

# **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**

In Portugal, the state of emergency started on 19 March and ended on 2 May<sup>1</sup>. The state of emergency was followed by the declaration of the situation of calamity that started on 3 May and is still in force<sup>2</sup>.

During the state of emergency, the Government imposed different restrictions of movement to three different groups: citizens infected with COVID-19 or under observation had to stay in mandatory confinement, with the violation of this duty being a crime of disobedience; citizens over the age of 70 or with chronic illness were subject to a special duty of protection and could only leave the house for some purposes (e.g. acquisition of goods and services, health reasons, short trips for the purpose of physical exercise); all the other citizens were subject to a general duty to stay at home and had less mobility restrictions, being able to leave the house, for example, to go shopping, to work, for health reasons, to help vulnerable people and family members, for volunteering, among others. The police forces had to ensure compliance with the restrictions in force<sup>3</sup>. In addition, due to the occurrence of outbreaks of

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<sup>1</sup> Portugal, [Decree of the President of the Republic 14-A/2020, declaring the state of emergency based on a situation of public calamity](#) (*Decreto do Presidente da República n.º 14-A/2020, que declara o estado de emergência, com fundamento na verificação de uma situação de calamidade pública*), 18 March 2020; Portugal, [Decree of the President of the Republic 17-A/2020, renewing the declaration of the state of emergency based on a situation of public calamity](#) (*Decreto do Presidente da República n.º 17-A/2020, que renova a declaração de estado de emergência, com fundamento na verificação de uma situação de calamidade pública*), 2 April 2020; Portugal, [Decree of the President of the Republic 20-A/2020, that renews the declaration of the state of emergency based on a situation of public calamity](#) (*Decreto do Presidente da República n.º 20-A/2020, que renova a declaração de estado de emergência, com fundamento na verificação de uma situação de calamidade pública*), 17 April 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Portugal, [Resolution of the Council of Minister 33-A/2020 that declared the situation of calamity in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (*Resolução do Conselho de Ministros n.º 33-A/2020 que declara a situação de calamidade, no âmbito da pandemia da doença COVID-19*), 30 April 2020; Portugal, [Resolution of the Council of Ministers 38/2020 that extends the declaration of the situation of calamity in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (*Resolução do Conselho de Ministros n.º 38/2020 que prorroga a declaração da situação de calamidade, no âmbito da pandemia da doença COVID-19*), 17 May 2020; Portugal, [Resolution of the Council of Ministers 40-A/2020, that extends the declaration of the situation of calamity, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (*Resolução do Conselho de Ministros n.º 40-A/2020, que prorroga a declaração da situação de calamidade, no âmbito da pandemia da doença COVID-19*), 29 May 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Portugal, [Decree 2-A/2020, implementing the application of the state of emergency decreed by the President of the Republic](#) (*Decreto n.º 2-A/2020, que regulamenta a aplicação do estado de emergência decretado pelo Presidente da República*), 20 March

COVID-19 in some locations, the Government enforced special limitations on movement by imposing sanitary cordons. The measures with impact on the Roma community were aimed at overcoming social and economic vulnerabilities, for example with regard to housing conditions. All Portuguese citizens, Roma and non-Roma, had to comply with the restrictions imposed by the Government. As mentioned below, in some Roma communities throughout the country there were outbreaks of COVID-19 that called for greater surveillance of the infected persons to avoid the spread of the virus.

The declaration of the situation of calamity imposed less restrictions. As such, people infected with COVID-19 as well as citizens for whom the health authority or other health professionals determined active surveillance remain in mandatory confinement, which is supervised by the police forces. Its violation is a crime of disobedience. For the other citizens, first only a civic duty to stay at home was imposed, so they had to refrain from leaving their houses, with some exceptions such as the acquisition of goods and services, working, health reasons, assisting vulnerable persons, accompanying children, practicing outdoor sports, going to libraries and archives, as well as green areas, among others. Since it was a civic duty, non-compliance was not sanctioned. As of 1 June, the population no longer has a civic duty to stay at home.

As already mentioned in the previous report (see Annex), in the municipality of Moura (South of the country) there were several outbreaks of COVID-19 in Roma communities, specifically in the neighborhood of Espadanal<sup>4</sup> and in the locations of Margaçal<sup>5</sup> and Vale do Touro<sup>6</sup>. In order to contain the spread of the virus in these locations, some restrictions were imposed, including sanitary cordons and mandatory confinement in all locations. These sanitary cordons were similar to others that were implemented in the country, with the specificity of these locations being inhabited only by Roma communities. As stated below, the Moura City Council provided direct support to those families. According to the media,

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2020; Portugal, [Decree 2-B/2020, that regulates the extension of the state of emergency decreed by the President of the Republic](#) (*Decreto n.º 2-B/2020, que regulamenta a prorrogação do estado de emergência decretado pelo Presidente da República*), 2 April 2020; Portugal, [Decree 2-C/2020, that regulates the extension of the state of emergency decreed by the President of the Republic](#) (*Decreto n.º 2-C/2020, que regulamenta a prorrogação do estado de emergência decretado pelo Presidente da República*), 17 April 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Público (2020), "[Na comunidade cigana de Moura há 17 crianças e dois adultos infetados por COVID-19](#)" ("In the Roma community of Moura there are 17 children and two adults infected with COVID-19"), 10 April 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Público (2020), "[Mais uma comunidade cigana infetada por Covid-19 em Moura](#)" ("Another Roma community infected by COVID-19 in Moura"), 23 April 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Público (2020), "[Já são três as comunidades contagiadas pela Covid-19 em Moura](#)" ("There are already three communities infected with Covid-19 in Moura"), 29 April 2020.



on 15 May, of the 76 positive cases confirmed in the municipality of Moura, there were still 4 active cases in Espadanal, 3 in Margaçal and 9 in Vale do Touro, which reflects a decrease in the number of infected persons (originally 33 in Espadanal, 9 in Margaçal and 23 in Vale do Touro)<sup>7</sup>.

