

MEETING INFORMATION

ROMA INTEGRATION EMERGENCY RESPONSE MEETINGS TO COVID-19

MONTENEGRO

Date: 07 May 2020, 2nd informative meeting

Organized by: Regional Cooperation Council Roma Integration 2020 (RCC RI2020)

Attendees: Governmental representatives, NCRP, EU Delegation, International organizations, Council of Roma, OSF, Local and mainstream and Roma organizations

Objective: The current situation of Covid-19 pandemic urged the governments in the region to undertake a number of overarching measures. Both the pandemic and the measures significantly influence the Roma communities in the region. In such situation the governments, and accordingly the Roma Integration 2020, need to adjust to the circumstance in performing their mandate for the best possible outcome for Roma within the given possibilities. Hence, the Roma Integration 2020, in consultation with the European Union and the Open Society Foundations, finds it necessary to facilitate a broad societal dialogue regarding the response to the Covid-19 crisis and its consequences to the Roma community in order to ensure broad needs assessment, proper short, medium and long term response, and adequate consideration of Roma in the mainstream measures.

INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION OF ROMA AND EGYPTIANS (RE) IN MONTENEGRO

1. Overview of existing measures taken at national and EU level for the most vulnerable RE

Government/NRCP:

- **New employed people, officially register and tax payers, from 1st of April, in the next 6 months will get subvention of 70% brutto salary.**
- The National Coordinating Body for Infectious Diseases (NCBID) and the Government of Montenegro are taking measures to answer to all the human needs at the moment. The applied quarantine measures are allowing one person per family to be at a time out for basic grocery and medicine shopping. So far solidarity and civil responsibility is well maintained. Discriminatory actions are not noted.
- For all the unemployed persons and pensioners with lowest income, besides the provided nutrition, hygienic and medical support, one-off payment of EUR 50 is provided by the Government under the economic measures.
- There will not be disconnection from energy and water supply in any household.
- National kitchen delivers food for all the people in the Konik area, populated with RE.
- Education and teaching classes are maintained via TV and mobile apps, the Ministry of Education is in coordination with media houses for the program delivery. **Special attention to be paid to the students in the final year of studies due to their exams and graduation for better results. The Roma school mediators should be active in a short period of time.**
- The city of Podgorica ensured 50.000 EUR for the municipality of Tuzi to combat coronavirus as not all municipalities have enough funding for disinfection.
- The only RE few positive cases to COVID 19 were noted in Konik area (the former camp). Appropriate governmental measures were taken on time to mitigate the risk of further spread.
- The whole area of Konik, 243 families, is in self isolation. Red Cross reacted urgently to provide the main necessities and comfort the people.
- Pointing out the good cooperation and in coordination with the local Roma NGOs (Young Roma, Phiren Amenca) the Red Cross delivered the first aid cycle in 13 municipalities where mainly RE are living.
- According to list prepared by the Roma NGOs, in Konik, on daily bases, the Red Cross is distributing bread, milk and baby diapers to the most vulnerable.
- **Due to the low socioeconomic status of residents at Vreli Ribnicki, Konik, water and electricity disruptions are frequent. All residents of the neighbourhood, however, have electricity and those who were disconnected due to accumulated debt were connected to the grid. Update: Part of the area of Ribnicki, where 2 cases of COVID 19 were discovered, a project for water supply has started.**
- Info leaflets on protection measures were translated in Romanes and Albanian and disseminated.
- **The Ministry of Education allocated 3000 EUR for tablets for students in the 8th and 9th grade.**
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EU Delegation:



- 3 million EUR are allocated for short term responses, contract with UN is signed 10 days ago for purchase of medical equipment, expected to arrive in 2 weeks.
- 50 million EUR are being planned for long term responses on health and socio economic measures. Models for funds distribution is an ongoing discussion with the EU Commission.
- The measures to be supported from the EU funds are in line with the governmental strategic goals. We wait to see from the Government what those measures are.
- 32 million EUR subventions are planned to support the recovery of the most threatened sectors from this crisis, but it is not yet programed how this can benefit RE and the informal workers.
- The communication between Brussels and the Government is managed by the NIPAC office and their role in the process of programing is very important as well as the Ministry of Finance.
- Everyone working on human rights and protection of minorities and vulnerable groups will make sure that certain amount is dedicated for measures targeting the most vulnerable.
- From the total 53 million EUR, 40 million EUR will be defined by as a state budget support, meaning the financing will be direct to the government. It is very important to have defined measures and indicators that will follow the social economic measures.
- Economical experts are working on the budgetary lines. It is important the government to came up with the social measures. May and June are curtail for the planning.

