

Challenges facing Roma during the crisis caused by COVID-19

- SHORT OVERVIEW -



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- short overview -

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Introduction: COVID-19 in the Republic of North Macedonia

The world pandemic has shifted social trends in the Republic of North Macedonia in which COVID-19 found the country in a state of pre-election period and a dissolved Assembly. The first case of the disease was registered on February 26,¹ and by April 29, 1,465 confirmed cases were reported.² Meanwhile, for the first time in the country's history, on March 18, the first decision ever³ was taken to declare a state of emergency throughout the country. In this state, the Government could enact decrees with legal force. The second decision was made on April 17.⁴ Although decrees were aimed at preserving the health of citizens, they (in) directly negatively affected the economy,⁵ and thus harmed the quality of life of citizens, and undermined the

satisfaction of existential needs of the most vulnerable categories. Some of the most vulnerable categories are the citizens of the Roma ethnic community, still facing discrimination, poverty and exclusion.⁶ The consequences of COVID-19 particularly have affected the most disadvantaged people that depend on daily earnings in the informal economy, who live in substandard conditions and who have not been provided with the means to live a dignified life.

In this public policy paper, we analyze the consequences of COVID-19 until May 2020, regarding the Roma population regarding the right to education, the right to health, the right to work, freedom of movement, the basic conditions for exercising the rights and freedoms and activities of donors and NGOs during the state of emergency. Categorized recommendations by areas are attached to this document.

1 [iportal.mk, "The first case of coronavirus in RSN" \(26 February 2020\)](https://iportal.mk/makedonija/video-vo-zhivo-prv-sluhaj-na-koronavirus-vo-rsm/) <<https://iportal.mk/makedonija/video-vo-zhivo-prv-sluhaj-na-koronavirus-vo-rsm/>> accessed on May 11, 2020.

2 „Situation with COVID-19 in North Macedonia and the world 29.4.2020" (29 April 2020) <<https://www.iph.mk/%d1%81%d0%be%d1%81%d1%82%d0%be%d1%98%d0%b1%d0%b0-%d1%81%d0%be-covid-19-%d0%b2%d0%be-%d1%81%d0%b5%d0%b2%d0%b5%d1%80%d0%bd%d0%b0-%d0%bc%d0%b0%d0%ba%d0%b5%d0%b4%d0%be%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%98%d0%b0-%d0%b8-7/>> accessed on 13 May 2020.

3 Decision on determining the existence of a state of emergency on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia for a period of 30 days, 2020 (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 68).

4 Decision on determining the existence of a state of emergency (Official Gazette of the Republic of Northern Macedonia, No. 104/20).

5 Ruzica Fotinovska, "Total budget revenues in April decreased by 38.15%" (12 April 2020) <<https://www.24.mk/details/vkupnite-prikhodi-vo-budzetot-vo-april-namaleni-za-38-15>> accessed on 23 April 2020.

6 Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia, "Roma are among the most vulnerable groups in a state of pandemic" (8 April 2020) <<https://makfax.com.mk/makedonija/%D1%85%D0%B5%D0%BB%D1%81%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%88%D0%BA%D0%B8-%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%82-%D1%80%D0%BE%D0%BC%D0%B8%D1%82%D0%B5-%D1%81%D0%B5-%D0%BC%D0%B5%D1%93%D1%83%D0%B-D%D0%B0%D1%98%D1%80/>> accessed on 11 May 2020.

Right to education: Deepening of the gap

Roma children were initially affected by the epidemic in terms of the right to education. Namely, on March 24, the Government adopted decrees with legal force for the application of the laws on primary and secondary education,⁷ which provide for the teaching in primary and secondary schools to be organized through “distance learning, i.e. home learning, with the use of devices for electronic communication”.⁸ Distance learning from home is a learning that requires the student, i.e. parents, to have access to electricity and to have an electronic device and a solid internet access that will allow the student to follow and be active during classes. However, 3% of Roma households do not have access to electricity (mostly in Shuto Orizari, Vinica and Kavadarci),⁹ 38% do not have access to the Internet, and 51% do not have a computer (95% have mobile phones).¹⁰

