

# 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?**

### **1.1 Type of measures**

Focus on:

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

The Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities of the Croatian Government (Office for Human Rights) sent an inquiry to all central state administration bodies as well as counties in which members of the Roma national minority live to request information on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Roma communities. According to the information received by the Office for Human Rights, no infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus has been documented within the Roma communities except for two persons in the Bjelovarsko-bilogorska County who were quarantined upon their return from abroad as they were tested positive for the coronavirus. Moreover, as the Office for Human Rights explains, there have been no other registered cases among the Roma communities documented, including in segregated settlements.<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the measures taken by the public authorities taken to halt the spread of the coronavirus were the same for all people residing in Croatia, including the Roma communities. For details on the measures taken please consult our report "Coronavirus COVID-19 outbreak in the EU" submitted to FRA as per service request no. 31.

The Administrative Department for Civil Society, Human Rights, and Sports of the Međimurska County (the Administrative Department of the Međimurska County) reported<sup>2</sup> that due to the government's restriction of movement outside the place of (permanent) residence across Croatia, members of the Roma community had difficulties in accessing bigger shopping centres where prices are significantly lower in comparison to smaller local shops as well as to health and social services<sup>3</sup>. Due to the temporary nationwide cancellation of public and intercity transport and lack of organised alternative transport, members of the Roma community had

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<sup>1</sup> Government's Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities (*Ured za ljudska prava i prava nacionalnih manjina*), email correspondence, 4 June 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Administrative Department for Civil Society, Human Rights, and Sports of the Međimurska County (*Međimurska županija, Upravni odjel za civilno društvo, ljudska prava i sport*), email correspondence, 3 June 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Administrative Department for Civil Society, Human Rights, and Sports of the Međimurska County (*Međimurska županija, Upravni odjel za civilno društvo, ljudska prava i sport*), email correspondence, 3 June 2020.

difficulties in reaching public institutions located in the City of Čakovec, the administrative capital of the Međimurska County. According to a recent baseline study on the Roma population in Croatia, there are 60 concentrated and 49 dispersed Roma settlements with an estimated Roma population of 24,524<sup>4</sup>.

## **1.2 Implications of measures**

Focus on:

- Employment
- Health
- Education
- Housing
- Food security
- Water and sanitation

Among the most urgent issues as regards implications of measures affecting the Roma communities, in particular, are the lower level of education, the significantly lower standard of living in comparison to the overall society, and the higher rate of unemployment<sup>5</sup>.

Besides, the Office for Human Rights further indicated the main problems, which members of the Roma population have faced in relation to the coronavirus pandemic. The enumerated main problems are loss of formal (e.g. jobs in the industrial and service sector) and informal (e.g. collecting secondary raw materials, daily agricultural work) jobs; limited access to public services due to restrictions of movement and mobility as well as limited availability of services, e.g. health services or social services; challenges with online schooling; temporary unavailability of protection equipment, e.g. face masks, gloves, and disinfectants; risks related to poor housing conditions, e.g. about keeping an interpersonal distance or access to water; and increased financial expenses due to restrictions of movement during which members of the Roma population living in segregated communities had to purchase in local shops which are usually more expensive than bigger shopping malls.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kunac, S., Klasnić, K. and Lalić, S. (2018), *Roma Inclusion in the Croatian Society: a Baseline Data Study*, Zagreb, Centre for Peace Studies. p. 68; 72-73.

<sup>5</sup> Administrative Department for Health and Social Welfare of the Osječko-Baranjska County (*Osječko-baranjska županija, Upravni odjel za zdravstvo i socijalnu skrb*), email correspondence, 2 June 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Government's Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities (*Ured za ljudska prava i prava nacionalnih manjina*), email correspondence, 4 June 2020.

The Administrative Department of the Međimurska County<sup>7</sup> reported that the implications of the pandemic among the Roma community were felt particularly by collectors of secondary raw materials whose income stemming from selling the secondary raw materials decreased significantly or even entirely<sup>8</sup>.

