

# Implications of COVID-19 pandemic on Roma and Travellers communities

**Country:** Slovakia

**Contractor's name:** Centre for the Research  
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## 1 Specific implications of the general measures taken to stop the COVID-19 pandemic on Roma and Travellers' communities?

### 1.1 Type of measures

- lockdowns of localities
- restriction of movement
- closure of businesses

As of 16 March 2020, the Government declared the state of emergency within the health care sector (according to the Article 5 of the Constitutional Law No. 227/2002 Coll).<sup>1</sup> This decision was taken to secure smooth performance of health care, during this time no health care professional can refuse to come to work and exercising the right to strike is prohibited.<sup>2</sup> According to the law the state of emergency can be declared only for a maximum of 90 days, thus the state of emergency was over on 13 June.

The lockdown of municipalities (or regions) was not adopted. In relation to Roma communities, only certain areas were lockdown (please see part 2.1 of this report). The movement of population was restricted the most during the Easter holiday when people could move only within their county, they could leave their homes only if it was necessary (e.g. do shopping, get medicine or health care, etc.).

The quarantine was ordered to all persons coming from abroad, first they had to stay in home isolation, later they had to undergo quarantine in state facilities (until so called intelligent quarantine was launched at the end of May). Before the state quarantine was adopted, Roma returning from abroad were reported not to keep home isolation in several localities. They were also blamed of spreading the coronavirus within their localities<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Slovakia, Law No. 227/2002 Coll. On the State Security in Times of War and State of Emergency. available at <https://www.zakonypreludi.sk/zz/2002-227/>; Slovakia, Government of the Slovak Republic (Vláda SR) (2020), 'Government Resolution No. 114/2020 on the Proposal to Declare State of Emergency Pursuant to the Law No. 227/2002 Coll.', 15 March 2020, available at <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Resolution/18252/1>

<sup>2</sup> Please see <https://www.minv.sk/?tlacove-spravy&sprava=koronavirus>

<sup>3</sup> Jádu, 'Donúti pandémie riešiť postavenie Rómov žijúcich na okraji spoločnosti?', May 2020, available at: [http://www.goethe.de/ins/cz/prj/jug/the/cor/cs16768382.htm?fbclid=IwAR2rbt2gLXjeuJyohDKPJHzJabvAQvTtrart\\_PFE207UwNH8Lp7D\\_0W1eKM%20info%20aj%20tu%20https://refresher.sk/82378-Radsej-vojna-ako-virus-bojime-sa-hlavne-o-deti-Nie-su-ruska-sijeme-si-](http://www.goethe.de/ins/cz/prj/jug/the/cor/cs16768382.htm?fbclid=IwAR2rbt2gLXjeuJyohDKPJHzJabvAQvTtrart_PFE207UwNH8Lp7D_0W1eKM%20info%20aj%20tu%20https://refresher.sk/82378-Radsej-vojna-ako-virus-bojime-sa-hlavne-o-deti-Nie-su-ruska-sijeme-si-)

In the time when first case of Covid-19 was recorded, strict quarantine measures were adopted requiring wearing face masks, keeping social distance, using disinfectants, and avoiding social contacts only to necessary minimum<sup>4</sup>. In Roma communities, it was difficult to keep all quarantine and hygienic measures because of the high density of population, bad housing standard and lacking protective equipment and disinfectants. Field social workers reported not to have protective equipment<sup>5</sup>.

The closure of businesses and overall slowdown of economy led to an increase in unemployment<sup>6</sup>. The income of Roma families fell because of the loss of income from abroad<sup>7</sup>. The strict rules adopted for shopping (only limited number of persons were allowed to enter the stores – 1 person per 25m<sup>2</sup>, they had to have facemask and use disinfectants) lead to tensions in smaller municipalities where only smaller stores sell the groceries and other basic stuff<sup>8</sup>.

The general regulations and protocols related to Covid-19 disease issued by Slovak public authorities have not specifically addressed the situation of Roma communities. They specified general rules applied to the whole population. However, shortly after the coronavirus outbreak, the Roma

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[http://www.goethe.de/ins/cz/prj/jug/the/cor/cs16768382.htm?fbclid=IwAR2rbt2gLXjeuJyohDKPJHzJabvAQvTtrart\\_PFE207UwNH8Lp7D\\_0W1eKM](http://www.goethe.de/ins/cz/prj/jug/the/cor/cs16768382.htm?fbclid=IwAR2rbt2gLXjeuJyohDKPJHzJabvAQvTtrart_PFE207UwNH8Lp7D_0W1eKM), Denník N, 'V Gelnici je prvá rómska osada v karanténe', 27 March 2020, available at: <https://dennikn.sk/1825153/v-gelnici-je-prva-romska-osada-v-karantene-nikto-tam-nema-priznaky-ochorenia/>

<sup>4</sup> Slovakia, Public Health Authority (Úrad verejného zdravotníctva SR), 'Informácia zo zasadnutia Ústredného krízového štábu v súvislosti s COVID-19', 6 March 2020, available at: [http://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4062:informacia-zo-zasadnutia-ustredneho-krizoveho-tabu-vnsuvislosti-sncovid-19&catid=250:koronavirus-2019-ncov&Itemid=153](http://www.uvzsr.sk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4062:informacia-zo-zasadnutia-ustredneho-krizoveho-tabu-vnsuvislosti-sncovid-19&catid=250:koronavirus-2019-ncov&Itemid=153), Slovakia, Public Health Authority (Úrad verejného zdravotníctva) (2020), Verejná vyhláška, ktorou sa oznamuje vydanie rozhodnutia o nariadení opatrenia na predchádzanie vzniku a šírenia ochorenia podľa §48 odsek 4 písmeno e) zákona č. 355/2007 Z.z. o ochrane podpore a rozvoji verejného zdravia a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov v znení neskorších predpisov, no. OLP/2405/2020, from 6 March 2020, available at: [http://www.uvzsr.sk/docs/info/covid19/Rozhodnutie\\_zakaz\\_navstev\\_nemocnice.pdf](http://www.uvzsr.sk/docs/info/covid19/Rozhodnutie_zakaz_navstev_nemocnice.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Kovačič Hanzelová, Z. (2020), 'Koronavírus: Štát pre vysoko rizikové rómske osady nemá plán', 13 March 2020, available at <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22357032/koronavirus-stat-pre-vysokorizikove-romske-osady-nema-plan.html>

<sup>6</sup> FB post of Abel Ravasz from 25 May 2020, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/abelravasz/photos/a.982139225187715/2843881862346766/?type=3&theater>

<sup>7</sup> Človek v ohrození, 'Spájame sa pre ochranu zraniteľných pred Covid-19', available at: <https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/spajame-sa-pre-ochranu-zranitelnych-pred-covid-19/>

<sup>8</sup> Jádu, 'Donúti pandémie riešiť postavenie Rómov žijúcich na okraji spoločnosti?', May 2020, available at: [http://www.goethe.de/ins/cz/prj/jug/the/cor/cs16768382.htm?fbclid=IwAR2rbt2gLXjeuJyohDKPJHzJabvAQvTtrart\\_PFE207UwNH8Lp7D\\_0W1eKM%20info%20aj%20tu%20https://refresher.sk/82378-Radsej-vojna-ako-virus-bojime-sa-hlavne-o-deti-Nie-su-ruska-sijeme-si-ich-sami-hovorja-Romovia-z-vychodu](http://www.goethe.de/ins/cz/prj/jug/the/cor/cs16768382.htm?fbclid=IwAR2rbt2gLXjeuJyohDKPJHzJabvAQvTtrart_PFE207UwNH8Lp7D_0W1eKM%20info%20aj%20tu%20https://refresher.sk/82378-Radsej-vojna-ako-virus-bojime-sa-hlavne-o-deti-Nie-su-ruska-sijeme-si-ich-sami-hovorja-Romovia-z-vychodu)

communities were recognized by public authorities as being of a high risk of spreading coronavirus<sup>9</sup>.

