

# CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IN THE EU – IMPACT ON ROMA AND TRAVELLERS

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# Contents

	Foreword.....	5
	Key findings.....	7
	Introduction .....	9
1	LOCKDOWNS AFFECT ROMA AND TRAVELLERS DISPROPORTIONATELY .....	11
2	PANDEMIC WIDENS GAP IN EDUCATION.....	13
3	IMPACT OF MEASURES TO TACKLE PANDEMIC ON EMPLOYMENT .....	16
4	INCREASED POVERTY AND RISK OF MALNUTRITION.....	17
5	POOR ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES.....	19
6	HOUSING DEPRIVATION, LACK OF ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION.....	21
7	CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTION .....	24
8	ANTI-GYPSYISM AND HATE SPEECH PERSIST DURING PANDEMIC.....	26
9	LESSONS LEARNT FROM FIRST WAVE OF PANDEMIC.....	28
	Endnotes .....	29



# Foreword

Commentary on the COVID-19 outbreak often describes the virus as a great equaliser, given that it does not discriminate based on class, race or other grounds. But a closer look makes clear that the virus has ravaged some communities more than others.

Often living in substandard and overcrowded housing conditions, Roma and Travellers face an increased risk of contracting COVID-19. As our bulletin shows, they are also disproportionately affected by measures taken to contain the virus.

In the 15 EU Member States covered in this bulletin, lockdowns kept many Roma and Travellers from working as street vendors and travelling traders, and from engaging in diverse forms of precarious work. They have also faced difficulties in claiming support and benefits available to workers in the formal labour market. As a result, poverty is on the rise – and the real risk of hunger looms.

Meanwhile, limited access to water, electricity and sanitation creates serious health concerns – which are exacerbated by various barriers to accessing health services. The lack of basic infrastructure is an issue for entire communities, but the younger generation faces another hurdle: without internet access and appropriate IT equipment, they risk falling even further behind at school.

Amidst these difficult realities, the persistent scourge of anti-Gypsyism remains ever-present, with hateful rhetoric on the rise in many countries.

Tackling these challenges is no easy undertaking. Yet one thing is certain: to succeed, efforts must support local authorities to strengthen their capacity or expertise in social inclusion work, and involve Roma and Travellers themselves – both during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond.

**Michael O’Flaherty**  
*Director*



# Key findings

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has affected the daily life of everyone. Roma and Travellers living in marginalised conditions and suffering from social exclusion and poverty face particular challenges. Since March, as the number of infected people in the European Union (EU) has increased, governments have put in place a variety of measures in an effort to contain the spread of the virus. The evidence summarised in this bulletin suggests that the negative effects of these measures have disproportionately affected marginalised and socially excluded Roma and Travellers.

For example, in **employment**, lockdowns left those Roma engaged in precarious work unemployed, while the informal status of such work makes it difficult for them to claim the support and benefits available to workers in the formal labour market. Lockdowns also affect those working as street vendors or travelling traders. Requirements for the formal registration of residence, which some Roma and Travellers lack, limits their access to welfare services and worsens the situation.

In **education**, many Roma and Traveller children, especially those living in informal settlements and encampments without access, or adequate access, to the internet or information technology (IT) equipment cannot benefit from online distance-learning measures.

In **housing**, a persisting lack of basic infrastructure, especially in informal settlements and encampments, increases the risk of COVID-19 infection. The World Health Organization recommends that these are essential for preventing transmission and protecting human health during all infectious disease outbreaks, including COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> All relevant public authorities should take urgent measures to ensure safe water, sanitation and waste management in close cooperation with Roma and Travellers.

The pandemic calls for both immediate and long-term policy measures targeting Roma and Travellers. The immediate measures should offset the challenges that these communities face in the sectors outlined above. It is important that all initiatives intending to address the implications of the pandemic also include Roma and Travellers. The pandemic has revealed a critical discrepancy between the scale of local-level needs and the capacity to address them. The long-term policy measures should address it. The devoted work of Roma health and education mediators or field-workers has helped to fill the gap during the emergency. The COVID-19 outbreak, however, demonstrates the need to invest in local implementation capacity for sustainable long-term results.

For these efforts to be sustainable, EU Member States need to redouble their efforts to address prejudice and anti-Gypsyism, especially within public administrations. They need to engage directly with Roma and Traveller communities to provide them with reliable information and to identify measures that can counteract or reduce any negative impact of lockdowns.



# Introduction

## ON TERMINOLOGY

The term “Roma” used at the Council of Europe refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. FRA, like the Council of Europe, adds the term ‘Travellers’ when necessary to highlight issues that specifically refer to them.

Council of Europe (2012), **Descriptive glossary of terms related to Roma issues**, Strasbourg, 18 May 2012

This bulletin builds on evidence collected by FRANET,<sup>2</sup> FRA’s multidisciplinary research network, in 15 EU Member States (Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden), where the overwhelming majority of Roma and Travellers live. FRA surveys have already generated comparable data for these countries.<sup>3</sup>

All EU Member States have National Roma Inclusion Strategies and respective implementation plans developed in line with the **2011 EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies up to 2020** and the **Council Recommendation of 9 December 2013 on effective Roma integration measures in the Member States**. Since 2016, the National Roma Contact Points (NRCs) in all Member States covered in this analysis have delivered **progress reports on the goals set in their national strategies**. A coalition of national non-governmental organisations (NGOs) also monitored progress within the **Roma Civil Monitor (MONITOR) project**, funded by the European Commission.

FRA data summarised the situation in the **2017 Roma integration indicators scoreboard (2011–2016)**. By 2016, the progress achieved in nine EU Member States, in which some 70 % of Roma in the EU live, was considered insufficient. In the light of these findings, the European Commission is preparing to launch in October 2020 an EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation with more elaborate and ambitious objectives.

The evidence outlined in this bulletin points to gaps in the Roma inclusion policies implemented so far, some of which are also mentioned in the European Commission’s **Overview of the Impact of Corona Virus Measures on the Marginalised Roma Communities in the EU** calling for improvements in housing, access to basic infrastructure and targeted employment programmes.

## BULLETIN #5: COVERAGE AND TIMELINE

Bulletin #5 on COVID-19 documents the situation of Roma and Travellers in 15 EU Member States from **1 March to 30 June 2020**. It looks at the specific implications of the pandemic on the biggest European minority, which also happens to be the most vulnerable

to poverty, exclusion, discrimination and violation of fundamental rights. It populates a set of key socio-economic indicators with data from FRA’s surveys\* to provide the overall context of the challenges encountered in areas such as employment, education and housing.

\* Data for Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain are from the 2016 **EU-MIDIS II** survey; data for Belgium, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden are from the 2019 **Roma and Travellers Survey**.