Even if this technical condition is met, it still does not mean that students will be able to attend classes without problems, as this also requires an appropriate room. 36% of Roma households live in premises smaller than 50 m²,¹¹ which can significantly affect the quality monitoring of child teaching. There are children in households who do not have and cannot afford to have a computer / tablet and internet access to attend classes. Secondary education in the Republic of North Macedonia is “mandatory for every citizen, under equal conditions”,¹² nevertheless, the requirements provided by the Decree put the poorer citizens in a less equal position compared to others. For example, in one of the largest schools in the country, “Braka Ramiz-Hamid” in Shuto Orizari, out of a total of 2,047 students, about 1,000 cannot attend classes because they do not have electronic devices and internet access.¹³ Due to the significant gap in literacy between Roma and non-Roma population is,¹⁴ the problem of distance learning from home among Roma children is further complicated by the fact that parents are expected to help children with their school tasks.

The right to education of boys and girls is affected in a different way. Since care provision is gender determined,¹⁵ during a pandemic it is expected that the increasing need for care either directly due to the pandemic or indirectly due to the restrictions, will mainly be on women and girls. This will prevent girls from fulfilling school related tasks. Moreover, globally, the rate of girls who have access to the Internet is 12 percent lower than that of boys,¹⁶ therefore digital teaching may further exclude girls. This disconnection is further enhanced by the already mentioned small access to digital technology among Roma.

7 Decrees with legal force for application of the Law on Primary Education and the Law on Secondary Education, 2020 (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 76/20).

8 Ibid.

9 AECOM International Development Europe SL, “Social Mapping Report” (2019) <http://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/dokumenti/2019/Social%20mapping%20report%20final_Macedonian.pdf> accessed on April 24, 2020.

10 Ibid., p. 59.

11 AECOM International Development Europe SL (n 11).

12 Law on Amendments to the Law on Secondary Education, 2007 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia, No. 49/07).

13 Srebra Gjorgjievska, “Statement by Alvin Salimovski, Director of ‘Braka Ramiz-Hamid’ school (22 April 2020) <<https://deca.mk/rechisi-1-000-uchenitsi-vo-braka-ramiz-hamid-vo-shuto-orizari-se-izolirani-od-nastava-drugata-polovina-koristat-zum/>> accessed on 23 April 2020.

14 Institute for Human Rights, “Roma Children’s Right to Education with a Special Focus on Roma Girls” (2016) <<https://www.ihr.org.mk/pub/obrazovanie.pdf>> accessed on May 11, 2020.

15 “Who take care of caregivers? Improving applied policies for informal long-term care” <[https://epi.org.mk/docs/Policy_brief\[MK\].pdf](https://epi.org.mk/docs/Policy_brief[MK].pdf)> .

16 United Nations Children’s Fund, “Discussion Paper Series: Children’s Rights and Business in a Digital World. Access to the Internet and Digital Literacy” (2017) <https://www.unicef.org/csr/css/UNICEF_CRB_Digital_World_Series_ACCESS.pdf> accessed on May 12, 2020.

Right to health: Deteriorated exclusion of Roma

One of the main challenges during the pandemic is the right to health care for the more vulnerable part of the Roma community. Regulations restricting the movement of citizens and restricting public transport also affect access to health care facilities. Namely, the distance to the nearest hospital for 27% of Roma is two kilometers,¹⁷ and the homes of about 12% of Roma households do not have access to paved road.¹⁸ Therefore, distance becomes an additional challenge for both the most urgent cases and the maintenance of health in general during the pandemic.

Access to clean drinking water, personal hygiene products and maintaining cleanliness in homes are key determinants of maintaining good health, especially in this period when, according to recommendations from the Ministry of Health, disinfection of homes and hygiene need to be increased. However, about 10% of Roma households in the country, mostly in Shuto Orizari, Prilep and Kumanovo, do not have drinking water inside their homes, while 18% of households do not have access to a sewer system.¹⁹ In some cities there are also illegal settlements that due to the location or the illegal status of their homes, these households have access to water only outside their homes, from rivers or public fountains.²⁰ The poor living conditions of some Roma also contribute to the lack of

personal hygiene.²¹ Lack of money and living below the poverty threshold makes them unable to provide basic hygiene and household products. Consequently, Roma in terms of health during a pandemic may be more susceptible to infection than other categories of citizens.

