

Research on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Hungarian Roma Community

In-Depth Findings
May-August 2020



**National Endowment
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Research Methodology



SAMPLE DESIGN

The sample is statistically representative of the Hungarian Roma population in terms of gender, level of education and region.



FIELDWORK PERIOD

August 2020 (the survey covers the time frame of May to August 2020)



SAMPLE SIZE

2,359 respondents (607 households).

27 settlements in nine counties.



TYPE OF SURVEY

This survey is exploratory, descriptive and explanatory. It consists of a combination of field surveying and focus group discussions.

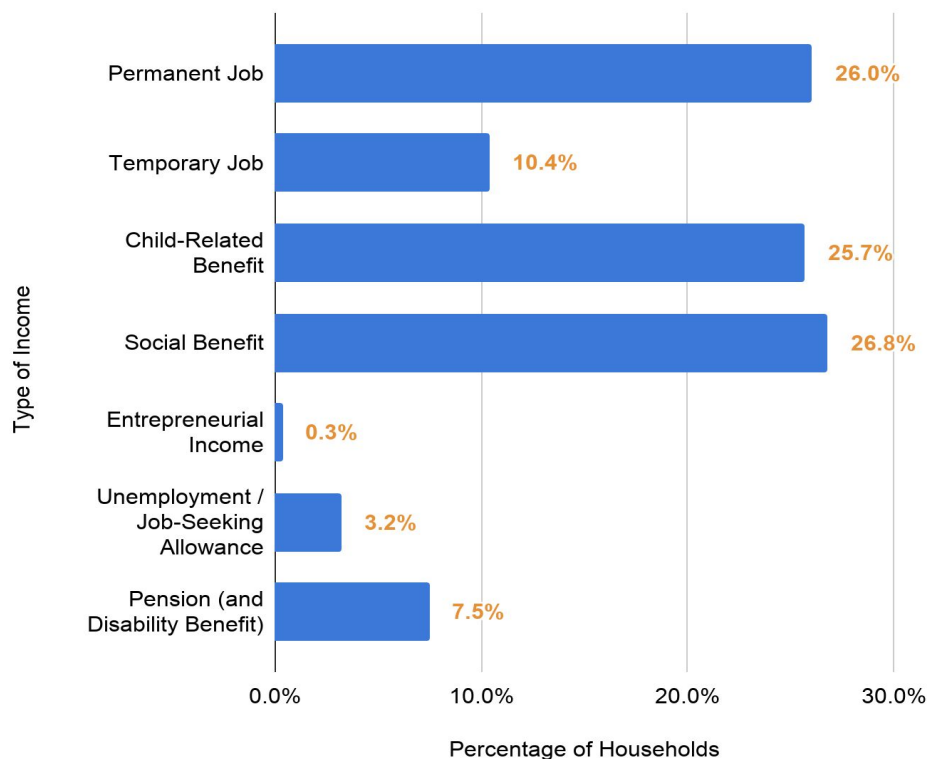
Content

1. Living Conditions
2. Impact on Education
3. Institutional Support
4. Discrimination and Hate Crime
5. Conclusions

Living Conditions

Employment during COVID-19 among the Roma community remains scarce.

Main sources of income:



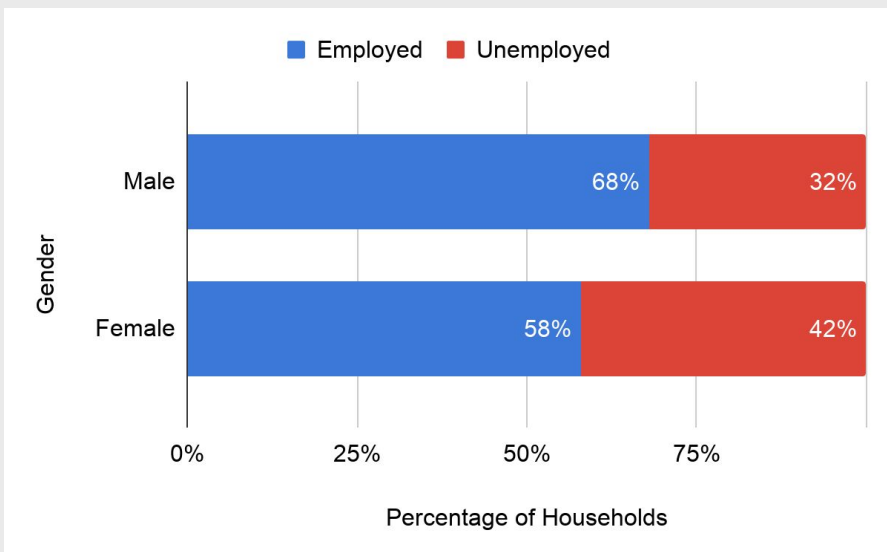
Only 61% of households have income from permanent employment.

Notes

- 15% of households do not have employment-based income.
- 23% of households only have one source of income.

Unemployment among Roma families increases.