2. Overview of the short term needs

- NRCP: Engaging the RE educational mediators are necessary to have better insight and data from grassroots. The mediators should also help the RE parents and children how to deal with the schooling trends existing at the moment. In addition, ensuring access to TV and mobile app for children (approx. 100 in Konik) is necessary. Since the loosening of the restrictive actions, the mediators will be engaged and active in the field very soon.
- Access to internet in RE settlements is essential. The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and the Roma NGOs have a list of targeted areas. Update: Action implemented trough access to internet vie tablets and smart phones.
- School materials to be delivered to children who have no access to TV and Internet, (approx. 100 in Konik), in Nikshic the Roma NGOs have the data. The Ministry of Education can secure more data from the teachers. Update: Action implemented details below the report.
- People without documents are excluded from all measures. The Government should include them as soon as possible and provide basic human treatment and long term solutions for their economic recovery.
- **Update on education:** NGO Mladi Romi (Young Roma) with financial support of the Roma Education Fund and the European Commission, provided 60 tablets in total value of € 5,500. The equipment was distributed to 40 high school students in final grades and 20 pupils in eighth and ninth grades of primary schools who do not have the adequate equipment to participate in on-line learning. In partnership with Crnogorski Telekom a.d. Podgorica, tablets were procured at purchase price and additionally Crnogorski Telekom provided for free 60 SIM cards with 30 GB of internet per month for the next two months.
- For the remaining 75 students in high school, tablets were secured trough the Embassy of the USA, one time grant agreement was signed with the NGO Young Roma in amount of 10.000 EUR.
- 124 students are about to finish 9th grade, 80 students are regularly followed by the NGO Young Roma and for 20 of them tablets were secured due the urgent need for graduation and exams period.
- In total 160 students by now have recieved tablets.
- IO HELP has distributed 120 smart phones in 3 schools with highest rate of Roma students.
- According to a survey conducted by the NGO Young Roma, on the availability of computer/laptops of Roma students at the beginning of April this year, on the sample of 245 students:
 - Out of the total number of high school students who are our beneficiaries (115), a total of 88 of them do not have a laptop or computer in their home.
 - When it comes to primary school, the survey included 130 students in eighth and ninth grade, and out of that number, 120 students do not have a laptop or a computer (92.3%),

The purchase of tablets for 60 primary and secondary school students is one of the adapted activities within the project "Improving primary education - first step towards quality secondary education", funded by the Roma Education Fund, as well as the regional project "Increasing access and participation of Roma students in





secondary education and transition to labor market', funded by the European Union and implemented through the Roma Education Fund (REF), and NGO Young Roma is a national partner organization for Montenegro. The mentioned projects involve 79 mentor teachers, who provide mentoring support for a total of 130 primary and 115 high school students during the school year and as well during the distance learning.

3. Who does what and coordination of various stakeholders?

- The Red Cross is mandated by the NCBID to manage all the humanitarian aid.
- The NRCP is in coordination with Red Cross and the National Roma Council for aid packages delivery.
- NGO Young Roma through the Council of Europe secured 400 humanitarian aid packages and delivered in cooperation with the Red Cross in RE populated municipalities.
- NGO Phiren Amenca and HELP donor organization secured 600 humanitarian aid packages.
- The Ministry of Education, Red Cross and UNICEF, are initiating, all the vulnerable RE children without internet, TV and mobile apps, to receive school materials once a week. The RE leaders and the school mediators should be tasked to ensure proper delivery. **Update: action successfully implemented.**
- The planning of the second cycle of humanitarian aid should take in consideration the needs of the communities. **Update action implemented:** From public information, we get to know that the second cycle of help is taking place and it is financed by the German Government and the IO HELP. Detailed description of the activities can be found in the link: <http://help-montenegro.org>

4. Enduring synergies and complementarity

- ✓ The second cycle of aid packages delivery should be in a month as that depends on donations. The Red Cross should make sure to coordinate with the Roma organizations on data and people in need by municipality. The RCC RI2020 is in communication with the Roma NGOs, OSF, REF, CoE, Romacted, and other international donor organizations to point out the need of short term emergency donations. **Implemented**
- ✓ The Ministry of Education is calling the Roma School mediators, the Red Cross and UNICEF to coordinate and support the delivery of school materials in Konik. Around 100 children are in need, while approx. 500 have access to the TV and internet. **Implemented**
- ✓ The NGO Young Roma and the education mediators to get in touch with teachers on data collection, how many children currently have no access to the provided methods of teaching at the moment. **Implemented through the survey**
- RCC RI 2020 can help the Ministry of Education to establish database and gather information on the most urgent needs of children and parents.
- NGO Young Roma and Red Cross to plan the distribution of the 2nd cycle humanitarian aid while the municipalities and the Government should allocate funds for the packages.

