



Analyses and perspectives from the survey on early marriage in Roma communities

in Italy, Romania, Croatia, Austria and Bulgaria
realised within the framework of community work

of the EU co-funded project
“Marry When You Are Ready”
coordinated by SPES – Centro di Servizio per il Volontariato del Lazio

Research report by Alfredo Alietti, University of Ferrara, Italy¹

Coordinator: **SPES** – Centro di Servizio per il Volontariato del Lazio (Italy)

Partners:

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ngo LIL (Macedonia)



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¹ This report is the result of the survey and of the analyses performed by the research group and it does not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union.

Introduction

Early marriage, presumed to be a widespread practice in Roma communities in Europe, is a delicate and controversial issuedibattuto (CAHAROM, 2015; ERTF, 2014). The dominant rhetoric in public opinion and in the political arena constantly reproduces an image of a distance impossible to assimilate, rooted in prejudice and sentiments of menace and danger. As regards specifically the practice of early marriage, this reinforces the idea of a primitive “Gypsy” culture, for some aspects considered degenerate, in sharp contrast with women’s rights and emancipation acquired in the so-called normal society (Stewart, 2012; Oprea, 2015). We thus assist to a classic mechanism of reification of a culture considered internally homogenous, rigid, traditional and tightly defined by impenetrable boundaries. In substance, early marriage thus becomes a further element that justifies the aversion and the refusal of the presumably progressive majority.

The phenomenon is certainly present, but it cannot be generalised to the varied and articulated world of Gypsy populations. It is in fact essential to understand that it is a product of interactions between different and characterising life conditions, distinct cultural models, generational conflicts, differentiated levels of socio-economic integration and cultural and political participation. As of consequence, such complex configuration outlines a picture that cannot be reduced to a mere culturalist interpretation that throws everything in the same basket without distinctions.

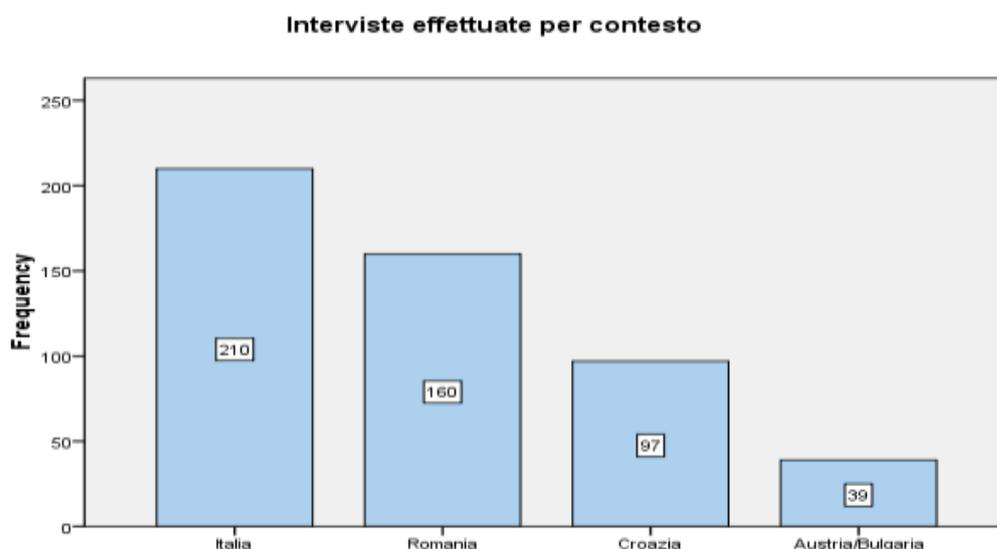
Furthermore, cultural determinism occults the persistent discrimination to which a big number of Roma groups is subject and the resulting dynamics of socio-spatial segregation which restrict the possibility to roll out a process of change pursuing the logic of substantial inclusion (Alietti, 2015; Ghergely, 2013; FRA, 2012; Sigona, Trehan, 2009). If the analyses of early marriage in principal countries of East Europe are observed, it emerges clearly that the phenomenon persists in most fragile areas and that it is associated to families in a state of deprivation and with low educational attainment (Crai, 2015; CAHAROM, 2015).

Risks connected to the condition of marginality are multiple, among these the rigidity of certain practices such as precisely early marriage, which can be defined as “reactive culturalism” in reaction to a hostile and discriminatory environment (Oprea, 2005). The fact that it is the women, *in primis*, to suffer most this situation is an essential aspect in comprehending the reality under discussion. Without doubt, it is necessary also to shed light to factors connected to a patriarchal vision that structures gender relationships in certain tzigian groups, limits the autonomy of women and reproduces their subordination (Vincze, 2013).

The lack of educational and work opportunities for Roma women appears to be the challenge to take in order to contrast their vulnerability and the bonds that tie them down. This research can represent a solid basis for future in depth analyses and further confirmations on the issue. The survey results indicate trends on which to work in the perspective of articulated enquiries into the backgrounds of diversities of opinions on early marriages, set a basis for mapping the diversities of practices and can be used as a tool to activate impactful policies pursuing inclusion and emancipation of the female component. It is difficult to imagine an incisive programme of integration of Roma communities, in respect of the internal articulation and differences, without an effective transformation of the living conditions of Roma women.

The research realised within the European project “Marry When You Are Ready” is an important passage to understand the processes underway and the attitudes expressed by women and men involved in the survey. The study has collected 506 interviews in various European countries (Italia, Romania, Croatia, Austria, Bulgaria) 21,5% men and 78,5% women.

Fig. 1 Interviews by context



The entire survey was realised at the places of residence of persons contacted. All the interviewers were cultural mediators and community workers of Roma origin: this permitted to build the relationship of trust necessary for this survey. Another element very important to this end is the fact that the interviews were conducted either in Romanì or in the family language of the interviewee. Unfortunately, some problem related to interview setting caused a significant number of uncomplete questionnaires, for example insufficient preparation of the interviewers and, in some cases, difficult conditions to realize better conditions for the interview. Anyway, this problem is normal when it has to collect data in the marginal communities.

The sample was determined by the original choice of the communities to involve in the project work and successively, within the national context, by the so-called snow ball technique.

The non-probabilistic nature of the sample and the non-response quota do not tarnish however the quality of the interviews and of the results emerged from the survey. In the following chapter a synthesis of the results is presented in order to outline the predominant orientations and opinions expressed in relation to the sphere of marriage choice. Factors that positively or negatively impact the possibility to advance the choice to marry to the legal age of full maturity are put in evidence: educational attainment and ethnicity.

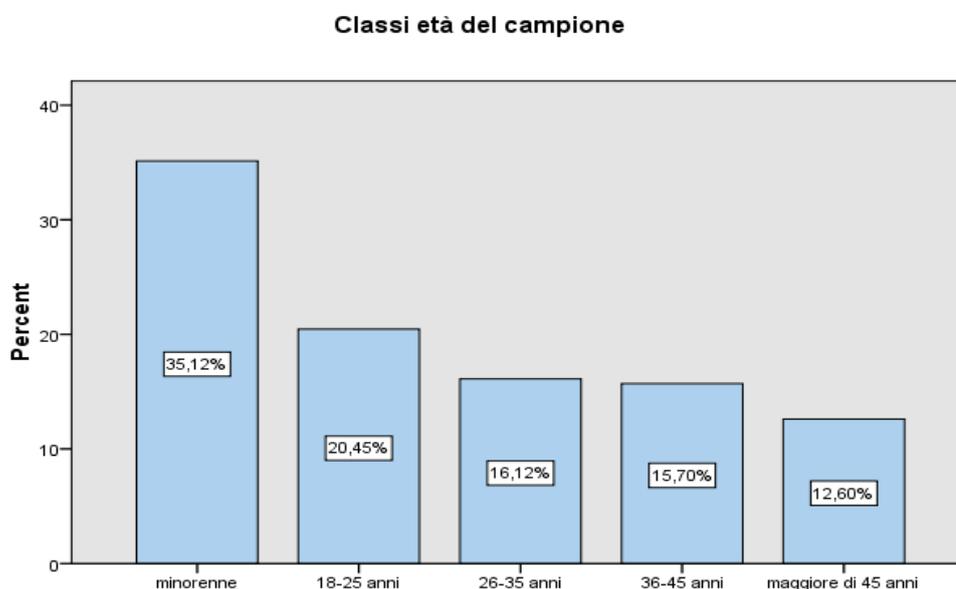
1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

The distribution of socio-demographic variables reflects very well the situation of Roma communities of the survey countries. In substance – populations with characters of relative social and economic marginality linked, in the first place, to difficulties in the schooling process and to low occupation rates.

A very large majority of the sample had no formal work or occupation at the moment of the interview, only 26,1% declared to have a job. In this “working” component, the prevalent professions are those typical of autonomous activities, such as iron collectors, peddlers and carnies. One fourth of the interviewees is still in school, in line with the distribution of the age groups which corresponds to 35% of minors. After the age of 18, the age groups of the sample are distributed more equally. This evidence underlines with a certain emphasis the conditions of privation in terms of cultural capital, expressed by the degree and the years of schooling, and in terms of access to professional competences potentially expendable on the job market. In substance, this confirms the dynamics of socio-economic exclusion which has durable effects on the life-course of new generations, especially of women.