Moreover, the Administrative Department of the Međimurska County further explained that a significant amount of the Roma population in the county lives in buildings that lack hygienic premises (e.g. lack of toilets, running water etc.) which constitutes a high risk for the spread of the virus in the Roma community. Also, due to an insufficient number of rooms per accommodation, families often do not have the preconditions for eventually necessary self-isolation.<sup>9</sup>

The recent study on the Roma population suggests that these conditions are a lived reality for a large proportion of the Roma population in Croatia.<sup>10</sup>

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

Focus on:

- Number of communities affected by lockdowns
- Magnitude of pandemic-induced poverty
- Types of Roma and Traveller occupations affected hardest
- Difference of impact on Roma women and children

As the lockdown measures were imposed nationwide, the Croatian society as a whole including all Roma communities was affected by the measures. Due to losses of income earned through collecting secondary raw materials,<sup>11</sup> deposit bottles etc. Roma families in financial dependence of such activities were struck the hardest by the lockdown and prohibition of movement. Low i.e. no income manifested itself in everyday lives of Roma

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<sup>7</sup> Administrative Department for Civil Society, Human Rights, and Sports of the Međimurska County (*Međimurska županija, Upravni odjel za civilno društvo, ljudska prava i sport*), email correspondence, 3 June 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Administrative Department for Civil Society, Human Rights, and Sports of the Međimurska County (*Međimurska županija, Upravni odjel za civilno društvo, ljudska prava i sport*), email correspondence, 3 June 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Administrative Department for Civil Society, Human Rights, and Sports of the Međimurska County (*Međimurska županija, Upravni odjel za civilno društvo, ljudska prava i sport*), email correspondence, 3 June 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Kunac, S., Klasnić, K. and Lalić, S. (2018), *Roma Inclusion in the Croatian Society: a Baseline Data Study*, Zagreb, Centre for Peace Studies.

<sup>11</sup> Radio Slobodna Evropa, Article "MP Still Awaits Response to Call for Help to Roma in Croatia", 8 April 2020, link available at: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/hrvatska-romi-korona-virus/30542202.html>

in financial dependence through e.g. inability in purchasing protective equipment against SARS-CoV-2, (sufficient) food and/or medicine.<sup>12</sup>

During the pandemic, women's rights groups and initiatives reported an increase in reports of domestic violence<sup>13</sup> although this is not visible in the official statistics by the Ministry of Interior. National Civil Headquarters Directorate published an info sheet at the central info portal [www.koronavirus.hr](http://www.koronavirus.hr) on combating domestic violence with guidelines for victims and witnesses<sup>14</sup>. There is no official data on reported cases of domestic violence in Roma communities during the pandemic. According to the Office for Human Rights, in some areas, a slight increase in domestic violence has been recorded.<sup>15</sup>

The Ombudsperson for Children published general guidelines for achieving the well-being of children during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>16</sup> followed by the recommendations on the protection of well-being for Roma children in the pandemic conditions.<sup>17</sup> Some of the key recommendations were to ensure the availability of clean water, soap and disinfectants in Roma settlements; to increase the level of health services in Roma settlements; and to include Roma non-governmental organisations and Roma councils in fighting the pandemic. With regard to online schooling, the Ombudsperson for Children recommends e.g. to ensure tablets for Roma students and free access to households with children; to provide support to Roma families without sufficient experience in using the internet and IT equipment; to include Roma non-governmental organisations dealing with education into the organisation and provision of online schooling.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ombudsperson's Office (*Ured pučke pravobraniteljice*), email correspondence, 4 June 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Faktograf.hr, Article "Is Croatia Noticing an Increase in Violence against Women During the Coronavirus?", 3 April 2020, link available at: <https://faktograf.hr/2020/04/03/biljezi-li-i-hrvatska-porast-nasilja-prema-zenama-u-vrijeme-korona-krize/>

<sup>14</sup> Conduct in the Situation of Increased Risk of Domestic Violence and Abuse and Neglect of Children Due to Increased Measures of Self Isolation (*Postupanje u situaciji pojačanog rizika od nasilja u obitelji i zlostavljanja i zanemarivanja djece zbog pojačanih mjera izolacije*), published on 6 April 2020, available at: <https://www.koronavirus.hr/postupanje-u-situaciji-pojacanog-rizika-od-nasilja-u-obitelji-i-zlostavljanja-i-zanemarivanja-djece-zbog-pojacanih-mjera-izolacije/407>