According to the Moura City Council to ensure compliance with the mandatory confinement rules, they coordinated with the police forces, specifically the National Republican Guard, by monitoring the access roads, to ensure that no one left the neighborhoods and there were no visits<sup>8</sup>. The media reported that, initially, some people tried to leave the neighbourhood of Espadanal, avoiding the supervision that was being done by the police forces. However, they later complied with the confinement measures<sup>9</sup>. The City Council appointed employees to create a bridge between the communities and the local authority and provide them with the necessary essential goods, such as food, hygiene and cleaning goods, medication and other products in need, for e.g. gas. Only these persons were allowed to enter the neighborhoods. Moreover, through a consistent presence of the City Council political representatives, [social welfare](#) and health technicians near the affected communities, the need for hand hygiene, social distancing and the use of masks was reinforced among the Roma communities, following the public health rules, namely by providing masks for the first exits of the people that tested negative for COVID-19. According to Moura City Council, the confinement measures succeeded since the number of infected people dropped considerably as proved by the results of the second round of tests<sup>10</sup>.

According to the Moura City Council the measures that affected the Roma community the most were the confinement measures. Since most people had no symptoms of the disease, they often asked to leave their neighbourhood or to receive family visits. On the other hand, several people were scared of the disease and asked for unnecessary medication that could hurt them. Nonetheless, in general, the Moura City Council had the perception, through the contacts made with the communities by the City Council political representatives and technicians, that the Roma communities in the municipality ended up recognising the importance of the measures adopted<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Diário do Alentejo (2020), "[Covid-19: 50 recuperados no concelho de Moura](#)" ("Covid-19: 50 persons recovered in the municipality of Moura"), 15 May 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Moura City Council, written response, 27 May 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Observador (2020), "[Comunidade cigana do Espadanal, em Moura, tem 32 casos de infeção confirmados: 17 são crianças e jovens](#)" ("Roma community of Espadanal, in Moura, has 32 confirmed cases of infection: 17 children and young people"), 12 April 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Moura City Council, written response, 27 May 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Moura City Council, written response, 27 May 2020.



In the beginning of May, the media reported that the Roma community of Lagoa Negra, in the municipality of Barcelos (North of the country), came under surveillance by the National Republican Guard after a child had tested positive for COVID-19. The community, of about 50 people, was all tested, and was under surveillance to avoid social contacts with other nearby Roma communities<sup>12</sup>. On 28 May, the media reported that there was only one inconclusive case and, as a result, the confinement measures imposed on this community ended. According to the media, the community behaved in an exemplary manner, complying with the guidelines issued by the health authorities<sup>13</sup>. According to the media, the case of Lagoa Negra was closely monitored by several entities, namely by the local health authorities, the police forces, the local authorities and, specifically, the mediation project of the municipality, which has a direct and consistent contact with the Roma community<sup>14</sup>.

On 1 June, the media reported that some people from Roma families living in the social neighborhood of Quinta da Mina in Azambuja (Lisbon region) had tested positive for COVID-19. This situation raised concerns with the local authority, which considered the possibility of requesting a sanitary cordon to those Roma families<sup>15</sup>. On 2 June, when questioned by the media about the reason for the disclosure of the ethnicity of the people infected, the President of the City Council stated that "Roma families" and other "normal families like us" lived in the neighbourhood, which was built under the Special Rehousing Plan, and that only Roma families were being tested because they were the only ones that had tested positive for the virus<sup>16</sup>. According to the President of the City Council, the best method to stop the outbreak of COVID-19 would be to create a sanitary cordon for those families, making sure that the infected persons stayed inside their homes, which, according to him, could be difficult for Roma families since they have several children and are always going outside. As such, the main concern was the non-compliance with the mandatory confinement rules imposed to those that tested positive for COVID-19<sup>17</sup>. A representative

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<sup>12</sup> Jornal de Notícias (2020), "[GNR vigia comunidade cigana em Barcelos após caso positivo de Covid-19](#)" ("GNR monitors Roma community in Barcelos after positive case of Covid-19"), 9 May 2020.

<sup>13</sup> O Minho (2020), "[Comunidade cigana em Barcelos já está livre da covid-19](#)" ("Roma community in Barcelos is already free of Covid-19"), 28 May 2020.

<sup>14</sup> O Minho (2020), "[Comunidade cigana em Barcelos já está livre da covid-19](#)" ("Roma community in Barcelos is already free of Covid-19"), 28 May 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Público (2020), "[Covid-19: Câmara da Azambuja admite pedir cordão sanitário, mas delegado regional de saúde rejeita](#)" (Covid-19: Azambuja City Council admits asking for a sanitary cordon, but regional health delegate refuses"), 1 June 2020.

<sup>16</sup> Público (2020), "[Autarca da Azambuja insiste em cordão sanitário a prédio habitado por famílias de "etnia cigana"](#)" ("Azambuja City Council President insists on a sanitary cordon to a building inhabited by Roma families"), 2 June 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Público (2020), "[Autarca da Azambuja insiste em cordão sanitário a prédio habitado por famílias de "etnia cigana"](#)" ("Azambuja City Council President insists on a sanitary cordon to a building inhabited by Roma families"), 2 June 2020.



from the *Letras Nómadas* association considered it “inadmissible” and “shameful” to want to impose a sanitary cordon in just one building in the middle of a social neighbourhood, and pointed out that the adoption of solutions of this type should be avoided just because the persons infected are poor or from a minority group. The representative also stated that several people do not comply with the rules of social coexistence, but that non-compliance is not exclusive of any community or group<sup>18</sup>. In addition, the Secretary of State, who is coordinating the pandemic intervention in the Lisbon and Tagus Valley region<sup>19</sup>, stressed that any reference to ethnicity or religion should be avoided when talking about patients infected with COVID-19 so that there is no stigma regarding the infected population<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, the Regional Health Delegate of Lisbon and Tagus Valley also rejected the need to implement a sanitary cordon, because they considered that it was sufficient that these Roma families, similarly to other infected families, complied with the mandatory confinement<sup>21</sup>. In a Parliamentary debate, the Prime Minister also admitted to disagreeing with the President of the Azambuja City Council<sup>22</sup>. The sanitary cordon was not imposed. This case is different from the sanitary cordons in the region of Moura because it tried to impose a sanitary cordon to a building where Roma families lived, inside a social neighborhood<sup>23</sup>. In Moura, the sanitary cordons and the confinement measures were imposed in certain locations that were only inhabited by Roma communities<sup>24</sup>.

