

# The reproductive behavior of the Romani population living in Italy

*Emiliana Baldoni, Maria Castiglioni, Gianpiero Dalla-Zuanna and Maria Letizia Tanturri*

Department of Statistical Sciences, University of Padua

Generally speaking, the fertility behavior of the Romani population in Europe is characterized by early unions and high fertility. However, analytical studies are very rare, and totally absent in Italy, where the Romani population (about 150-200 thousand people in 2011) has grown after the Balkan Wars and the entry of Romania in the EU, and live mainly in a very disadvantaged social situation (Dalla-Zuanna 2013).

The importance of this type of research is evident. From the demographic point of view, we study a population of high fertility and early union formation within the Italian context of lowest-low fertility and latest-late leaving the parental home. Moreover, a wider knowledge of the reproductive behavior of the Romani people allows to think about possible health interventions for mothers and children.

In the first part of the paper (summarized here), for the first time we use some individual data-bases for estimating the fertility trends of Romani population during 1997-2011 in the Italian cities of Rome, Milan, Naples and Padua. In the second part (in progress), using some in-deep interviews to health and social workers, we try to explain the meaning of the quantitative results.

## *Data*

In the years 2010-12, the Municipalities of Rome, Milan, Naples and Padua have built a data-base of the Romani population living in the *autorizzati* (legal) camps. Every person has been classified by name, surname, sex, age, relationship with the head of the family and nationality (table 1). For Rome, there are also the same data for 6,282 Romani people living in spontaneous camps. However, an analytical analysis of data of *irregolari* (not regular) camps of Rome shows a clear under-representation of children. Consequently, they are excluded from the analysis of reproductive behavior.

*Table 1. Romani population of the analyzed data-base (legal camps)*

	<i>Camps</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Age &lt; 15</i>	<i>Age &gt; 49</i>	<i>Mean age</i>
<i>Rome</i>	8	2,288	2,252	4,540	43	7	21.5
<i>Milan</i>	8	299	330	629	32	10	26.0
<i>Naples</i>	2	328	314	642	40	7	21.6
<i>Padua</i>	2	101	126	227	42	9	22.8

A glance to the age distribution shows a very young population (see the last column of table 1 and figure 1). However, there are important differences between Milan and the other cities. As only data on population are available, for estimating fertility we use the own-children method for Rome

(as the data base is large enough), whereas for the other cities, the TFR for the fifteen years before the data collection (at the end of 2011) is estimated using the formula [1]:

