Risk Management Plan at Local Level Targeting Roma Community and Their Vulnerability

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Promoting good governance and Roma empowerment at local level

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1 Contents

2 Context

The context of understanding the role, position and status of the Roma population in the Macedonian society, referring to various perspectives and stages in the disaster management cycle, could be considered complex and overburdened with many challenges.
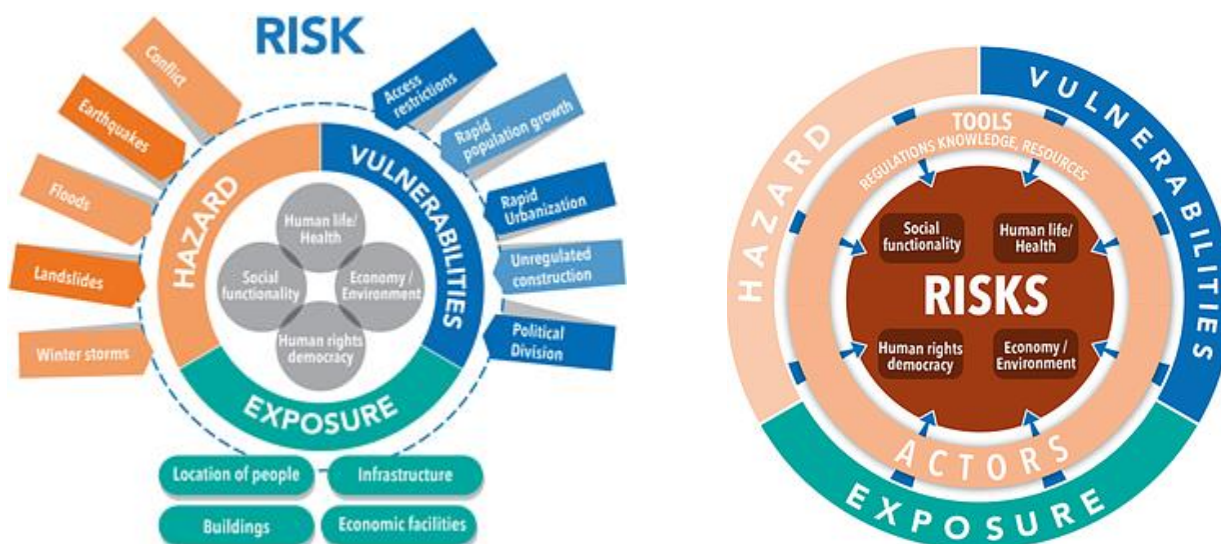
Figure 1: Risks and vulnerabilities presented within Disaster Risk Management[1]

Therefore, when analyzing such context in developing a more comprehensive risk management plan, there are several key parameters that must be considered as relevant. Namely,:

o   Demographic, socio-economic and other relevant data concerning the Roma population in the Republic of North Macedonia.
o   Scope of integration of Roma communities in Disaster Risk Management through legal and institutional instruments and arrangements.
o   Shock context – vulnerability and exposure of the Roma population and Roma communities to risks and hazards, including COVID-19.

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[1] UNOCHA, Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO): Risks and Vulnerabilities, New York and Geneva, 2018. Available at: https://www.ochaopt.org/content/emergency-response-preparedness-erp-and-disaster-risk-management-drm (accessed on 15 December 2023)

2.1 Demographic, socio-economic and other relevant data concerning the Roma population in the Republic of North Macedonia

According to the last census of 2021, there were 46,433 people counted as Roma, or 2.53% of the population in the country.[2] The largest concentration of the Roma population is in the municipality of Shuto Orizari, while in the other 14 municipalities that are the subject of analysis for the purpose of drawing up the risk management plan, a different picture can be observed. In certain municipalities, the Roma population lives in places inhabited predominantly by Roma, whereas in other municipalities the Roma population lives in settlements with a mixed ethnic composition of the population.

Nevertheless, the general situation of the Roma population in North Macedonia indicates that the Roma population is still the most vulnerable and disadvantaged ethical community in the country, being a community that faces both institutional discrimination and social prejudice.[3] Surveys reveal that other groups perceive them as the least trusted community in the country due to the deeply rooted societal stereotypes.[4] The daily lives of Roma individuals are marked by numerous challenges stemming from prejudice and discrimination. These obstacles create barriers to their social inclusion, empowerment, employment and active participation in policy-making processes at both national and local levels.

The Roma people, as the most significant ethnic minority in the EU, but also as an ethnic community in the Republic of North Macedonia, are subject to severe discrimination, social exclusion and poverty. Due to their deplorable living conditions, isolation and widespread Antigypsyism, Roma are among the most affected by the socioeconomic crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic[5], but also, by other emergencies and disasters when essentially a series of problems and challenges arise which additionally make them more vulnerable and marginalized within the national disaster management system.

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[2] State Statistical Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, "Total Resident Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of North Macedonia, Census 2021", Skopje, pp. 32–33. Available at: https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziPoslednaPublikacija_en.aspx?id=87 (accessed on 15 December 2023)

[3] Minority Rights Group International, Minorities and indigenous peoples in Macedonia, 2020. Available at: https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-11/ (accessed on 15 December 2023).

[4] USAID, Roma Inclusion Activity, USAID North Macedonia, 2023. Available at: https://www.usaid.gov/north-macedonia/fact-sheets/roma-inclusion-activity (accessed on 15 December 2023).

[5] Macías León, Almudena, and Natalia Del Pino-Brunet. 2023. "The Vulnerability of European Roma to the Socioeconomic Crisis Triggered by the COVID-19 Pandemic" *Social Sciences* 12, no. 5: 292. Available at: https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12050292 (accessed on 15 December 2023).

2.2 Scope of integration of Roma communities in Disaster (Risk) Management through legal and institutional instruments and arrangements

The national and international legal framework pertaining to the management of disaster risks plays a crucial role in shaping the approach of national and local civil protection authorities towards the Roma population—a group identified as vulnerable and marginalized within the broader strategy for at-risk communities. Consequently, guidelines for managing disasters, particularly those affecting the Roma population, consider the following legal acts:

- Constitution, national law and bylaws in disaster risk management, as the Law on Protection and Rescue (2004) and the Law on Crisis Management (2005).
- National Strategy for Inclusion of Roma 2022 – 2030.
- Action Plan for reduction of the COVID-19 consequences among the Roma community in the post-COVID period at the local level, 2022.
- United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- UNDRR's Sendai Framework (2015-2030).
- National Climate Strategy.
- Council of Europe's Guidelines upholding equality and protecting against discrimination and hate during the COVID-19 pandemic and similar crises in the future (2020) and Explanatory Memorandum as an Appendix to the Guidelines (2021).

