

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

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## **1 Specific implications of the general measures taken to stop the COVID-19 pandemic on Roma and Travellers' communities?**

### **Type of measures**

By means of Royal Decree 463/2020 of 14 March<sup>1</sup>, the Spanish Government declared the state of alarm to deal with the serious and exceptional situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This declaration has meant the adoption of a battery of measures considered essential, proportionate to the extreme gravity of the situation and which do not involve the suspension of any fundamental rights. However, since these measures mainly affect the right to freedom of movement and the right of assembly, they involve the closure of localities, businesses and activities of various kinds.

Therefore, in its original version, Article 7 of the aforementioned Royal Decree, in regulating the limitation of the freedom of movement of persons, provides as follows:

"1. During the period of the state of alert, persons may only circulate on public roads for the purpose of carrying out the following activities:

a) Acquisition of food, pharmaceutical products and basic necessities.

b) Assistance to health centres, services and establishments.

c) Travel to the workplace to carry out their work, professional or business activities.

d) Return to the place of habitual residence.

e) Assistance and care for the elderly, minors, dependents, disabled persons or particularly vulnerable persons.

f) Travel to financial and insurance entities.

g) Due to force majeure or a situation of need.

h) Any other activity of a similar nature to be carried out individually, unless accompanied by disabled persons or for another justified reason.

2. Similarly, private vehicles shall be allowed to drive on public roads to carry out the activities referred to in the previous section or to refuel at petrol stations or service stations.

3. In any case, the recommendations and obligations issued by the health authorities must be respected during any journey.

4. The Minister of the Interior may decide to close down roads or sections of roads for reasons of public health, safety or the flow of traffic, or to restrict access to them for certain vehicles on the same grounds.

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<sup>1</sup> Spain, Royal Decree declaring the state of alarm for the management of the health crisis situation caused by COVID-19 (*Real Decreto por el que se declara el estado de alarma para la gestión de la situación de crisis sanitaria ocasionada por el COVID-19*), 14 March 2020.

When the measures referred to in the previous paragraphs are adopted ex officio, the regional administrations exercising powers to enforce State legislation on traffic, vehicle circulation and road safety shall be informed in advance.

The State, regional and local authorities responsible for traffic, vehicle traffic and road safety will ensure that the public is made aware of measures that may affect road traffic.”

In turn, Article 10 of the same Royal Decree regulates containment measures in the field of commercial activity, cultural facilities, recreational establishments and activities, hotel and restaurant activities, and other additional ones in the following terms:

“1. The opening to the public of retail premises and establishments is suspended, with the exception of retail shops for food, beverages, basic necessities, pharmaceuticals, medical, optical and orthopaedic products, hygiene products, hairdressing, press and stationery, motor fuel, tobacconists, technological and telecommunications equipment, pet food, internet, telephone or mail order business, dry-cleaning and laundry services. Any other activity or establishment which, in the opinion of the competent authority, may pose a risk of contagion is suspended.

2. The permanence in the commercial establishments whose opening is allowed must be the strictly necessary for the consumers to be able to make the acquisition of food and products of first necessity, being suspended the possibility of consumption of products in the own establishments.

In any case, crowding shall be avoided, and consumers and employees shall be controlled to maintain a safety distance of at least one metre in order to avoid possible contagion.

3. The opening to the public of museums, archives, libraries, monuments, as well as of the premises and establishments where public shows, sports and leisure activities indicated in the annex to this royal decree, are to be suspended.

4. Hotel and restaurant activities are suspended, and only home delivery services may be provided.

5. Verbenas, parades and popular festivals are also suspended.”

In accordance with the provisions of Article 10.3, the annex to the Royal Decree contains the list of facilities and activities whose opening to the public is suspended.

### **Implications of measures**

The restriction of movement, lockdowns of localities and closure of businesses have had serious consequences on the employment of a large part of the Roma population whose economic income comes from street vending and markets.



