

MEETING INFORMATION

ROMA INTEGRATION EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO COVID-19

:: SERBIA ::

Date: 07 May 2020, II Meeting

Organised by: Roma Integration 2020, Regional Cooperation Council

Attendees: Governmental representatives, National Roma Contact Point (NRCP), European Union Delegation, International organizations, Red Cross, Open Society Foundations, 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 support with humanitarian packages containing food, hygiene and other necessary materials continued being provided and distributed, including with the EU funded project of UNOPS
- Reacting to a recommendation from the first meeting, the National Roma Contact Point (NRCP) informed that the GIS has been accessed in order to identify Roma settlements lacking water; the information should be made available by the Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure for the purpose of planning funds responding to the crisis
- The German implementing agency GIZ informed the NRCP of additional funds for employment
- The state of emergency has ended the day before, but emergency measures are still in force
- The key concern is how to employ as many people as possible
- Performing activities in the informal sectors, such as waste collection, will continue to be problematic after the pandemic, thus it is expected Roma to continue suffering economic difficulties
- If the situation allows, the Coordination Body will meet by the end of May

Education:

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development (MESTD) submitted written information before the meeting, responding to the information and recommendations from the first meeting. It was therefore invited to share the information at the beginning of the second meeting and the area of education was discussed first. The following information summarizes the written information and the discussion at the meeting.

- During the crisis, the MESTD provided distant education through TV, email, google classrooms, Viber
- Since not all pupils are able to follow distant education, schools provide printed materials that can be collected at the school or from teaching assistants or teachers of religious education or Romani language, with previous agreement and taking all the preventive measures
- Roma students receive additional help by the 261 teaching assistants in: daily communication with teachers and exchange of educational materials and reporting on individual pupils' activities; daily communication with pupils and parents and delivering of educational tasks and other materials (by phone, Viber, email, etc.); collecting pupils' works and delivery to the teachers if pupils cannot do that; intensified communication by phone with pupils following education only through TV who are doing their tasks in a notebook for record; recording pupils' educational achievements for the purpose of evaluation; informing, preparing and helping pupils for the final exam, following their work and collecting their results; participating in the evaluation of pupils
- Some of the Roma teaching assistants work in the communities, and some work on distance (depending on the conditions); they are regularly and lawfully employed, thus dismissal is prevented
- Monitoring of the process of distant education of pupils belonging to sensitive communities is ongoing through a survey implemented with UNICEF; the results are expected in May and will inform planning
- In partnership with the international donors and the Children's Foundation Pestaloci, MESTD secured smart devices for 70 primary schools with significant number of Roma; the MESTD plans to establish digital libraries where pupils can borrow smart devices with internet (similar to book libraries); some primary





- schools refused to distributed the equipment from fear it would not be returned (the MESTD will work further to make sure the equipment can be distributed)
- According to the MESTD there are no pupils that were not able to follow education through at least one of the offered ways; 5% of all the pupils have not had complete access (had partial), and 2.28% are Roma
 - Trial final exam was organised online, but the actual final exam will be organised regularly, when the situation allows that; additionally, 8th grade students completing primary school will have the possibility to fix their grades through work with teachers in small groups
 - Additional classes for pupils that missed some of the educational content during the crisis will be organised in small groups during June if the situation allows
 - While there are certain challenges to organise “summer camps” described in the written contribution by MESTD (that teachers must be engaged, safety of children must be ensured, etc.) at the meeting it was said the idea can be considered if needed – in case some pupils have not adopted the material during the period of crisis – in close cooperation between MESTD and donors
 - MESTD plans to establish an online platform with the possibility to be used at any time similar crisis occurs or for individual students that in certain periods of time are prevented from going to school; donor support will be needed to implement this plan
 - Support in the form of mentoring, learning support, motivational support for continuing education, books, learning materials, etc. are still needed for the Roma population as usual; such support has been provided by the civil society in cooperation with the educational system and the local self-governments and should continue
 - The distant education was introduced quickly, without much preparing, because of the situation, thus there is no information on how it influenced the quality of the education of the pupils, including Roma; after the results and influence are assessed further plans shall be made and donor support may be needed to implement follow-up activities
 - The teaching assistants were provided protective equipment – masks and gloves – by the Open Society Foundation and the League of Roma in order to be able to resume work in the communities where possible
 - Delivery of books free of charge is linked with the status of social aid recipient, which is questionable because of the crisis (there may be families that are not social aid recipients or are unable to prove this)

