

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ROMA COMMUNITIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE WESTERN BALKANS

Survey December 2020

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This survey was possible with the valuable contributions from ERGO members and partners from the European Union and Western Balkan countries and Turkey. We would like to thank in particular Roma Active Albania in Albania, Otharin in Bosnia and Herzegovina, expert Orhan Tahir in Belgium, Integro in Bulgaria, Slovo 21 and Life Together in Czechia, Amrita OBK association in Hungary, Pavee Point in Ireland, Voice of Roma Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo*, RROMA in North Macedonia, Nevo Parudimos in Romania, Roma Forum in Serbia, Roma Advocacy and Research Centre in Slovakia and Zero Discrimination association in Turkey as well as Roma and Traveller communities in all the respective countries.

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December 2020

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ERGO Network carried out this work in the framework of the project "Roma Included in Social Europe", funded by the EaSI Programme (all parts concerning EU Member States) and in the framework of the project "Romani Women Power of Change" (all parts concerning Western Balkans and Turkey) carried out as a partner of Roma Active Albania and funded by the European Union.



Co-funded by
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This publication has received funding from the European Union. The information contained in this publication reflects only the authors' view, and its contents not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union. The European Union is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.



Federal Foreign Office



This publication has received financial support from the Foreign Office of the Federal Republic of Germany.










* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.



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INTRODUCTION

Since the very beginning of the coronavirus pandemic in Europe, the European Roma Grassroots Organization (ERGO) has been receiving reports from member organisations about the negative effects of Covid-19 on Roma and Traveller¹ communities. As a result, in April 2020, ERGO published a newsletter with briefs on the situation of Roma and Traveller communities and the effects of the pandemic at national level and submitted several reports to EU institutions, based on the information received from the grassroots level.

Preliminary findings from members indicated that Roma were disproportionately affected by both the pandemic and the related measures associated with it across Member States, Enlargement and Neighbourhood Countries, aggravated by long-term systemic discrimination and antigypsyism.

Despite some positive responses regarding immediate measures taken by some governments and local authorities to assist vulnerable groups, including Roma and Travellers, increasing concerns from our members called for more consolidated data in order to better understand the situation of Roma and Travellers in the EU and Western Balkans and Turkey. The data is necessary to advocate for better institutional and political coordination and a focus on minimising the impact of the pandemic in its second and/or third wave on vulnerable communities including Roma and Travellers.

As a result, ERGO Network together with its members and partner organisations prepared a questionnaire to be used as part of national surveys in seven EU countries and six Western Balkan countries and Turkey. The results of this survey constitute the basis of this report.

¹ The reference to 'Roma', as an umbrella term, encompasses a wide range of different people of Romani origin such as: Roma, Sinti, Kale, Romanichels and Boyash/Rudari. It also encompasses groups such as Ashkali, Egyptians, Yenish, Dom, Lom, Rom and Abdal, as well as traveller populations, including ethnic Travellers or those designated under the administrative term gens du voyage and people who identify as Gypsies, Tsiganes or Tziganes, without denying their specificities.



KEY FINDINGS

The coronavirus pandemic has affected the daily life of Roma and Travellers living in marginalised communities and suffering from social exclusion and poverty. The data collected in this survey confirms that marginalized Roma and Travellers are amongst the most affected and impacted by Covid-19, mainly due to their devastating living conditions and exclusion,

triggered by widespread antigypsyism. As this study suggests, during the pandemic many Roma and Travellers living in poverty found it very hard to protect themselves from getting the virus because of lack of access to water and sanitation. This was even harder for those living in segregated and informal settlements and/or improvised shelters.

The data collected in this survey confirms that marginalized Roma and Travellers are amongst the most affected and impacted by Covid-19.



Access to basic needs

Throughout the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic, many Roma and Travellers had **limited food or medical supplies during confinement or quarantine, which increased their vulnerability to the pandemic**. In addition, most families were affected by a lack of internet, lack of gas, running water, garbage collection and electricity.

Access to education

With schools being closed and education being delivered either online or remotely, Roma and Traveller children have been particularly hard hit. Proper housing, an encouraging and supportive home environment, language assistance, internet access, possessing a laptop/PC as well as access to electricity represent the minimum conditions for all children to continue their formal education online. However, **most Roma children and their families (particularly those living in rural areas and in settlements) have limited or no access to internet, computers or tablets, and in some cases even electricity is not available**. Since lack of internet access and electronic devices is higher in regions where significant numbers of Roma reside, most Roma children cannot attend online classes, thus leading to long-term effects on their education. As the study shows, as a consequence a significant number of Roma and Traveller children were not able to pass specific classes or the entire school year as such.



Access to employment

In the area of employment, Roma and Travellers with lower incomes and insecure or informal employment experienced reductions in their income or unemployment due to lockdown and social distancing regulations. Many Roma working in the informal sector, e.g. those working the fields or for private owners as daily labourers, lost their sources of daily income. During the pandemic approx. 60% of the respondents in the Western Balkans and a staggering 73% in Turkey stopped income generating activities. Most of them were involved in informal employment activities or on daily contracts, etc.



Access to healthcare

Because of poor health and more chronic illnesses such as asthma or chronic bronchitis compared to the general population, Roma and Travellers can be more susceptible to COVID-19 and other serious complications in the long run. Without access to health insurance, the health and lives of their entire families are at high risk.

When it comes to **health insurance**, 42% of those interviewed did not have health insurance and half of them suffered from different health problems at the time of the survey: asthma, bronchitis, cancer, diabetes, heart problems, pneumonia etc, which could be considered risk factors to Covid-19. The majority of Roma and Travellers faced problems in accessing medications or/and protective gears, mainly due to their economic situation. During the pandemic, a significant number of respondents suffered from depression or anxiety.



Access to housing

According to the survey, many Roma and Travellers live in overcrowded spaces with up to 5 and more persons living in accommodation with 2 rooms to 3 rooms. 28% of respondents live in urban marginalised areas, while 13% live in a settlement (up to 36% in Serbia).

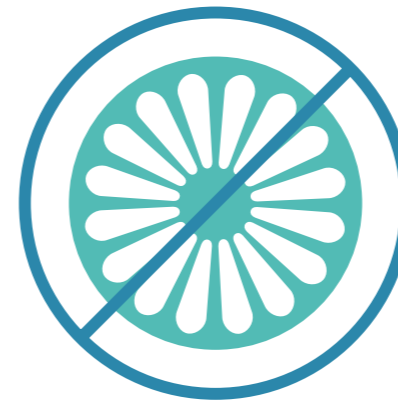
Roma and Travellers have difficulties in paying bills, fees and debts, including electricity, water bills, their private dept and bank loans, rent or mortgage, gas bills and school fees. Despite the moratorium in forced evictions in various Member States during the pandemic, some respondents in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania Slovakia, and some of the Western Balkan countries have responded that they have been evicted during the pandemic.



Migration

During the pandemic, a small number of Roma families were forced to migrate because of economic reasons, mostly intra-EU in the case of EU citizens and internally in the case of enlargement countries.

In the majority of cases, they were helped to adjust in the new place by NGOs or the municipality and in one case by the Red Cross.



Discrimination

During the pandemic Roma and Travellers have been stigmatised and scapegoated for spreading the coronavirus. Many reported that they felt discriminated against via internet and social media because they were Roma by the police, by medical staff, by civil servants, in shops, by the educational system, by neighbours, when using transportation or by employers. They expressed that they have experienced hate speech or offensive language, refusal of services by municipalities, discriminatory restrictions (in freedom of movement), lockdown, police violence or racist attacks. Reasons mentioned were because someone thought they had the coronavirus, often because of the colour or their skin or Roma origin and the misconception that Roma are spreading the virus. Most respondents who were victims of discrimination or personal crime did not report the victimization.

Gender aspects

During the pandemic, most Roma and Traveller women respondents felt safe at home, even though some of them experienced verbal or physical violence during the lockdown period.

Half of the female respondents have access to contraceptives and 22% use contraceptives. At the time of the interviews, 42 women were pregnant with moderate access to prenatal care.





RECOMMENDATIONS

Basic needs

- With the second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic, Roma and Traveller communities are experiencing an increased economic crisis that calls for a better humanitarian response across the region focusing on the most vulnerable groups, including marginalized Roma and Traveller communities, making sure they are reached in all Member States, Enlargement and Neighbourhood Countries.
- Consider subsidizing consumption costs for the most vulnerable and those who have lost incomes, or freezing payments until the end of the recovery plan period and prohibit the cancellation of basic utility services during the pandemic.
- EU recovery funding must reach the Roma and Travellers. Give guidelines to governments, including the National Roma Contact Points (NRCPs), and managing authorities to make sure allocations are made for the vulnerable and Roma especially.
- Include a special provision for Roma and Travellers when implementing European instruments for temporary support and other relevant funds at national level under the Corona response to mitigate the economic and social effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Define policy and funding centred around equity and ensuring that vulnerable groups, such as Roma and Travellers are not left behind particularly in times of crises.
- Use funds to support small Roma and Traveller NGOs involved in supportive activities during the pandemic.



Education

- Guarantee the right to education of Roma and Traveller children during and after the pandemic by elaborating sustainable, comprehensive national policies aiming to effectively reduce the educational gap between Roma and non-Roma, including ethnic segregation in schools. Such policies must provide an immediate response to current challenges faced by Roma and Traveller parents and children and school professionals in continuing formal education and may include affordable access to electricity and Internet and adequate equipment for providing and following online classes (PC, laptop, tablets), including TV devices for tele-school.
- Provide support to Roma and Traveller children who rely on schools for meals, e.g., through food vouchers.
- Ensure that EU emergency funds allocated for tackling Covid-19 specifically reflect the needs of Roma and Traveller children and other vulnerable children.
- Ensure that the current situation of physical distancing is not used for further discrimination against and stigmatization of Roma and Traveller students other vulnerable communities.
- Ensure that all children receive financial, social, pedagogical and psychological support during and after the pandemic to handle its effects on education and health regardless of children's school attendance.
- Pay particular attention to supporting vulnerable children, who are more likely to drop out of school and to experience a more severe drop in their academic achievement after prolonged school breaks.





Employment

- Governments should provide immediate financial support for lost employment and income and ensure that this is also available to Roma and Traveller workers.
- Authorities should urgently develop and implement economic measures during the crisis or provide financial aid to vulnerable groups working in the informal economy, such as market sellers, day labourers, etc.
- Set up specific provisions to ensure that income support is also accessible for vulnerable groups, such as those without the online or transport means to apply, those without a bank account, or those unable to read or write.
- Regularise informal work: make sure seasonal jobs, craftsmen, artists (singers) or small business entrepreneurs and self-employed persons are covered by employment contracts giving access to decent work rights.
- Ensure that previous debt does not limit access by Roma to social benefits rolled out as a response to the pandemic.

Health

- Ensure that Roma and Travellers in quarantine and poor settlements have access to food, medicine, hygiene products and health care, and that they are supported to comply with public health measures in a manner that respects their human rights.
- Ensure the adoption of adequate, timely intervention plans that can guarantee equal access to healthcare to Roma and Traveller people and vulnerable groups living in segregated settlements in case they test positive for Covid-19.
- Scale-up and reinforce the health mediators' scheme and introduce it where it does not yet exist.
- Adopt laws explicitly recognising the human right to water and sanitation and



- ensure that informal housing conditions do not prevent people from enjoying the right to safe drinking water and sanitation; adopt policies and allocate budgets for connecting Roma settlements to public drinking water and sewerage systems.
- Sanction all forms of discrimination by health professionals and exclusion from health care services considering the current pandemic situation; establish internal control systems to monitor the quality of health services for Roma,

- including emergency assistance, that would include racism audits of health institutions.
- Prioritise access to health insurance, medication, access to testing services, user-friendly public health information and ensure vaccination against Covid-19 reaches marginalised Roma and Traveller communities, including those who are not registered with national health insurance programs, who lack identity documents or are stateless.

Housing

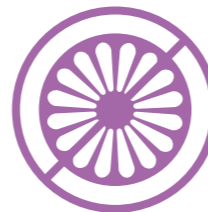
- Urgent measures must address the lack of water, adequate sanitation, electricity and needed infrastructure. This could be done by reconnecting families or settlements cut off from water or electricity supply or by the regular delivery of water by vehicle to the settlements.
- Find solutions to address inadequate, overcrowded housing conditions and lack of access to basic utilities. Poor housing conditions represent a systemic risk for the impacts of health crises, requiring a longer-term government response to build resilience.
- Enforce temporary suspension of mortgage payments and utility bills, and suspension of forced closing of utility services for families at risk during the crisis period.
- Ensure temporary housing for the homeless.
- Guarantee a moratorium (cancellation) on all (forced) evictions during the pandemic and confinement measures. Find temporary alternative accommodation for those already evicted.
- Prioritize investing in housing infrastructure development, decent and adequate housing and legalisation of informal settlements. This would protect Roma from being at risk from hazards and pandemics and be an opportunity to invest in green, sustainable community designs.





Migration

- Governments should include consistently and systematically migrant workers as a target population in their COVID-19 responses, with particular attention to the needs of women migrant workers, including increased risks of violence in lockdown and in quarantine.
- Even in case of a pandemic, a migrant worker whose employment contract was terminated because of Covid-19 conditions, should be entitled, on the same terms as national workers, to reinstatement, to compensation for loss of wages or of other payment, or to access to a new job with a right to indemnification. If he is not reinstated, he should be allowed sufficient time to find alternative employment.
- A migrant who has lost his employment due to Covid-19 should be allowed sufficient time to find alternative employment, at least for a period corresponding to that during which he may be entitled to unemployment benefit; the authorisation of residence should be extended accordingly.
- Provide all migrant workers with access to legal remedies for unfair treatment. All migrant workers, including those who may have become undocumented or in irregular status, should have access to legal remedies for unfair treatment, including related to reduced or non-payment of wages, denial of other entitlements and workplace discrimination, and have access to legal advice and language interpretation services where necessary.
- Extend access to health services and social protection coverage to migrant workers, to ensure social insurance and universality of coverage and solidarity in financing. Sickness-related benefits can help to protect both migrant workers and their communities.



Non-discrimination

- A priority should be to monitor and assess the socio-economic impact of the pandemic on the Roma community during the pandemic itself together with CSOs. This would require collecting disaggregated data (according to gender, age and vulnerability) to ensure viable, effective post-pandemic policy design.
- Special attention should be paid to the possibility of a growing gap between the Roma communities and society in general.
- Ensure that Roma and Travellers are safe from racist violence and intimidation and prevent racist decisions to set-up police checkpoints and walls tar-

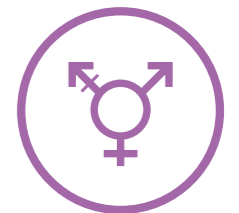
getting Roma settlements to supposedly control lockdown measures.

- Rigorously investigate incidents of police abuse against Roma and Travellers to ensure there is no impunity for introducing and/or implementing repressive, violent measures against individuals or communities, as well as for inducing fear and intimidation.

Gender aspects

- Consider the gender dimensions of the Covid-19 pandemic in terms of care duties, safety and healthcare in the long-term management of the disease and its impact.
- Implement solutions that can mitigate risks to women's economic security, health, and safety, both during and beyond the crisis in the public and private sector.
- Incorporate a gender-based violence analysis into government and global health institutions' responses to COVID-19, including in public policy, economic, and health solutions.
- Integrate domestic violence prevention messaging into COVID-19 prevention materials for health care providers, humanitarian aid and outreach workers.
- Fund services that are tailored to meet the needs of all persons vulnerable to

- Monitor and sanction the dissemination of misinformation, hate speech and the scapegoating and targeting of Roma and Travellers by the media, politicians or public figures.
- Immediate steps should be taken to resolve the issues of lack of identity documents, lack of legal status, or renewal of identity documents in order to ensure access to rights and services.



domestic violence; fund local organizations responding to domestic violence, including groups adapting their programming to address rising violence in the context of COVID-19.

- Maintain all essential elements of reproductive care (antenatal and postnatal care) so that women and new-borns have access to skilled care at all times, including referral for the management of complications and for auxiliary services, such as laboratory, blood banks and timely and safe transport to health facilities. Essential commodities and supplies should be available for pregnancy, childbirth and postnatal care services, including new-born care.
- Women's reproductive health and rights must be safeguarded during the pandemic; related services and supplies must continue to be delivered and the vulnerable must be protected and supported.



METHODOLOGY

In August and September 2020, ERGO Network members conducted face-to-face and online/telephone surveys in seven EU Member States and, together with Roma Active Albania, in six enlargement countries.

A list of 65 entries of open, closed and multiple questions was prepared for respondents in the European Union countries and a similar list for the Western Balkans, where an additional 4 questions were added² at the request of ERGO members conducting the survey, as to better reflect the realities of Roma in the Western Balkans and Turkey.

In the EU the survey was conducted by ERGO members in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Slovakia and Romania, by a partner NGO in Hungary and an expert in Belgium³

in the framework of the DG EMPL funded work programme **Roma Included in Social Europe**. In the Western Balkans, the survey was conducted with the support of Roma Active Albania with ERGO members from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, Kosovo and Turkey⁴ in the framework of the project **Romani women, power of change in the Western Balkans and Turkey**, funded by the European Union.

The surveys were conducted under challenging conditions due to sanitary concerns, limited access to Roma communities and respondents, and time pressure. To support the process, online surveys enabled the operators to enter information from the respondents directly into the online form and thus avoid direct contact and to facilitate data processing and



photo credits:
Integro Association, Bulgaria

analysis. However, this approach resulted in some errors in the data completed – i.e. follow-up questions that targeted specific respondents were not answered just by the targeted respondents etc. While some of these errors were expected, it is important to point out that the survey does not claim nor aimed to be representative. The aim was to provide an insight into real situations of numerous Roma individuals and families.