# 1

## LOCKDOWNS AFFECT ROMA AND TRAVELLERS DISPROPORTIONATELY



Many EU Member States imposed strict measures to restrict the movement of people and enforce social distancing. These measures apply to everyone, but affect people differently depending on their socio-economic situation, gender, age, disability or ethnic minority status. Lockdown measures have taken a **heavier toll** on the daily life of marginalised and socially excluded Roma and Travellers.

In Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia, lockdowns affected entire Roma neighbourhoods. In the early stages of the pandemic, some Member States introduced lockdowns of Roma communities as precautionary measures, despite no confirmed cases of infection. For example, in Bulgaria, **six Roma neighbourhoods** (each with populations of tens of thousands) were locked down in March as a precautionary measure, although no COVID-19 cases had been identified in any of them. In April, Roma neighbourhoods in **Peshtera** and **Brestovitsa** were also locked down. In May, local authorities in Yambol locked down the **Rayna Knyaginya neighbourhood**, with a population of 7,000, and in June, the Iztok neighbourhood in the town of **Kyustendil** was also locked down.

In Romania, several localities were locked down. In the town of **Țândărei**, where approximately 15 % of its 13,200 inhabitants are Roma, movement into and out of the locality was banned except for supplies and emergency transport. A similar measure was taken for the village of **Toflea**, where about 5,000 of its 6,000 inhabitants are Roma, and for the Postă neighbourhood in the city of **Buzău**. In all these cases, COVID-19 outbreaks were associated with the relatively high number of people returning from abroad in the first days of the pandemic.

In Slovakia, five Roma neighbourhoods were locked down between March and May 2020. In Greece, a complete 14-day lockdown was introduced following the identification of several COVID-19 cases in Nea Smyrni, a **Roma neighbourhood in Larissa**. This was done following an on site visit of the relevant Minister and the country's COVID scientific task force leader, who discussed the situation and measures to be taken with the local Roma community. The government of Greece, which is currently chairing the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, issued a statement stressing that Roma are not a threat, but rather a particularly vulnerable group, and announced a series of protection and support measures. In Portugal, the **Moura municipality** activated the municipal civil protection emergency plan following media reports that 17 children and two adults were infected with COVID-19 in the Roma community of **Espadanal**. A sanitary fence was put up in the neighbourhood, controlled by the National

Republican Guard, and a similar fence was also installed around the Roma community in **Margaça**, also in the municipality of Moura.

**Civil society, international human rights organisations** and Roma rights activists expressed concerns that some measures and restrictions were discriminatory. Fear that poor living and sanitary conditions in Roma neighbourhoods might increase infections was often driving lockdowns, with measures taken exceeding the reasonable precaution. For example, in Bulgaria, drones with thermal sensors were used to identify people with high temperatures in Burgas, and a plane sprayed 3,000 litres of **disinfectant on Roma houses and neighbourhood streets** in Yambol.

Roma and Travellers in Ireland, France, Belgium and the Netherlands were subject to the general restrictions on free movement, which banned them from leaving sites and camps where they stayed, except for urgent reasons, such as accessing medical care, work-related travel for those engaged in the formal economy, essential shopping, providing assistance to vulnerable persons or attending funerals. These restrictions disproportionately affected Travellers, because caravans offer very limited living space for families, and authorised camps and sites are overcrowded. In France, **the President of the National Consultative Commission on Travellers** outlined the difficulty of placing caravans at a distance from one other, as well as problems concerning inadequate access to water and sanitation. In Belgium, Travellers also had insufficient caravan parking lots, as **police** reportedly **attempted to prevent their settlement in authorised sites**. In Ireland, some Travellers faced **difficulties complying with the anti-epidemic measures** to self-isolate, maintain physical distance and follow hygienic practices in substandard living conditions.

# 2

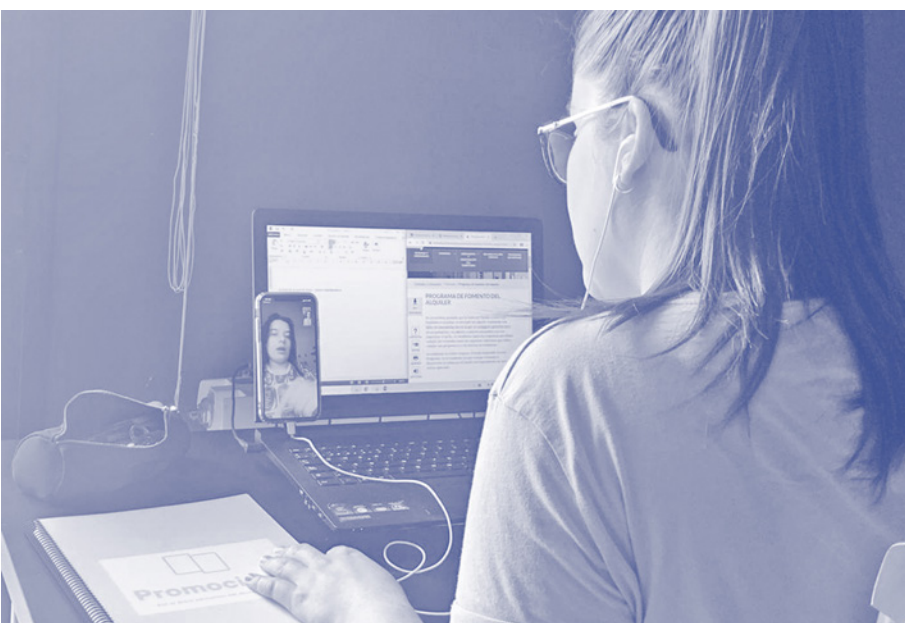
## PANDEMIC WIDENS GAP IN EDUCATION

Member States covered in this Bulletin, except Sweden, suspended in-person educational activities in early March 2020, with the exception of some kindergartens and schools for children of essential workers. In many cases, schooling continued through online distance learning. However, Roma and Traveller children affected by substandard housing without access to the internet or even to electricity and lacking the necessary IT equipment were disproportionately affected. Even before the pandemic, 68 % of Roma in the 18–24 years age group in the nine EU Member States surveyed in 2016<sup>4</sup> were

early leavers from education and training (66 % in the six EU Member States surveyed in 2019).<sup>5</sup> No data is yet available on the involvement of Roma children in distance learning, but it is reasonable to expect that this proportion will increase because many Roma and Traveller children cannot participate on an equal footing in online learning activities.

