

MEETING INFORMATION

ROMA INTEGRATION EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO COVID-19

:: NORTH MACEDONIA ::

Date: 15 April 2020, I Meeting

Organised by: Roma Integration 2020, Regional Cooperation Council

Attendees: Governmental representatives, National Roma Contact Point (NRCP), European Union Delegation, International organizations, Foundation Open Society Institute, local mainstream and Roma organisations

Technical info: The meetings are held via the online meetings application Zoom, lasting 90 minutes, with up to 100 participants. The Policy Expert of the Roma Integration 2020 is responsible to coordinate the organisation of the meeting with the NRCP, invite participants and share the details for online joining the meeting.

Objective: 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. Specifically, to coordinate information and ensure transparency of information regarding the assessed needs from the field, the actions undertaken by various stakeholders, to propose targeted and mainstream measures, and to ensure the needs of Roma remain on the political/decision-making agenda.

Actions of the Government, municipalities and independent state bodies:

- The Government of North Macedonia has adopted a [range of measures](#) to address the Covid-19 crisis
- The National Roma Contact Point attends Government meetings held almost every day for adoption and adjusting of measures to cope with the crisis; proposals from citizens and others are reviewed
- The National Roma Contact Point is receiving calls from citizens daily regarding the measures and services they can benefit from, and is **referring the citizens to the adequate institutions**
- The National Roma Contact Point is communicating with **bilateral and multilateral donors** to secure **additional help** (besides the help provided by the Government) targeting specifically Roma
- The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is preparing **by-laws** for implementation of the law **regulating the status of the stateless persons**, and it is expected that those registered in the database will be able to apply next month; until then they are **not users of any of the public services**, thus it is important to prioritise these persons with humanitarian aid
- The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy is planning to supply **educational materials** to the Roma children attending **preschool** through the inclusion project, based on the preschool educational materials provided [online](#)
- **Suto Orizari** municipality is distributing **masks and humanitarian packages** to Roma
- Romacted works with the Red Cross and the **12 partner municipalities** in distributing humanitarian aid to the poorest Roma families: 30 packages in Berovo, several rounds of packages in Kocani, 70% of Roma families covered with packages from various donors in Kicevo, 25 food packages and 25 vouchers in Tetovo, 99 packages in Bitola to be distributed tomorrow

EU Delegation actions:

- The EU Delegation is working on processing the funds of around **60 million EUR for North Macedonia addressing the Covid-19 crisis**; 4 million EUR are already contracted for direct support of the health system; the rest of the funds are being programmed and will be operationalised as a direct support to the state budget for the implementation of the measures adopted by the Government; the programming is complex and long; there is no possibility to use the funding for humanitarian aid, thus the focus will be on recovery from the consequences of the crisis
- Besides these funds, **IPA 3 is being programmed** and there are still funds that are not allocated or can be **relocated from IPA 2**, that may include proposals addressing the needs of the Roma
- The **European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)** programme for small grants for civil society organisations will be completely dedicated to recovery from the Covid-19 crisis
- The focus of the EU in the programming of the funds is on the socio-economic recovery from the consequences of the Covid-19 crisis, including addressing the increased unemployment through **granting self-employment** and **small and medium businesses** that will need help to get back in business through small loans that will also be available for those active in the informal economy (the activities are not defined yet, but in any case, they will be in line with the measures undertaken or proposed by the state institutions)