A relevant telephone survey conducted by the *Fundación Secretariado Gitano* (Romany Secretariat Foundation) to 11,000 Roma people throughout the country<sup>2</sup> came to the main conclusion that there is a low incidence of Covid-19 in Roma households (in terms of infections or deaths). It identified the lack of food and basic needs, the scarcity of resources and the educational gap among the serious impacts of the coronavirus crisis on the Roma population. Above all, the most pressing need, and the one which most preoccupies the families, is the need to cover basic necessities and obtain food. “Despite the resources provided by the Government to relieve the situation of social emergency facing many people, and despite the recommendations to direct these resources to the most vulnerable families, for various reasons the aid is not arriving with sufficient speed. We are observing a lack of food and of basic necessities in many Roma households, which were already living in a state of extreme poverty and vulnerability”, says the survey document.

The survey recognises that the situation of vulnerability and inequality affecting the Roma population was already alarming before the crisis caused by Covid-19. In Spain, “poverty and social exclusion affected more than 80% of Roma people, with 46% living in extreme poverty. The child poverty rate stood at 89%, with 51% in a situation of extreme poverty”<sup>3</sup>.

This pre-existing significant vulnerability and inequality has been exacerbated by the impact of the lockdown, making up a crisis that “Roma people has ever faced before”. According to the same survey, the lockdown has had an immediate effect on the ability to earn a living of a large number of Roma families<sup>4</sup>, whose primary source of income is street vending, an activity which was already an unreliable income source even before this crisis. The closure of street markets, and the impossibility of alternative activities such as collecting scrap metal, selling fruit or other activities which

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<sup>2</sup> Fundación Secretariado Gitano (2020), ‘The Fundación Secretariado Gitano carries out a telephone survey to 11,000 Roma people that reveals the serious social impact of the Covid-19 crisis’, Press release, 27 April 2020, available at: <https://www.gitanos.org/actualidad/archivo/131067.html.en>. The almost 11,000 people interviewed are participants in programmes run by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano in 68 cities in 14 Autonomous Regions. 58% of the surveys were conducted among women and 42% among men. Fifteen per cent of the people surveyed are under 16 years old (participants in our education or childcare programmes), 46 per cent are aged 16-30, 21 per cent are aged 30-40 and 18 per cent are over 40 (adults are mainly participants in our employment or anti-poverty programmes). It is therefore possible to consider this survey statistically significant, but perhaps not as representative.

<sup>3</sup> Fundación Secretariado Gitano (2020), *Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the Roma population. Results of a survey of 11,000 participants in programmes organised by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano*, April 2020, available at: [https://www.gitanos.org/upload/05/37/EN\\_ENCUESTA\\_PARTICIPANTES\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.gitanos.org/upload/05/37/EN_ENCUESTA_PARTICIPANTES_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> That it is not possible to quantify or estimate, in this report.

used to provide a day-to-day income, has left many families facing a situation of social emergency, without any income, and with serious difficulties in accessing Government aid for the self-employed. In addition, contrary to the common belief that Roma families live on social welfare payments, only a third of Roma households living in extreme poverty receive such social welfare benefits such as minimum income payments<sup>5</sup>.

The situation in slum settlements<sup>6</sup>, where public health protection and public and social services are scarce is also of particular concern. The health of residents and of many families living in overcrowded conditions is also poor due to existing medical conditions and the sanitary risks posed by their immediate environment, which means they represent a high-risk population<sup>7</sup>.

According to the Roma Secretariat Foundation, prior to the pandemic, the Roma population employment situation was characterised by the low representation in the labour market, with those in work often being in insecure jobs with little social or legal protection. "The unemployment rate was as high as 52% (more than three times the rate (...) found in the general population) and Roma women were at a clear disadvantage, with an employment rate of only 16%. Only 53% of the economically active were salaried workers (compared with 80% in the general population), while self-employed workers represented 47% (compared with less than 20% in the general population). This high proportion of self-employed workers is due to the high prevalence of street vending, which continues to be the main form of work for Roma people"<sup>8</sup>.