The lack of data disaggregated by ethnic origin prevents an assessment of the impact of distance learning on children from minority ethnic groups. However, in Bulgaria, **the Ministry of Education and Science** estimated that about 10 % of students could not be included in distance learning owing to a lack of electronic devices. According to a study conducted by the Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialog and Tolerance, a Roma NGO, this percentage was much higher among Roma students. **The study** used an online

survey of nearly 200 schools with significant shares of students from vulnerable groups. It shows that one quarter of these schools were able to engage in distance learning with about half of their students. Six schools were able to include only between 10 % and 25 % of the students, and seven schools less than 10 % because of a lack of electronic devices and, in some places, internet connection. In Czechia, in April, the **Czech School Inspectorate** conducted telephone interviews with approximately 5,000 principals of primary and secondary schools. In approximately 1,000 schools, one third of the students do not communicate online with their teachers and in approximately 100 schools more than half of the students do not participate in online learning, the results show. The respondents consider that this affects mostly socio-economically disadvantaged regions, where most of the Roma live, and attribute this to lack of IT equipment or access to the internet, as well as a lack of parental support. In Slovakia, the **Education Policy Institute** (under



the Ministry of Education) found that 32,000 school children, many of them Roma from marginalised localities, have no access to the internet.

In Spain, a **survey** conducted by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) with almost 11,000 respondents shows that only one third of Roma children have access to a computer at home and more than 40 % of Roma students do not have access to the internet. One third of Roma children cannot carry out the learning tasks set by their centres of education, in most cases because they lack the necessary equipment and/or access to educational materials. In Ireland, Traveller advocacy groups highlighted in a **letter to the Department of Education and Skills** “a deficit of and a lack of access to appropriate devices and Wi-Fi coverage.”

Various measures were introduced at national or regional/local level, where responsibility for education is subnational, to provide children belonging to vulnerable groups with access to distance education. Such measures, especially if they are specifically targeted, can also benefit Roma and Travellers. For example, in Romania, the Ministry of Education and Research issued an **Instruction** on 21 April for the strengthening of pre-university education through online learning. It obliges parents or legal tutors to take all necessary steps to ensure the participation of students in online distance-learning activities. However, the **National School for Political and Administrative Sciences**, the **Centre for Legal Resources** and **UNICEF** pointed out that this instruction does not address the practical challenges parents and children in marginalised Roma neighbourhoods face when trying to comply with these obligations.

The scope and quality of these educational measures vary widely. In Bulgaria, according to **media reports**, the Ministry of Education and Science provided 461 schools with 1,986 laptops and concluded agreements with mobile operators for the provision of internet connection to students at preferential prices. It also revised the financing rules to enable schools to cover the cost of internet connectivity for students from socially disadvantaged families. There is no publicly available information on the share of Roma children who benefited from these measures. In Romania, **the government** allocated RON 150 million (€ 30 million) for supplying 250,000 tablets to children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, including many Roma, to ensure their participation in distance learning.

In the Netherlands, educational institutions can apply for **extra financial resources** to counter possible disadvantages resulting from school closures due to the pandemic. For example, € 244 million is available for preventing backlog or catching up in early child education and care, primary and secondary education, special education, vocational training, continued general training for adolescents and middle-level professional education. In addition, € 30 million is available for maintaining apprenticeships, training on the job and practical learning. It is reasonable to assume that young Roma and Travellers will also benefit from these measures, although data disaggregated by ethnic origin are not publicly available. In Ireland, the government took a number of **measures**, including additional funding of € 10 million, to support the purchase of technology and devices for disadvantaged students. Schools were requested to direct funding to support children who are disadvantaged (including Traveller and Roma children) due to a lack of access to digital devices.

## PROMISING PRACTICE – EFFORTS TO SECURE ACCESS TO ONLINE/DISTANCE EDUCATION

Bulgaria provided internet access and computers for children from vulnerable families. Romania approved a **National Programme, ‘Home School’, and allocated funding from the Budget Reserve Fund at the disposal of the government.** The Netherlands introduced support aimed at preventing educational disadvantage and delay in learning (with funding in the range of € 244 million). In Ireland, the Department of Education and Skills issued **guidance** advising on how schools and teachers can support continuity in the learning of pupils at risk of educational disadvantage during the school closures associated with COVID-19.

## PROMISING PRACTICE – EDUCATIONAL MEDIATORS PROVIDE SUPPORT BEYOND EDUCATION

The European Commission/Council of Europe joint programme Building capacity at local level for the integration of Roma (ROMACT) supported responses to the pandemic in Bulgaria and Romania.\*

Roma Community Action Groups, including mediators, addressed the needs of the most vulnerable in 46 municipalities and 46 grants were awarded directly to local authorities and/or Roma civil society organisations for awareness raising campaigns on health care, distribution of protection masks and gloves to mediators and social workers, as well as family packages of hygiene and sanitary products or basic food items and vouchers to those most in need. Around 30,000 persons received supplies and some 50,000 persons received information on how to cope better and stay safe during the pandemic.

The Council of Europe and the European Union have started discussions for more medium- and long-term actions to address the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on Roma communities.

Source: **ROMACT small grants scheme during COVID19 pandemic**

\* A similar programme, **JP ROMACTED** (co-funded by DG NEAR of the European Commission) also covers the Western Balkans and Turkey. The Programme also contributed to the **Roma-targeted response** to the pandemic.

In France, the Ministry of National Education and La Poste (the main postal service) have **partnered in organising the distribution of computer equipment** to families identified as “lacking digital devices”. They have also enabled students experiencing digital disconnection to receive their homework by post using the ‘Assignments at home’ system. In addition, the government invested € 15 million to reinforce the continuity of education in working-class neighbourhoods, which was mainly used to provide IT hardware and connectivity for pupils in need. Following the closure of schools, the organisations Article 1 and Fédération des associations générales étudiantes launched an operation of school support to facilitate educational continuity for low-income pupils and children of healthcare professionals. Such measures could benefit Roma and Travellers who are at risk of poverty.

Member States also used other methods to compensate for educational deficits relating to inaccessible distance learning. Printed teaching materials for younger children and students from disadvantaged groups without access to adequate IT equipment or the internet were distributed by post or by teachers, educational and health mediators, local administration employees, police officers and volunteers. In Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain, public television provided regular broadcasts of educational television programmes mainly for primary school children.

Such measures are essential, but more needs to be done. The European Commission has highlighted that “children who lack resources and support were already lower performers before the crisis. They are likely to have lost further ground during the Covid-19 school closures. This will increase overall European educational inequalities”.<sup>6</sup> Achievement gaps caused by socio-economic differences and compounded by the effect of minority ethnic origin could widen because of disparities in access to computers, home internet connections and direct instruction from teachers. Children from the most vulnerable groups of Roma and Travellers often do not have the knowledge, skills or support at home to make use of distance-learning opportunities. Measures such as individualised support for Roma and Traveller parents and children as well as specialised teacher training are essential to support these children in using online/distance learning effectively.