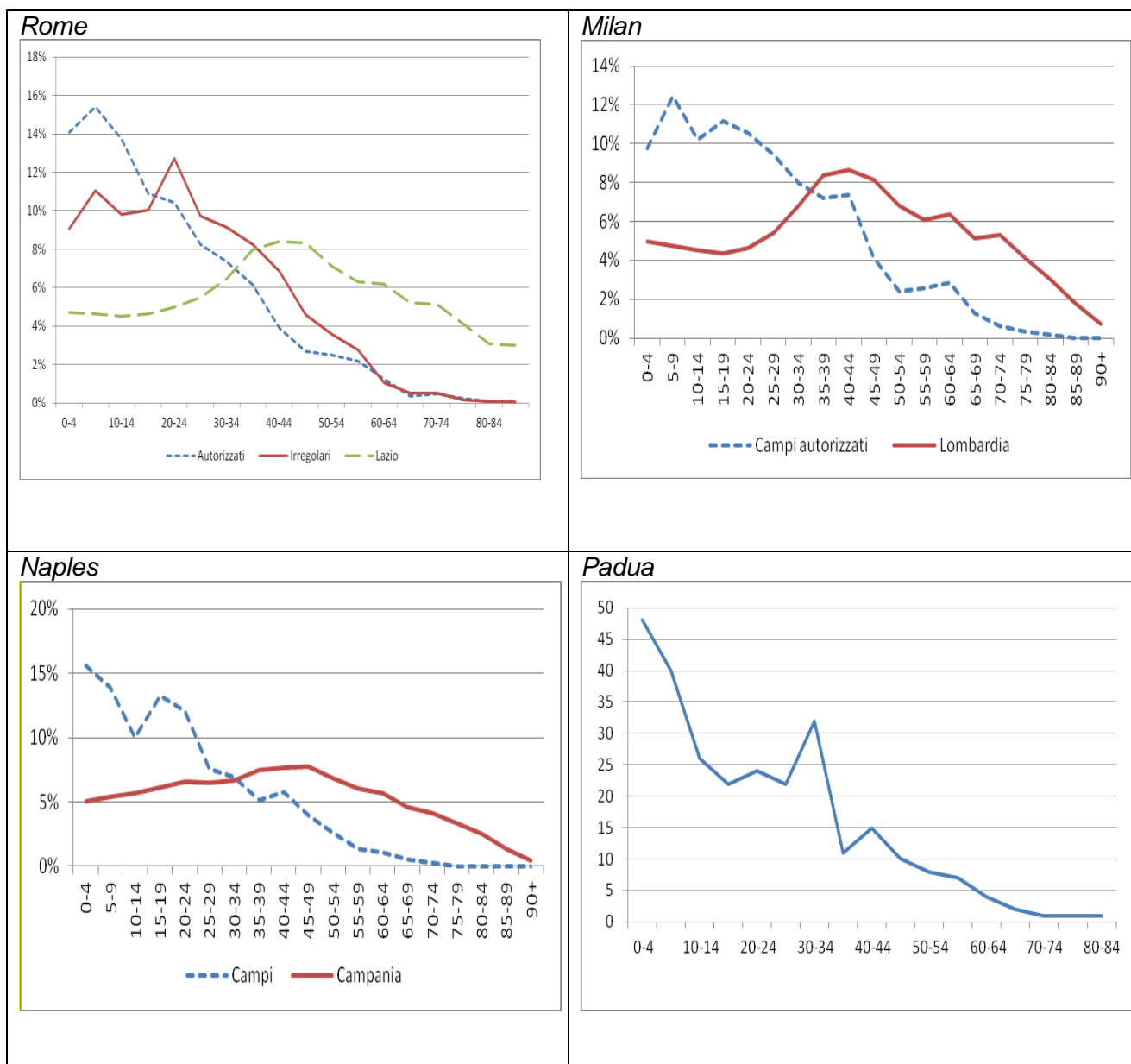
$$TFR_{2011-i-k,2011-i} = (P_{i,i+k} / W_{i+15,i+k+40}) \times [(25+k+1)/(k+1)] \quad [1]$$

where **P** is population, **W** are women, (**i, i+k**) are the age interval of children. E.g. if **i=5** and **k=9**:

$$TFR_{2011-5-9,2011-5} = (P_{5,5+9} / W_{5+15,5+9+40}) \times [(25+9+1)/(9+1)] = TFR_{1997,2006} = (P_{5,14} / W_{20,54}) \times (7/2)$$

The main hypothesis under this retrospective estimation is that mortality of children and mothers after birth is not too different.

Figure 1. Distribution by age: Romani people living in Rome, Milan, Naples and Padua and population living in the corresponding region.



## Results

### General fertility

The general fertility of Romani, calculated using formula [1] declines in Rome, Milan and Naples. However, the levels of fertility and the pace of decline are not the same in the three cities (table 2)

*Table 2. Estimation of mean number of children of Romani women in Rome, Milan, Naples and Padua. 1997-2011*

	Rome	Milan	Naples	Padua
2007-11 6 x Children (0-4) / Women (15-44)	3.59	2.08	5.01	
2002-06 6 x Children (5-9) / Women (20-49)	4.79	3.14	5.94	
1997-01 6 x Children (10-14) / Women (25-54)	5.42	3.00	6.16	
1997-11 8/3 x Children (0-14) / Women (15-54)	4.43	3.04	4.99	4.60