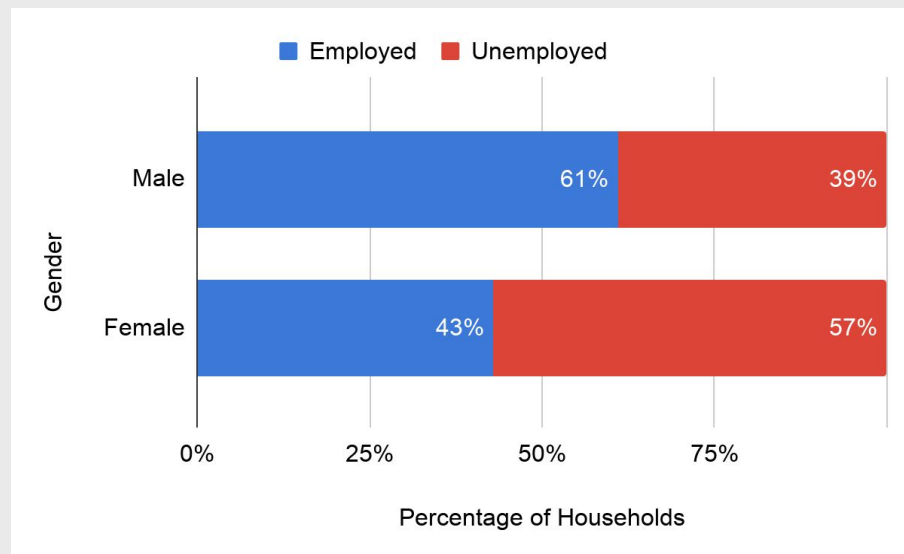
Before the pandemic:



Active employment drops by 15% for women.

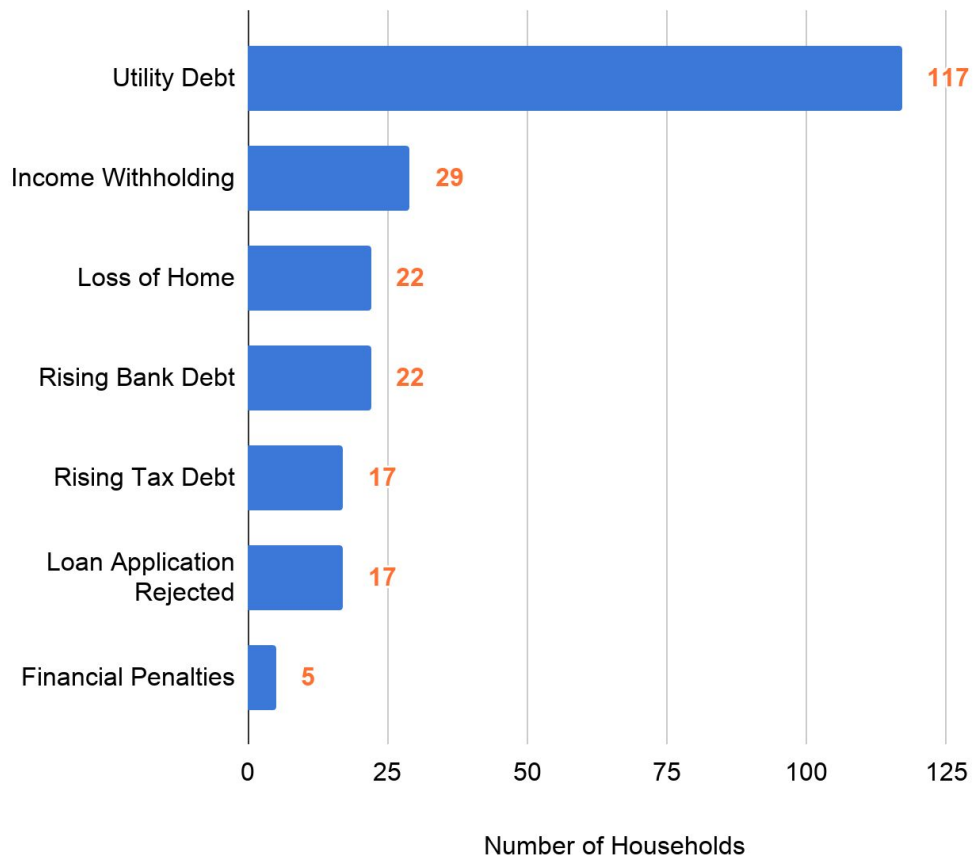
Active employment drops by 7% for men.

By September 2020:



Utility debt remains the most immediate financial concern.

Main financial concerns between March and July:



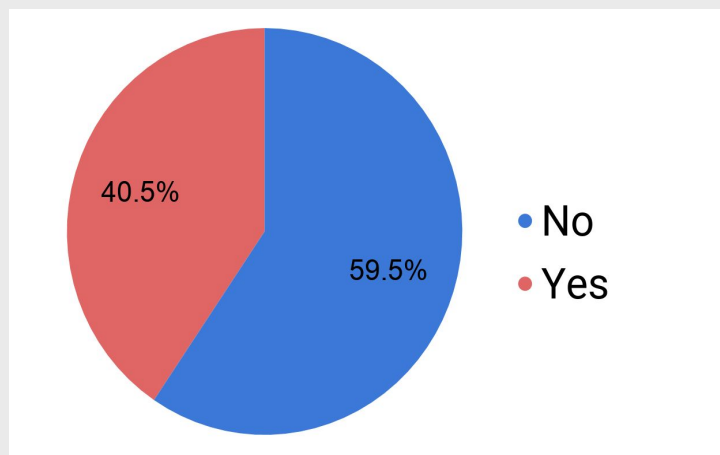
20% of households are concerned about utility debt as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Loss of income because of garnishments and loss of homes are also significant concerns.

Notes

- Withheld income and loss of homes are likely related to utility debt.
- 50% of indebted households live in their own properties, 25% live in rented housing, and 25% in public housing.

Most Roma households do not request financial assistance.

