

THE SOCIO- ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON ROMA IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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BELGRADE, DECEMBER 2021

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1. Introduction



Purpose of the assessment:

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- 1) contribute to better understanding of the socio-economic impact of Covid-19 on Roma in WB economies
 - 2) advise future policy-making decisions and design related to National Roma Integration Strategies
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2. METHODOLOGY

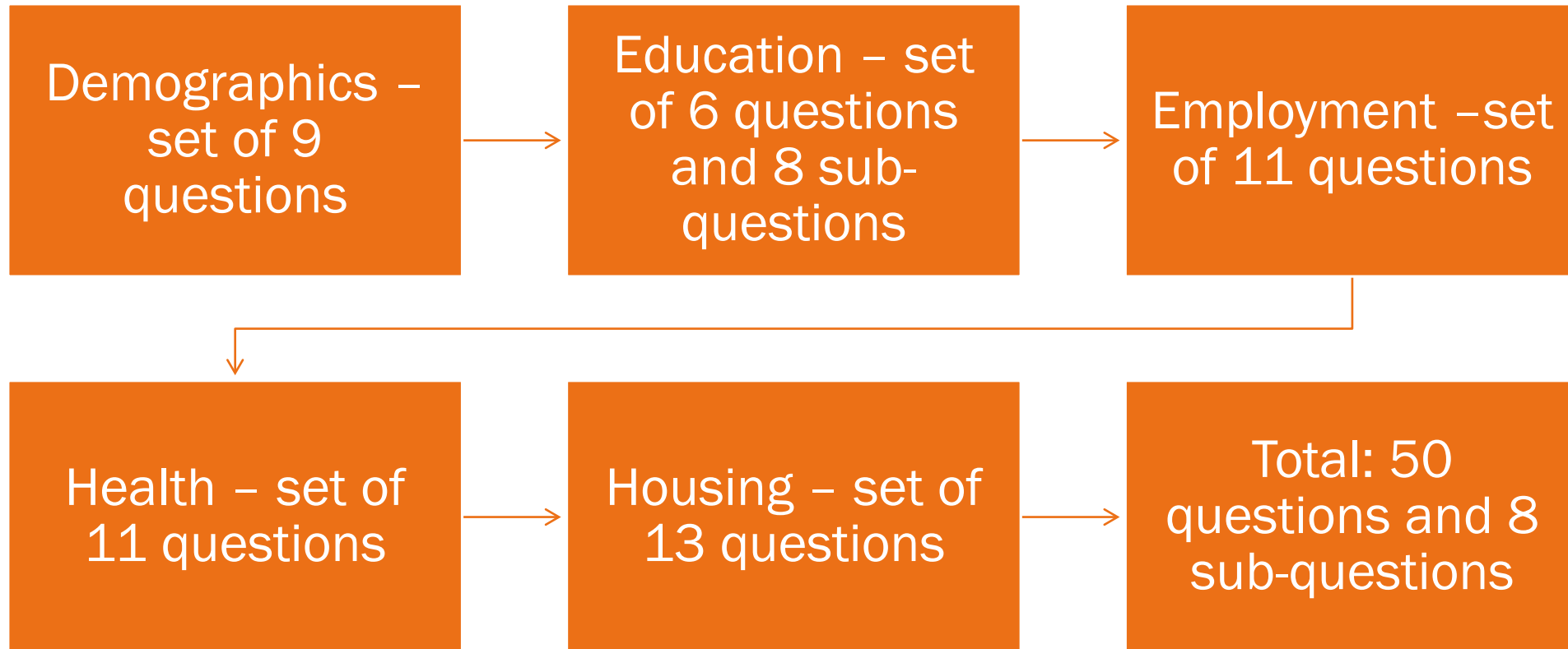
- Quantitative research method - focus on gathering and analyse numerical data
- Sampling method – using official statistical data (1.5% Roma in WB) clustered by gender (55% M: 45% F), age (15-64) and location (density)
- surveyed 3000 Roma – 1.7% of the total Roma population in the region (randomly selected)
- data collection was performed through the CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) method
- Field research was conducted from April to May 2021 (D&D Business Support Center)