### *Fertility during 1997-2011 of the Romani women living in the regular camps of Rome*

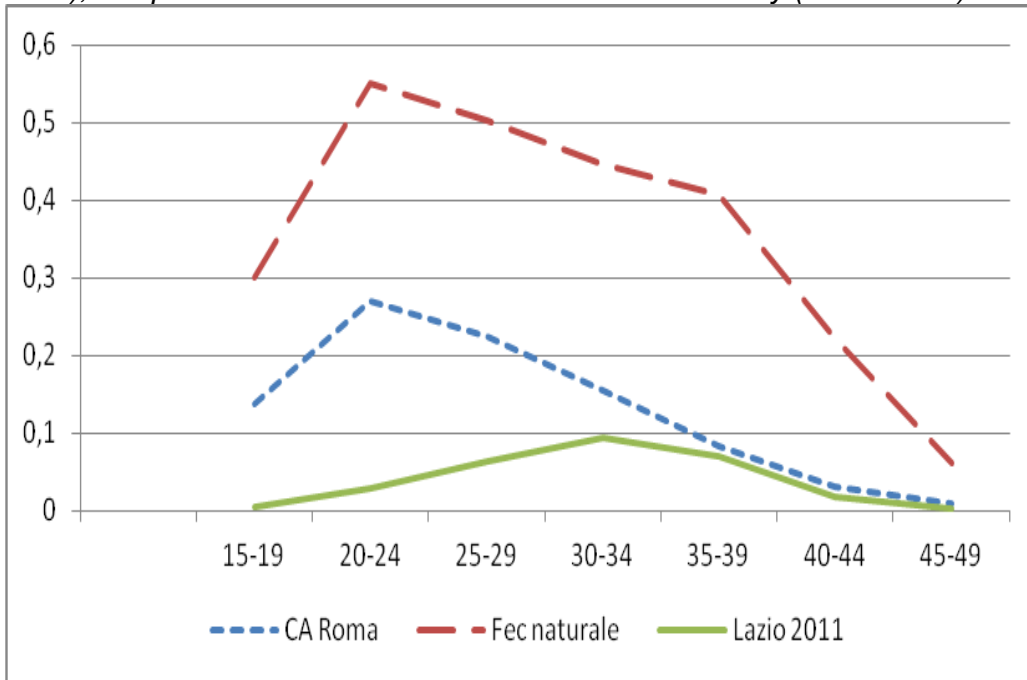
The data-base for Rome is large enough to apply the own-children method. Table 3 and figure 2 show fertility by age considering a period of fifteen years (1997-2011; we do not consider previous years in order to minimize the risk of children leaving the parental home). Fertility at young ages is very high, even if far from the “natural” level. Anyway, after the 35<sup>th</sup> birthday the fertility of Romani women and of women living in Latium are not very different, very far from natural fertility.

*Table 3. Fertility of the Romani people living in the legal camps of Rome (1997-11), and comparison with other populations*

	<i>Romani living in Rome</i>	<i>Natural fertility (*)</i>	<i>Lazio 2011</i>
Fertility rates by age			
15-19	0.137	0.300	0.005
20-24	0.269	0.550	0.029
25-29	0.225	0.502	0.064
30-34	0.155	0.447	0.095
35-39	0.084	0.406	0.069
40-44	0.030	0.222	0.018
45-49	0.008	0.061	0.002
TFR	4.54	12.44	1.41
Mean age at birth	26.5	29.1	32.0