At the beginning of coronavirus pandemic, the state authorities had no plan on how to tackle the spread of coronavirus in Roma communities. The situation was partly addressed by the Governmental Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities who established Crisis staff for Roma communities at their office and tried to coordinate the support for Roma communities throughout a map portal displaying needs of Roma communities and organizations and individuals who can provide necessary help like food, drinking water, protective equipment, disinfectants, etc<sup>10</sup>. The Governmental Plenipotentiary also prepared a set of recommendations on how to address the situation in Roma communities<sup>11</sup>. These steps were taken by the then Plenipotentiary Abel Ravasz who was replaced by Andrea Bučková in the beginning of April<sup>12</sup>. After that the first cases of Roma people infected by coronavirus were recorded, the Government decided on the lockdown of certain Roma communities (reported in detail in part 2.1)<sup>13</sup>. This measure was enshrined in the Plan of Covid-19 disease management in marginalized Roma communities (*Plán riešenia ochorenia Covid-19 v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách*) adopted by the new Government of PM Igor Matovič at the beginning of April, Roma communities with the share of persons tested positive for Covid-19 more than 10% were lockdown<sup>14</sup>. The Plan defines the target group of the adopted measures which are 1044 Roma settlements listed by the Central Crises Staff as the most endangered by the spread of coronavirus. According to the Plan, the

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<sup>9</sup> Slovakia, Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (Ministerstvo vnútra SR), 'Dôležité informácie', Press release from 17 March 2020, available at: [https://www.minv.sk/?spravy\\_rk&sprava=dolezite-informacie](https://www.minv.sk/?spravy_rk&sprava=dolezite-informacie)

<sup>10</sup> Slovakia, Governmental Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities (Splnomocnenec vlády SR pre rómske komunity), 'Spustili sme mapový portál pre zobrazovanie a koordináciu naplňania potrieb obyvateľov z prostredia marginalizovaných rómskych komunit', available at: <http://www.minv.sk/?spustili-sme-mapovy-portal-pre-zobrazovanie-a-koordinaciu-naplňania-potrieb-obyvateľov-z-prostredia-marginalizovaných-romských-komunit>

<sup>11</sup> Slovakia, Governmental Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities (Splnomocnenec vlády SR pre rómske komunity), 'Návrhy opatrení pre marginalizované rómske komunity v súvislosti so šírením vírusového ochorenia Covid-19', available at: <http://www.minv.sk/?navrhy-opatreni-pre-marginalizovane-romske-komunity-v-suvislosti-s-sirenim-virusoveho-ochorenia-covid-19>

<sup>12</sup> Slovakia, Government of the Slovak Republic (Vláda SR), 'Návrh na odvolanie splnomocnenca vlády Slovenskej republiky a vymenovanie splnomocnenkyne vlády Slovenskej republiky pre rómske komunity', adopted by the Government on 31 March 2020, available at: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/24670/1>

<sup>13</sup> Slovakia, Government of the Slovak Republic (Vláda SR), 'Plán riešenia ochorenia Covid-19 v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách', adopted by the Government on 2 April 2020, available at: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/24697/1>

<sup>14</sup> Slovakia, Government of the Slovak Republic (Vláda SR), 'Plán riešenia ochorenia Covid-19 v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách', adopted by the Government on 2 April 2020, available at: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/24697/1>

regional hygienist decides on the lockdown of a Roma settlement based on the pandemic situation there. The Plan further specifies details on testing and management of persons sick of Covid-19. As for the lockdown settlements, the Plan states that distribution of groceries and drinking water must be secured, as well as health care, people living in lockdown settlements must be informed on the situation. However, the Plan does not specify more details how the adopted measures shall be implemented.

## 1.2 Implications of measures

- Employment

Income of households in marginalized Roma communities dropped significantly due to return of those working abroad. Numbers of returnees are not known. That, in turn, increased indebtedness and usury.<sup>15</sup> During the pandemic, the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family suspended all activation works which also represent a source of income in marginalized Roma communities (for instance, in 2017, up to 40% of unemployed Roma participated in activation works<sup>16</sup>). Activation benefit amounts to 63, 07 EUR a month. During the pandemic activation works have been suspended and so-called protective benefit (37, 30 EUR) is being paid out to those registered to perform activation works.<sup>17</sup> Benefit in material need (66, 30 EUR a month) is being paid out without the obligation to perform 32 hours of communal works.<sup>18</sup> As reported by People in Peril NGO (*Človek v ohrození, n.o.*), occasional undeclared work (for instance in construction or agriculture) is also a significant source of income in Roma communities. Such works were suspended during the pandemic which lead to a loss of this income. It is further estimated that in cases of collective layoffs Roma were the first to be let go; this is, however, only an assumption with no empirical data to support it.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'Spájame sa pre ochranu zraniteľných pred COVID-19', press release, 21 April 2020, available at <https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/spajame-sa-pre-ochranu-zranitelnych-pred-covid-19/>

<sup>16</sup> Hidas, S., Lafférsová, Z., Machlica, G. (2018), 'Inklúzia Rómov je celospoločenskou výzvou', Commentary 2018/18, Institute of Financial Policy, Ministry of Finance (*Inštitút finančnej politiky, Ministerstvo financií SR*).

<sup>17</sup> Slovakia, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (*Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny SR*) (2020), 'Hmotná núdza', press release, available at <https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/koronavirus-pracovna-socialna-oblast/hmotna-nudza/>

<sup>18</sup> Slovakia, Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic (*Ministerstvo práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny SR*) (2020), 'Hmotná núdza', press release, available at <https://www.employment.gov.sk/sk/koronavirus-pracovna-socialna-oblast/hmotna-nudza/>; Slovakia, Law No. 417/2013 Coll. On Material Need as amended (*Zákon č. 417/2013 Z.z. o hmotnej núdzi a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov*), 26 November 2013, available at <https://www.zakonypreludi.sk/zz/2013-417>

<sup>19</sup> Information provided by Michaela Mudroňová of People in Peril NGO via telephone on 8 June 2020.

- Health

People in Peril NGO reported that difficult access to health care in marginalized Roma communities made Roma more vulnerable to COVID-19 due to their generally poorer health condition. The NGO therefore called upon the government to ensure distribution of medicine and care to those who could not secure it themselves.<sup>20</sup>

As of 21 April 2020, it became mandatory to wear a face mask in public.<sup>21</sup> People in Peril NGO, however, reported lack of protective equipment (including face masks) for both social field workers and population in marginalized communities.<sup>22</sup> People in Peril NGO further reported that Roma in marginalized communities were unable to stock up on protective equipment due to their low or completely missing income.<sup>23</sup> Towards the end of April community centres in Roma communities received some protective equipment (mainly face masks) from the Office of Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities and the Implementation Agency (*Implementačná agentúra*) but only for their employees, not for communities. Some municipalities (e.g. Prešov<sup>24</sup>, Banská Bystrica<sup>25</sup>) came to realize the vulnerability of local Roma communities and distributed protective equipment in these localities.<sup>26</sup>

- Education

Based on the decision of Central Crisis Staff from 12 March 2020 all schools were closed from 16 March 2020. Distance learning affected all children in primary, secondary and tertiary education. Schools for children in kindergartens and grades 0-5 of primary schools reopened on 1 June 2020.

<sup>20</sup> People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'Spájame sa pre ochranu zraniteľných pred COVID-19', press release, 21 April 2020, available at <https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/spajame-sa-pre-ochranu-zranitelnych-pred-covid-19/>

<sup>21</sup> Slovakia, Public Health Authority (*Úrad verejného zdravotníctva SR*) (2020), 'Opatrenie Úradu verejného zdravotníctva SR pri ohrození verejného zdravia č. OLP/3355/2020', 20 April 2020, available at [https://www.ruvzpp.sk/upload/files/Opatrenie\\_UVZSR\\_pre\\_nosenie\\_rusok\\_2020-04-20.pdf](https://www.ruvzpp.sk/upload/files/Opatrenie_UVZSR_pre_nosenie_rusok_2020-04-20.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'Spájame sa pre ochranu zraniteľných pred COVID-19', press release, 21 April 2020, available at <https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/spajame-sa-pre-ochranu-zranitelnych-pred-covid-19/>

<sup>23</sup> People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'Keď hru zvanú koronavírus hrajú ľudia s oveľa horšími kartami, ako sme dostali my', press release, 8 April 2020, available at <https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/ked-hru-zvanu-koronavirus-hraju-s-ovela-horsimi-kartami-ako-sme-dostali-my/>

<sup>24</sup> Korzár SME (2020), 'Mesto Prešov rozdalo rúška Rómom aj bezdomovcom', 23 March 2020, available at <https://presov.korzar.sme.sk/c/22366130/mesto-presov-rozdalo-ruska-romom-aj-bezdomovcom.html>

<sup>25</sup> My Bystrica (2020), 'Do rómskych osád a ľuďom bez domova sme rozniesli rúška. Mesto pripravuje ďalšie opatrenia', 21 April 2020, available at <https://mybystrica.sme.sk/c/22388553/do-romskych-osad-a-ludom-bez-domova-rozniesli-ruska.html>

<sup>26</sup> Information provided by Michaela Mudroňová of People in Peril NGO via telephone on 8 June 2020.