A total of 1352 persons, 700 women and 649 men and 3 with another declared gender, have been interviewed. From the persons interviewed, 725 persons were from

the EU countries (with 383 women and 342 men) in Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Romania, Slovakia and 627 persons from the Western Balkans (317 women and 307 men) in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Northern Macedonia, Kosovo, Serbia and Turkey.

The age of respondents from the EU was medium in the majority of cases, with a small representation of students and with 3% of persons over 65 years of age. A very similar population answered the questionnaires in the Western Balkans, with a slightly bigger number of respondents over 65 years of age (5%).

² The four extra questions regarded civic registration status, health insurance, online learning and type of housing

³ In the EU, the survey was conducted by expert Orhan Tahir in Belgium, Integro association in Bulgaria, Slovo 21 and Life Together in Czechia, Amrita OBK association in Hungary, Pavee Point in Ireland, Nevo Parudimos in Romania and Roma Advocacy and Research Centre in Slovakia.

⁴ The partners in the Western Balkans and Turkey included Roma Active Albania, Otaharin in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Voice of Roma Ashkali and Egyptians in Kosovo, RROMA in North Macedonia, Roma Forum in Serbia and Zero Discrimination association in Turkey.



FINDINGS

ACCESS TO BASIC NEEDS

The European Union Fundamental Rights Agency reported that 80% of Roma in nine EU Member States surveyed in 2016 and 72 % of Roma and Travellers in the six EU Member States surveyed in 2019 were at-risk-of-poverty, with 92% of Roma surveyed in 2016 indicating that they face some difficulties in making ends meet.⁵ Every fourth Roma (27%) lives in a household where someone went to bed hungry in the last month. Across the EU, 30% of Roma households live without any access to tap water, making it very difficult to frequently wash hands, which is one of the ways to prevent infection with COVID-19. In addition, 46% have no indoor

toilet, shower or bathroom. One in ten Roma live in housing without electricity.⁶ Every fourth Roma and Traveller in five countries does not have a bank account, a percentage much higher than in the general population.⁷ Around a fifth of caravan dwellers in Belgium, and Gypsies and Travellers in the United Kingdom, do not have access to tap water or electricity at halting sites, while lack of access to public services such as public transport or post is notably high in France.⁸ Roma women in several countries have worse living conditions than men.

⁵ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey - Roma, 2017 https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings_en.pdf (hereinafter EU FRA 2017)

⁶ EU FRA 2017

⁷ EU FRA 2017

⁸ European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Roma and Travellers in Six Countries, 2020 - https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-roma-travellers-six-countries_en.pdf (hereinafter EU FRA 2020)

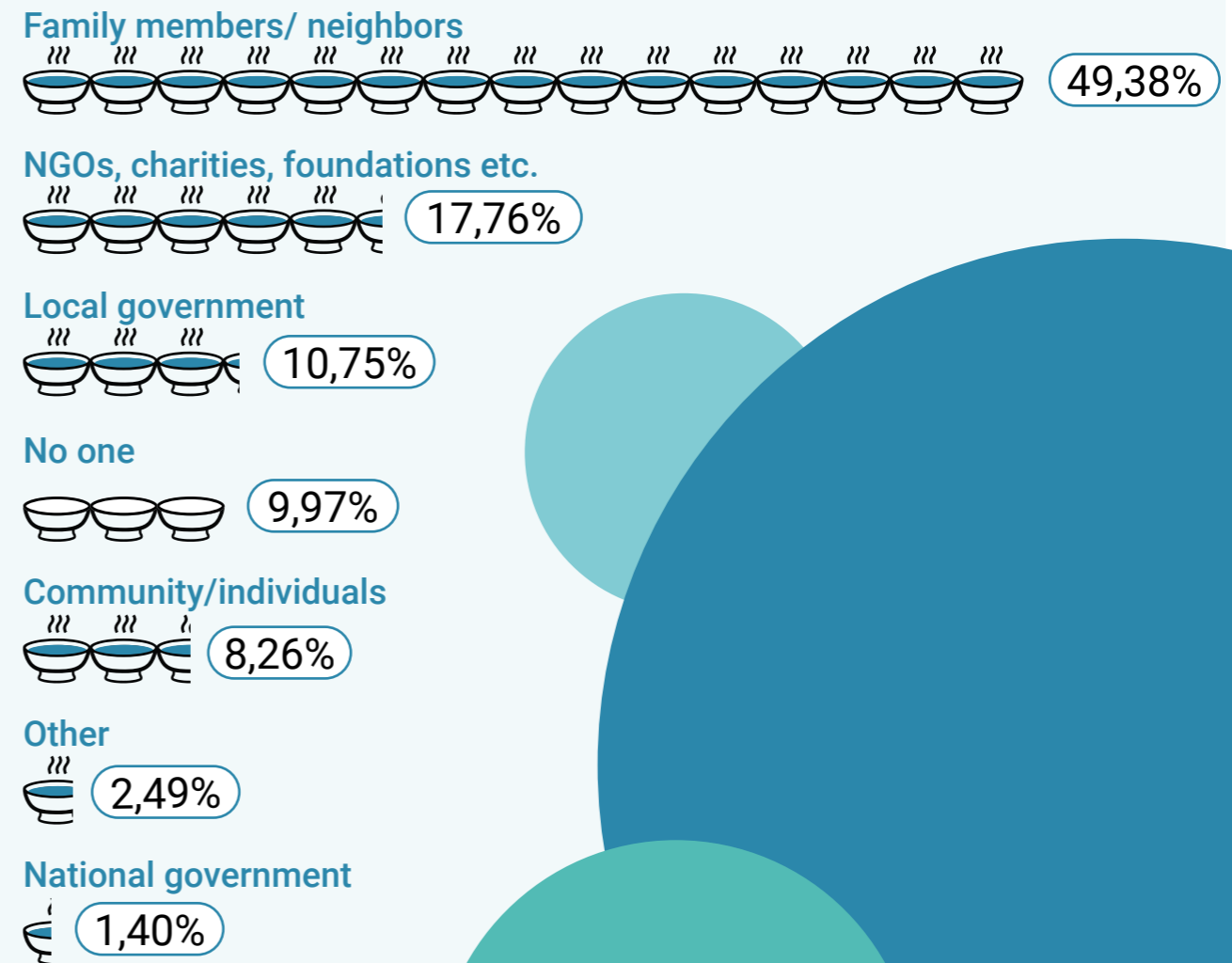
European Union

Across European Union countries, 28.57% of respondents to the ERGO survey faced difficulties with **securing food during the pandemic**. Bulgaria and Hungary were among the countries where respondents suffered most, with 79% and 54% respectively, followed by the Czech Republic with 35.5%.

Respondents reported that in general authorities did not provide them with masks, disinfectants, or food while in lockdown or confinement. In most cases

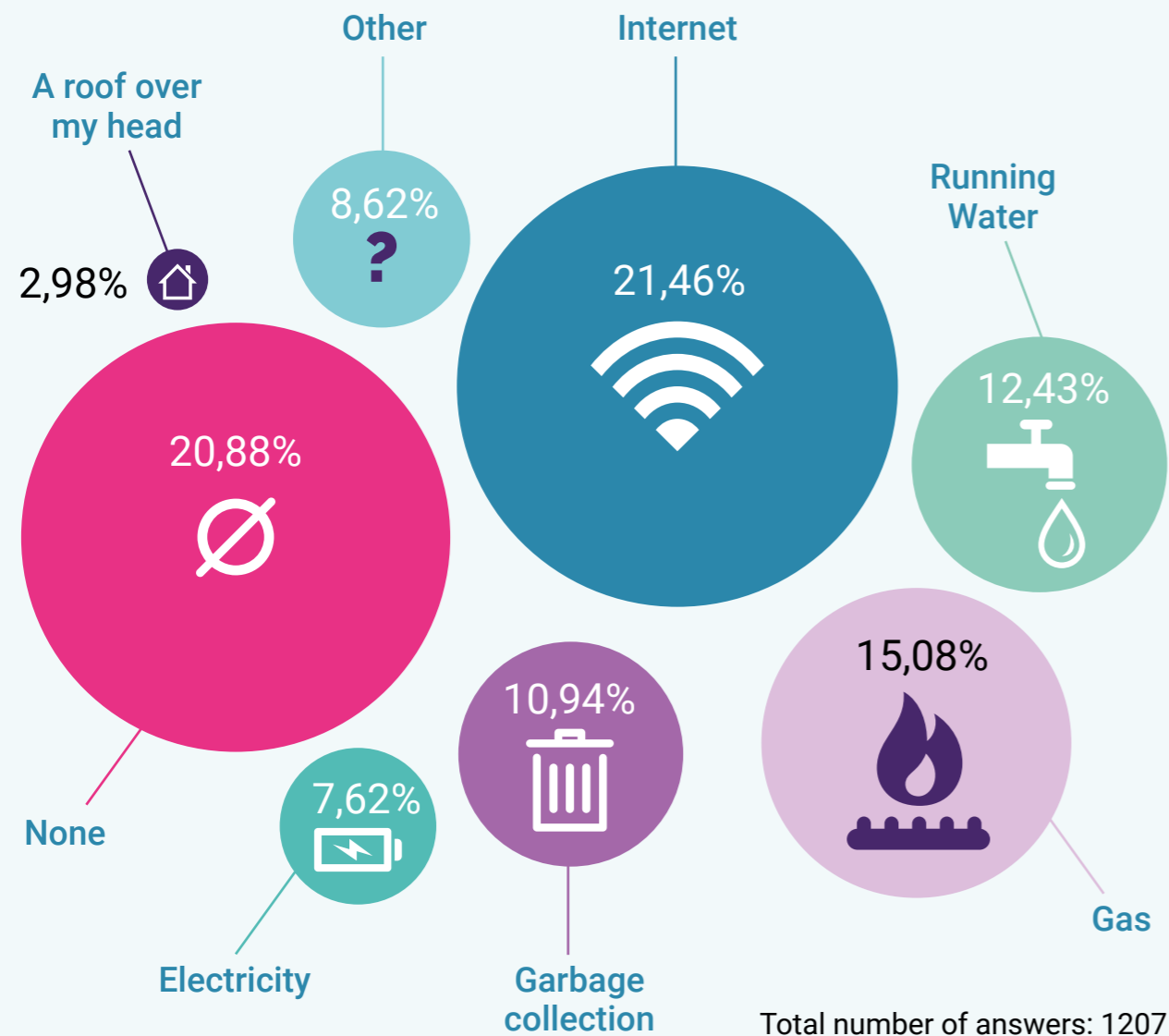
(50%) family members stepped in and helped with regular food provisions, followed by NGOs and charities (18%). Only in 10% of cases local governments helped. Belgian respondents answered that they have received no regular help from either the local municipalities or the government. One person responded receiving help from local municipalities in the case of both Ireland and the Czech Republic, and 3 respondents in the case of Bulgaria.

Graph no.1 Sources of support - During the emergency period, have you been helped on a regular basis with food by:



Total number of answers: 642

Graph no. 2 Access to services - Which of the following services do you lack? (multiple answers are possible)



Most families were affected by a **lack of internet**, followed by a lack of gas (15%), running water (12%), garbage collection (11%) and electricity (8%).

In the case of Bulgaria, 61% answered that they lacked internet access, 58% lacked access to running water, 54% access to garbage collection, 40% to electricity, 19%

lack access to gas and 8% a roof over their heads. Similar dramatic answers were registered in Slovakia, were 76% lack access to gas, 74% lack access to internet, 39% lack access to garbage collection, 21% lack access to running water, 8% to electricity and 2% a roof over their head. In addition, 59% lack access to other utilities that were not included on the list.

Western Balkans

In the Western Balkans 34,5% of respondents have had difficulty securing food since the pandemic started because they were unemployed or had problems receiving their salaries on time. Among them, Turkey registered 41% of cases where Roma respondents faced difficulties in securing food for their families.

During the pandemic, most respondents were helped by family members or NGOs on a regular basis and less by local municipalities of the government. Most families lack internet access (20%), followed by gas (approx. 14%), garbage collection (approx. 10%), running water (approx. 9%), electricity (8%) or a roof over their hands (7%). On a country level, Turkey had a higher score for the lack of access to gas (55%).

Serbian "Cukaricka suma" settlement before the European Court of Human Rights

The informal settlement of „Cukaricka suma“ in Belgrade is home to 70 Roma families who have been left to fend for themselves since 1999, when they migrated from Kosovo, without basic living conditions - without water, electricity and organized garbage collection. In the situation of the coronavirus pandemic, when all citizens are urged to intensify hygiene to slow down the spread of the infection and protect themselves and their families, several hundred people who live there did not have a chance to do so. After several attempts by the CSO - A11 Initiative to animate the Government of the Republic of Serbia to take urgent measures to protect the most vulnerable and when there were no other ways to draw attention to the problems of these people, the A11 Initiative filed a request for an interim measure of the European Court of Human Rights. The European Court acted on this request immediately and initiated proceedings against Serbia, which clearly confirmed that the situation in this settlement and the lack of reaction of the authorities represent a serious and real risk and degrading treatment of Roma from this settlement and violation of their human rights. At the end, The European Court of Human Rights has given up on imposing a temporary measure against the Republic of Serbia. Based on the decision of the Court and the statement of the Republic of Serbia, Initiative A11 again addressed the local authorities and requested urgent humanitarian support, water supply and measures to combat the coronavirus in the informal Roma settlement "Cukaricka suma". Local authorities eventually delivered cisterns with water that can be used for drinking and hygiene, as well as food and hygiene packages provided by the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs and the Red Cross.



EDUCATION

According to the Fundamental Rights Agency, only 53% of Roma children attend early childhood education. 63% of Roma aged 16-24 are not employed, in education or training⁹. Only 18% of Roma completed higher secondary education or higher; one in three Roma children attends classes where most classmates are Roma¹⁰. Only 39% of non-Roma would feel comfortable if their children had Roma classmates¹¹. Two thirds of Roma and Travellers aged 18-24 years leave school early with at most only lower secondary education. The figure for Roma and Travellers aged 30-34 years achieving tertiary education in 2019 is close to zero.

Roma children are not provided, from a very early age, with the same learning opportunities, as the vicious circles of poverty and discrimination act as powerful barriers in accessing education and training. Subsequently, they have lower attendance and completion rates, which in turn lead to poor labour market integration and social participation. Additionally, segregated education where Roma are over-represented is not only against EU values and principles, but also fuels inequalities and discrimination. EAPN reported¹² that Travellers and Roma experienced high levels of educational disadvantage during the Covid-19 pandemic and associated

9 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Second European Union Minorities and Discrimination Survey - Roma, 2017: https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2016-eu-minorities-survey-roma-selected-findings_en.pdf (hereinafter EU FRA 2017)

10 European Commission, Report on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies – 2019 https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/swd2019-320-final_report_on_the_implementation_of_national_roma_integration_strategies_en.pdf (hereinafter EC NRIS 2019)

11 European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Roma and Travellers in Six Countries, 2020 https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-roma-travellers-six-countries_en.pdf

12 EAPN report 2020

lockdown measures. Many Roma students found themselves unable to access online education due to absent infrastructure and equipment. Home schooling meant less support from teachers and school assistants that could not be replaced by parents,

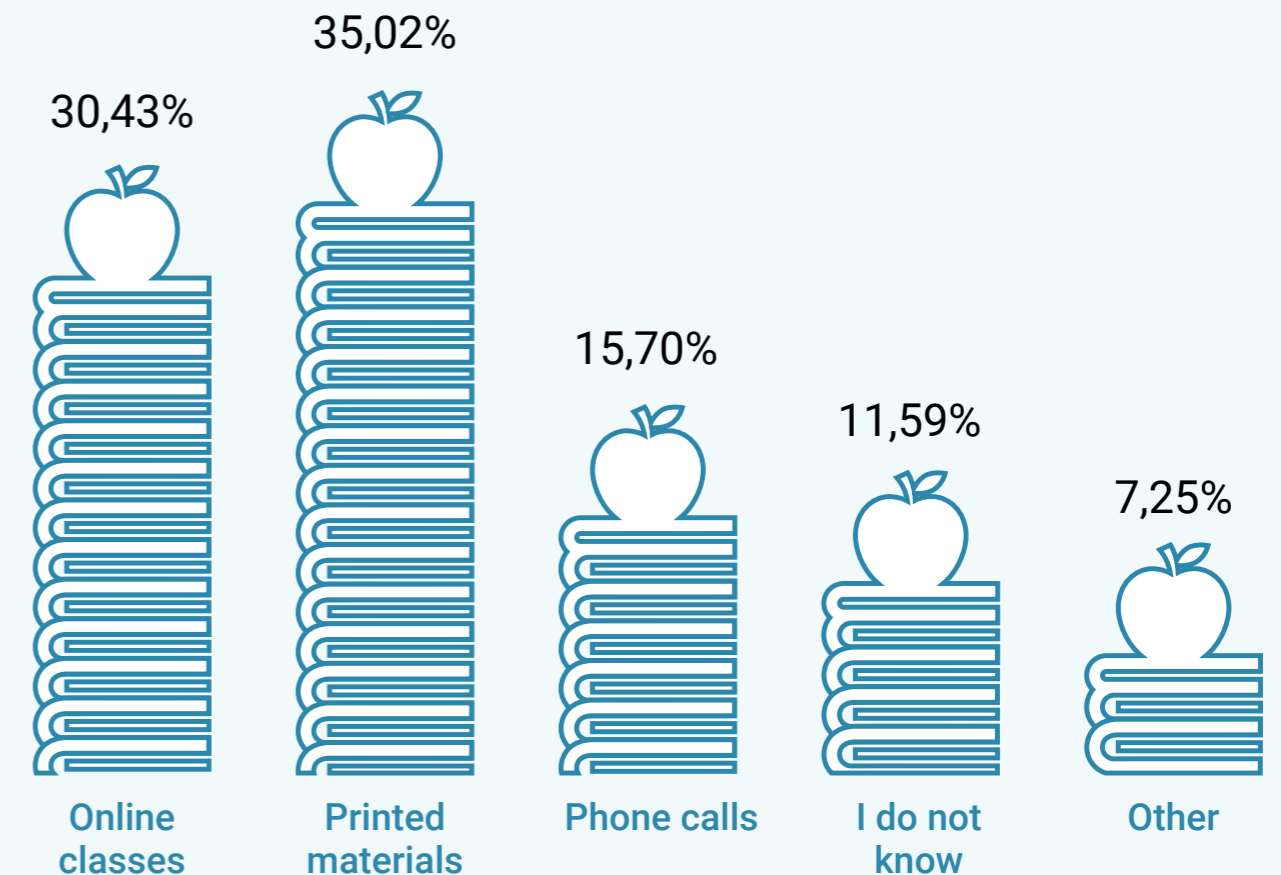
many of whom have a low education and sometimes are illiterate. Moreover, the closure of schools also deprived Roma children in some countries of free daily meals, thus creating an additional burden on their families' strained budgets.