Parents who could telework from home had more opportunities to combine work with their children’s education and digital skills development. Parents working outside the home, which many Roma and Travellers do, could not do this. In addition, a significant proportion of Roma children in central and eastern Europe are raised by grandparents or other relatives, as their parents are working abroad. These children are even less likely to receive family support in online distance learning.

# 3

## IMPACT OF MEASURES TO TACKLE PANDEMIC ON EMPLOYMENT

**FRA bulletin #2** shows that lockdowns and movement restrictions disproportionately affect the type of work that many Roma and Travellers do, for example working as street vendors, at markets, in construction or in recycling. That results in loss of income.

All Member States covered, except Sweden, imposed restrictions on movement and closed non-essential businesses to contain the spread of COVID-19. Even before the pandemic, a large proportion of Roma and Travellers were affected by unemployment or low work intensity, FRA data show. The proportion of young people aged 16–24 years who were not in employment, education or training was 62 % in the nine EU Member States surveyed in 2016<sup>7</sup> (47 % in the six Member States surveyed in 2019<sup>8</sup>). A total of 44 % of the people surveyed in 2016 lived in households with work intensity lower than 20 %.<sup>9</sup>

Restrictions on movement particularly affect Roma and Travellers who are self-employed or engaged in the informal economy or seasonal work, without an employment contract, the evidence collected for this report, the information provided by NRCs to the **European Commission** and assessments by **civil society** indicate. That exacerbates their precarious living conditions and deepens inequalities.

The 15 Member States in this report adopted measures to support businesses and protect jobs for those with regular jobs in the formal labour market. Consequently, mainstream employment support measures excluded many Roma and Travellers. In Ireland, the pandemic exacerbated experiences of exclusion from social welfare support, **Pavee Point** (an Irish Travellers and Roma organisation) noted. In Czechia, the government has largely ignored the specific needs of socially excluded localities, claimed the director of the **Roma organisation Khamoro** (a local NGO in Chodov providing social services to Roma communities). Many Roma live in such areas, which lack access to basic services and have higher deprivation rates and residential segregation.

Most of the EU Member States examined did not implement specific measures targeting Roma and Travellers employed in the informal economy. Many were not eligible for loans on preferential conditions or for support to the self-employed because their earnings before the pandemic were low or irregular and taxes and social security contributions had not been paid. The same applies to rescheduling payments on bank loans and mortgages for the period of the state of emergency: the majority of Roma and Travellers could not benefit from public support measures because they usually borrow informally from local loan sharks under extremely unfavourable conditions.

# 4

## INCREASED POVERTY AND RISK OF MALNUTRITION

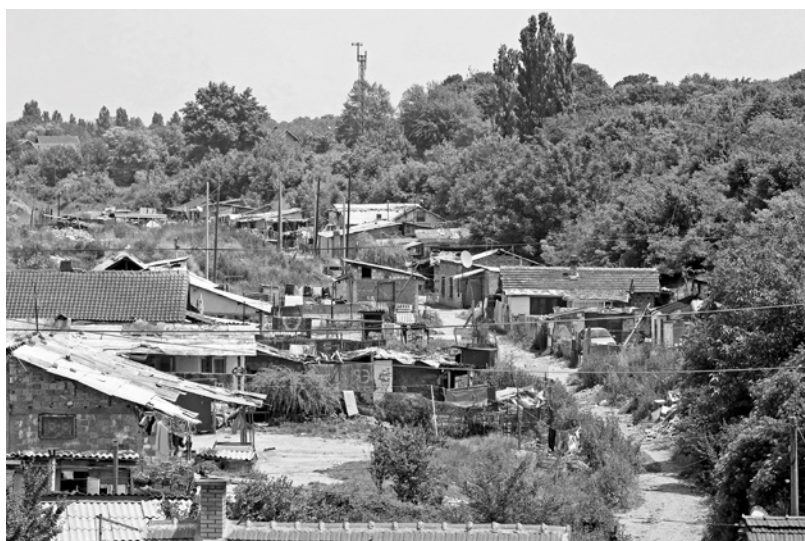


The rise in unemployment among many Roma and Travellers brought about by measures to reduce the spread of the pandemic increased poverty levels, which were already alarmingly high. The at-risk-of-poverty rate (below 60 % of median equivalised income after social transfers) was on average 80 % for Roma in the nine EU Member States surveyed in 2016<sup>10</sup> and 72 % for Roma and Travellers in the six EU Member States surveyed in 2019.<sup>11</sup>

Local authorities in all Member States examined have taken measures to ensure access to adequate housing, food and other basic needs for locked down vulnerable populations. In France, for example, more **than 21,000 accommodation places were made available to homeless people and 97 specialised accommodation sites** for COVID-19 patients were set up. Public services in Île-de-France, in partnership with local communities and several associations, provided **health protection and basic means of subsistence for the populations living in the slums, illegal camps and squats**. The **Romeurope group** initially described the situation as “disastrous” but it improved after local authorities organised food distribution. Nevertheless, the NGO **Médecins du monde** reported “a real food crisis” in Bordeaux, where “about 500 people, including children and pregnant women, [had] nothing left to eat”. The **United Associations Collective** described the situation of Travellers in some localities as “extremely tense”. For instance, in Toulouse in April, nearly 200 families were blocked from accessing food distributions.

In Italy, the **Ordinance of the Italian Civil Protection No. 658** of 29 March 2020 earmarked € 400 million to Italian municipalities to finance urgent measures of food solidarity in the form of food vouchers. The Municipality of Rome, based on the **Department Directive** of 30 March, provided shopping vouchers worth over € 21 million to some **66,000 individuals and families** in disadvantaged situations, both residents and non-residents, including **2,266 Roma**. However, the Directive establishes that only people enrolled in municipal civil registries are eligible, which excludes Roma living in informal settlements, for example. In fact, on 6 May the **municipal authorities in Milan** excluded 253 families from the list of 13,475 beneficiaries because they could not prove that they were municipal residents. Courts swiftly intervened in Italy, as well as in France, to ensure that local authorities provide food vouchers to these groups.

Some Member States took targeted measures to mitigate the economic implications of COVID-19 on Roma and Travellers. For instance, in Spain, the Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030<sup>12</sup> issued **recommendations for action by social services in segregated settlements and highly vulnerable**



**neighbourhoods in the context of the COVID-19 crisis**, and the FSG launched an **Emergency Social Fund** to tackle the situation of vulnerability affecting thousands of Roma families. In Greece, the **Ministry of the Interior** allocated € 2.255 million to 98 municipalities with Roma settlements and camps for measures such as disinfection, the provision of drinking water and food where necessary, informing the population and providing antiseptics. In Slovakia, with schools closed, the Public Health Authority issued ordinance **OLP/3010/2020** allowing school canteens to continue the provision of food in the form of food packages for children in vulnerable situations, including Roma.