As regards the marital status, a little over 50% is married, followed by 32% of unmarried interviewees e by a residual quota of 7,0% of divorcees or remarried (9,4%).

Fig. 2 **Distribution of sample by age group**

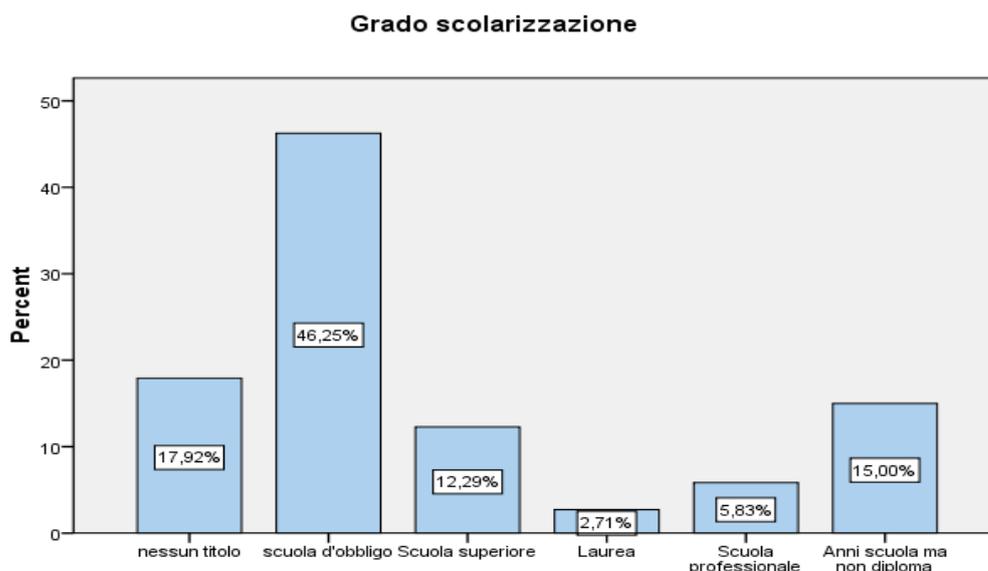


35% of subjects are mothers/fathers of one or two children and 33% of three or more children. As far as family composition is concerned, a majority part of 46% has more than one brother or sister.

73% of the interviewees has always lived in the same country. The sample population is therefore stable and not marked by particular migratory movements.

Finally, levels of education are, as anticipated, low in average. 46,3% went to elementary school but almost 18% have not completed the basic 8-year obligatory schooling. The other 35% is divided between those that have completed high school or professional secondary schooling, interviewees with university degree (2%) and those that have some years of schooling following the elementary school but have not obtained a diploma.

Fig. 3 Distribution of sample by educational attainment



But, however feeble the educational attainment still results, the sample demonstrates a profound mutation as regards schooling with respect to their parents who, mothers of the interviewees in particular, show extremely low literacy levels.

From the following batch of questions enquiring into the will to continue school, the importance of schooling and the motivations for abandon, some significant aspects emerge. On the one hand, the vast majority of women and men interviewed champions the importance of continuity of education, 87,4% and 86,1% respectively. On the other hand, 36,4% declared they would not have wished to continue with school anyhow. This sheds light on the issue of school drop-out, especially for girls, connected to social, economic and cultural situations. The main reasons for leaving school are linked to marriage and work. Other decisive factors that often interact with the marriage decision are the living conditions and lack of personal motivations. Childbirth and parents' prohibition are scarcely relevant. Education and the relationship with the school system represent, as will be discussed in the following chapters, an essential element for breaking the vicious circle of vulnerability and exclusion and for feeding the necessary changes in those Roma populations that live in conditions of disadvantage. This is even more important for young women, in order to augment their autonomy e their capacity to assume an ever more decisive role inside the communities.

2. Overview of data

The results of the research show a stratified picture where “tradition” and “change” are combined. With these terms, the intention is to pinpoint an attitude that can’t be reduced to a culturally rigid image of marriage and sentimental choices capable of encompassing univocally all that happens within the complexity of the Roma world. The observation of data shows a sort of tension between the norms dictated by belonging to certain well defined codes of conduct and a disposition to be autonomous in taking decisions about marriage.

More prominently, it is the women that feel the responsibility to join, at the same time, the expectations of the family with the need to lay claim that they should decide their destiny by themselves. This sense of responsibility is fed by characters inhering to the reproduction of socio-cultural fundamentals, daily living strategies and the transition towards an uncertain future.

Starting from these premises, the analyses of the answers to the questionnaire show, at first sight, that the age groups in which marriage happens tend to be in line between the generations of women, albeit the percentage of women that entered marriage at 20 or later is higher than that of their mothers. The marriage age for the majority of the women of the sample concentrates in the age group “16-20 years”, followed by the age group “15 or younger” – for a total of 87,5%.

Fig. 4 Age of marriage by age groups (women only)

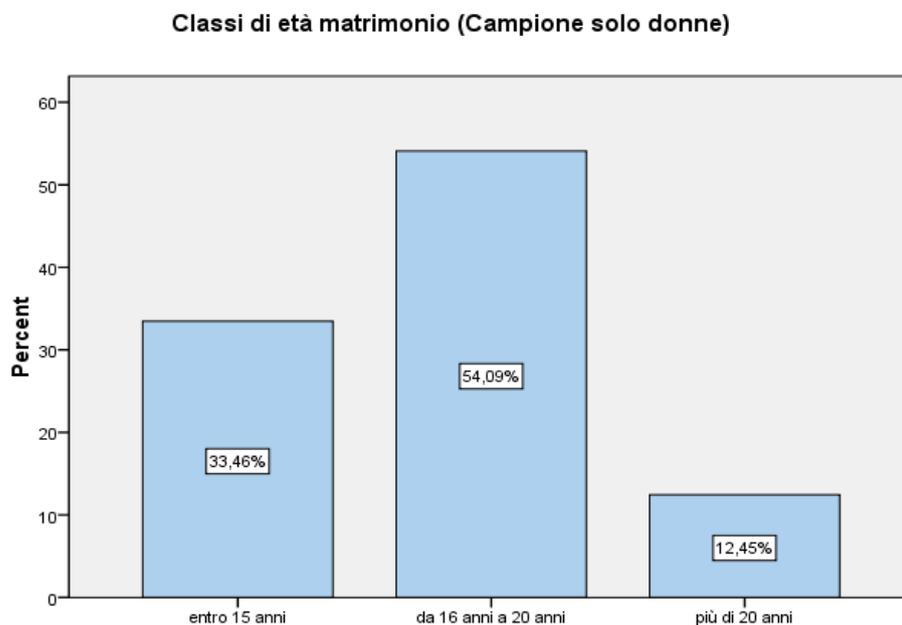
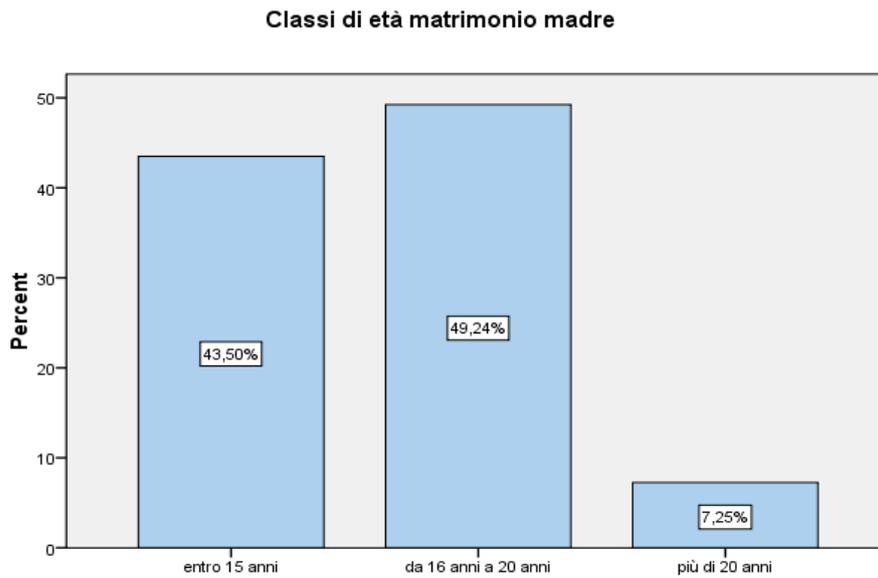


