



ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

Impact and consequences of the COVID – 19
pandemic on Roma communities
in Bosnia and Herzegovina



With funding from
 Austrian
Development
Cooperation

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Roma women association „Bolja budućnost“ Tuzla

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SUMMARY

The document "Impact and Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Roma Communities in BiH" was created through the implementation of a project implemented by Roma women association "Bolja buducnost" Tuzla within the regional project FAIR III (For the active inclusion and the rights of Roma women in the Western Balkans), supported by Austrian Development Cooperation through CARE International, Balkans. The main task of this policy document is to determine, through three levels of research, how and to what extent the COVID - 19 pandemic affected the situation in Roma communities, concerning the socio-economic, educational, gender and health aspects.

The impact of the COVID - 19 pandemics in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) is presented from the perspective of Roma men and women in the community, representatives of institutions that are directly or indirectly involved in working with the Roma population and through an analysis of existing data related to this topic. The research, with the support of members of the Roma Women's Network "Uspjeh", was conducted on a sample of 120 Roma men and women and 30 representatives of institutions from Visoko, Kakanj, Donji Vakuf, Bijeljina, Prnjavor and Tuzla. The analysis of the obtained data was realized by quantitative and qualitative methodology.

The results showed a very unfavorable position of the Roma community during the pandemic, multiple poverty, and the negligence of institutions towards the Roma community, which due to the circumstances in which it otherwise exists, found itself in a difficult position during the pandemic. The fact of neglect, multiple discrimination and isolation of the Roma community is proved by the fact that no Roma man or woman from the target sample was tested for COVID - 19, nor is it known that any of the members of Roma communities were included in the testing. Because of the situation in Roma communities, infrastructure, sanitary and other conditions, as well as ways in which the members of the Roma community generally acquire income, it is almost impossible that there was no case of infection COVID - 19 in Roma communities in B&H.

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS / CONTEXT

During December 2019, the new disease began to attract the attention of the media and the public around the world. Scientists soon discovered that the cause of this disease was the coronavirus, which first appeared in the Chinese city of Wuhan and for which, there is still no adequate medical response. Since then, public fears have grown in parallel, aided by mass media coverage of the spread of the virus to other parts of the world. On February 11, 2020, the virus was given the scientific name COVID -19. The COVID-19 virus has turned into a major disaster for the world, citizens, and the global economy.

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared a pandemic of the COVID-19 disease, caused by the new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, globally worldwide.

The first case of the spread of the coronavirus pandemic in Bosnia and Herzegovina was recorded on March 5, 2020, when a person from Banja Luka was tested positive for the SARS-CoV-2 virus after returning from Italy. On March 16, 2020, the state of the accident was declared in the Federation of B&H, and a little earlier in the Republika Srpska, and restrictive measures came into force, which included a kind of quarantine, restriction of population movement, ban on cafes, restaurants, shopping centers, shops, etc. All schools have been closed and foreign nationals from areas with intensive coronavirus transmission have been banned from entering the country, and curfew has also taken effect.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought almost tectonic social changes to the world, including Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is no category of population in B & H, but also around the world, that in certain or all aspects of life was not threatened by the pandemic of coronavirus. Undoubtedly, the enormous scale of the pandemic, like a health crisis, however, what is in some ways even more difficult, is that COVID-19 has disrupted billions of lives and endangered the global economy. At the same time, it is a pandemic and a humanitarian and development crisis that has left and leaves deep social, economic, and political scars in the years ahead, especially when it comes to the poorest and most endangered countries.

Although the pandemic had big consequences for the entire B&H society and all segments of its existence and activities, the governing structures and a large number of other relevant actors were mainly concerned with the adoption of measures and laws for prevention and remediation of coronavirus. Considering the consequences of a pandemic in the context of general population health, the state of health, economic consequences for the state and the economy in general, and long-term economic consequences, which are certainly not negligible and have a far-reaching impact on the entire population but authorities or institutions very rarely looked at the position of marginalized and multi-vulnerable categories of the population, which are also, especially due to their specific position, a very important segment of society. About the consequences that had crashed, "the little man" is mainly concerned by the civil sector, i.e. Non-governmental organizations of humanitarian and human rights orientation, who was also in a very difficult position. Numerous NGOs reported multiple human rights violations through the adoption of restrictive measures, as well as their disastrous consequences for certain categories of the

population, but the government generally remained without adequate reactions to such allegations. This was especially true for marginalized and vulnerable categories of the population, where Roma in general, and especially Roma women and children, are certainly included, due to the multiple vulnerabilities and discrimination they face and the circumstances in which they exist daily.

Roma as one of the most vulnerable categories of the population in B&H, at the same time the most numerous national minority often lives concentrated in one area, in the so-called Roma communities and precisely because of that it was a particularly risky group, to which almost no one paid special attention systemically or institutionally. Common to all Roma settlements is the fact that many people live in them in a cramped area. Families in which two or three generations live together often have only one or two rooms available. In such settlements, there is often no running water or sewage. This creates ideal conditions for the spread of infectious diseases such as COVID 19. The fact is that the Roma were repeatedly endangered during the pandemic and at a significantly increased risk, not only from infection but also due to possible unforeseeable consequences due to the introduction of protection measures.