The pandemic highlighted the importance of Roma mediators. In most Member States examined, these health and education mediators play a crucial role in distributing food packages and supporting marginalised and socially excluded Roma in many ways. The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of formal residential status as a criterion of eligibility for social support, even as basic as food vouchers. Lack of municipal registration or a permanent address is an obstacle for the issuance of an identity card and hinders the exercise of a number of fundamental rights, since all administrative, banking, notary and other services require formal identification. For example, in Bulgaria, 75,406 Bulgarian citizens (mostly Roma) still have no registered address, according to data with which the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works provided the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee on 30 April 2020. This resulted from changes in the Civil Register legislation in 2011, which introduced the requirement for a document of ownership of a dwelling or tenancy agreements for registration, which many Roma do not possess.<sup>13</sup> In July 2020, the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities voiced similar concerns in its **third opinion on Bulgaria**.

# 5

## POOR ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES

**FRA Bulletin #2** outlines concerns that members of ethnic minorities living in inadequate housing might be at increased risk of infection from COVID-19. This applies particularly to Roma and Travellers, who often live in overcrowded accommodation where it is difficult to comply with requirements for social distancing, isolating those who are infected and applying hygiene rules. Moreover, evidence<sup>14</sup> suggests that Roma and Travellers suffer disproportionately from health problems such as diabetes, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, cardiovascular and pulmonary diseases, and disabilities. This puts them at particular risk of health complications and premature death from concomitant diseases.

In all Member States covered, Roma and Travellers also face barriers to accessing healthcare services. The share of Roma who said that they are covered by medical insurance was on average 74 % in the nine EU Member States surveyed in 2016, according to FRA data, but as low as 45 % in Bulgaria and 54 % in Romania.<sup>15</sup> It was 84 % in the six EU Member States surveyed in 2019.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, one quarter of the Roma surveyed in the nine Member States with the highest share of Roma populations suffer longstanding illnesses or health problems.<sup>17</sup> However, in the absence of epidemiologic or mortality data (including on COVID-19 related deaths) by ethnicity, it is not possible to quantify the impact of the pandemic on particular groups.

The risk of infection is augmented when Roma working in countries with a high prevalence of infection return home to central and eastern European countries after losing their jobs. For example, in Slovakia the **Central Crisis Team** identified

**1,044 localities** (mostly segregated) where more than a quarter of a million Roma live at high risk of infection following the return of about 1,400 Roma from abroad, more than 200 of whom were showing symptoms of respiratory disease. According to *The Lancet Infectious Diseases* (a monthly peer-reviewed medical journal) this led the government, after infections were identified, to seal off five settlements in the towns of Krompachy, Bystrany and Zehra with a combined population of about 6,000.

Roma and Travellers often do not contact health authorities either because of their mistrust of institutions or because they are not



well informed, FRANET reports. In France, Travellers were less aware than the general population of the possibility of accessing healthcare during the crisis and stopped their treatment for their chronic diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension, **Médecins sans frontières** noted. The temporary suspension of public transport also adds to the challenges, as reported in **Croatia**.

Roma from central and eastern Europe living in western European countries often do not speak the languages of their host countries well and may not be familiar with the conditions and procedures for accessing medical services, an earlier **report of the FSG** indicated. They also mistrust institutions, including health service providers, mainly because of negative experiences with health services in their own countries. The pandemic compounds these challenges.

The healthcare systems in the EU have provided care and treatment to those who are most vulnerable, including Roma and Travellers, the evidence collected shows. Regardless of health insurance status in the 15 Member States examined, persons with COVID-19 symptoms were able to consult a doctor, be tested for coronavirus infection and, when necessary, be hospitalised. The Spanish government has been promoting special attention and

**measures to satisfy the basic needs of people living in segregated and vulnerable environments**, including in Roma settlements. In France, the Interministerial Delegation for Accommodation and Access to Housing specified in its **guidelines intended for Travellers communities** that all recommendations and obligations on the healthcare of those who test positive for COVID-19 and the follow-up of contact cases also apply to Travellers. Although there are no specific measures targeting Roma people, the French government has published **instructions** for persons working with the homeless and residents of squats, slums and illegal camps, where many Roma live. Regional health agencies coordinate testing in collective accommodation structures and identify mobile teams capable of taking samples and transmitting them to a laboratory.

Roma women face disproportionately higher health risks than non-Roma women. The inability to communicate face to face with doctors raised tensions and created anxiety among pregnant Roma women, mothers of infants and their family members. Many in-person prophylactic medical examinations, mother-and-child health programmes and immunisations were postponed. Health mediators stepped in to regularly visit pregnant women and mothers with young children to monitor their condition and inform healthcare staff about any health problems.



## PROMISING PRACTICE – HEALTH MEDIATORS FILLING THE GAPS AT LOCAL LEVEL

Networks of Roma health mediators have existed in Bulgaria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Hungary, Romania, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain for the past 20 years to facilitate the access of Roma to health services and to mediate relations with administrations. The pandemic expanded their terms of reference to assist local health institutions in taking medical samples, quarantining persons, monitoring compliance with social distancing and hygiene requirements, informing physicians about changes in patients' conditions, and buying and delivering prescribed medicines to patients. They even provided psychological support to families who lost their loved ones to the virus.

Source: National Network of Health Mediators (2020), **Guidelines for health mediators – Coronavirus**

# 6

## HOUSING DEPRIVATION, LACK OF ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

Around four fifths of the Roma in EU Member States live in overcrowded neighbourhoods and dwellings and almost half of them have limited or no access to drinking water, sewage or electricity, the European Commission estimates in its [Overview of the Impact of Coronavirus Measures on the Marginalised Roma Communities in the EU](#). As many as 78 % of the Roma surveyed in 2016 in nine Member States<sup>18</sup> and 46 % of Roma and Travellers surveyed in six additional EU Member States in 2019<sup>19</sup> lived in overcrowded households. The share of people living in household without tap water inside the dwelling was 30 % in the nine EU Member States surveyed in 2016 and 9 % in the six EU Member States surveyed in 2019. Overcrowding and lack of access to clean water make it impossible for many Roma and Travellers to take the necessary precautions to prevent the spread of the virus. Moreover, restrictions on movement and quarantines imposed on Roma neighbourhoods and Traveller camps mean that these populations have difficulties procuring essential supplies, including food, medicine and hygiene products.

If living in overcrowded or unsanitary housing is in general “a source of suffering and difficulties”, in the particular situation of lockdown, people can “find themselves trapped in these unworthy homes, posing risks to their mental and physical health”, the [National Consultative Commission on Human Rights](#) in France highlighted.