- The EU Delegation recommended all the **EU funded projects targeting Roma** in North Macedonia to try to **modify** their activities in order to provide direct urgent help to the communities during the crisis, although the modifications are always slow because of the bureaucratic procedures; these are small amounts (5-10,000 EUR) for packages with food and hygiene
- Currently the [call for implementation of the action “EU for Roma and people living in deep poverty”](#) is open, with a deadline of 11 May 2020; the action is 3.5 million EUR, and will be implemented through projects of up to 800,000 EUR; it is expected that the contracts are signed by the end of the year; the action should address the housing situation, including urban planning and legalisation and provision of basic infrastructure; it is recommended that the mapped infrastructure needs in the Roma settlements are included in the projects
- It is expected that **any call for proposals** from the EU in the near future will encourage activities for recovery from the **Covid-19 crisis**
- The **negotiations** are opened with the North Macedonia, thus the **priorities** from the negotiation chapters will also be prioritised for funding
- The EU Delegation is providing **scholarships for primary school Roma students** through the Foundation Open Society Institute (FOSI), whereby about 300 families – beneficiaries of social aid, received 200 EUR with the first instalment last month; the scholarship will continue to be distributed regardless of the fact that the schools are not working; FOSI is seeking ways to deliver educational materials to the children that are not able to follow education through internet

Other actions:

- UNICEF provides **3,500 humanitarian packages** for the most vulnerable groups, distributed through the Red Cross, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP)
- UNICEF has three **hot-lines for children, adolescents and parents** providing advice, and the information about these lines is distributed to the Roma communities by the Roma health mediators
- UNICEF is negotiating with the Ministry of Health establishing a telephone based **platform for advising pregnant women and mothers with infants**, using the patronage nurses and Roma health mediators, and also integrating an internet module within the existing [“My term”](#)
- Roma Entrepreneurship Development Initiative - REDI supplied **1,000 masks and gloves** to the most vulnerable informal **waste collectors**
- REDI plans to **install at least 2 public drinking fountains** in some of the Roma settlements in **Prilep and Bitola** where there is no water supply, and distribute masks and gloves to the most vulnerable and information about the measures and recommendations of the Government
- REDI is expecting additional funding to support **Roma entrepreneurs** during and after the crisis
- Foundation Open Society Institute - FOSI started distributing **2,000 humanitarian packages** to the most vulnerable Roma families in **9 municipalities**, through the Red Cross that cooperates with active Roma civil society organisations on the field; the same action will be repeated with **1,260 packages for other 9 municipalities**
- Romalitico shares **information** with the Roma about the Covid-19, the protection recommendations and measures, and socio-economic measures implemented by the Government
- Romalitico distributed **humanitarian aid packages to Debar**, since it was the first place that was locked down because of outbreak of the virus, but is preparing to distribute humanitarian aid packages in up to 15 other municipalities
- UNDP, at the request of the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, provided **80 packages** with food and hygiene materials for the Roma families in the collective centres Ranka Milanovik and Vizbegovo (these are the informal plastic collectors dislocated from “under Kale”)
- UNDP is implementing a project funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) for employment of vulnerable groups, within which it will engage **50 Roma in 12 municipalities** partners on the Romacted programme, on **public works** for disinfection of public areas

Assessed needs communicated with the authorities:

- The Roma civil society organisations are trying to help people to **access the new measures** announced by the Government; there are reports that some institutions responsible to apply the measures do not know about them, do not respond at all, do not adhere to the protective guidelines (the Government is informed by FOSI coordinated civil society organisations)
- Romalitico is receiving huge number of **complaints from Roma** that are trying to access the measure “guaranteed minimum monetary aid” – when Roma ask to file an application for the measure, the public servants from the social centres are telling them there is no such measure; therefore Romalitico will submit information to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
- The Ministry of Labour and Social Policy representative responded that all Roma households without income should apply for “guaranteed minimum monetary aid”, although there are problems with the





- implementation – the social centres may not be fully informed and instructed; if civil society organisations notice problems on the field they should immediately alarm the Ministry
- There are **locations without water, households** and whole **settlements** that are **overcrowded** whereby self-isolation is impossible; the civil society organisations submitted a request to the Government to urgently designate objects to be used for self-isolation for those individuals or households that do not have conditions for self-isolation, but without response from the institution so far; the National Roma Contact Point representative agreed at the meeting that overcrowding is a problem
 - Romalitico and REDI jointly prepared a **proposal for socio-economic measures** for the Roma community sent to the Government, without response so far
 - The Government's measure for **delayed payment** of loan rates does not cover **non-banking fast loans**, which are mostly used by Roma, thus Romalitico requested that the measure is extended to these instruments as well (such as the Horizonti, which actually [responded](#) to the Romalitico reation)
 - Romacted requested 11 mayors (Debar was excluded because it was covered with the needed help) to:
 - o Distribute **humanitarian aid** in food and hygienic materials
 - o **Disinfect the public areas** in the Roma settlements
 - o Including a **Roma person** as a **member** of the **Local crisis headquarters**