European Union

42.5% of children were included in the school process during the pandemic state of emergency. For those attending school,

30% had to follow online classes, while also/or use printed materials (35% of cases) and or follow tasks by phone (16%).

Graph no. 3 Teaching methods - Which methods has the school used during the COVID-19 crisis? (multiple answers possible)

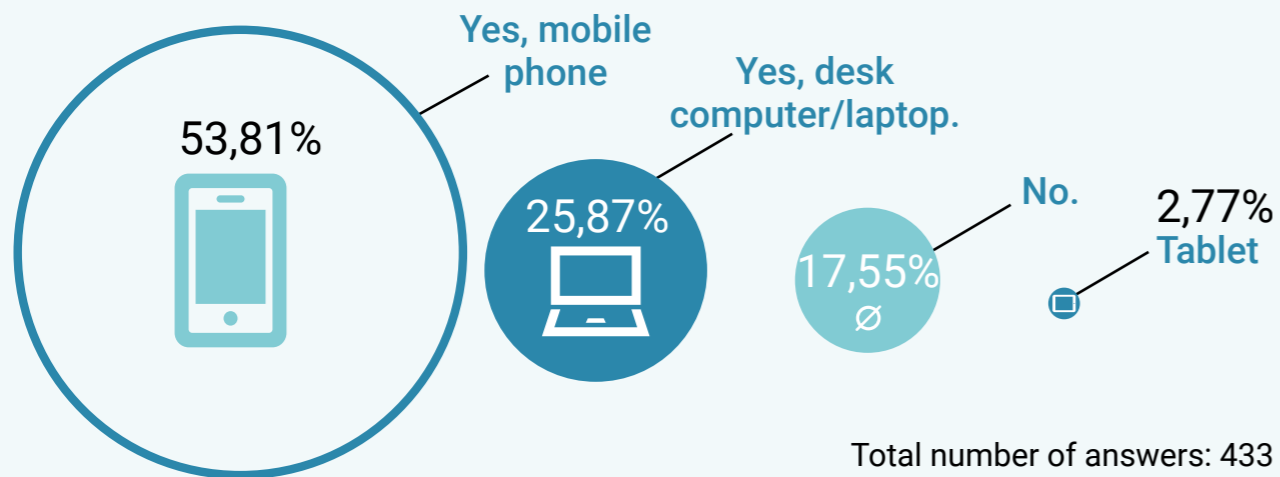


Total number of answers: 414

Only approx. 26% had access to a computer or a laptop and approx. 3% to a tablet. Approx. 54 % had a mobile phone. In

Bulgaria, only 5% had access to a laptop or desktop computer and in Slovakia only 7%.

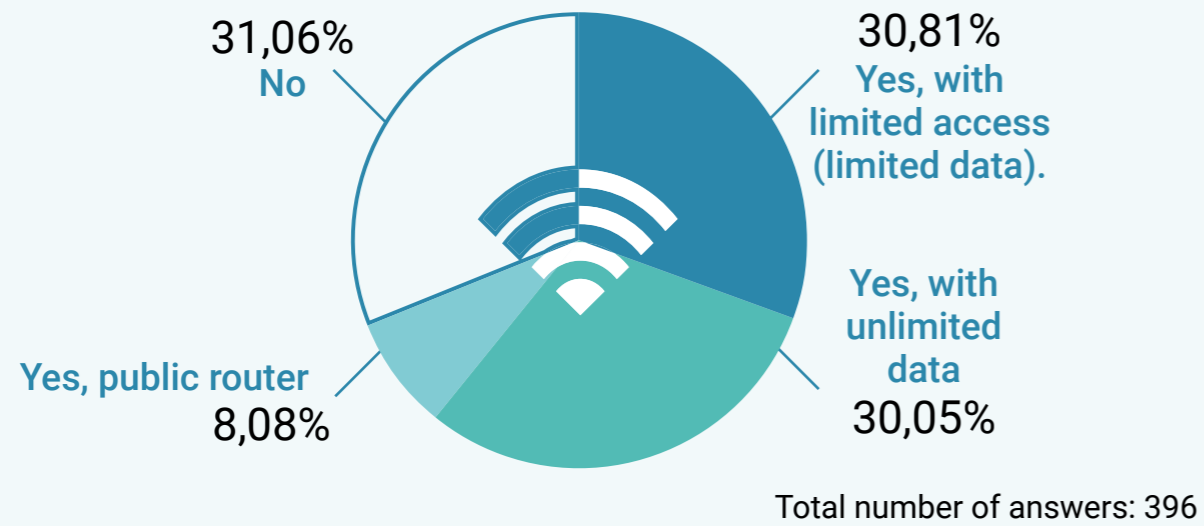
Graph no. 4 Access to devices - Do you have access to any digital devices? which one?



Among 396 respondents to this question, 31% of students did not have internet access at home, while 30% had limited internet data. 80% of Roma students

in Slovakia, 58% of Roma students in Bulgaria, 33% of Roma students in the Czech Republic and 22% in Ireland do not have access to internet.

Graph no. 5 Internet access - Do you have internet access at home?



NGOs (21%) and local municipalities (15%) helped in part to facilitate online learning. Help with homework and tasks was mostly provided by family members (approx. 33%), followed by the school (17%) and social workers, volunteers or NGOs (10%).

During the pandemic, approx. 29% of Roma students have had additional problems and challenges. Among them, 14% did not pass specific courses because of the lack of online access, 2% did not pass the school year because they got sick and approx. 5% did not pass the school year because of a conflict with a teacher or the school.

Western Balkans

According to the respondents, 42% of children were included in the school process during the pandemic state of emergency. For those attending school, approx. 55% had to follow online classes, while also/ or use printed materials (approx. 10% of cases) and or follow tasks by phone (17%). 5% of students did not adapt to the school changes. In Kosovo and Serbia, 90% of respondents had to follow online classes, in Turkey 29%.

Overall, only approx. 31% have access to a desktop or laptop and approx. 8% to a tablet, 56% to a mobile phone and approx. 5% do not have any digital device. In Kosovo, 35% of respondents have access to a laptop or desktop computer, in North Macedonia 31%, in Serbia 28%, in Albania 18,5%, in Turkey only 15% and in Bosnia and Herzegovina 6%.

Only approx. 35% of students have unlimited access to internet, approx. 41% have limited data access, and 17% have no

10% of Roma students in Bulgaria, 6% in Hungary, 4% in Ireland, 3% in Romania and 1% in the Czech Republic did not pass the school year.

access to internet. In Albania, approx. 27% of respondents have unlimited internet data, while 14% of respondents have limited internet access. In Bosnia and Herzegovina 26% of respondents have limited internet data and only 3,5% unlimited internet data. In North Macedonia, 22% of respondents had limited data access and 39,5% respondents unlimited data access. In Serbia, 58% of respondents have no access to internet, and in Turkey 36%. In Kosovo, 74% of respondents had limited internet data and 21% unlimited internet data.

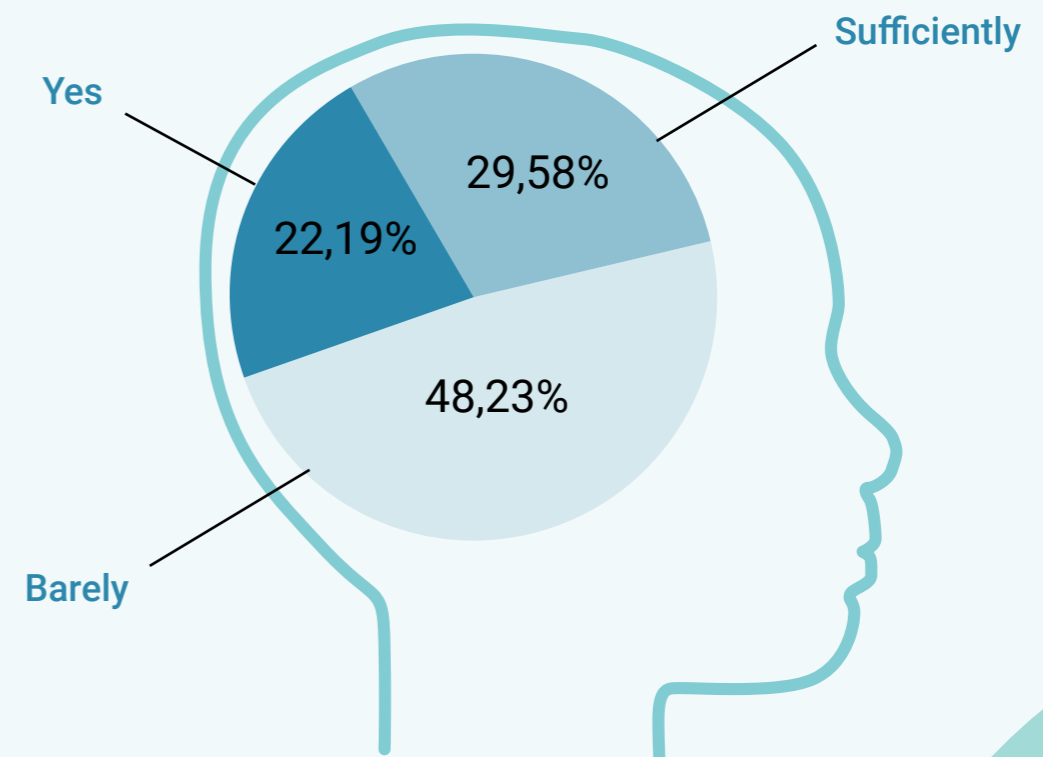
38% of students have no regular support for doing their school tasks and homework; 20% have support from a family member, 19% from social workers, school assistants or volunteers and only 22% from school.

13% of students did not pass the school year, 38% did not pass specific courses because of lack of online access and

approx. 11% did not pass the year because of a conflict with a teacher/school. Access to online courses was facilitated by NGOs in approx. 49% of cases, by the government in 18% and by local municipalities in 13% of the cases. Regarding

country-based data, in Albania, approx. 9% of respondents did not pass the school year, in Kosovo 5%, in Turkey 3% and in Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia 2%.

Graph No 6: Satisfaction with online classes - Did the online classes satisfied the learning needs of you/your children? Were the online classes elaborated in an effective way for you/the children to easily achieve the learning objectives?



Total number of answers: 311



EMPLOYMENT



According to FRA¹³:

- 43% of Roma aged 20-64% were in paid work (34% of men and 16% of women), at the time of the interviews.
- 63% of Roma aged 16-24 were not employed, in education or in training (55% of young Roma men and 72% of young Roma women).
- Only 1 in 4 Roma aged 16 years or older reports 'employed' or 'self-employed' as their main activity at the time of the survey.
- 40% of Roma reported feeling discriminated when looking for work.

13 EU FRA 2017

Photo credits:

Vzajemne souziti, Czech Republic

The low employment rates among Roma are likely to decrease further during the Coronavirus crisis. As highlighted by the European Commission in its **Overview of the impact of coronavirus measures on marginalised Roma communities in the EU**, "the social measures applied by MS refer only to people who lost formal and regular jobs. However, their livelihoods depend on daily or occasional work in the informal sector (seasonal jobs, unregulated contracts), hence they are the first to remain without jobs and unable to access unemployment benefits. This reality has also led to waves of Roma working in other MS as EU mobile workers returning to their home countries, where they face insecurity, online and offline hate comments and scapegoating."¹⁴

During the Coronavirus outbreak, many Roma working in the informal sector have lost their jobs and those working in

Western European countries returned to their homes mainly in Romania, Bulgaria, and Slovakia, many in segregated and very poor settlements and communities. Their return stirred biased comments and hateful reactions from non-Roma, including the media, politicians and local authorities, accusing Roma of spreading of the virus because of their poor living conditions and social marginalization, and thus blaming them for their misfortunate fate moulded by discrimination and institutional racism.

According to the 2020 report of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)¹⁵, almost 44% of Roma men and 27% Roma women usually obtain their income through street sales, either in open-air markets or on foot. Mandatory quarantine makes it impossible for large numbers of these families to earn a living." Others work in public communal services and were exposed to health risks.

European Union

At the time of the interviews, approx. 38% of respondents were employed and 29% were unemployed, 16% on social benefits, 5% pensioners and 4% students. 4% were either retired, on maternity or parental leave.

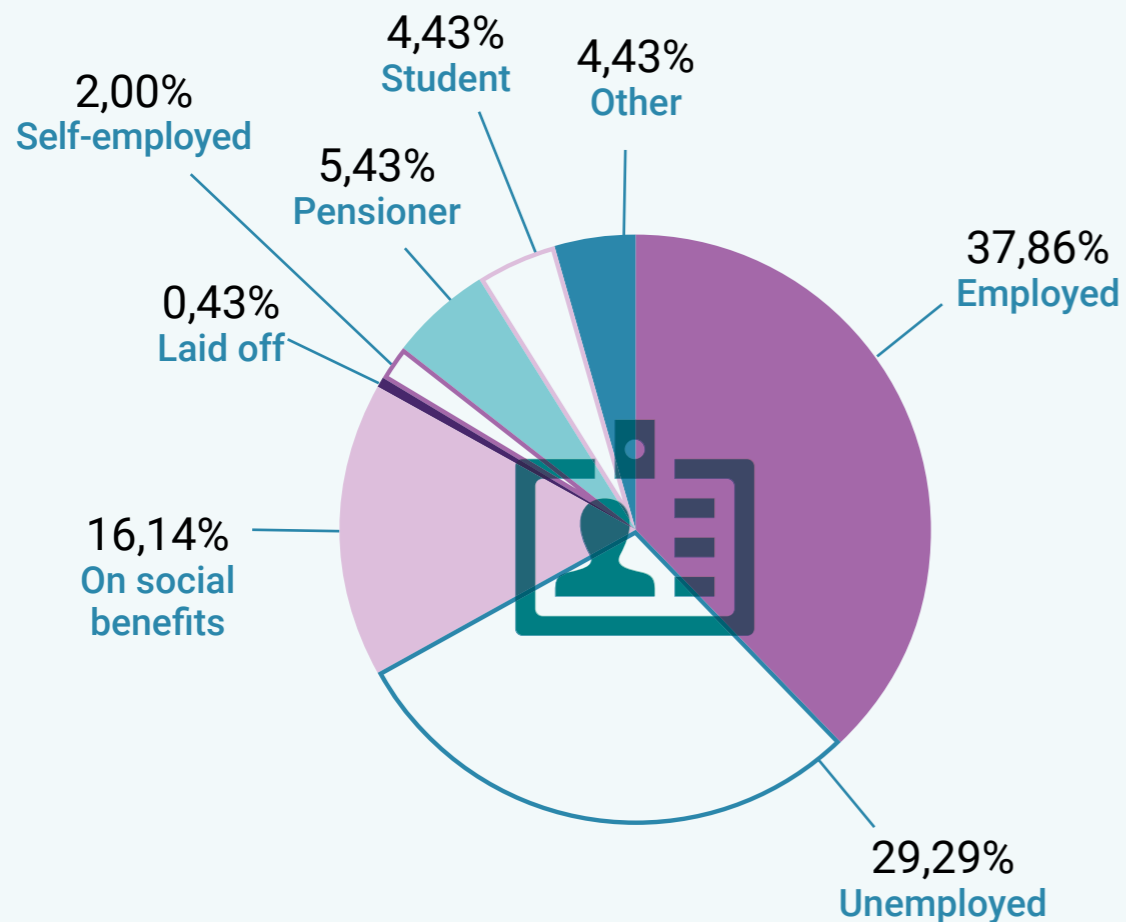
On a country level, in Bulgaria 18% of respondents were employed and 54% were unemployed at the time of the interviews, in Ireland 43% were employed and 37% were unemployed, in Hungary 45%

were employed and 30% unemployed, in Romania 39% were employed and 28% unemployed, in Slovakia 18% were employed and 26% unemployed, in the Czech Republic 35% were employed and 21.5 % unemployed and in Belgium 66% were employed and 9% unemployed. In addition, in Slovakia, 37% of respondents were on social benefits and in the Czech Republic 25% - the highest among respondents.

14 overview of the impact of coronavirus measures on the marginalised Roma communities in the EU: [overview_of_covid19_and_roma_-_impact_-_measures_-_priorities_for_funding_-_23_04_2020.docx.pdf](#) (europa.eu)

15 [EAPN-EAPN_REPORT_IMPACT_COVID19_Annex-1-4552.pdf](#)

Graph no. 7 Employment status - What is your employment status?



Total number of answers: 700

During emergency measures, 12% of respondents had to stop income generating activities (25% in Bulgaria, 20% in Romania and 17% in Hungary), mostly because they were involved in informal employment activities or on daily contracts, such as being a musician, hotel maid, in constructions, a taxi driver or being in their probation period etc.

18% of those employed were working as essential workers, with the biggest

representation in Hungary at 27%, Ireland 22% and Romania 20%. Only 7% were teleworking.

5% of respondents lost their jobs because of Covid-19, e.g. because of the borders being closed, companies closing or being fired.

Only 5% of respondents declared that they were included in a state income compensation scheme during the state of emergency.