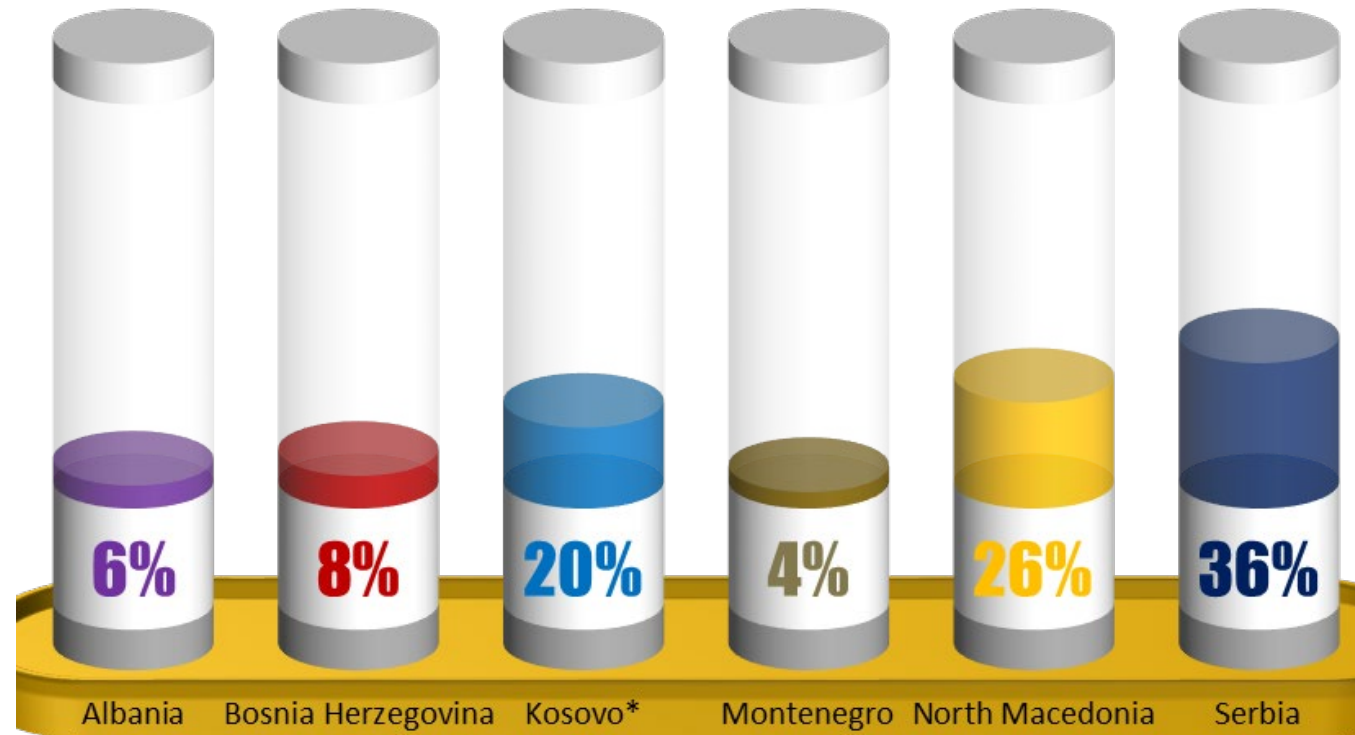




QUESTIONNAIRE – LIKERT SCALE

Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1	2	3	4	5





Actual sample size of surveyed participants by economy

Sample distribution by municipalities

Albania – 5

Bosnia Herzegovina - 6

Kosovo* - 8

Montenegro - 6

North Macedonia - 6

Serbia – 7

Total: 38 municipalities



Regional Overview - Education

- Every second child has difficulties in understanding online classes
- School achievements have worsened to 50% of the pupils/students
- Drop-out rates increased for 11%
- Sixty two percent of respondents justify the drop-out due to difficult financial situation
- Four out of 10 children benefited from education related measures
- The pandemic caused additional barriers to the access of education which is backward process
- Additionally the quality of online teaching declined due to lack of IT skills of teachers and parents



Regional Overview - Employment

- the income has been reduced to every second respondent

- six out of ten respondents have concerns in losing their jobs for the next 12 months

- seven percent of survey participants lost their jobs, every second of them has not registered unemployment status

- one out of ten respondents has benefited from employment related measures

- half of the surveyed participants have debts for utility bills

- one third of the surveyed participants are under threat of hunger as they have debts for buying food

- at regional level, employment and income of respondents are most severely affected compared to other survey topics