Other school remained closed until the end of the school year (30 June 2020).

According to the analysis of Education Policy Institute (under the Ministry of education), there have been many challenges in distance learning for children from the socially disadvantaged environment, especially for those living in marginalised Roma communities. Based on their study, there was a lack of systemic measures for accessing children from the socially deprived environment to distance learning. 44% of children (aged 6-11 years) live in overcrowded households with limited possibilities for learning. More than 110 000 children are dependent on public school meals (many of them are Roma, but no data disaggregated by ethnicity are available). As for the online education – 32 000 of children have no access to the internet (again, many of them are Roma from marginalised localities). The distance learning has had a very negative impact on children from Roma communities – in some cases, they are completely excluded from education due to the limited access to the internet, inappropriate housing and social conditions in the households and due to the unpreparedness of teachers to provide education distantly.<sup>27</sup>

The organisation EduRoma published more detailed monitoring of conditions for distance learning in marginalised Roma communities. Based on their analysis, there are several significant barriers for children from Roma marginalised communities for effective education during the crisis<sup>28</sup>:

- Low education of some parents has a negative impact on possibilities of distance education of their children – the lack of capabilities to help them with homework, parents feel overwhelmed by the scope of information, learning assignments, etc. Roma children are thus in disadvantaged position compared to other children
- Many of Romani children have special educational needs and language barrier, which makes distance learning even more complicated for them
- Lack of communication between teachers and parents before crisis also influenced the situation during the crisis

Second monitoring of EduRoma from April 2020 provided information about differences in education between Roma children having access to internet and those, who have no internet connection. EduRoma conducted 86 semi – structured interviews with Romani children, teachers and social workers. Education of “offline” children is very demanding for teachers, social and

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<sup>27</sup> Slovakia, Bednárík, M (et.al) (2020), *Ako v čase krízy zabezpečiť vzdelávanie pre všetky deti*, Bratislava, Inštitút vzdelávacej politiky, April 2020, available at: <https://www.ozpsav.sk/sk/Aktuality/udalosti-oznamy/ako-v-case-krizy-zabezpecit-pristup-k-vzdelavaniu-pre-vsetky-deti-komentar-ivp.alej>

<sup>28</sup> Rafael, V. – Krejčíková, K. (2020) *Ako zostať blízko na diaľku. Prvé výsledky monitorovania žiakov z marginalizovaných rómskych komunít počas pandémie COVID 19*. Bratislava, EduRoma., available at: <https://eduroma.sk/docs/ako-zostat-blizko-na-dialku.pdf>





community workers. While teachers prepare school assignments, social workers print them and distribute to children. However, cooperation with some families is difficult and some of the children remained excluded from education at all. Children having access to internet complained about lack of the feedback from teachers, ineffective communication with teachers, limited skill for using technologies. Accordingly, not all of the parents are capable to help them with the school assignments<sup>29</sup>.

- Housing

Roma in marginalized communities face another health risk caused by their very low standard of living and overcrowding which prevents them from practicing social distancing and isolation as recommended by public authorities.<sup>30</sup> However, we could not identify any evidence of corona virus having an impact on housing of Roma.

- Food security

Suspension of schooling caused also closure of school canteens where lunches were provided free of charge to all children.<sup>31</sup> All children from marginalized Roma communities thus lost access to one meal a day (as well as all children from the majority). Children from marginalized Roma communities are to a large extent dependent on free lunches due to their families' low socio-economic status. According to the Institute of Educational Policy<sup>32</sup>, up to 110 thousand children (not exclusively Roma though) are dependent on lunches free of charge.

<sup>29</sup> Rafael, V. – Krejčíková, K. (2020) *Aký je rozdiel medzi online a offline žiakmi z chudobných rómskych lokalít. Druhá časť výsledkov správy o dištančnom vzdelávaní počas pandémie COVID 19*. Bratislava, EduRoma, available at: <https://eduroma.sk/docs/ako-zostat-blizko-na-dialku-2.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'Keď hru yvanú koronavírus hrajú ľudia s oveľa horšími kartami, ako sme dostali my', press release, 8 April 2020, available at <https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/ked-hru-zvanu-koronavirus-hraju-s-ovela-horsimi-kartami-ako-sme-dostali-my/>; People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'Výsledky dotazníka: Vo vylúčených komunitách chýbajú ochranné prostriedky', press release, 24 March 2020, available at <https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/vysledky-dotaznika-vo-vylucenych-komunitach-chybaju-ochranneprostriedky/>

<sup>31</sup> Slovakia, Law No. 375/2018 Coll. that amends and supplements the Law No. 544/2010 Coll. on Subsidies in the purview of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and that amends and supplements Law No. 245/2008 Coll. the Schooling Act as amended (*Zákon č. 375/2018 Z.z. ktorým sa mení a dopĺňa zákon č. 544/2010 Z.z. o dotáciách v pôsobnosti Ministerstva práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny SR v znení neskorších predpisov a ktorým sa dopĺňa zákon č. 245/2008 Z.z. o výchove a vzdelávaní (školský zákon) v znení neskorších predpisov*), 4 December 2018, available at <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2018/375/>

<sup>32</sup> Slovakia, Bednárík, M (et.al) (2020), *Ako v čase krízy zabezpečiť vzdelávanie pre všetky deti*, Bratislava, Inštitút vzdelávacej politiky, April 2020, available at: <https://www.ozpsav.sk/sk/Aktuality/udalosti-oznamy/ako-v-case-krizy-zabezpecit-pristup-k-vzdelavaniu-pre-vsetky-deti-komentar-ivp.alej>

People in Peril further reported that loss of income lead to food deprivation.<sup>33</sup> The NGO therefore called upon the government to provide food supplies for families with no income.<sup>34</sup> They reported that as of 8 June 2020 they were not aware of any government initiative in this matter.<sup>35</sup>

As reported by People in Peril NGO, in the beginning of the pandemic Roma had no access to face masks and were often refused entry to groceries without having their upper respiratory tract covered. This was when wearing face masks was not yet mandatory. Roma therefore faced difficulties shopping for groceries.<sup>36</sup> However, this is anecdotal evidence that could not be verified elsewhere.

- Water and sanitation

In its recommendations on mitigating impacts of corona virus on the most vulnerable groups, People in Peril NGO highlighted the problem of lack of access to clean water and sanitation in marginalized Roma communities. They therefore urged the Government to secure access to clean water in all marginalized communities.<sup>37</sup> Same recommendations were articulated by the then Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities who discussed them with the Government on 15 March 2020.

Families in impoverished communities were also unable to buy enough disinfection and soap due to their loss of income and generally low socio-economic status.<sup>38</sup> People in Peril NGO urged the Government to help with hygiene in marginalized Roma communities to prevent the spread of corona virus. More specifically they recommended to provide water containers with water taps, buckets, soaps, hand disinfection and mobile toilets.<sup>39</sup> The then

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<sup>33</sup> People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'Spájame sa pre ochranu zraniteľných pred COVID-19', press release, 21 April 2020, available at <https://clovekvoohrozeni.sk/spajame-sa-pre-ochranu-zranitelnych-pred-covid-19/>

<sup>34</sup> People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'Spájame sa pre ochranu zraniteľných pred COVID-19', press release, 21 April 2020, available at <https://clovekvoohrozeni.sk/spajame-sa-pre-ochranu-zranitelnych-pred-covid-19/>; People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'Vytvorili sme odporúčania pre humanitárne zásahy vo vylúčených komunitách', press release, 2 April 2020, available at <https://clovekvoohrozeni.sk/vytvorili-sme-odporucania-pre-humanitarne-zasahy-vo-vylucenych-komunitach/>

<sup>35</sup> Information provided by Andrea Najvirtová, director of People in Peril NGO via telephone on 8 June 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Information provided by Michaela Mudroňová of People in Peril NGO via telephone on 8 June 2020.

<sup>37</sup> People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'Vytvorili sme odporúčania pre humanitárne zásahy vo vylúčených komunitách', press release, 2 April 2020, available at <https://clovekvoohrozeni.sk/vytvorili-sme-odporucania-pre-humanitarne-zasahy-vo-vylucenych-komunitach/>

<sup>38</sup> People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'Vo vylúčených komunitách sme odovzdali 339 hygienických balíčkov', press release, 21 May 2020, available at <https://clovekvoohrozeni.sk/vo-vylucenych-komunitach-sme-odovzdali-339-hygienickyh-balickov/>

<sup>39</sup> People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'Vytvorili sme odporúčania pre humanitárne zásahy vo vylúčených komunitách', press release, 2 April 2020, available at <https://clovekvoohrozeni.sk/vytvorili-sme-odporucania-pre-humanitarne-zasahy-vo-vylucenych-komunitach/>

Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities formulated the same recommendations.<sup>40</sup>

### 1.3 Estimates of the scale of the impact

- Number of communities affected by lockdowns

Please see the detail information on localities affected by lockdowns in section 2.1.