<sup>15</sup> Government's Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities (*Ured za ljudska prava i prava nacionalnih manjina*), email correspondence, 4 June 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Ombudsperson for Children (2020), *Children's Rights and the Corona Virus*, 22 May 2020, available at: <http://dijete.hr/djecja-prava-i-koronavirus/>

<sup>17</sup> Ombudsperson for Children (2020), *Recommendation for the Protection of the Wellbeing of Roma Children During the Pandemic*, 21 April 2020, available at: <https://dijete.hr/preporuka-o-zastiti-dobrobiti-romske-djece-u-uvjetima-pandemije/>

<sup>18</sup> Ombudsperson for Children (2020), *Recommendation for the Protection of the Wellbeing of Roma Children During the Pandemic*, 21 April 2020, available at: <https://dijete.hr/preporuka-o-zastiti-dobrobiti-romske-djece-u-uvjetima-pandemije/>

## **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**

Please focus on:

- Medical testing
- Physical distancing
- Quarantine
- Provision of running water and sanitation to communities without it

In general, public authorities have neither prepared nor implemented specific measures targeted at the Roma communities, except for measures pertinent to education. Moreover, according to the Office for Human Rights, direct measures aimed at the Roma communities were only implemented on the regional and local level<sup>19</sup>, particularly in the Međimurska County, where according to the latest estimation 25.97 per cent (6,368 persons) a of the Roma population lives.<sup>20</sup>

During the coronavirus outbreak, the local government of the City of Belišće provided the segregated Roma community living on its territory with running clean water, sanitation, and electricity, which enabled the community to follow the recommendations as regards hand hygiene as well as the pupils with the prerequisite to participate in online schooling.<sup>21</sup>

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

Please focus on:

- Any related phenomena in the key thematic areas addressed in question 1
- Highlight any measures specifically targeting women and children.

The representatives of the Croatian Roma communities requested state support as regards food and hygienic products for preventing the spread of

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<sup>19</sup> Government's Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities (*Ured za ljudska prava i prava nacionalnih manjina*), email correspondence, 4 June 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Kunac, S., Klasnić, K. and Lalić, S. (2018), *Roma Inclusion in the Croatian Society: a Baseline Data Study*, Zagreb, Centre for Peace Studies. pp. 67-68.

<sup>21</sup> Administrative Department for Health and Social Welfare of the Osječko-Baranjska County (*Osječko-baranjska županija, Upravni odjel za zdravstvo i socijalnu skrb*), email correspondence, 2 June 2020.

the coronavirus as well as its implications, e.g. poverty-induced hunger.<sup>22</sup> As result, the National Civil Headquarters Directorate donated 20,000 face masks to the Roma population on 28 April 2020.<sup>23</sup> In addition, on the county level, 5,040 Roma households in Međimurska County,<sup>24</sup> 588 Roma households in Osječko-baranjska County<sup>25</sup> and Roma households in Istarska County<sup>26</sup> were given soaps and flyers containing, in some cases bilingual (Romani čhib i.e. Bayashi-Roma) instructions on conduct and safety measures during the critical phase of the spread of the coronavirus as well as contacts for information and support. Moreover, in some counties (e.g. Međimurska or Osječko-baranjska), food packages were handed out to those most in need including Roma through local Red Cross Societies.<sup>27</sup> In Croatia, there are 20 Counties and the City of Zagreb. However, according to the latest research on the Roma national minority in Croatia, Roma communities live in 15 out of 20 counties.<sup>28</sup>

According to the Administrative Department for Health and Social Welfare of the Osječko-baranjska County, the local authorities have regularly published all decisions and instructions issued by the headquarters of the Civil Protection on bulletin boards in local communities respectively Roma settlements, as well as on all web sites of the county, cities and municipalities to reach as many people as possible. Moreover, emergency services have been made available 24/7 for all necessary support of the residents as regards questions and inquiries about the coronavirus.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, according to the state institution Centre for Social Welfare of the City of Pula/Polje, Istria County, the local and regional self-government in Istria County continued to carry out regular activities within its jurisdiction