Additional needs:

- There is no information on the spread of the virus within the Roma communities
- Most of the humanitarian aid is distributed in Skopje, while Roma in some municipalities are neglected so far; there is a need for coordination of the distribution of the humanitarian aid, in order to avoid providing aid to certain families more than once and not covering other families at all
- Most of the informal waste collectors are currently without any income, because they are not able to sell the plastic; most of them also do not have protective equipment
- Provision of education to children from poor families remains a challenge
- The Roma Education Fund should get involved in terms of addressing the challenges in education during the crisis
- The period of isolation may be used to also provide education for adults, that are otherwise engaged in earning income and do not have the time to complete their education, in order to increase their competitiveness on the labour market
- Romalitico receives huge number of complaints from Roma workers, mostly from the garment industry, complaining that the employers are **violating their rights** (for examples asking them to sign contracts to half-time, while they are still working full-time); Romalitico is looking for a possibility to partner with the Helsinki Committee in order to provide **legal representation** and start judicial cases for these complaints
- Roma settlements mapped by Romacted without **basic utilities**:
 - o 29 November, Tetovo (water, sewerage)
 - o Dupka, Gostivar (water, electricity)
 - o Meksiko, Kicevo (water)
 - o Bair, upper part, Bitola (water)
 - o Tranzit, Strumica (water)
 - o Prohor Pcinski, Berovo (water)

Data collection and coordination initiatives:

- The National Roma Contact Point is following the activities of the civil society
- Romalitico has **mapped so far around 20 settlements** where Roma do not have access to water, with around 4,000 inhabitants
- Romalitico is preparing to launch **online interactive map** next week with information on help distributed by various donors in order to prevent overlapping and ensure coordination
- FOSI coordinates with **10 active Roma civil society** organisations working directly with the people in the field – weekly online meetings held in order to assess the situation and undertake concrete activities
- Romacted coordinates assessment of urgent needs in the Roma communities in the **12 partner municipalities**, prepared a list of the most vulnerable families for each municipality, and submitted official requests to 11 mayors (Debar was excluded because it was covered with the needed help)
- On **Roma infected with the virus**, FOSI has the information that one Roma person from Suto Orizari, two from Kumanovo and one from Kocani died with the Covid-19; the family members of the person from Suto Orizari were examined and they are negative, and their quarantine of 15 days passed; from Kumanovo there are no data on the family members; these data are from civil society organisations; generally, there are no official data disaggregated by municipalities and ethnicity
- Romacted will contact the coordinators and the municipalities in order to **identify** all the Roma **settlements without electricity** and other basic utilities





Policy/measures proposals (besides addressing the identified needs above):

- The Government is urged to **consult with the civil society** regarding the planned measures and funding and to respond to the civil society requests and proposals
- The Government must ensure **access to the newly adopted measures** addressing the Covid-19 crisis to the Roma, including to the “guaranteed minimum monetary aid”
- The Government should urgently **designate objects** to be used **for self-isolation** for those individuals or households that do not have conditions for self-isolation
- The Government should review and potentially adopt with appropriate budget the proposed **socio-economic measures** for the Roma community sent by Romalitico and REDI
- Since the **persons without documents** do not have access to the social measures, Romalitico proposes that the Government provides them either with **vouchers** to purchase items **or** with **food** and other necessities in the amount of 7,000 MKD
- For the settlements without **water**, Romacted proposes to the municipalities to either **install public drinking fountains** or to supply water with **cisterns**, which is currently not done