5. Proposed targeted and mainstream measures

- The NRCP is ensuring that there will not be any family in need of food, water and electricity; these mainstream measures will remain in place.
- There will not be relocation of budget for the implementation of the Strategy for RE integration. This may happen only in very urgent cases if ministries are in need but further relocation will be ensured if such need occurs.
- The Ministry of Education has prepared educational material for children with no access to mobile phones, TV and internet. The materials should be delivered as soon as possible. **Update: With the help of UNICEF and HELP, the Ministry of Education has distributed the school materials.**
- The governmental measure to provide 50 EUR for social aid receivers and pensioners does not include and count the people who are not in any of these groups nor are registered job seekers. Since the measure is planned to be implemented through the Centres for employment and pension funds, this will not be beneficial for the RE people, therefore, NGO Young Roma is proposing the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights/NRCP to coordinate the process and provide information flow among relevant stakeholders. The NGOs will provide data on unregistered people that have to be taken in consideration.





- NGO Young Roma is proposing the budget plan for implementation of the National Strategy for Roma and Egyptians that remain unspent, to be relocated to measures identified by the Roma organizations in accordance with the community needs.
- Roma volunteers are organized by the Roma Council and NGO Young Roma for any emergency need.

6. Follow up

1. With a purpose to ensure Roma and Egyptians are taken into governmental strategic consideration when defining socio economic post COVID 19 recovery the NRCP should be in a position to provide short, mid and long term recommendations, that includes financial planning and implementation of the measures agreed with all the relevant stakeholders (NRCP, EUD, RI2020, NGOs). **Advocacy plans are in place and ready to be proposed.**

To fasten up the process of programming of EU funds, the first follow up step, as outcome from this meeting is the RCC RI2020, the Ministry of Human and Minority rights/NRCP, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare, the EU Commission, the EU Delegation, the NIPAC office will have an online meeting during next week. The meeting should discuss adequate consideration of Roma and Egyptians in the mainstream measures and propose targeted long term socio economic measures. **Meeting organization is in progress.**

2. Planning the financing and delivery of the second cycle of humanitarian aid. **Update: Action complete.**
3. Distribution of school materials for children without access to TV and internet. **Update: Action complete.**
4. Short term measures to benefit the people without documents to be taken in consideration immediately. **Follow up on this measure is still needed.**
5. The budget planned for implementation of the National Strategy for Roma and Egyptians that remains unspent, should be relocated to measures identified by the Roma organizations in accordance with the community needs.

Follow up from the second meeting:

6. Through the Council of Europe and its Romacted program, additional 20.000 EUR will be secured for the post COVID 19 recovery. In this regard, the facilitators from the Roma communities and the municipalities will ensure a dialogue to define the priorities for financing.
7. **Water and electricity** to be discussed as an immediate access solution from one hand and as a long term solution 27 settlements in 13 municipalities identified by Young Roma are facing problems with access these main resources, but this is a situation provoked by the non-standardized way of living and not legalized areas. Around 200 people have no access to water. RCC Roma Integration 2020 to have a follow up meeting on housing and legalization according to the Roadmap and housing methodology.
8. According to movement of Roma and Egyptians UPRE, around 45 families have no access to water and electricity in Podgorica due to living in a non-legalized area. There were and still are proposed solutions but the main actor who can solve the problem is the municipality, therefore urgent solutions should be found. Additional meeting on this issue is to be held and as proposed by the NRCP, with municipal authorities and with representatives from the Commission for monitoring the National Roma Strategy.
9. According to the Council of Roma, connection to electrical grid is not possible if the house or the settlement is not legalized. Regarding access to water, 3 years now, letters with request have been sent to the relevant authorities, especially for the 9 families from the Konik camp, in a meeting with the director of the state water company, was discussed that water grid is not going to be established under such circumstances but water tank or drinking fountain is possible. However, water infrastructure must be established as well as right to property documents.
10. Follow up on benefit measures for people without regulated legal status, people not registered under any social institution, people who work in undeclared zone, and people who can partially benefit from the existing measures.
EU funds and post socio economic recover measures
11. Follow up meeting with different line ministries (responsible Ministry of Finance) RCC and NIPAC, to set strategical social measures within the Roma responsive budgeting that will inform the EU Delegation on the targeted measures proposed for Roma (besides the mainstream) before the end of July.