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<sup>22</sup> Radio Slobodna Evropa, Article "MP Still Awaits Response to Call for Help to Roma in Croatia", 8 April 2020, link available at: <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/hrvatska-romi-korona-virus/30542202.html>

<sup>23</sup> Civil Protection Headquarters (*Ravnateljstvo Civilne zaštite*), email correspondence, 26 May 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Administrative Department for Civil Society, Human Rights, and Sports of the Međimurska County (*Međimurska županija, Upravni odjel za civilno društvo, ljudska prava i sport*), email correspondence, 3 June 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Administrative Department for Health and Social Welfare of the Osječko-Baranjska County (*Osječko-baranjska županija, Upravni odjel za zdravstvo i socijalnu skrb*), email correspondence, 2 June 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Centre for Social Welfare of the City of Pula/Polje (*Centar za socijalnu skrb Pula*), email correspondence, 29 May 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Centre for Social Welfare of the City of Pula/Polje (*Centar za socijalnu skrb Pula*), email correspondence, 29 May 2020 and Red Cross Society of the City of Čakovec (*Gradsko društvo Crvenog križa Čakovec*), email correspondence, 8 June 2020.

<sup>28</sup> Kunac, S., Klasnić, K. and Lalić, S. (2018), *Roma Inclusion in the Croatian Society: a Baseline Data Study*, Zagreb, Centre for Peace Studies. pp. 68-71.

<sup>29</sup> Administrative Department for Civil Society, Human Rights, and Sports of the Međimurska County (*Međimurska županija, Upravni odjel za civilno društvo, ljudska prava i sport*), email correspondence, 3 June 2020.

through programmes aimed at supporting socially vulnerable families, including Roma families.<sup>30</sup>

The state institution Centre for Social Welfare of the City of Čakovec, Međimurska County, found a way to monitor families with a high risk of neglect or abuse. Due to the restrictions of movement, the Centre has adjusted its actions by intensifying communication via telephone with all families in which a protective measure stipulated as per the family law was imposed. Likewise, according to the Centre, procedures related to financial aid were carried out regularly and wherever necessary. Moreover, the Centre provided additional information on the activities of the Red Cross Society of Čakovec, Međimurska County, which carried out the following activities in the area of protection of Roma children and families: information and counselling of families included in the project "Roma – support" (a total of 48 visits); distribution of hygienic products for all Roma households (soaps); and distribution of informative materials on proper hand washing.<sup>31</sup>

The Public Health Service "Dr. Andrija Štampar" and the Committee for Health of the Council of the Roma National Minority of the City of Zagreb have jointly prepared recommendations and instructions in Croatian and Romani to adhere to general protection measures during the disease caused by the new coronavirus. The documents have been made available on their websites, social networks and other platforms.<sup>32</sup>

### 2.3 Measures addressing the needs of Roma children

Please focus on barriers to education related to schooling in online classes format.

The Ministry of Science and Education states that during the epidemic the classes were conducted from a distance, based on the Government's decisions from 13 March<sup>33</sup> and from 19 March 2020.<sup>34</sup> As the new

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<sup>30</sup> Centre for Social Welfare of the City of Pula/Pola (*Centar za socijalnu skrb Pula*), email correspondence, 29 May 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Centre for Social Welfare Čakovec (*Centar za socijalnu skrb Čakovec*), email correspondence, 2 June 2020. See also: Red Cross Society of the City of Čakovec, email correspondence, 9 June 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Instructions are available at: <http://www.stampar.hr/hr/preporuke-za-pripadnike-romske-nacionalne-manjine>.