(\*) Fertility of Hutterites

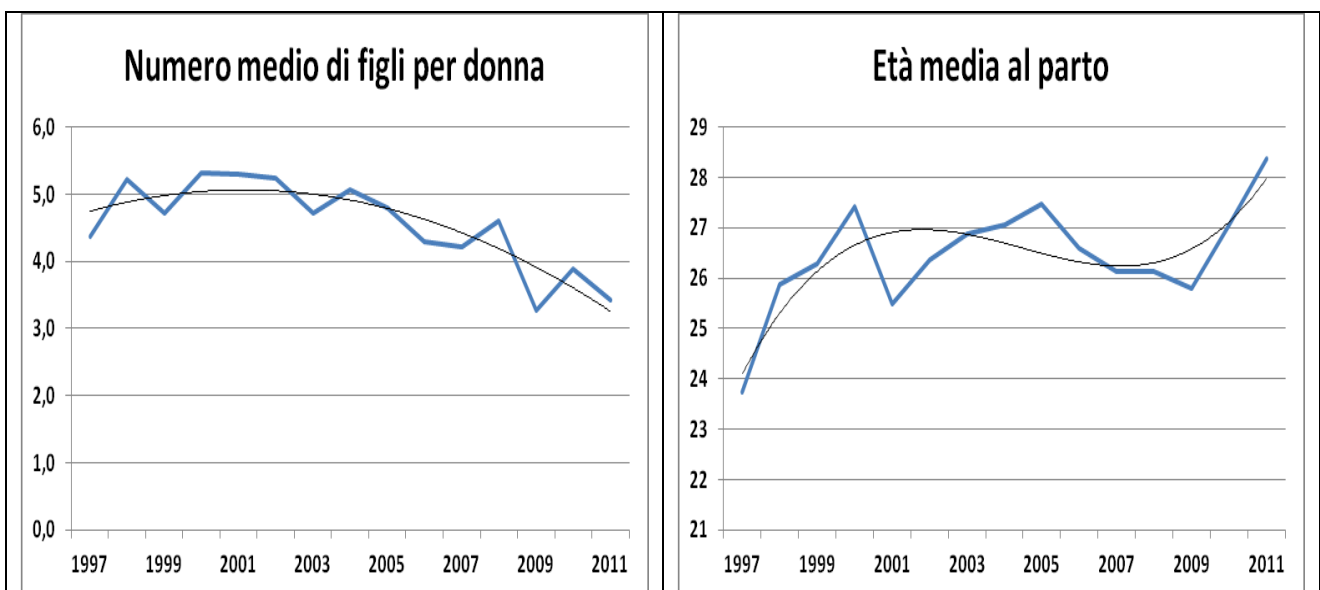
Figure 2. Fertility by age for Romani women living in the legal camps of Rome (CA Roma 1997-2011), compared with the same measures for natural fertility (fec naturale) and Lazio 2011



Fertility changes during 1997-2011 of Romani women living in Rome in 2011

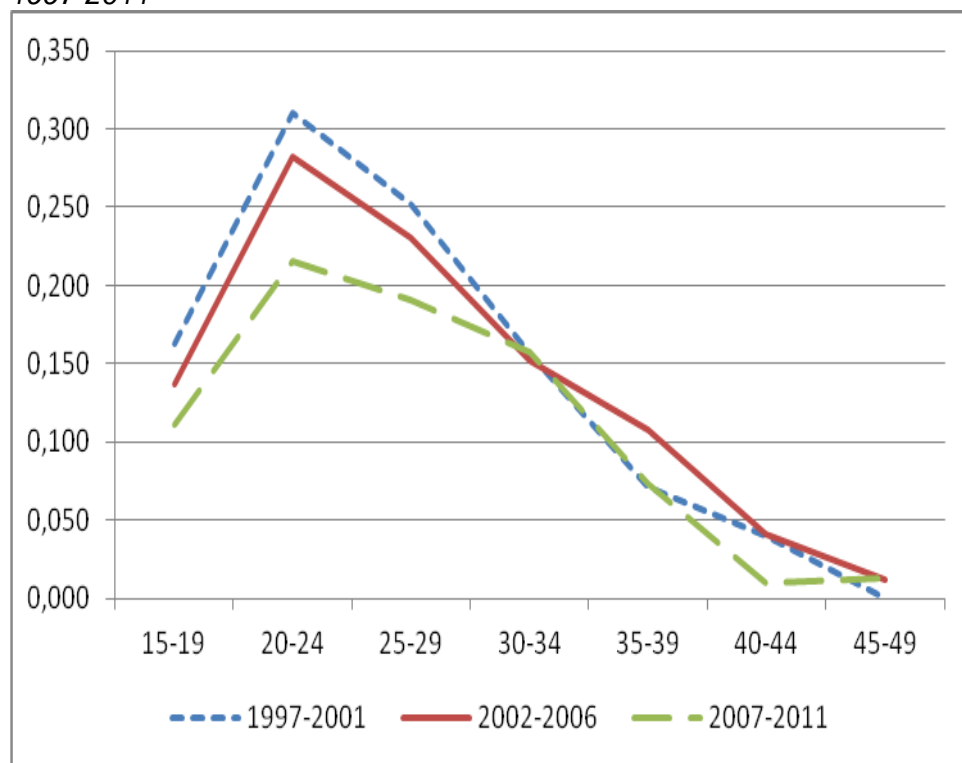
Figure 3 tells the same history of table 2, in a more analytic way. Fertility of Romani living in Rome is around 5 children per woman until the beginning of the new century. The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by a decline, with TFR around 3.5 in the last triennium 2009-11. During all the 15 years, the mean age at birth has increased.