Additional protection during the pandemic is the wearing of masks and gloves when entering a closed premises with a lot of people, such as markets, banks, green markets etc. In this regard, on April 22, the Government adopted a Regulation²² which required that all persons going out of their homes must wear personal protection items, which means covering the face and mouth with masks, silk scarves, shawls and other similar covers. In addition, the Government has established fines in the amount of 20 euros in denar counter-value for individuals who will be found without personal protection. During the pandemic, one mask costs MKD 30,²³ which is a significant burden on the family budget of many citizens, especially Roma living in sub-standard conditions. The Government needs to provide free masks for the entire population, and especially for the most vulnerable categories. So far, 100,000 free masks have been provided to citizens of Prilep, Kumanovo and Tetovo²⁴ as cities with a larger number of infected citizens, but we still need to see how many of them will be distributed to the most indigent families and whether the government will provide free masks for the whole country in the future.

With regard to access to health services for vulnerable categories during state of emergency, the Government has adopted a Decree²⁵ allowing all persons that are not covered with health insurance "to be able to receive health services in health care facilities related to the diagnosis and treatment of coronavirus COVID-19 at the expense of the Health Insurance Fund of the Republic of North Macedonia ". This solution addresses the problem of the unemployed

17 AECOM International Development Europe SL (n 11).

18 Ibid.

19 AECOM International Development Europe SL (n 11).

20 The case of lack of access to water was decided by the Bitola Court of Appeal Bitola in December 2019 when it ruled on discrimination against residents of a Roma settlement in Prilep due to ethnic origin, because the Municipality of Prilep and PCE Vodovod Prilep did not provide access to clean drinking water. Source: Bitola Court of Appeal, "Case number: GZ-1671/19".

21 Roma SOS Prilep, "The Narrative of Roma Health: Habits change if the perception of problems changes in the relation patient - health worker!" (2017) <http://romasosprilep.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Javen-dokument_MK.pdf> accessed on April 24, 2020.

22 Decree with legal force for wearing personal protection items to prevent the spread of the disease, control of the infectious disease caused by coronavirus COVID-19 and protection of the population during the state of emergency, 2020 (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 107 / 20).

23 telma.com.mk, "Protective masks have reached a price of 30 denars" (February 28, 2020) <<https://telma.com.mk/zashtitnite-maski-dostignaa-tse-na-od-30-denari/>> accessed on April 27, 2020.

24 nezavisen.mk, "100,000 free masks provided for the citizens of Kumanovo, Prilep and Tetovo" (April 25, 2020) <<https://nezavisen.mk/obezbedeni-100-000-besplatni-maski-za-gragjanite-na-kumanovo-prilep-i-tetovo/>> accessed on April 27, 2020.

25 Decree with legal force for application of the Law on Health Insurance during the state of emergency, 2020 (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 92/20).

during a state of emergency or who earn their living through the informal economy. This will be especially important for Roma women. Namely, even before the pandemic, there was the issue of disproportionately high unemployment of Roma women; 4,804 unemployed Roma women were registered, of which 1,547 live on the territory of the City of Skopje.²⁶

This indicates the multiple exclusion and discrimination of Roma women on the basis of gender and ethnicity, which in their case is most often manifested as intersex discrimination, including access to health services. This problem is also manifested in relation to access to health services related to sexual and reproductive health. Even before the pandemic, this approach was again restricted after the regression in Shuto Orizari. Namely, as of January 22, there is no gynecological clinic any more, where women of Shuto Orizari could go to see their own gynecologist, which directly endangers their health.²⁷ In the current pandemic situation, with restricted public transport and movement hours, access to these services for women is further hampered, if not made impossible. In this context, according to research conducted by the Shuto Orizari Women's Initiative, only 14% of 195 Roma women surveyed know where to go if they experience symptoms of the virus.²⁸

But the situation is nothing better in other parts of the country. Even before the pandemic, there were numerous reports of discrimination and even violence against Roma women seeking gynecological health services.²⁹ Moreover, research showed that 57% of Roma women paid for a check-up at a gynecologist, although these check-ups should be free of charge.³⁰

On March 31, a woman that gave birth in Ohrid, together with her newborn baby, died at the Gynecology and Obstetrics Clinic in Skopje, after she had been waiting for three days to be admitted to the gynecology clinic in Ohrid to give birth.