The multiple vulnerabilities of the Roma population during a pandemic can be viewed from several aspects. If we take into account the economic aspect, bearing in mind that the income of the Roma community is mainly generated through trade, collection and sale of secondary raw materials and similar activities, which are mainly of a service nature, we can conclude that all inflows of any income are mostly closed even the most basic, such as food and hygiene. If we consider the educational aspect, Roma children are generally not provided with IT equipment, do not have access to the Internet, and are therefore, in most cases, had limited access to classes in available ways.¹ If we consider the health aspect, it should be noted that there are many Roma communities deprived of basic hygiene conditions, such as water and electricity, which increases the risk of infection and its spread. Also, they are in deficit with hygienic and disinfectants, masks and they are often in a disadvantage position when it comes to access to health services because some number of Roma men and women do not have health insurance and sometimes considered as "less worthy for medical care". Social distancing and lockdown, as women's rights defenders have warned, resulted with increasing cases of violence against women. Violence against women in Roma communities is reality and for some women happens every day. In the lights of the current situation on this issue, we can only assume and fear of an increasing number of sad statistics.

As stated in a document issued by UN women², ethnic minorities throughout the region face all vulnerabilities in an intensified form due to discriminatory attitudes and attitudes towards them and existing inequalities that are now exacerbated by restrictions on access to key services and supplies. In this document, i.e. through sub-regional consultations led by UN Women, women's organizations described the experiences of women in the pandemic, which have so far been recorded in various documents, as well as some lesser-known outcomes of the pandemic that should be mentioned, such as a high need for psychological support for women at risk of violence in their homes, service providers and adolescents; the extremely difficult situation for women

¹ Online learning and television learning

² UN women: Response of women's organizations to COVID - 19 (April 2020: Sub - regional consultation) available at: <http://zenskamreza.ba/glas-odgovor-zenskih-organizacija-na-covid-19-april-2020-sub-regionalne-konsultacije/>

living in camps and illegal (illegal) settlements/territories; high levels of burnout, exhaustion and trauma among civil society staff and service providers, in general, where the majority are women; as well as high rates of adolescent suicide across the region since the onset of the pandemic. They noticed strong and unified solidarity of women and men working together to solve all these challenges, and to build long-term well-being of their communities. They seek the transfer of public resources in support of their work.

As mentioned earlier, through the research of all available data, no data are found that any systematic support to Roma communities has been provided by the authorities or institutions. There are various programs or projects of support from international or non-governmental organizations for the Roma population, which almost every day tried to provide to Roma communities' at least basic means of survival, as well as disinfectants and masks. Some municipalities and other local communities tried to provide support to their vulnerable population through various forms of assistance and support where Roma was classified to the category of socially vulnerable, but these are mostly sporadic cases.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To see the real situation in Roma communities during the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences it has left for the Roma population in Bosnia and Herzegovina, with special emphasis on education, socio-economic and gender health status, and assuming that the Roma community in the period of the pandemic and after it, was repeatedly endangered and at special risk due to the specific circumstances in which it otherwise finds itself, to prove this claim from several levels, a combined methodology was applied, ie methods of qualitative and quantitative methodology, where the results of the qualitative part of the research are presented descriptively, without a numerical or percentage presentation of the state of the results, while the quantitative part of the research is presented exactly, ie numerically and / or percentage. The research was conducted in the following local communities: Tuzla, Kakanj, Visoko, Donji Vakuf, Bijeljina and Prnjavor.

The research for the purpose of this document was conducted at three levels:

- ✓ meta-analysis (analysis of existing data on a given topic)
- ✓ research on a sample of 120 Roma women and men from five localities of FBiH and RS using the focus group method, i.e. qualitative methodology
- ✓ interviewing representatives of institutions³ in the above mentioned six locations

In order to implement the qualitative part of the research, a scenario for the implementation of focus groups for 5 female researchers was created, which addressed the questions that will answer the question or assumption that is the backbone, i.e. the task of this research. The task refers to the situation analysis in Roma communities during the COVID 19 pandemic from the perspective of Roma and representatives of institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations that are directly or indirectly involved in working with Roma.

The questionnaire for field research (for representatives of institutions) consists of 12 questions concerning the attitudes and experiences on the work and activities of institutions during the pandemic, what measures and programs they implemented in the crisis period, and their views on

³ Public institution Primary School "Podrinje" Mihatovici, Tuzla, Public institution Primary School "Simin Han", Tuzla, City administration of City of Tuzla, Center for Social Work, Tuzla, Ministry of Health of Tuzla Canton, City of Bijeljina, Police Administration, Bijeljina, Association of citizens Otaharin, Bijeljina, Primary School , Bijeljina, Center for Social Work, Bijeljina, Employment Service, Visoko, Public institution Primary School "Kulin ban" Visoko, Primary School "Safvet beg Basagic", Visoko, Public Institution Center for Social Work, Visoko, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Visoko, Association "Mladi volonteri ", Visoko, Public Institution Center for Social Work, Prnjavor, Public Institution Center of secondary schools“ Ivo Andrić ”Prnjavor, Police Station, Prnjavor, Municipality Donji Vakuf, Police Station, Donji Vakuf, Employment Service, Donji Vakuf, Center for Social Work, Donji Vakuf , Public Institution Center for Social Work, Kakanj, Police Station, Kakanj, Private Health Institution „Intermed“, Kakanj, Employment Service, Kakanj, Lara Foundation Bijeljina

