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Editorial. Special Issue: Roma communities navigating and coping with the current and future effects of the COVID19 Crisis

Rosa María Cisneros-Kostic¹, Fernando Macías-Aranda², Emilia Aiello³, and Teresa Sordé-Martí⁴

1) Centre for Dance Research (C-DaRE), Coventry University. United Kingdom

2) Roma Studies Group (CEG), Universitat de Barcelona. Spain

3) Ash Center, Harvard Kennedy School. United States of America

4) Research Group on Migration & Ethnic Minorities (GEDIME), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Spain

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Editorial. Special Issue: Roma communities navigating and coping with the current and future effects of the COVID19 Crisis

Rosa María Cisneros-Kostic
IJRS Assistant Editor

Emilia Aiello
IJRS Assistant Editor

Fernando Macías-Aranda
IJRS Secretary

Teresa Sordé-Martí
IJRS Editor

The Roma people suffer throughout Europe and in May 2020 the Council of Europe acknowledged that prejudice and hate are an everyday reality for the millions of Roma that live in Europe. The COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic poses even more challenges to those communities that are vulnerable and marginalised. Now, the Roma are being severely impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, and expressions of Anti-Gypsyism have been reported everywhere. At this moment of global crisis, the vulnerabilities that humans and our planet face are imminent. With a reliance on digital and health at the forefront of our minds, we ask the scientific community (especially Roma scholars), to stop and consider the Roma community during these unprecedented circumstances and unpredictable times. ERGO Network (2020) released an official statement asking its partners to remain vigilant and ensure that the European Commission takes into account the needs and rights of Roma across Europe.

With this backdrop, in May 2020, the International Journal of Roma Studies decided to curate a Special Issue and put a call for papers welcoming scholars from any disciplines to contribute and reflect on the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the Roma and migrant communities. The papers in this special issue reflect, present and discuss potential solutions to contribute to the betterment of the situation that Roma communities face across Europe in health, education, employment, housing, or fundamental rights

This Special Issue is comprised of four articles that cover health, education, digital literacy and human rights. Bernadette Varga is the Roma Public Health Policy Adviser for Migrants & Ethnic Minorities and a candidate of the United Nations Human Rights Council Special Rapporteur on the right to health mandate for 2020. Varga's article Access to healthcare services for the Roma and undocumented migrants in the EU in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, offers a Literature review on the access to health services and migrant health policies in the EU and the UK. The target groups of this research were Roma citizens and third-country national undocumented migrants residing in the European Union.

Arza Porras, J., Gil-González, D., Catalá Oltra, F. et al., look at Roma in Spain and the article COVID-19 crisis and the manner which the pandemic has impacted on households of the Roma community. Researchers from the University of Navarre, the University of Alicante and the Health Institute Carlos III, interviewed via telephone, 592 Roma households during lockdown. Solidarity among the researches from the public universities and the health institute to garner results that reflect the significant impact that the pandemic has caused in households that were already affected by social exclusion and inequality

The digital gap is widening and a critical reflection on how the most vulnerable communities, such as the Roma are coping with this new reality, is timely. Many Roma and especially adults are under threat of being left behind and so strategies need to be developed and implemented alongside public policy ensuring that people can cope with this problem. With the article Across the great divide: The impact of digital inequality on Scotland's Gypsy/Traveller children and young people during the COVID-19 emergency Lynne Tammi from the University of Dundee examines current Scottish national and local government awareness of, and responses to, the learning and development needs and entitlements of Gypsy/Traveller children and young people pre and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The author offers a snapshot analysis of emerging testimony from Learning and Development Workers, parents and young people in Scotland.

Finally, Marques' paper analyses the everyday racism faced by many Roma. Her contribution collects narratives of Anti-Gypsyism in Spain and carries out a reflection about how racism is built as the structural base of

society and how it manifests in the day-to-day of racialized people. Marques' work also debates about the construction of stereotypes and prejudices against the Romani populations in different countries, reinforcing what today is known as Anti-Gypsyism. This was evident in the context of COVID-19, in which Roma populations around the world have suffered from persecution and discrimination due to blaming and making the transmission of the disease responsible, among others.

With a focus on education and the digital gap the Spotlight on Voices from the Community features an article by Friends, Families and Travellers, a leading national English charity working on behalf of all Gypsies, Travellers and Roma, pulls together information from four charities and organisations based in England and reflects on their experiences of “Lockdown” and how they reacted to COVID-19. The types of programmes or projects they set up to support their local communities are skimmed over highlighting the voices of the grassroots communities and the way the families and organisations collaborated to address the digital gap exasperated by COVID-19.

In summary, the *IJRS* aimed to reflect on the fundamental rights of Roma and the implications of COVID-19. Government measures to combat COVID-19 have profound implications for everybody's fundamental rights, including the right to life, health and education, especially for already vulnerable or at-risk people, such as the Roma. Respecting human rights and protecting public health is in everyone's best interest - they have to go hand-in-hand (EU-FRA, 2020). The COVID-19 crisis continues to affect the fundamental rights of Roma in Europe. These articles contribute to scientific evidence being gathered that stakes a claim in the future of Roma suggesting that Roma are disenfranchised in a number of contexts but these social realities cannot be ignored and the scientific and political community aims to ensure that the fundamental rights of the Roma in Europe are being considered and respected.

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