EU Delegation actions:

The EU Delegation provided an update on the information from the first meeting, informing that:

- UNOPS started this week the distribution of packages in the four towns with the surrounding (Nis, Valjevo, Subotica and Belgrade)
- The initial agreement with the SCTM to distribute 500 packages for Belgrade settlement has been extended to additional 300 packages
- The distribution of packages provided by the EU is according to the needs assessment table coordinated by the SIPRU
- The EU Delegation allocated 15 million EUR support to Serbia to cope with the crisis, providing materials and equipment for the health sector (last planes with aid are expected to land next week)
- Internally at the EU Delegation the discussion is on the period after the crisis, as discussed also at the Zagreb Summit yesterday
- The initial support for the recovery is 78 million EUR and certain information for now is that 7 million EUR shall be added to the UNOPS project primarily for employment in general and for vulnerable groups including Roma
- There is no concrete plan on this, and the EU Delegation is primarily expecting the Government to express the priorities for funding
- The EU with the Member States and European investment institutions (such as EBRD, EIB) at the level of Europe and also Serbia now acts as a Team Europe, thus the EU Delegation established the Team Europe for planning and implementing all the support; the first meeting regarding this is tomorrow, organised by the [Public Investment Management Office](#) of Serbia, which is expected to be the entry point regarding the planning of the recovery funds; from the side of the EU Delegation, Ms Mirjana Maksimovic will work to make sure that the funding has the aspect of the socio-economic recovery of the vulnerable groups, but it would be good from the Government side to have information on the needs

Other actions and additional information:

- Council of Europe’s Romacted representative informed that the project will continue with a second phase, which will overlap with the first phase during Sep-Dec 2020 in order to disburse small grants to the municipalities that was not timely implemented
- Romacted shared information that Roma have been infected with the Corona-19 virus in Nis and the Orlovsko settlement in Belgrade; the information is not confirmed by the NRCP because at national level data are provided in total, without disaggregation by ethnicity or other characteristic





- RCC Roma Integration 2020 informed on the initiative that started before the crisis to prepare a comprehensive programme to tackle undeclared work among Roma in the various sectors, including waste collectors, street/open market vendors, seasonal workers, housekeepers/cleaners, construction workers, musicians and similar. The initiative is in coordination and cooperation with the NRCP and the National Council of the Roma National Minority. RCC Roma Integration 2020 will make efforts to speed up the work on this initiative in order to inform the EU and other available funding in the area of employment.
- The Red Cross of Serbia informed on the total of some 8,000 packages being distributed to Roma families from 30 municipalities; additionally, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Social and Veteran Affairs the Red Cross shall distribute 20,550 packages distributed in 519 substandard settlements of 76 local communities; along with the packages the Red Cross distributes information regarding the risks and prevention of health and the emergency measures in Roma and Serbian language, which is follow-up on a recommendation from the first meeting
- The Open Society Foundation continued working with the League of Roma, Opre Roma and Romanipen on addressing emergency issues and plans to organise a participatory process with the Roma communities to assess the impact and the needs, analyse policies and budgets and advocate
- The Zagreb Summit resulting in the [Zagreb Declaration](#) ensures a package of over EUR 3.3 billion to the benefit of the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery, including immediate support for the health sector and significant support for the **social and economic recovery**, as well as a EUR 750 million package of Macro-Financial Assistance and a EUR 1.7 billion package of assistance from the European Investment Bank; the needs of Roma, and particularly employment, should be addressed also through these funds
- GIZ will start three projects in the next three weeks, two of which are in cooperation with the Red Cross, to distribute humanitarian packages to 1,000 marginalised families, mostly Roma; the third project is with the Association of Local Roma Coordinators, dealing with information, prevention, networking, mobilisation and empowerment of the Roma community in the next four months; 9-month project documentation is being prepared for additional 1.5 million EUR from the German BMZ for recovery and ensuring income for the families in the substandard Roma settlements, with the focus on employment (adding up on the existing funds for employment implemented by GIZ)