the status of the Roma community during the pandemic. The survey for representatives of institutions was conducted in such a way that activists from the target sites directly or indirectly contacted representatives of the target group of institutions, 30 of them (Public institution Primary School "Podrinje" Mihatovići, Tuzla, Public institution Primary School "Simin Han", Tuzla, City administration of City of Tuzla, Center for Social Work, Tuzla, Ministry of Health of Tuzla Canton, City of Bijeljina, Police Administration, Bijeljina, Association of citizens Otaharin, Bijeljina, Primary School , Bijeljina, Center for Social Work, Bijeljina, Employment Service, Visoko, Public institution Primary School "Kulin ban" Visoko, Primary School "Safvet beg Basagic", Visoko, Public Institution Center for Social Work, Visoko, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Visoko, Association "Mladi volonteri ", Visoko, Public Institution Center for Social Work, Prnjavor, Public Institution Center of secondary schools“ Ivo Andrić ”Prnjavor, Police Station, Prnjavor, Municipality Donji Vakuf, Police Station, Donji Vakuf, Employment Service, Donji Vakuf, Center for Social Work, Donji Vakuf , Public Institution Center for Social Work, Kakanj, Police Station, Kakanj, Private Health Institution „Intermed“, Kakanj, Employment Service, Kakanj, Lara Foundation Bijeljina) who after filling and submitting, were then processed by quantitative methodology for this research document. For obtaining statistical data, the SPSS software package was used.

RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS

In order to prove the starting point of this document, ie the assumption that Roma communities were endangered during the pandemic, the following methods were used: focus group method, survey method for interviewing representatives of institutions and the so-called meta analysis, ie presentation and analysis of available data on this topic.

The focus group was conducted in the local communities in which the members of Roma Women Network „Uspjeh“ operate, with the aim of determining the real situation in Roma communities caused by the corona virus pandemic. In each of the communities, 3 focus groups were conducted with predefined topics, ie segments of life that are considered to have undergone the greatest transformation during the pandemic and restrictive measures implemented due to this situation. As stated, each of the three focus groups treated some of the segments of life that have undergone the greatest changes in BiH. society, namely: educational, socio - economic and gender - health aspects.

According to the pre-defined scenario and instructions, each member for each of the mentioned topics should have gathered from 5 to 12 participants while for the group focusing on the aspect of gender-health was only for women participants, with the number of participants in the group gathered from 8 to 10 by location.

Data analysis was inductive and followed a constant comparative method. The aim was to determine the situation in Roma communities, as well as the consequences that the corona virus pandemic has left on the life and everyday life of Roma men and women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The identification of areas of interest was related to earlier knowledge and contextual factors identifiable based on previous empirical knowledge and fieldwork.

As mentioned earlier, the experiences of the Roma community were analyzed by means of qualitative methodology, ie focus groups whose aim was to examine the experiences and attitudes of Roma men and women in the fields of interest which were categorized into 3 thematic groups on the basis of the characteristics of the participants. Each of the 3 thematic groups treated 3 segments in which society, and specifically the Roma community experienced changes that have negatively affected their daily life.

Educational aspect

When it comes to groups - education, the focus groups that were realized in 5 targeted localities were heterogeneous in terms of gender, and the common characteristic of all respondents was that all of them come from Roma communities and most of the respondents are from the socially endangered population. This group included 45 participants, of which 9 men and 36 women, including all localities.

QUESTIONS CATEGORIES

How would you describe the situation of Roma children's access to education after school closure? Online teaching

What, in your opinion, will be the long-term impact on closures (isolation) and subsequent distance learning these months? Do you think some children, especially teenage girls, are more likely to drop out of school next year? Dropping out of school

Did the children drop out school, if so, how did the teaching staff react?

After the closure (isolation) was relaxed, was there a change in the way Roma children were treated by their non-Roma colleagues? Are you aware of any cases of peer abuse? Bullying ili cyber bullying

How did the children feel about online teaching, was it harder or easier for them than in regular circumstances? Obstacles in the implementation of online teaching

What do you consider to be the main obstacles to Roma children's access to education?

What was the attitude of the teaching staff towards the children if they did not have the means to access the teaching?

Did they have adequate learning space?

Did the children have difficulty mastering the material? Did they have any help with that?

Based on the qualitative analysis, the following categories identified by the inductive approach were identified:

- ✓ Online schooling
- ✓ Dropping out of school
- ✓ Bullying/ cyber bullying
- ✓ Obstacles / difficulties in the implementation of online teaching

Online schooling

The identified category of online schooling was derived from the discussion on the general topic of schooling in the COVID-19 pandemic, the views of parents on online teaching, and also by examining the attitudes of participants regarding the process of online teaching and its consequences on further participation. Almost all respondents agreed that this type of teaching is detrimental to children, their motivation and further education. Focus group participants from all target areas have the same attitude, that through this process they have noticed that children have a decrease in "respect for school, teaching staff, as well as the teaching process itself", and there is also a uniform attitude about the problematic fact that children can, but also do not have to, attend classes and that they generally do not bear any consequences for that. Also, one of the problems that the parents encountered is that the children generally do not take this type of schooling seriously, are not attentive, do not follow the instructions of the teacher, and also mentioned other difficulties they encountered due to this type of teaching implementation, which will be discussed in more detail later. All participants in all focus groups believe that the traditional form of teaching is much better, more adequate and more accessible for every child, and ensures that every child learns something, at least by attending classes.