The mother was a 37-year-old Roma woman living in substandard conditions. From March 26 to 29, although she continuously complained of pain and was admitted to the hospital, the doctor repeatedly told her that she was not ready for childbirth, indicating systemic discrimination due to her social status and skin color. After arriving at the Ohrid hospital on March 31 due to her deteriorating condition, she was immediately transferred to Skopje, where she waited six hours to receive the results of the COVID-19 test, which turned out to be negative.³¹ However, after the operation, the mother died along with her baby. This situation clearly shows that the determinants of biased action by institutions have been strengthened during the crisis caused by COVID-19, which only emphasizes the unequal approach of institutions based on skin color, ethnicity and social status. In a situation where the system is shaken, the perception of institutions about who is "worth" providing service to is shifted through the prism of ethnic and class differences.

26 Employment Agency of the Republic of Northern Macedonia, "Review of unemployed persons by ethnic origine with a status of 31.03.2020" <<https://av.gov.mk/content/Statisticki%20podatoci/Mapr%202020/O3nacionalnost032020.xls.pdf>> accessed on April 28, 2020.

27 Alsat-m.tv, "Shutka was left without a gynecologist, she went to Cento" (January 24, 2020) <<https://www.alsat-m.tv/mk/шутка-остана-без-гинеколог-побегна-во/>> accessed on April 28, 2020.

28 Source: Women's Initiative from Shuto Orizari.

29 "Those two nurses insulted me all the time and scolded me over my shouting and at one point one of them slapped me", mkd.mk, "This is what it means to be a Roma woman and give birth in a state clinic" (June 25, 2016) <<https://www.mkd.mk/makedonija/eve-shto-znachi-da-si-romka-i-da-se-poragjash-vo-drzhavna-klinika>> accessed May 13, 2020.

30 Roma Women's Initiative by Shuto Orizari, "Happy Women's Day" (March 6, 2020) <<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2526010200999119>> accessed April 28, 2020.

31 European Roma Rights Centre, "9 Month Pregnant Romani Woman Dies After Waiting Six-Hours For COVID-19 Test Results to Get Emergency Care" (6 April 2020) <<http://www.errc.org/news/9-month-pregnant-romani-woman-dies-after-waiting-six-hours-for-covid-19-test-results-to-get-emergency-care?fbclid=IwAR02ttx4u4nqsyNF6Yc9ENrFV3AMnhle15uz-PQ33Hl-AowNMS1lFeQzjRtE>> accessed April 2020.

Right to work: Limited conditions for daily earnings

About 40% of Roma in the country are involved in the informal way of earning.³² This way of survival based on daily earnings makes them vulnerable and in normal conditions of movement of social trends. In the light of an epidemic, the Government has taken decisions that restrict citizens' right to freedom of movement throughout the country. The first such decision to ban and set a special movement regime was taken on March 22,³³ which prohibited the movement of citizens in the period from 9pm to 6 am the next day. Already on March 25, the Government adopted a Decision,³⁴ banning the movement on weekends from 4pm to 5pm, and then introduced stricter measures on April 6, banning movement every working day from 4pm to 5am the next day.³⁵ Such restrictions on movement, along with the government's recommendations for physical distancing, have significantly hampered the efforts of people to provide for their needs. Consequently, plastic and iron collectors have faced reduced daily earnings due to the shorter time they have left to move and the stagnation of economic flows in terms of buying what they collect.

32 Romalítico, „Eu Progress Report - Roma Integration in North Macedonia 2019“.

33 Decision on prohibition and special regime of movement on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2020 (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 72/20).

34 Decision on amending the Decision on prohibition and special regime of movement on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2020 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Northern Macedonia, No. 78/20).

35 Decision on amending the Decision on prohibition and special regime of movement on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia, 2020 (Official Gazette of the Republic of Northern Macedonia, No. 92/20).