<sup>33</sup> Decision on the suspension of teaching in higher education institutions, secondary, primary schools and pre-school education and the establishment of distance learning (*Odluka o obustavi izvođenja nastave u visokim učilištima, srednjim i osnovnim školama te redovnog rada ustanova predškolskog odgoja i obrazovanja te uspostavi nastave na daljinu*), available at: <https://vlada.gov.hr/sjednice/212-telefonska-sjednica-vlade-republike-hrvatske/28985>

<sup>34</sup> Amendments to the Decision on the suspension of teaching in higher education institutions, secondary, primary schools and pre-school education and the establishment of distance learning (*Prijedlog odluke o izmjeni Odluke o obustavi izvođenja nastave u visokim učilištima, srednjim i osnovnim školama te redovnog rada ustanova predškolskog odgoja i*

circumstances were unforeseen and extraordinary, classes took place through television broadcast (in cooperation with Croatian Radio-Television, public broadcaster), through the internet and other telecommunications platforms. According to the ministry, like all primary and secondary schools in the Republic of Croatia, schools with a large number of Roma pupils prepared for distance learning following the instructions and guidelines to primary and secondary schools regarding the organization of distance learning with the assistance of information and communication technology.

As the ministry states<sup>35</sup>, the most urgent problems were identified in schools attended by students of the Roma minority, who live in isolated/segregated settlements in conditions of extreme poverty and minimal hygienic conditions. Such families generally do not have access to the internet. Contact with parents is more difficult to establish as a small number of these families own a telephone / mobile phone, so they are hard to reach and for a teacher to provide support through different chat or social media platforms or groups.

With the support of the Ministry of Science and Education, sector for national minorities, REYN - the network of support to Roma children in Croatia in the period of 31 March to 3 April 2020 conducted a survey<sup>36</sup> on the involvement of Roma pupils in distance learning activities. The survey was conducted after all pupils and students in the Republic of Croatia attended distance learning classes for two weeks due to the COVID-19 virus pandemic. The survey aimed to provide support to pupils who, for some reason, have not been involved in distance learning activities, to support teachers, and to exchange good practices in overcoming the challenges of distance learning. The results of the survey show that in about 30% of schools, more than 30% of Roma children do not participate in distance learning. The reasons for this are various, from poverty (70%) to the inability to receive adequate support in families (78%). The results of the survey served the purpose of overcoming difficulties in distance learning for children living in unfavourable conditions. The questionnaire was sent to all primary schools in the Republic of Croatia attended by children of the Roma minority, out of which, 65 participated in the survey. The survey shows that schools designed, if necessary, different methods and activities for the inclusion of Roma pupils in distance learning.

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*obrazovanja i uspostavi nastave na daljinu*), point 9 (točka 9), available at:

<https://vlada.gov.hr/sjednice/216-sjednica-vlade-republike-hrvatske-29028/29028>

<sup>35</sup> Ministry of Science and Education (*Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja*), email correspondence, 27 May 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Romani Early Years Network - REYN (*REYN Mreža Hrvatska*), available at:

<http://www.reyn-hrvatska.net/index.php/2020/04/23/djeca-romi-koja-su-nastavom-na-daljini-ostala-na-obrazovnoj-distanci/>

As the ministry further reports,<sup>37</sup> monitoring of pupils during distance learning is facilitated through various alternative forms of communication with an emphasis on communication with parents to constantly encourage them to support children in the learning process. Direct contact with families is established also through the help of Roma assistants in education. Additional support is as well provided by teachers in extended stays, and pupils and parents have access to the school's professional service and parents' counselling unit.

The Ombudsperson's Office<sup>38</sup> considers that emphasis must be made on Roma children's ability to participate in distance learning, as 80% of Roma households do not have a computer, tablet or any other access to digital content.<sup>39</sup> Although classes were organized through TV broadcast, the content did not envisage preparatory classes of Croatian language for children with poorer knowledge of the language as Croatian often is Roma children's secondary language. According to the ombudsperson, without preparatory language classes, Roma children will have further arrears in the knowledge of the Croatian language adding to their inequality in regards to peers and leaving marks throughout their schooling, affect early school dropping-out and leaving many Roma in poverty and social exclusion.

In Međimurska County, pupils faced various difficulties during online schooling. The specific problems were following distance learning via TV due to a lack of signal and/or (sufficient) TVs, latter being an issue in families with more children as well as lack of access to information on changes in TV schedule<sup>40</sup>.