Dropping out of school

Although the phenomenon of dropping out of regular schooling by Roma children is not unknown in the society of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the aim of this document, among other things, was to examine whether the phenomenon of school dropout was present during the pandemic and, if so, to what extent it was present. Based on the participants' answers, it is not clear whether in certain cases it is a question of dropping out of school, or just the impossibility of access to online classes, which did not cause the consequence of constant dropping out of regular schooling. What should be pointed out is that there is a fear among parents, if the above situation is repeated, that there will be a mass withdrawal of children from school, because it is very difficult for their conditions and capacities to adapt to such an education system. Several parents pointed out that the children did not attend online classes, but that they did not receive feedback from the school and teaching staff on what would happen to their children's further education and access to classes. Most other participants stated that children did not drop out of school during the pandemic.

Bullying/ cyber bullying

Part of the research also referred to the questioning of constant bullying or cyber bullying during the implementation of online teaching. It is known that peer violence against Roma children is present, especially in the form of discrimination, ridicule and humiliation, but according to focus group participants, violence did not increase significantly during the pandemic, or at least parents are not aware of it. There were no specific cases of peer violence that would upset the community or be common knowledge, according to data obtained during the implementation of focus groups.

Obstacles / difficulties in the implementation of online teaching

The new way of teaching has brought with it a number of challenges, which were difficult to overcome for children from the general population, especially for children from Roma communities. Parents' views on this issue are broadly uniform; only 2 opinions stand out, mothers believe that „everything depends on the parent“ or in other words, that the parents direct the children and in some way determine how seriously will the child be dedicated to this „problem“ and be an authority to children in this context. A significant number of the participants from all locations point out that they had problems on the issue of participation in online teaching of children due to the due to the lack of adequate equipment, illiteracy of parents and the inability to help children in mastering the material, and the lack of adequate and separate rooms so that children can follow classes and perform tasks without hindrance. In some households e.g. 7-8 persons live in two rooms and children did not have the opportunity to cope with the new challenges in the context of online teaching. What a significant number of participants pointed out was that they had the support and assistance of both the schools themselves and non-governmental organizations that provided children with technical devices for following classes, as well as Internet access. Also, according to parents, a significant number of teaching staff showed understanding when children could not access online classes and found ways to keep children from being damaged in this context. However, it should be mentioned that some parents stated that they were never invited by the teaching staff, although the children never attended online classes, and that they did not show interest in what was happening and why the children were not present at the classes. Also, one of the problems that parents encountered during the implementation of online classes is that the children constantly had access to the Internet, and instead of learning, they played more games, watched cartoons or were on social networks. It should be noted that all parents unanimously believe that classical teaching is much better, easier and simpler for their children, and that they had difficulties with children in mastering online teaching. Also, several parents pointed out that their children had all the conditions for uninterrupted work from a special room, technical aids as well as assistance in performing tasks by the family. Also, some of the participants stated that children, but also mothers, often cried from not being able to cope with this challenge.

Socio - economic aspect

When it comes to the socio - economic aspect of this research, it is considered in some way the central category of this analysis, ie the initial problem / question, because from this aspect, ie what it represents, all others, treated and not treated through this research. As will be seen through the analysis, all the problems encountered by the participants in this research, mainly stemmed from financial scarcity. For this aspect, the total number of participants in groups from all localities was 44, of which 13 men and 31 women.

Questions	Categories
How would you assess the impact on Roma employment since the beginning of the pandemic?	The impact of the pandemic on the socio - economic situation in Roma communities
To what extent did the pandemic affect the income of Roma families? Are you aware of cases where families could not cover the cost of food and utilities? How common are they?	
Did their income decrease and how much did they feel about it, and if so, how did it affect all aspects of their lives?	
Did they have any important needs that they could not meet?	
Did the crisis affect their family or any other aspects of life?	
How did they "survive" the pandemic?	
Did they have any help?	Help during a pandemic
If so, from whom and how often?	
Did they turn to any institutions for help, if so, what were the answers?	
Was financial assistance available from the state? How adequate was this and was there enough information about it in Roma communities?	Back to 'normal life'
Has life and the economic situation returned to normal now?	

According to the questions and answers given through the focus group, the following categories were identified:

- ✓ The impact of the pandemic on the socio-economic situation in Roma communities
- ✓ Help during a pandemic
- ✓ Back to 'normal life'.

The impact of the pandemic on the socio - economic situation in Roma communities

Necessity is that pandemic affected to all segments of life, especially when it comes to socio-economic aspects, which was confirmed by all focus group participants in all targeted locations. According to the answers, it can be concluded that the impact of the pandemic was reflected to the extent that people had nothing to eat, nor did they have a way to provide the means to earn any income, which would solve the various problems they encountered, ranging from paying

When it comes to employment issues, the participants pointed out that the situation regarding the employment of Roma men and women before the pandemic was very bad and employability was very low, however, with the arrival of the pandemic and state of accident, the situation worsened, so those who were employed mostly lost their jobs, or were overworked, and paid almost nothing or very little, while those who earned a living in alternative ways were also extremely damaged because they were prevented from earning a living in any way.