The survey on the impact of the Covid-19 crisis has yielded the following result on the Roma population employment situation:

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<sup>5</sup> Fundación Secretariado Gitano (2020), *Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the Roma population. Results of a survey of 11,000 participants in programmes organised by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano*, April 2020, available at: [https://www.gitanos.org/upload/05/37/EN\\_ENCUESTA\\_PARTICIPANTES\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.gitanos.org/upload/05/37/EN_ENCUESTA_PARTICIPANTES_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> It has not been possible to specify the number of Roma settlements. However, it is estimated that the majority of the Roma/Gypsy population is sedentary, with an estimated 725,000-750,000 people, approximately 1.5% of the total Spanish population. They are unevenly distributed throughout Spain, residing particularly in the large cities such as Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Granada, Valencia, Zaragoza and Murcia; with a greater concentration in the autonomous communities of Andalusia, Valencia and Catalonia. See, Government of Spain, "Roma People" (Pueblo gitano), <https://www.mscbs.gob.es/ssi/familiasInfancia/PoblacionGitana/home.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Fundación Secretariado Gitano (2020), *Impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the Roma population. Results of a survey of 11,000 participants in programmes organised by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano*, April 2020, available at: [https://www.gitanos.org/upload/05/37/EN\\_ENCUESTA\\_PARTICIPANTES\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.gitanos.org/upload/05/37/EN_ENCUESTA_PARTICIPANTES_FINAL.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Idem.

"64% of Roma people interviewed were unemployed before the Covid-19 crisis: only 14% were employed, 3% were self-employed as street vendors and 19% were street vendors in the informal economy (assisting family members) or collected scrap metal. This situation of inequality and vulnerability has intensified as the crisis has developed.

With the state of alarm, the situation of two thirds of Roma people in paid employment has worsened: more than one third have lost their jobs, another third have been temporarily laid off and 12% have seen their working hours reduced. Only 24% have not seen any change in their situation. 71% of self-employed people are street vendors in the informal economy, often assisting family members, and are not registered as self-employed; 12% are street vendors who are registered as self-employed (of these, 52% are registered through a cooperative) and 17% collect scrap metal. Only 3% of street vendors have been able to continue their activity during the crisis.

Of those who receive social welfare, 60% receive minimum income payments; 21% receive benefits, 10% receive an unemployment allowance and 6% receive some kind of pension. 58% of unemployed people do not receive any kind of social welfare payment and find themselves lacking financial protection at this time".

As for education, before the Covid-19 crisis it was known that only 17% of Roma people over the age of 16 have completed compulsory secondary education or higher education<sup>9</sup>. Six out of ten Roma boys and girls do not finish compulsory secondary education. The said survey found that current pandemic crisis may lead to an even higher rate of school failure among Roma pupils, already victims of the digital gap and of educational inequality. The closure of primary and high schools has led to the creation of an education system based around digital resources, but a large number of Roma families do not possess the necessary facilities or skills to access and use them. Furthermore, subject-related learning support, which previously pupils received in normal school-based classes and in support classes, is now more difficult to access. Pupils thus face serious difficulties in following their courses, combined with limited family support<sup>10</sup>.

### **Estimates of the scale of the impact**

The data available and accessed to date do not allow for determining the number of Roma communities affected by the lockdowns of localities and

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<sup>9</sup> Idem.

<sup>10</sup> Idem.



activities. However, considering the national scope of the state of alarm and its restrictions on mobility and the right of assembly, it is possible to ascertain that each and every one of the communities has been affected by such lockdowns.

The official website of the *Fundación Secretariado Gitano* shows that the Spanish Roma community is located in 1,069 municipalities in the 17 autonomous communities and 2 autonomous cities. The Roma population mainly lives in Andalusia, the Valencian Community, Catalonia or the Community of Madrid, in protected housing and in a multi-family building; in outlying districts or in homes scattered throughout the municipalities.