Regional Overview – Health

- Seven out of ten respondents rate positively the performances of health services, while the remaining one third of participants have negative opinion
- The pandemic consequences on mental, emotional, and physical health are significant and ranging from medium to major effects. Lockdown measures have had medium effects on every third person's mental, emotional, and physical health, while mental health is most affected with major effects for 14% of the participants.
- Opinions on vaccine mirrors the mainstream opinion, one third is not willing to get vaccination, while every third is neutral.
- four out of ten respondents do not have suitable conditions for self-isolation at home in case of Covid-19 infection

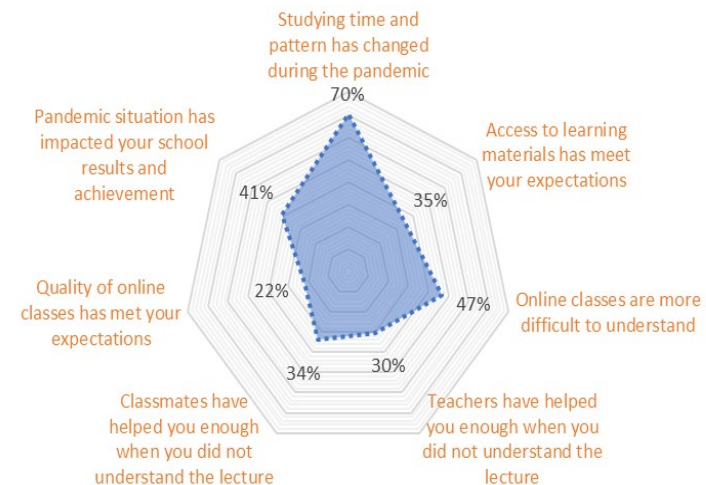
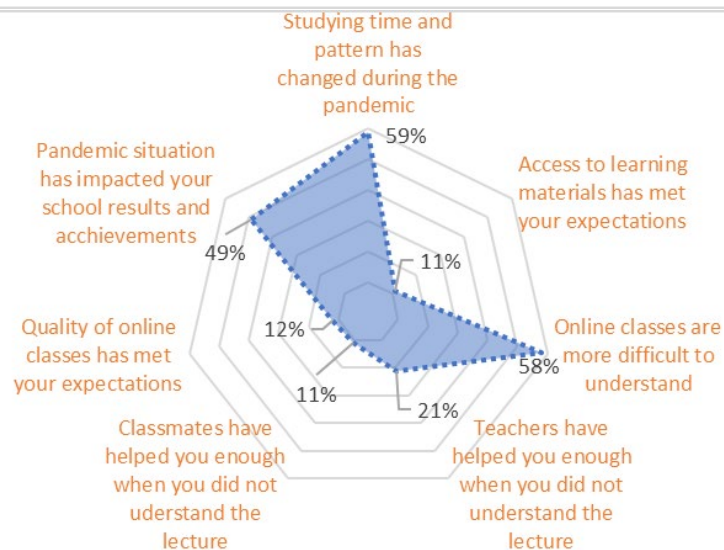
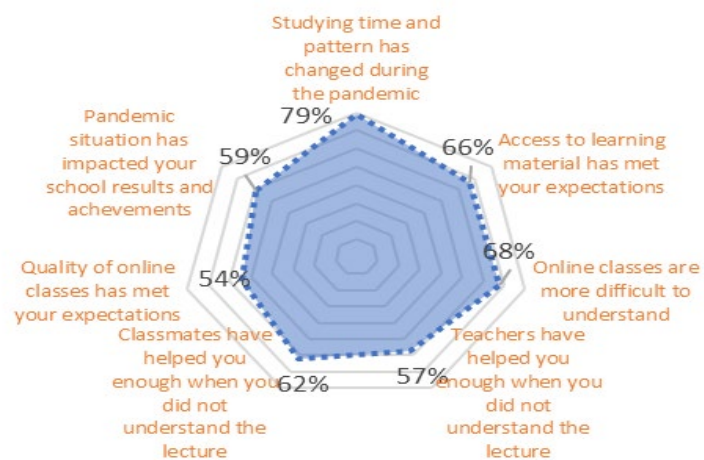
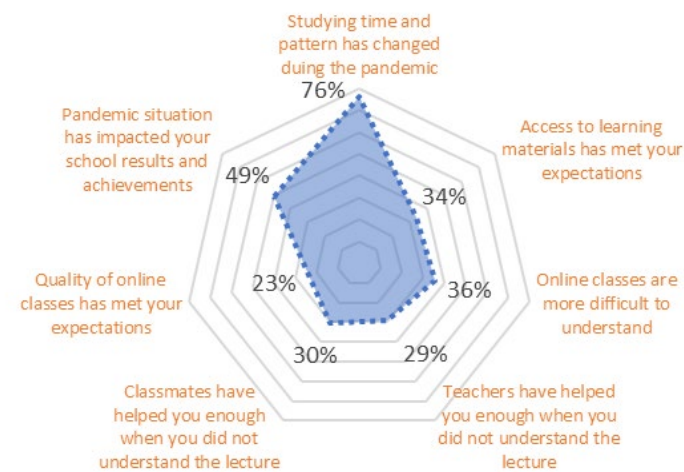
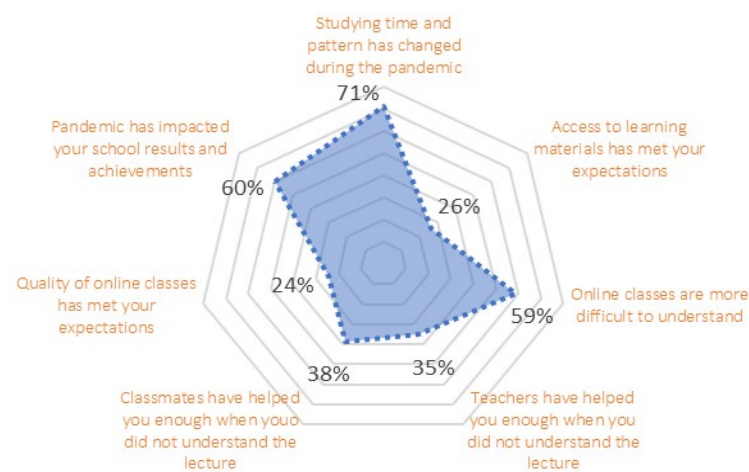
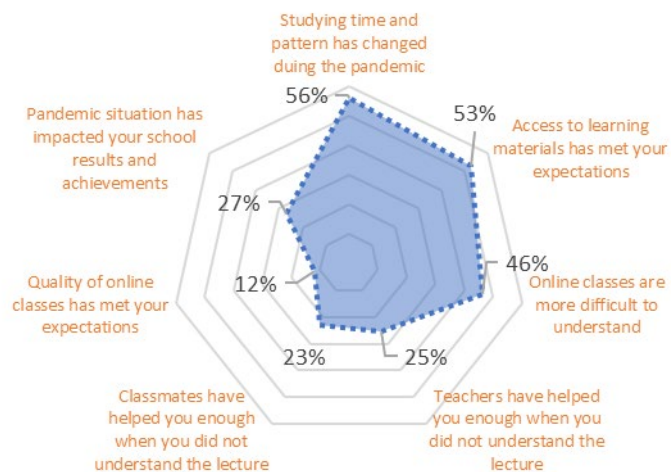