Percentage of households that request financial help:

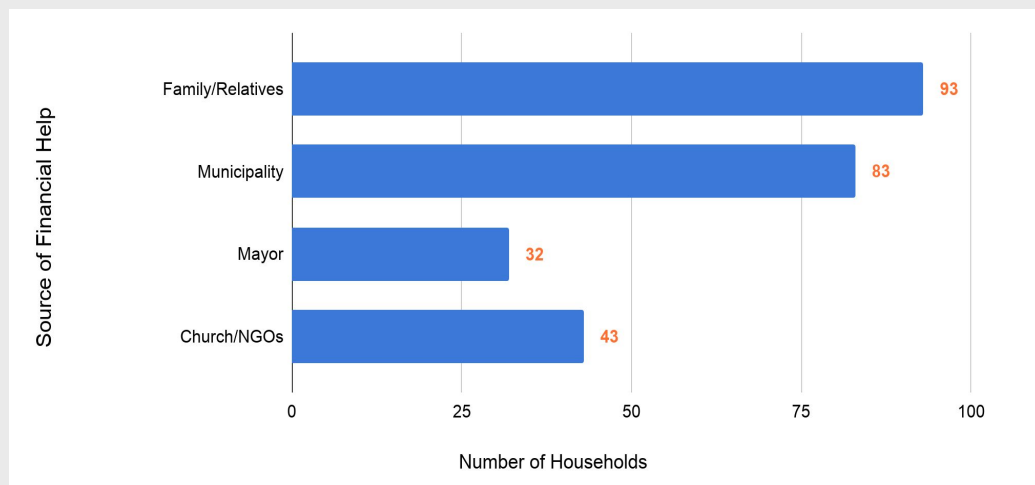


60% of households do not ask for financial help.

Notes

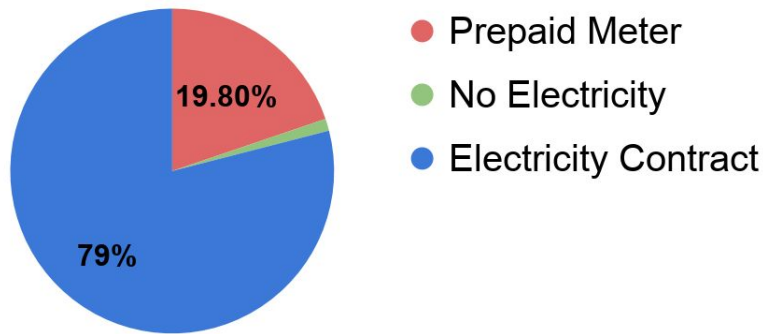
- Only 46% of those who ask for financial help turn to their municipality or mayor.
- Most respondents are unaware of their eligibility to receive financial assistance.

Main sources of financial assistance requests:

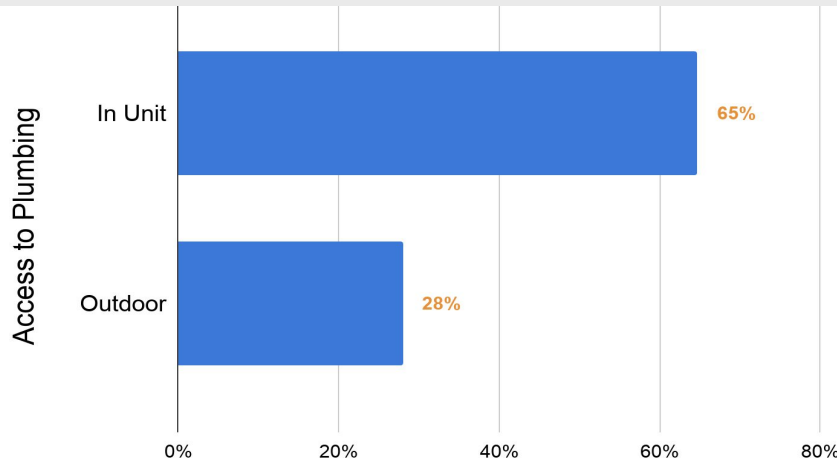


Households face challenges in accessing electricity and water.

Access to electricity:



Access to plumbing:



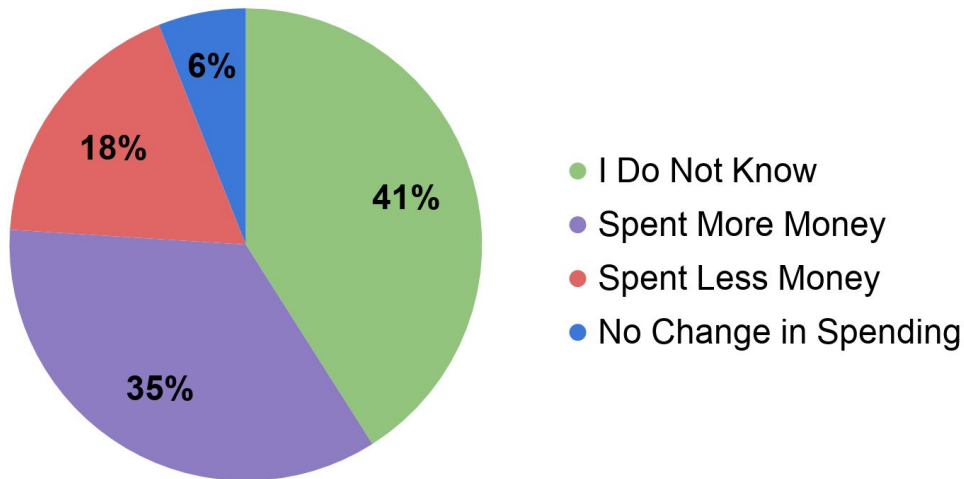
Persistent challenges in accessing electricity and water make Roma households more vulnerable to the virus.

Notes

- Households with a prepaid electricity meter often have an insecure electricity supply.
- The financial strain of the pandemic translates to electricity insecurity.
- Over a quarter of households require outdoor plumbing facilities, rendering isolation a challenge.

Households struggle with access to food and basic necessities.