Most of the participants pointed out that due to limited movement, curfew, and lower frequency of people in the city, it was very difficult to gain any income, as a result of which debts increased and needs remained the same, which could not be met. Through the conversation, the topic of begging was brought up, where those who earned income in that way stated that the situation greatly deteriorated from that aspect as well, due to bans, ie the police that did not allow begging, and due to very reduced movement of people. , which is why it was not possible to "earn" even the minimum means that would enable survival. What was imposed as a discussion during this part of the conversation is that those who beg with children pointed out as an aggravating circumstance that children were not allowed to move or go out on the street, and as one mother pointed out, if they beg themselves, "They don't earn anything."

However, what was pointed out as positive in this part of the conversation was the reaction of other participants in the focus group, who generally condemned begging involving children, and pointed out that it is not okay for children to be exploited for these purposes. Also, collectors of secondary raw materials pointed out that they used to be able to survive in some way by doing this business, but during the pandemic, due to limited movement and the closure of companies that bought secondary raw materials, they were not able to collect secondary raw materials. raw materials, to sell them, or earn anything. It was especially difficult for large families, for whom this way of earning money was usually the only source of income.

It should be noted the allegations of young mothers who, according to their claims, found themselves in a particularly difficult situation, because they were not able to buy diapers and baby food, and from the donations they eventually received, there was mostly no such help. Also, mothers of babies pointed out that even if they had the means to buy diapers and baby food, there was a great shortage of those goods; so even when they got the money, there was no opportunity to buy diapers and baby food. Some of the participants also stated that they were not able to buy the medicines, which were necessary for them or the children.

One of the endangered categories, which emphasized its allegations about the severity of survival during the pandemic, are people older than 65, who did not have the right to move. They state that it's had a big impact on their survival as an economic as well as with all other aspects of life.

What should be pointed out is that some participants stated that they believe that, according to the situation, they will "die of hunger rather than the crown." , that is, to satisfy the need for social contact, which affected young people the most.

Help during the pandemic

Very important segment of this document is certainly the question of whether, how much and from whom Roma communities had support and assistance during the pandemic, whether material or some other kind. The most significant number of participants pointed out that they did not receive any systemic support, ie support or assistance from the state or its institutions, even from local centers for social work, which are mostly familiar with their cases, and a significant number of respondents complained that they did not. were in a position, i.e. they were not even allowed to apply for any assistance.

Several participants in some focus groups point out that they received vouchers of a certain value from the municipality for which they could buy food in certain shopping centers or supermarkets, however, vouchers are mostly symbolic values that certainly cannot meet the needs of a multi-member families. Most of the participants stated that the only help they received was help from local Roma associations or some other non-governmental organizations, both in food and in disinfectants and masks.

Also, a significant topic that has crept up on all focus groups is the payment of utilities during the pandemic period; all emphasize the convenience that was present, the possibility of deferred payment in that period, however, after the passage of the so-called. During the crisis period, warnings for payments and exclusions arrived, and most of the respondents thought that it was not a benefit, because "now they are even worse, because the debts have accumulated."

Back to 'normal life'

According to the testimonies of all focus group participants from all targeted localities, the return to normal life will take a long time. As most state, they are only now catching up with all the aftermath of the pandemic; poverty, debts, unpaid bills, consequences for mental and physical health and a number of other problems. In Roma communities throughout BiH, life after the pandemic has not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels, as many Roma men and women hardly had a "normal course of life" even before the pandemic. "

We conclude that the consequences of the pandemic on the socio-economic aspect of life are large-scale and that they are still present today, although the pandemic in the form in which it was before, is over.

Gender - health aspect

The gender-health aspect of this research includes several levels that are examined, namely: the consequences of the pandemic on the psychological and physical health of participants, potential violence or increased intensity of violence if it already existed, the appearance of aggression, nervousness and anxiety or increased intensity with the household member or the person participating in the focus group, then the questions related to people and families who have addicted members, children with disabilities or people with disabilities, as well as the question related to whether there have been tests on COVID - 19 in Roma communities. It should be emphasized that this focus group was a targeted exception in terms of group structure, and that the participants in this group were exclusively women, due to the sensitivity of the topic and the importance of obtaining real data, as much as possible, for this aspect, the total number of participants in groups from all localities was 43.

QUESTIONS	Categories
Did they feel increased aggression in their partners towards themselves and other family members?	Psychological consequences of pandemic
Did they notice increased nervousness and possibly aggression in themselves?	
Did they have any unusual situations in the house? How did they feel about all the situations and the general situation?	
Did the problems that occurred during that period perhaps affect their physical health?	Psychosomatic diseases
Were they possibly victims of physical abuse during the pandemic?	Violence during pandemic
If so, did they call the police? If so, how did the police react?	
Has the situation improved after the situation has returned to normal?	
If you have women with small children, children with disabilities (special needs), the disabled, the seriously ill or the elderly aged 65+, it would be desirable to pay special attention to them as well, to the impact of this situation on them	Particularly vulnerable groups
Were they, or someone close to them, or a person they know tested for the corona virus and whether someone had symptoms, tried to get tested, but failed.	COVID testing

The identified categories inductively based on the questions and answers from this aspect of the research are the following:

- ✓ Psychological consequences of pandemic
- ✓ Psychosomatic diseases
- ✓ Violence during pandemic
- ✓ Particularly vulnerable groups
- ✓ COVID testing

Psychological consequences of the pandemic

Within this category, data on intrapersonal and interpersonal aggression of participants during a pandemic are obtained, as well as other consequences that have affected the psychological state and health of participants such as nervousness, anxiety, fear, etc.