In drafting the Risk Management Plan at the local level with a specific focus on the vulnerability of the Roma community, it is crucial to assess the integration of the aforementioned acts into pivotal municipal documents related to disaster risk management. Hence, the analysis during the plan's preparation is centered on several key documents within the realm of disaster risk management across the fifteen municipalities[6], as follows:

- Risk assessment from natural disasters and other accidents (according to the Law on Protection and Rescue, 2004).
- Assessment of security threats from all risks and hazards (according to the Law on Crisis Management, 2005).
- Plan for Protection and Rescue (according to the Law on Protection and Rescue, 2004)
- Annual Program for Crisis Management (according to the Law on Local Self-Government [2002] and Law on Crisis Management [2005]).
- Operative Plan for Floods Protection and Defense (according to the Law on Local Self-Government [2002] and Law on Waters [2008]).
- Flood Risk Management Assessment (according to the EU Flood Risk Assessment and Management Directive, 2007).
- Flood Risk Management Plan (according to the EU's Floods Directive, 2007).

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[6] Shuto Orizari, Vinica, Delchevo, Berovo, Kochani, Strumica, Prilep, Bitola, Debar, Tetovo, Gostivar, Kichevo, Veles, Shtip and Kriva Palanka.

Considering that these acts have been enacted in the last two decades, practitioners and representatives of the Roma community in the municipalities already have their own attitudes regarding the implementation of measures and activities outlined in the plans and the outcomes derived from their application. Consequently, various conclusions can be drawn concerning the integration of Roma communities in Disaster (Risk) Management through legal and institutional instruments. The main points of the statements refer to:

- Questions pertaining to the effectiveness of the current legal regulations governing the functioning of the two key disaster risk management systems – System Monitoring and Control and Stakeholder Preparedness Review, specifically as to how crisis management and civil protection are executed at the local level, where municipalities play a central role in civil protection.
- Inadequate inter-institutional collaboration with the community, particularly in relations between civil society organizations, one one side, and local community, municipality, and local institutions, on the other.
- A prevailing mistrust among the Roma population towards institutional systems (both at the local and national level). This mistrust is rooted in a broader perception of inadequate equipment within the local firefighters' units, impacting the overall efficiency in handling and responding to disasters.
- Limited utilization of the potential within the Roma population, specifically in terms of involving them in activities related to identifying and addressing risks and hazards associated with disasters.

2.3 Shock context – vulnerability and exposure of the Roma population and Roma communities to risks and hazards

The continuous emergencies and disasters, but also the global impact of the Coronavirus pandemic has touched the lives of everyone. The population at risk, due to poverty and social marginalization, encounter distinct challenges. Across nations, the health crisis triggered by COVID-19 has led to substantial economic and social upheaval. Nonetheless, the consequences of this crisis have been unevenly distributed among different population sectors, with specific groups bearing a disproportionate burden of mortality and morbidity. This has intensified pre-existing disparities in health, social, and economic dimensions within societies.

Preliminary studies suggest that some people are more likely to be affected by health, economic, and social crises because of the interaction of certain factors. Belonging to an

ethnic minority is one of these factors.[789] In England, environmental poverty and ethnicity are linked to a higher COVID-19 mortality rate.[10] The pandemic's economic effects have impacted the population sectors with more precarious jobs (youth, women, and low-paying jobs). Housing situation, employment status, and income level of families have also shaped the impact of the pandemic on the different population sectors.[11]

The global response to the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the consideration of experiences in managing it, has facilitated the development of a distinct approach concerning the Roma population and other vulnerable and marginalized groups of citizens at various levels. Insights gained from international, national, and local solutions are especially valuable when incorporated into the formulation of measures to address a broad spectrum of risks and hazards.

The repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic have become increasingly pronounced, particularly affecting those who are unemployed, socially vulnerable, and among the most marginalized populations, such as the Roma community. The crisis stemming from COVID-19 underscores the challenge of implementing inclusive measures and fostering integration for marginalized groups, exemplified by the Roma community, in such critical situations.[12]

The recommendations[13] put forth by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe highlight several key points for local governments in response to crises, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic:

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[7] Platt, Lucinda, and Ross Warwick. 2020. *Are Some Ethnic Groups More Vulnerable to COVID-19 than Others?* London: The Institute for Fiscal Studies. Available online: **https://ifs.org.uk/inequality/chapter/are-some-ethnic-groups-more-vulnerable-to-covid-19-than-others/** (accessed on 15 December 2023).

[8] Matache, Margareta, and Jacqueline Bhabha. 2020. Anti-Roma racism is spiraling during COVID-19 pandemic. *Health and Human Rights* 22: 379–82.

[9] Pareek, Manish, Mansoor N. Bangash, Nilesh Pareek, Daniel Pan, Shirley Sze, Jatinder S. Minhas, Wasim Hanif, and Kamlesh Khunti. 2020. Ethnicity and COVID-19: An urgent public health research priority. *Lancet* 395: 1421–22.

[10] Rose, Tanith, Mason Kate, Pennington Andy, McHale Philip, Buchan Iain, Taylor-Robinson David, and Barr Ben. 2020. Inequalities in COVID19 mortality related to ethnicity and socioeconomic deprivation. *medRxiv*.

[11] Ocaña, Carlos, Eduardo Baldrés, Elisa Chuliá, María Jesús Fernández, Miguel Ángel Malo, Juan Carlos Rodríguez, and Raymond Torres. 2020. *Impacto social de la pandemia en España. Una evaluación premilinar*. Madrid: Funcas. Available online: **https://www.funcas.es/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Impacto-social-de-la-pandemia-en-Espa%C3%B1a.pdf** (accessed on 15 December 2023).

[12] Romalitico and ROMACTED, Action plan for reducing the consequences of COVID-19 among the Roma community in the post-COVID period at the local level (Municipality of Bitola, Berovo, Vinica, Veles, Gostivar, Delchevo, Debar, Kriva Palanka, Kichevo, Kochani, Prilep, Strumica, Tetovo, Shtip , Shuto Orizari) [Акциски план за намалување на последиците од КОВИД 19 кај ромската заедница во пост – КОВИД периодот на локално ниво (Општина Битола, Берово, Виница, Велес, Гостивар, Делчево, Дебар, Крива Паланка, Кичево, Кочани, Прилеп, Струмица, Тетово, Штип, Шуто Оризари)], Implementation period 2023-2024, Romalitico and ROMACTED, Skopje, June 2022.