Fig. 5 Age of mother’s marriage by age groups

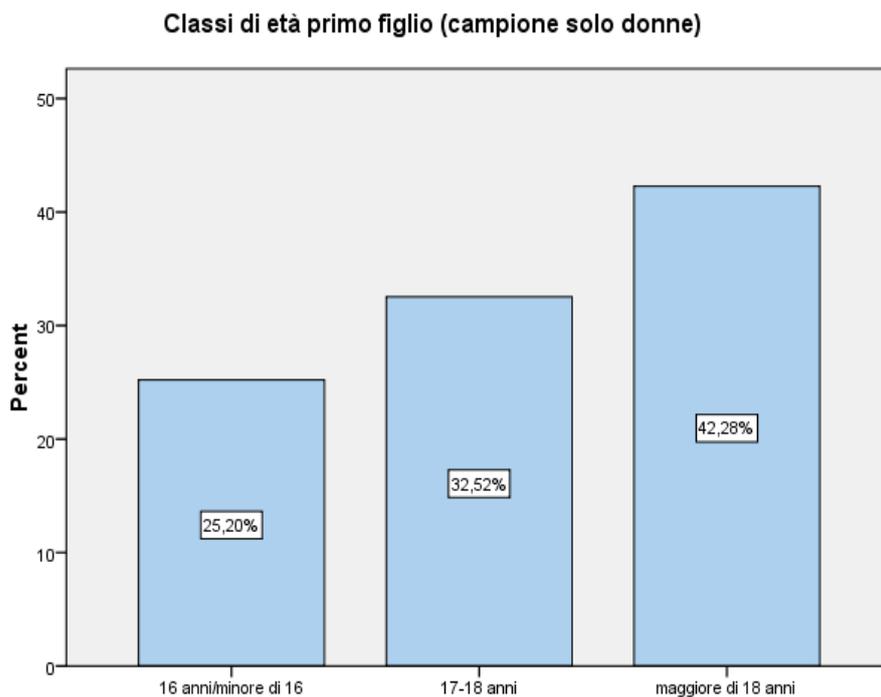


The average age of marriage is almost identical between the women interviewed and the generation of their mothers, respectively 17,1% and 16,8%.

The comparison between the two generations of women shows clearly a progressive diminishment of marriages under 15 years of age. Nevertheless, also in the new generation the phenomenon is without doubt still high. This confirms the assumption that early marriage is still present and diffused in a certain type of contexts.

The age of first childbirth is situated in prevalence after 16 years of age, with the tendency to give birth for the first time after 20 years of age (42,28%). First childbirth at the age of 16 or younger is also significant, in relation to early marriage, and is equally distributed in all age groups of women interviewed.

Fig. 6 Age of first childbirth by age groups (women only)



These first two observations, relative to only women interviewed, show with clarity how present early marriage is in line with the expected “tradition” and the birth of the first child. From this general tendency we can infer that there is no discontinuity in the passage of generations. Nevertheless, as we will see later, some differences are being delineated which ought to be considered before reducing the observation to a sort of preordained destiny (fate?). In anticipation of the analyses that will follow, let’s observe the distribution of these variables according to the level of education, declined in the years of schooling and the belonging to different ethnic groups that were part of the sample.

As regards the level of education, the result is absolutely evident: greater number of years of schooling corresponds to major propensity to delay marriage to after 15 years of age (see Table 1). The fundamental weight of education is shown with all its explicative force.

Also in checking for differences with reference to ethnic groups to which the interviewees belong, the data emerge equally clearly in differentiating between age of marriage groups (see Table 2). The communities of Bosnian/Xoraxanè Roma register the highest rate of early marriage with respect to other ethnic groups. These are followed by Dasikhanè Rom, with the rate of early marriage also quite high. The rate lowers significantly for the Romanian and Sinti Roma – correlated with the fact that these ethnic groups register higher educational levels both for women and for the men interviewed.

The most numerous class of the marriage age is the one in the middle, between 16 and 20 years of age, testifying for a generalized orientation to get married at a rather early age.

Table 1 Age of marriage by age group and educational attainment (women only)

School attainment	15 or younger	from 16 to 20 years of age	20 and older	Total
Low	47,1	47,1	5,7	100,0
Medium-low	33,8	61,3	5,0	100,0
Medium-high	2,3	62,8	34,9	100,0
Total	32,9	55,7	11,4	100,0

(valid cases 210)

Table 2 Age of marriage by age group and ethnicity

Ethnic group	15 or younger	from 16 to 20 years of age	20 and older	Totale
Bosnian/Xoraxané	46,5	48,8	4,7	100,0
Dasikhané	39,2	50,6	10,1	100,0
RomanianRoma	22,6	62,4	15,1	100,0
Sinti	13,0	56,5	30,4	100,0
Total	31,5	55,5	13,0	100,0

(valid cases 238)

Going back to general reflections, we can observe the distributions regarding the choice of the partner and the modalities through which the decision to get married was reached. The first figure to note is that a very large majority (84,9%) of the sample married a partner belonging to the same ethnic group. This is associated to the fact that 58% of interviewees declared that they knew well their future spouse before marriage.

Fig. 7 Husband/wife belongs to the same ethnic group

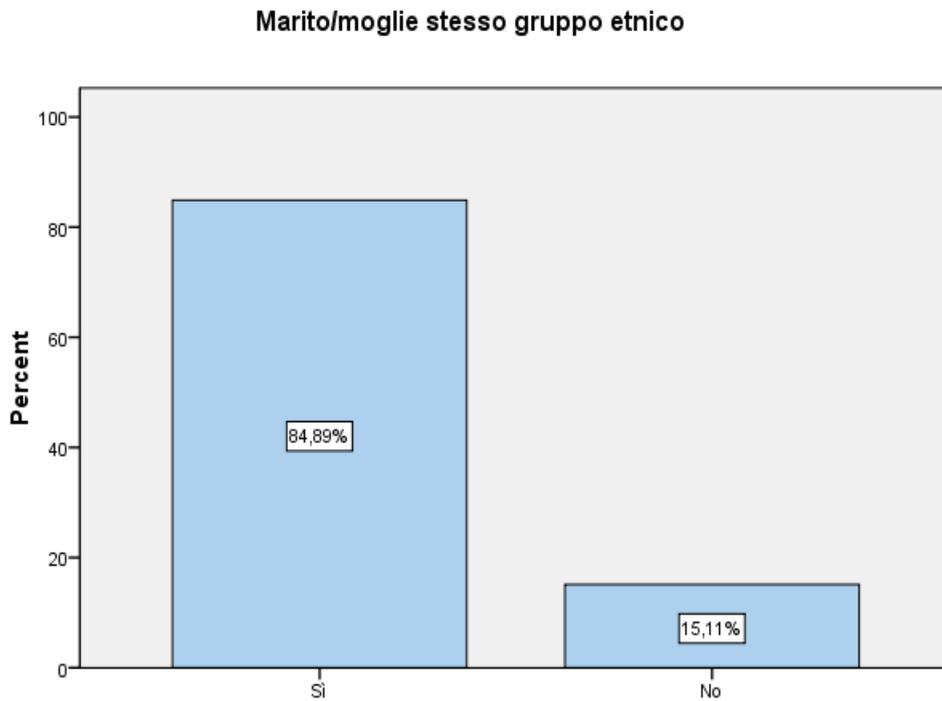
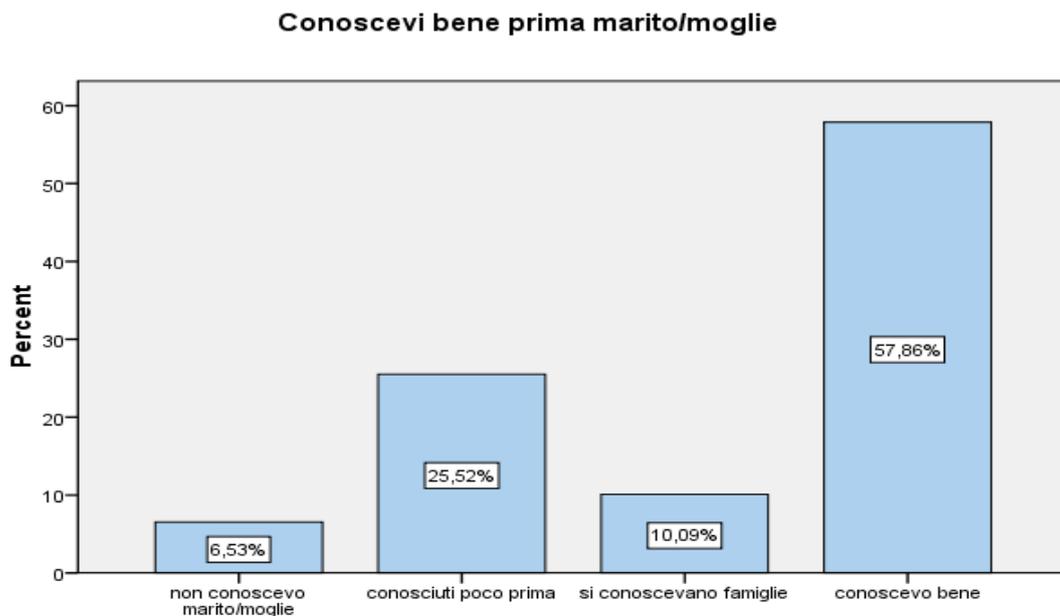


Fig. 8 How well were you acquainted with your husband/wife to be before marriage?

