

Pandemic worsens Roma and Travellers poverty and discrimination



“The Coronavirus does not discriminate, but the measures to contain it do. Facing stricter lockdown, poor welfare support and limited access to online learning, many Roma and Travellers communities have been ravaged by the pandemic. Member States need to tackle these challenges, strengthen social inclusion and involve Roma and Travellers themselves – both during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond,” says FRA’s Director **Michael O’Flaherty**.

FRA’s latest bulletin [“Coronavirus pandemic in the EU – Impact on Roma and Travellers”](#) documents the main challenges:

- **Lockdown** – entire Roma and Traveller communities faced stricter lockdown as precautionary measures, even before there were any confirmed infections.
- **Housing** – many live in overcrowded households with no access to running water. This makes physical distancing or washing hands very difficult, and put Roma and Travellers at higher risk of contracting the disease.
- **Employment** – lockdown left street vendors and those with precarious contracts unemployed. As many Roma and Travellers were not part of the formal economy before the pandemic, they cannot access support or claim

welfare benefits.

- **Poverty** – the loss of jobs increased poverty and the risk of malnutrition, which was already high before the pandemic.
- **Healthcare** – in some countries, only half of Roma and Travellers have health insurance. Moreover, many face discrimination when accessing healthcare.
- **Education** – already before the pandemic, most Roma and Traveller children were early school leavers. Now, many do not have internet access nor computers, so they cannot take part in online learning when schools close.
- **Hate speech** – hate speech and discrimination against Roma and Travellers increased during the pandemic, as they were blamed for spreading the virus.

FRA calls on Member States to implement inclusion measures recommended since [2013 by the Council of the European Union](#). In particular, FRA stresses that:

1. Roma and Travellers must have equal access to all mainstream poverty reduction, employment generation and other social inclusion schemes.
2. Health and education mediators, who provide basic services in Roma communities during the pandemic, need adequate resources and support to assist people in need, especially since the number of infections is rising again across the EU.
3. Member States need to fight anti-Gypsyism and prejudice against Roma and Travellers. Their communities are often presented as a risk to the general population while in fact they are more at risk themselves because of the conditions they live in.

Background:

[FRA's new Roma & Travellers survey](#) shows that a quarter of Roma and Travellers in Western Europe could not afford basic items, such as heating or healthy food already before the pandemic. They also face rampant discrimination and harassment in their everyday lives.

The EU will soon release its new 'EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation'. It aims to find a way forward and address the challenges Roma and Travellers face in the EU.

This bulletin documents the situation of Roma and Travellers in 15 EU Member States between 1 March to 30 June 2020.