Changes in household spending on food and essential items:



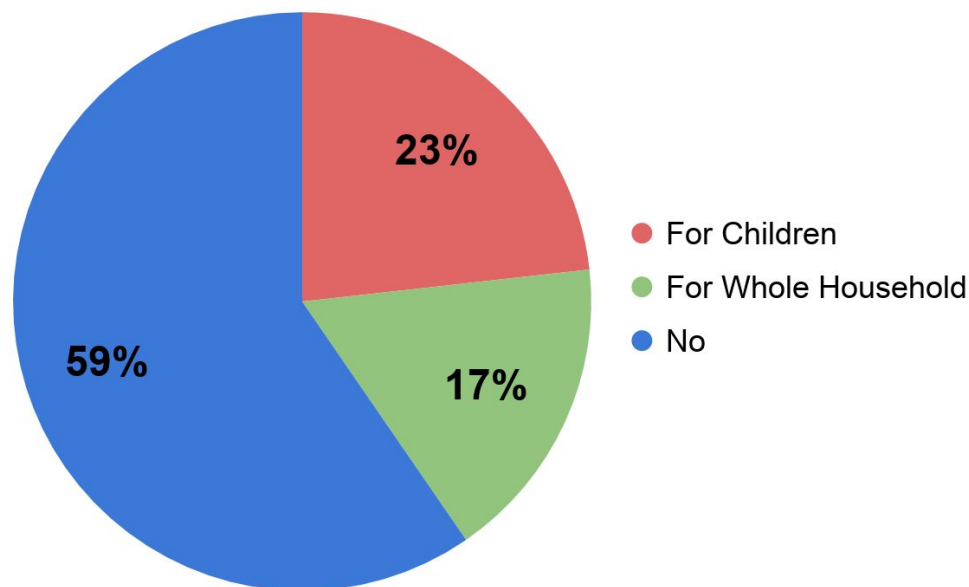
Families need more food but have less money to purchase it, leading to food insecurity.

Notes

- With lower income levels, 35% of respondents spend more money on food.
- Respondents report struggling to provide children with vitamins and nutritious food.

Many households rely on external support for food.

Households using food provisions during the pandemic:



Despite food insecurity, most households (59%) do not request external food provisions.

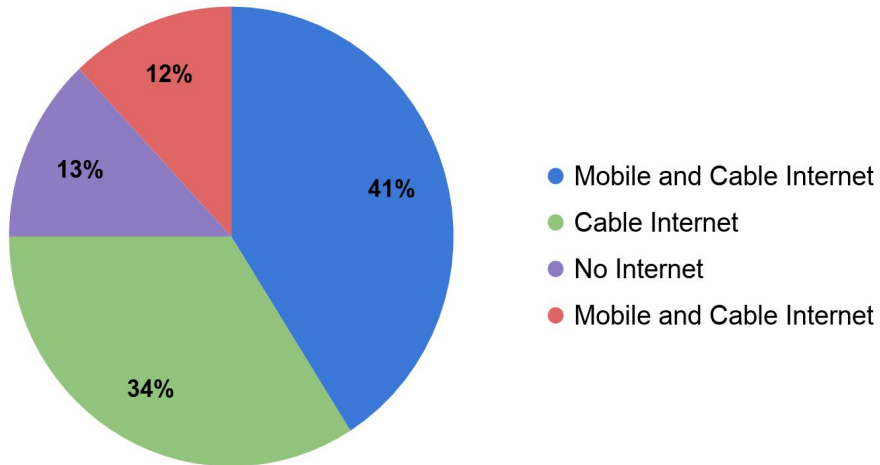
Notes

- 50% of children are eligible for free school meals before schools closed.
- Only 23% children receive these meals after schools closed.

Impact on Education

Households struggle with access to stable internet.

Households access to internet:

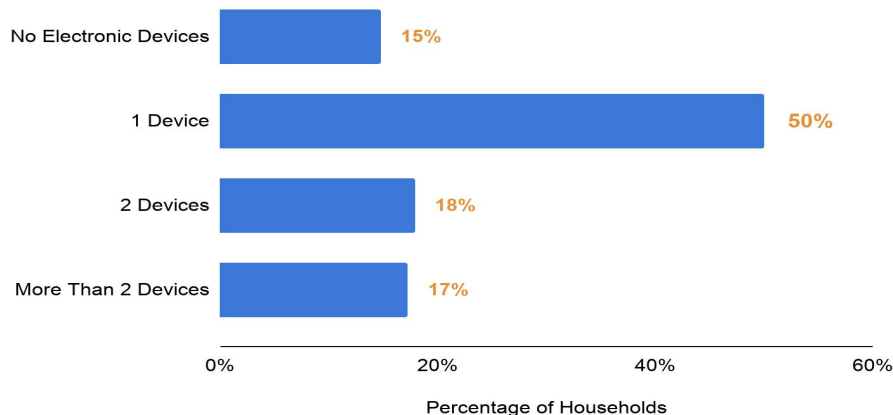


Access to internet is a critical challenge, affecting how Roma children receive education.

Notes

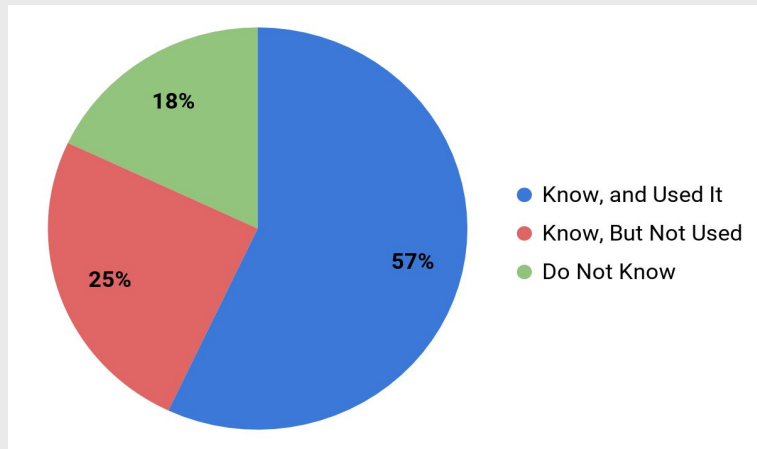
- More than half of households have school-aged children.
- 49% of households only have one internet device.
- 13% of households do not have access to internet.
- Only 9% of respondents received internet devices from institutions or organizations. The remainder purchased all the devices they have in their possession.