Figure 3. TFR (Numero medio di figli per donna) and mean age at birth (Età media al parto) during 1997-2011 of Romani women living in Rome in 2011



These changes are due to the decline of fertility during the first fifteen years of the reproductive life (figure 4). Only during the next years it will be possible to understand if this decline is relevant also in a cohort perspective, or if – rather – the Romani women born during the 70s and the 80s will recovery at age 30+ the fertility “lost” at age 15-29.

Figure 4. Age specific fertility rates of Romani women living in Rome in 2011. Changes during 1997-2011



#### Fertility of Romani women by place of birth

The fertility of Romani women living in Rome is not the same by place of birth (table 4, figures 5 and 6). Fertility is particularly low for the women whose place of birth is unknown. It could be that this group is similar to Romani living in spontaneous camps: many of them are adults without a stable family and/or with children living far from the mother.

For Romani women coming from ex-Yugoslavia, fertility is high (TFR=5.79) and without any clue of decline. On the other hand, the fertility of women born in Romania is lower (TFR=4.23) at every age, and it has declined since the beginning of the new century. Finally, also the trend of fertility of Italian-born Romani women has declined since the beginning of the 21st century; however, the medium level of their fertility is high (TFR=5.44), not far from the one calculated for women coming from the ex-Yugoslavia.

These last results doubt the strength of the fertility decline of the Roman women living in Rome. The more “stable” data, that concern the Romani women born in Italy, show that the fertility decline is only at its infancy.

Table 4. Fertility of Romani women living in Rome by place of birth. 1997-2011

	Italy	ex-Yugoslavia	Romania	Unknown (mancante)	Total
15-19	0.153	0.130	0.194	0.188	0.137
20-24	0.311	0.336	0.273	0.162	0.269
25-29	0.238	0.303	0.219	0.121	0.225
30-34	0.200	0.224	0.095	0.046	0.155
35-39	0.186	0.128	0.053	0.027	0.084
40-44	0.000	0.037	0.013	0.007	0.030
45-49	0.000	0.013	0.000	0.003	0.008
TFR	5.44	5.79	4.23	2.77	4.54
Mean age at birth	27.3	28.0	25.0	23.8	26.5
% fertility <25	43%	40%	55%	63%	45%
Row % (women aged 15+)	26%	20%	20%	34%	100%