According to the same *Fundación Secretariado Gitano*, Spain is the European country in which most progress has been made in the residential inclusion of the Roma population. In effect, it is estimated that 92.88% reside in the urban framework; 54.5% are housing with some type of public protection; 49.7% are rental housing and 44.25% are property; 60% are multi-family housing, with an average of 4.74 people per house. But, even so, 2.17% of Roma families live in shacks (2,273 households, around 11,000 people); 2.78% of the neighbourhoods where they live are slum and segregated settlements; and 8.63% of housing does not meet the conditions of habitability (9,000 substandard dwellings, around 40,000 people)<sup>11</sup>.

The above mentioned survey shows that more than half of the participants (53.2%) need support from their local social services. While 37% are receiving it, 61.2% are not yet in need. Most of these people are women (61%), followed by children (19%). Extrapolated in their right measure and considering the “high rates of unemployment, high precariousness and a strong gender gap” that characterize the Roma population in the labour market as well as a child poverty rate of 89%<sup>12</sup>, these figures might suggest that the economic impact of the pandemic probably has a more acute incidence on women and, by extension, on the children who depend on them.

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<sup>11</sup> Data taken from the relevant *Study-map on housing and the Roma population, 2015 Executive summary*, Ministry of Health, Consumer Affairs and Social Welfare, September 2016, available at: <https://www.mscbs.gob.es/ssi/familiasInfancia/PoblacionGitana/informesyEstudios.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> *Fundación Secretariado Gitano (2019), Comparative study on the situation of the Roma population in Spain in relation to employment and poverty 2018 (Estudio comparado sobre la situación de la población gitana en España en relación al empleo y la pobreza 2018)*, Madrid, Fundación Secretariado Gitano, pp.13 and 36.



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

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

The confinement and social distancing measures decreed by the public authorities in the context of the state of alarm have been and still are generally applicable to the whole population. This report has not identified measures taken specifically to address the spread of the virus among the Roma and Traveller communities. Nor has it found any news on medical tests carried out specifically on Roma communities and settlements.

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

From the very beginning of the state of alarm, the *Fundación Secretariado Gitano* made proposals to the Spanish Government on emergency measures to avoid the social and health risks of the most vulnerable Roma families<sup>13</sup>. The priorities of these proposals fell into three main areas: i) emergency economic aid for street vendors; ii) a socio-health action plan in segregated environments and with high social exclusion; and iii) an action plan for families in situations of extreme poverty.

In turn, the Government of Spain has been promoting, since the beginning of the crisis, special attention to the basic needs of people living in segregated and especially vulnerable environments, among which the Roma settlements stand out. Through the corresponding technical document of 27 March<sup>14</sup>, it establishes that, in general, people who live in segregated settlements and highly vulnerable neighbourhoods should comply with the rules of confinement and social distancing established for the rest of the population. At the same time, their safety, the coverage of their needs and the possibility of having access to basic services and benefits should be guaranteed. It additionally states that in view of the lack of knowledge of the situation and the degree of compliance with the measures imposed in these environments, the town councils should guarantee social and health

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<sup>13</sup> Fundación Secretariado Gitano (2020), *Propuestas al Gobierno de medidas de urgencia para evitar el riesgo social y sanitario de las familias gitanas más vulnerables*, 17 March 2020, available at: <https://www.gitanos.org/actualidad/archivo/130962.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Spain, Ministry of Social Rights and Agenda 2030 (2020), Technical document on recommendations for action by social services in the face of the crisis by COVID-19, in segregated settlements and highly vulnerable neighbourhoods (*Documento Técnico de recomendaciones de actuación de los servicios sociales ante la crisis por COVID-19, en asentamientos segregados y barrios altamente vulnerables*), 27 March 2020, available at: [https://www.mscbs.gob.es/profesionales/saludPublica/ccayes/alertasActual/nCov-China/documentos/Recomendaciones\\_actuacion\\_COVID\\_asentamientos\\_y\\_barrios\\_vulnerables\\_27\\_3\\_2020.pdf](https://www.mscbs.gob.es/profesionales/saludPublica/ccayes/alertasActual/nCov-China/documentos/Recomendaciones_actuacion_COVID_asentamientos_y_barrios_vulnerables_27_3_2020.pdf).