Regional Overview – Housing

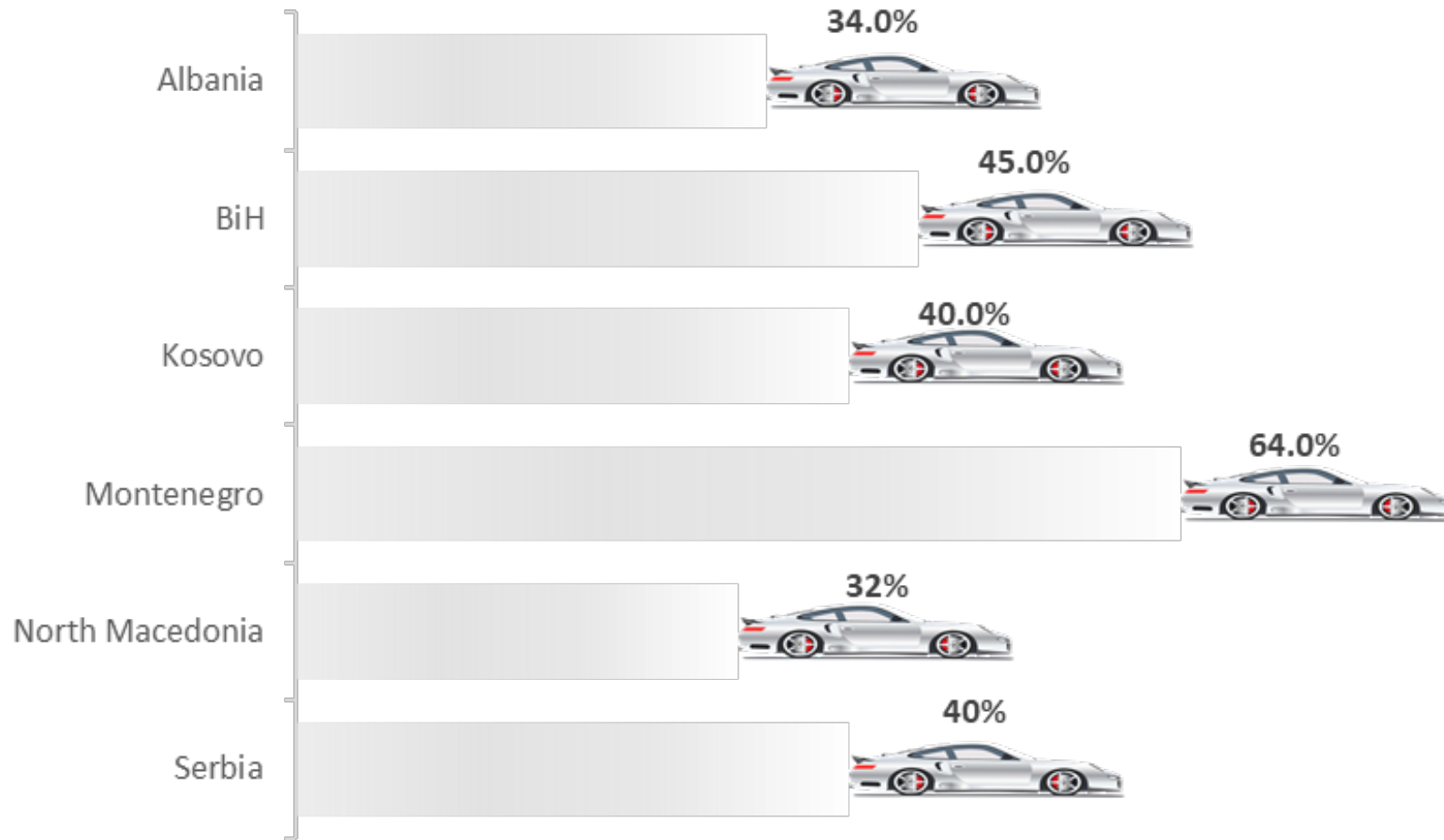
- Housing situation is the least affected from the pandemic despite the fact that it has indirect effects on living conditions from the economic point of view
- The pandemic caused delays in the process of legalization of properties to 10% of the respondents
- since the pandemic beginning the housing situation changed to 7% of the surveyed participants. Forced evictions are reported from 53 households
- every second family lives in high humidity homes while four out of ten households have bad quality of roofs