The seasonal workers were also affected due to the closure of the country's airports,³⁶ but also to the closure of the borders of the Schengen area for citizens of third countries.³⁷ In a situation when there is a projection of GDP decline of 4%,³⁸ those who are involved in informal street sales, stalls and other similar activities have additional negative implications. This is due to the projections of a significant reduction of companies' profit, employment and consumption of citizens, and consequently change of the consumption behavior of citizens in terms of saving their money and buying exclusively basic products in markets.³⁹ To alleviate the situation of these people, the Government in its second package of economic crisis measures adopted on March 31,⁴⁰ for persons without employment or persons who were part of the informal economy provided compensation of 7,000 denars per household for the months of April and May. According to government estimates, the measure would cover 20,000 new households and 30,000 existing beneficiaries.

An additional aspect is the exceptional way in which the crisis will affect Roma women. Namely, despite the fact that they are disproportionately more affected by the problem of unemployment, employed Roma women usually work in sales and hygiene services.⁴¹ The workers who provide these services are, in fact, at the forefront of dealing with COVID-19 and are on a daily basis exposed to possible infection. Thus, the vulnerability of most of the Roma employees in the country is, in fact, further increased during the crisis.

36 Decision on amending the Decision on measures for prevention of introduction and spread of coronavirus COVID-19, 2020 (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 66/20).

37 slobodnaevropa.mk, "EU closes borders for third-country nationals" (March 17, 2020) <<https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/30493710.html>> accessed April 24, 2020.

38 International Monetary Fund, „Republic of North Macedonia: Request for Purchase Under the Rapid Financing Instrument-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for the Republic of North Macedonia“ (21 April 2020) <<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2020/04/16/Republic-of-North-Macedonia-Request-for-Purchase-Under-the-Rapid-Financing-Instrument-Press-49340>> accessed April 24, 2020."plainCitation": "International Monetary Fund, 'Republic of North Macedonia : Request for Purchase Under the Rapid Financing Instrument-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for the Republic of North Macedonia' (21 April 2020)

39 Ibid."URL": "<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/CR/Issues/2020/04/16/Republic-of-North-Macedonia-Request-for-Purchase-Under-the-Rapid-Financing-Instrument-Press-49340>"; "author": [{"family": "International Monetary Fund", "given": ""}], "accessed": [{"date-parts": [{"2020, 4, 24}], "issued": [{"date-parts": [{"2020, 4, 21}], "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}]

40 Government of the Republic of Northern Macedonia, "The Government has adopted the second package of economic crisis measures in order to preserve as many jobs as possible for the citizens and to help the economy" (March 31, 2020) <<https://vlada.mk/node/20813>> accessed April 24, 2020.

41 AECOM International Development Europe SL (n 11), p. 20.

Freedom of movement: Racial profiling

The Government instructed the Ministry of Interior “to give to any person leaving the borders of the Republic of North Macedonia to sign a personal statement pledging not to return to the Republic of North Macedonia in the next three months”.⁴² The statement and the temporary ban on a citizen to return to the country, although an exception is provided in Article 27 of the Constitution,⁴³ is still a lack of care for its citizens. The government eased this situation when it introduced a 14-day strict isolation (quarantine) measure on March 21 for citizens entering the country’s border crossings,⁴⁴ after previously placing nine Roma in a group quarantine on March 17, while the remaining 300 passengers that entered the country the same day had signed only a statement of self-isolation.⁴⁵ The men posted a video from the Pepeliste barracks, showing bugs in the room, humidity and unhygienic conditions. Additionally, hate speech on ethnic grounds could be read in many of the comments under the video.⁴⁶ Such selective action and racial profiling of one’s own citizens is a violation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.⁴⁷

Basic conditions for exercising rights and freedoms: A decade long problem of non-possession of personal documents

About 750 people⁴⁸ who have lived for generations in the country, mostly of Roma ethnicity, are not registered in the birth register. Consequently, they cannot obtain personal identification documents, which is why they do not meet the basic criteria, such as having an ID card to apply for any services or measures offered by the state. Although the Law on Unregistered Persons in the Birth Register,⁴⁹ which offers a solution for these persons, was passed in February 2020, still the competent institutions are not yet administratively equipped with bylaws to register these persons in special registers according to law. These individuals are most affected by the crisis since they cannot be beneficiaries of any of the measures introduced during the state of emergency, except for the measure for free testing and treatment for COVID-19. In addition, humanitarian packages are the only informal measure they can use during a crisis, as they do not require formal procedures for end users.

