

# Letter to the editor: Outbreak of a new measles B3 variant in the Roma/Sinti population with transmission in the nosocomial setting, Italy, November 2015 to April 2016

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To the editor: The article by Filia et al. [1] has generated a significant echo in the Italian national media with alarming titles on the responsibilities of the Roma and Sinti population [2,3]. Despite this clearly not being the intention of the authors, the article raises a number of issues which in our opinion should not be ignored.

In the introduction, the authors state that “despite a national goal to eliminate measles by 2015, Italy is one of 18 European Region Member States where endemic transmission of measles has not been interrupted”. As long as the vaccine is not compulsory, it will be difficult to interrupt endemic transmission, especially if vaccination coverage is below standard even among healthcare workers.

Secondly, the Roma and Sinti are not a nomadic ethnic group: nomadism is practiced by less than 3% of the population [4], and the term itself is considered to be outdated both linguistically and culturally, even by National Inclusion Strategy [5]. Nomadism has often been used “to provide cultural legitimacy to the marginalisation of Roma and Sinti”. [6] The poor access of Roma and Sinti communities to health services is not caused by mobility, but by marginalisation [5,7-11]. As clearly stated by the authors, the Roma and Sinti accepted to be vaccinated when such a possibility was offered to them. This goes to show that the lack of coverage cannot be solely attributed to the refusal by the Roma and Sinti communities to vaccinate [9].

Finally, the article does not specify whether the communities in which the cases of measles were reported were Roma or Sinti, and whether they were Italian or foreign. This information would be quite relevant because it would imply different degrees of institutional responsibility for the lack of coverage if these

were communities of Italian citizens historically present on the territory.

Reports on outbreaks of infectious diseases involving minority or marginalised groups should always take into account socio-cultural dynamics.

## Conflict of interest

None declared.

## Authors' contributions

Lorenzo Monasta conceived the letter and wrote the first and the second version. Alessandra Knowles contributed to the discussion about the content and edited both versions.

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