Findings by Economy– Education

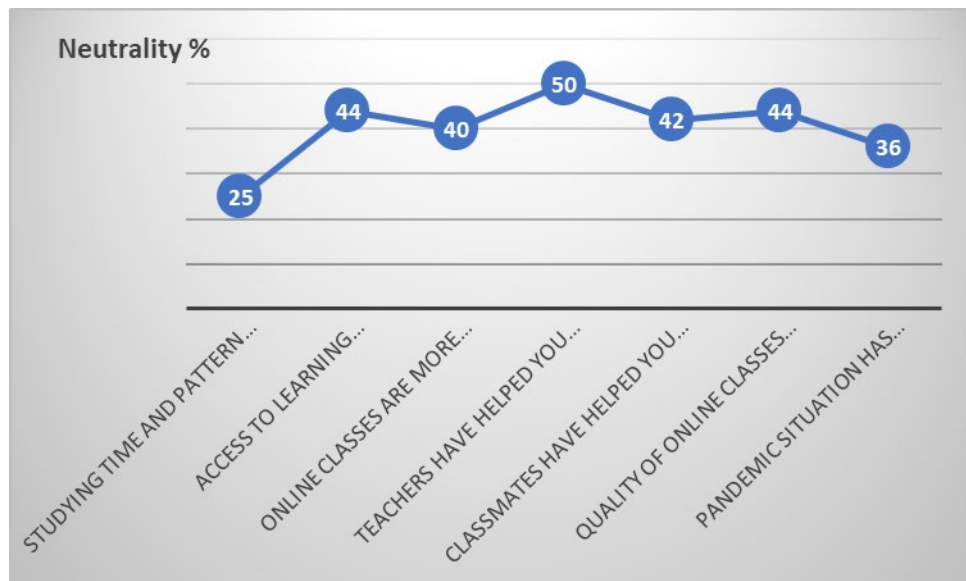


Average % of agree responses on education by economy