[13] Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on upholding equality and protecting against discrimination and hate during the Covid-19 pandemic and similar crises in the future, Council of Europe,

1. **Active Measures for Social Services:** Local governments are urged to implement active measures for social services related to crises, including housing, health, and employment benefits. It is emphasized that these services should specifically reach members of the most vulnerable groups (Recommendation 6).

2. **Data Collection on Vulnerable Groups:** The Committee recommends the collection of segregated data concerning the number and condition of individuals from various minority and disadvantaged groups. This data serves as a basis for understanding the impact of the pandemic in terms of discrimination and equality, including mapping vulnerable groups in the prevention phase (Recommendation 7).

3. **Access to Regular Health Services:** Ensuring adequate access to regular health services for Roma and other vulnerable groups is underlines as a crucial measure. This not only facilitates health status checks and virus prevention but also addresses other diseases and infections (Recommendation 10).

4. **Improvement of Living Conditions:** Recommendations include improving living conditions in Roma settlements to prevent the spread of viruses. This involves provisions for fresh running water and waste disposal facilities (Recommendation 11).

5. **Education Strategies and Bridging the Digital Divide:** Educational strategies for continuous learning for all children are recommended, with a specific emphasis on consultation with members of vulnerable communities and minorities. Measures to bridge the digital divide, especially as regards online education, are encouraged, including tailored support for students from disadvantaged and minority communities (Recommendation 12).

6. **Support for Informal Economy and Seasonal Workers:** Recommendations include making unemployment benefits available to cover those in the informal economy and seasonal workers. Assistance should also be provided to vulnerable groups on how to apply for benefits (Recommendation 13).

7. **Respect for Diversity in Crisis Management:** The Committee highlights that weaknesses in dealing with diversity can make countries more vulnerable in responding effectively to pandemics. Anti-discrimination, diversity and inclusion are emphasized as key strategic priorities for improved results in crisis management and future crisis situations (Recommendation 16).

Steering Committee on Anti-Discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI), Strasbourg, 2020. Available at: https://edoc.coe.int/en/living-together-diversity-and-freedom-in-europe/9745-guidelines-of-the-committee-of-ministers-of-the-council-of-europe-on-upholding-equality-and-protecting-against-discrimination-and-hate-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-and-similar-crises-in-the-future.html (accessed on 15 December 2023).

Therefore, drawing from the experiences in managing COVID-19 and considering the overall vulnerability factors of the Roma community, the **specific vulnerability factors of the Roma population** can be further elucidated across all phases of disaster risk management. These factors encompass two primary perspectives concerning the Roma population. The <u>first perspective</u> examines how central and local authorities incorporate Roma individuals into crisis management institutions and protection and rescue systems. The <u>second perspective</u> delves into how local civil protection authorities attend to the needs of the Roma population when it is exposed to risks or threatened by the dangers of disasters.

Roma face **discrimination** in all spheres of life and are the most excluded minority group. Despite official recognition – Roma people are explicitly mentioned as an ethnic community in the Preamble of the Constitution amended by the Ohrid Framework Agreement in 2001 – Roma remain excluded from mainstream society.[14] Despite existing legal and institutional safeguards, discrimination continues to persist as a daily experience for the Roma community. From a young age, they encounter prejudice and exclusion from the broader society.

Roma population face some of the **worst housing conditions** in the country. Around 28 per cent of Roma live in impoverished neighborhoods, in poorly constructed housing that often lacks formal registration - due to lack of urban plans in their municipalities, lack of information about the process or inability to cover the related costs. Only 74% of Roma housing has toilet facilities and 84% are connected to the public sewerage system, compared to 92% in both regards for the rest of the population.[15] Overcrowding is also widespread: many Roma families live in houses with less than 5 square meters per person. The highest number in a given household is noted in Kichevo (6.83 person in one household); Kavadarci (6.22), Gostivar (5.79) and Shuto Orizari - 5.46 persons per household.[16] Throughout the pandemic, these families encountered significant challenges related to securing sufficient space for isolation and maintaining social distance, particularly when a family member fell ill. Ensuring adequate hygiene and protection also posed considerable difficulties in these circumstances.[17] This was

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[14] Minority Rights Group International, Minorities and Indigenous Peoples in Macedonia, 2020. Available at: https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-11/ (accessed on 15 December 2023)

[15] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Regional Survey for Roma: Country fact sheets, 2017. Available at: https://www.undp.org/eurasia/publications/regional-roma-survey-2017-country-fact-sheets (accessed on 15 December 2023)

[16] Albert Memeti, Social Mapping of Roma in the Republic of North Macedonia, REGIONAL CONFERENCE: "Regional Methodology for Mapping Housing of Roma", 5 November 2019, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Available at:
https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/download/docs/Social%20Mapping%20of%20Roma%20in%20the%200Republic%20of%20North%20Macedonia%20-%20Albert%20Memeti.pptx/46f84d690374e861bbb459148fdc6d0d.pptx (accessed on 15 December 2023)

[17] Romalitico and ROMACTED, Action plan for reducing the consequences of COVID-19 among the Roma community in the post-COVID period at the local level (Municipality of Bitola, Berovo, Vinica, Veles, Gostivar, Delchevo, Debar, Kriva Palanka, Kichevo, Kochani, Prilep, Strumica, Tetovo, Shtip , Shuto Orizari) [Акциски план за намалување на последиците од КОВИД 19 кај ромската заедница во пост – КОВИД периодот на локално ниво (Општина Битола, Берово, Виница, Велес, Гостивар, Делчево, Дебар, Крива Паланка, Кичево, Кочани,

also a considerable problem for the education of Roma children during COVID-19 related school closures.[18]

This situation is only made worse by the precariousness of these arrangements, with some 80,000 Roma households lacking long-term housing solutions. The frequent absence of adequate drinking water, electricity, heating or sanitation also contributes to widespread ill health.[19] Based on previous analyses and data derived from social mapping, approximately 28% of Roma individuals have not legalized their residences. This is attributed to the absence of an urban plan in the municipality for these settlements or due to financial constraints. Furthermore, citizens who have submitted requests for the legalization of their facilities have been waiting for over 5 years for a response from the relevant institutions regarding the status of their request. Consequently, substandard housing conditions significantly impact access to education, health services, employment, and other fundamental human rights that should be accessible to every individual. The lack of such access contributes to the marginalization of the community, fostering poverty and limited education, often confining them to segregated neighborhoods.[20]

Living in substandard conditions for a segment of the Roma population entails residing in areas that, based on risk and danger assessments, are categorized as hazardous—locations prone to rockfalls, landslides, proximity to riverbeds, busy and unsecured streets, etc. The structures they inhabit are often poorly constructed and lack basic technical prerequisites for habitation. In these circumstances, people frequently resort to illegal water and electricity connections.