The responses mostly differed depending on the target area, which is an interesting fact, because in terms of other examined aspects and identified categories, attitudes, experiences and opinions were mostly uniform with some exceptions.

Participants of one group, ie a group of participants from one of the target localities, 7 of them, emphasized that they did not notice significant aggression in their partners or other family members, as well as nervousness and anxiety and that they generally get along well with their partners. the time of the pandemic. The second group, ie the majority of participants from all other localities, pointed out that the partners showed increased nervousness and aggression, which was caused by real circumstances of poverty, fear, isolation, lack of basic means of subsistence, and 3 to 4 participants pointed out that they were partners. they were also nervous about the lack of alcohol, cafes and socializing.

Most of the participants stated that they felt increased nervousness, occasionally aggression because they lacked basic necessities of life, food and medicine, and other needs such as the need to socialize and go out were unable to be met.

Also, according to the participants, the nervousness increased because all the family members were in the house, which created additional tension for the family. Some older participants point out that "otherwise life is like that", that sometimes there is a period of nervousness and aggression due to difficult circumstances, but that it is often up to our personalities, however, none of those present disputed that the pandemic had an impact on aggression and nervousness.

Psychosomatic diseases

Due to stress, uncertainty, fear and other negative emotions that were almost the daily routine of a large number of focus group participants, the subject of interest was certainly the question of whether such a condition and to what extent affected the physical health of participants. Again, we encounter the fact that the answers mostly differ by localities, which is presumably the result of "mass / majority psychology"; because if it happens that one participant gives the answer that there were no consequences of that kind for her and her health, the rest of the group will mostly agree. It certainly happens that there is a discussion because of different answers, but the situations are mostly such that the answers are usually equated with exceptions to individuals who have a different attitude or opinion.

Some participants stated that they had no consequences for their physical health during the pandemic or symptoms of the coronavirus, and only one participant from the given focus group stated that she felt mentally and physically ill because she did not work, which affected her complete psycho - physical health.

The rest of the focus group participants mostly cited various consequences in the form of classic psychosomatic diseases, diabetes (high blood sugar), hypertension, heart problems, etc. As some of the participants had certain chronic diseases before, they cited an example where they could not come to health services, even though they needed it. They also cited examples that they could not find prescriptions for the necessary medicines, and therefore not even medicines.

Violence during the pandemic

Numerous women's organizations during the pandemic warned of an increased rate of violence and a very difficult situation in which the victims of violence find themselves, who are indoors with the perpetrator with the previously mentioned risks. Due to established stereotypes, the Roma community found itself in an even worse position, and a particularly difficult position on this issue was the position of Roma women. Multiple risks due to a number of aggravating circumstances have made Romani women a particularly risky and vulnerable group. As in the case of the previously identified categories, we encounter differences in attitudes, opinions and confessions according to the locality, where in certain localities women generally do not "open up" on this issue and deny the existence of any kind of violence in their case. In other localities, we come across the claims of the participants that there was physical violence in increased intensity, especially because the husbands were constantly at home, and committed violence against the household. One of the participants stated that her husband was an alcoholic, that he was constantly in an alcoholic state and that as a result, her family and she were victims of violence in continuity.

What this participant emphasized as the difference between violence before and during the pandemic is that the husband is not at home until the pandemic occurs during the day and at least at that time they are not disturbed by him, but "only" when he returns home in the evening. the situation during the pandemic was much worse because the perpetrator was constantly at home. Another participant states that her husband is already a well-known bully, with whom the police are also familiar, and he constantly committed violence against his family members during the pandemic, both physically and verbally.

Through this focus group, we came to know about one case of violence in a certain target locality, which is the so-called of a public nature, which takes place in the Roma community, whose victims are women from Roma communities, girls and children in general. It is a case in which a man exhibitionist in a Roma settlement sexually harasses all those women and girls who live near him, publicly masturbating, cursing, and inviting and enticing girls to enter his house with the intention of "using" them.

In addition, he disturbs his neighbors with constant shouting, loud music, throwing glasses and bottles, and in various other ways, while he is constantly in an alcoholic state. The police were called on several occasions, but everything mostly ended with warnings from the same person, who calmed down for a very short time, and then "continued as before". It should be emphasized that this is an older man and a person with a disability.

When it comes to other cases of violence, it should be noted that the police responded to calls, but that the reactions of the perpetrators are mostly individual. While some calm down and do not

commit violence for at least some time, others "become even worse" and the violence only intensifies.

Also, within one focus group, there was information about a girl who, at the age of 14, engaged in prostitution in order to survive. She was a victim of violence by her father, who forcibly married her to a man much older than her, and then she experienced violence from that husband, from whom she "divorced".