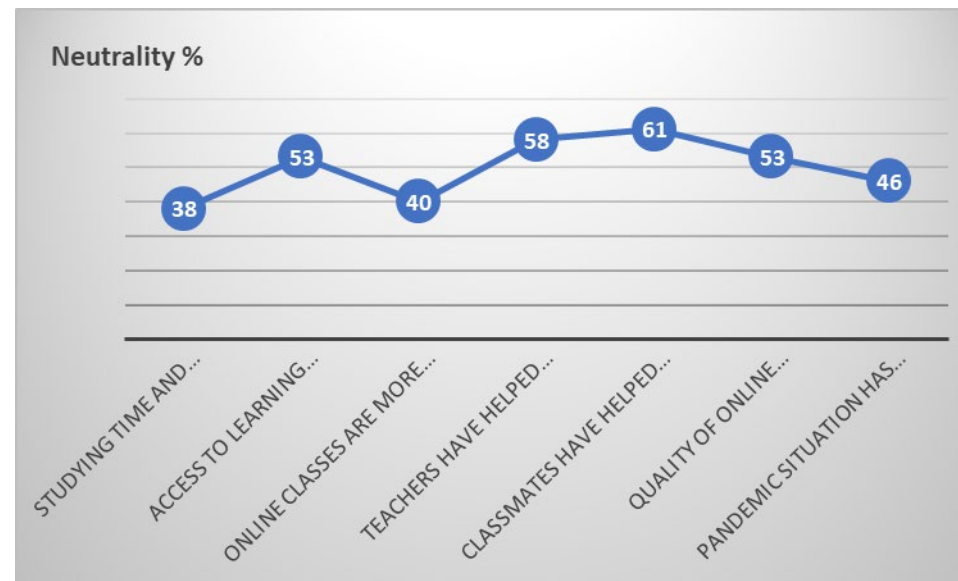


Findings by Economy

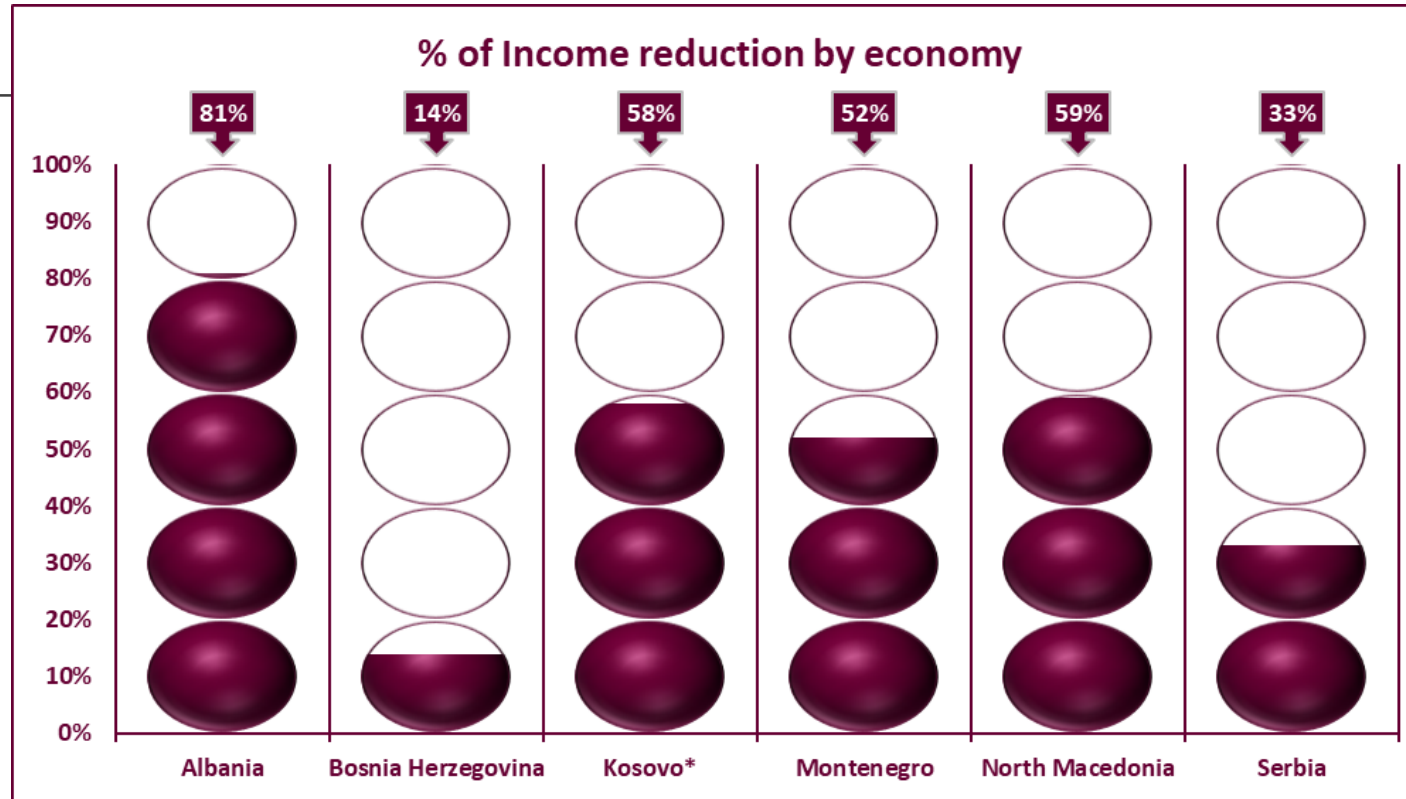
percent of neutral responses Serbia on education