The vulnerability of individuals in improvised and unlawfully constructed dwellings is exacerbated when it comes to availing themselves of home insurance (disaster risk finance) and seeking compensation in the event of natural disasters and other accidents. Illegal buildings are often overlooked in municipal risk and danger assessments, as well as in protection and rescue plans. Working in environments dominated by illegal buildings is especially challenging due to the difficulty of civil protection authorities' vehicles accessing these locations. The absence of adequate infrastructure, such as hydrant networks and drainage, can impact response time and efficiency in handling emergencies.

Прилеп, Струмица, Тетово, Штип, Шуто Оризари)], Implementation period 2023-2024, Romalitico and ROMACTED, Skopje, June 2022.

[18] Council of Europe, ECRI Report on North Macedonia (sixth monitoring cycle), Strasbourg, 2023. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/sixth-ecri-report-on-north-macedonia/1680ac8c47 (accessed on 15 December 2023)

[19] Minority Rights Group International, Minorities and Indigenous Peoples in Macedonia, 2020. Available at: https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-11/ (accessed on 15 December 2023)

[20] Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, Strategy for Inclusion of Roma 2022 – 2030, Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, Skopje, 2022. Available at: https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/ec401e5c4bf3d348990512774b419ffc.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2023)

Many Roma people live in poverty, and they were particularly gravely affected by the country's post-1991 transition to a market economy, with a marked increase in **poverty** and **unemployment**.[21] Persons engaged in stable and traditional employment contracts are typically less affected by prolonged crises or extended disaster recovery periods. In contrast, individuals with short-term and part-time contracts, as well as self-employed workers and those in the informal economy, may often find themselves excluded or overlooked in such situations.

The Roma community, particularly Roma women, has long been grappling with the challenges of unemployment, and the onset of the coronavirus has further aggravated this situation. Many Roma families, often engaged in informal or seasonal work, found themselves unemployed due to the measures and restrictions imposed during the pandemic. The analysis reveals that salaries have decreased, with 61% of respondents expressing concern about potential job loss in the next 12 months due to the COVID-19 crisis.[22] The prevalent poverty and financial instability within the Roma population are often rooted in the fact that a segment of the community is involved in informal economy activities. The informal economy is particularly susceptible to adverse conditions during crises and disasters, amplifying the impact on the livelihoods of the Roma population.

Among Roma men, the most prevalent form of informal employment includes involvement in trade, taxi services, construction and agriculture. On the other hand, Roma women commonly engage in trade and provide cleaning services as part of their informal employment. Additionally, many Roma families depend on seasonal work, particularly during the summer harvest season. It's noteworthy that approximately 48% of Roma families are welfare recipients, underscoring the reliance on support systems to meet basic needs within the community.[23]

A large part of the Roma population has **incomplete or low formal education and has not acquired knowledge and skills through informal education**. As concerns unemployment of Roma people, this is to a large degree an extension of the problem of low levels of formal qualifications that many Roma have. People with little or no school education are generally more prone to unemployment. As of mid-2021, 92% of all unemployed individuals had only completed primary education or not even that.[24] A real systemic problem is also the fact that schools do not have a system for collecting data on the socio-economic status of Roma

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[21] Minority Rights Group International, Minorities and Indigenous peoples in Macedonia, 2020. Available at: https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-11/ (accessed on 15 December 2023)

[22] Социо-економско влијание на КОВИД 19 врз Ромите во Западен Балкан, Извештај на Регионалниот Совет за соработка, декември 2021 (страна 52-53).

[23] Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, Strategy for Inclusion of Roma 2022 – 2030, Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, Skopje, 2022. Available at: https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/files/admin/docs/ec401e5c4bf3d348990512774b419ffc.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2023)

[24] Employment Agency, quoted in: Government of North Macedonia 2022: 35.

children, which would enable an assessment of the need for assistance in accessing appropriate education.[25] Due to the significantly higher unemployment rate among the Roma community, their engagement in skills-building activities is consequently inadequate. Roma children still suffer from social stigma, discrimination, and segregation, and face numerous barriers in their access to regular and quality education and training. Of all the ethnic groups in North Macedonia, illiteracy levels are the highest among Roma. However, there have been some indicators of improvement in educational enrolment and completion among Roma students in primary and secondary schools.[26]

Poverty is an additional barrier to education that limits access to school and skills gained through education. Many Roma parents do not have enough money to buy clothes, shoes or school materials for their children. As some of the most destitute Roma households lack access to running water making hygiene difficult, parents may choose not to send their children to school to protect them from bullying. Many Roma families also leave on seasonal work with their children, who then miss school during that period. In some traditional families, girls are encouraged to stay at home to help around the household and take care of their siblings rather than go to school. Some children also lack the necessary documentation to be able to attend school or to receive the certificate of completion. Roma children are sometimes barred from enrolment or not fully aware of the rights guaranteed to them by law.[27]

The Roma population is particularly vulnerable to the dangers of disasters due to **insufficient awareness**[28], primarily stemming from limited access to opportunities for acquiring skills. This includes training, workshops and exercises related to coping with the hazards of natural and other disasters, as well as other matters relevant to disaster risk management. This lack of access to information and training to develop essential skills, such as first aid, using emergency numbers and employing fire extinguishers, makes vulnerable and marginalized groups particularly susceptible in case of a disaster. While this remains a general issue in the

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[25] Romalitico and ROMACTED, Action plan for reducing the consequences of COVID-19 among the Roma community in the post-COVID period at the local level (Municipality of Bitola, Berovo, Vinica, Veles, Gostivar, Delchevo, Debar, Kriva Palanka, Kichevo, Kochani, Prilep, Strumica, Tetovo, Shtip , Shuto Orizari) [Акциски план за намалување на последиците од КОВИД 19 кај ромската заедница во пост – КОВИД периодот на локално ниво (Општина Битола, Берово, Виница, Велес, Гостивар, Делчево, Дебар, Крива Паланка, Кичево, Кочани, Прилеп, Струмица, Тетово, Штип, Шуто Оризари)], Implementation period 2023-2024, Romalitico and ROMACTED, Skopje, June 2022.
[26] Minority Rights Group International, Minorities and Indigenous Peoples in Macedonia, 2020. Available at: https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-11/ (accessed on 15 December 2023)
[27] Minority Rights Group International, Minorities and Indigenous Peoples in Macedonia, 2020. Available at: https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-11/ (accessed on 15 December 2023)
[28] Related to the Priority 2 (Strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk) of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 – 2030. Available at: https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf (accessed on 15 December 2023)

country, addressing the specific needs of these groups becomes imperative to enhance their resilience and preparedness.