Number of internet devices per household:

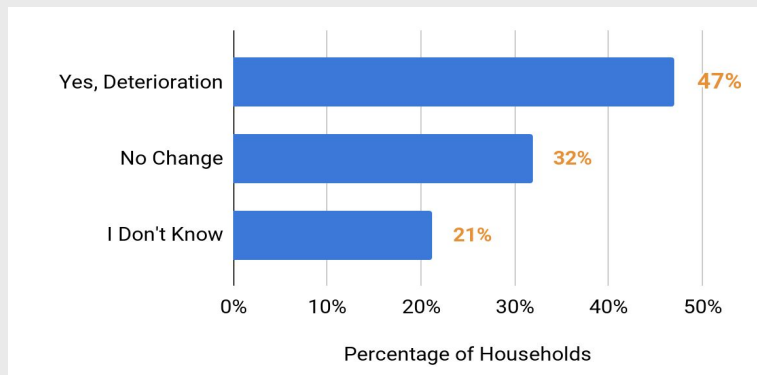


Engagement and quality of online education for children declined.

Awareness and use of KRETA (online education) system:



Perceptions of children's educational performance during the pandemic:



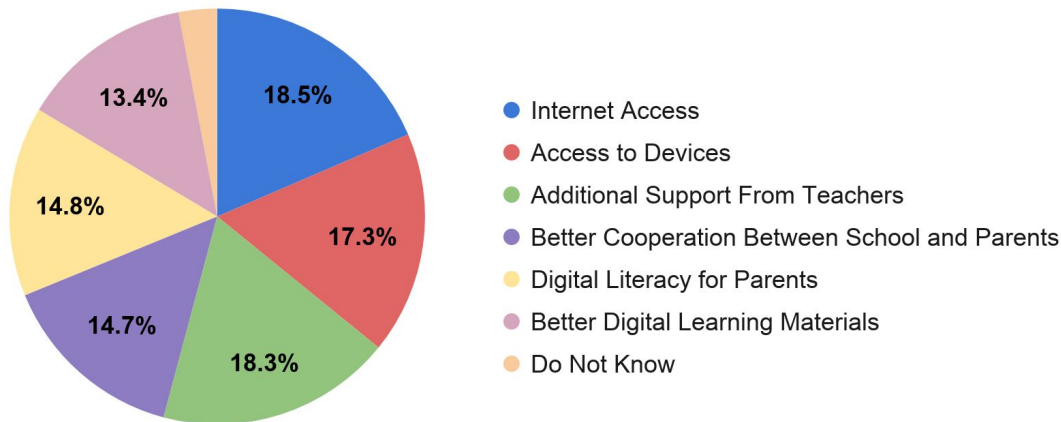
Nearly half of respondents do not know how to use the online education system.

Notes

- Nearly half of respondents believe their children are performing worse during the pandemic.
- Women are much more involved in facilitating child online education. Only 4% of male respondents say they provided assistance.
- 23% of children receive no help at all from their parents.

Respondents have clear ideas of how education can improve.

Perception of how to make distance learning easier:



Improved internet connectivity and better support from schools are cited as most important for improving education.

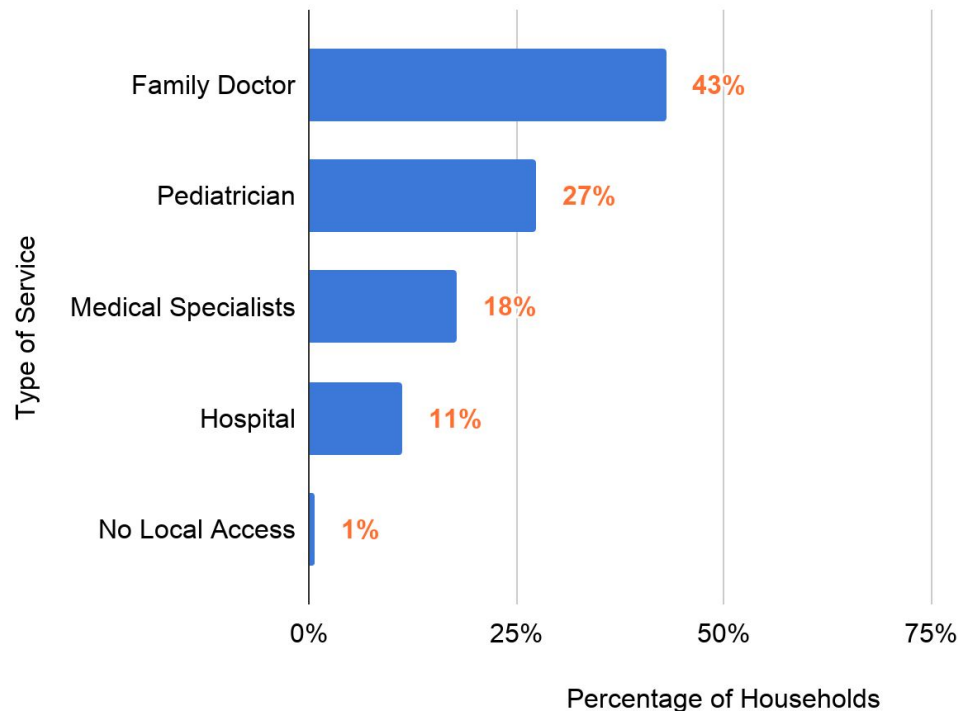
Notes

- Access to devices or internet accounts is the key issue for 35% percent for respondents.
- 48% of respondents mention a need for better cooperation between schools, teachers and parents.
- Roma school mediators and education-focused NGOs are becoming important to address both challenges.