As already mentioned in the previous reports, during the state of emergency only the services that were considered essential could stay open such as, for e.g., supermarkets, bakeries, health and social support services, essential public services and their repair and maintenance (water, electricity, gas), opticians, veterinaries, pharmacies, among others. The situation of calamity saw the gradual lifting of the suspensions and interdictions imposed by the state of emergency and the gradual return of the economic activity to its normal state. The reopening of businesses was

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<sup>18</sup> Público (2020), “[Autarca da Azambuja insiste em cordão sanitário a prédio habitado por famílias de “etnia cigana”](#)” (“Azambuja City Council President insists on a sanitary cordon for a building inhabited by Roma families”), 2 June 2020.

<sup>19</sup> For more information, [see the Government webpage on the appointment of five Secretaries of State, one per region, to coordinate the implementation of the measures to fight the pandemic](#).

<sup>20</sup> Público (2020), “[Autarca da Azambuja insiste em cordão sanitário a prédio habitado por famílias de “etnia cigana”](#)” (“Azambuja City Council President insists on a sanitary cordon for a building inhabited by Roma families”), 2 June 2020.

<sup>21</sup> Público (2020), “[Autarca da Azambuja insiste em cordão sanitário a prédio habitado por famílias de “etnia cigana”](#)” (“Azambuja City Council President insists on a sanitary cordon for a building inhabited by Roma families”), 2 June 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Portugal, [Diário da Assembleia da República, I Série, No. 58](#), 4 June 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Público (2020), “[Autarca da Azambuja insiste em cordão sanitário a prédio habitado por famílias de “etnia cigana”](#)” (“Azambuja City Council President insists on a sanitary cordon for a building inhabited by Roma families”), 2 June 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Moura City Council, telephone response, 15 June 2020.

implemented in several phases. With respect to Roma, the main constraint was the closure of fairs and markets, their main source of income. According to the media, the Association of Roma Mediators of Portugal pointed out that the restrictions on fairs and markets imposed by the Government due to the pandemic brought additional difficulties to Roma citizens, since they were prevented from carrying out the activity that in the great majority of the cases is the only professional occupation and income source that supports them<sup>25</sup>. On 18 May, the Government allowed the re-opening of fairs and markets for the sale of products, imposing the approval of a contingency plan<sup>26</sup>. The fairs and markets are being gradually opened, although subject to public health contingencies, which, on the one hand, restricts the activities and, on the other, the number of clients, affecting their income<sup>27</sup>.

## 1.2 Implications of measures

The COVID-19 pandemic has aggravated the vulnerability of Roma communities, similarly to what happened with other disadvantaged groups. According to the media, the President of the Association of Roma Mediators of Portugal stated that Roma faced many difficulties in Portugal due to the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>28</sup>. With regard employment, since fairs and markets were closed, their income is lower or inexistent and, therefore, they have less money to buy food and need more help. In an effort to reach the community, the association sent an e-mail to some members of the Roma community with a set of recommendations based on the Directorate-General for Health guidelines, specifically regarding hygiene, isolation, advising against group activities and travel and also mentioning entities that provide food aid, including welfare institutions like *Cáritas* or the local authorities and monitored some situations more closely<sup>29</sup>. The economic difficulties faced by the Roma community were also a concern of the

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<sup>25</sup> TVI 24 (2020), "[Sem poder vender nas feiras, comunidade cigana já teme a fome](#)" ("Unable to sell at fairs, Roma community already fears hunger"), 24 March 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Portugal, [Resolution of the Council of Ministers 38/2020 that extends the declaration of the situation of calamity in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (*Resolução do Conselho de Ministros nº 38/2020 que prorroga a declaração da situação de calamidade, no âmbito da pandemia da doença COVID-19*), 17 May 2020.

<sup>27</sup> For e.g., see *Diário de Notícias* (2020), "[Feiras da Ladra, Relógio e Galinheiras regressaram no fim de semana](#)" ("Fairs of Ladra, Relógio and Galinheiras return in the weekend"), 22 May 2020.

<sup>28</sup> TVI 24 (2020), "[Sem poder vender nas feiras, comunidade cigana já teme a fome](#)" ("Unable to sell at fairs, Roma community already fears hunger"), 24 March 2020.

<sup>29</sup> TVI 24 (2020), "[Sem poder vender nas feiras, comunidade cigana já teme a fome](#)" ("Unable to sell at fairs, Roma community already fears hunger"), 24 March 2020.



President of the *Letras Nómadas* association, who underlined that, with the fairs and markets closed, a lot of Roma people had no job<sup>30</sup>.