Photo credits:
Integro Association, Bulgaria

Western Balkans

41% of respondents were unemployed at the time of the interviews, approx. 31% employed, 7,5% on social benefits, 8,5% students, 6% pensioners and approx. 8% self-employed. At country level, 39,5% of respondents were employed or self-employed and 19% were unemployed in Albania, approx. 10% were employed and approx. 58% were unemployed in Bosnia and Herzegovina. 57% of respondents were employed while 17,5% of respondents were unemployed in North Macedonia, 20% were employed and 57% were unemployed in Kosovo. In Serbia 31% were employed and 33% unemployed and in Turkey 27% were employed and 57% were unemployed.

During emergency measures, 59% of respondents stopped income generating activities. 15,5% of respondents were working as an essential worker (medical staff, social worker, food chain supplier, supermarket employee, cleaners etc.). In Albania, approx. 30% of respondents had to stop their income generating activities, in Turkey the percentage lies at 73%, in Bosnia and Herzegovina at 26%, in North Macedonia at 17%, in Serbia at 62% of respondents and in Kosovo at 46%.

Only approx. 12% of respondents overall were teleworking, while only one person was teleworking in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, 8% in Turkey, approx 9% in Albania, approx 16% in North Macedonia and 19% in Kosovo.

Belgium - Discrimination in employment of a Roma woman from Bulgaria

S. A. is a young Romani woman from Bulgaria who lives in Belgium since 2017. She has a University degree in a technical subject from Bulgaria. In 2019 she completed a 6-months professional course, which helped her find a job in an industrial company in Antwerp. At the beginning of March, she showed flu-like symptoms and was placed on sick leave. As her condition worsened, she sought emergency medical care twice within a month. However, she was not tested for COVID-19 and doctors refused to admit her to the hospital. She was given a medical document stating that she was suspected of having COVID-19, though she has never been tested.

When S.A. sent that document to her employer, she was told that she would be attached to another team within her department due to the reduced workload. At the end of the quarantine, S.A. felt better and was supposed to return to her job.

Before coming back to work in April, S.A. learned that her new team leader, a Bulgarian emigrant of Bulgarian ethnic origin, refused to accept her in his team. His formal reason was that S.A. might still be sick. According to S.A., her Bulgarian colleague knew that she was of Romani background and that this was the real reason for not accepting her. In her words, he had demonstrated a negative attitude towards her prior to the pandemic.

S.A. believes that she was subjected to double discrimination at her workplace: for being Roma and for being sick of an illness that was never diagnosed. But she was also aware that if she raised this issue publicly, she might lose her job because she was new in the company, unlike her Bulgarian team leader. That is why she decided to talk to him personally without involving the Belgian managers of the company. After the conversation, S.A. had the impression that the question had been settled, so she started working with the new team leader. However, only a month later, in May 2020, she was given a notice of contract termination due to economic reasons.

S.A. has been unemployed since June 2020. She is very worried that she still cannot find another job. Her husband is unemployed, too and they have a little child.

Serbia - Suspension of social assistance

A.M. is a single mother living in a poor Belgrade settlement with two daughters of school and preschool age. In recent years, she has been living on social assistance (70 € per month) and occasionally sells items found in garbage containers on an open market. She is in poor health and a recent surgery prevents her from doing hard work. A.M. is almost illiterate and never went to school. The older daughter is enrolled in the last grade of primary school, but at risk of drop-out because she rarely attends classes since the beginning of the school year. The school administration proposed that she finishes the second semester in a special school for children with learning difficulties. The five-year-old daughter was enrolled in kindergarten before the state of emergency was implemented in Serbia.

Social assistance was stopped for A.M. just before the introduction of the state of emergency. She was not informed about the reason for termination and while she was trying to receive information from the Centre for Social Work, public institutions in Serbia closed their doors to citizens, telling her to wait for the end of the state of emergency. During the state of emergency, she and her children were hungry, without any income and without the opportunity to work, as open markets were closed. No one offered them help nor did she know who to turn to for help. The daughters did not go to kindergarten or school, and no one contacted them to explain their rights or offer additional support. Neighbours provided some food. She mostly did not think about safety measures to protect themselves from the virus. She could not go for the necessary check-ups after her recent surgery or take her child with asthma for an examination. The first day after the end of the state of emergency, she went to the Centre for Social Work, where she was given the explanation that her social assistance was terminated because she was able to do cleaning work and her preschool child went to kindergarten, but she was never offered any job by the NES. The decision ignored her health condition and the level of her education limiting her opportunities for employment. Her appeal was rejected, because the deadline for appealing had expired during the state of emergency, when the doors of the Centre for Social Work were closed for beneficiaries. As a result of the denial of the right to social assistance, her younger daughter had to be expelled from the pre-school programme that was connected to the assistance. Now, at the end of September 2020, A.M. is still not entitled to any benefits and still waiting for a response to her repeated complaint. Without any income, damaged health, without any support from the authorities, worried about the prospects for her children, she depends only on the solidarity of neighbours and other citizens.



MIGRATION

During the pandemic, many Roma working in Western Europe were forced to return to their homes mainly in Romania, Bulgaria and Slovakia, many in segregated and very poor settlements and communities. Upon their return, they faced increasing challenges in finding another source of income

and provide for their families. Those who returned back to work in Western European countries or were already there at the start and during the pandemic faced challenges in keeping their jobs, some alleging being fired because of being Roma.



European Union

During the pandemic, 16 families (2%) of those being surveyed have been forced to migrate because of economic reasons, 4% from Bulgaria to Belgium, 4% from Bulgaria to Germany, 2% from the Czech Republic to England, 2% from Romania and 1% from Ireland to another EU country.

In the majority of cases, they were helped by NGOs or the municipality and in one case by the Red Cross to settle in the new place of living.

Slovakia - Losing income

Jan is 45 years old. He lives with his wife and three children in a rented apartment in Skalica, at the border of the Czech Republic with Austria. Jan finished only basic education. His wife works as a cleaner in a hospital. He does not receive any state support and pays for his health insurance as a voluntarily unemployed person. Because of his low education, Jan cannot find a well-paid job in Slovakia. Thus, he has been working in Austria for several years as an auxiliary worker without an employment contract. He earns about 1,500 € net per month, while his wife earns about 400 € net a month. With the pandemic, Slovakia closed its borders and Jan lost his job because he could not travel anymore. If he had crossed the border, he would have had to remain in a fourteen-day quarantine after returning to the Slovak Republic, which would not have been accepted by his employer. Jan and his wife found themselves dependent on only one income, which was just enough to pay for basic things such as rent, electricity and basic food. John became depressed, which led to tensions in the family. Although the government has implemented several compensatory measures, people like Jan, who worked informally abroad, were left out. Still, John's family was lucky because his wife was able to keep her job as a front-line worker.

Western Balkans

A small number of Roma families (1%) were forced to migrate mainly internally during the pandemic because of economic

reasons. In the majority of the cases, they have been helped by the Red Cross.



HEALTH

A significant health inequality gap exists between Roma and the majority population across every area of physical and mental health and wellbeing, including rates of suicide¹⁶, life expectancy, and infant mortality. It arises from compounding social determinants such as poverty, inadequate housing, lack of sanitation, poor nutrition, hard physical labour in unsuitable conditions, high levels of discrimination and racism in accessing healthcare, as well as impaired access to both healthcare and long-term care services and also medicines.

One in four Roma (26%) is not covered by national health insurance and/or private insurance¹⁷. 28% of Roma feel limited in their activities by their state of health. 22% of Roma have a longstanding illness or health problem¹⁸. There is a 10-year difference in life expectancy between Roma (64 years) and non-Roma (74 years), as well as a tenfold higher vulnerability to tuberculosis. One in 10 Roma and Travellers felt discriminated against when accessing healthcare in six countries, while almost all report worse health and more limitations than the general population according to the Fundamental Rights Agency¹⁹.

16 In Ireland, the suicide rate for Travellers is six times that of non-Travellers: European Commission (October 2018). [Civil Society Monitoring Report on Implementation of the National Traveller and Roma Integration Strategy: Assessing progress in four key policy areas of the strategy](#). Prepared by Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre. EU Commission DG. Justice and Consumers, Brussels. Page 24.

17 EU FRA 2017.

18 EU NRIS 2019.

19 EU FRA 2020.

With the surge of Covid-19, large Roma and Traveller communities throughout the EU and enlargement countries were at high risk due to poor sanitary conditions, lack of access to clean running water, basic hygiene and infrastructure. Thus, prevention measures, such as hand-wash and social distancing were almost impossible to follow. Existing segregation additionally caused unequal access to primary healthcare and basic services and put many vulnerable Roma at high risk. In addition, several Roma settlements were placed in quarantine and cut off from the world without any provision of basic supplies. Good

health is one of the four sectoral priorities of the EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, and it is also supported by the Sustainable Development Goals (3).

The EAPN has recorded²⁰ COVID-19 related deaths in the Traveller and Roma communities, both of which already had poorer health outcomes than the general population. However, there was no ethnic identifier being used to gather data related to testing, so the exact impact is difficult to monitor.

European Union

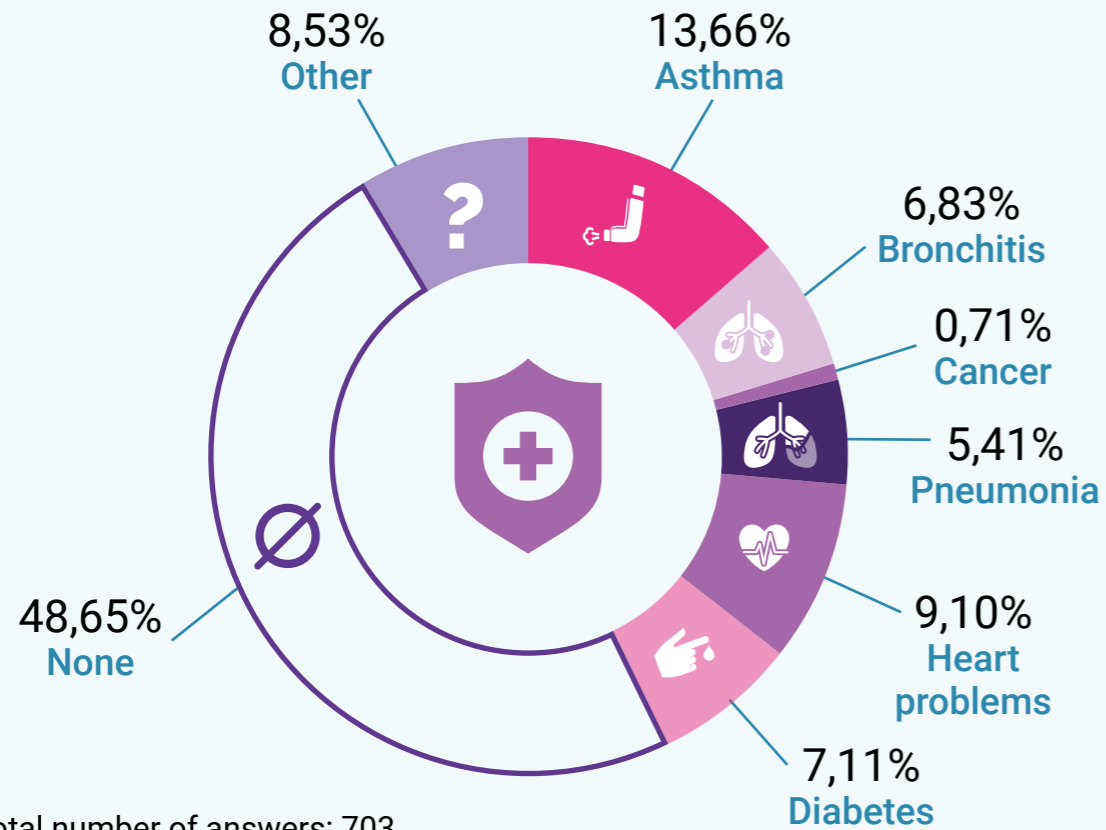
42% of those interviewed do not have **health insurance** and half of them suffer from problems such as asthma, heart problems, diabetes, bronchitis and pneumonia – which are complications to Covid-19. At country level, 29% of respondents from Bulgaria and 40 % of respondents from Romania have health insurance. Surprising data comes from Ireland, where among 103 respondents only 6% declared having health insurance.

For Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, health insurance among respondents ranges from 73% in Hungary to 88% in Slovakia.

Out of the respondents from the seven EU Member States included in the survey, 51% suffer from at least one serious health conditions, such as: asthma, bronchitis, cancer, diabetes, heart problems, pneumonia etc. The highest number of people suffering from these health conditions were found among the respondents in Czech Republic (67%) and in Hungary (52%).

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Graph no. 8 Health conditions - Do you have any of these health conditions? (multiple answers are possible)



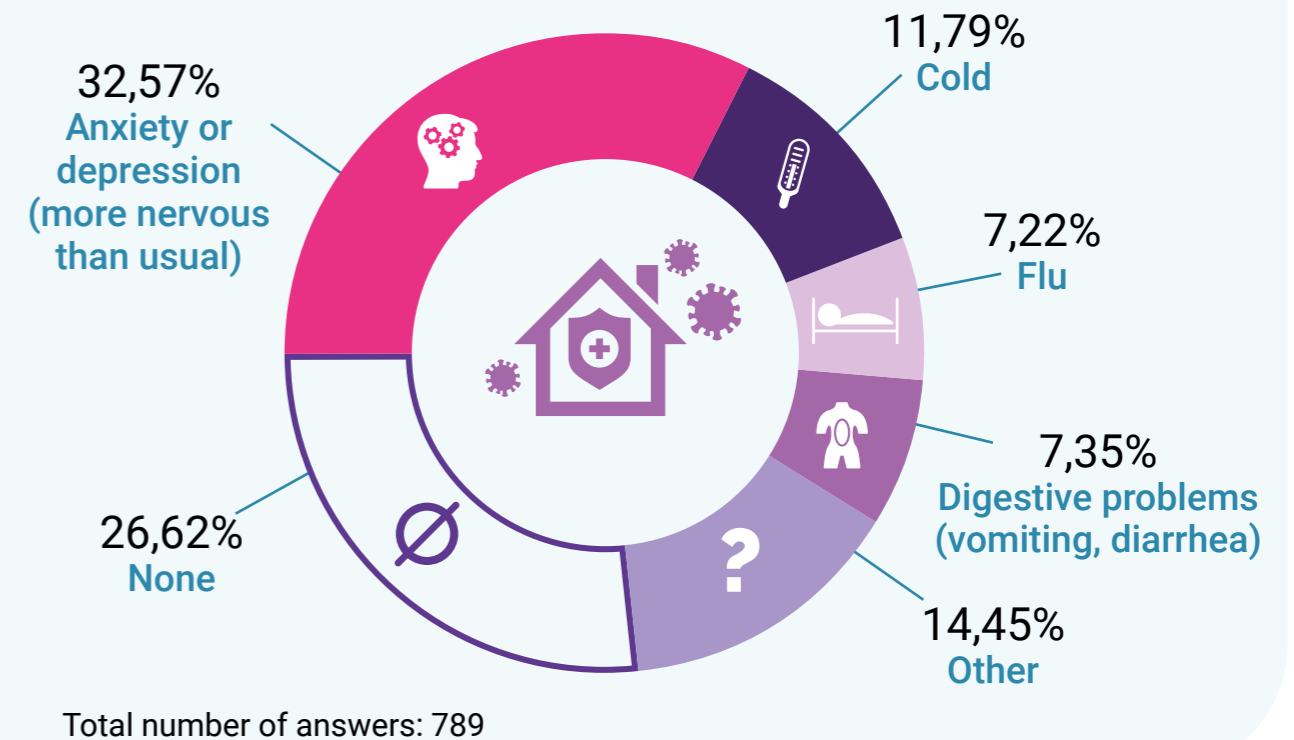
149 respondents (21%) had been **tested for coronavirus** at the time of the interviews. Among those testing positive, the majority were confined at home, 9 respondents were quarantined in specially designated facilities and 10 were hospitalised. The highest number of respondents tested were in Slovakia (59%).

Approx. 39% of respondents faced problems in accessing medication or/and protective products (masks, disinfectant, etc.), mainly due to financial constraints, with the highest numbers in the Czech Republic (77%), Bulgaria (68%) and Hungary (47%). Some have received help to purchase medicine or protective products from local municipalities (23%) or

NGOs (23%) or other community members (15%). In Slovakia 82% received help from local municipalities for the provision of medicine and or protective masks and disinfectants.

In 33% of cases families members or co-habitants of respondents suffered from depression or anxiety during the pandemic while 7% suffered from digestive problems (vomiting, diarrhoea, etc.). Some of them had a flu or a cold (19%) or other health problems (14%). In Bulgaria, in 66% of cases family members or co-habitants suffered from anxiety or depression, in the Czech Republic in 60% and in Ireland in 42%.

Graph no. 9 health problems during the pandemic - Do you or any member of your household have suffered any of the following health problems since the start of the confinement? (multiple answers are possible)



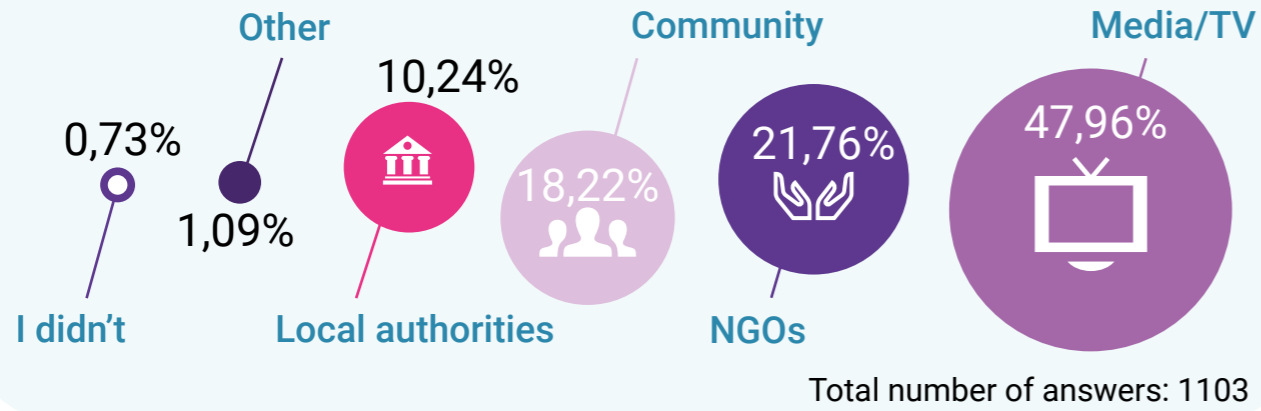
Western Balkans

57% of respondents in the Western Balkans have health insurance, of which 42% obtained it through employment, 41% through support schemes and 9% through voluntary insurance. 8% of respondents did not answer the question. At country level, Bosnia and Herzegovina is in the best position with 92% respondents who have health insurance, followed by North Macedonia with 90%, Serbia with 77%

and Albania with approx. 77% of respondents, while at the other end in Turkey and Kosovo only 19% have health insurance.