monitoring with sufficient frequency to adequately address the situation of the affected families. According to the same document, this should imply:

- “- Checking the state of health and referring/guiding if necessary by means of notification to the corresponding Health System, in case of presenting symptoms compatible with COVID-19.
- Explain the preventive measures recommended by the health authorities and ensure that they are properly understood by the people being treated.
- Attend to the basic needs (provision of food and other basic necessities such as medicines or basic hygiene products) of the population residing in those neighbourhoods.
- Guarantee basic supplies (water, electricity, gas, etc.) in accordance with Article 4 of RD-L 8/2020 of 17 March on extraordinary emergency measures to address the economic and social impact of COVID-19.
- Guarantee the implementation of the necessary hygiene and sanitary measures to prevent the spread of the infection, including the provision of preventive material or, in extreme situations, the provision of alternative accommodation if necessary to prevent the spread of the virus.
- Addressing any other similar circumstances that seriously jeopardise the integrity, safety and security of persons residing in these environments, as well as the implementation of social containment and distancing measures imposed by the state of alarm”.

Furthermore, considering that households living in segregated settlements or in highly vulnerable neighbourhoods are usually composed of a high percentage of children, this same document establishes the need for: i) ensure that all those who receive canteen scholarships are guaranteed an adequate, balanced and healthy diet, through food aid mechanisms or, failing that, through monetary transfers to families; ii) guarantee coverage of all the needs of early childhood (0-3 years) and pregnant women; iii) ensure follow-up and support for children in their school work during the time they are confined, in order to minimize the damage that the situation could cause to their school achievements; iv) monitoring (and, where appropriate, intervention) in the event of any situation of risk, lack of protection or abandonment that may be exacerbated by the situation of confinement.

The above-mentioned survey conducted by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano shows, but without quantifying it, that the Government has made available the necessary resources to alleviate the social emergency that many people are experiencing, and has made

recommendations<sup>15</sup> to channel them to the most vulnerable families, including the Roma. And that, for unknown reasons, this aid is not arriving quickly enough.

The *Fundación Secretariado Gitano* itself has launched an important social initiative, the *Fundo de Emergencia Social* (*#JuntoALasFamiliasGitanas*)<sup>16</sup>, to alleviate the impact of the Covid-19 on the Romany community, and which is being widely supported by companies and private sector entities<sup>17</sup>.

For the time being, this report does not know the real magnitude and impact of this initiative and of the measures taken at the various levels of public administration to deal with this "social emergency" that affects a significant part of the Roma population as a result of the pandemic.

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<sup>15</sup> - Act urgently, putting statutory social services to work in rapidly and flexibly implementing the Government Recommendations for the most vulnerable settlements and neighbourhoods, and in coordinating emergency aid and food delivery in the most deprived areas.

- Direct and increase the amount of aid from FEAD (Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived) in the coming weeks, ensuring that it is distributed efficiently and that the responsible organisations work effectively in the most vulnerable areas.

- Apply the promised Minimum Living Income with urgency and flexibility, although details of the new benefit may be modified and finalised in the months to come. If this is not possible, make urgent financial aid available, at least to the families with the lowest income and with dependent children in their care.

- Make legal provision for funds stemming from income tax subsidies and from 0.7% of corporate tax to be distributed by specialised Third Sector organisations to help cover basic necessities (and the digital divide).

- Strengthen the collaboration of local authorities with NGOs, and make the most of the abilities of the FSG and of many other NGOs to manage aid correctly and to get it directly to those who need it.