- Magnitude of pandemic-induced poverty

According to the information from the lockdown localities, the poorest families living there were starving. The problem of usury is probably on the rise<sup>41</sup>. People in lockdown localities were reported not to have access to groceries because they were not allowed to leave the locality to do shopping, they also had not enough cash to be able to buy groceries delivered to the border of the locality. They were also not allowed to pick up wood to be able to prepare meal (most of them use wood for heating and preparation of meal). The delivery of groceries and other equipment was not coordinated enough<sup>42</sup>.

Other information on the rise of poverty in Roma communities have not been identified.

- Types of Roma and Traveller occupations affected hardest

The overall rise of unemployment was recorded in Slovakia during April (from 5,19% in March to 6,57% in April and 7,2% in May ). The number of persons looking for jobs increased as well – in April 180,756 people were unemployed which was more about 37,763 persons than in March. In May, 198,256 persons were seeking for employment<sup>43</sup>. The official statistics does not provide more detail data, the data disaggregated by ethnicity are not available at all. The rise of unemployment was recorded in all regions of Slovakia, however, the most significant rise occurred in the region of

<sup>40</sup> Slovakia, Office of Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (*Úrad splnomocnenca vlády SR pre rómske komunity, Ministerstvo vnútra SR*) (2020), 'A letter of Mr. Ábel Ravasz, the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities to the Prime Minister', 22 March 2020, available at [http://www.minv.sk/swift\\_data/source/romovia/galerie/korona\\_2020/Ravasz\\_list-koronavirus-v-MRK-22.3..pdf?fbclid=IwAR3mhNKdwZemCKE5fu-Hx1U1u\\_Cfs2QO3kBu7DRHsyje0UJLDbMltJEhL8](http://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/romovia/galerie/korona_2020/Ravasz_list-koronavirus-v-MRK-22.3..pdf?fbclid=IwAR3mhNKdwZemCKE5fu-Hx1U1u_Cfs2QO3kBu7DRHsyje0UJLDbMltJEhL8)

<sup>41</sup> SME podcast, Rozhovory ZKH – Ravasz: prvé testovanie v Jarovniciach bolo odporné, bola to military show, 20 April 2020, available at: <https://video.sme.sk/c/22387530/rozhovory-zkh-abel-ravasz-romovia-a-koronavirus-video.html>

<sup>42</sup> Denník N (2020), 'Zavrite ich všetkých: uzavretie rómskych osád do karantény bolo zúfalo nedomyslené', 12 April 2020, available at: <https://dennikn.sk/1851065/zavrite-ich-vsetkych-uzavretie-romskych-osad-do-karanteny-bolo-zufalo-nedomyslene/>

<sup>43</sup> Slovakia, The Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (Ústredie práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny SR), 'V máji si na Slovensku našlo prácu viac ľudí ako v apríli', available at: [https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/media/medialne-spravy/v-maji-si-na-slovensku-naslo-pracu-viac-ludi-ako-v-aprili.html?page\\_id=1010355](https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/media/medialne-spravy/v-maji-si-na-slovensku-naslo-pracu-viac-ludi-ako-v-aprili.html?page_id=1010355)

Prešov<sup>44</sup> which is a region with higher concentration of Roma population compared to other regions.

NGO Človek v ohrození active in Roma communities observed that many Roma have already lost their jobs or are at a high risk of losing their employment. Before the coronavirus pandemic, many Roma were working abroad, had an unofficial job (e.g. in agriculture, construction), or worked only on a temporary labour contract, short-term contract or in probation work. All these working positions have been negatively influenced by the coronavirus pandemic<sup>45</sup>.

- Difference of impact on Roma women and children

The overall rise of domestic violence has been reported and the situation of victims of domestic violence became harder during the pandemic situation<sup>46</sup>. It is very likely that Roma women have been also affected by the rise of domestic violence, however, more detail information on this issue has not been identified.

By closing the schools, Roma children lost the possibility of having the meal at schools. The impact of not attending the school for several months may be very significant for this category of children (more information is in section 1.2).

## **2 Specific measures to address the implications of the pandemic on Roma and Travellers**

### **2.1 Measures to tackle the spread of the virus specifically among Roma and Travellers communities**

- Medical testing

Slovakia's Central Crisis Staff has identified 1,044 excluded localities, currently inhabited by more than a quarter of a million people of Roma origin, as being risky from the standpoint of an eventual spread of COVID-19. The authorities estimated that 1,400 Romani people have recently returned to Slovakia from abroad, with more than 200 showing symptoms of a respiratory disease. Slovak PM Igor Matovič said, that testing the excluded Roma is inevitable. He also said that due to substandard options for maintaining personal hygiene in the settlements, one infected person could spread COVID-19 to as many as 20 other people. In the PM's view,

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<sup>44</sup> Slovakia, The Central Office of Labour, Social Affairs and Family (Ústredie práce, sociálnych vecí a rodiny SR), 'Celkový počet uchádzačov o zamestnanie v apríli medzimesačne vzrástol o 33 613', Press release from 20 May 2020, available at: [https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/buxus/docs/KGR/TS/TS\\_-\\_statistika\\_nezamestnanosti\\_april\\_2020.pdf](https://www.upsvr.gov.sk/buxus/docs/KGR/TS/TS_-_statistika_nezamestnanosti_april_2020.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> <https://spis.korzar.sme.sk/c/22386488/pomaha-romom-s-pracou-kriza-sa-najviac-dotkne-najzranitelnejsich.html>

<sup>46</sup> Glob.sk, 'Generálna prokuratúra zaznamenala nárast počtu trestných konaní domáceho násillia', 2 June 2020, available at: <https://glob.zoznam.sk/generalna-prokuratúra-zaznamenala-narast-poctu-trestnych-konani-domaceho-nasillia/>

that means that the excluded Roma are at a greater risk of infection than the majority population..<sup>47</sup>. Abel Ravasz – the former Plenipotentiary, points out that in the case of the Roma communities, the whole month of March can be basically considered as lost. The state began to address this issue on March 15, when after his letter the old government approved the first partial measures (freeing the access to drinking water, preparation for the payment of benefits, the promise to equip social workers with facemasks). He added that they had had to wait for two weeks for further measures – until April 1 – when the plans of the new government were presented.<sup>48</sup>

The Carousel military assistance operation was launched on 3 April, during which they tested more than 9,000 Roma in more than 290 localities in Slovakia. Out of the total number of the tested, 143 were tested positive.<sup>49</sup> The air force was also invited to cooperate. 9010 samples were taken in 293 settlements.<sup>50</sup> Of the Roma communities, the most serious case was Žehra, where 72 cases of the disease were identified, the second highest number, 13 cases of sick persons were found in Nitra.<sup>51</sup>

The testing had a legal framework in Resolution of the Government No. 196/2020 – Plan for the management of COVID-19 in marginalised Roma communities, of 2 April 2020 (*Plán riešenia ochorenia Covid-19 v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách*).<sup>52</sup> This plan has been prepared and implemented in cooperation with organization Healthy regions (*Zdravé regióny*) that provides activities aimed at improving the access of Roma to health care. This organization also employ s many Roma as health mediators who provided important assistance and mediated contact between

<sup>47</sup> Romea.cz (2020), 'Slovakia: COVID-19 testing begins in Romani settlements, those who test positive will be locally quarantined', 4 April 2020, available at: <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/slovakia-covid-19-testing-begins-in-romani-settlements-those-who-test-positive-will-be-locally-quarantined>

<sup>48</sup> Ravasz, A. (2020), 'Štát premrhal v rómskych komunitách celý mesiac, nemôžeme stratit ďalší', Dennik N, 2 April 2020, available at <https://dennikn.sk/1834928/stat-premrhal-v-romskych-komunitach-cely-mesiac-nemozeme-stratit-dalsi/>

<sup>49</sup> TA3 (2020), 'Karanténu zrušili aj v poslednej uzatvorenej lokalite na Slovensku', 30 May 2020, available at: <https://www.ta3.com/clanok/1184470/karantenu-zrusili-aj-v-poslednej-uzatvorenej-lokalite-na-slovensku.html>