In Portugal, the National Health Service is universal and, therefore, the Roma community has the same access as the general population. There are no reports of cases of Roma citizens being unable to access pharmacies, health centres and hospitals. However, in some cases, there was a special effort to provide essential goods, such as food and medicines. According to Moura City Council, the employees provided the Roma communities that were subject to confinement measures with medicines and coordinated with the health centre with regard to the medical prescriptions for the chronic illnesses of those citizens. With regard to education, for students from the 1st to the 9th grade access to education is done through distance learning until the end of the school year, using digital methods, which is reinforced with the support of the television daily broadcast of educational content. Students from the 10th grade will also continue with distance learning. With respect to the 11th and 12th grades, the Government decided to start the classroom lessons as of 18 May, but only for the subjects whose final exams are necessary for accessing higher education<sup>31</sup>. Finally, higher education institutions must also ensure the gradual and effective combination of face-to-face activities with digital means. As detailed below, on topic 2.3., several measures were adopted to ensure that children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, including Roma children, can have access to education. Many Roma children faced difficulties in education arising from the lack of computers or other digital means and the lack of electricity. According to the media, the majority of Roma children do not have access to a computer or television and, in many cases, even electricity, which means they are unable to accompany distance learning<sup>32</sup>. This difficulty was faced by several children with social disadvantaged backgrounds.

As mentioned in the previous report, thousands of Roma families live in “non-classic” houses (e.g. tents, sheds, caravans), without access to running water, electricity and basic sanitation, which makes them particularly vulnerable during the pandemic. The living conditions of Roma were one of the concerns of the *Letras Nómadas* association that

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<sup>30</sup> Diário de Notícias (2020), “[Ciganos: Ensino à distância? Medidas de higiene? “Como? Se até a comida falta”](#)” (“Roma: Distance learning? Hygiene measures? “How? If even the food is missing”), 28 April 2020.

<sup>31</sup> Portugal, [Resolution of the Council of Ministers 33-C/2020 that establishes a strategy to lift the containment measures adopted within the scope of the combating the COVID-19 pandemic](#) (*Resolução do Conselho de Ministros n.º 33-C/2020 que estabelece uma estratégia de levantamento de medidas de confinamento no âmbito do combate à pandemia de doença COVID 19*), 30 April 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Diário de Notícias (2020), “[Ciganos: Ensino à distância? Medidas de higiene? “Como? Se até a comida falta”](#)” (“Roma: Distance learning? Hygiene measures? “How? If even the food is missing”), 28 April 2020.

underlined the difficulties in complying with the guidelines of the health authorities, such as washing their hands frequently, since these families, in most cases, do not have access to running water<sup>33</sup>.

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

According to the information provided by the High Commissioner for Migration, in Portugal there are around 37,000 Roma and Roma communities represent approximately 0.4% of the Portuguese population. The High Commissioner for Migration underlined that the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified previous situations of economic and social inequality, lack of living conditions and precarious employment, placing vulnerable groups, such as Roma populations, at greater risk<sup>34</sup>.

As mentioned in the previous report, it is estimated that more than 3,000 Roma families live in precarious homes. The organisations, associations and municipalities have identified at least 70 particularly vulnerable families across the country, including 15 families evicted from the Alfredo Bensaúde neighbourhood, in Lisbon, which were sleeping in tents, vans and building landings<sup>35</sup>.

As reported by the media, the *Letras Nómadas* association stated that at least half of the Roma population that lives in Portugal was starving due to the pandemic, mainly due to the lack of income as a result of the closure of markets and fairs. Roma associations have been helping the community with food and medicine<sup>36</sup>.

## **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**

The High Commissioner for Migration informed us that, even before the state of emergency was decreed, to raise awareness among the Roma communities, they sent information issued by the Directorate-General for Health to Roma associations and to the Choices Projects on COVID-19 and on measures to prevent contamination. The information issued by the

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<sup>33</sup> Público (2020), "[Como estão a enfrentar a epidemia comunidades ciganas em acampamentos sem água corrente?](#)" ("How are Roma communities facing the epidemic in camps without running water?"), 25 March 2020.

<sup>34</sup> High Commissioner for Migration, written response, 1 June 2020.

<sup>35</sup> Público (2020), "[Como estão a enfrentar a epidemia comunidades ciganas em acampamentos sem água corrente?](#)" ("How are Roma communities facing the epidemic in camps without running water?"), 25 March 2020.

<sup>36</sup> Diário de Notícias (2020), "[Ciganos: Ensino à distância? Medidas de higiene? 'Como? Se até a comida falta'](#)" ("Roma: Distance learning? Hygiene measures? 'How? If even the food is missing'"), 28 April 2020.

Directorate-General for Health has been regularly made available on the Facebook page of the High Commissioner for Migration, since March 2020. According to the High Commissioner for Migration, the support of the projects was extremely important due to their [in-depth knowledge](#) of the specificities of the local Roma communities, which allows them to present adequate responses to each community<sup>37</sup>. In addition, the High Commissioner for Migration supported the awareness-raising and prevention campaign on COVID-19 among the Roma communities “O Ciganinho Chico alerta! Parte I e II” through a protocol signed with *Sílaba Dinâmica* (intercultural association), *Letras Nómadas* (association for research and revitalisation of the Roma communities) and also *Ribalta Ambição* (association for gender equality in Roma communities)<sup>38</sup>. Finally, the High Commissioner for Migration, in coordination with their local partners such as the local authorities, the local health and civil protection services, the Roma associations, Municipal and Intercultural Mediators Projects and the 103 Choices Projects across the country, have been able to identify and support situations of special vulnerability. The Choices Projects aim to promote the social inclusion of children and young people from socio-economic vulnerable origins, namely those of immigrant descent or from ethnic minorities<sup>39</sup>. The Municipal and Intercultural Mediators Projects aim to strengthen the integration of the most vulnerable populations, namely Roma and migrant communities, as well as deepen intercultural dialogue between the various communities and the host society, promoting social cohesion and improving the quality of life of all citizens living in the national territory<sup>40</sup>. For example, in cases where, in small areas or neighbourhoods, cases of infection by Covid-19 were detected, the local stakeholders mentioned above were immediately mobilised to ensure more extensive testing and support in the necessary measures, such as confinement and availability of food and medicine<sup>41</sup>.

The Secretary of State that is coordinating the intervention for the pandemic in the Algarve region informed us that, even though there were no cases of COVID-19 in the 536 Roma or nomad families that live in the region, they still promoted awareness-raising actions on the protection and hygiene measures that the Roma communities must adopt to prevent the spread of the virus. In addition, in Portimão there is a container with two

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<sup>37</sup> High Commissioner for Migration, written response, 1 June 2020.