As with other ethnic groups in North Macedonia, **Roma cannot participate effectively in public life**, which is dominated by ethnic Macedonian-Albanian relations. This challenge extends to the limited representation of Roma individuals in public and state positions, contributing to disparities in access to equal opportunities. The dearth of Roma individuals in official roles is reflected in their overall access to fundamental rights and resources. The selection of individuals for official positions often occurs under significant political influence, with political allegiance serving as a primary criterion. Consequently, the expectation is that political representatives from the Roma community should be particularly instrumental in addressing and actualizing the basic safety and health needs of the Roma population. This highlights the importance of inclusive representation and advocacy within political structures to address the specific concerns and well-being of the Roma community.

Discrimination against Roma in **healthcare** is still widespread and remains largely unreported. The negative experiences many go through when attempting to access healthcare can discourage them from engaging these services in the future. Roma people have higher morbidity and mortality rates than the general population: this is reflected in the significantly lower average life expectancy among Roma (68 years) compared to the average of the national population (73.5 years). Discrimination by medical personnel against Roma plays a key role in their reluctance to see a doctor.[29] The challenging conditions faced by the Roma population, compounded by inadequate information about accessing health services, lack of health insurance, and suboptimal habits for preventive examinations and hygiene maintenance in substandard living conditions, contribute to heightened vulnerability. These factors increase the risk of early onset of certain diseases, infections and pandemics within the Roma community. Improving access to information, promoting health insurance coverage, cultivating preventive healthcare practices, and addressing the living conditions of the Roma are crucial steps to mitigate the impact of health-related challenges and enhance overall well-being.

In the realm of health, the Roma population faces numerous challenges, which were exacerbated during the pandemic. The lack of access to health services became even more pronounced for several reasons, including:[30]

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[29] Minority Rights Group International, Minorities and Indigenous Peoples in Macedonia, 2020. Available at: https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-11/ (accessed on 15 December 2023)

[30] Romalitico and ROMACTED, Action plan for reducing the consequences of COVID-19 among the Roma community in the post-COVID period at the local level (Municipality of Bitola, Berovo, Vinica, Veles, Gostivar, Delchevo, Debar, Kriva Palanka, Kichevo, Kochani, Prilep, Strumica, Tetovo, Shtip , Shuto Orizari) [Акциски план за намалување на последиците од КОВИД 19 кај ромската заедница во пост – КОВИД периодот на локално ниво (Општина Битола, Берово, Виница, Велес, Гостивар, Делчево, Дебар, Крива Паланка, Кичево, Кочани, Прилеп, Струмица, Тетово, Штип, Шуто Оризари)], Implementation period 2023-2024, Romalitico and ROMACTED, Skopje, June 2022.

- **Healthcare Accessibility:** Approximately 27% of Roma individuals are two kilometres away from the nearest hospital, and around 12% of Roma households lack access to an asphalt road.[31]
- **Water and Sanitation Issues:** Around 10% of Roma households lack drinking water within their homes, and 18% do not have access to a sewage system. These factors contribute to difficulties in maintaining personal hygiene.[32]
- **Poor Living Conditions:** Roma settlements often contend with substandard living conditions and their proximity to illegal dumps poses infection risks.
- **Financial Constraints:** Limited financial resources further hinder access to adequate personal hygiene products.
- **Vaccine Awareness:** There is a lack of awareness about vaccines and the vaccination process among the Roma population.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and targeted approach, considering healthcare accessibility, water and sanitation infrastructure, living conditions, financial constraints and healthcare education.

According to the authorities, the most positive activity of improving healthcare for Roma is the project of "Roma Health Mediators", launched in 2013 at the initiative of civil society organizations in partnership with the Ministry of Health, with the aim of improving the health status of Roma. The project is currently implemented in 10 municipalities, with 16 mediators. The authorities informed the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) that they have also witnessed some good results and had positive experiences with Roma health mediators during the COVID-19 pandemic. The government foresees increasing the number of health mediators to 32.[33]

Roma women are particularly vulnerable as they face both physical and financial barriers in their access to primary gynaecological health are. They often live in remote settlements without any public transport or the gynaecologist charges them even for services which otherwise would be free. Many Roma women do not receive any type of health education and are therefore not aware of their rights.[34] The lack of involvement of Roma women in domestic and social processes acts as a barrier, impeding their access to information and the acquisition of skills for proactive measures before, during, and after a disaster.

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[31] European Policy Institute, *Challenges Facing Roma During the Crisis Caused by COVID-19*, European Policy Institute, Skopje, 2020. Available at: https://epi.org.mk/post/15076?lang=en (accessed on 15 December 2023)
[32] European Policy Institute, *Challenges Facing Roma During the Crisis Caused by COVID-19*, European Policy Institute, Skopje, 2020. Available at: https://epi.org.mk/post/15076?lang=en (accessed on 15 December 2023)
[33] Council of Europe, ECRI Report on North Macedonia (sixth monitoring cycle), Strasbourg, 2023. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/sixth-ecri-report-on-north-macedonia/1680ac8c47 (accessed on 15 December 2023)
[34] Minority Rights Group International, Minorities and Indigenous Peoples in Macedonia, 2020. Available at: https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-11/ (accessed on 15 December 2023)

Roma people who do not have any personal documentation find themselves on the margins of society, at **risk of statelessness**, with even more limited access to basic services. According to estimates by the Macedonian Young Lawyers Association, there are 664 persons at risk of statelessness, with around 70 per cent of them being Roma.[35] Individuals without citizenship who were born and have been residing in Macedonia for an extended period of time face deprivation of their fundamental rights, including certain entitlements typically granted to citizens of the country, particularly in the aftermath of a disaster.