42 “Decisions of the 22nd session of the Government: The Government has proposed that the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia establishes the state of emergency on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia in order to prevent the introduction, spread and to deal with coronavirus” (March 18, 2020). <<https://vlada.mk/node/20588>> accessed April 24, 2020.

43 Every citizen has the right to leave the territory of the Republic and return to the Republic. The realization of these rights may be restricted by law, only when necessary to protect the security of the country, to prosecute or to protect the health of the people.

44 Decree with legal force for application of the Law for the protection of the population from infectious diseases during the state of emergency, 2020 (Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, No. 72/20).

45 irl.mk, “Out of the 300 people who passed Deve Bair, only 9 Roma were taken in group quarantine” (March 20, 2020) <<https://irl.mk/od-300-lue-koi-minale-na-deve-bair-samo-9-romi-se-odneseni-vo-grupen-karantin/>> accessed April 24, 2020.

46 Television 24, “There are no hygienic conditions in the quarantine in Pepeliste” (March 17, 2020) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzZaJgXtKpk&feature=emb_title> accessed April 27, 2020.

47 United Nations, “International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination” <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cerd.aspx>> accessed April 24, 2020.

48 opserver.mk, “Civil society organizations seek systematic and lasting solutions to Roma problems” (November 29, 2019) <<https://opserver.mk/politika/gragjanski-organizacii-baraat-sistemski-i-trajni-reshenija-za-problemitite-na-romite/>> accessed March 30, 2020.

49 Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, Law on Unregistered Persons in the Birth Register.

Activities of donors and non-governmental organizations

International donors and NGOs have contributed to the support of socially disadvantaged Roma. Namely, the Foundation "Open Society" - Macedonia on April 2 announced that \$ 100,000 is provided for humanitarian packages for the most vulnerable Roma families in the country planning to cover "10,000 citizens in 2,000 households living in Shuto Orizari, Tetovo, Gostivar, Bitola, Prilep, Kumanovo, Delchevo, Vinica, Pehchevo and the village of Crnik".⁵⁰ The following organizations were included in the implementation of the activities: the Red Cross together with the local Roma non-governmental organizations "Romano Chachipe", IRIZ - Skopje, "Sonce" - Tetovo, "Station PET" - Prilep, NRC - Kumanovo, NGO KHAM - Delchevo, HOPS - Skopje and the Center for Street Children - Shuto Orizari. Moreover, on April 27, it was announced that additional 1,260 humanitarian packages were planned covering 5,000 citizens in the municipalities of Berovo, Radovish, Strumica, Kavadarci, Negotino, Kicevo, Kocani, Stip and Veles.⁵¹ The Council of Europe's ROMACTED program was involved in alleviating the plight of vulnerable Roma. Their representatives and representatives of local governments distributed vouchers and humanitarian packages with food and hygiene items to

50 fosm.mk, "Open Society Foundation - Macedonia donates \$100,000 to the most vulnerable Roma families" (April 2, 2020) <<https://fosm.mk/vazni-informacii/fondacizjata-otvoreno-opshtestvo-makedonija-donira-100-000-dolari-za-najzagrozenite-romski-semejstva/?fbclid=IwAR1fpLBgLPKqPeBKyGo-JNTR6yndlk6QwrAAup7DkMaHg7JblFAEsBwOjJk>> accessed April 27, 2020.

51 fosm.mk, "Foundation 'Open Society' - Macedonia donates additional 1,260 humanitarian packages for the most vulnerable Roma families" (April 27, 2020) <<https://fosm.mk/vazni-informacii/fondacizjata-otvoreno-opshtestvo-makedonija-donira-dopolnitelni-1-260-humanitarni-paketi-za-najzagrozenite-romski-semejstva/>> accessed April 27, 2020.