<sup>38</sup> For more information, see the videos on the “[O Ciganinho Chico alerta! Parte I](#)” and “[O Ciganinho Chico alerta! Parte II](#)” campaign.

<sup>39</sup> For more information, see [the High Commission for Migration webpage on the Choices Programme](#).

<sup>40</sup> For more information, see [the High Commission for Migration webpage on the Municipal and Intercultural Mediators Projects](#).

<sup>41</sup> High Commissioner for Migration, written response, 1 June 2020.

rooms and two bathrooms in case there is a need to isolate citizens<sup>42</sup>. According to the media, the municipality of Portimão in the Algarve region carried out awareness-raising actions near Roma communities, aiming to alert the communities for the need to adopt new social behaviours and good practices to contain the spread of the virus. The awareness-raising actions were based on information of the local authority, considering the level of literacy of the community that aimed to reinforce the recommendations of the health authorities, as well as alert and raise awareness regarding some common practices of Roma daily living, namely discouraging group trips<sup>43</sup>.

On 18 March, the EAPN (European Anti-Poverty Network) Portugal underlined the difficulties felt by more vulnerable persons as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, urging all entities, public and private, to consider the difficulties faced by Roma communities across the country, that are extremely vulnerable due to the lack of housing, hygiene and health conditions. In addition, EAPN also points out the need to protect elderly persons, precarious workers and to pay special attention to gender inequality situations that may arise from the work overload faced by women<sup>44</sup>.

On 9 April, the EAPN Portugal launched a campaign called “SOS Roma Communities” to raise money for the purchase of safety and hygiene kits to give to Roma communities. The kits were mainly aimed at the most deprived families, such as those that live in camps and tents, in surroundings that harm dignity and endanger individual and community health. These kits, which cost €22 in total, consist of masks, gloves, alcohol, soap, disinfectant wipes and bleach. In its first phase, the campaign was aimed at around 100 families across several municipalities in the North, Centre and Alentejo regions, namely in the municipalities of Elvas, Beja, Mourão, Guarda, Fundão, Viseu, Braga, Barcelos and Porto, but they intended to extend it to the entire country<sup>45</sup>. As such, EAPN Portugal relaunched the campaign on 1 May, lasting until 31 May. To gain greater visibility in the media, the singer Salvador Sobral (winner of the Eurovision festival in 2018) became the spokesperson of the campaign. According to EAPN Portugal, during the first phase of the campaign, 500 kits were purchased and 126 families were helped. The organisation was

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<sup>42</sup> Secretary of State of Fishing (coordinating the pandemic intervention in the Algarve region), written response, 29 May 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Sul Informação (2020), “[Portimão lança campanha entre a comunidade cigana para ajudar a travar a Covid-19](#)” (“Portimão launches campaign among the Roma community to help stop Covid-19”), 27 March 2020.

<sup>44</sup> Portugal, EAPN Portugal (2020), [As implicações do Coronavírus em Portugal: a posição da EAPN Portugal](#). (The implications of coronavirus in Portugal: the position of EAPN Portugal), 18 March 2020.

<sup>45</sup> For more information on [the “SOS Roma Communities” campaign, see the webpage of EAPN Portugal](#).

able to raise €9,500 through its associates, some companies and other persons<sup>46</sup>.

On 5 May, in Barcelos, several kits purchased under the SOS Roma Communities campaign were delivered to 37 Roma families. The representative for the social action department of Barcelos City Council stressed the need to raise awareness among the Roma community to the risks associated with common practices in their daily lives, advising against group travel (e.g. trips to the supermarkets or to the hospital) and the sharing of public bathrooms with persons from the same household<sup>47</sup>.

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

On 31 March, the association *Animar* stated that, as a consequence of the state of emergency, the Roma communities were in a situation of extraordinary vulnerability, due to their social and economic characteristics, to which it was urgent to respond<sup>48</sup>. In this context, they urged that some issues were considered and effective measures were taken by the Government. As such, considering that Roma families are economically dependent from street vending in fairs and markets and, thus, their activity is compromised, they believed it was essential to provide for exceptional financial support measures to fill the lack of income. In addition, considering the precarious conditions of the Roma families, they understood that it was essential to provide adequate housing and access to basic necessities that allowed the isolation required by the state of emergency. Regarding the nomadic families, they pointed out that it was necessary to create nomadic parks in each district with free access to water, sanitary and kitchen facilities. Finally, they underlined the need for health support that allows diagnosis and sanitary isolation when necessary, as well as social support for food, clothing and hygiene items. Considering the fact that in many municipalities there is the position of Intercultural Mediator, they should act as sources of information among Roma communities to explain the measures that were adopted under the state of emergency, as well as be involved in drafting specific contingency plans for local Roma communities by the municipalities. Finally, in the light of the suspension of classroom activities, the association considers it essential to ensure that students belonging to Roma communities have access to means and resources that guarantee the continuity of their

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<sup>46</sup> For more information on [the relaunching of the "SOS Roma Communities" campaign see the EAPN Portugal webpage](#).

<sup>47</sup> For more information, see [the Barcelos City Council webpage on the hygiene kits to fight Covid-19 that were given to the Roma communities](#).

<sup>48</sup> Animar (2020), "[Animar – Associação Portuguesa para o Desenvolvimento Local pede reforço de medidas de apoio às comunidades ciganas](#)", 31 March 2020.

studies. The *Animar* association sent these recommendations to the Government<sup>49</sup>.