In Member States with large numbers of Roma, the return of thousands of Roma migrant workers has further increased overcrowding, making it practically impossible to isolate anyone infected at home. [Czechia](#), [Slovakia](#) and [Romania](#) have responded by providing opportunities for asymptomatic patients or those with mild symptoms to be isolated from their families in state-run facilities (guest houses) located outside Roma neighbourhoods. Several Member States have also taken measures to address the lack of access to water, electricity, heating and sanitation in Roma and Traveller neighbourhoods, camps or squats during the lockdown and to halt evictions. In France, the public authorities have issued instructions relating to access to water and sanitation for Travellers. They have also [recommended](#) that municipalities maintain access to a continuous water and electricity supply without any immediate obligation to pay and/or prepay, facilitating the staggering or postponement of the recovery of charges. Some utility providers decided to supply water and electricity free of charge during confinement. In Ireland, representatives of the [Traveller Community](#) commented that, although welcome, it is regrettable that it has taken a crisis such as COVID-19 for Travellers to get access to basic sanitation services. There is concern that, once the crisis abates, the provision of such services will end.



With the onset of the pandemic many Roma and Travellers feared that they might be evicted from camps, sites or other informal accommodation. However, shortly after the pandemic began, evictions were banned in most EU Member States. In Ireland, Section 5 (7) of the **Emergency Measures in the Public Interest (Covid-19) Act 2020** came into effect on 27 March. It stipulates that “all Travellers currently residing in any location should not be evicted from that location during the COVID-19 emergency, except where the movement ‘is required to ameliorate hardship and provide protection’ and subject to consultation with the Travellers concerned”. In Belgium, on 23 March, the Walloon Minister of Housing issued **a circular** recommending that Travellers currently settled on official or unofficial sites must be able to remain there without hindrance, and asked local authorities to suspend the execution of current or future eviction procedures. Nevertheless, some local authorities had asked groups of Travellers to leave, the **National and Walloon Committee for Travellers** said. It called on these authorities to allow Travellers to stay where they have settled until the end of the lockdown. In France, the **Interministerial Delegation for Accommodation and Access to Housing** suggested that the evictions of illegal occupants should be suspended until 11 May. It also proposed postponing eviction procedures linked to non-payments. Hungary also **suspended evictions**, although the **Open Society Foundations** voiced concern that this is only a temporary solution, as evictions will resume on the 15th day after the end of the state of emergency.

Some Member States have taken measures to provide shelter and social isolation for the homeless. In Romania, during the state of emergency, the **local public authorities** were obliged to identify and keep records of homeless people, as well as to ensure their shelter and care. In Belgium, the **Federal Minister for Poverty Reduction** allocated € 652,050 to extend in Brussels the federal winter shelter for the homeless, including many Roma, by two months, until 31 May. Another € 200,000 went to the cities of Ghent, Antwerp, Liège and Charleroi to open up **places where sick homeless persons can be housed** in safety. In France, before the crisis 80 % of squats and slums in which some 19,000–20,000 people live (of which around 15,000 are Roma) had no access to clean water, making it impossible to comply with hygiene and prevention measures, the **National Human Rights Collective Romeurope** estimates. Many Travellers also lack access to water and sanitation because large groups have difficulties finding appropriate sites, the **United Associations Collective** states. Families are sometimes stranded on sites without access to such basic infrastructure and are thus even further from support and solidarity systems. In an attempt to address these problems, on 20 March 2020, the **Hérault Prefecture** announced that the regional health agency, the Departmental Directorate of Social Cohesion and the Montpellier municipality were working on the establishment of water reservoirs.

In Slovakia, following calls from NGOs and a question from the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities to the Council of Ministers, the government issued an **order to supply water** to all Roma settlements. Approximately 50 localities were to receive drinking water tanks. In Spain, from the beginning of the crisis, the government took special **measures to satisfy the basic needs** of people living in segregated and especially vulnerable environments, including Roma settlements. These measures guarantee the provision of water, electricity and gas, for example, as well as the implementation of hygiene and sanitation measures necessary to prevent the spread of the infection. These include the provision of face masks and disinfectants or, in extreme situations, alternative accommodation if necessary to prevent the spread of the virus.

## PROMISING PRACTICE – NATIONAL COURT DECISIONS ON ACCESS TO WATER AND SANITATION

Several courts in France ordered the provision of water and sanitation to communities lacking it. On 22 April, the Administrative Court of Melun asked the prefecture and the municipalities of L'Hay-les-Roses, Choisy-le-Roi and Villejuif to supply drinking water, organise household waste collection and install toilets and temporary showers for people living in slums. The court considered that the absence of these installations constitutes a serious and manifestly illegal infringement of human dignity. On 29 April, the Lille Administrative Court issued a similar order to the prefecture and the city of Villeneuve-d'Ascq.

In Ireland, the Minister for Housing sent a **circular to Local Authorities** requesting them to support the Traveller Community with water provision and sanitation. In Bulgaria, the local authorities in Sofia introduced regular (twice a day) street cleaning, garbage collection and disinfection in the **two Roma neighbourhoods** of Fakulteta and Filipovtsi. Local health mediators supported the implementation of these measures. Similar measures were implemented in other large segregated neighbourhoods in the country. Where public authorities did not react, health mediators stepped in to organise the **cleaning of the neighbourhoods, waste collection and disinfection**. In Belgium, the Walloon Minister of Housing recommended that local authorities organise access to **water and electricity for Gens du voyage** during lockdown, but no similar measures were reported in Flanders. Greece announced on 13 April additional measures to support vulnerable groups in the new **Act of Legislative Content, which** included the extension of the free provision of pharmaceuticals to those uninsured until 31 May 2020.

Targeted measures for Roma and Travellers did not always reach them. In Ireland, as of 6 June, 11 of 31 local authorities **had not requested special funding** to address the Traveller community's needs in accommodation and sanitation, which the Minister for Housing had approved on 18 March, and **more than € 4m in Traveller housing funding was not spent**. Across all 15 Member States examined, access to clean water and sanitation during the state of emergency was not always guaranteed to Roma households.



# 7

## CIVIL SOCIETY CONTRIBUTION

Major Roma and Traveller civil society organisations raised serious concerns across the 15 EU Member States examined about the vulnerability of many Roma and Travellers to infection in light of persisting daily hardships, multiple deprivation, looming hunger and scapegoating.

Some Roma NGOs kept in close contact with NRCs (units in the national public administration responsible for coordinating Roma inclusion policies), ministries, local authorities, local health, social and educational institutions, law enforcement agencies and media to raise awareness and to prevent acts of discrimination against Roma and Travellers. Some initiated actions and services for the benefit of those in need as well as community-level information campaigns to provide people with timely information about ongoing or forthcoming restrictive measures. These aim to reduce mass discontent and the risk of protests, and to mediate to resolve them when they arise. Some NGOs organised campaigns to provide children in Roma neighbourhoods with **digital devices** or help in organising **distance learning**, or to provide **secure facemasks, hygiene materials, medicines**, water and food for the poorest.