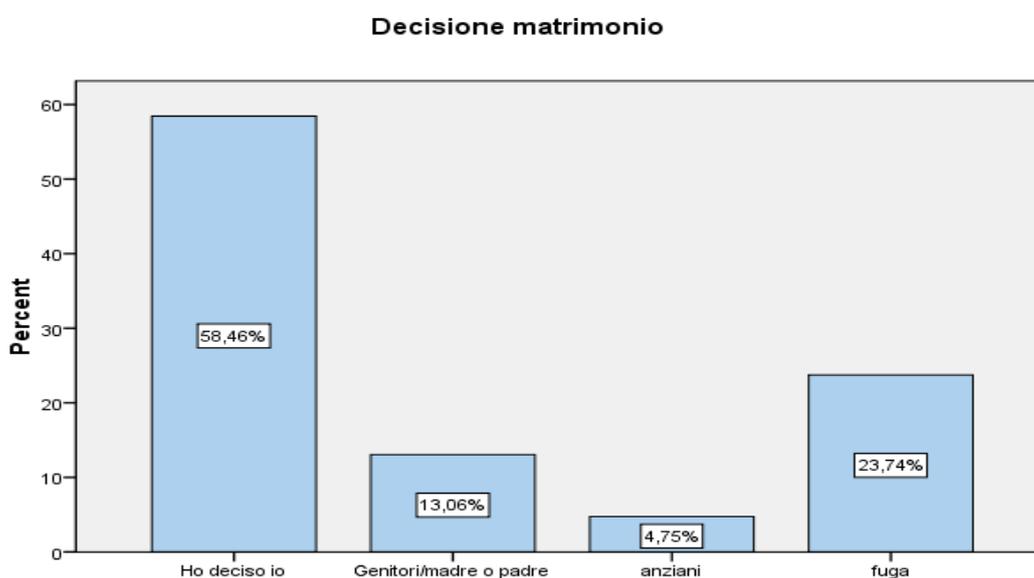


Such configuration can be situated within a framework of choice explicitly internal to the family or ethnic group network, which in turn points towards a model of “closure” and limited chances for marriage. These data mirror in part cultural models

and, for the other part, prevalent living conditions of the Roma groups connected, very often, to housing modalities in agglomerates constituted by families of the same national origin. The aforementioned closure contemplates therefore a mix between the tradition, actual circumstances in which Roma youth grow and socialise and the quality of housing in a wide sense, characterised by segregation and socio-spatial isolation.

The following step of analysis is focused on the theme of “decision to marry” which magnetises strongly “culturalist” representations, centred on a traditional vision of relationships between sexes and the relationship with the reference group as a whole.

Fig. 9 How was the decision about your marriage taken?



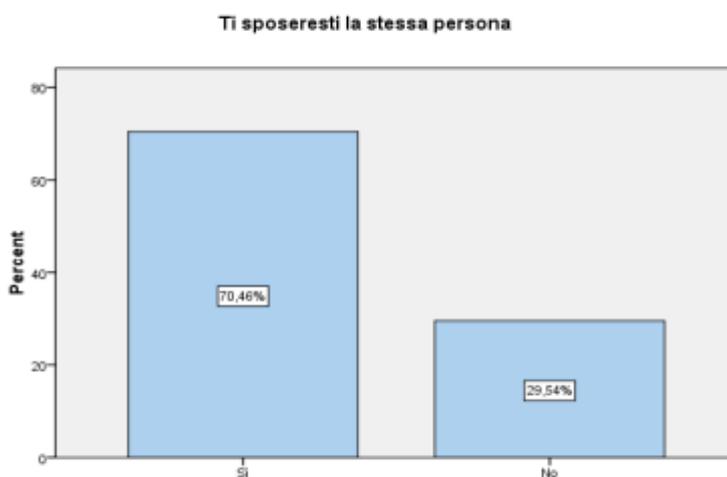
The graph shows that 58,4% of interviewees declares that the decision about marriage was take autonomously. The next most numerous modality (23,74%) is the so-called elopement of lovers; followed by 13,6% of interviewees declaring that the decision to marry was taken by their parents. A very small percentage, a bit less than 5%, results influenced by the council of the elderly or persons of authority. So while on the one hand a process of choice is ever more characterised by the personal decision, the ceremonial role of the elopement of the future spouses present in some of the groups emerges as a significant phenomenon. The elopement functions as a tool for the agreement between, and with, respective families. As regards the influence of the council of the elderly, it is appropriate to evaluate the context where this traditional rule on how to organise marriages is exercised. The relative weight of the families results however quite significant in an important part of the life trajectories of the sample involved.

In these reflections as well a picture emerges in which tendencies conformist to the ritualised practices of the community and a certain grade of emancipation, at least in declaration, live in parallel and show the complexity of relational mechanisms in the Roma universe. In line with the affirmations of the introductory note, Roma women

are the protagonists of a possible re-definition of the conformism to the tradition that, at the same time, does not put to risk the unity of the family and of the wider community.

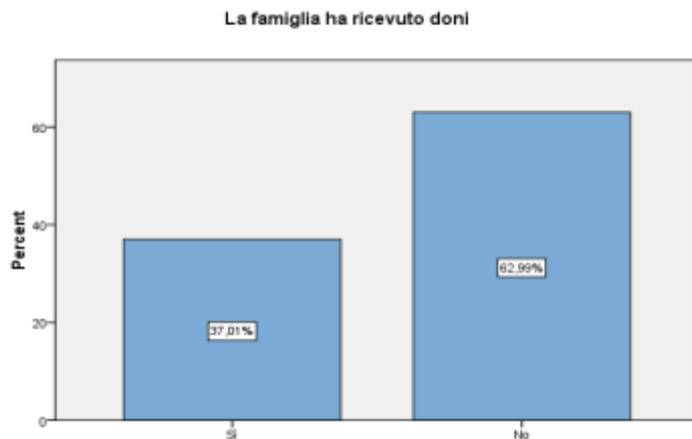
The following questions enquires into the affective continuity in marriage. By large majority, the positivity of the initial choice of the partner prevails. One third though is unsatisfied, composed prevalently by the women of the sample. No particular issues are to be raised in regard to the marriage carriers and to normal mutations in affections that intervene in the relationships of the couples. Undoubtedly, the social and economic subordination of the female figure, where this is manifested, can represent an inhibiting factor in making the choice to divorce from the husband.

Fig. 10 Would you marry again the same person?



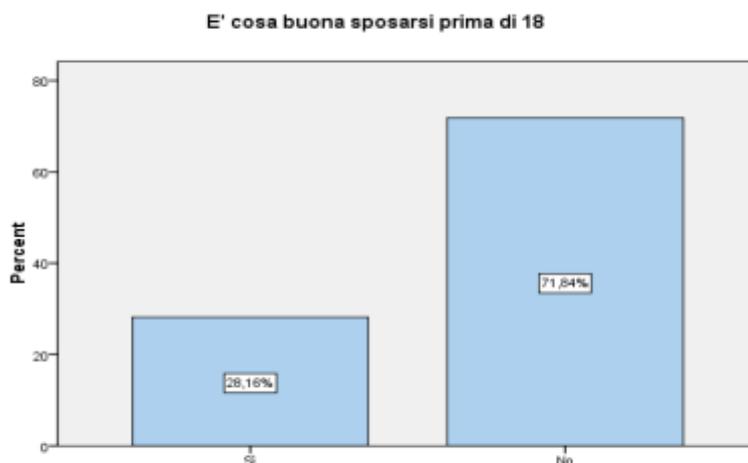
From the answers to the question regarding gifts received in the occasion of marriage, appears evident that the translations to national contexts and the general reticence on monetary transactions generated confusion in distinguishing gifts in money and gifts in goods. This important note apart, the graph shows that 63% of couples has not received donations. Should this situation be confirmed, it ought be valued as an indicator of a possible economic condition of the family that does not permit to honour this supposedly traditional obligation.

Fig. 11 Has the family of the bride received gifts?



The following section of the questionnaire is centred on the focus of the research: evaluations regarding early marriage and the autonomy or the lack thereof of the will of the spouses. The point on which to reflect is the age threshold within which to assume the marriage responsibility. The results show a strong attitude to consider negatively the possibility to get married before the legal age of 18.

Fig. 12 Is it a good thing to get married before a person is 18 years old?

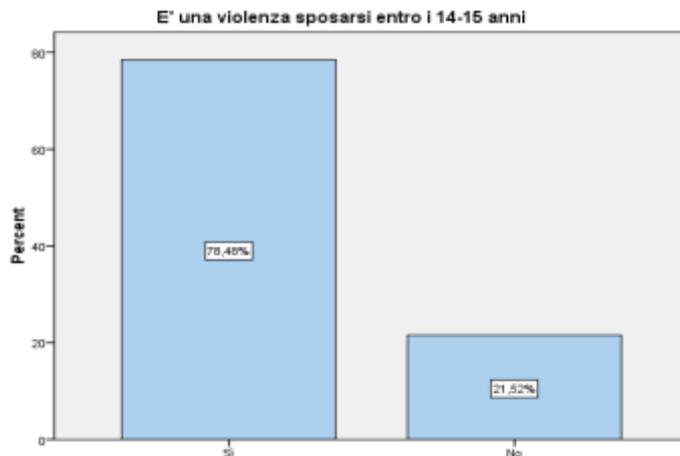


The question on the perception of marriage at 14-15 years of age as violence confirms an orientation of negative critique of the entire sample.