<sup>16</sup> *Fundación Secretariado Gitano* (2020), *The Fundación Secretariado Gitano is launching the Emergency Social Fund #JuntoALasFamiliasGitanas (#WithRomaFamilies) to tackle the situation of vulnerability now affecting thousands of families*, 29 April 2020, available at: <https://www.gitanos.org/actualidad/archivo/131072.html.en>. It arises in response to the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on thousands of the Roma families in a situation of vulnerability, as shown by the results of the survey of 11,000 Roma people, referred to above. The Fund is based on donations from individuals, companies and organisations, and reaches the needy above all in the form of (i) vouchers for food and basic products such as medicines or hygiene products for the families that need them most, and (ii) computer equipment and Internet connections to alleviate the impact of the "digital gap" on Roma students.

<sup>17</sup> *El Independiente* (2020), 'La Fundación "la Caixa" y el Secretariado Gitano impulsan medidas para paliar el impacto del Covid-19 en la comunidad gitana' (*The "la Caixa" Foundation and the Secretariado Gitano promote measures to alleviate the impact of the Covid-19 on the Romany community*), 22 May 2020.

The *Fundación Secretariado Gitano* values the recently approved minimum living income<sup>18</sup> very positively, not only as the best structural response to the "social emergency" caused by the state of alarm, but also and above all, as a powerful mechanism to put an end to poverty in Spain. This was made clear by this organisation in its appearance in the Congress of Deputies (the Spanish Parliament) on 1 June<sup>19</sup>, during which it also made a number of proposals. Among these proposals are: a shock plan to combat school failure; a plan to prevent and reverse the segregation of Roma students in schools; inclusive measures to avoid the digital divide; the reactivation of adapted measures for training, qualification and access to employment for others; the protection of street vending as a profitable and sustainable economic activity; a plan for the eradication of shantytowns; a plan for intervention and rehabilitation of highly vulnerable neighbourhoods.

### **Measures addressing the needs of Roma children**

As outlined in a previous report, Article 9 (on containment measures in the field of education and training) of Royal Decree 463/2020 of 14 March<sup>20</sup>, states that: "1. Classroom-based educational activity is suspended in all centres and at all stages, cycles, grades, courses and levels of education referred to in Article 3 of Organic Law 2/2006 of 3 May on Education, including university education, as well as any other educational or training activities provided in other public or private centres. 2. During the period of suspension, educational activities will be maintained through the distance and online modalities, whenever possible".

To date (8 June 2020), the Ministry of Education and Professional Training has sought to develop and implement this legal provision through the adoption of two ministerial orders and four resolutions<sup>21</sup>. Two of these instruments are of particular importance in the fight against inequality and the exclusion of socioeconomically disadvantaged children.

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<sup>18</sup> Spain, Royal Decree-Law 20/2020 establishing the minimum living income (*Real Decreto-ley 20/2020 por el que se establece el ingreso mínimo vital*), 29 May 2020. Available at: <https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rdl/2020/05/29/20>

<sup>19</sup> Fundación Secretariado Gitano (2020), The Fundación Secretariado Gitano appears before the Reconstruction Commission at the Congress to present its proposals (*La Fundación Secretariado Gitano comparece ante la Comisión de Reconstrucción en el Congreso para presentar sus propuestas*), 2 June 2020, available at: <https://www.gitanos.org/actualidad/archivo/131256.html.es>.

<sup>20</sup> Spain, Royal Decree declaring the state of alarm for the management of the health crisis situation caused by COVID-19 (*Real Decreto por el que se declara el estado de alarma para la gestión de la situación de crisis sanitaria ocasionada por el COVID-19*), 14 March 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Gobierno de España (2020), Estado de alarma. Medidas crisis sanitaria COVID-19, [https://administracion.gob.es/pag\\_Home/atencionCiudadana/Estado-de-alarma-crisis-sanitaria.html#.Xqm-sJntaUn](https://administracion.gob.es/pag_Home/atencionCiudadana/Estado-de-alarma-crisis-sanitaria.html#.Xqm-sJntaUn)

In its annex II on guidelines for the third quarter, Order EFP/365/2020, of 22 April, which establishes the framework and guidelines for action for the third quarter of the 2019-2020 academic year and the start of the 2020-2021 academic year, in the face of the crisis situation caused by COVID-19<sup>22</sup>, establishes that the Administrations and educational centres:

- will make a special effort to identify students who lack the means of digital connection and will encourage the use of different types of devices for various purposes;
- intensify the provision of technological and other resources to students that they need for the development of their activities;
- develop appropriate and realistic training tools and programmes to enable students to get the most out of blended learning.