In a number of Member States, for example **Bulgaria, Italy, Slovakia and Spain**, Roma organisations collected information and data to assess the impact of the pandemic and the social and economic measures to mitigate its impact on Roma families. The European Network of National Human Rights Institutions



### PROMISING PRACTICE – CITIZENS’ ACTIONS IN RESPONSE TO PANDEMIC BENEFIT FROM GOVERNMENT’S COORDINATION

In Slovakia, the Office of Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities launched a map portal called ‘Coordination of aid for municipalities with marginalised Roma communities’. The maps contain information on the need for face masks, disinfection and gloves and the urgent need for access to drinking water and food supplies in particular localities. The Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities coordinates the provision of help where needed and uses its network of social field workers to distribute the aid.

Source: **Office of Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities**, Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic, 2020 [Úrad splnomocnenca vlády SR pre rómske komunity, Ministerstvo vnútra SR]

(ENNHRI) also maintains a **COVID-19 database** with information on actions taken by their members in individual Member States, including related to Roma.

Various organisations launched awareness-raising campaigns and distributed leaflets and sanitary material or pharmaceuticals. Others engaged in activities to help Roma children successfully cope with the difficulties of distance learning and the successful completion of the school year. However, the pandemic has revealed a critical discrepancy between the scale of needs at local level and **local implementation capacity**. It has highlighted that sustainable results need the genuine participation of the people usually referred to as the “target group”, both in situations of emergency and beyond.<sup>20</sup>

Health and education mediators managed to partially fill this gap between needs and capacity, as they were **at the very forefront of the fight against the pandemic** and were aware of the multiple implications of restrictive measures. With social services under severe strain, many Roma approached those closer to their communities, namely the mediators who carried out important relief and social support work. Poorly resourced and working for a minimum salary, they supported health authorities, **mobilised people** to manufacture and distribute facemasks, organised the cleaning and sanitation of neighbourhoods, and engaged in dialogue to prevent conflicts and deal with the frustration and anger created by the restrictive measures while maintaining contact with local authorities and assisting them on a daily basis in the provision of the necessary services for Roma communities. They filled the gap during the emergency. However, the question of who will address these aspects beyond the emergency remains open.

### PROMISING PRACTICE – DATA COLLECTED BY ROMA HELP FINE-TUNE POLICY RESPONSES TO PANDEMIC

Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) conducted 10,935 telephone interviews with participants in FSG programmes in 68 cities across 14 autonomous regions during the week of 30 March – 3 April. A total of 58 % of the interviewees were women and 42 % were men. Respondents provided information on the challenges facing Roma in health, employment, education and perceptions of discrimination. This information was communicated to the relevant authorities, helping them to address the specific needs of Roma in Spain during the pandemic.

Source: FSG, 2020



# 8

## ANTI-GYPSYISM AND HATE SPEECH PERSIST DURING PANDEMIC

There is evidence of an increase in anti-Roma rhetoric across the media and social networks since the first cases of COVID-19 in the 15 Member States examined, except Czechia and Sweden. In Spain, the media reported an **increase in attitudes of discrimination, rejection and hatred** against Roma, who were blamed for the increase in the number of infected people. In Greece, media reports focused mainly on **alleged non-respect of restrictive measures** by Roma or on their negative reactions to lockdowns. In a **statement**, Amnesty International points out that the introduction of restrictive measures in Roma neighbourhoods in Bulgaria and Slovakia was accompanied by “an increasingly hostile anti-Roma rhetoric, frequently stoked by politicians”, who were exploiting the public health crises to “present Roma as a collective threat to the general population”. In Slovakia **official statements were more positive** in 2020, highlighting the vulnerability of marginalised Roma, media reports show. However, anti-Roma sentiments continued at a local level. The mayor of Rimavská Sobota published an **open letter to the Prime Minister** calling for the lockdown of Roma settlements to prevent the spread of the virus.



## PROMISING PRACTICE – NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS COMBAT DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

In Romania, a number of Roma communities experienced total lockdown. Developments in one of them – Țândărei – prompted national institutions to react. In April 2020, the return of Roma seasonal workers from abroad was broadcast on prime-time television using inappropriate racialised terms. The audiovisual arbiter, the National Audiovisual Council (Consiliul National al Audiovizualului), issued a public warning. Moreover, the National Council for Combating Discrimination (Consiliul National pentru Combaterea Discriminarii) sanctioned certain persons, including a leading political science professor, for distributing an image with racist content online, related to the Țândărei case.

Sources: National Audiovisual Council of Romania, **press communication from 7 May 2020**; National Council for Combating Discrimination of Romania, **press communication from 6 May 2020**.

Certain politicians in **Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania** and **Slovakia** used media reports of mass returns of Roma migrant workers from countries with a high prevalence of COVID-19 to fan fears about its spread. This has reinforced negative attitudes and stereotypes. In Bulgaria, the political party IMRO – member of the ruling coalition – called for **Roma 'ghettos' to be locked down** arguing that they could “turn out to be the real nests of contagion” because of poor living conditions and low levels of hygiene. In Romania, the NRCP (**National Agency for Roma**) argued that Roma returning from abroad could “represent a real danger for the whole community” through “their unawareness”.<sup>21</sup> Travellers have also been portrayed as coronavirus carriers in **France** and **Ireland**, activating old stereotypes of Travellers as a threat to public health.

The media reported on Roma **scapegoating** when fears of a second wave of COVID-19 infection emerged, but also when concerns arose about if the chronically underfunded national health systems could withstand the continued burden of COVID-19 patients. These fears are particularly strong in poorer EU Member States with under-funded and weak healthcare systems. Here, some politicians have blamed uninsured Roma, who do not pay social security contributions but use health insurance funds and hospitals.

In France, two days before the lockdown started to relax, **the mayor of the Voisenon municipality** (Seine-et-Marne department) appealed for “vigilance and solidarity”, calling on citizens to contact the competent services “as soon as you see a caravan circulating in our village”. Several **associations and NGOs** criticised the statement and requested that the municipality apologise publicly to the people targeted. In Romania, a **news agency** reported in April that 800 Roma had returned from abroad bringing the virus. The same narrative was presented on prime-time **television**, prompting a **public warning** from the audio-visual arbiter, the National Audio-visual Council.