On the basis of the evident expression of opposition to early marriage it is useful to evaluate with attention the minority part of the interviewees that have not considered valid adapting to this diffuse sentiment. Presumably, those who consider positively the hypothesis of early marriage may be strongly aware of situations where this practice is easier to find and of consequence unwilling to denounce its dimension of violence. This does not necessarily mean accepting it as a given thing, but bear knowledge of a reality present in Roma communities and refuse to denounce it explicitly. In this, it is important to point out a possible conflict between the younger generation of women and the more elderly. Younger women show a marked aversion

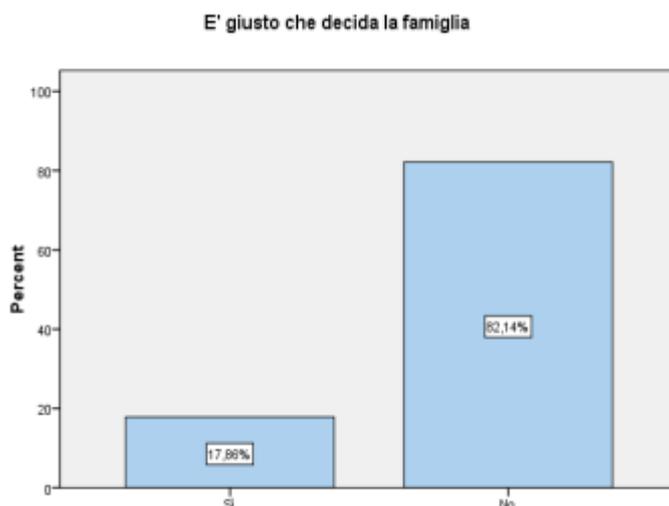
to early marriage. For the elderly generation of women, it can be hypothesised what affirmed above, that is an experiential proximity with this type of praxis, progressively less tolerated by new generations. Gender shows no significant differences as regards attitudes contrary to early marriage.

Fig. 13 Is it a violence to give in marriage a 14-15 year old girl?



The opinion on the role of the family as “decision maker” of the sentimental and marriage choices confirms the movement towards autonomy and the personal will, implicit in previous observations. In fact, 82% of the sample affirms that it should not be the family to choose the partner and decide the marriage.

Fig. 14 Is it right that it's the family to decide and not the spouses?



The analysis of these three questions and their results is telling of a clear and certain attitude contrary to underage marriage and in favour of the personal responsibility to decide according to the individual will.

The final part of the questionnaire enquires opinions regarding a series of items relative to motivations underlying the decision to marry and to delay until the legal age

of 18 this crucial moment. On a general level, there are two spheres of fundamental importance for understanding the predominant sentiment of the interviewees and the coherence with previously expressed opinions. From the tables below (see Table 2 and Table 3) it is possible to deduce how, among the different reasons, there is a clear differentiation that determines and, from a certain point of view reinforces, a latent conflict between personal aspirations, living conditions and models of socialising.

Personal aspirations are clearly delineated from the absolute majority that singles out love (98,7%) and the will of the spouses (96,6%) as fundamental motivations in deciding with whom to share life. Also, the majority of the sample (67,4%) indicates the value of virginity, in line with the dimensions of respectability and family honour which are very important in the intra-community relationships (Marcu, 2014). The good name of the family is also considered as an important factor by the majority of interviewees, in line with the intention to not put under strain the structure of intra-family relationships and the expectations of the parents. These are still considered as important subjects as regards the marriage strategy. Nevertheless, in line with previous discussions, almost half of the sample does not consider the will of the parents of fundamental importance. Finally, the issue of money or, better said, the capacity to provide livelihood for the future family and also to contribute to acceptable living standards of the families of origin. Also on this issue the sample is divided in halves. This reflects possible situations of economic difficulty and, as of consequence, the value of money as influencer of marriage choices.

There are no significant differences in opinions on the importance of different factors between the sample of women only and the total (including men interviewed).

Table3 Motivations for marriage (women only)

	Veryimportant	Of littleimportance	Not importantatall	Total
Love	98,7	1,0	0,3	100,0
Money	35,1	53,8	11,1	100,0
Good name of the family	48,5	29,8	21,7	100,0
Will of parents	51,8	38,8	9,4	100,0
Will of spouses	96,6	2,9	0,5	100,0
Virginity	67,4	18,2	14,4	100,0

Table4 Motivations for marriage (all)

	Veryimportant	Of littleimportanc e	Not importantatall	Totale
Love	98,0	1,8	0,2	100,0
Money	37,6	51,2	11,3	100,0
Good name of the family	47,4	31,7	20,9	100,0
Will of parents	49,7	40,1	10,2	100,0
Will of spouses	96,4	2,8	0,8	100,0
Virginity	65,6	18,2	16,2	100,0

From the excursus on the factors determining the decision to get married, it is possible to discern the typical characters of the sentimental component of future partners and of their autonomous will and choice. In this horizon other elements, just as typical, remain. These are closely connected to the imprinting of family relationships and to the honourability of the girl in particular as decisive factors.

Obviously, this distinction does not mean that one excludes the other in the different life experiences. On the contrary, we postulate that there is a negotiation within the families of the spouses between the prerogatives of autonomy and the prerogatives of family relationships with reference to traditional behavioural norms and the economic situation.

The last aspect dealt with by the questionnaire regards the opinions on the potential of the motives and incentives that could help postponing the marriage to legal age. This is important in order to hypothesise policies grounded in the considerations of women and men interviewed during the survey of the community work. In the first place, it is strikingly evident the indication from the ground to privilege economic support that would permit postponing marriage by granting direct contributions to training and economic benefits for families to keep the adolescents in education, as an exit strategy from mere survival. Possibilities for work emerge as important for the vast majority of the sample, confirming the weight of a condition of vulnerability that in many cases pushes towards a premature marriage union. Just as diffuse is the priority accorded to the necessity that in making the marriage choice the young women exercise their individual will in an autonomous and responsible manner.

Table5 Motivations for delaying marriage till after 18 years of age

	Yes	No	Total
Sanctions by the State	55,3	44,7	100,0
Scholarships	83,4	16,6	100,0
Possibility of job	86,1	13,9	100,0
Economic benefits	68,1	31,9	100,0
Community leaders	47,9	52,1	100,0
Understanditisviolence	69,8	30,2	100,0
Autonomousof women	85,6	14,4	100,0

Punitive interventions by the hand of public institutions is considered as a valid instrument in contrasting early marriage by one half of the interviewees. Roughly the same proportion of interviewees considers important the influence of community leaders.

The issue of the figure and of the role of the leaders of the community does not result immediately intelligible (clear?). It is necessary to understand in fact that, in many cases, these are actually merely symbolic functions that have no effect on the mutations under way. It is often a function of almost exclusively of formal representativeness. In other cases, the elderly, as community leaders, can exercise a wider role and be decisive in orienting choices of families, including those about marriage. In the long and complex phase of transition from aspects of traditional and communitarian life towards wider openings to the external world, the elderly and the community leaders are widely differentiated in their capacity to wield power and influence according to their local reality. One thing only is certain: inevitably, the prestige of their intervention has been reduced, albeit within the positive value of the family as the relational cornerstone.

As regards the understanding of the violent nature of early marriage, in terms of this being a viable reason for postponing marriage, the data underline the importance of this factor (69,8%). But the percentage of those that are not convinced that understanding the violent nature of early marriage can be important can't be overlooked. Motivations for this can be related to the previous discussion. Interpretations of these empirical evidences are not of immediate understanding, because these insist on both the symbolic

and the material aspects of the phenomenon. In fact, early marriage (before 18 years of age) is a widespread experience among the women interviewed. The opinion therefore adapts itself to these personal experiences and to the positive and negative effects the persons underwent in the course of time with the partner and with the extended family. To put it simply, to declare implicitly the violent character of such practice could entail casting a vital doubt to an existential choice subject to multiple variables. These variables relate to bonds and pressures connected to the role of women in the structure of gender relationships, different life conditions, but also personal and free-will decisions. Anyhow, the mutation in the perception of “when” is right to decide to get married is evident and it follows the direction of a more mature and individual-based choice of building a family.

3. Educational attainment, ethnic groups and early marriage

In questa sezione saranno approfonditi taluni aspetti fondamentali per comprendere le sottostanti dinamiche nelle traiettorie di vita che inducono la scelta della precocità matrimoniale. Riprendendo parte del ragionamento introduttivo il tema si muove entro il confine sempre mobile tra una supposta appartenenza alla comunità e alle sue specificità culturali e gli effetti della discriminazione multipla esperita da numerosi gruppi rom e sinti. Una geografia mobile delle scelte e delle aspettative rispetto al destino di moglie e madre (o anche di padre e marito) che, tuttavia, struttura evidenze significative riguardo la volontà di autonomia.

This section will look into depth into certain aspects that are fundamental for understanding the dynamics underlying the life trajectories that induce the choice of early marriage. Starting from some parts of the introductory discussion, the theme spreads between perpetually moving frontiers of the supposed belonging to the community and to its cultural specificities and of the effects of multiple discrimination experienced by numerous Roma groups. It is a mobile geography of choices and expectations regarding the fate of being wife and mother (but also father and husband). At the same time, these structure significant evidences regarding the wish for autonomy.

