-permanent, structure).
- The willingness of Collegno municipality to move from the current attitude of passive assistance to a new approach of shared-responsibility when supporting with the Roma community (and its women in particular).
- A local network – of public and non-profit organizations – capable of testing actions enhancing the professionalization and employability of Roma people.
- A solid system of schools and educational institutions with a years-long background of experiences teaching Roma children. The schools have confirmed their availability to experiment new methodologies, also involving extra-curricular activities.
Threats:

- The public opinion that (due to the ongoing socio-economic crisis) may be easily influenced against any investment addressed to the Roma community.

Why being a partner in the Rights, Equality and Citizenship program?

Collegno Municipality agrees and identifies itself with the goals of the program, particularly with the ideal of “fighting segregation in education, and promoting the empowerment of Roma youth and their active involvement in the process of Roma integration, including through the capacity building of civil society active at the local level”.

Collegno Municipality would like to join a European Partnership applying for this call in order to:

- introduce and provide concrete examples of inclusive practices considering both the long-standing experiences of its local network of operators and the implemented or ongoing experimentations;
- employ ideas, tools and resources to promote the government’s strategic focus;
- find out, experiment and test new forms of intervention.

For projects applying to this call, the areas Collegno could more readily and suitably intervene are:

- training of professionals: involving all the internal staff of the municipality (social services, civil registries, urban police), teachers and educators, socio-sanitary operators of the local network;
- mutual learning, exchange of good practices and cooperation (including the identification of best practices transferable to other participating countries) in relation to the fields of education and professional placement, entrepreneurship (also small- businesses), development and improvement of the Roma woman figure, especially addressed to young women.

Contact

For a pre-evaluation of the feasibility, action plan, partners’ tasks and responsibilities of any eventual partnership proposal:

**Alberto Lasso – Francesco Ferrari** ÉFA – Équipe Formatori Associati Consultants Mobile:
+39 3494506462

Mail:   efa.erasmusplus@gmail.com

Skype:   alberto.lasso.m.