Particularly vulnerable groups

In public reviews of the pandemic impact, state of accident and restrictive measures very rarely it was focused on particularly vulnerable categories of citizens such as children with disabilities, people with disabilities, families with addicts, persons with chronically illnesses, etc. Also, limited reviews were given in focus groups in all localities, except sporadic cases.

Only one mother of a child with disabilities gave an overview of this situation and states that she had no problems in the context of procuring the necessary therapy, but she believes that it was much more difficult for mothers of children with disabilities. Life and everyday life with a dependant is generally very difficult, especially in extraordinary circumstances, and more about this has been already stated through the analysis of the aforementioned categories.

Testing for COVID - 19 in Roma communities

According to all focus group participants from all five localities, no person residing in Roma communities was tested for COVID-19, only in one community were several families were isolated due to contact with people who came from abroad during the pandemic.

ATTITUDES OF INSTITUTIONS REPRESENTATIVES

In order to get a more complete picture, in addition to the analysis of documentation, focus groups with participants from Roma communities, representatives of institutions that directly or indirectly work with the Roma population or in their work touch on issues and phenomena identified as significant in this research were contacted. Representatives of the following institutions and organizations were interviewed: local centre’s for social work, city / municipal services for social issues, preschool and school institutions, health care institutions, employment services, police administrations and non-governmental organizations dealing with women's or Roma issues.

TABLE 1: Has the COVID-19 pandemic significantly affected the work of your institution?

	Frecvency	Percentages
I totally agree	20	66,7
I partially agree	9	30,0
I don't agree	1	3,3
Total	30	100,0

Since the pandemic affect all segments of life in the whole of society, it was considered appropriate to see how much the institutions dealing with social issues, education, health and safety of people, experienced changes in their work. Namely, as table no. 1 shows, the pandemic mainly affected the work of institutions to a greater extent, which was confirmed by almost 96.7% of respondents (including the answers “I completely agree” and “I partially agree”).

TABLE 2: Did the number of beneficiaries coming to seek help increase significantly during the pandemic?

	Frequency	Percentages
I totally agree	9	30,0
I partially agree	12	40,0
I don't agree	9	30,0
Total	30	100,0

The number of beneficiaries that asked for help from the institutions and organizations covered by this survey has partially increased, as can be seen in Table no. 2. The answer "completely agree" was given by 30% of respondents, while 40% of respondents "partially agree". Given the limited

mobility, this percentage still represents a significant shift, in the context of the need for assistance of any kind.

TABLE 3: Did you have new beneficiaries asking for help?

	Frequency	Percentages
Yes	24	80,0
No	6	20,0
Total	30	100,0

It is interesting and worrying that as many as 80% of respondents answered that there were new beneficiaries who turned for help, having in mind the character of institutions and organizations covered by this survey.

TABLE 4: Did you have special programs to help the population during the pandemic?

	Frequency	Percentages
Yes	18	60,0
No	11	36,7
Total	29	96,7
Missing answer	1	3,3
Total	30	100,0

TABLE 5.: Have you had an increased number of reports of domestic violence?

	Frequency	Percentages
Yes	3	10,0
No	26	86,7
Total	29	96,7
Missing answer	1	3,3
Total	30	100,0

As stated on several occasions, due to the gravity of the situation in which the whole society finds itself, it was necessary to take institutional care of every citizen, especially those who are already deprived, marginalized and generally in need of help. It is encouraging that 60% of respondents state that they had assistance programs for the citizens, as can be seen from Table 4. It should be noted that the institutions surveyed are institutions of a wider range, so the questions were focused on all of them, but a number of questions, according to the structure did not apply to each of the surveyed institutions, and some of the answers are such that they didn't give a complete picture on certain issues.

For instance, in case with the question of increasing the number of reports of domestic violence, where only 10% of respondents answered that there was an increase in the number of reports of violence. But bearing that it's a mixed group of 30 respondents, and some do not deal directly with violence, this percentage is not negligible.

As mentioned in an earlier analysis, one of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic is certainly a new form of teaching, the so-called on line teaching. For all children, but also for parents, it was a big challenge. For Roma children this was a special challenge. A significant number of children did not have the conditions for this type of teaching, which is why Roma children were often deprived of one of their basic rights, the right to education.

TABLE 6: Are you familiar with the way of conducting online classes for Roma and socially vulnerable children, ie. do you know if they were able to attend classes?

		Frequency	Percentages
	Yes	17	56,7
	No	12	40,0
	Total	29	96,7
Missing answer		1	3,3
TOTAL		30	100,0

TABLE 7: Are you aware that a child dropped out of school during a pandemic?

		Frequency	Percentages
	Yes	2	6,7
	No	27	90,0
	Total	29	96,7
Missing answer		1	3,3
TOTAL		30	100,0

A significant issue is certainly the issue of the education of Roma children during a pandemic, as noted earlier. Most of the respondents are familiar with online teaching and the approach of Roma children to it. Namely, according to the respondents, 2 of them state the case that they know that Roma children dropped out of regular schooling during online classes.

As many as 90% of respondents state, they have had the opportunity to help vulnerable categories through institutional action. Comparing the data with the data presented through the focus group, where most participants state that they received assistance exclusively from the non-governmental sector, it is assumed that a small percentage of Roma men and women were covered by this type of assistance, except through municipalities that distributed vouchers for food aid, through non-governmental and international organizations.