Institutional Support

Roma communities do not have sufficient access to health services.

Access to health services in settlements by type of service:



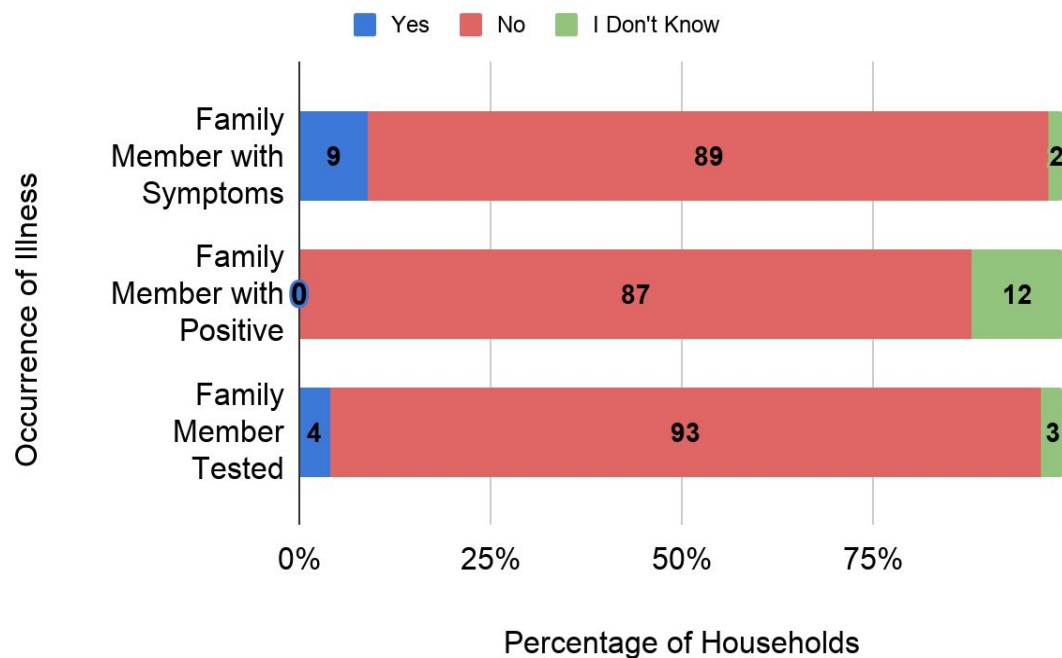
74% of respondents do not have access to hospital care in their localities.

Notes

- 6.8% of respondents do not have health insurance because of lack of permanent employment.
- Only 1% of localities included in the survey have access to a hospital, a pediatrician, and a family doctor. The localities with good access to health care tended to be towns.
- Specialized care and hospitals are typically 10 - 25 kilometers away from most communities.

Access to COVID-19 testing is very low.

Incidence of COVID-19 in households:



Despite knowing family members with symptoms, 12% of respondents are unsure if someone had COVID-19, partly due to very limited testing.

Notes

- Only 0.5% of respondents say that they had a COVID-19 infection in the family.
- Only 4% of respondents say that people in their family had been tested for COVID-19.
- Only 8% know of cases in their settlements.

Limited preventative measures for those returning from abroad.

Official measures among 607 surveyed households:

Measures	Number
Quarantine	18
Provided testing	9
Placing an “Infection Danger” sign on the home	7

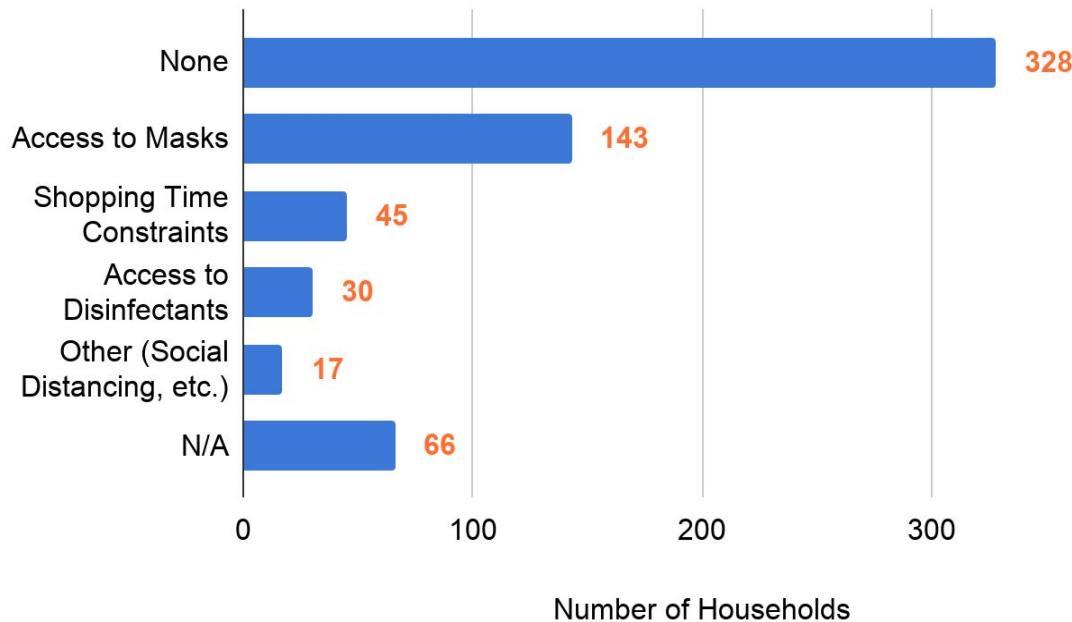
The number of tests for COVID-19 is extremely low, even for vulnerable groups.