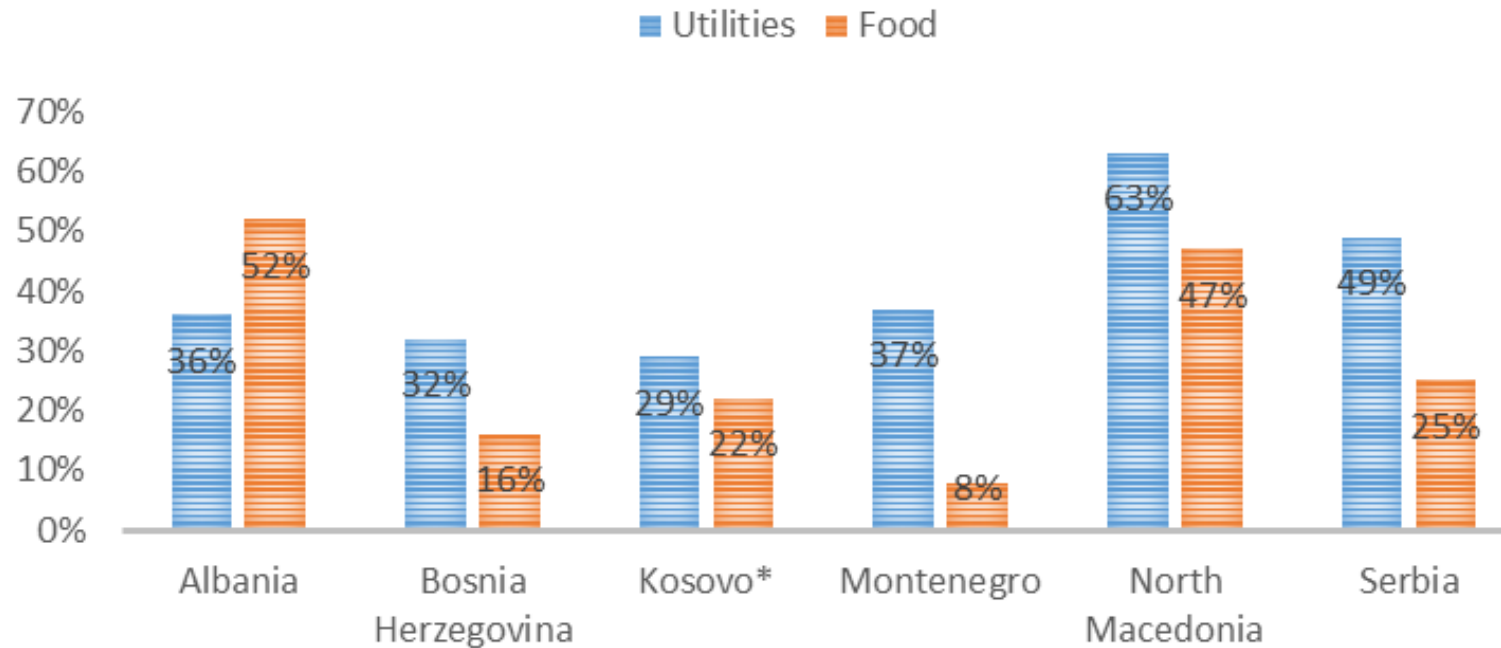
percent of responses North Macedonia on education