TABLE 8: Have you had the opportunity to help vulnerable categories of the population through institutional action? (in any sense)

	Frequency	Percentages
Yes	27	90,0
No	3	10,0
TOTAL	30	100,0

TABLE 9: Does your institution plan to implement projects or programs to support the population most affected by the pandemic?

	Frequency	Percentages
Yes	13	43,3
No	17	56,7
TOTAL	30	100,0

The questions from Tables 8 and 9 referred to the projects of institutional support to the vulnerable population, whether there were any earlier, and whether there are plans for their further implementation. In the previous period, as many as 90% of respondents stated that they had the opportunity to provide assistance to the vulnerable population through institutions, while 43.3% of them stated that there are plans for future projects.

It is known that the Roma community is often a subject of stereotypes of prejudice and hate speech. The best way to witness these phenomena is by reading comments on social media on articles and posts dealing with Roma men and women. Often the Roma population encounters hate speech on the street, in institutions and in many other places. However, only one respondent stated that he was aware of one case of hate speech that took place in a Roma community.

TABLE 10: Are you aware of hate speech incidents or similar incidents that have occurred in the Roma community?

		Frequency	Percentages
	Yes	1	3,3
	No	28	93,3
	Total	29	96,7
Missing answer		1	3,3
TOTAL		30	100,0

TABLE 11: Due to its specific position from before, was the Roma community particularly affected by the pandemic, and completely neglected by the authorities and institutions when it comes to systemic support to them?

	Frequency	Percentages
I totally agree	5	16,7
I partially agree	8	26,7
I don't agree	17	56,7
TOTAL	30	100,0

An interesting fact is that as many as 56.7% believe that the Roma community was particularly affected by the pandemic, and also neglected by the institutions. It should be taken into account that many Roma communities do not have basic living conditions, such as electricity and water, and therefore basic hygiene, which is the primary protection against the COVID-19 virus, without taking into account other vulnerability parameters.

CONCLUSION

Based on the presented results, i.e. attitudes and experiences of focus group participants, as well as the results of surveys of representatives of institutions from target localities, it is concluded that the position of the Roma community during the pandemic was very difficult, and the consequences of the pandemic are still being considered. According to the attitudes of the majority of focus group participants, "return to normal life" will last for a long time, taking into account, besides, the consequences of the pandemic, the already difficult situation of the Roma community, discrimination, poverty and isolation with which they face every day. The biggest reflection of the pandemic is visible through the socio-economic aspect because a significant number of participants pointed out that they did not even have the means to meet basic needs, such as the need for food and medicine, which inevitably affects and creates other problems and negative conditions. As noted, the state of permanent and severe scarcity inevitably affects all other aspects of life, such as general psycho-physical health, family harmony, interpersonal relationships, and creates a state of tension, aggression and anxiety that often result with domestic violence, as witnessed by several female participants of focus groups. The families of addicts, as well as people with mental disorders, were in a particularly difficult position, because the state of isolation and permanent stay indoors leaves several negative consequences both for themselves and their family members. The education segment also showed several aggravating circumstances for Roma children, due to a set of specific circumstances surrounding them, such as lack or inadequate technical aids, lack of space for learning and monitoring classes, lack of a person to help them master the material because they are parents often illiterate or insufficiently educated to help them overcome difficulties with the material. In this research, which was conducted in Tuzla, Visoko, Kakanj, Prnjavor, Bijeljina and Donji Vakuf, it is stated that certain representatives of institutions are aware of 2 cases of Roma leaving school during the pandemic.

Attention should also be paid to the participant's dissatisfaction with the lack of institutional and systemic support during the pandemic and given the situation in Roma communities, and it is considered them to be a high-risk category for the emergence of infection.

It is concluded that the situation in Roma communities during the pandemic, and even now, was and remains very difficult and worrying. The lack of basic means of subsistence and conditions for compliance with prevention measures can have far-reaching consequences not only for the Roma community, but also for society in general, if adequate institutional and systemic support is not provided soon.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This document is a form of advocacy document that aims to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic in Roma communities and prevent further adverse events, as well as to find prevention and rehabilitation mechanisms in case of the next COVID-19 or some other form of large-scale crisis. Based on the presented results, analysis and conclusions, the following recommendations are made:

- ✓ Establish permanent consultative mechanisms with Roma organizations. Consult systematically (at national and local level) with Roma organizations on what Roma community's needs.
- ✓ Initiate research and data collection disaggregated by gender and age. Carry out rapid assessments of the situation and needs of Roma communities.
- ✓ Adhere to internationally agreed human rights standards in every aspect of the pandemic response, ensuring equality and non-discrimination for all, including labor, health and all other rights.
- ✓ Work with Roma organizations to provide targeted assistance to vulnerable groups, including social, economic, legal and psychological support, and to include this cooperation in national plans for preventive measures and assistance to the population.
- ✓ Ensure continued and, if necessary, additional funding for Roma civil society organizations to continue their regular programs and new activities as response to the pandemic.
- ✓ Provide direct humanitarian and other assistance to Roma communities living in camps, unregulated territories, and shelters. They are extremely vulnerable and underestimated.
- ✓ Provide funds to help Roma children in accessing to online classes.
- ✓ Provide institutional support for women victims of violence from Roma communities.