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[35] Minority Rights Group International, Minorities and Indigenous peoples in Macedonia, 2020. Available at: https://minorityrights.org/minorities/roma-11/ (accessed on 15 December 2023)

3 Recognize the expertise and positive attitudes of Roma population in the local community

Local population usually serves as first and last responders during emergencies and disasters. Their understanding of at-risk neighborhoods, vulnerable households, and individuals can help identify critical needs of the affected households and communities.

Understanding the requirements of Roma communities residing in disaster-prone households and areas is a crucial initial step in formulating municipal risk and threat assessments, as well as devising protection and rescue plans. This knowledge plays a pivotal role in shaping measures and activities throughout the entire disaster (risk) management cycle. It involves the awareness of the local Roma population in identifying and accessing "safe areas," aiding in the development of evacuation plans, which include mapping evacuation routes and actively participating in exercises and scenarios.

Roma individuals can significantly contribute to the preliminary stages of need assessment by assisting in filling out forms before civil protection workers from local and national governments commence household surveys. The data collected, primarily from vulnerable and marginalized individuals managing their households, facilitates the mapping of diverse family needs. This information ensures that supplies are directed to those who require them the most, such as single-parent households, the elderly, pregnant or lactating women, and people with disabilities.

Expertise in the field and community is proving essential in disaster prevention and response efforts. A thorough understanding of the local environment, terrain details, risk factors and demographics of individuals and households in the immediate community is essential. The capacity to communicate and relay precise and comprehensive information about the situation and needs directly from the field is proving vital in the planning of disaster response activities.

The expertise held by the Roma population in their local community is accompanied by a **profound sense of belonging**, particularly in communities where common interests, solidarity, humanity and a shared desire for mutual support and prosperity are easily recognized. This holds true in situations where a community interacts closely within a confined space, with families comprising multiple members and functioning under **informal leadership**.

These characteristics facilitate the swift organization and mobilization of the local population, leading to the rapid establishment of a teamwork system and effective mutual information exchange for coordinated assistance. Belonging to the Roma community is intertwined with **people's loyalty** to their residing community. Consequently, when considering the representation of Roma individuals in municipal protection and rescue forces, those employed or hired by municipalities exhibit a special interest in engaging in activities related to risk reduction, as well as response and recovery from disasters. There is a strong desire among people to intervene promptly and actively participate in providing assistance.

The fact that Roma settlements are predominantly inhabited by a **youthful population** endows these local communities with substantial human potential capable of responding

effectively in the event of a disaster. Beyond their physical fitness and quick response capabilities, this population possesses resourcefulness, craftsmanship skills, adept negotiation abilities and a ready willingness to engage both within the local community and with municipalities and/or the private sector. This makes them valuable assets in activities related to disaster prevention, response, and recovery.

The role, experiences, and knowledge of **health and educational mediators**, along with the representatives from institutional groups established through the ROMACTED program in 15 municipalities, are of paramount importance. Similarly, the facilitators involved in the program contribute significantly. These individuals possess a comprehensive understanding of the municipal landscape, the specific needs of the Roma population and the measures undertaken by the municipality in addressing COVID-19. They are also well-versed in other initiatives implemented by the municipality, designed to assist the Roma community in navigating various risks and challenges.

4 Integrate the knowledge of Roma population in design and implementation of measures and activities in the disaster management

Integrating the knowledge of Roma population in the entire disaster (risk) management's cycle must be through inclusive approaches and by using participatory processes to address the needs of vulnerable and marginalized groups. By focusing on inclusivity and by engaging vulnerable and marginalized groups, the approach will contribute to comprehensive prevention, preparedness, response and recovery activities that address Roma population's specific challenges and provide equitable access to the benefits of improved infrastructure, opportunities and services.

There are several ways to proactively engage, educate, and mobilize the Roma population. They are presented hereunder, arranged in different phases of disaster risk management:

Measure	Prevention	Preparednes	Response	Recovery
Establish channels of communication and collaboration between formal representatives and informal leaders within the Roma community, as well as with community representatives such as municipalities, local communities, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Additionally, foster connections with local representatives of central institutions such as the Protection and Rescue Directorate (PRD) and the Crisis Management Centre (CMC). These channels aim to enhance understanding of the skills present within the Roma community and facilitate joint efforts to identify how these skills can be most effectively utilized to assist and support the local community at various stages of the disaster and crisis management cycle.	X	X	X	X
Actively engage representatives of the Roma population by including them in ad-hoc bodies responsible for the protection and rescue within the municipality. This pertains specifically to integrating Roma representatives into both the protection and rescue headquarters and the universal unit (composed by municipal firefighters' unit, public enterprises and administration staff), fostering a more inclusive approach to emergency response and preparedness.	X	X	X	X
Facilitate the inclusion of Roma individuals in the activities and support provided by other crucial local civil protection authorities. Motivate and guarantee proper representation of Roma community representatives in entities such as voluntary firefighting associations, CMC and PRD.	X	X	X	X

This inclusion should extend to operational and territorial forces at the local level of the PRD, operational forces of public enterprises such as "National Forests" and the JSC "Water Economy".				
Incorporate representatives from the Roma community, including members of the local community's Disaster Management Committees (if established), mediators, informal and religious leaders as well as representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in the formulation of municipal disaster risk assessments and protection and rescue plans. **Encourage active participation of Roma individuals and diverse community members in the collaborative creation of stakeholder risk and hazard maps during the elaboration of risk and threat assessments for disaster-prone areas. This involvement should extend to at-risk households, contributing to the development of risk and threat assessments, and actively engaging in decision-making processes related to protection and rescue planning.** This opportunity allows representatives to incorporate the needs and risk exposure of individuals and households within the Roma community into the assessment. This assessment serves as a foundational document guiding the development of measures and activities outlined in disaster management plans. By ensuring the inclusion of Roma perspectives, the plans become more comprehensive and reflective of the diverse needs and vulnerabilities present within the community. The Disaster Management Committees will assume responsibility for coordinating disaster-related matters within their respective areas, encompassing flood and open fire prevention, preparedness, and response during crucial periods of the year. Through training and capacity-building initiatives, the aim is for committee members to acquire fundamental knowledge in disaster risk management. This process is designed to foster local ownership and enhance the effectiveness of their roles within the committees, ultimately contributing to improved disaster management practices. Identify specific residents to assess the suitability of foreseen measures for facilitating the swift evacuation or sheltering in places of vulnerable populations. Utilize their testimonials to refine the planning of evacuation routes, ensuring efficient access to shelters and support centres. Such a comprehensive approach aims to address the diverse needs of vulnerable populations, including access to health, social, psychological, and other essential services.	X	X		
Conduct assessments and exercises to verify the effectiveness of disseminating disaster management information among Roma communities. Evaluate the extent to which individuals receive and comprehend information, especially pertaining to early warnings. This testing process aims to ensure that the communication channels are accessible and understandable for Roma people, promoting inclusivity and enhancing the overall effectiveness of disaster management communication within the community.		X		