Likewise, through the Resolution of 13 April 2020<sup>23</sup>, the collaboration agreement between the Spanish Radio and Television Corporation and the Ministry of Education and Professional Training was made public, for the production of the "container programme" (*programa contenedor*) "*Aprendemos en casa*" (We learn at home). It is intended that those students who lack devices and Internet access have an alternative way to continue developing their school learning.

Despite the Government's efforts, many social media reflect, in a profuse way, the increase in inequality as the great threat of the coronavirus in the online school. It is stressed that teachers are particularly concerned about the "digital gap", remembering that not all families have resources for telematic education<sup>24</sup>.

This situation of "digital gap" and its negative impact on education during the state of alarm has been quite acute among the Roma students. According to the result of the survey already mentioned several times, i) only a third of girls and boys participating in our educational programmes

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<sup>22</sup> Spain, Order establishing the framework and guidelines for action for the third quarter of the 2019-2020 academic year and the start of the 2020-2021 academic year, in the face of the crisis situation caused by COVID-19 (*Orden por la que se establecen el marco y las directrices de actuación para el tercer trimestre del curso 2019-2020 y el inicio del curso 2020-2021, ante la situación de crisis ocasionada por el COVID-19*), 22 April 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Spain, Resolution publishing the collaboration agreement between the Spanish Radio and Television Corporation, S.M.E. and the Ministry of Education and Professional Training, for the production of the container programme "We learn at home" (*Resolución por la que se publica el Convenio de colaboración entre la Corporación de Radio y Televisión Española, Sociedad Anónima, S.M.E. y el Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional, para la producción del programa contenedor "Aprendemos en casa"*), 13 April 2020.

<sup>24</sup> See among many others: Rodríguez Álvarez, S. (2020), "El aumento de la desigualdad, la gran amenaza del coronavirus en la escuela online", *infoLibre*, 26 de marzo de 2020; Yoldi Hualde, U. (2020), "La brecha digital impide a más de 7.000 escolares de Navarra seguir las clases on line", *Noticias de Navarra*, 2 de abril de 2020; Torres Menárguez, A. (2020), "La epidemia agrava la brecha educativa: las familias con menos recursos gestionan peor el estrés", *El País*, 27 de marzo de 2020.

have access to a computer, an essential tool to be able to access school tasks comfortably and while having access to other resources on the same screen; ii) More than 40% of students do not have internet access, or have limited data allowances; iii) almost a third of Roma girls and boys (29%) cannot carry out the learning tasks being set by their centres of education, in most cases because they lack the necessary equipment (58.8%) and/or access to educational materials (48.7%). In addition, almost half (49%), while they have the necessary equipment and materials, cannot make progress because they do not understand the subject matter and are not receiving the support they need to resolve this problem.

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

#### **Negative public reactions**

On 17 March 2020, three days after the declaration of the state of alarm, the Khetane Platform of the Roma Associative Movement of the Spanish State made public its "Press release on the anti-gypsyism of information related to the COVID-19 coronavirus epidemic", thus denouncing the "media that feeds racism"<sup>25</sup>.

From then until the end of April, the media<sup>26</sup> have profusely reported on the increase in attitudes of discrimination, rejection and hatred suffered by the Roma population, accused of being "guilty" of the increase in the number of infected people in different autonomous communities. According to the press, this serious situation is of great concern to the Council for the Elimination of Racial or Ethnic Discrimination, which is part of the Ministry of Equality, and is endeavouring to combat it<sup>27</sup>.