Findings by economy



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Findings by economy



Conclusions

1. Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic the overall situation of Roma is worsening rather than improving.
 - a) the pandemic is a new roadblock to the ongoing social inclusion policy efforts in the WB economies
 - b) the pandemic has worsened all forms of (pre)existent inequalities
 - c) if not timely and suitably adjusted, it is very likely that current social inclusion policies will fail to deliver targeted objectives
2. The under resourced Roma communities remained under-supported by anti Covid-19 measures
 - a) implementation of anti-Covid measures is low despite allocation of significant amounts of funds in the state budget
 - b) Insufficient support to Roma women, children and elders in segregated settlements
 - c) short-lived mobilization of local resources
3. The pandemic has disproportionately affected survey participants
 - a) Most negative implications are detected in the area of employment and education
 - b) Informal workers remained ineligible for social support programs
 - c) Living under continuous mental and emotional stress

Recommendations

Education

- a) Governments and school leadership should ensure continuity of learning by investing all means and institutional capacities for removing system inadequacies and inequities in education.
- b) Advance institutional resilience and efficiency for delivering inclusive knowledge transfer and be better prepared to operate under uncertain and turbulent circumstances.
- c) Widening access, including support structures, for digital learning resources to children and their parents coming from disadvantaged communities.
- d) Ensure **social interaction and teachers' support in case of distance learning**, tailored according to the age and gender of pupils.
- e) Provide **fair and adequate financial subsidies for pupils from poor families** aimed to accelerate learning through catch up classes.
- f) Western Balkan governments are called upon to **conceptualize and contextualize the ten OECD Principles for Effective and Equitable Educational Recovery from Covid-19** at national and local level; (The OECD Principles provide guidelines on how to recover and reshape education systems to meet the needs of every child during and after a pandemic crisis).

Recommendations

Employment

- a) Urgently standardize the support measures for business owners and workforce in sense of setting timeline and continuity in next three to five years.
- b) Establish local facility structures for better matching of jobs (demand) and skills (supply).
- c) Introduce **Universal Basic Income norms** and tools for socially disadvantaged and long-term unemployed citizens (instead of ongoing poorly funded welfare support).
- d) **Incentivize transformation of informal** work to formal jobs by minimizing or fully removing taxes.
- e) Advance legal and operational mechanisms for fighting racism and discrimination in the labour market, including exploitation of women and child labour in the chains of grey economy.
- f) Regulate **work-from-home standards**, payments and working hours.

Recommendations

Health

- a) Public health institutions should **ensure** all Roma communities **have fair and equitable access** to health services and resources, including providing culturally and linguistically appropriate resources for childcare, women, and elders.
- b) Increase **availability and accessibility** of COVID-19 tests and vaccination for Roma population in **segregated settlements**.
- c) Help household members exposed to Covid-19 to isolate, where necessary establish self-quarantine facilities.
- d) Provide clear and accurate information on regular basis regarding anti-Covid-19 measures and health services in Roma settlements.
- e) **Introduction of free treatment and free medicines for persons with Covid-19**, especially households without health insurance, persons without birth certificates and the long-term unemployed.
- f) Partner local Roma CSOs for channelling the public health information to Roma communities, monitoring the quality of health services, including early-warning mechanism for reporting explicit/implicit biases of health service delivery
- g) **Provide free of charge** masks, hand sanitizers, gloves, disinfectants to households being poor or settled in segregated settlements.

Recommendations

Housing

- a) Provide state guarantees through institutional subsidies to cover utility costs (electricity, water) for social cases, persons not registered in the registry of births, unemployed and under-employed families.
- b) Introduction of regulatory norms for protection of tenants from forced eviction and gentrification for social cases, persons not registered in the registry of born, unemployed and insufficiently employed families.
- c) Provide free legal aid for the legalization process, including tax exemptions for poor households.
- d) General urban planning should integrate detailed plans for segregated / remote Roma settlements, including continuous investments in basic infrastructure.

National Roma Integration Strategies-related specific recommendations

- establish strong institutional and political ownership of NRIS, competent and effective institutional structures and adequate funding mechanisms
- NRIS-responsible institutions should do regular needs assessments
- NRIS-national platforms should define top priorities with mid-to-long-term investments focus
- advance collaboration platforms, establish shared responsibility and accountability metrics
- Centralized and decentralized decision-making structures, including legal and financial means for implementation