<sup>50</sup> Šimoňáková, M. (2020), 'Poslednú karantenizovanú lokalitu otvorili. V Dreveníku zavládla radosť', *ME Korzár Spiš*, 30 May 2020, available at <https://kosice.korzar.sme.sk/c/22405177/kosicania-dostavaju-za-nenosenie-ruska-vysoke-pokuty.html> <https://spis.korzar.sme.sk/c/22415506/poslednu-karantenizovanu-lokalitu-otvorili-v-dreveniku-zavladla-radost.html>

<sup>51</sup> TA3 (2020), 'Zisťovali, odkiaľ pochádzajú nakazení. Časť je z osád a DSS', 26 May 2020, available at: <https://www.ta3.com/clanok/1184096/zistovali-odkial-pochadzaju-nakazeni-cast-je-z-osad-a-dss.html>

<sup>52</sup> Slovakia, Public Health Authority (Úrad verejného zdravotníctva) (2020), *Plán riešenia ochorenia COVID-19 v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách*, from 2 April 2020, available at

[http://www.uvzs.sk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=4166:plan-rieenia-ochorenia-covid-19-v-marginalizovanych-romskych-komunitach&catid=250:koronavirus-2019-ncov&Itemid=153](http://www.uvzs.sk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4166:plan-rieenia-ochorenia-covid-19-v-marginalizovanych-romskych-komunitach&catid=250:koronavirus-2019-ncov&Itemid=153), Slovakia, Government of the Slovak Republic (Vláda SR) (2020), *Plán riešenia ochorenia Covid-19 v marginalizovaných rómskych komunitách*, adopted by the Government on 2 April 2020, available at: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/24697/1>

the staff doing testing in the localities and people living there.<sup>53</sup> Health mediators assisted in Roma localities where testing was carried out, they helped in the most affected locality Žehra where many Roma were put into the quarantine. Healthy regions also provided Roma with information on Covid-19, how to protect themselves against the corona virus, they also regularly published information on the situation in Roma communities on their FB page<sup>54</sup>.

Deploying soldiers to take samples in Romani villages was justified by the PM saying he did not want to burden regular hospital paramedics with the job. Military helicopters were also deployed to distribute medical supplies to hospitals around Slovakia<sup>55</sup>. Throughout the operation, the soldiers cooperated with local community leaders and social workers. They tested primarily those citizens who had returned from abroad and lived in localities with an increased concentration of people. They also assessed community hygiene standards and access to drinking water.<sup>56</sup> Positively tested residents had two options: They could either go to a quarantine centre or to a home quarantine.<sup>57</sup>

Not everybody agreed with how the testing in Romani settlements was being performed. According to Klára Orgovánová, former Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for Roma, it would have been better for the testing to be performed by regional public health authorities. Similar concerns were expressed before by former Plenipotentiary Ábel Ravasz, who was removed and replaced by Andrea Bučková at the end of March<sup>58</sup>. Several Roma NGOs also expressed their disagreement with the testing in Roma communities assisted by the army. They supported the need for testing of people living in Roma communities, however, they criticized the participation of armed forces. In their view, this reveals that Roma people are not treated equally

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<sup>53</sup> Romea.cz (2020), '40 FAQs about COVID-19 testing in marginalized Roma communities', 6 April 2020, available at: <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/slovakia-40-faqs-about-covid-19-testing-in-marginalized-roma-communities>

<sup>54</sup> Please see [https://www.facebook.com/pg/zdraveregionny.eu/posts/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/zdraveregionny.eu/posts/?ref=page_internal)

<sup>55</sup> Romea.cz (2020), 'Slovakia: COVID-19 testing begins in Romani settlements, those who test positive will be locally quarantined', 4 April 2020, available at: <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/slovakia-covid-19-testing-begins-in-romani-settlements-those-who-test-positive-will-be-locally-quarantined>

<sup>56</sup> Cuprik, R. (2020), 'Na testovanie v osadách nasadili aj vrtuľníky Black-Hawk, ľudí mali vytipovaných', *SME*, 15 April 2020, available at <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22384126/ludi-maju-vytypovanych-na-testovanie-v-osadach-nasadili-aj-vrtulniky-black-hawk.html#paid-content-before>

<sup>57</sup> Cuprik, R. (2020), 'Na testovanie v osadách nasadili aj vrtuľníky Black-Hawk, ľudí mali vytipovaných', *SME*, 15 April 2020, available at <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22384126/ludi-maju-vytypovanych-na-testovanie-v-osadach-nasadili-aj-vrtulniky-black-hawk.html#paid-content-before>

<sup>58</sup> Slovakia, Government of the Slovak Republic (Vláda SR) (2020), *Návrh na odvolanie splnomocnenca vlády Slovenskej republiky pre rómske komunity a na vymenovanie splnomocnenkyne vlády Slovenskej republiky pre rómske komunity*, adopted by the Government on 31 March 2020, available at: <https://rokovania.gov.sk/RVL/Material/24670/1>

as other Slovak citizens<sup>59</sup>. The new Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities – Andrea Bučková – stated on her FB profile that the pilot testing in selected 33 municipalities with the presence of marginalized Roma communities is not the result of the superficial and ill-considered decision and that she would oversee the fulfilment of commitments of the Government towards the communities.<sup>60</sup>

- Physical distancing

The Plenipotentiary for the Roma Community announced on her website on 10 June that the measures against the spread of COVID-19 were gradually being relaxed, but the pandemic situation still persists. Although the conditions for the mandatory wearing of face masks have eased, they remain one of the key preventive measures. Other important steps in the fight against COVID-19 are thorough hand washing and maintaining a sufficient social distance. She called for basic hygiene measures to be taken into account at home, outdoors and in the workplace.<sup>61</sup> No proposal of structural change within this area has been identified.

- Quarantine

As of 9 of April, Slovakia closed several Romani-inhabited localities after the tests confirmed COVID-19 infection there. The Government had closed a total of five localities (with about 6,000 Romani inhabitants) because of the positive cases of COVID-19.<sup>62</sup> COVID-19 has been discovered in five localities in the Spiš area – three localities were in the town of Krompachy, others have been recorded in the nearby municipalities of Bystrany and Žehra. The mayors of those municipalities (in whose territory the lockdown localities belong) expressed appreciation for the Government’s approach to the quarantine.<sup>63</sup> NGOs criticized this step of Government as not being necessary and causing many practical problems for people living in the lockdown

<sup>59</sup> SME Daily, ‘Rómske združenia nesúhlasia so spôsobom testovania v osadách’, 6 April 2020, available at: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22377283/romske-zdruzenia-nesuhlasia-so-sposobom-testovania-v-osadach.html>

<sup>60</sup> FB post of Andrea Buckova from 9 April 2020, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/andreabuckovaRK/>

<sup>61</sup> Slovakia, Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (*Ministerstvo vnútra SR*) (2020), ‘Upozornenie na dodržiavanie opatrení ÚVZ v súvislosti s uvoľnením domácej izolácie a štátnej karantény’, 10 June 2020, available at [https://www.minv.sk/?spravy\\_rk&sprava=upozornenie-na-dodrzivanie-opatreni-uvz-v-suvvislosti-s-uvolnenim-domacej-izolacie-a-statnej-karanteny](https://www.minv.sk/?spravy_rk&sprava=upozornenie-na-dodrzivanie-opatreni-uvz-v-suvvislosti-s-uvolnenim-domacej-izolacie-a-statnej-karanteny)

<sup>62</sup> Romea.cz (2020), ‘At-home quarantine not functional in Romani-inhabited settlements, COVID-19 infected persons to be taken to state-run facilities’, 13 April 2020, available at: <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/slovakia-at-home-quarantine-not-functional-in-romani-inhabited-settlements-covid-19-infected-persons-to-be-taken-to-state>

<sup>63</sup> Romea.cz (2020), ‘Five Romani-inhabited settlements are being closed for quarantine, 30+ COVID-19 infected persons found so far’, 9 April 2020, available at: <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/slovakia-five-romani-inhabited-settlements-are-being-closed-for-quarantine-30-covid-19-infected-persons-found-so-far>

localities<sup>64</sup>. During the lockdown, people suffered from not having enough food, drinking water, medicine, health care, but also cash money and wood for heating and preparation of meal<sup>65</sup>. The Healthy Regions (*Zdravé Regióny*) subsidised organisation provided psycho-social assistance in the quarantine towns.<sup>66</sup> Some share of Healthy Regions organisation, social workers and Roma civic patrols are always members of Roma communities.