Centres for Social Welfare from the cities of Ludbreg in the Varaždin County, Pula/Pola in the Istria County and Čakovec in the Međimurska County<sup>41</sup> stated that their personnel, on the request of primary schools, assisted pupils with difficulties in online teaching, providing parents with counselling assistance for overcoming difficulties.

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<sup>37</sup> As reported through the email correspondence with the Ministry of Science and Education on 27 May 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Ombudsperson's Office (*Ured pučke pravobraniteljice*), email correspondence, 4 June 2020.

<sup>39</sup> As reported through the email correspondence with the Ombudsperson's Office on 4 June 2020.

<sup>40</sup> Centre for Social Welfare of the City of Čakovec (*Centar za socijalnu skrb Čakovec*), email correspondence, 2 June 2020.

<sup>41</sup> Email correspondence with Centres for Social Welfare: Centre for Social Welfare of the City of Ludbreg (Varaždin County) on 27 May 2020, Centre for Social Welfare of the city of Pula/Pola (Istria county) on 29 May 2020, and Centre for Social Welfare of the City of Čakovec (*Centar za socijalnu skrb Čakovec*) on 2 June 2020.

The Ministry of Science and Education<sup>42</sup> developed an allocation plan for a hundred tablets with internet access and 500 SIM cards from UNICEF's donation to those Roma pupils who have no options for distance learning.

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

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

Please focus on:

- Negative reactions in statements by politicians and public figures
- Hate speech in online and traditional media
- Any manifestations of antigypsyism or hate crime against Roma and Travellers.

As social media became a more important tool for many citizens to communicate, inform and organise themselves in the times of limited movement, quarantine and working from home conditions, there were more new online initiatives, groups and communities that involved a lot of users<sup>43</sup>. Therefore, hate speech content occurred on unexpected pages and in groups, that involve diverse users - e.g. hateful messages and threats were spread in the Facebook group "Virtual grocery market"<sup>44</sup> where citizens are organised for sale and delivery of homemade food and products. In one particular case reported to the Centre for Peace Studies and Human Rights House Zagreb, organizations administrating web portal "Dosta je mržnje",<sup>45</sup> the seller was verbally attacked due to his real or perceived Roma origin. Admins of the Facebook page were alerted to strengthen the rules of the group and Facebook was alerted to remove the hate speech content.

Also, some old, well-known but inactive groups that spread hate became active again e.g. Facebook group "I want normal life in Međimurje"<sup>46</sup> where a strong anti-Roma narrative is present. This group was set as support to protest of the part of citizens from Međimurska County against Roma citizens

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<sup>42</sup> Ministry of Science and Education (*Ministarstvo znanosti i obrazovanja*), email correspondence, 27 May 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Online initiatives, groups, and communities were organised on the issues of pandemic and Zagreb earthquake on 22 March 2020, here are some: For each other (*Jedni za druge*) <https://www.facebook.com/groups/523065185274554/> (with many local branches in cities across Croatia), pages referring to available psychological counselling or offering support with pets while owners are in self-isolation, and support in general, during the times of the crisis.

<sup>44</sup> Facebook group Virtual grocery market (*Virtualni zagrebački plac*), <https://web.facebook.com/groups/virtualni.zagrebacki.plac/>

<sup>45</sup> Web page Enough with the hatred (*Dosta je mržnje*), <https://www.dostajemrznje.org/>

<sup>46</sup> Facebook group I want normal life in Međimurje (*Želim normalan život u Međimurju*), <https://web.facebook.com/zelimnormalanzivotumedjimurju/>

living there, which was held on 1 June 2019.<sup>47</sup> This Facebook page, in general, generates a lot of unacceptable speech against Roma and at the beginning of the epidemic, content was detected referring to Roma settlements as “potential hotspots of infection” and similar discriminatory statements. This kind of content is usually represented as a short news story shared in the Facebook group from local info portals inducing unacceptable and vulgar comments by group members. Such comments are being reported as a part of the Centre for Peace Studies’ role as a trusted flagger to social media networks.<sup>48</sup>

The Ombudsperson's Office states they are not aware of any negative public reactions to the Roma minority during the pandemic, nor have they received any complaints to that effect.<sup>49</sup> One complaint was received from a person who was upset by a message of inappropriate content, offensive to Roma minority, which she received via WhatsApp from her work colleague. The Ombudsperson's Office initiated an investigation into this complaint and requested relevant observations, but the procedure is still ongoing.