Members of vulnerable groups, like the general population, require timely and accurate information. Recognizing that some individuals may lack proficiency in official languages, it is essential to promptly disseminate information in languages they understand, including minority languages. Considering that Roma people may use communication channels distinct from the mainstream population, authorities should identify and leverage channels accessible to different communities. Dissemination efforts should extend to languages understood by these communities. Information should be compiled and disseminated in a manner appropriate for the recipients, tailored to their specific living conditions and needs. This approach ensures that communication is inclusive, effective, and culturally sensitive. In numerous disasters, survivors often receive assistance from their neighbours. Establishing an alerting point within the community, such as connecting the phones of informal leaders to the local early warning system, can serve as a crucial mechanism. This setup enables prompt signalling of urgent needs, facilitating the efficient mobilization of resources to areas where they are most needed. Additionally, it plays a vital role in coordinating community-wide alarm activities and organizing a collaborative response from the community to the disaster at hand. * Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, information dissemination was conducted through various channels, including SMS, social media, informative posters, flyers, and television and radio programs, with a specific focus on minority languages. The strategy of utilizing multipliers, such as representatives of vulnerable groups, mediators, and authoritative figures like teachers, medical professionals, nurses, religious leaders, and police officials in collaboration with the aforementioned groups, proved to be successful. This approach ensured a wide-reaching and inclusive distribution of information, engaging key community figures to enhance understanding and compliance within diverse and vulnerable populations.				
Integrate representatives from the Roma community into the planning and monitoring processes of the municipal budget. Through participatory activities, these representatives will be able to provide recommendations for the allocation of funds, including the purchase of equipment based on the previously identified needs within the Roma community. Such an inclusive approach specifically addresses the allocation of substantial budgets to municipalities for the procurement of emergency and disaster management supplies and equipment in Roma settlements. These resources may include medical tests, tools, personal protective equipment (such as masks, disinfectants, and gloves), and other essential items identified through collaborative planning and ongoing monitoring efforts.	X	X		X
Engage representatives from the Roma community in the planning and execution of campaigns and training sessions focused on handling various types of disasters in both secondary and primary schools. This involvement extends to activities organized by the municipality and those supported by third-party bodies, predominantly civil society organizations.	X	X		

In practical terms, this could involve training representatives from the Roma community using the "Training of Trainers" model. These trained individuals would then be equipped to provide first aid and offer psychological support to the at-risk population during times of disaster. Such an inclusive strategy ensures that disaster preparedness initiatives are tailored to the specific needs and context of the Roma community.				
Employ internet activism to enhance warning mechanisms for disaster hazards and danger zones. **Adjust the intensity of online activities in response to the evolving situation, focusing on tasks such as mapping endangered citizens and households, coordinating on-the-ground activities for aid provision, and distributing food and other assistance to vulnerable and marginalized groups.** This dynamic use of internet activism serves as a valuable tool for real-time communication, coordination and support during various stages of disaster response and recovery.	X	X	X	X
Involve the Roma community in the extensive rebuilding and reconstruction of infrastructure and public facilities, including those designated as Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) structural measures. This engagement aims to guarantee that the revitalization of affected areas is achieved through the active participation of Roma individuals, with benefits extending to all citizens. The approach prioritizes Roma-inclusive planning by integrating marginalized perspectives and empowering the Roma population through heightened awareness of their rights and opportunities. This not only contributes to a more resilient and improved community but also fosters a sense of equity and collaboration among all residents.				X
Integrate provisions into existing regulations or establish new regulations to recognize and reward local community champions actively involved in implementing disaster (risk) management activities. This regulatory approach not only encourages and supports community-driven disaster management initiatives but also serves as an acknowledgement of the vital role played by local champions in enhancing overall community resilience. To underscore the importance of local knowledge and recognize residents' crucial role in disaster-risk management (DRM), governments, relief agencies, and other stakeholders can establish digital bank accounts for participants involved in DRM planning. This ensures that everyone contributing to these efforts is compensated for their time and contributions in a secure and transparent manner. The digital public works model, as exemplified by GFDRR (Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery), offers an innovative approach to urban data collection, generation, and validation. This not only strengthens urban resilience but also provides income-generating opportunities and imparts new digital skills to youth, women, and persons with disabilities. This integrated approach fosters a more inclusive and sustainable DRM strategy.	X	X	X	X
Implement trust-based grant making by providing informal leaders, such as disaster management talents/champions, health and education	X			X

mediators, faith leaders, and others, with the autonomy to use small grants. These grants are intended to address pre-identified urgent needs, empowering these leaders to respond swiftly, adapt to evolving situations, and effectively provide lifesaving support to their communities. Both local and central civil protection authorities can play a role in facilitating the mobilization of international organizations and donors. They can also provide funding to civil society organizations, enabling them to deliver essential assets for prevention and emergency/disaster relief. This collaborative approach ensures a streamlined and responsive process to meet the unique needs of communities during times of crisis.				
To ensure that stateless and non-resident Roma people are effectively covered by measures throughout all stages of the disaster management cycle, including those defined in the municipal protection and rescue plan, the following steps can be taken: • **Inclusive Planning and Assessment:** Include the specific needs and vulnerabilities of stateless and non-resident Roma people in the risk assessments and planning processes. Identify encampment areas that can meet hygiene standards and public health requirements during disasters. • **Provision of Adequate Shelter:** Ensure that encampment areas are equipped with adequate facilities to meet hygiene standards, including access to clean water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services. Work towards upgrading or providing temporary shelters that mitigate health risks, especially during disease outbreaks such as the COVID-19 virus. • **Hygiene and Sanitation Support:** Implement specific measures to provide water and hygiene items to those living in substandard housing without running water, emphasizing the importance of hand hygiene and cleanliness. • **Healthcare Access:** Facilitate access to healthcare services for stateless and non-resident Roma populations, addressing any barriers they may face, including issues related to documentation or legal status. • **Prevention of Homelessness:** Develop and implement measures to prevent homelessness among stateless and non-resident Roma people during disasters, ensuring that they have access to safe and secure shelters. • **Legal Protections:** Advocate for legal protection for stateless individuals, ensuring that they have access to necessary services and are not subjected to discrimination during disasters. • **Community Engagement:** Involve representatives from stateless and non-resident Roma communities in the planning and decision-making processes to ensure their perspectives are considered and their needs addressed. • **Education and Awareness:** Conduct educational campaigns to raise awareness among both the general population and stateless/non-resident Roma communities about disaster risks, preparedness measures and available support services. • **International Collaboration:** Collaborate with international organizations and NGOs to secure resources and expertise for the effective	X	X	X	X