3.1 Educational attainment

La prima variabile su cui discutere è quella relativa alla scolarità. Dal punto di vista sociologico il livello di capitale culturale legato al titolo di studio raggiunto è determinante nell’aprire maggiori possibilità di vita e, soprattutto, di aver una maggiore consapevolezza della propria individualità nel confronto con i vincoli parentali e di gruppo. Nell’analisi sull’effetto scolarità sul matrimonio precoce si è scelto di adottare gli anni di frequenza scolastica piuttosto che il titolo di studio, in maniera tale da uniformare il campione poiché la rilevazione del titolo di studio muta risulta meno affidabile dato le differenze di contesto.

The first variable to discuss regards schooling. From the sociological point of view, the level of cultural capital linked to the degree of education reached is determinant in opening major life possibilities and, most of all, in being more conscious of one’s own individuality with respect to family and group bonds. In the analysis of the effect of the educational attainment on early marriage, we have decided to adopt years of schooling

rather than the degree, so as to render the sample more uniform, given the differences of national contexts².

In general, the impact of schooling is positive: it is correlated to a more marked orientation towards autonomy and individual decision.

We will now observe in detail the distribution of data, starting from the opinions expressed about the marriage. The opinion about the marriage is amply influenced by the years of schooling: the higher the educational attainment is, the more negative is the judgement about the early marriage. Inevitably here come into play higher expectations on life that are created as the person advances in the training path (see Table 6).

Table 6 Is it good to get married before 18 years of age by educational attainment

Educational attainment	Yes	No	Total
Low	53,3	46,7	100,0
Medium-low	20,6	79,4	100,0
Medium-high	25,6	74,4	100,0
Total	32,4	67,6	100,0

(validcases367)

As far as the violent aspect of marriage with minors is concerned, the opinions are, coherently with the general data, clearly contrary. Nevertheless, a difference in the extent of the negative attitude can be observed between the low and the medium-high educational level – 77% and 86% of the sample, respectively (see tab. 7). Again, albeit with some difference in intensity, these data reflect coherently the weight of the schooling experience on the life perspectives and on the individuals’ free will and autonomy of decision.

Table 7 Marriage at 14-15 years of age considered as violence by educational attainment

Educational attainment	Yes	No	Total
Low	77,5	22,5	100,0
Medium-low	70,7	29,3	100,0
Medium-high	86,6	13,4	100,0
Total	76,5	23,5	100,0

(validcases366)

As regards the opinion about the family making the decision of marriage, the previous observations hold valid (see Table 8). In fact, different levels of schooling reduce, or amplify, the importance of families in making the choice of contracting marriage. Subjects with less years of schooling tend to bow to the judgement of the respective families of origin.

²The variable is divided in three groups: less than 5 years of schooling is considered “low educational attainment”, 6-10 years “medium-low”, more than 10 years “medium-high”.

Table 8 Should the family decide about the marriage by educational attainment

Educational attainment	Yes	No	Total
Low	25,4	74,6	100,0
Medium-low	11,0	89,0	100,0
Medium-high	12,7	87,3	100,0
Total	16,1	83,9	100,0

(valid cases 361)

Such configuration gets reinforced by crossing the data with the actual situation of interviewees of who took the decision on when and whom to marry (see Table 9). Here the impact of educational attainment is even more evident. This is particularly telling as regards the practice of elopement, widely spread among the sample with less years of schooling.

Table 9 Who took the decision about your marriage by educational attainment

Educational attainment	I decided	Parents	Elderly	Elopement	Total
Low	54,6	23,1	1,9	20,4	100,0
Medium-low	43,4	12,3	6,6	37,7	100,0
Medium-high	85,7	1,6	3,2	9,5	100,0
Total	57,4	14,1	4,0	24,5	100,0

(valid cases 277)

In the analysis of the importance of factors in determining the marriage choices, the affectivity and economic situation of the families of origin of the spouses do not seem to differentiate the interviewees. On the contrary, a marked diversity emerges as regards the good name of the family of the future spouse and, in parallel to the previously discussed aspects, the will of the parents (see Table 10 and Table 11). Low educational attainment is an element that, on the one hand, follows with major intensity the family model in the choices regarding marriage but, on the other hand, does not consider the reputational aspects of the future spouse and her/his family of origin.

Table 10 Importance of the good name of the family by educational attainment

Educational attainment	Very important	Of little importance	Not at all important	Total
Low	35,7	25,2	39,1	100,0
Medium-low	50,6	34,6	14,7	100,0
Medium-high	50,0	35,9	14,1	100,0

Educational attainment	Veryimportant	Of littleimportance	Notatallimportant	Total
Low	35,7	25,2	39,1	100,0
Medium-low	50,6	34,6	14,7	100,0
Medium-high	50,0	35,9	14,1	100,0
Total	45,6	31,8	22,6	100,0

(validcases347)

Table 11 Importance of the will of the parents, by educational attainment

Educational attainment	Veryimportant	Of littleimportance	Notatallimportant	Total
Low	55,3%	34,2%	10,5%	100,0
Medium-low	44,5%	43,9%	11,6%	100,0
Medium-high	35,5%	51,3%	13,2%	100,0
Total	46,1%	42,3%	11,6%	100,0

(validcases345)

The role of money as reason results significant independently by educational attainment (see table). However, we have some little differences among categories, in particular the people with higher level of educational attainment, undestandable by an orientation sustained in base of better living conditions and higher expectations on the future of bride or groom.

Table 10 Importance of the money by educational attainment

Educational attainment	Veryimportant	Of littleimportance	Notatallimportant	Total
Low	33,3	47,7	18,9	100,0
Medium-low	41,8	47,5	10,8	100,0
Medium-high	38,0	54,4	7,6	100,0
Total	38,2	49,1	12,6	100,0

(validcases 348)

In the distribution of the data, the importance of the virginity of the bride emerges in its decisive character for the majority of the sample, with no regard to the educational attainment (see Table 12). It is worth noting though that medium-high and low levels of educational attainment reach similar percentages. On the contrary, a much higher percentage of medium-low levels deems important this aspect of honorability. In order to understand this result it is not sufficient to recall a wider and more “critical” awareness regarding virginity consequent to extra-familiar socialisation. It is possible to imagine that other variables influence favourable or contrary opinion on this aspect, for example belonging to a specific group or to a context characterised by the force of primary bonds.

Table 12 Importance of virginity by educational attainment

Educational attainment	Very important	Of little importance	Not at all important	Total
Low	55,7	20,0	24,3	100,0
Medium-low	71,3	17,2	11,5	100,0
Medium-high	51,9	23,4	24,7	100,0
Total	61,9	19,5	18,6	100,0

(valid cases 357)

With the following tables we bring into the discussion the most significant orientations emerging from crossing the educational attainment variable with the question “what can be done” to limit early marriage.

The first question regards the sanctions by the state. The result is, from a certain point of view, surprising (see Table 13). Among the low educational attainment subjects a great majority judges positively the possibility of a repressive intervention by the State. As the level of educational attainment raises, the opinion is less clear-cut and less favourable to the usefulness of such tools. To understand this result, we can hypothesise a position that accounts for cultural aspects that are deemed scarcely modifiable by a normative interference.

Table 13 Sanctions by the state by educational attainment

Educational attainment	Yes	No	Total
Low	71,4	28,6	100,0
Medium-low	48,1	51,9	100,0
Medium-high	58,8	41,3	100,0
Total	58,0	42,0	100,0

(valid cases 350)

The second important question puts in evidence the role of community leaders and/or of the council of the elderly (see Table 14). In this case, where the opinion is linked to the position of authority of the reference figures of the community, the educational attainment is of fundamental importance in orienting the thinking of the interviewees.

Table 14 Position of the leaders of the community by educational attainment

Educational attainment	Yes	No	Total
Low	61,8	38,2	100,0
Medium-low	37,0	63,0	100,0
Medium-high	47,3	52,7	100,0

Educational attainment	Yes	No	Total
Low	61,8	38,2	100,0
Medium-low	37,0	63,0	100,0
Medium-high	47,3	52,7	100,0
Totale	47,6	52,4	100,0

(valid cases 330)

The third aspect is linked to the socio-economic inclusion as a deterrent possibly useful to defer in time the decision to get married. Results show that the possibility of getting a job and economic benefits of different nature are deemed of great value, independently from the level of schooling (see Table 15, Table 16 and Table 17). The percentage of support expressed for this set of tools is higher for groups characterised by low and medium-low educational attainment. We can hypothesise that this opinion is amplified by the condition of need for resources and support to the individual and to the family. Inevitably, the perspective of continuing the education is strictly connected to at least acceptable life conditions that can guarantee the fulfilment of primary necessities. In addition, it ought be mentioned explicitly and not given for granted, economic deprivations not only diminish the possibilities to study, but also reproduce dependency of women in gender relationships and a widely spread prejudice which emphasises the belief that Roma are not interested and even oppose school and its educational models.