Notes

- Even though mandated by law, there is limited testing of the 46 reported cases of those returning from abroad.
- In almost half of the confirmed COVID-19 cases, the authorities do not take any measures.
- Testing is prioritized for people who show symptoms or need other medical care.

Respondents find some preventative measures challenging.

Main challenges complying with preventative measures:



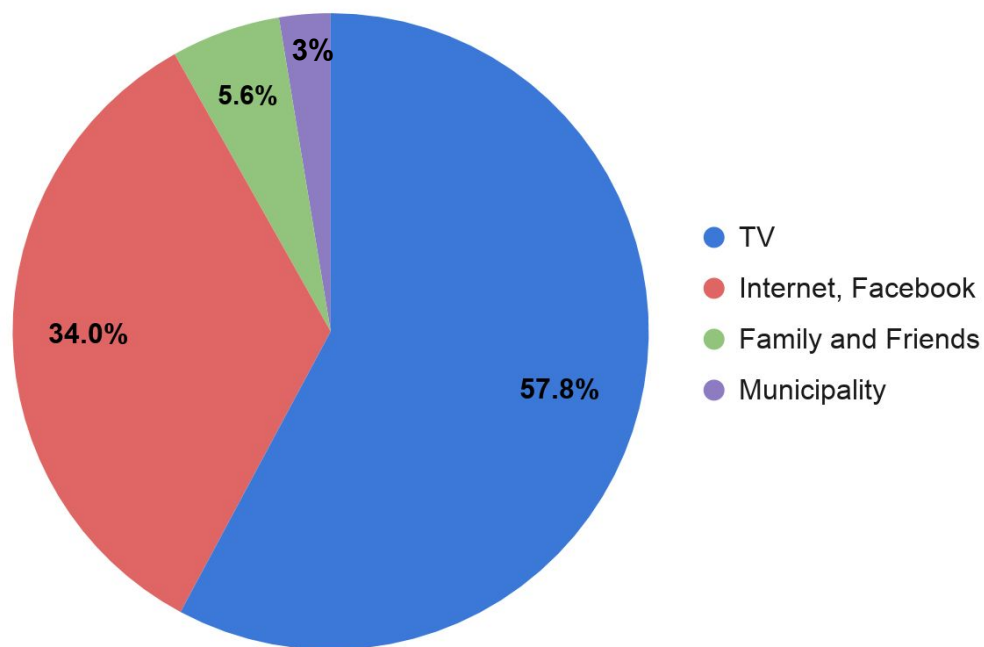
40% of respondents think that some protective measures are difficult to comply with.

Notes

- The main issue is to acquire a mask (26%).
- 8% have difficulties restricting themselves to limited store opening hours.
- 5% of respondents do not have access to disinfectants.

Sources of information on COVID-19.

Main sources of information on COVID-19 and preventative measures:



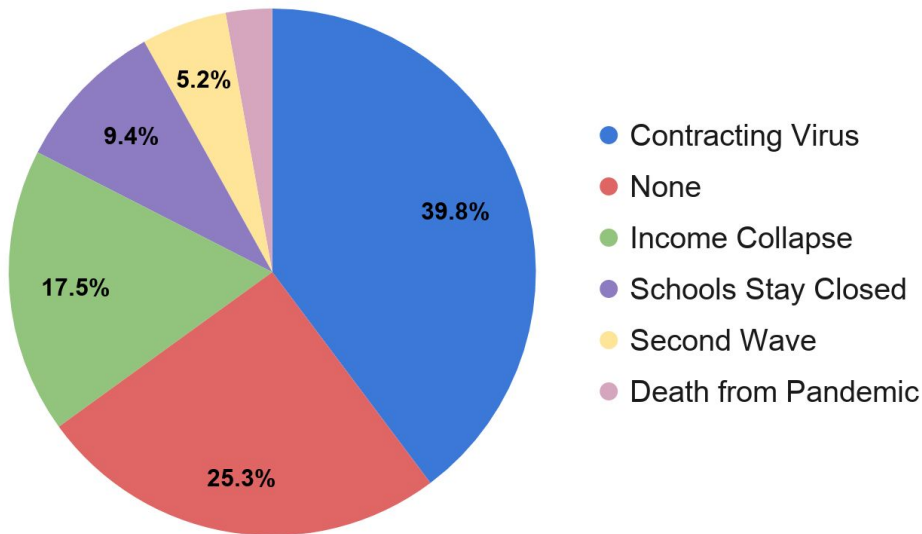
Only one settlement reports receiving information from the municipality.

Notes

- Television and Facebook are the most trusted sources of information.
- Only 3% of respondents turn to municipalities for information about the coronavirus.
- Family, friends and neighbors are not a primary source of information.

Respondents' concerns about COVID-19 varies.