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

Unless proven otherwise, the little or almost non-existent information available in the media in recent weeks about "anti-gypsyism" in the context of the pandemic may suggest some change in the discriminatory social

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<sup>25</sup> Unión Romani (2020), *Comunicado de prensa ante el antigitanismo informativo relacionado con la epidemia del coronavirus COVID-19. Medios que alimentan el racismo*, 17 March 2020, available at: <https://unionromani.org/2020/03/17/comunicado-de-prensa-ante-el-antigitanismo-informativo-relacionado-con-la-epidemia-del-coronavirus-covid-19/>.

<sup>26</sup> See among others: Sánchez, G. (2020), "Los gitanos, nuevo foco de mensajes racistas que les acusan de extender el coronavirus en España", *eldiario.es*, 22 de abril de 2020; Babiker, S. (2020), "Antigitanismo y emergencia económica: la crisis sanitaria se ensaña con el pueblo gitano", *El Salto*, 8 de abril de 2020; Hernández, M. (2020), "Cómo el coronavirus puede agravar la discriminación hacia los gitanos", *TheObjective*, 8 de abril de 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Sánchez, G. (2020), "Los gitanos, nuevo foco de mensajes racistas que les acusan de extender el coronavirus en España", *eldiario.es*, 22 de abril de 2020.



attitude towards this population. Meanwhile, in its aforementioned appearance before the Reconstruction Commission in the Congress of Deputies (the Spanish Parliament) on 1 June, the Fundación Secretariado Gitano proposed, among other measures, the urgent approval of the Integral Law on Equal Treatment and Non-Discrimination<sup>28</sup>. It did so arguing that "the Roma population is the most rejected social group, which has a bad social image that in many cases leads to discriminatory and anti-Romany behaviour, as well as hate speech. Discrimination violates the right to equality, infringes on the dignity of Roma people and prevents them from escaping from social exclusion. We urgently need a legal framework that effectively ensures the equal enjoyment of all human rights. A comprehensive law that protects all potential groups that are victims of discrimination"<sup>29</sup>.

## Sources checked

For this report, extensive desk research was conducted, including a thorough sweep of websites and other official (government/public authorities) and unofficial sources of information, including the media and civil society organizations. Among the official sources, the website of the Government of Spain, which provides updated information on the coronavirus outbreak (<https://www.mscbs.gob.es/profesionales/saludPublica/ccayes/alertasActual/nCov-China/home.htm>), the page providing information on the decisions of the Council of Ministers and the interventions of the President and other members of the Government of Spain on the evolution of the crisis and the measures being taken at various levels (<https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/consejodeministros/Paginas/index.aspx>), as well as the website of the EFE Agency (<https://www.efe.com/efe/espana/1>) are of paramount importance. Among the unofficial sources of information that have been consulted are the websites of numerous newspapers (both in their printed and electronic editions) and of civil society organisations that try to promote and defend the human rights of the Roma population. Among these are the Roma Union

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<sup>28</sup> Presented by the Socialist Parliamentary Group in 2011 and 2019, without being approved. The last proposal may be checked from [http://www.congreso.es/public\\_oficiales/L13/CONG/BOCG/B/BOCG-13-B-67-1.PDF](http://www.congreso.es/public_oficiales/L13/CONG/BOCG/B/BOCG-13-B-67-1.PDF)

<sup>29</sup> Fundación Secretariado Gitano (2020), The Fundación Secretariado Gitano appears before the Reconstruction Commission at the Congress to present its proposals (*La Fundación Secretariado Gitano comparece ante la Comisión de Reconstrucción en el Congreso para presentar sus propuestas*), 2 June 2020, available at: <https://www.gitanos.org/actualidad/archivo/131256.html.es>.



and the Romany Secretariat Foundation. The survey carried out by the latter (with an important sample of up to 11,000 people interviewed) has turned out to be the most relevant document, not only because of the results and conclusions it reaches, but also because it evokes some of the most important results of very important studies published in recent years on the situation of the Roma population in terms of employment and housing in Spain.