Table 15 Scholarship by educational attainment

Educational attainment	Yes	No	Total
Low	86,8	13,2	100,0
Medium-low	85,7	14,3	100,0
Medium-high	72,0	28,0	100,0
Total	83,1	16,9	100,0

(valid cases 343)

Table 16 Possibility to get a job at 18 by educational attainment

Educational attainment	Yes	No	Total
Low	82,1	17,9	100,0
Medium-low	90,0	10,0	100,0
Medium-high	75,3	24,7	100,0
Total	84,2	15,8	100,0

(valid cases 334)

Table 17 Economic benefits by educational attainment

Educational attainment	Yes	No	Total
Low	74,8	25,2	100,0
Medium-low	70,1	29,9	100,0
Medium-high	54,8	45,2	100,0
Total	68,3	31,7	100,0

(validcases331)

The last point looks into the symbolic and cultural dimension explicated by the understanding, or better awareness, of the violent nature of early marriage and of the issue of autonomous choice of women (see Table 18 and Table 19). As pointed out previously, this passage is extremely difficult to interpret because this terrain mixes family bonds, traditional behavioural models, social status and economic condition. Starting from clear evidence favouring the strengthening of the understanding of these aspects, the educational attainment influences the opinion expressed in an ambivalent manner. For example, interviewees with low educational attainment believe that understanding the violent nature of early marriage could lead families to postpone the moment of marriage in a much higher percentage than those with more years of schooling. On the contrary, the partisans of the autonomous decision-making for women are more numerous among interviewees with medium-high educational attainment.

Table18 Understand that it is a violenceby educational attainment

Educational attainment	Yes	No	Total
Low	76,6	23,4	100,0
Medium-low	61,7	38,3	100,0
Medium-high	63,0	37,0	100,0
Total	66,9	33,1	100,0

(validcases329)

Table19 Understand that young women should decide for themselvesby educational attainment

Educational attainment	Yes	No	Total
Low	78,5	21,5	100,0
Medium-low	83,7	16,3	100,0
Medium-high	88,1	11,9	100,0
Total	82,9	17,1	100,0

Analyses of educational attainment show clearly that the number of years of schooling exercises significant impact on the evaluations and opinions of the sample, even if its effects take place within a prevalently critical horizon. Reinforcing the investment in education through targeted tools and projects is definitely a powerful means towards the objective of neutralising those specific conditions that contribute to the legitimisation of early marriage.

3.2 Ethnicity

The analysis by ethnic group belonging reveals a marked differentiation between the various groups of the sample. This result underlines and confirms that the Roma universe can't be reduced to a homogeneity of culture and values which defines the boundary with the external society. Although some common elements can be singled out, these can hardly justify the construction of a univocal meaning with respect to life choice.

We will check the data for ethnicity following the same process we have used in checking for educational attainment, starting from the decision about marriage and the role of family networks *versus* the individual will (see Table 20).

Table20 Who took the decision about your marriage by ethnic group

	I decided	Parents	Elderly	Elopement	Total
Bosnian/Xoraxané	38,7%	27,4%	6,5%	27,4%	100,0%
RomaDasikhané	69,2%	10,3%	2,8%	17,8%	100,0%
RomanianRoms	60,2%	10,6%	4,4%	24,8%	100,0%
Sinti	64,5%	6,5%	6,5%	22,6%	100,0%
Total	59,4%	13,4%	4,5%	22,7%	100,0%

The autonomous decision leads with ample majority for the groups of the sample, with the exception of Bosnian and Xoraxané Roma where the percentage of individual choice of marriage is significantly lower. It is interesting to observe that for these specific ethnic groups the influence of parents is very important, in percentage much higher than for other ethnic groups. The elderly or persons of authority are a minor influence as regards the marriage strategies. On the contrary, elopement prior to marriage is quite diffused regardless of the ethnicity. This last “traditional” modality appears to resist as a surrogate for the will of future spouses.

The distribution of data on the issue of whether it is appropriate to get married before the legal age of 18 shows visible differences (see Table 21). Dasikhanè and, in lower but still significant percentage, the Bosnian/Xoraxané Roma show a positive attitude, while Romanian Roma and Sinti result amply contrary.

Table21 Is it good to get married before 18 years of age by ethnic group

	Yes	No	Total
Bosnian/Xoraxané	33,8	66,2	100,0
RomaDasikhané	46,6	53,4	100,0
RomanianRoma	17,6	82,4	100,0
Sinti	19,6	80,4	100,0
Total	28,7	71,3	100,0

(validcases457)

This difference, that shows that (how) the opinion about early marriage is not totally negative, is reflected in the consideration about the violent nature of early marriage (see Table 22). In fact, the two groups, Bosnian/Xoraxané and Dasikhanè Roma, are more “tolerant” with respect to the other two groups present in the survey.

Table22 Marriage at 14-15 years of age considered as violence by ethnic group

	Yes	No	Total
Bosnian/Xoraxané	67,6	32,4	100,0
RomsDasikhané	70,8	29,2	100,0

Romanian Roma	85,9	14,1	100,0
Sinti	89,3	10,7	100,0
Total	79,1	20,9	100,0

(validcases455)

This difference in opinion on these two variables on the supposedly “right age” for marriage between the different ethnic groups poses the problem of understanding how much this reflects a cultural meaning or is necessary to contemplate the conditions of discrimination and inequality present in different national contexts. It is worth noting at this point that almost all Bosnian/Xoraxané and Dasikhanè Roma of the sample live in ghetto camps of the Italian metropolitan peripheries and not “in the house”. Without doubt, we can advance the hypothesis that in some groups a cultural scheme persists that in part justifies the possibility of early marriage. But, as discussed before, the segregation and the forced isolation from the rest of the external society fosters the permanence of such considerations. The family as decision maker appears more present with the members of Dasikhanè Roma while on the other end of the spectrum, Sinti show extremely low percentages of family influencing the marriage choices (see Table 23).

Table23 Should the family decide about the marriage by ethnic group

	Yes	No	Total
Bosnian/Xoraxané	17,4	82,6	100,0
RomaDasikhané	27,8	72,2	100,0
Romanian Roma	15,0	85,0	100,0
Sinti	7,1	92,9	100,0
Total	18,0	82,0	100,0

(validcases444)

With respect to what was written before, it is necessary to bear in mind at all times that parents and family networks become progressively less decisive, at least this is what our sample survey shows. Of consequence, it is normal that fundamental value be attributed to the sentimental sphere, as demonstrated by the almost totality of answers in all ethnic groups on the importance of love in making the decision about marriage. Economic wellbeing as a condition in the marriage choice appears an important factor to evaluate (see Table 24), albeit with some differences among ethnic groups. On the other hand, for an important part of Romanian Roma and of Sinti interviewed the good family name of the future spouse is extremely important. The combination therefore between the economic status and the family reputation opens perspectives that shed light on differences between ethnic groups.

Table24 Importance of money by ethnic group

	Veryimportant	Of littleimportance	Notimportanttotal	Total
BosnianXoraxané	45,5	50,0	4,5	100,0
RomaDasikhané	45,0	41,1	14,0	100,0

Romanian Roma	30,5	57,9	11,6	100,0
Sinti	32,1	57,1	10,7	100,0
Total	37,2	51,7	11,1	100,0

(validcases441)

Table25 Importance of the good name of the family, by ethnic group

	Veryimportant	Of littleimportance	Notimportanttotal	Total
Bosnian/Xoraxané	35,4	39,6	25,0	100,0
RomaDasikhané	36,2	20,2	43,6	100,0
Romanian Roma	53,3	34,3	12,4	
Sinti	78,8	18,2	3,0	100,0
Total	48,5	29,7	21,8	100,0

(validcases432)

In confirmation of the previous analyses regarding the role of parents, the following table confirms their importance for the Dasikhanè Roma while the results for other ethnic groups are split roughly in halves.

Table26 Importance of the will of the parents by ethnic group

	Veryimportant	Of littleimportance	Notimportanttotal	Total
Bosnian/Xoraxané	52,3	41,5	6,2	100,0
RomaDasikhané	61,9	28,6	9,5	100,0
Romanian Roma	42,2	47,6	10,3	100,0
Sinti	48,2	35,7	16,1	100,0
Total	50,2	39,6	10,2	100,0

(validcases446)

Considering the fact that more than 90% of interviewees in all ethnic groups judges favourably the autonomous choice of future spouses it is evident that what emerges, rather than a contradiction, is a dialectic between the will of the individual and that of the family, in research of an equilibrium. This negotiation becomes the terrain where changes in respective socio-economic and cultural peculiarities get structured. The virginity of the spouse is confirmed as a “traditional” element of absolute centrality in the choices and decisions beyond ethnic specificities (see Table 27). This is an additional confirmation of the overlap between the traditional factors connected to socialisation in distinct cultural values and the factors of modernity where other principles disconnected from the expectations of the family and wider community are inserted.

Table27 Importance of virginity,by ethnic group

	Very important	Of little importance	Not important at all	Total
Bosnian/Xoraxané	66,7	15,2	18,2	100,0
RomaDasikhané	55,1	18,1	26,8	100,0
Romanian Roma	71,1	17,4	11,6	
Sinti	75,0	19,6	5,4	100,0
Total	66,3	17,5	16,2	100,0

(validcases439)

Orientations emerging from the palette of actions that the questionnaire posed as possible motivations for parents to delay the marriage of their daughters until the legal age of 18, shed light on a series of evidences that can be interpreted only recurring to in depth knowledge of everyday life and the sphere of relationships with the outside world and the gagé institutions. Repressive actions by the organs of public authorities appears as convincing and efficient for Dasikhanè and Romanian Roma (see Table 28). Also among Sinti the percentage of those who support this hypothetic tool is high, while sanctions from the State are considered not good by Bosnian/Xoraxané Roma.