Most respondents learned about Covid-19 preventive measures from the media (approx. 48%), followed by NGOs (approx. 22%) or community (18%). Only in 10% of cases respondents learnt about Covid-19 from local authorities.

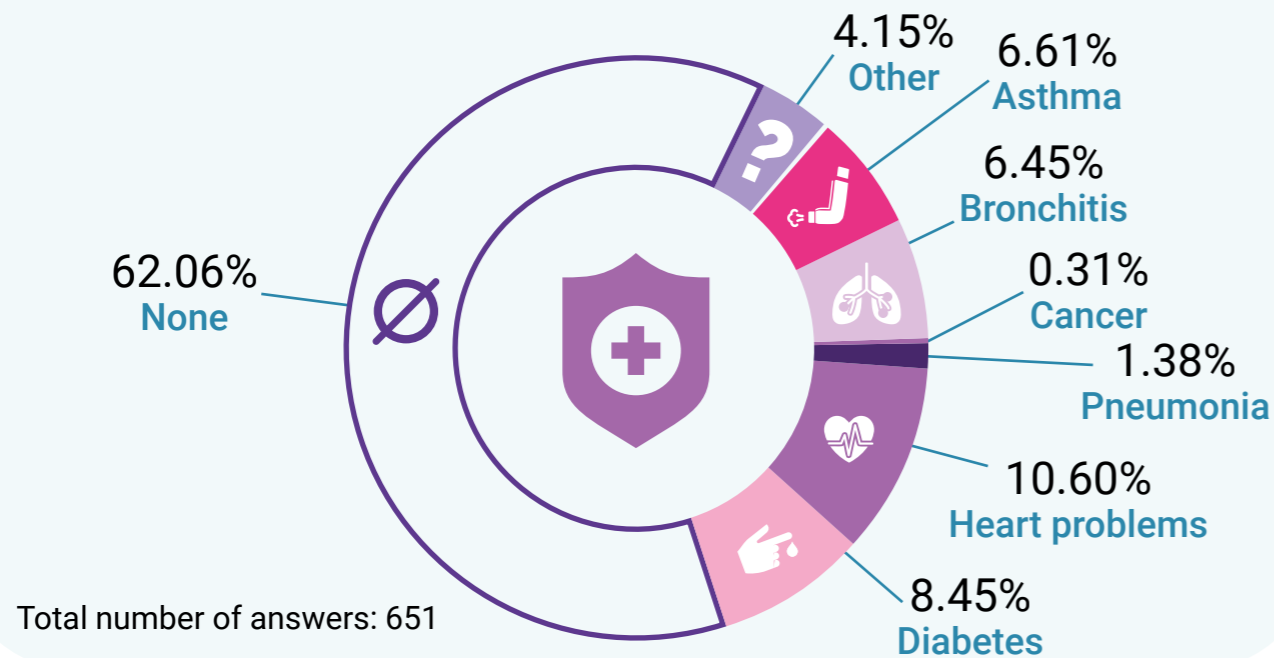
Graph no. 10 information about preventive measures - From where did you learn about COVID-19 preventive measures? (multiple answers are possible)



Only approx. 8% of respondents have been tested for coronavirus. Those testing positive were mostly confined at home (18%), in 8% of cases quarantined in specially designated facilities and in 9% of cases hospitalised.

In the Western Balkans respondents have a slightly better health situation when it comes to serious health conditions such as asthma, bronchitis, cancer, diabetes, heart problems, pneumonia etc. 38% of respondents report such problems in comparison with 51% in the European Union.

Graph no. 11 Health conditions in Western Balkans - Do you have any of these health conditions? (multiple answers are possible)

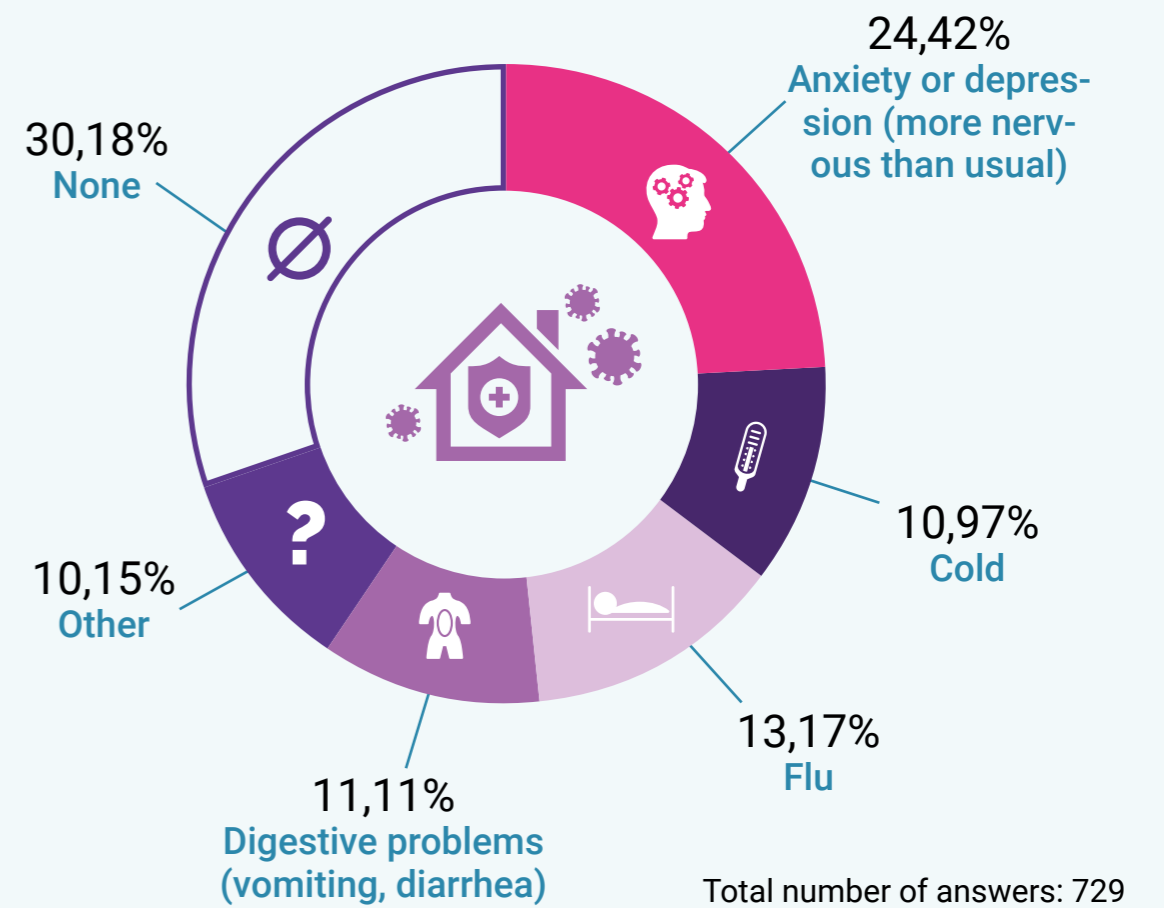


33% of respondents in the Western Balkans and Turkey faced problems accessing medication or protective products, particularly in Serbia (52%) and in Turkey (34%). Respondents were helped to access such products by NGOs (27%), local municipalities (16%), the government (6%) and other community members (6%). However, 73% respondents in Serbia, 70% in Albania, 51%

in North Macedonia, 55% in Kosovo and 53% in Turkey did not receive any help.

24% of respondents had family members or other persons living in their household who suffered from anxiety or depression more than usually during the pandemic, while 24% suffered from cold or flu, 11% from digestive problems (vomiting, diarrhea) and 10% from other health problems.

Graph no. 12 Health problems during the pandemic in Western Balkans - Do you or any member of your household have suffered any of the following health problems since the start of the confinement? (multiple answers are possible)





GENDER ASPECTS

The lockdowns, stay-at-home orders and other measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic have increased women's exposure to violent partners or other household members. Reports also show that the disproportionately placed burden on women regarding child care and household responsibilities and reduced time that women had available for paid work, increasingly affected women's mental health.

Access to routine reproductive healthcare also suffered. Disruptions in the access of family planning and contraception as well as to medically assisted reproduction and safe abortions were registered globally. Reductions in access to and utilization of essential maternal and new-born health services during epidemics translated into an increased number of women and new-borns who suffer complications or die during pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period.



European Union

Ten percent of Roma and Traveller female respondents answered that they did not feel safe at home during the pandemic (13% in the Czech Republic, 11% in Bulgaria, 10% in Romania, 7% in Slovakia, 4% in Romania and 3% in Ireland). 18% experienced verbal or physical violence during the lockdown period (20% in Slovakia, 19% in Romania, 13% in the Czech Republic, 9% in Hungary, 6% in Bulgaria and Ireland and 4% in Belgium). The women chose to speak about it only in 9% of cases (16% in Romania, 8% in Ireland, 4% in Hungary). Exception makes Belgium, where 90% of

those who answered the question said that they talked about it with someone.

Out of 339 female respondents, 21% use contraceptives and 53% have access to contraceptives. Most women who reported using contraceptives are from Ireland (35%), followed by Bulgaria and Hungary (13%), Romania (12%), the Czech Republic and Slovakia 5% and Belgium (1%).

At the time of the interviews, 30 women were pregnant (8%): 13 in the Czech Republic, 5 in Hungary, 4 in Slovakia, 2 in Bulgaria and 1 in Romania. Out of them, only half of them had easy/free access to prenatal services.

Western Balkans

In the Western Balkans and Turkey, 7% of female respondents answered that they did not feel safe at home, while 11% of women experienced verbal or physical violence while in lockdown. In 35% of the cases they talked to someone about it.

Only approx. 22% of female respondents use contraceptives and less than half (46%) have access to contraceptives. 12 Roma women were pregnant at the time of interviews and have moderate access to prenatal care (31%).



HOUSING

Forced at the margins, many Roma end up living in informal settlements and segregated neighbourhoods, in inadequate and overcrowded dwellings, without access to utilities' infrastructure, and in unsanitary conditions. Many communities are disproportionately exposed to environmental degradation and pollution stemming from waste dumps and landfills, contaminated sites or dirty industries. Around half of Romanian Roma live close to waste dumps. In addition, many Travellers still face forced sedentarization policies or lack halting sites.

According to the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, one in three Roma (32%) live in households with a leaking roof, damp walls or rot. One in five Roma (20%) live in

dwellings that are too dark. 41% of Roma felt discriminated when looking for housing²¹. 76% of Roma live in a neighbourhood where all or most residents are Roma while 78% of Roma live in overcrowded households²². Up to 10% of caravan dwellers and Roma were evicted at least once in the past five years in Belgium and France. 26% of Roma and Travellers live in housing with bad conditions. Travellers in Ireland are especially affected by bad housing conditions such as leaking roofs, mould and damp walls²³.

Forced evictions of Roma have continued to take place during the pandemic, although formally evictions had been suspended in some countries, such as Germany, Hungary, Italy, Romania, Spain

21 EU FRA 2017

22 European Commission, Report on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies – 2019 -

23 EU FRA 2020

and the United Kingdom²⁴. More so, the Covid-19 pandemic has evidenced that poor housing conditions represent a systemic risk for the public health system, placing a disproportionate burden on Roma inhabitants and requiring a longer-term government response to build

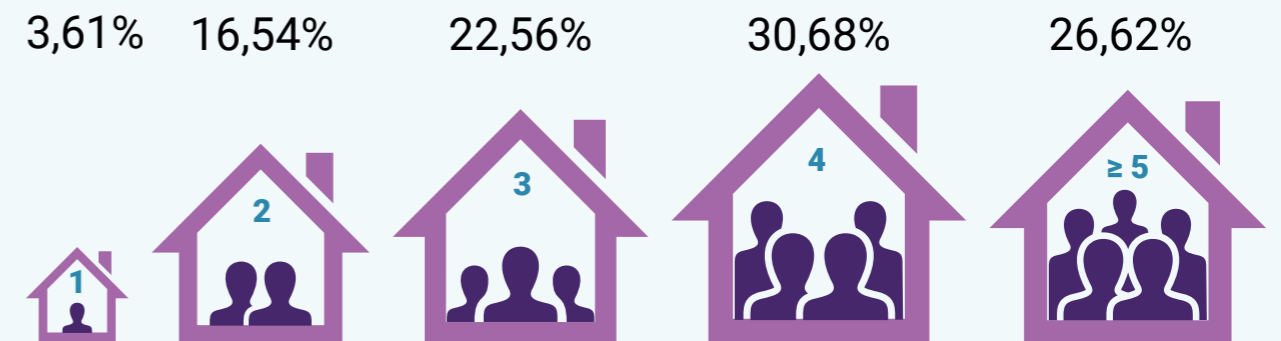
resilience. Europe should honour its commitments and deliver on adequate housing for the Roma, one of the four sectoral priorities of the EU Strategic Framework for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, supported also in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (11).

European Union

The survey results confirms that Roma families live in the majority of cases in overcrowded spaces, making it difficult

to self-isolate in case a family member comes down with Covid-19.

Graph no. 13 Housing – How many people live in your household/caravan/home?



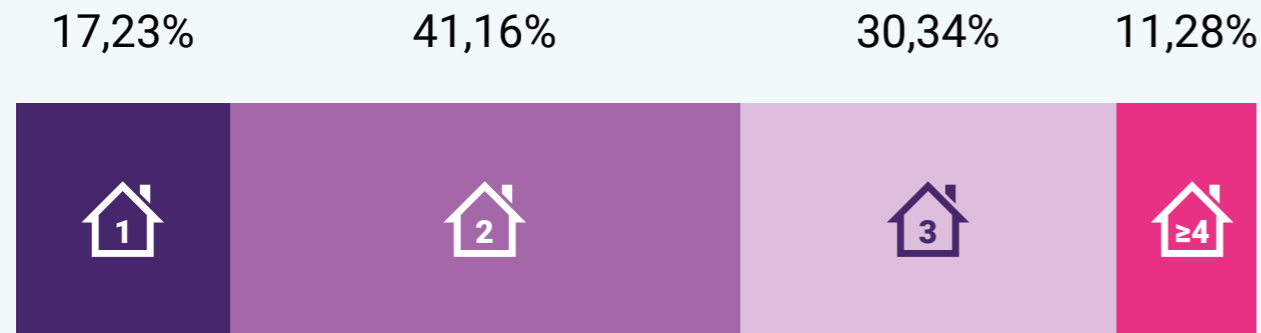
Total number of answers: 665

When asked how many rooms they had, the majority of respondents live in 2 rooms households (41%), while 30% of

respondents live in 3 rooms households, only 11% in 4 rooms and 17% in one room households.

24 Roma in the Covid-19 Crisis: An Early Warning from Six EU Member States, Open society Roma Initiatives Office, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/publications/roma-in-the-covid-19-crisis>

Graph no. 14 Housing – How many rooms do you have?



Total number of answers: 656

32% of respondents live in urban regular areas, 28% live in urban marginalised areas, approx. 21% in rural areas, 13% in settlements and 3% on a garbage dump (with 17% in Bulgaria). 38% of respondents in Hungary, 25% in Ireland and 20% in Slovakia live in a Roma or Traveller only settlement.

Many Roma and Travellers have difficulties to pay bills, fees and debts. Overall, 24% among respondents in the EU countries have difficulties to pay their electricity bills, 16% their water bills, 16% their private debt and bank loans, 11% their rent or mortgage, 8% their gas bills and 4% their school fees.

Bulgarian (75%) and Hungarian (74%) respondents found it the hardest to pay electricity bills. Difficulties to pay water bills were also highest for Hungarian (61%) and Bulgarian (54%) respondents, followed by Romanian (31) and Slovakian (30%) respondents. 41% of Romanian

respondents and 27% of Hungarian respondents had difficulties to pay electricity bills. 36% of Romanian respondents and 34% of Slovakian respondents had difficulties to pay rent and mortgage bills. 30% of Slovakian respondents and 25% of Bulgarian respondents had problems paying private debts.

67% of Irish respondents answered that they had no problem in paying bills, followed by Romanian respondents 23% and Slovak respondents (21%).

2% of respondents lost their accommodation during Covid-19 (7% in Romania, 5% in the Czech Republic, 2% in Hungary and 1% in Belgium) because they could not pay rent, had only short-term lease contracts or lack of proof of accommodation.

Despite the moratorium in forced evictions in various Member States during the pandemic, 2% of respondents have responded that they had been evicted.



Western Balkans

In Western Balkan countries, 5 or more people live in the same household in 37% of cases, 4 in 26% and 3 in 20% of cases. Overall, respondents live in two and three rooms in 36% cases and in above 4 rooms in 22% cases.

27% of respondents in Albania live with 5 or more people in the same household. 24% live in households with 4 people and approx. 17% of cases with 3 people in the same household. Respondents in Albania share in approx. 35% of cases 3 rooms and in approx. 30% of cases 2 rooms.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 39% of respondents live with 5 or more people in the same household; 11% of respondents live with 4 people in the same house and 13% of respondents live with 3 people under the same roof.