From 13 April, based on the decision of Government persons tested positive from lockdown Roma communities were transferred from at-home quarantine into state-run facilities.<sup>67</sup> The lockdown of localities lasted until 15th May (some of the localities were opened earlier), with the town of Žehra being fully reopened as the last.<sup>68</sup>

- Provision of running water and sanitation to communities without it

Many people living in Roma communities in Slovakia have no access to drinking water, or they have only access to a remote source of drinking water. At the end of March, the Prime Minister called on municipalities to provide clean drinking water during emergency to marginalised Roma communities.<sup>69</sup>

The military operation Umbrella was focused on monitoring illegal mobility and the green zone around closed settlements, joint patrols with members of the Police Force of the Slovak Republic, supplying the localities with drinking water, medical equipment, disinfection, etc. Drinking water is provided for the settlements at all times.<sup>70</sup> Roma civic patrols in Roma

<sup>64</sup> Amnesty International, 'Stigmatizujúca karanténa rómskych komunit na Slovensku a v Bulharsku', 17 April 2020, available at: <https://www.amnesty.sk/stigmatizujuca-karantena-romskych-komunit-na-slovensku-a-v-bulharsku/>

<sup>65</sup> Denník N, 'Zavrite ich všetkých: uzavretie rómskych osád do karantény bolo zúfalo nedomyšlené', 12 April 2020, available at: <https://dennikn.sk/1851065/zavrite-ich-vsetkych-uzavretie-romskych-osad-do-karanteny-bolo-zufalo-nedomyslene/>

<sup>66</sup> TA3 (2020), 'Minúty pre hrdinov: psychosociálna špecialistka Karina Andrášiková', 1 June 2020, available at: <https://www.ta3.com/clanok/1184641/minuty-pre-hrdinov-psychosocialna-specialistka-karina-andrasikova.html>

<sup>67</sup> Romea.cz (2020), 'At-home quarantine not functional in Romani-inhabited settlements, COVID-19 infected persons to be taken to state-run facilities', 13 April 2020, available at: <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/slovakia-at-home-quarantine-not-functional-in-romani-inhabited-settlements-covid-19-infected-persons-to-be-taken-to-state>

<sup>68</sup> Romea.cz (2020), 'At-home quarantine not functional in Romani-inhabited settlements, COVID-19 infected persons to be taken to state-run facilities', 13 April 2020, available at: <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/slovakia-at-home-quarantine-not-functional-in-romani-inhabited-settlements-covid-19-infected-persons-to-be-taken-to-state>

<sup>69</sup> SME (2020), 'Slovensko má 61 prípadov koronavírusu, sprísňujú sa opatrenia', 15 March 2020, available at <https://domov.sme.sk/c/22358998/slovensko-ma-desat-novych-pripadov-celkovo-je-54-infikovanych.html?ref=tab>

<sup>70</sup> Tvnoviny.sk (2020), 'Z uzatvorených osád na Spiši ide do karantény 25 ľudí. Necítia sa doma v bezpečí', 13 April 2020, available at: [https://www.tvnoviny.sk/koronavirus/1994629\\_z-uzatvorených-osad-na-spisi-ide-do-karanteny-25-ludi-necitia-sa-doma-v-bezpeci](https://www.tvnoviny.sk/koronavirus/1994629_z-uzatvorených-osad-na-spisi-ide-do-karanteny-25-ludi-necitia-sa-doma-v-bezpeci)



communities supervised the compliance with COVID-19-related measures and monitored individual areas on a daily basis.<sup>71</sup> Roma civic patrols also helped identify people who had returned from abroad and were to be tested.<sup>72</sup>

## 2.2 Measures to support Roma and Travelers communities in regards to medical and social assistance

- Any related phenomena in the key thematic areas addressed in question 1
- **Food security**

Food aid in marginalized Roma communities was very scarce and dependent on NGOs. For instance, People in Peril NGO distributed food aid in the most impoverished community they work in (Kojatice). They donated packages of basic groceries (flour, lentils, rice, canned food) to 45 families. This was, however, a one-off aid.<sup>73</sup>

Food supply in Roma communities that were put in quarantine was usually secured by municipalities in cooperation with local supermarkets and/or entrepreneurs. At first, municipalities supplied Roma in quarantined communities with “universal” food packages, i.e. everybody received packages containing the same products regardless of what they actually needed. Later on, people in quarantine usually made lists of products they needed, and the municipality ensured their delivery. All products had to be purchased, nothing was donated.<sup>74</sup> In some localities, some produce was supplied by local entrepreneurs, e.g. in Bystrany local meat vendor was selling meat over the police tape.<sup>75</sup>

- **Health**

<sup>71</sup> TASR (2020), ‘Prešov: V lokalite K Starej tehelni sa výskyt ochorenia Covid-19 nepotvrdil’, 14 April 2020, available at: <https://www.tasr.sk/tasr-clanok/TASR:20200414TBB00207>

<sup>72</sup> Aktuality.sk (2020), ‘Pollák: V osadách sme mali informátorov, nad vírusom vyhrávame 2:07’, 3 May 2020, available at <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/786646/pollak-v-osadach-sme-mali-informatorov-nad-virusom-vyhravame-2-0/>

<sup>73</sup> People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), ‘Vo vylúčených komunitách sme odovzdali 339 hygienických balíčkov’, press release, 21 May 2020, available at <https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/vo-vylucenych-komunitach-sme-odovzdali-339-hygienickych-balickov/>

<sup>74</sup> Šimoňáková, M. (2020), ‘V karanténe v rómskych lokalitách na Spiši skončilo 6200 ľudí’, *SME Daily*, 9 April 2020, available at <https://spis.korzar.sme.sk/c/22380008/uzavrete-osady-na-spisi-strazia-policaiti-pripraveni-su-aj-vojaci.html>; Pravda Daily (2020), ‘Okolo 6000 ľudí v piatich rómskych lokalitách na Spiši je v karanténe’, 9 April 2020, available at <https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/548219-okolo-6000-ludi-v-piatich-romskych-lokalitach-na-spisi-je-v-karantene/>

<sup>75</sup> Čavojská, J. (2020), ‘Zavretí spolu: V rómskych osadách v karanténe nechali zdravých s chorými’, *Plus7dní*, 22 April 2020, available at <https://plus7dni.pluska.sk/domov/zavreti-spolu-romskych-osadach-karantene-uzavreli-chorych-zdravymi>

Supply of face masks to marginalized Roma communities was largely in the hand of NGOs and civic initiatives. For instance, People in Peril NGO started with distribution of face masks in localities where they run community centres.<sup>76</sup> In some communities (e.g. Sveržov, Spišské Podhradie) local women took part in sewing face masks.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, the Kto pomôže Slovensku initiative donated 1750 face masks to the Regional Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities in Banská Bystrica (on 13 May 2020), 125 face masks to the Roma community in Zborov (on 30 April 2020), 400 pieces of disinfection to the Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities (on 20 and 23 April 2020) and 30 respirators to the Association of Young Roma (*Združenie mladých Rómov*, on 22 April 2020).<sup>78</sup>

- **Water and sanitation**

With respect to access to sanitation, Roma communities mostly remained dependent on aid provided by NGOs. For instance, People in Peril NGO distributed 339 hygiene packages in all five localities they work in (Kojatice, Rošovce, Plavecký Štvrtok, Sveržov and Petrovany). The packages contained shampoos, a surface disinfectant, soaps, toilet paper and bleach.<sup>79</sup>

With respect to access to water the then Prime Minister called upon the municipalities to secure access to clean drinking water to local Roma communities. As a result all municipalities were to provide access to clean water to their local Roma population and approximately 50 localities were to receive water tanks with drinking water.<sup>80</sup> People in Peril NGO reported that in most municipalities access to water for local Roma communities was arranged; in some municipalities access remained limited.<sup>81</sup>

On 27 April 2020, the Ministry of Interior opened a call for proposals to support access to drinking water in municipalities with marginalized Roma communities. The deadline for submissions is 1 June 2020. The call with the

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<sup>76</sup> People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'S koronavírusom bojujeme na viacerých frontoch', press release, 15 April 2020, available at <https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/s-koronavirusom-bojujeme-na-viacerych-frontoch/>

<sup>77</sup> People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'S koronavírusom bojujeme na viacerých frontoch', press release, 15 April 2020, available at <https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/s-koronavirusom-bojujeme-na-viacerych-frontoch/>

<sup>78</sup> For more information on donations please see <https://ktopomozeslovensku.sk/komu-sme-pomohli>

<sup>79</sup> People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'Vo vylúčených komunitách sme odovzdali 339 hygienických balíčkov', press release, 21 May 2020, available at <https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/vo-vylucenych-komunitach-sme-odovzdali-339-hygienickych-balickov/>

<sup>80</sup> People in Peril (*Človek v ohrození*) (2020), 'Spájame sa pre ochranu zraniteľných pred COVID-19', press release, 21 April 2020, available at <https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/spajame-sa-pre-ochranu-zranitelnych-pred-covid-19/>

<sup>81</sup> Information provided by Andrea Najvirtovej, director of People in Peril NGO via telephone on 8 June 2020.

allocation of 10 million EUR is co-funded by the European Fund of Regional Development.<sup>82</sup>

People in Peril also donated two 10 litre water containers with a tap to each family in Kojatice, the most impoverished community they work in where the only source of water is a natural water spring; 110 water containers were also donated to a nearby Roma community in Svinia where standard of living is also extremely low. With the new containers families do not have to go to the water spring as often as before.<sup>83</sup>

The Office of Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities launched a map portal called "Coordination of aid for municipalities with marginalized Roma communities". Maps contain information on the need of face masks, disinfection, gloves, urgent need of access to drinking water and need for food supplies in respective localities. The Office of the Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities coordinates provision of help where needed and uses their network of social field workers to distribute the aid.<sup>84</sup>

- Highlight any measures specifically targeting women and children.