A number of violent incidents have also been reported. In Romania, on 18 March, mass-media reports emerged of **an incident in Bujoreni**, Vâlcea County, where Roma returning from abroad were attacked for allegedly violating self-isolation measures. In Slovakia, on 29 April, a police officer beat and threatened to shoot several Romani children in the settlement of **Krompachy** (one of the quarantined communities) for not respecting the quarantine measures. In France, at the beginning of May, **three Molotov cocktails** were thrown at a Roma slum located in Argenteuil (Val-d'Oise department) from a nearby road, causing fires on the roofs of the huts in which adults and children lived. At least the following case of Anti-Gypsyism in Italy should be reported. In a suburb of Naples, where a large community of Bulgarian Roma live, anti-Roma incidents were reported in the media<sup>22</sup> after members of that community tested positive to COVID-19, as well as political statements with negative reference to Roma.<sup>23</sup>

There are also examples of measures to combat anti-Gypsyism. In Greece, the Ombudsman is currently investigating the possible disciplinary liability of police officers for abuse of power with a discriminatory intent in three cases relating to COVID-19 confinement, one of which concerned a Roma person.<sup>24</sup> In Romania, the National Council for Combating Discrimination issued sanctions against a **local newspaper**, a **former President of Romania** and a **university professor** for discriminatory or hate statements against Roma during the state of emergency.

# 9

## LESSONS LEARNT FROM FIRST WAVE OF PANDEMIC

The evidence collected by FRA shows that the pandemic affects Roma and Travellers disproportionately, particularly those living in socially excluded and marginalised settings. The toll on these communities would not be so heavy if Member States had effectively implemented inclusion measures, such as those recommended since 2013 by the Council of the European Union. Now more than ever, it is imperative that such measures are implemented and that all Roma and Travellers have equal access to all mainstream poverty reduction, employment generation and other social inclusion schemes.

The pandemic revealed worrying gaps in the capacity of local authorities to support effectively socially excluded and marginalised Roma. Health and education mediators provided invaluable practical support, well beyond hygiene measures, but they need to be better supported and resourced to be able to continue their work.

The pandemic has shown that trust in public authorities is essential for the effective implementation of measures to tackle it. To achieve such trust among Roma and Travellers, national and in particular local authorities must redouble their efforts to combat anti-Gypsyism, deconstruct negative stereotypes and involve Roma and Travellers themselves in identifying and implementing measures to tackle this pandemic.



# Endnotes

- 1 For more information, see the WHO interim guidance on [Water, sanitation, hygiene, and waste management for SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19](#).
- 2 **FRANET** comprises contractors in each EU Member State, the UK and countries that have Observer status, who, on request, provide relevant data to FRA on fundamental rights issues to facilitate FRA's comparative analyses.
- 3 In 2016, the **EU MIDIS II** survey collected data on the situation of Roma in Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, and Spain; in 2019, the **Roma and Travellers Survey** covered Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom (not covered in this bulletin).
- 4 FRA (2018), *A persisting concern: anti-Gypsyism as a barrier to Roma inclusion*, Luxembourg, Publications Office, p. 30.
- 5 FRA (2020), *Roma and Travellers in six countries*, p. 91.
- 6 See the European Commission's Fairness Policy Brief on [Educational inequalities in Europe and physical school closures during COVID-19](#).
- 7 FRA (2018), *A persisting concern: anti-Gypsyism as a barrier to Roma inclusion*, Luxembourg, Publications Office, p. 37.
- 8 FRA (2020), *Roma and Travellers in six countries*, p. 93.
- 9 FRA [data visualisation portal](#).
- 10 FRA (2018), *A persisting concern: anti-Gypsyism as a barrier to Roma inclusion*, p. 33.
- 11 FRA (2020), *Roma and Travellers in six countries*, p. 96.
- 12 The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** was adopted at a high-level United Nations (UN) summit in September 2015 by all 193 member states of the United Nations. It **aims** to end poverty in all its forms and envisages "a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination".
- 13 For more information, see the report on [Civil Register legislation](#).
- 14 Department of the Taoiseach (2020), *Report on Social Implications of COVID-19 in Ireland: Preliminary Assessment*. Government of Ireland, Dublin; Pavée Point (2010), *All Ireland Traveller Health Study*; COVID-19 NGO Group (2020), *Marginalised Groups. Promoting Equality, Inclusion and Human Rights in the COVID-19 Crisis*; Seidler, Y., Van den Heerik, A., Van San, M., De Boom, J. and Jorna, P. (2018), *Monitor Sociale Inclusie: meting 3, Tweede vervolgmeting naar de woon- en leefomstandigheden Roma en Sinti in Nederland* [Monitor Social Inclusion, Third Measurement, Second follow up on the living conditions of Sinti, Roma and Travellers in the Netherlands].
- 15 FRA (2018), *A persisting concern: anti-Gypsyism as a barrier to Roma inclusion*, Luxembourg, Publications Office, p. 41.
- 16 FRA (2020), *Roma and Travellers in six countries*, p. 94.
- 17 FRA (2013), *Inequalities and multiple discrimination in access to the quality of healthcare*; Mihailov, D. (2012), *The health situation of Roma communities: Analysis of the data from the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey 2011*, Roma Inclusion Working Papers, Bratislava, UNDP; FSG (2009), *Health and the Roma Community, Analysis of the Situation in Europe*, Madrid, FSG.
- 18 FRA [data visualisation portal](#).
- 19 FRA (2020), *Roma and Travellers in six countries*, p. 95.
- 20 FRA (2018), *Working with Roma: Participation and empowerment of local communities*, Luxembourg, Publications Office.
- 21 Romania, National Agency for Roma (*Agenția Națională pentru Romi*), Memo on the 'Report of the National Agency for Roma on the need for the intervention of competent authorities for the benefit of members of vulnerable communities with Roma in the context of the implementation of measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19' (*Raport al Agenției Naționale pentru Romi cu privire la necesitatea intervenției autorităților competente în beneficiul membrilor comunităților vulnerabile cu romi în contextul implementării măsurilor de prevenire a răspândirii virusului COVID 19*), 16 April 2020, p. 3.
- 22 See article in *Corriere Della Sera* of June 26, available [online](#).
- 23 See article in *RaiNews* of Jul 3, available [online](#).
- 24 Greece, Response from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, General Secretariat for Social Solidarity and Fight against poverty, 15 June 2020.








# PROMOTING AND PROTECTING YOUR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS ACROSS THE EU —

Often living in substandard and overcrowded housing conditions, Roma and Travellers face an increased risk of contracting COVID-19. They are also disproportionately affected by measures taken to contain the virus. This FRA Bulletin takes a closer look at this reality in 15 EU Member States, focusing on education; employment; poverty; healthcare; housing; and anti-Gypsyism. It also outlines civil society efforts to tackle the diverse challenges triggered by the Coronavirus pandemic.

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