In general, Roma, as Portuguese citizens, can apply to State support measures for people with low income, such as the Social Insertion Income<sup>50</sup>. In addition, specific measures to support Roma citizens during the pandemic were implemented. According to the High Commissioner for Migration, the budget for the 4th Support Programme for Roma Associations, which was launched on 29 May 2020, was increased from €32,000 to €50,000. Due to the pandemic, the option for “Activities or actions of food support or other related to the current social emergency” was created, which made it possible for the Roma Associations applying to present projects on specific initiatives to respond to the support needs identified in the community<sup>51</sup>. The 4th Support Programme for Roma Associations aims to support projects lasting up to 12 months, from 1 July 2020 to 30 June 2021, and with budgets up to €6,000. The period for submitting the applications will run until 18 June<sup>52</sup>.

Lisbon City Council informed us that it has developed a set of programmes and measures for the vulnerable population that, even though not directed to any specific group, due to its cross-sectional nature, also covers the Roma community and other nomads in the city<sup>53</sup>. On 20 April, the Social Emergency Fund’s operating rules were changed, in order to simplify support to households in situations of severe housing emergency or emerging economic need, due to an abnormal reduction or significant reduction in income. The Social Emergency Fund is aimed at households that are in a housing emergency situation, who receive a maximum amount of €1,000 per family for a series of eligible expenses<sup>54</sup>. In addition, Lisbon City Council suspended all rent payments in municipal housing until 30 June, after which, the amount that was not charged can be paid for 18 months without any interest or penalty. This measure covers about 24,000 families and 70,000 persons<sup>55</sup>. In the social neighbourhood Alfredo Bensaúde, 11 families from the Roma community were removed from the

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<sup>49</sup> Animar (2020), “[Animar – Associação Portuguesa para o Desenvolvimento Local pede reforço de medidas de apoio às comunidades ciganas](#)”, 31 March 2020.

<sup>50</sup> For more information, see [the Social Security webpage on the Social Insertion Income](#).

<sup>51</sup> High Commissioner for Migration, written response, 1 June 2020.

<sup>52</sup> For more information, [see the High Commissioner for Migration webpage on the 4th Support Programme for Roma Associations](#).

<sup>53</sup> Lisbon City Council, written response, 8 June 2020.

<sup>54</sup> Lisbon City Council, written response, 8 June 2020. Câmara Municipal de Lisboa (Lisbon City Council) (2020), “[Alteração das Regras de Funcionamento do Fundo de Emergência Social do Município de Lisboa](#)”, Ano XXVII, 2.º Suplemento ao Boletim Municipal n.º 1366, 23 April 2020.

<sup>55</sup> Lisbon City Council, written response, 8 June 2020. For more information, [see the Lisbon City Council webpage on the temporary support measures for families, companies and jobs in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic](#).

street and housed, since they were unable to carry out the confinement imposed by the health authorities. These families were evicted from houses illegally occupied in the social neighbourhood and were living in the streets or in makeshift accommodation<sup>56</sup>. Moreover, daily contacts were made to monitor economic and health needs and monitor cases of domestic violence with resident's associations, parish councils and partners of the BIP/ZIP Programme on Neighbourhoods and areas of priority intervention in Lisbon. Some BIP/ZIP projects are in locations where the Roma community is present and, thus, had an important role during the pandemic, through measures such as: manufacturing and distributing masks; raising and distributing food goods; providing information and support to the community on the challenges posed by the impact of COVID-19; providing school support to students, through the distribution of school materials, by teaching them how to use computers and through the supply of meals; supply of medicines and meals; supply of milk to families with children up to two years old; and supporting families on issues regarding social security, finances, access to courts and justice and worker's rights<sup>57</sup>. Finally, there was a solidary action for the distribution of food goods in municipal neighbourhoods, in cooperation with the resident's associations, markets and fairs of Lisbon as well as producers<sup>58</sup>.

Moura City Council provided information on the measures adopted to support the Roma communities that were in mandatory confinement in the municipality. As mentioned above, the municipality employees, duly protected, ensured the provision of the necessary goods to all the households. This measure allowed people to stay home and not resort to family members who lived in other neighbourhoods, thus not placing the health of others at risk. The families were questioned about food, medicine, hygiene and other products they needed. Almost every day requests were made to the employees, who promptly sent them to the family who had requested them. The baskets were different for each household, depending on its members, and were made up of several products (e.g. meat, fruit, fish, past, hygiene and cleaning products). For the municipality to be able to respond to all of these requests, agreements were formalised with a commercial area and two pharmacies. According to the City Council, the presence of children in the households was also taken into account, providing them with age-appropriate food and hygiene products. Women were also provided with feminine hygiene products<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> Público (2020), "[Despejos no Bairro Alfredo Bensaúde continuam em tempo de pandemia](#)" ("Evictions in the Alfredo Bensaúde neighbourhood continue in times of pandemic"), 14 March 2020.

<sup>57</sup> Lisbon City Council, written response, 8 June 2020.

<sup>58</sup> Lisbon City Council, written response, 8 June 2020.

<sup>59</sup> Moura City Council, written response, 27 May 2020.

The Ombudsman informed us to have received a complaint following an infection outbreak in a peripheral neighbourhood in Moura due to lack of access to food and medicine, urging the provision of those goods for free. The Ombudsman found that the Moura City Council had provided the delivery of food and other goods. The local authorities justified charging for those goods because the Social Insertion Income, a State support for people with low income that many Roma families have, had not been suspended or reduced. The City Council also stated to have support schemes for people in need to buy food and medicines. The Ombudsman sought to clarify the situation of children, since, due to the suspension of school activities, they had stopped receiving school meals, which would mean an increase in family expenditure. According to the Ombudsman, the municipality replied that there was no interest shown in receiving school meals<sup>60</sup>.