Figure 5. Fertility of Romani women living in Rome by place of birth. 1997-2011

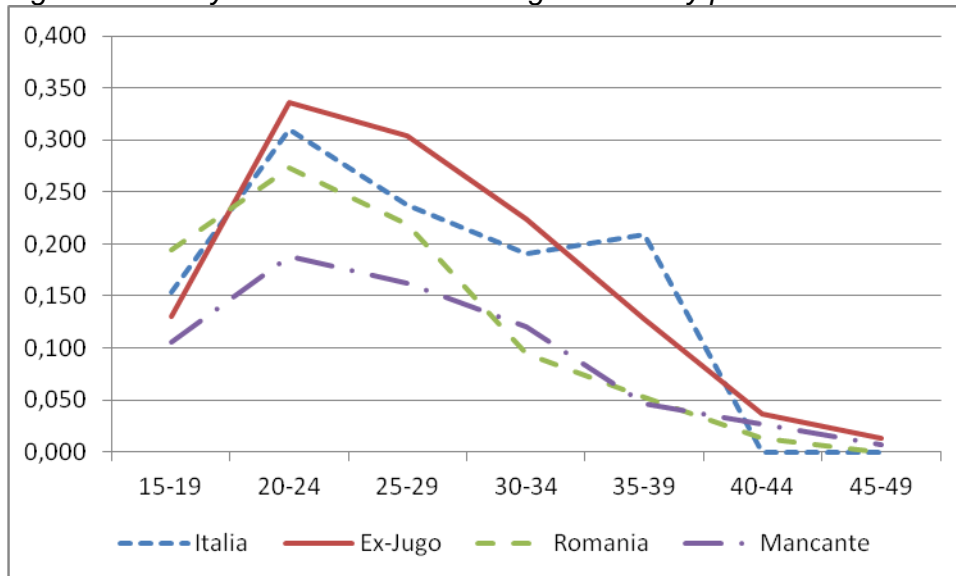
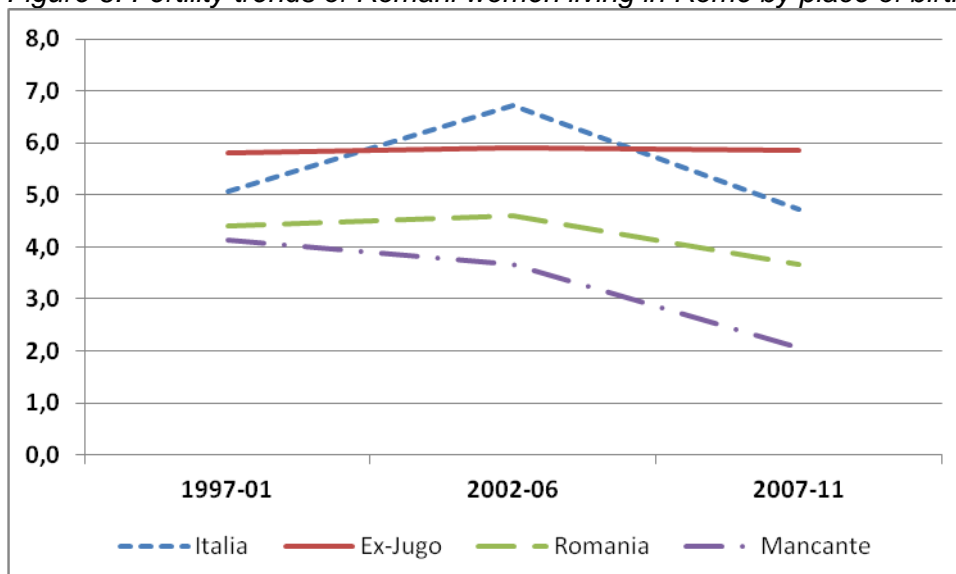


Figure 6. Fertility trends of Romani women living in Rome by place of birth



## *Discussion*

These results open at least four questions.

First, they highlight the great potential of growth of a population so young. Just like has happened in many third world populations, although the fertility diminish sharply, the Romani population living in Italy will grow rapidly even without the contribution of immigration, by 2% a year or more.

Second, the differences between the cities studied here should be better understood. In particular, are difficult to interpret the differences in fertility between the Romani women who live in the regular camps of Milan (mostly Italian) and Italian living in the regular camps of Rome. The socio-economic and housing conditions, and the level of integration should be carefully considered, as well as unequal access to social and health services.

Third, it should be better understood the meaning of relatively low fertility after age 30. The in-depth interviews do not seem to suggest a widespread use of birth control among "older " women nor an extensive practice of induced abortion. The role of other intermediate variables should be taken into account, in particular the frequency of sexual intercourses in the late part of fecund life.

Finally, it should be interpreted the decline in fertility at young ages: is it related to the increase of the age at the wedding (as is now happening in many poor countries) or – rather – to a greater use of birth control among young Romani women, or both?

## Reference

**Dalla-Zuanna G. (editor) (2013)** *Il forte disagio abitativo in Italia, con un focus sulla popolazione nomade*, Cittalia Foundation, published only on web, [http://www.cittalia.it/images/file/disagio\\_abitativo.pdf](http://www.cittalia.it/images/file/disagio_abitativo.pdf)