No measures specifically targeting women and children were identified.

### 2.3 Measures addressing the needs of Roma children

At the beginning of the crisis, there was a huge lack of state measures supporting children from Roma communities. The situation was even more complicated by the change of Government in March 2020 after the parliamentary elections which caused that several processes were not established at that time.

However, several measures had been introduced in April and May by the state institutions, such as State Pedagogical Institute and Research Institute of Child Psychology:

- a) Portal "www.ucimenadialku.sk" has been created with the purpose to help teachers and parents to handle the situation during the distance learning. The website also contains the section named "Support for education of children from marginalised Roma communities". State

<sup>82</sup> Slovakia, Office of Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (Úrad splnomocnenca vlády SR pre rómske komunity, Ministerstvo vnútra SR) (2020), 'MV SR opäťovne vyhlásilo výzvu na podporu prístupu k pitnej vode', press release 27 April 2020, available at [http://www.minv.sk/?spravy\\_rk&sprava=mv-sr-opatovne-vyhlasilo-vyzvu-na-podporu-pristupu-k-pitnej-vode&fbclid=IwAR17aOtRvY-U00hfJ087EN179QT7oCQBIoTri2yEEzsqTvwceEASeDEVoPBc](http://www.minv.sk/?spravy_rk&sprava=mv-sr-opatovne-vyhlasilo-vyzvu-na-podporu-pristupu-k-pitnej-vode&fbclid=IwAR17aOtRvY-U00hfJ087EN179QT7oCQBIoTri2yEEzsqTvwceEASeDEVoPBc)

<sup>83</sup> People in Peril (Človek v ohrození) (2020), 'S koronavírusom bojujeme na viacerých frontoch', press release, 15 April 2020, available at <https://clovekvohrozeni.sk/s-koronavirusom-bojujeme-na-viacerych-frontoch/>

<sup>84</sup> Slovakia, Office of Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities, Ministry of Interior of the Slovak Republic (Úrad splnomocnenca vlády SR pre rómske komunity, Ministerstvo vnútra SR) (2020), 'Odprúčania Úradu splnomocnenkyne vlády SR pre rómske komunity pre samosprávu v súvislosti s ochorením COVID-19', available at [http://www.minv.sk/swift\\_data/source/romovia/clanky/USVRK\\_Usmernenie.pdf](http://www.minv.sk/swift_data/source/romovia/clanky/USVRK_Usmernenie.pdf)

pedagogical institute created working lists and methodical guides for teachers and parents of Romani children<sup>85</sup>.

- b) Research institute for child psychology organised online webinar on “how to communicate with parents of Romani children during the crisis”<sup>86</sup>. However, no information on the structure and numbers of participants is available.
- c) Public TV broadcasting (distance education named Thumenca Kher – Together with you) for Romani children once a week was organised by the Slovak public television RTVS in cooperation with Roma teachers and several other experts<sup>87</sup>.

On the other hand, state did not provide any technical supporting measures for Roma children from socially disadvantaged communities. No tablets, PCs or other technical equipment were provided by the state. Several private companies (mobile operators) offered 10 thousand of SIM cards with internet data for children with no internet access. However, communication with the Ministry of Education failed and the project failed. Ministry of Education has not explained reasons for this miscommunication<sup>88</sup>. Private companies then started the cooperation with several NGO and private initiatives. O2 started the initiative “Good data - We learn together” for all parents who upload photos of them and their children learning together at home. The initiative also applied for teachers who provide online education<sup>89</sup>. Orange company provided 10GB data free of charge to all their clients.<sup>90</sup> Unfortunately, no detailed information about cooperation with NGOs is publicly available.

### **3 Any negative public reactions targeting Roma and Travellers or positive change in attitudes towards them**

#### **3.1 Negative public reactions**

- Negative reactions in statements by politicians and public figures

<sup>85</sup> <https://ucimenadialku.sk/ro>

<sup>86</sup> Information available at the website of the Research Institute: <https://www.rtvsk.sk/televizia/archiv/15830>

<sup>87</sup> <https://www.rtvsk.sk/televizia/archiv/15830>

<sup>88</sup> Gdovinová, D. (2020) `Mobilní operátori chceli deťom darovať desaťtisíce SIM kariet, rokovania s ministerstvom však zlyhali`, Denník N Daily, 22 may 2020, available at: <https://dennikn.sk/1903631/mobilni-operatori-chceli-darovat-desattisice-sim-kariet-detom-rokovania-s-ministerstvom-skolstva-vsak-zlyhali/>

<sup>89</sup> Soda O2 (2020) `Spríjmnite si čas doma. O2 ponúka až 40GB dát`, 14 May, Soda magazine O2, available at: <https://soda.o2.sk/pribehy/sprijmnite-si-cas-straveny-doma-o2-rozdava-az-40-gb-dat/>

<sup>90</sup> Gdovinová, D. (2020) `Mobilní operátori chceli deťom darovať desaťtisíce SIM kariet, rokovania s ministerstvom však zlyhali`, Denník N Daily, 22 may 2020, available at: <https://dennikn.sk/1903631/mobilni-operatori-chceli-darovat-desattisice-sim-kariet-detom-rokovania-s-ministerstvom-skolstva-vsak-zlyhali/>

- Hate speech in online and traditional media
- Any manifestations of antigypsyism or hate crime against Roma and Travellers.

### Political discourse

During the pandemic situation, several Roma communities were quarantined after some of their inhabitants were tested positive for Covid-19. The Prime Minister Igor Matovič informed about the situation in a very emotional way stating "There is a huge burning problem in Roma communities". However, Matovič did not blame Roma themselves for the situation, he pointed out that it was a fault of the previous Government, because people coming from other countries were not isolated in so-called state quarantine<sup>91</sup>. There was no significant change in the rhetoric between old and a new government, since the situation of Roma communities became serious only after the new government was established. The previous Prime Minister Pellegrini expressed only the concern about higher concentration of people at the post offices during the period when social benefits are paid. Minister of defence and minister of interior also expressed that they plan "to deploy army forces to ensure public order in connection with measures to combat the new coronavirus throughout the Slovak Republic, if necessary"<sup>92</sup>, but Roma communities were not particularly mentioned. However, army forces were deployed later especially in Roma communities.

Former Plenipotentiary for Roma communities Abel Ravasz criticised the Government for the quarantine measures and for the way people in Roma communities were tested for coronavirus (by using the army). Ravasz said it was a demonstration of power, which could stigmatise Roma.<sup>93</sup> According to him and several Roma NGOs, these measures and their performance could increase the tension and negative attitudes of majority towards Roma<sup>94</sup>.

At the beginning of the pandemic (in March), the mayor of Rimavská Sobota, published an open letter for the prime minister expressing his concerns that the coronavirus will spread among the population because many Roma recently returned from abroad and they did not respect the mandatory

<sup>91</sup> Folentová, V. – Osvaldová, L. (2020) `Niektoré osady pre koronavírus uzatvoria. Matovič neplánuje uvoľniť opatrenia`, Denník N, 8 April 2020, available at: <https://dennikn.sk/1845973/matovic-neblaznime-neurolnujme-opatrenia-mame-101-novych-pripadov-31-v-piatich-osadach/>

<sup>92</sup> Vražda, D. - Hrivnák, T (2020) `Môžu sa stať z osád ohniská nákazy? Štát sa stále nespamätal, rúška tam prenikajú pomaly`, Denník N daily, 17 March 2020, available at: <https://dennikn.sk/1806084/mozu-sa-stat-z-osad-ohniska-nakazy-stat-sa-zatial-nespamatal-ruska-tam-prenikaju-pomaly/>.