The Ombudsman also informed us that, based on news that were being reported in the media regarding the vulnerability of Roma they made some inquiries in three cases. First, regarding a Roma community living on the outskirts of Marinha Grande in extremely precarious conditions, without water, electricity or sanitation. The Marinha Grande City Council stated that they were monitoring the situation, along with the Public Security Police and the Social Security, and raising awareness about the general duty to stay at home. In addition, there were several donations of food and hygiene products to those communities. Second, the Ombudsman also made some inquiries regarding a group of people that arrived in Évora and were hosted on municipal land 20 km away from the municipality. The City Council stated that it did not have a closer place that allowed their settlement with animals. Moreover, they stated that various goods were donated, such as food, including baby food and diapers. To ensure access to running water, a tank was installed and bottled water was made available. The people from this group were not in isolation and, therefore, were able to travel to nearby places to shop for food and were made aware of the preventive measures adopted. The third situation that was followed by the Ombudsman was in the neighbourhood of Pedreiras in Beja (South of the country). With more than 100 children attending schools and benefiting from school meals, there was a concern about an increase in family expenditure. However, this was not the case, since schools, which remained open to provide food support to students, confirmed the daily distribution of meals<sup>61</sup>.

The Calouste Gulbenkian foundation created a fund of 5.75 million euros, to be distributed across the areas of health, science, education, culture and civil society. The money earmarked for civil society includes money to

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<sup>60</sup> Ombudsman, written response, 1 June 2020.

<sup>61</sup> Ombudsman, written response, 1 June 2020.



strengthen the capacity responses of food banks and helping associations that work with Roma, immigrants and refugees, in partnership with the High Commissioner for Migration<sup>62</sup>. A sum of €100,000 (€75,000 from the foundation and €25,000 from the High Commissioner for Migration) is being distributed among 42 entities across the country, that have already begun delivering essential goods to more than 17,000 immigrant, refugee and Roma people<sup>63</sup>.

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

The Ministry of Education informed us that several measures were adopted to help children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, including Roma children. As mentioned above, with regard to some grades, schools are providing classes through distance learning methods. Also, some schools have remained open to provide daily meals to students in need and to support students with special educational needs and children up to 12 years old or other dependants of essential service workers<sup>64</sup>. Since distance learning requires technological resources a needs assessment was carried out in all public schools, as well as a series of partnerships for the consistent distribution of equipment. In fact, collaborations with municipalities and civil society organisations made it possible to distribute computers to thousands of students who did not have them. A plan is under preparation to guarantee computers and Internet access for all students in the next school year. Specifically, as regards the inclusion of Roma children, the Directorate-General for Education made data available on their website specifically regarding working with Roma students to support schools<sup>65</sup>. In addition, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of State and Presidency presented a set of proposals for action and invited all schools to share, through a website, initiatives, strategies and solutions for children and young people, namely those in need or in a vulnerable situation, pointing out that it is essential to support students who are at greater risk of social exclusion<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>62</sup> For more information, see [the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation webpage on the Covid-19 Emergency Fund](#).

<sup>63</sup> Público (2020), "[Cem mil euros para socorrer minorias. "Não tinha nem batatas!"](#)" ("One hundred thousand euros to help minorities. "I didn't even have potatoes!"), 3 June 2020.

<sup>64</sup> Portugal, [Decree-Law 10-A/2020, establishing exceptional and temporary measures regarding the epidemic of the new Coronavirus Covid-19](#) (*Decreto-Lei n.º 10-A/2020, que estabelece medidas excecionais e temporárias relativas à situação epidemiológica do novo Coronavírus – COVID-19*), 13 March 2020. This Decree-Law had several amendments. The last amendment was by Law 16/2020 of 29 May.

<sup>65</sup> Ministry of Education, written response, 2 June 2020. For more information, see [the Directorate-General for Education webpage on resources and good practices](#).

<sup>66</sup> Portugal, Ministério da Educação; Ministério do Estado e da Presidência (Ministry of Education; Ministry of State and Presidency) (2020), [Intervenção educativa para crianças e jovens em situação de vulnerabilidade](#), 20 March 2020.



The Ombudsman reported a complaint regarding the lack of educational access for a group of children from a social neighbourhood in Loures, due to the lack of electricity, which made it impossible to follow school activities on television or through other electronic means, such as a computer. Twelve children from the 1st to 7th grades were affected. The Ombudsman stated that the situation was being monitored by Loures City Council and the school group, through the delivery of worksheets and other educational materials and the delivery of school meals. According to the Ombudsman, the same method was adopted in a Roma community living in Marinha Grande due to the lack of electricity and the widespread illiteracy in the use of electronic equipment. As such, the City Council informed the Ombudsman that they adopted a strategy for the delivery and collection of study materials in schools alongside with the supply of meals. This was also the case for a nomad family camping in Évora, since the children, despite having no connexion to the school establishments of the municipality, were receiving worksheets from a teacher. In Moura, the Ombudsman confirmed that a process for the delivery and collection of teaching materials, including books and activity sheets, was underway, to enable the follow-up defined for the “Study at Home” activities<sup>67</sup>. This was also confirmed by the Moura City Council<sup>68</sup>.

Faro City Council informed us that, among the measures to support Roma children in the municipality, the Lusco-Fusco Project had a constant presence near the community, in order to monitor and support children integrated or not into the school environment, ensuring follow-up education, as well as informal education for parents. According to the City Council, children were provided with food support, the schools were given €20,000 for the purchase of technological equipment and a vehicle was made available to deliver and collect school work, in direct collaboration with the police forces (Escola Segura – Safe School)<sup>69</sup>.

Lisbon City Council informed us that around 8,450 students (including Roma and nomadic students) from public schools in Lisbon, received meals for breakfast, lunch and snacks, during the suspension of school activities due to the pandemic. Meals were available in a take-away system, for reasons of hygiene and safety, in schools referred to as a collection point, in all school groups, between 12:00h and 13:30h. Moreover, 3,319 portable computers with Internet access were distributed to all school groups in the municipality, for students from the 3rd and 4th grades that benefited from social support, of which 254 are adapted for students with

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<sup>67</sup> Ombudsman, written response, 1 June 2020.

<sup>68</sup> Moura City Council, written response, 27 May 2020.