In North Macedonia, 14% of respondents live with 5 or more people, while 32% live with 4 people in the same house and approx. 27% live with 3 people in the same house.

66% of respondents in Kosovo and 35% in Turkey live with 5 or more people in the same household. In Turkey, in 27% of cases there are 4 people in the same house and in 29% three people, sharing mostly 2 (53%) or 3 rooms (41%).

In Serbia, 43% answered that they are 5 or more people in the same household. 33% live in households with 4 people and 14% are 3 people, in houses that have mostly 2 rooms (57%), followed by 3 rooms (21%) or 1 room (17%). 5% live in 4 rooms or more.

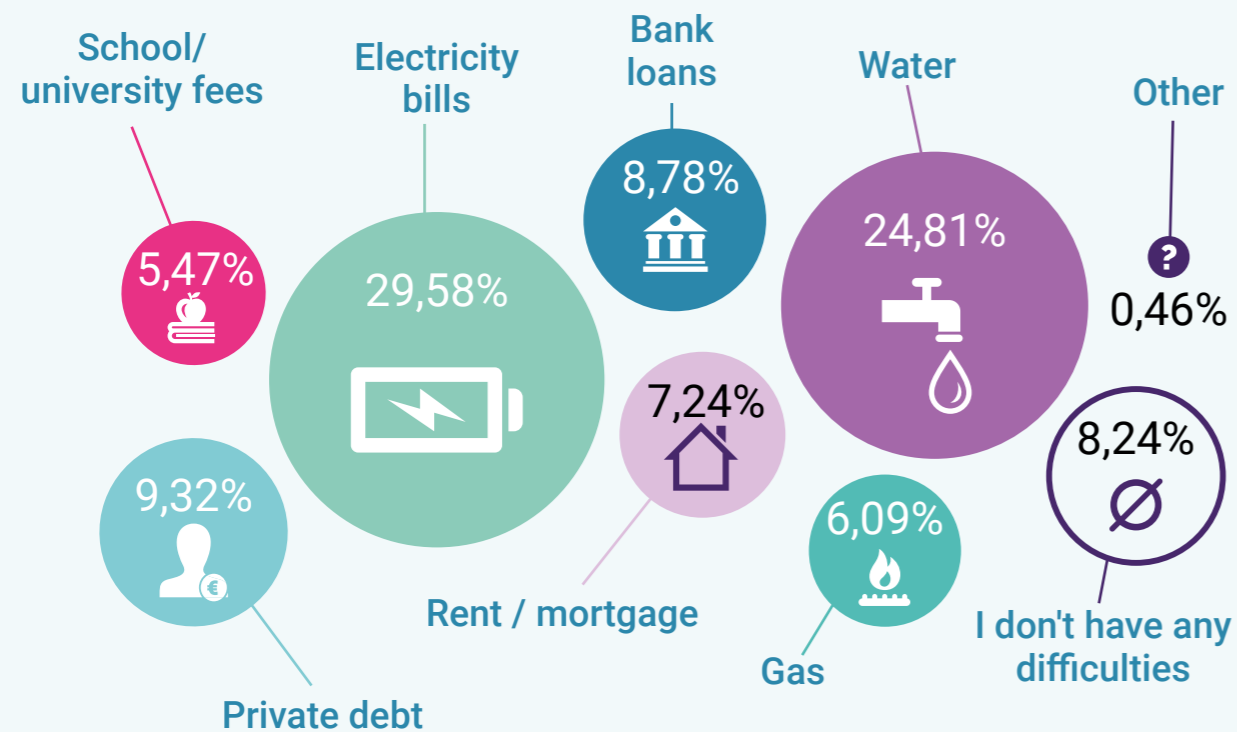
In Kosovo, 66% said that they are 5 or more people in the same house, followed by 25% with 4 people, living in the majority of cases (42%) in 3 rooms, followed by 2 rooms (28%) and 4 or more rooms (28%).

49% of respondents live in urban regular areas, 25% in urban marginalised areas, 16% in rural areas, 8% in settlements and 1,4% on a garbage dump.

Asked if they had difficulties paying their bills during the pandemic, respondents from the Western Balkans and Turkey chose multiple answers, including 30% for

electricity bills, 25% for water, 9% private debts and bank loans, 7% rent or mortgage and 5% school fees. Only 8% across the countries did not have any difficulties.

Graph no. 15 Difficulties in paying bills - Do you have difficulties paying: (multiple choices are possible)



Total number of answers: 1298

At country level, Albanian respondents had difficulties to pay particularly electricity bills (approx. 46%), water bills (36%), private debt (12%), school fees (10%), bank loans (approx. 9%), rent (8%) and gas (3%). 22,5% had no difficulties paying their bills. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, 85% of respondents had difficulties paying their electricity bills, approx. 80% had difficulties to pay they water bills, approx. 43% gas bills, approx. 24% private debt,

18% rent, approx. 10% bank loans and 7% school fees. Only 3,5% respondents had no difficulties to pay their bills. In North Macedonia, 54% of respondents had difficulties to pay their electricity bills, 37% their water bills, 19% bank loans, 16% school fees, 10% their gas bills, 4% private debt and 1% their rent or mortgage. Approx. 27% of respondents did not have problems to pay their bills. Turkish respondents struggled mainly with electricity bills



(70%), water (64%), rent/mortgage (53%), bank loans (50%) or private debt (47%), followed by school fees (13%) and gas bills (11%). Only 8% did not have any difficulties in paying bills.

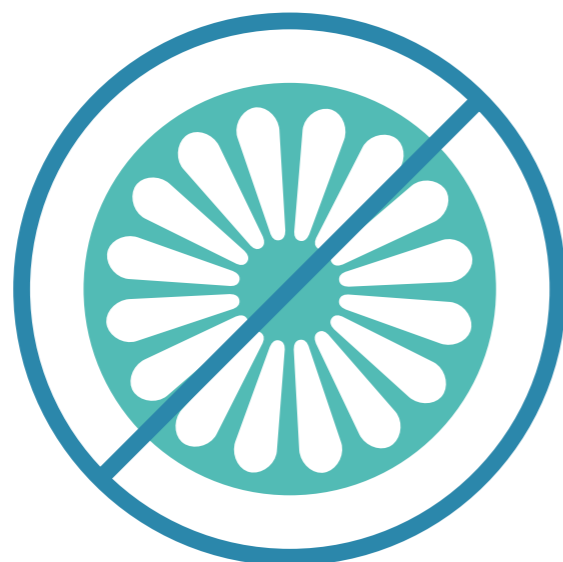
In Serbia, the majority of respondents had difficulties paying the electricity bills and private debts (52%), followed by water bills (40%), school fees (10%), rent/mortgage (10%) and bank loans (2%). 14% of respondents did not have any problems to pay their bills.

In Kosovo, most respondents had difficulties paying the electricity bills (66%) and water (55%), followed by bank loans and

school fees (13% each), private debt (5%), rent/mortgage (4%) and gas (1%). 26% of respondents did not have problems to pay the bills.

16 respondents answered that their families had been evicted during the pandemic and only 4 families had been provided with alternative accommodation.

At the time of the interviews, 46% of respondents in the Western Balkans and Turkey lived in a house or flat, 1% in shacks and 0.37% in a caravan. 29% lived in own their house, 2% in social housing, 8% in rented accommodation and 10% in a non-legalised building.



DISCRIMINATION

Most Roma in Europe face discrimination, harassment, and hate crimes because of their ethnic origin. As a result of antigypsyism, significant parts of the Roma population struggle with poverty, social exclusion and limited access to employment or services, such as education, healthcare, housing and others. Data shows that Roma face disproportionate barriers to accessing health services exacerbated by a lack of insurance or personal identification documents, but also due to distance or discriminatory attitudes. Roma also see their access to justice curtailed – for financial reasons, lack of information and pervasive discriminatory attitudes. According to FRA reports, 41% of Roma feel they have been discriminated against in everyday situations such as looking for work, at work, housing, health and education. According to the 2019 Eurobarometer, 61%

of non-Roma think there is widespread discrimination against the Roma in their country, while 77% don't have a Roma friend or acquaintance²⁵.

With the Covid-19 pandemic, severe measures have been adopted with the purpose of curbing the spread of the virus, including mandatory quarantines, suspensions of mass gatherings, isolation of individuals, travel bans and cordoning-off of regions or cities with sanctions in case of non-compliance. Several member states of the Council of Europe submitted communications to the Secretary General with temporary derogations from the Convention of Human Rights under the state of emergency measures regarding suspension of education processes, establishment of quarantine procedures and self-isolation, restriction of assembly, manifestation and

25 European Commission, Special Barometer Discrimination in the EU, 2019 - https://data.europa.eu/euodp/en/data/dataset/S2251_91_4_493_ENG (hereinafter *EC Barometer 2019*)

gathering, restriction on the right of property, etc.

In the context, the Roma have been subjected to scapegoating, hate speech in the media and public discourse being made responsible for spreading the virus alongside other racialised minorities, and to disproportionate corrective measures

and fines, including – in several instances across countries – racially-motivated police violence and brutality.

ERGO members and other civil society organisations reported several violations of fundamental rights of Roma and Travellers during the first months of the coronavirus pandemic.

BULGARIA

With the state of emergency, the Bulgarian authorities introduced gradually stricter measures to prevent the spread of the virus in Roma communities across the country.

Since 16 April 2020 residents of the Fakulteta and Filipovtsi neighbourhoods have been subject to checkpoint controls because of concerns about them being at high risk of infection after 10 cases were reported in the impoverished area. Sofia's Mayor denied that measures to restrict movement in Roma neighbourhoods amounted to discrimination, saying they were about stemming contagion and saving lives of residents. "Many of the Roma work on the grey market without contracts or steady employers," said a health mediator.

The authorities have built temporary walls around and imposed a complete containment regime on Roma areas in the towns of Nova Zagora, Kazanlak and Sliven, home to some 50,000 Roma, arguing that "lack of discipline among its residents" makes the social distancing measures difficult to enforce.

Similar measures were introduced in the Roma neighbourhood of Shesti near Nova Zagora after the authorities argued that residents did not have access to clean water and sanitation and therefore were not able to maintain the recommended level of hygiene to curb the spread of the virus beyond the settlements. The authorities, however, did not take steps to ensure that the settlement itself would be granted full access to public supply of water during the pandemic.

Several towns, including the seaside town of Burgas, decided to use drones with thermal sensors to remotely take the temperatures of residents in Roma settlements only. Armed military personnel were deployed around the perimeter of settlements, which is highly disproportionate if the purpose is protection of public health. In particular, the fact that they were carrying weapons that should only be deployed in high-risk scenarios demonstrates that Roma communities are perceived as an "enemy".

The introduction of measures focused on Roma neighbourhoods were accompanied by an increasingly hostile, anti-Roma rhetoric, frequently stoked by politicians. The Bulgarian National Movement (VMRO) party, a junior coalition partner in the government, exploited the public health crisis to present Roma as a collective threat to the general population that needs to be “controlled and contained”. There was no evidence of confirmed cases among the Roma community at that time.

Interior Minister Mladen Marinov has also threatened further coercive measures “to protect the general population” if Roma fail to comply with the strict social distancing measures. While Roma communities remained confined to their settlements, there was no evidence that the authorities have provided any assistance to the families living there to ensure that they can comply with government advice on how to protect against infection through regular hand washing or access necessary health care if they have symptoms of COVID-19 or how to provide for their families during the quarantine.

Source: Amnesty International²⁶

ROMANIA

Since the beginning of April 2020, and particularly around Orthodox Easter in Romania, many cases of violent police abuse against Roma were reported across the country in the context of the pandemic.

In the case of Rahova - Bucharest, a person using the name “Spartacus” on 19 April 2020 organised a party at his place during confinement and posted a live video daring the police to come. Hours later he posted a new video to his Facebook page where he apologizes to the Police²⁷, where he appears bruised and swollen. It seems that the police forced him to apologise as a way to humiliate him publicly. Several people, including minors from the Rahova neighbourhood, complained that they were beaten by the police²⁸, who allegedly had entered the wrong addresses (looking for Spartacus).

26 Amnesty International criticizes closures of Romani settlements in Bulgaria and Slovakia as part of COVID-19 response, 22.04.2020: <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR0121562020ENGLISH.PDF>

27 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsmMpzd-WJI>;
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsmMpzd-WJI&t=5s>

28 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=av_Uw3bKLzo;
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-uuteyrgzQ>

Linked to the above events in Rahova, a 29-year-old mother declared to media and NGOs that the police entered her home while watching TV with three of her four children and pulled her by the hair outside. They took her outside where there were other women, including Spartacus’s wife, telling them to kneel in a line together with their children. The woman asked one of the police officers to let her find her children and the officer screamed at her: “Shut up you fucking crow! Fuck your crow mouth!” According to police reports, 37 persons were taken to the police station that night, including children. At the station everyone was made to face the wall in the police yard, and kept there for four hours in the cold, without the possibility to go to the bathroom and drinking water from a hose. After 15 hours in the police station, they were released. Five men, including Spartacus, were arrested and two women are under judicial investigation.

On 20 April, after several incidents, including in Rahova, Hunedoara and Sacele, Traian Berbeceanu, the Chief of Cabinet of the Minister of Interior Marcel Velea, posted on his Facebook page that “violence must be responded to with violence. Proportionately.” In addition, the Europol Union of the Romania Police posted to Facebook a photo of Spartacus where he appears beaten up with the comment “citizen with rights”, which is an ironic comment about human rights and an intimidating message for a police force to communicate.

Source: Romani Criss, social media.



SLOVAKIA

On 9 April 2020 the Government of Slovakia decided to quarantine five entire Roma settlements in eastern Slovakia: three in the village of Krompachy, and one each in the villages of Bystrany and Žehra, without providing families any information about the duration and conditions of their confinement. The Government argued that such measures were necessary to protect public health as there were 31 positive cases in those five settlements, which have more than 6,800 residents. The authorities reportedly did not separate those who had positive tests for COVID-19 from the rest of the community. Moreover, according to the available evidence, the authorities did not put in place adequate provisions of food and medical supplies. In another of the quarantined settlements, the authorities were selling simple food packages for 15 Euros, instead of giving them for free to those families who had lost their income due to the measures.

Roma also reported instances when ambulances initially refused to come and assist residents who needed health care. In addition, people in the settlements were worried about the lack of information concerning the duration of the quarantine and the lack of resources to sustain themselves if should the quarantine last longer.

On 27 April 2020, a police officer in Krompachy beat five young children from a Roma quarantined settlement with a truncheon. According to the children, the officer also threatened to shoot them. His reason to use force, allegedly, was that the children were collecting wood and playing outside of the quarantine zone. Following the events, the MEP Peter Pollak filed a motion with the Interior Ministry Inspection Authority to investigate the case.

The mayor of Kosice, Jaroslav Polacek, posted a warning to social media that coronavirus can spread because of the behaviour of "socially unadaptable people" in Roma settlements who do not respect emergency measures.

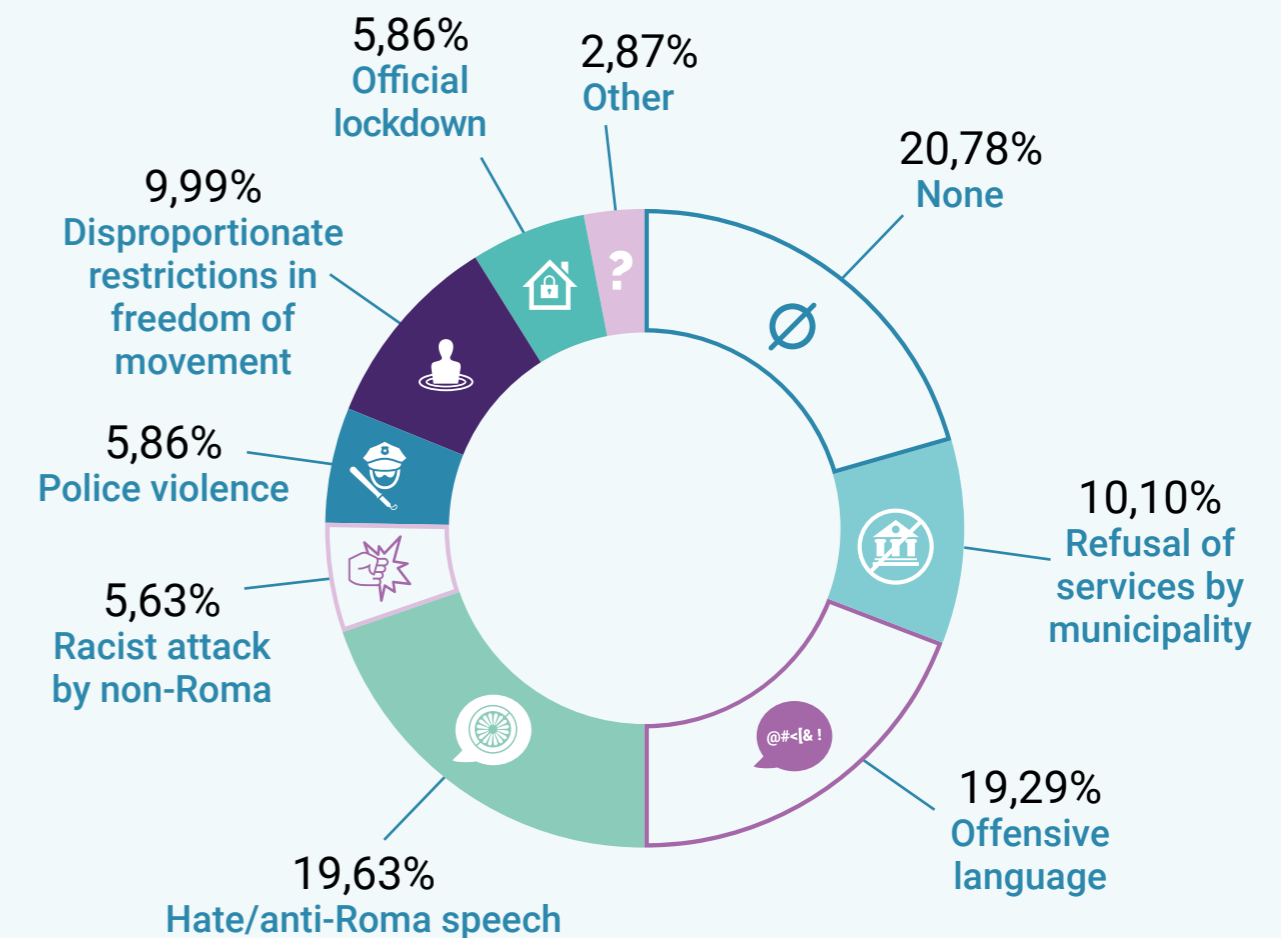
Sources: Amnesty International; Romea; Roma Advocacy and Research Centre, SK

European Union

Approx. 39% of Roma felt discriminated against during this pandemic because they were Roma: 59% in Bulgaria, 50% in the Czech Republic, 46% in Romania, 44% in Slovakia, 24% in Hungary and 22% in Belgium.