<sup>93</sup> Folentová, V. – Osvaldová, L. (2020) `Niektoré osady pre koronavírus uzatvoria. Matovič neplánuje uvoľniť opatrenia`, Denník N, 8 April 2020, available at: <https://dennikn.sk/1845973/matovic-neblaznime-neurolnujme-opatrenia-mame-101-novych-pripadov-31-v-piatich-osadach/>

<sup>94</sup> Korzár Spiš (2020) `Rómske organizácie kritizujú spôsob testovania v osadách`, 9 April 2020, available at: <https://spis.korzar.sme.sk/c/22380127/romske-organizacie-kritizuju-sposob-testovania-v-osadach.html>

quarantine. He called for the lockdown of Roma settlements even though there was not any single case of positive testing of its inhabitants at time. After the mayor published his open letter on his Facebook, a huge amount of racial and xenophobic reactions appeared on the internet.<sup>95</sup>

### **Hate speech in online and traditional media**

The current Plenipotentiary for Roma communities Andrea Bučková warned that the situation in Roma communities could lead to the strengthening of negative attitudes towards Roma during the pandemic. On social media, there is a huge spread of hate speech against Roma. There are several closed FB groups spreading misinformation and hoaxes regarding Roma. For instance – status stating that Roma people get face masks and disinfection equipment for free had more than 27 000 shares. Other statuses published in closed groups either by ordinary people or by representatives of right-wing extremist parties had also several thousands of shares<sup>96</sup>

The minister of the defence stated that he would initiate the change in legislation that the spread of hoaxes and misinformation related to the pandemic would be restricted by law<sup>97</sup>. However, no legal action has been taken since then.

According to the statements of Plenipotentiary for Roma communities the only solution for this is to use respectful language in media (and among politicians), thorough explaining of adopted measures to public and providing good practices and examples from the Roma communities<sup>98</sup>.

Police of the Slovak Republic has a Facebook page providing information about hoaxes and disinformation. On May 11, police informed about the hoax spreading throughout social media. The hoax saying that states provide free alcohol to Roma living in the quarantined locality had about 6000 of shares. Police debunked this hoax and stressed that the information was

<sup>95</sup> My Novohrad (2020) `Primátor zvažoval zavrieť rómske sídlisko, žiada premiéra o stanovisko`, 18 March 2020, available at: <https://mynovohrad.sme.sk/c/22362269/primator-zvazoval-zatvorit-romske-sidliskoziada-premiera-o-stanovisko.html>

<sup>96</sup> Sliz M. (2020), `Koronavírus: Vyvolá epidémia nárast nenávisť voči Rómom?`, Aktuality.sk, 7 April 2020, available at: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/780025/koronavirus-vyvola-epidemia-rast-nenavisti-voci-romom-na-facebooku-ju-uz-podnecuju/>

<sup>97</sup> Sliz M. (2020), `Koronavírus: Vyvolá epidémia nárast nenávisť voči Rómom?`, Aktuality.sk, 7 April 2020, available at: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/780025/koronavirus-vyvola-epidemia-rast-nenavisti-voci-romom-na-facebooku-ju-uz-podnecuju/>

<sup>98</sup> Sliz M. (2020), `Koronavírus: Vyvolá epidémia nárast nenávisť voči Rómom?`, Aktuality.sk, 7 April 2020, available at: <https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/780025/koronavirus-vyvola-epidemia-rast-nenavisti-voci-romom-na-facebooku-ju-uz-podnecuju/>

manipulated by the author to evoke hatred against Roma<sup>99</sup>. However, no legal action followed.

### **Manifestations of antigypsyism or hate crime against Roma and Travellers**

The most visible and significant incident against Roma during the pandemic was the incident when the police officer was said to have beaten five children with his truncheon on Monday, 27 April. In a Romani settlement in Krompachy, which was under quarantine at the time. According to the children's testimony, he is even said to have threatened to shoot them. A member of European Parliament Peter Pollák and the Slovak Government Plenipotentiary for Romani Communities Andrea Bučková have filed a crime report in relation to this incident. The plenipotentiary stated that: "This is an unacceptable, unjustifiable act, which is why I have filed a criminal report with the Office of the Inspection Services and the Prosecutor-General of the Slovak Republic is aware of it<sup>100</sup>".

The Ombudsperson of the Slovak republic also criticised the incident: "Any disproportionate methods used by police or excessive use of force deserves to be condemned," the ombudswoman said. "I consider it unacceptable that violence be committed against children. Moreover, it is unacceptable for police to use force against children. Not even the pandemic can be a reason to use disproportionate policing methods. The information published in the media is exceptionally serious and for that reason I will be investigating this incident".<sup>101</sup>

### **3.2 Positive change in attitudes**

- Examples of changing narrative regarding these communities in public statements, media coverage

The President of the Slovak Republic, Zuzana Čaputová greeted Roma people for International Romani Day. In her speech, the Slovak President thanked Roma people for their involvement in combating the COVID-19 pandemic. She also thanked Roma health care workers and Romani volunteers who were sewing face masks.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Information available at the FB of the Police <https://www.facebook.com/hoaxPZ/photos/a.317666309061243/700592964101907/?type=3>

<sup>100</sup> Romea.cz (2020), 'Slovak MEP and Govt Plenipotentiary for Romani Communities file crime report over assault on Romani children in Krompachy', 4 May 2020, available at: <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/slovak-mep-and-govt-plenipotentiary-for-romani-communities-file-crime-report-over-assault-on-romani-children-in-krompachy>

<sup>101</sup> Romea.cz (2020), 'Slovak MEP and Govt Plenipotentiary for Romani Communities file crime report over assault on Romani children in Krompachy', 4 May 2020, available at: <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/slovak-mep-and-govt-plenipotentiary-for-romani-communities-file-crime-report-over-assault-on-romani-children-in-krompachy>

<sup>102</sup> Romea.cz (2020), 'Slovak President greets Romani people for International Romani Day: Paľikerav tumenge. Džanav mištes hoj jekhetane koda keraha.', 8 April 2020, available at:

On 25 April, after lifting the quarantine in Bystrany, PM Igor Matovič thanked all those who helped the people in the settlement, as well as its inhabitants, for their discipline. According to PM Matovič, the Roma settlement in Bystrany becomes a model for the whole of Slovakia.<sup>103</sup>

An accident involving a vehicle of the Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic occurred in eastern Slovakia on Easter Sunday. The first to rush to the scene were local Romani people from the nearby community of Sol' (Prešov Region). Members of the Armed Forces happened to have performed tests for COVID-19 there the day before in the local Romani community. The Armed Forces of the Slovak Republic posted the news to its Facebook profile "Today the inhabitants of the community of Sol', assisted the rescue of our boys from a car accident. We tested Romani people in Sol' yesterday, and it was exactly the Roma who called for help for our accident today. THANK YOU! PS: We've breathed a sigh of relief: Everybody will be ok," says the post.<sup>104</sup>

- Manifestations of social solidarity with Roma and Travellers

Various initiatives occurred during the coronavirus pandemic, such as aid for the supply of food to the quarantined settlements. The Roma from the surrounding non-quarantined municipalities, brought food to the Roma quarantined in Žehra, as they needed a different assortment than the food chain sold them.<sup>105</sup>

- Examples of and local initiatives transcending ethnic boundaries.

No such activity has been identified.

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<http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/slovak-president-greets-romani-people-for-international-romani-day-palikerav-tumenge.dzanav-mistes-hoj-jekhetane-koda-keraha>

<sup>103</sup> Slovakia, The Government Office of the Slovak Republic (*Úrad vlády SR*) (2020), 'Bystrany: V rómskej osade hygienici zrušili karanténu', press release, 25 April 2020, available at <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/bystrany-v-romskej-osade-hygienici-zrusili-karantenu/>

<sup>104</sup> Romea.cz (2020), 'Slovak Armed Forces thank Romani community on Facebook for rescuing soldiers from a car accident', 15 April 2020, available at: <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/slovak-armed-forces-thank-romani-community-on-facebook-for-rescuing-soldiers-from-a-car-accident>

<sup>105</sup> Noviny.sk (2020), 'Rómovia do Žehrianskej osady priviezli už viac ako tonu potravín. Chcú tak nezištne pomáhať', 18 April 2020, available at: <https://www.noviny.sk/slovensko/525744-zasobovaci-potravin-do-zehrianskej-osady-priviezli-uz-viac-ako-tonu-potravin-mnohi-pomahaju-nezistne>