Table28 Sanctions by the state by ethnic group

	Yes	No	Total
Bosnian/Xoraxané	38,5	61,5	100,0
RomaDasikhané	66,7	33,3	100,0
Romanian Roma	56,7	43,3	100,0
Sinti	48,2	51,8	100,0
Total	55,8	44,2	100,0

(validcases441)

Sul versante dei contributi per garantire continuità allo studio si distingue la posizione del campione appartenenti ai gruppi sinti i quali esprimono una percentuale rilevante di giudizi contrari (vedi tab. 29).

In the opinion regarding the economic contributions to guarantee the continuity in education the Sinti distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups by expressing a relevant percentage of negative opinion (see Table 29).

Table29 Scholarship by ethnic group

	Yes	No	Total
Bosnian/Xoraxané	92,6	7,4	100,0

RomaDasikhané	82,1	17,9	100,0
Romanian Roma	84,5	15,5	100,0
Sinti	67,9	32,1	100,0
Total	82,9	17,1	100,0

(validcases428)

Le prospettive di lavoro è, in conformità con le osservazioni generali e per scolarità, un motivo indiscutibilmente decisivo a prescindere dalle appartenenze (vedi tab. 30).

The perspective of work is, in conformity with general observations and the check for schooling, an indisputably decisive motive, regardless of ethnic belonging (see Table 30). The positive opinion of the whole sample is clearly delineated, although there are differences in percentages. In particular, almost all Bosnian/Xoraxané interviewees are in favour of this motivation.

Table30 Possibility to get a job at 18by ethnic group

	Yes	No	Total
Bosnian/Xoraxané	98,4	1,6	100,0
RomaDasikhané	80,6	19,4	100,0
Romanian Roma	87,7	12,3	100,0
Sinti	76,8	23,2	100,0
Total	85,8	14,2	100,0

(validcases423)

Economic benefits put in evidence the orientation already shown on the issue of the scholarship. Bosnian/Xoraxané Roma are clearly favourable, while Sinti show greater ambivalence. We can imagine that on this issue the specific living conditions of the communities are projected and different self-representations of one's own socio-economic status come into play. If early marriage is connected to poverty and deprivation, the opinion on what kind of incentives and support are most useful to contrast the phenomenon changes accordingly.

Table31 Economic benefits by ethnic group

	Yes	No	Total
Bosnian/Xoraxané	87,7	12,3	100,0
RomaDasikhané	65,9	34,1	100,0
Romanian Roma	64,6	35,4	100,0
Sinti	57,1	42,9	100,0
Total	67,5	32,5	100,0

(validcases419)

The authority of the position of the leaders of the community demonstrates an important discrepancy when checked against the ethnic belonging (see Table 32). Bosnian/Xoraxané Roma and Sinti do not recognise the efficacy of their intervention. On the contrary, the majority of Dasikhanè and Romanian Roma deem important the positioning of these figures of authority.

Table32 Position of the leaders of the community by ethnic group

	Yes	No	Total
Bosnian/Xoraxané	18,8	81,3	100,0
RomaDasikhané	57,5	42,5	100,0
Romanian Roma	58,6	41,4	100,0
Sinti	25,0	75,0	100,0
Total	47,6	52,4	100,0

(validcases419)

On the last two aspects, the understanding of the violent nature of early marriage and the autonomy of the spouse, the data are not so differentiated. The interviewees demonstrate a common and prevalent orientation towards the awareness that there is implicit violence in forcing underage girls into marriage. But the results also show an important portion, around 40% of Bosnian/Xoraxané and Sinti that do not think that early marriage is a violence (see Table 33). A possibly “indulgent” view on this dimension can derive from the perspective of unwillingness to condemn a still living practice.

Table33 Understand it is a violence by ethnic group

	Yes	No	Total
Bosnian/Xoraxané	59,7	40,3	100,0
RomaDasikhané	72,8	27,2	100,0
Romanian Roma	76,1	23,9	100,0
Sinti	58,9	41,1	100,0
Total	70,2	29,8	100,0

(validcases413)

This is accompanied by a total agreement that a path should be undertaken which recognises to women their potential of freedom to decide for themselves and their stronger capacity to negotiate with the expectations of the reference community and their life perspectives (see Table 34).

Table34 Understand women should decide autonomously, by ethnic group

	Yes	No	Total
Bosnian/Xoraxané	84,8	15,2	100,0

RomaDasikhané	80,4	19,6	100,0
Romanian Roma	89,6	10,4	100,0
Sinti	80,4	19,6	100,0
Total	85,2	14,8	100,0

(validcases406)

4. Someconclusive considerations

The synthesis discussed so far shows tendencies of absolute value in illustrating behaviours and opinions on the issue. Marriage prior to the legal age of 18 is certainly still present and delineates a continuity between generations. The female component is of particular importance here. But, if we do not stop on this basic result, what transpires is a movement pointing to the direction of reconsidering the choice of early marriage in favour of a boost towards aspirations and will of individuals. This means we are facing a mutation in the gender and family dynamics on which is of fundamental value to intervene in the coming future.

The analysis of the answers regarding the opinions on the choice of marriage and the issues around early marriage shows no significant dependency on the demographic variables. Gender, for example, does not determine the configuration of opinions and evaluations, expressing clearly the affirmation of autonomy and sentimental will of spouses. In the same way, the age does not appear to determine discrepancies around the role of the women and a substantial change in the practice of early marriage.

On the contrary, the analyses using the lenses of educational attainment and of ethnicity put in evidence marked differentiation in behaviours, opinions regarding the marriage choices and implicit community rules. The degree and the number of years of schooling intervene in a substantial manner on the choice of postponing marriage. This speaks clearly in favour of implementing medium-long term programs, often neglected by local public policies, which provide incentives and support schooling, education and training. For the female component, in particular for the new generations, this prospective is of fundamental importance if the objective is to contrast the burdens of a constant marginality connected to the phenomenon. Clear evidence emerges also about the impact of ethnic belonging on the opinions expressed about the key questions.

Socialisation and behavioural models enshrined within a scheme that can be more or less defined as “cultural” seems to be reproduced between generations. The force of the tradition, if we can accept to name it in this manner, is a factor that can limit the changes in the gender relationships and in the prerogatives of boosting the autonomy and the responsibility of women, men and the communities as a whole. But, as recalled already on multiple occasions in this report, we must not disguise that cultural boundaries are the result of relationships between people, groups and socio-economic-political systems that are historically capable to either open or close them. In fact, from the data emerges that early marriage is often an effect of not having opportunities, of feeling constantly pushed inside an enclosure of irreducible diversity. It is important to state forcefully that spatial segregation in “nomad ghetto camps”, or in segregated

neighbourhoods, or in isolated villages, accompanied by pervasive social discrimination, amplifies the process of exclusion of the communities and, more specifically, the subaltern position of women.

Culture itself is not some sort of a cage that constricts its members to interpret the same role over and over again and to follow an already written script. This outlook is debatable. The so called cultural schemes represent certainly containers which define roles, expectations and behaviours, but at the same time these are subject to changes. Perhaps such variations do not generate total upheavals, but can modify some essential parts. Gender relationships and the marriage, which represents an essential phase within the central weight granted to the family in Roma communities, can be modified within a burdensome and composite relationship with the mainstream society.

The problem is naturally to support through serious and effective inclusion policies this necessary and attended change. New generations and young women feel that they can obtain the right space in which to build their aspirations and autonomies without breaking the boundaries of their loyalty to the group and to its traditions. Characters emerging from the research declare this without any false note: there is no contradiction between the maintenance of Roma identity which perpetrates certain cultural practices and its renewal in the logic of an open dialogue with the gaged society. Once again, the necessary focus ought be on supporting this phase of transition whose boundaries are rather uncertain. To this end, public institutions and civil society should concur in offering educational, work and housing opportunities.

From this, it emerges clearly how important it is to pursue the objective of sustaining and giving prominence to progressive forces that are being formed inside the heterogeneous Roma world. The aim is to feed the positive circuits directed to the emancipation of women and of new generations, so they can gain force with respect to the internal conservative and external discriminatory dynamics. The integration is not a prize contest between the good and the bad, and neither a univocal act. It is an outcome of reciprocity and shared pathways. The project Marry When You Are Ready and the research realised through the community work of the project represents a significant moment of reflexion on these issues and a brick with which a common house, and not a wall, should be built.

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Community Work Framework

Data collected as part of the Community Work 2016-2017 of the Marry When You Are Ready project implemented by partners

Italy Rom – Romni Onlus – Coordinator Saška Jovanović;

Italy Sinti – Romano Drom – Coordinator Giorgio Bezzecchi;

Romania – Forum of Roma Women from Romania – Coordinator Oana Ionita;

Croatia – Association of Roma Women Romsko Srce – Coordinator Dragana Đurđević;

Austria – NGO Pampusza – Coordinator Sonja Barbul;

Bulgaria – Association LIDER – Coordinator Miglena Mihaylova.

Community Work survey designed and coordinated by Ksenija Fonović for SPES, Marry When You Are Ready Coordinating Organisation.

For further information contact ksfonovic@spes.lazio.it

www.ternibori.org

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