24% of all respondents felt discriminated via internet and social media, 11 % by the police, 13% by medical staff, 14% by civil servants, 9% in shops, 8% by the educational system, 7% by neighbours, 6.5% when using transportation (6,5%) and 6% by employers.

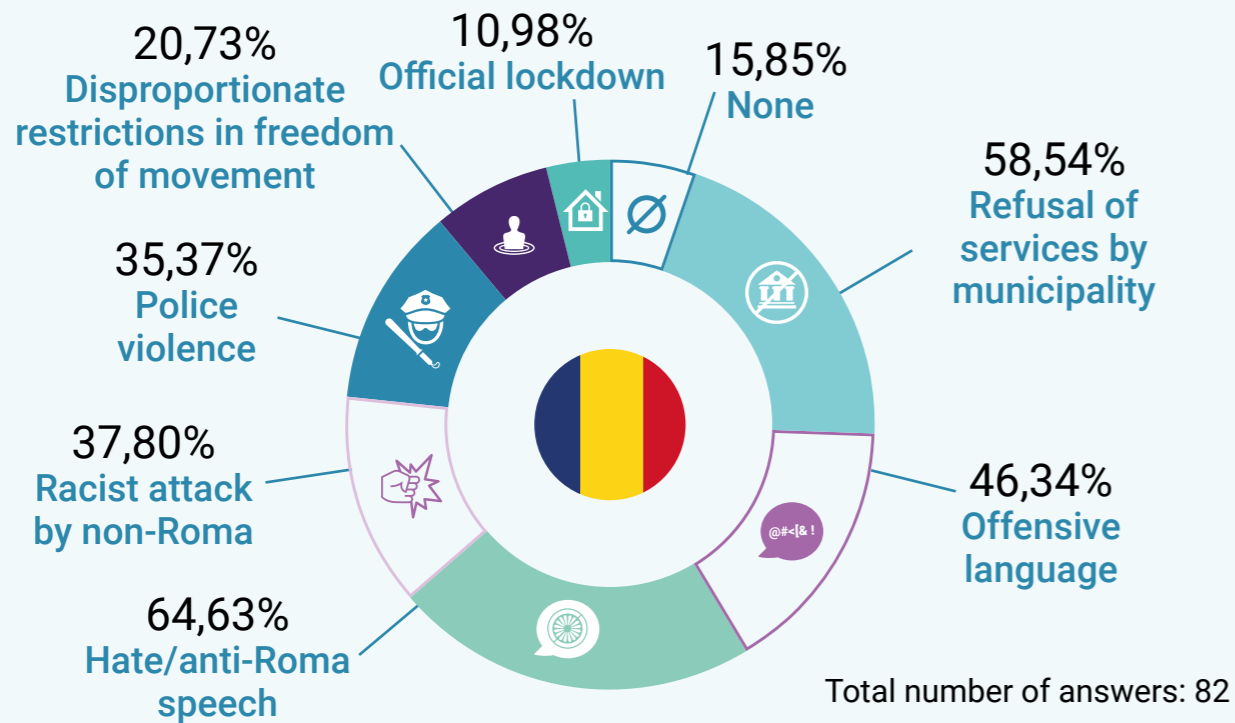
Graph no. 16- Types of discrimination



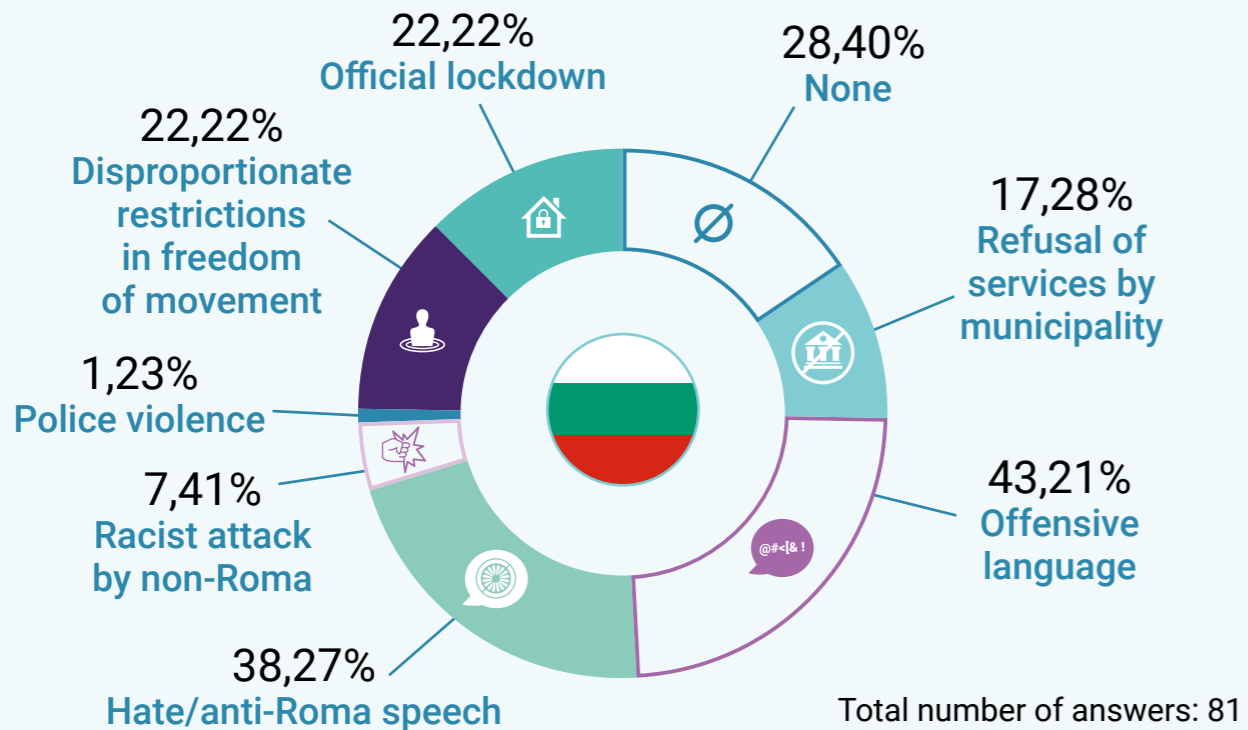
Total number of answers: 871

Roma have experienced hate speech or offensive language (39%), discriminatory restrictions (in freedom of movement) (10%), lockdown (6%), police of services by municipalities (10%), violence of services by municipalities (10%), or racist attacks (6%).

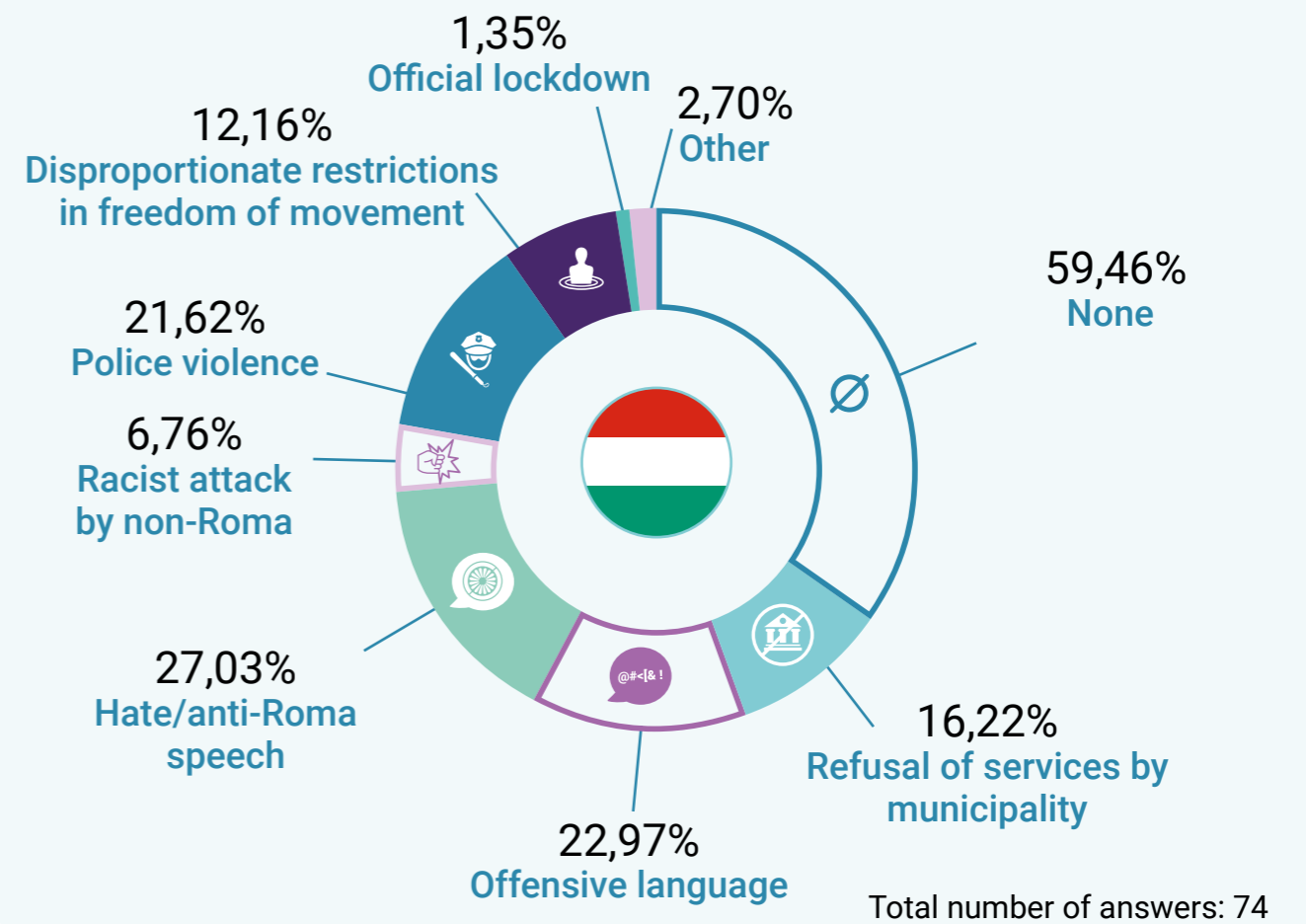
Graph 17: Types of discrimination in Romania



Graph 18: Types of discrimination in Bulgaria



Graph 19: Types of discrimination in Hungary



Approx. 8% of respondents stated that they were harassed or threatened because someone thought they had the coronavirus, often because of the colour or their skin or Roma origin and the misconception that Roma are spreading the virus. Most numbers were reported by the Czech and Belgian respondents (12%), followed by Romanian respondents (11%), Hungarian (8%), Slovakian (7%) and Bulgarian (5%). Most respondents who were victims of discrimination or personal crime did not report the victimization (87%). Only approx.

4% reported to the police, NGOs, the equality body and or the prosecutor. On a country level, 16% Romanian respondents reported such cases. In the other countries only 1 or 2 percent of respondents reported cases, and Bulgarian respondents did not report any case.

Out of 374 persons who answered the question, approx. 18% have been verbally or physically abused during the lockdown period, however 91% of them chose not to speak to anyone about it.

Western Balkans

25% of respondents considered that they had been discriminated against during the pandemic because they were Roma, with the largest number in Turkey (37%). When

asked in which context, 45% of respondents answered that they were discriminated against in the following situations:

Graph 20: Sources of discrimination in Western Balkans and Turkey



In Albania, 23% of respondents felt discriminated against during the pandemic because they were Roma. Albanian respondents stated that they felt discriminated against on social media and internet (23%), in public transportation (16%), in

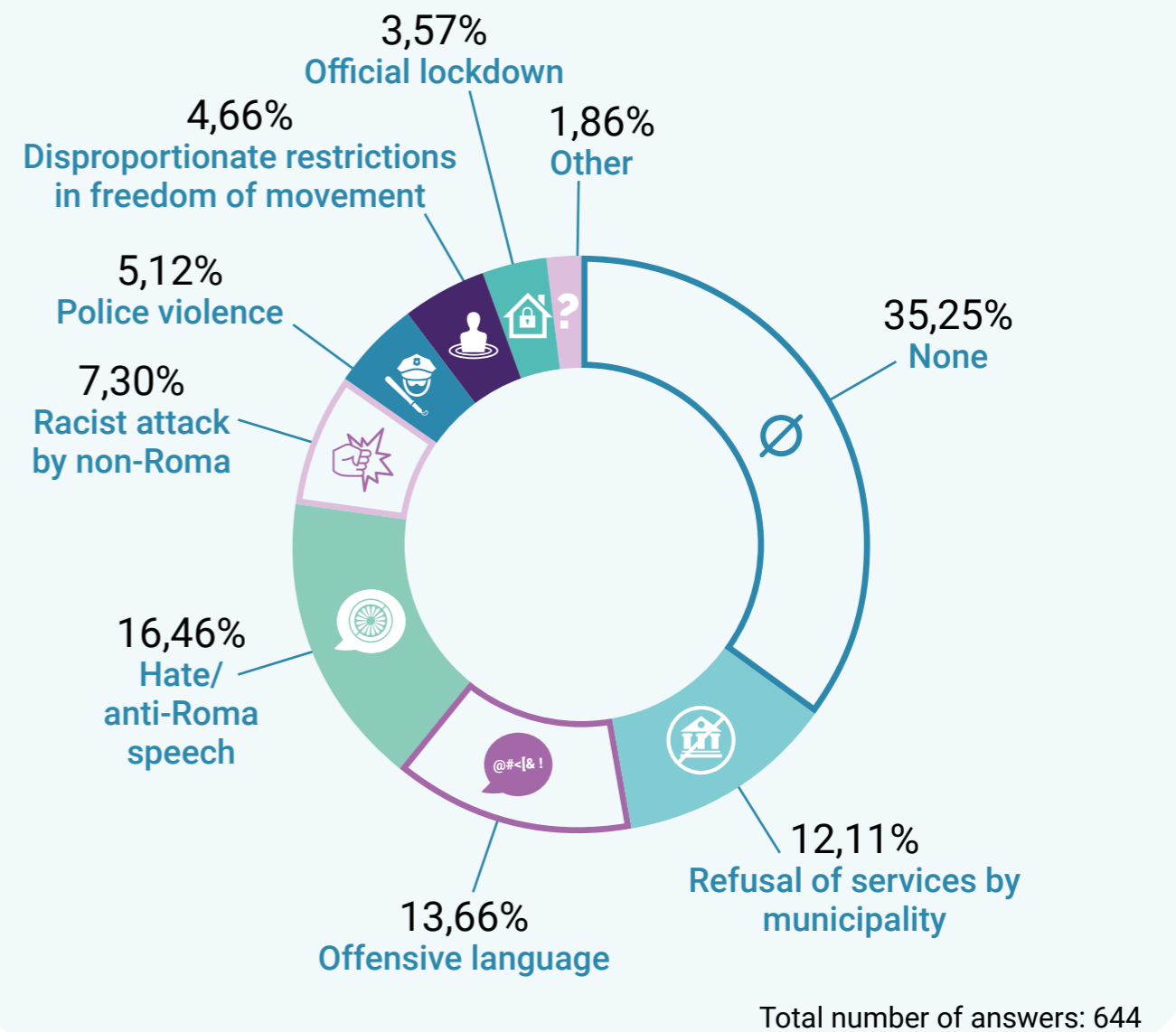
encounters with police (15%), by medical personnel (15%), by social services or local municipalities (15%), by their non-Roma neighbours (14,5%), in the educational system (approx. 13%), by their employers (8%) and at the grocery shops (7%). In North

Macedonia, 32% of respondents felt discriminated against during the pandemic because of their ethnicity. 20% of respondents felt discriminated on the social media and internet, 10% from social services and municipality, approx. 7% by medical staff, approx. 6% by their non-Roma neighbours, 5% when shopping for groceries, 5% by the educational system, approx. 4% while using public transportation, approx. 4% in encounter with police and approx.