Roma families from Tetovo and Bitola, and their structures assisted the Foundation "Open Society" - Macedonia to distribute their humanitarian packages in the selected municipalities.⁵²

Other activities in support and assistance to Roma families include informative videos explaining the government's measures during the crisis,⁵³ Roma language infographics for the protection of pregnant women from COVID-19,⁵⁴ handing out manuals for dealing with the virus⁵⁵ and sharing of humanitarian packages from various Roma organizations at the local level in the communities where they operate.

52 ROMACTED Program, "ROMACTED Assistance and Contribution to Actions during the COVID-19 Pandemic in North Macedonia" (16 April 2020) <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/roma-local-governance/-/romacted-assistance-and-contribution-to-actions-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-in-north-macedonia?fbclid=IwAR1P-BQ73nJWdDSzB_UWJa9ON-V2ZcnkQnbtMn3Dy-K5CF64m_US_u9lqwEs> accessed April 27, 2020.

53 Romano Chachipe, "Important Information in the Field of Social Protection" (April 15, 2020) <<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?t=13&v=246822276514243>> accessed April 27, 2020.

54 Roma Women and Youth Association "Luludi", "Sar Šaj o Khamne Džuvlja Te Arakhenpes Taro Covid-19" (April 22, 2020) <<https://www.facebook.com/romaNgoluludi/photos/pcb.1939236002876396/19392344486209881/?type=3&theater>> accessed April 27, 2020.

55 Romano Chachipe, "Manuals for dealing with COVID-19 from the technical support ESE, were distributed to 400 families at the same time" (April 10, 2020) <https://www.facebook.com/romanochachipe2018/posts/2840820329340692?__tn__=-R> accessed April 27, 2020.



Conclusion

Lack of access to infrastructure, resources and decent / formal work makes part of the Roma community most affected by the crisis caused by COVID-19. In a situation when their health and existential needs are endangered, targeted action and activities are needed to alleviate these conditions. The government's economic and social measures can only partially improve the lives of these people in the short term, but they will not solve the problems that will remain hanging after the end of this situation. Because the virus affects the entire country and the fact that a large part of the population economically depends on the measures and benefits that are created during the state of emergency, the government is not expected to solve all the existing problems of the Roma during the crisis. However, in relation to the existing measures, it remains to be seen how and to what extent the measures will be absorbed by the Roma community and how they will affect their lives during the crisis. It is already evident that the measures will not be used by those who are not registered in the birth register, so after the crisis the government will have to pay attention to provide the conditions for consistent implementation of the Law on Un-registered Persons in the birth register, but also to provide basic infrastructural conditions that are not at a satisfactory level in many Roma settlements across the country.

Recommendations:

EDUCATION

- It is necessary to reduce the literacy gap between the Roma population and the non-Roma population through targeted policies and programs to encourage the education of the Roma community.
- The government should make efforts to provide basic electronic devices and internet access for every child.
- To design and implement programs to help and support Roma parents, so that they can support children in the process of “distance learning”, including through digital literacy programs.

HEALTH

- To provide free access to masks and hygiene products for all socially vulnerable Roma.
- Improve access to health care facilities, including by improving the infrastructure of Roma communities in terms of access to water, sewerage, paved roads and hospitals. In this regard, it is necessary to legalize certain settlements or to find a solution for the proper relocation of Roma settlements.
- To find a permanent solution for the lack of gynecological services in the municipality of Shuto Orizari.
- To solve the problem of shortage of family doctors in Shuto Orizari.
- To raise awareness among healthcare professionals about the treatment of members of the Roma community, especially Roma women, when accessing health services. It is necessary to thoroughly investigate all disputes related to treatment, especially during a pandemic.

RIGHT TO A DECENT JOB

- The government should create policies to legalize those involved in the informal economy, given that with their work they contribute to a cleaner environment.
- Targeted and applicable policies and measures are needed to access employment programs in the Roma community.
- Targeted policies for Roma women are needed in order to reduce the employment gap, including additional efforts by institutions and civil society organizations to further prepare and involve Roma women in the labor market.

FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT:

- It is necessary to raise awareness about the racial profiling by various officials.
- Competent institutions should investigate all disputed cases known to the public.

BASIC CONDITIONS FOR EXERCISING RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS:

- The government should task the competent institutions to develop the bylaws for consistent application of the Law on Unregistered Persons in the birth register.

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