### 3.2 Positive change in attitudes

Please focus on

- Examples of changing narrative regarding these communities in public statements, media coverage
- Manifestations of social solidarity with Roma and Travellers
- Examples of and local initiatives transcending ethnic boundaries.

With the outbreak of the coronavirus epidemic in Croatia, questions arose as to whether Roma settlements will become hotspots of infection and whether they will be quarantined as in some other EU Member States. Some of the news portals published articles with interviews or testimonies with inhabitants of these settlements and local officials.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Jutarnji list newspaper, online edition, article “In Čakovec protest was organized against Roma”, 1 June 2019, link available at: <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/u-cakovcu-se-prosvjedovalo-protiv-roma-zastupnik-kajtazi-oni-romima-ne-zele-dobro-zabiljezen-incident-sudionici-skupa-nasrnuli-na-kontraprosvjednike-8952506>.

<sup>48</sup> European Commission (2020), Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, Countering illegal hate speech online - 5th evaluation of the Code of Conduct, 22 June 2020, available at:

[https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/codeofconduct\\_2020\\_factsheet\\_12.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/codeofconduct_2020_factsheet_12.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> Ombudsperson's Office (*Ured pučke pravobraniteljice*), email correspondence, 4 June 2020

<sup>50</sup> Net.hr info portal, article “It was expected that these settlements will become hotspots of corona disease but that didn’t happen”, 25 April 2020, link available at:

<https://net.hr/danas/hrvatska/ocekivalo-se-da-ce-ova-naselja-postati-zariste-korone-ali-to-se-nije-dogodilo-mislim-da-nas-je-sreca-pomazila/>; Radio Slobodna Evropa, article “MP Still

Besides, there were few identified positive examples of media coverage during the epidemic. On the International Romani Day, 8 April, an article on the local news portal of the City of Slavonski Brod was published on the experiences of Roma parent home schooling his children during the pandemic.<sup>51</sup> The same news portal, a couple of days later reports on the discriminatory experiences of the youth football player from the Romani settlement.<sup>52</sup> Cause for the interview was maintaining fitness through regular training during the epidemic but most of the article talks about his experiences of racism in sports and in education.

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Awaits Response to Call for Help to Roma in Croatia”, 8 April 2020, [link available at: https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/hrvatska-romi-korona-virus/30542202.html](https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/hrvatska-romi-korona-virus/30542202.html).

<sup>51</sup> Slavonski Brod info portal, article “If only one of us gets sick, the whole settlement would be isolated”, 8 April 2020, link available at: [https://sbplus.hr/slavonski\\_brod/zivot/koronavirus/da\\_samo\\_jedno\\_od\\_nas\\_oboli\\_izolirali\\_bi\\_cijelo\\_naselje.aspx#.XuMYm0UzY2x](https://sbplus.hr/slavonski_brod/zivot/koronavirus/da_samo_jedno_od_nas_oboli_izolirali_bi_cijelo_naselje.aspx#.XuMYm0UzY2x)

<sup>52</sup> Slavonski Brod info portal, article “It was not easy to run for a training on a bicycle”, 14 May 2020, link available at: [https://sbplus.hr/slavonski\\_brod/sport/nogomet/nije\\_bilo\\_lako\\_biciklom\\_iz\\_romskog\\_naselja\\_juriti\\_na\\_trening.aspx?fbclid=IwAR1cSOvdsPXzk-JnUk4jBhNS4kEEmzpqMoxWsRmgHVbKvjD-5LL6F4HaxhE#.XuMYkUUzY2y](https://sbplus.hr/slavonski_brod/sport/nogomet/nije_bilo_lako_biciklom_iz_romskog_naselja_juriti_na_trening.aspx?fbclid=IwAR1cSOvdsPXzk-JnUk4jBhNS4kEEmzpqMoxWsRmgHVbKvjD-5LL6F4HaxhE#.XuMYkUUzY2y)