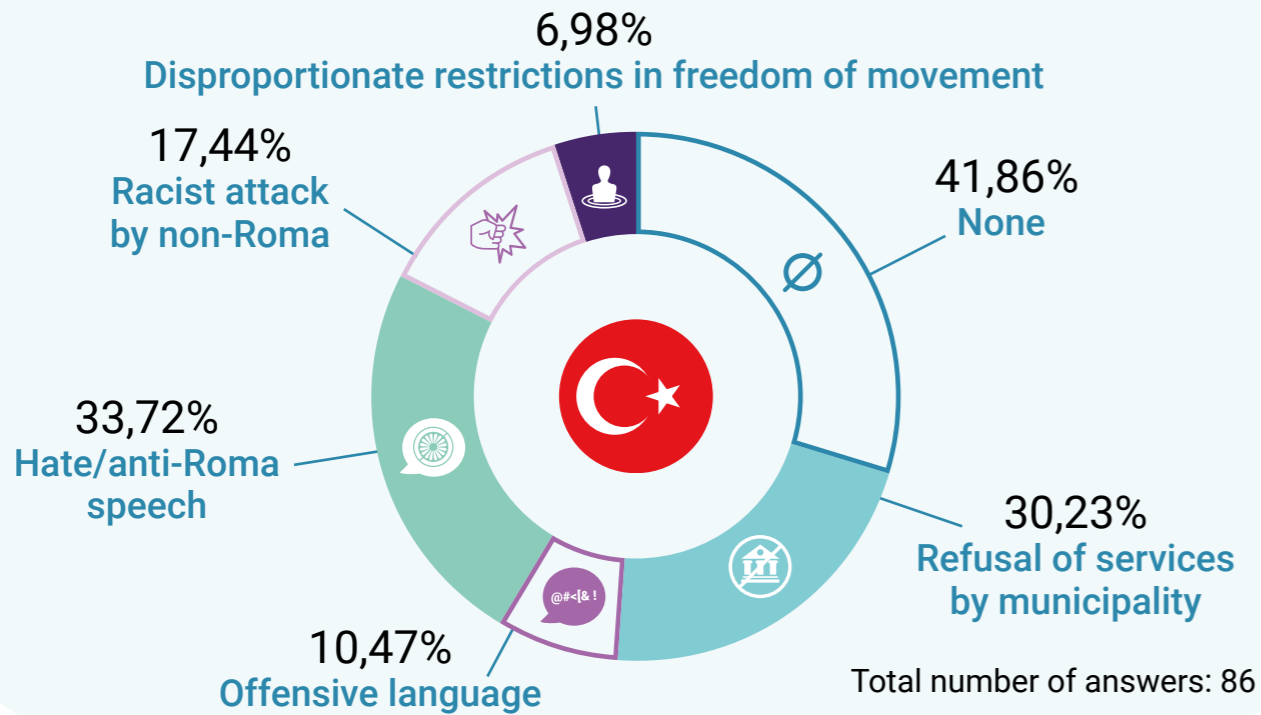
3% by their employers. in Bosnia and Herzegovina 7% of respondents felt discriminated against, between 2 and 4% on social media, via police encounters, when shopping for groceries, by education institutions, by medical staff and by social services.

When asked 'What type of discrimination (or racist violence) they experienced, 417 respondents indicated the following:

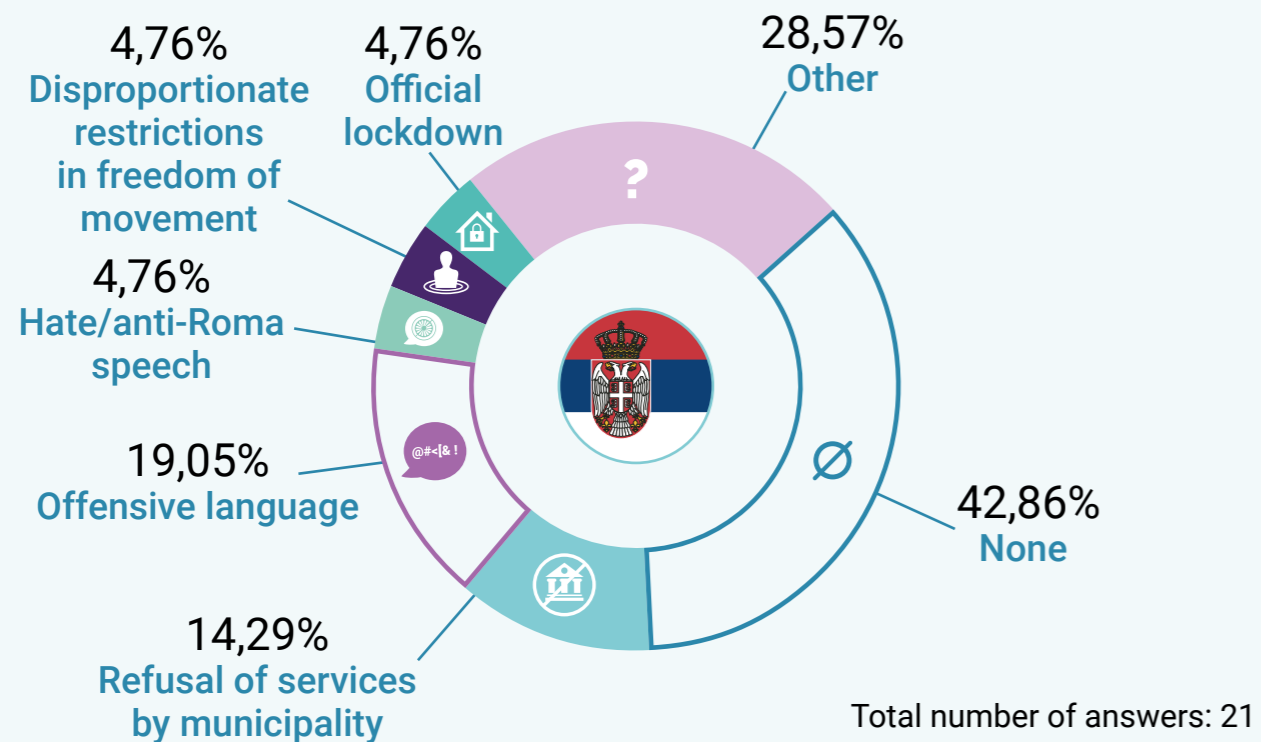
Graph 21: Types of discrimination in Western Balkans and Turkey



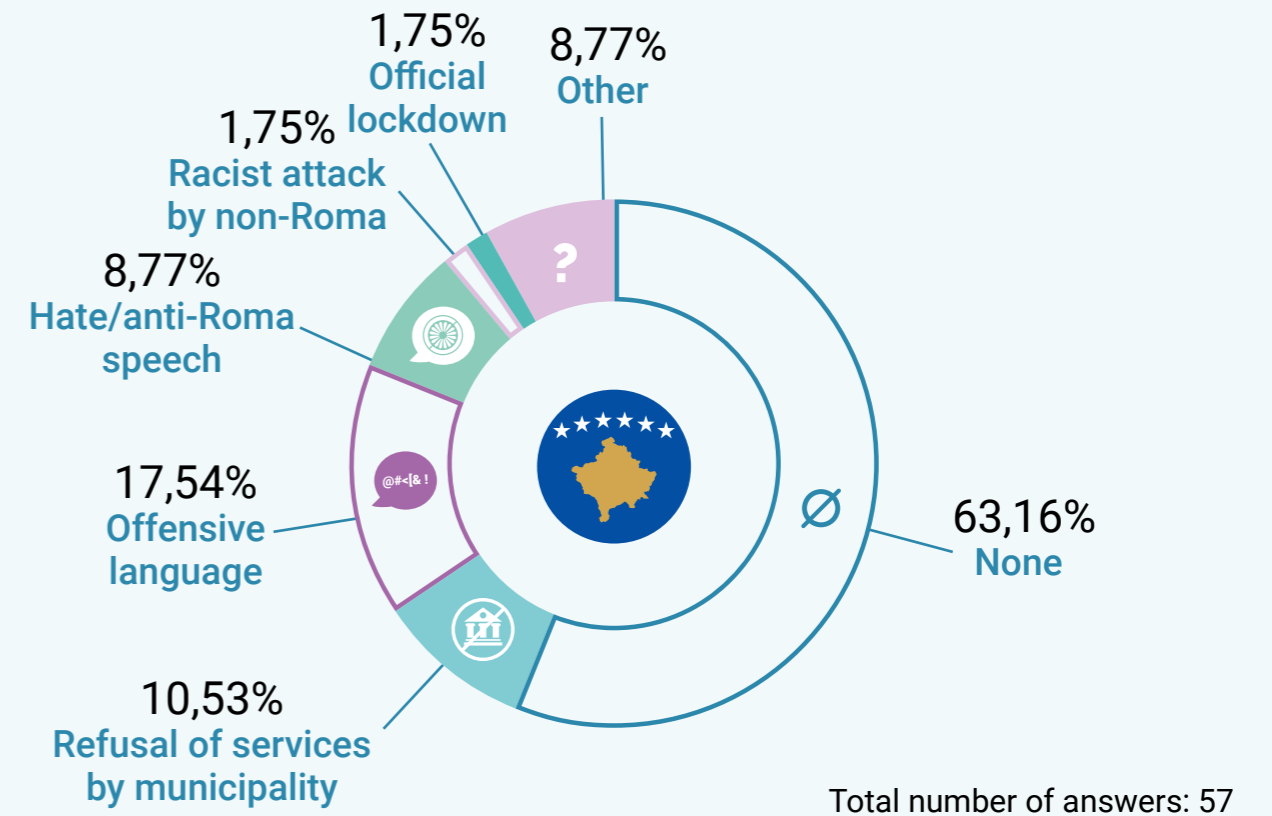
Graph 22: Types of discrimination in Turkey



Graph 23: Types of discrimination in Serbia



Graph 24: Types of discrimination in Kosovo



7% of respondents have been harassed or threatened because someone thought they were infected with the coronavirus. Only 12% of respondents reported violence they experienced to NGOs, the

police, equality body and to the prosecutor. 11% of respondents encountered verbal or physical abuse during the lockdown period and chose to talk about it on 35% of cases.



RECOMMENDATIONS BY RESPONDENTS

At the end of the survey, ERGO Network asked respondents:

What are the priorities or measures that should be taken at the national and European levels in the current situation to help Roma communities during the pandemic?

Overall respondents from all surveyed countries answered that the rights and safety of Roma and Travellers should be respected and prioritised during the pandemic and its aftermath, particularly by ensuring freedom from discrimination, access to employment, running water, food, protective equipment, health care and housing.

They also emphasised the need for poor families to receive help to pay bills during the pandemic, and to have internet access and computers for children to follow online classes.



In addition, respondents from Belgium proposed measures to stop hate speech against Roma on social networks and target discrimination against Roma in the home countries in Eastern Europe especially in the area of employment, as their main reason for intra-EU migration in Belgium was not being able to find a job at home in Bulgaria.



In Hungary, some respondents also demanded that Covid-19 tests should be free for all. Respondents complained that prices had gone up during the pandemic and warned that poor people became poorer and that many would have difficulties in paying their private debts to collectors and that they risked going to jail for not being able to pay back their debts.



In the Czech Republic, respondents also called not to segregate and exclude Roma from the rest of society by restricting freedom of movement and demanded the prevention of discrimination. They suggested that more focus should be placed on women, pregnancy and education. Affordable housing should be prioritised, including social housing, subsidised renting and job opportunities, including short-term jobs. They emphasised that NGOs should be kept safe and supported to help communities in need.



Respondents from Kosovo recommended that the economic recovery package be approved by the Assembly of Kosovo and that Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo and in Europe should be firstly recognised as three separate ethnic communities and not as part of the Roma community in order to effectively help these communities. Respondents underlined that the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians have not benefited at all from emergency measures in the municipality of Istog. Supporting employment, small businesses and entrepreneurship for Roma should be a priority. External donors should be requested to support basic education, health, employment and housing of Roma in Kosovo.



Respondents from Ireland criticised the lack of water and sanitation for all Traveller families, especially those living in caravans and roadsides and their urgent need to pay for their housing and accommodation. They indicated that social welfare payments every two weeks is not enough to support a family and that it should be increased alongside with more funding for Traveller Primary Care programmes. They indicated that Traveller families did not have the services and facilities to self-isolate and that a second trailer in such situations would help them keep social distancing and prevent overcrowding and the spreading of the virus. Irish respondents also indicated the need to provide Travellers with more information about Covid-19 and set up separate facilities for Travellers to get tested against Covid-19, viewed that they tend not to go to the hospital for fear of discrimination by doctors and personnel. Measures to sanction police officers making racist comments against Travellers are needed. Respondents called for more funding for Traveller NGOs to support communities because they are the first point of contact and because the government and local councils are constantly failing to do so. They recommended that local councils visit halting sites more regularly and map the situation in order to respond to the needs on the ground. The situation of Traveller women should be prioritised.



Romanian respondents highlighted that the measures should include free access to medical services also to those without health insurance, including free vaccination against Covid-19 and mental healthcare; access to information on Covid-19 prevention and assistance, using various communication means, including in Romani language. They also asked to provide access to safe quarantine measures to avoid the spread of the virus; set up mobile or temporary healthcare units/facilities to provide testing without ethnicization of Roma and other vulnerable groups, particularly in poor and overcrowded localities. Some suggested to set up new organisations promoting and protecting human and environmental rights. Suggestions were also made to change the law regarding poor and disadvantaged communities in the area of housing, access to water, electricity, gas etc. especially during pandemics. Recommendations were made for the enforcement of the anti-discrimination law to protect Roma against racism and of the newly adopted law on combatting antigypsyism. Some respondents also referred to the need of a European legislation targeting Roma communities living in poverty and marginalisation.



Some Roma respondents in Serbia were afraid that once the emergency status is going to be lifted, they would be evicted from their homes without being provided with alternative accommodation, as a result of previous eviction orders.



Albanian respondents highlighted that while everyone in Europe has been hit hard by the Covid-19 pandemic, Roma communities were affected the most and that any time of support toward Roma families to go through this crisis would be something that would very much help them.



Many respondents in Bosnia and Herzegovina emphasised that during the Covid-19 crisis priority should be given to young mothers and their babies and that health treatments should be free for vulnerable Roma communities.



Respondents in North Macedonia underlined that policy makers should work more on addressing discrimination faced by Roma and propose new policies on fighting discrimination, hate speech, and antigypsyism in the media and build the capacity of Roma and include them in political life.



Finally, respondents from Turkey indicated that there are families living in the street at risk of forced migration who require assistance. They reported that Roma are despised because of their ethnicity especially by healthcare institutions and the police and that Roma units or experts within local municipalities would help address some of the discrimination and unequal treatment Roma are experiencing. They also signalled that during the pandemic, violence has increased in homes and that expert support of families should be provided.



CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNT

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the extreme exposure of excluded and marginalised Roma and Traveller communities across Europe to negative socio-economic and fundamental rights impacts. Characterised by the European Fundamental Rights Agency as the “only European population living in third world countries”, the appalling and total deprivation that Roma and Travellers live in and the urgent need to make important investments in marginalised Roma and Traveller communities in order to improve access to infrastructure, to quality education, employment, healthcare and housing became ten times more evident with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The findings of the survey point to gaps in the approach of local authorities and governments dealing with vulnerable groups such as Roma and Travellers to secure humanitarian aid for marginalised and poor communities, to ensure access to education for all children, whether offline or online, to support families losing their income because they were working daily jobs, often in the informal economy, to keep individuals and families safe from domestic and or racial violence and to ensure continuous care to specific groups such as women and pregnant mothers. In addition, anti-Roma rhetoric increased significantly during the pandemic, blaming Roma for spreading the coronavirus.

Characterised by the European Fundamental Rights Agency as the “only European population living in third world countries”

CSOs tried to warn about the dangers of antigypsyism going unrecognised and unpunished. Many governments curtailed human rights of minorities during this crisis and the EU proved to be weak and powerless with its tools and enforcement mechanisms against discrimination and racial violence.

Going forward, the EU has to set a better example for governments and their duties to uphold the rule of law and human rights and be quicker and firmer in sanctioning racist governments.

At European Union level, the pandemic coincided with the year when the European Commission launched the **EU strategic framework for Roma equality, inclusion and participation 2020-2030**, a reference European policy for advancing the situation of Roma in the European Union, Enlargement and Neighbourhood countries. The new framework sets out a comprehensive three-pillar approach: socio-economic inclusion of marginalised Roma with fostering equality and promoting participation. It also sets EU headline targets, includes data collection, reporting and monitoring, and proposes a new portfolio of indicators. The framework includes targeted measures to address the Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on Roma communities and guidelines on how EU funding could be used to benefit Roma.

As response to the pandemic, on 8 April 2020, Commissioners Dalli, Kyriakides and Schmit sent, on behalf of the Commission, a letter to the relevant Ministers in each Member State emphasising the need for specific measures for vulnerable groups, including Roma. The Commissioners drew attention to the importance of the availability of food and drinking water for all, as well as delivery of key sanitation products and medicines. Additionally, the letter pointed to the pre-existing racial inequalities, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and recommended that governments ensure the wide dissemination of information on the current crisis to both Roma communities and the majority population to avoid hate spreading further. They encouraged cooperation with NGOs and other institutions that could provide housing, health and social support for vulnerable groups during the Covid-19 crisis.

The Commission reported initiating two packages of measures to financially assist the Roma communities affected by the Coronavirus outbreak, i.e. the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative (CRII) and the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus (CRII+) and to enable the rapid mobilisation of available allocations under the European Structural and Investment Funds and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) for emergency response. It is also expected that the EU Solidarity Fund would provide additional assistance of up to €800 million to the worst affected countries in order to alleviate the financial burden of the immediate response measures.

Despite the good intentions by the EU, many Roma and Traveller communities alongside other vulnerable groups remained largely unprotected and exposed during the Covid-19 crisis. The public health priorities seemed to compete or go against the human rights agenda, with the

most vulnerable falling between the cracks of challenged democracies.

EU leaders are expected to vote in March 2021 on a bold Council Recommendation on Roma, putting at the forefront a strong focus on humanitarian aid and a human rights plan to fight structural racism and inequality, deliver basic services and infrastructure in Roma communities, offer viable solutions in the areas of education, employment, health, social protection, poverty and put an end to forced evictions, segregation in education and housing, homelessness, hate speech and racist crime and police brutality - in order to guarantee a level playing field in the access to basic rights and services.

It is clear that if we are to overcome the imminent future economic crisis, governments have to set higher targets for Roma inclusion and increase the scope of interventions beyond what is included in the new EU Roma Framework, for all countries. In addition, governments should allocate adequate budgetary means for the implementation of national strategic frameworks and ensure systematic monitoring of compliance with the rule of law and fundamental rights by national, regional and local authorities in ensuring the equal treatment of Roma.



photo credits:
Integro Association, Bulgaria