implementation of measures that specifically address the needs of stateless and non-resident Roma populations. • **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of measures implemented for stateless and non-resident Roma populations. Adjust and refine strategies based on feedback and lessons learned to improve the overall response. By incorporating these measures into the municipal plan for protection and rescue, authorities can help ensure that the needs of stateless and non-resident Roma people are adequately addressed throughout the entire disaster management cycle.				
To address the educational challenges faced by Roma children from vulnerable groups during disasters, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, several contingency measures can be implemented: • **Immediate Reallocation of Budget:** Allocate or reallocate budget resources specifically for Roma children from vulnerable groups to ensure continuity of their education during emergencies. • **Provision of Technical Equipment:** Provide computers, tablets, smartphones, and other necessary technical equipment to Roma children in vulnerable groups who lack access to these resources for online learning. • **Internet Access Support:** Offer subsidies for mobile internet access, distribute free internet in Roma neighborhoods, and provide SIM-cards to ensure that students have the necessary connectivity for online learning. • **Creation of Educational Programs:** Collaborate with public service broadcasters to create specific TV or radio programs for tele-schooling, taking into consideration the languages of linguistic minorities. • **Printed Educational Material:** Prepare and distribute printed educational materials and homework packages to children who may not have access to online learning resources. • **Involvement of Educational Mediators:** Mobilize Roma educational mediators, school personnel, and social workers to provide support, motivation, and assistance to children from vulnerable groups in transitioning to online education. • **Monitoring and Assessment:** Assess the participation and quality of online education through research or surveys, utilizing feedback to plan and implement further measures for increasing attendance and improving the overall quality of online schooling. • **Language and Social Interaction:** Continue, as much as possible, education in minority languages, ensuring that the linguistic and cultural needs of Roma children are considered. Facilitate social interaction and extracurricular activities, recognizing their importance for the overall well-being and development of students. • **Coordination with Government and Civil Organizations:** Collaborate with local and national governments, civil organizations, and mobile operators to coordinate efforts in providing necessary services and assets for the education of Roma children.		X	X

• **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Design contingency measures with flexibility and adaptability in mind, considering the dynamic nature of emergencies and the evolving needs of vulnerable populations. By implementing these measures, governments and relevant stakeholders can work towards ensuring that Roma children from vulnerable groups have equitable access to education, despite the challenges posed by disasters and emergencies.				
Make public services accessible to vulnerable groups. As in cases of disasters, the work and access to front offices of public services is somehow limited, the vulnerable persons need assistance to reach them in a digital way. However, a significant number of persons belonging to vulnerable groups do not have access to computers or the Internet, or are not able to use those computer systems, sometimes due to illiteracy.			X	X

Factors of Vulnerability Experience of Roma People and Measures that Need to be Taken in Disaster Risk Management

Factors of Roma People's Vulnerability Experience in Disaster	Responses to the crisis in the fields of nondiscrimination, diversity and inclusion
- Social marginalization - Housing vulnerability / inadequate house and living conditions / Unsafe water drinking and sanitation. - Educational disparities. - Economic vulnerability. - Discrimination. - Limited access to healthcare and social services. - Food insecurity and malnutrition. - Displacement and homelessness. - Lack of representation and participation. - Historical trauma and social inclusion.	Comprehensive approach that recognizes their rights, promotes inclusion and diversity, and addresses underlying social, economic, and political inequalities. This includes implementing culturally sensitive disaster preparedness and response measures, improving access to healthcare and social services, promoting education and economic opportunities, combating discrimination and stigma, and empowering Roma communities to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives. The <u>general measures</u> referring to Roma population consider: - Improving housing and living conditions. - Enhancing access to clean water and sanitation, strengthening healthcare systems. - Providing emergency assistance and support. - Promoting the active participation of Roma communities in disaster preparedness and response efforts. - Promoting community-based resilience-building initiatives - Combating stigma and discrimination and fostering meaningful participation of Roma communities in disaster preparedness, response, and recovery efforts. - Specific employment programmes. - Adult education programmes. - Social protection.
	Specific measures pertaining to <u>children</u>: - Free internet. - Scholarships. - Mentorship and Tutorship Programmes. - Educational Mediators. - Free transport to schools. - Support for parents.
	Specific measures pertaining to <u>women</u>: - Available protection shelters for women and their children, victims of gender-based violence in rural areas. - Access to sexual and reproductive healthcare in rural areas. - Comprehensive strategies that prioritize gender-sensitive disaster preparedness, response and recovery efforts. - Strategies that aim to promote women's access to essential services ensure their safety and security and empower them to actively participate in decision-making processes related to disaster risk reduction and resilience-building initiatives.

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The Programme is designed to build up political will and sustained policy engagement of local authorities, to enhance democratic local governance and to build up capacity and stimulate the empowerment of local Roma communities to contribute to the design, implementation and monitoring of plans and projects concerning them through the following outcomes:

1. empowering Roma community - on the individual level (assisting people to practice their basic rights and to expand their capacity and skills), as well as on the community level (assisting people to get organised to voice out their interests around community problem solving, and;
2. improving and expanding the institutions' commitment, capacities, knowledge and skills in working for Roma inclusion, putting in practice the concepts of good governance;
3. contributing to preparation of the local development actions that aim to improve the quality of life for Roma and to reduce the gap between Roma and non-Roma, including in relation to mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic

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The member states of the European Union have decided to link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.

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