Policy/measures proposals:¹

- **Central coordination, information, planning and governing implementation:**
 - o The National Roma Contact Point should as soon as possible get in contact with the Public Investment Management Office and maintain communication and coordination in order to make sure the needs, priorities and plans regarding Roma are included in the planned donor funding; the RCC Roma Integration 2020 is available to provide support to the NRCP to prepare any type of input needed for the planning process
 - o The government should develop a **comprehensive plan to address the situation of Roma** during and after the Covid-19 crisis
 - o The policy check-list prepared by the RCC should serve as a starting point
 - o The policy proposals by Initiative A11 should be used to inform the plan
 - o The Social Inclusion and Poverty Reduction Unit (SIPRU) of the Government should become the central institution for coordination, information, planning and governing implementation
 - o SIPRU should **coordinate** the government institutions, municipalities, international organisations/donors and civil society
 - o SIPRU should prepare the comprehensive **plan** including distribution of humanitarian aid, provision of public services and utilities (regular and specially designed to address the crisis), and recovery of the Roma communities (including in terms of building the necessary infrastructure and economic recovery)
 - o SIPRU should gather **information** regarding the situation on the ground, provision of aid, implementation of activities, results and impact from the action; SIPRU should request **access** to the **Geographic Information System** on Substandard Roma Settlements (in order to locate settlements / families without water, electricity, etc.) and the **database of the Roma health mediators**; SIPRU should continue **maintaining the table** developed with UN and Roma networks;
 - o SIPRU should present the comprehensive plan to address the situation of Roma to the Government, the Ministry of European Integration, the National IPA Coordinator (NIPAC), and the EU Delegation (in order to ensure the needs of Roma are incorporated in the mainstream plan and to secure public and EU funding for implementation)

¹ Proposals taken up from the previous meeting(s) are marked with blue colour, and new from this meeting are marked with red colour.





- The socio-economic recovery and development of the Roma community should be made part of the funding with the funds listed in the Zagreb Declaration
- **Local coordination: Roma** (local coordinators) should be involved as **members** of the **Local Crisis Headquarters** established in the municipalities to decide on the responses to the crisis
- **Data collection:**
 - Concrete information on settlements to be collected, updated, monitored and made available to those implementing actions regarding the response to Covid-19 and consequences (as said above, coordinated by SIPRU)
 - The Ministry of Construction, Transport and Infrastructure to extract data from the Geographic Information System on Substandard Roma Settlements (established with EU funding) about localities without connection to water as a matter of urgency and make those data available for planning purposes
 - The Ministry of Health to make the Roma health mediators database available to use for the purpose of planning the aid to Roma
 - The situation regarding distant education in the Roma settlements to be assessed (lack of connection to electricity, TV/internet, lack of devices for following the education, need for additional learning support, etc.)
 - Allegations regarding lists of humanitarian aid beneficiaries being prepared by political parties to be checked and if confirmed, to make sure there is no abuse of humanitarian aid for political purposes
- **Other specific recommendations:**
 - The Ministry of Health to provide information on the work of the Roma health mediators and the database of the Roma health mediators
 - Increase the capacities for distribution of humanitarian aid
 - To ensure humanitarian aid is distributed fairly, as most of the humanitarian aid so far goes to bigger towns where there are active NGOs, while smaller and rural municipalities are not covered
 - The decision of the Government not to postpone and to organise final exams online should be reconsidered for those children that did not have the ability to follow education during the crisis (besides Roma there are children in similar situation from other poor families, rural families, etc.)
 - Summer camps to be organised for the children that have not been able to follow education during crisis in order to catch up
 - Teaching assistants and health mediators to work in the Roma settlements in order to: assess the situation; provide information to the people on the measures during and after the crisis; assist people in accessing the relevant (previous and new) public services; alert the institutions on the needs
 - For Roma adults without education that can follow distant education to provide adult education (in order to increase their competences on the labour market)
 - The Government must include socially deprived persons in the regular and additional social aid (including humanitarian aid), including those that are not registered by the social centres; similarly, socially deprived persons should benefit from measures in any other sectors (such as free of charge books for education of children, for example) regardless of their status of social aid beneficiaries
 - The MESTD should ensure in cooperation with other institutions that all children from socially deprived families, regardless of their status of social aid beneficiaries, should be registered to receive books free of charge
 - Analysis of the impact of the crisis to be performed regarding education, housing, health and employment of Roma communities
 - RCC Roma Integration 2020 to resume and speed up the work on tackling undeclared work of Roma in order to provide input for the funds made available for economic recovery and employment