<sup>69</sup> Faro City Council, written reply, 27 May 2020.

special educational needs. The students who received the equipment did not have technological means at home to follow distance learning<sup>70</sup>.

The High Commissioner for Migration, through the Choices Projects, is working with more than 1,000 children and young people from Roma communities. They have provided school support through the delivery and collection of school materials, as well as long distance school support (individual or in group) and, when necessary, access to food<sup>71</sup>.

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

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

In Portugal, the negative public reactions regarding Roma focused on the public speeches of a deputy from the *Chega* Party, a right-wing party in the Parliament.

On 28 April, he questioned the Minister of Health in Parliament regarding a Roma community in the municipality of Moura that was allegedly refusing to take COVID-19 tests, asking how the health authorities were going to act, what measures would be taken to ensure that the situation would not repeat itself and that the Roma community would not be exempt from the responsibilities and duties imposed<sup>72</sup>.

In declarations to the media, the *Chega* Party deputy claimed that a specific containment plan was necessary for the Roma community. According to the deputy, there were several situations of “non-compliance or alienation from the Roma community” regarding the rules imposed by the health authorities during the pandemic. The deputy stated that “the Roma community is a serious public security problem”. He argued that we have to stop pretending that this “problem” does not exist, explaining that the COVID-19 pandemic is an “excellent time” to take on “the problem” and act on Roma. He also announced that he was establishing contacts with three ideologically right-wing parties to move his proposal forward. However, none of the parties supported his proposal<sup>73</sup>.

According to the media, the *Chega* deputy stated that he would advance with his proposal even without support. The media reported that the *Chega* deputy’s proposal for a specific plan for the Roma community aimed at

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<sup>70</sup> Lisbon City Council, written response, 8 June 2020.

<sup>71</sup> High Commissioner for Migration, written response, 1 June 2020.

<sup>72</sup> Portugal, Parlamento (Parliament), [Pergunta n.º 1963/XIV/1. Recusa de uma comunidade cigana de Moura em realizar testes ao COVID-19](#) (Question 1963/XIV/1: Refusal of a Roma community in Moura to carry out tests on COVID-19), 28 April 2020.

<sup>73</sup> Jornal i (2020), [“Chega quer plano de confinamento “específico” para comunidade cigana”](#) (“Chega wants “specific” confinement plan for Roma community”), 4 May 2020.

more policing in the areas of residence of these communities, greater investment in training and awareness actions and specific containment rules, as well as an urgent survey to know the composition, quantification and location of Roma communities in Portugal<sup>74</sup>.

On 7 May, in the biweekly debate in the Parliament, the deputy from *Chega* questioned the Prime Minister on whether he agreed or not with the fact that there is a problem with the Roma community in Portugal and also on what the Prime Minister plans to do with regard to the repeated non-compliance with the confinement rules by Roma people<sup>75</sup>.

On 3 June, the deputy from *Chega* in the biweekly debate held in Parliament, again questioned the Prime Minister about the problem with the Roma in Portugal that he believes exists<sup>76</sup>.

### 3.2 Positive change in attitudes

In response to the proposal made by the *Chega* deputy to establish specific confinement for the Roma community, a Portuguese international football player of Roma ethnicity criticised the *Chega* deputy calling out on his “racist populism”, warning about the discriminatory statements made against the Roma population and asserting his status as a Portuguese Roma citizen<sup>77</sup>. His statements were supported by several public figures and politicians, in solidarity against racist speeches.

On 6 May, a group of non-governmental organisations and individuals signed a document that repudiated the *Chega* deputy’s statements on the Roma community. According to those organisations and individuals, all people, Roma and non-Roma, can be contaminated by COVID-19 and are subject to the rules of confinement imposed by the state. It was underlined that Roma citizens were collaborating with the health authorities, whether through the confinement rules, or by taking tests. Moreover, they argued that the *Chega* deputy’s proposal grossly violates the Constitution, by discriminating against a community for its ethnic-racial characteristics and by threatening to disproportionately restrict their rights, freedoms and guarantees when compared with other citizens, through a specific confinement measure that is motivated only by their ethnic origin. They underline that all parties with a parliamentary seat have the duty to defend the rule of law and, therefore, to adamantly defend that all, regardless of

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<sup>74</sup> Expresso (2020), “[Covid-19: Ventura diz que apresentará plano de confinamento para população cigana mesmo sem apoios](#)” (“Covid-19: Ventura says he will present a confinement plan for the Roma population even without support”), 6 May 2020.

<sup>75</sup> Portugal, [Diário da Assembleia da República, I Série, No. 51](#), 8 May 2020.

<sup>76</sup> Portugal, [Diário da Assembleia da República, I Série, No. 58](#), 4 June 2020.

<sup>77</sup> Expresso (2020), “[Covid-19: Ventura diz que apresentará plano de confinamento para população cigana mesmo sem apoios](#)” (“Covid-19: Ventura says he will present a confinement plan for the Roma population even without support”), 6 May 2020.

their ethnic origin, observe their rights and duties as citizens. As such, according to them, the attacks by the *Chega* party and its deputy on a specific group of Portuguese citizens, based exclusively on their ethnic-racial characteristics, considering that they are a “problem”, bears a racist message that deserves total rejection<sup>78</sup>.

In Parliament, during the biweekly debate, after being questioned by the deputy from the *Chega* party, the Prime Minister stated that there is no problem with the Roma community in Portugal and compliance with the health standards should be equally applied to all, regardless of their ethnicity, place of residence, religion or race<sup>79</sup>.

Finally, we highlight the statement made by EAPN Portugal, rejecting all manifestations of racism against the Roma communities, as well as against any other ethnic minority<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>78</sup> For more information, see [the announcement available on APAV webpage](#).

<sup>79</sup> Portugal, [Diário da Assembleia da República, I Série, No. 51](#), 8 May 2020.

<sup>80</sup> For more information, see [the EAPN webpage on the statement made regarding racism](#).