Biggest concern about the future because of pandemic:



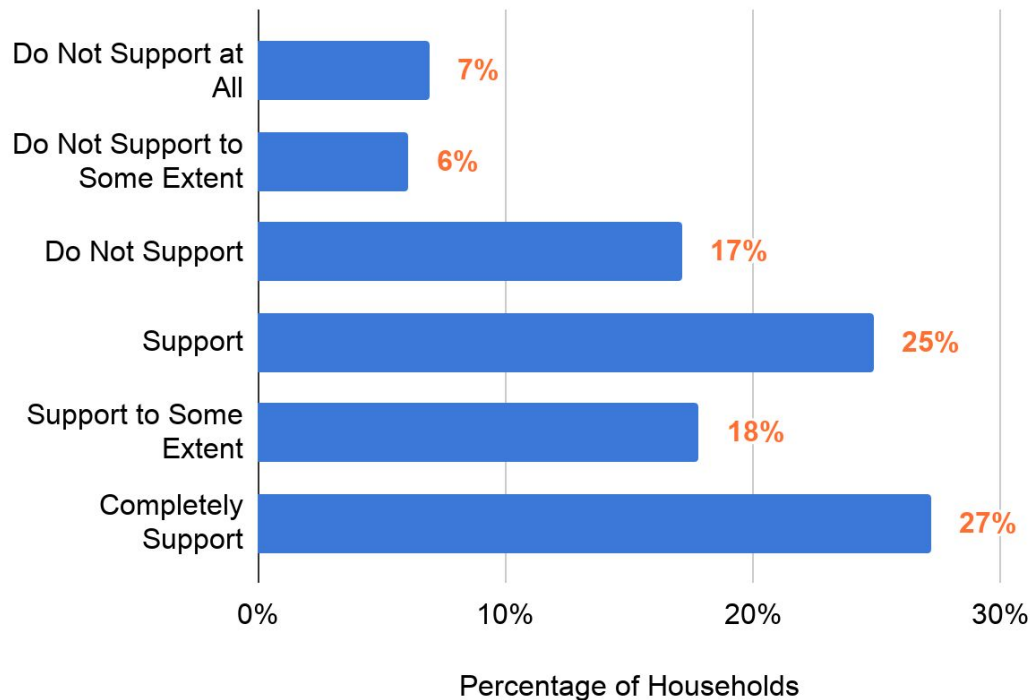
Concerns about the future are mixed among respondents, correlating to the biggest challenges faced during the first wave.

Notes

- Only 5% of respondents say that they are afraid of the second wave being more severe.
- Nearly a fifth of respondents (17.5%) cite that their income collapsing is a greater fear than contracting the virus.
- Some respondents will disobey future measures to preserve their livelihood.

Support for the measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 varies.

Support for preventative measures introduced by the government:



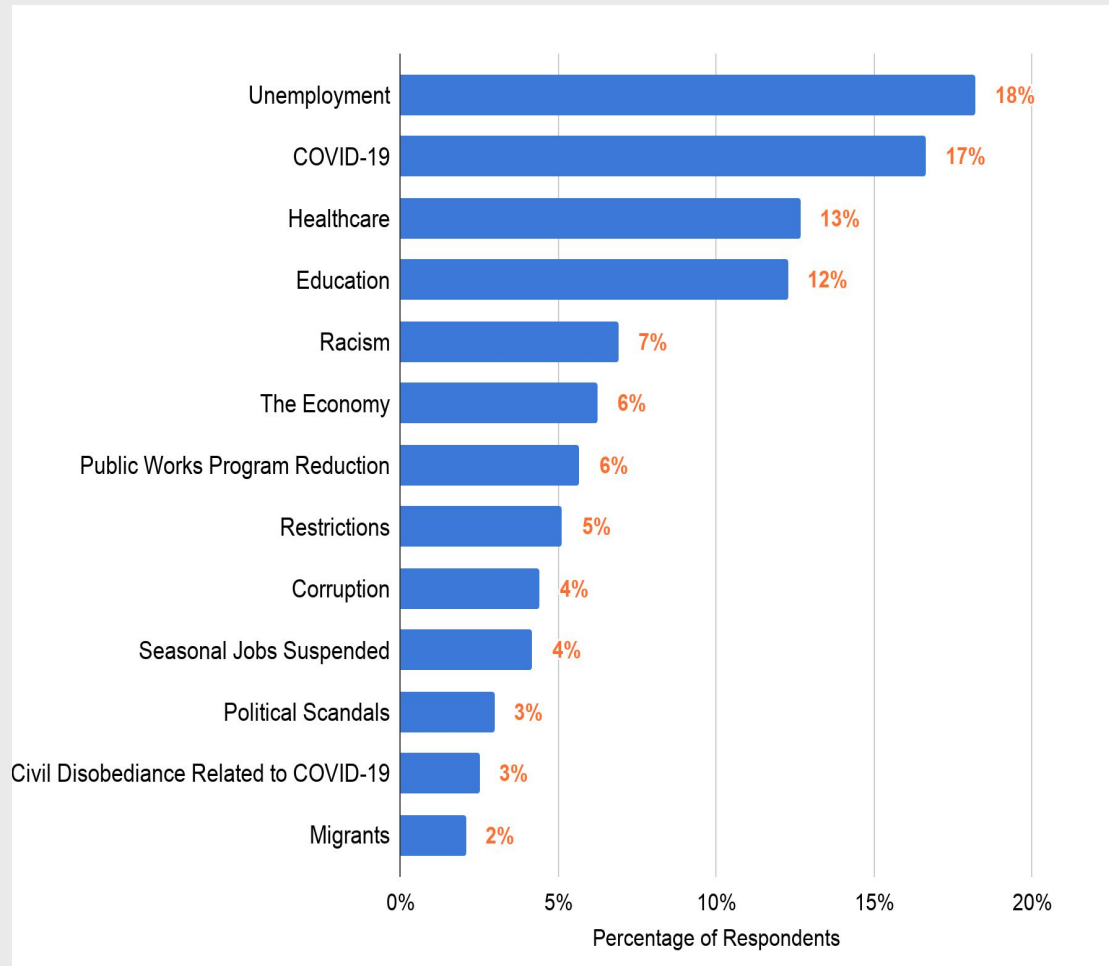
A 70% majority support the government's measures.

Notes

- 30% of respondents – to varying extents – do not support the government's measures as they experienced no or insufficient communication from municipalities, even when they specifically ask.
- Focus groups identify poor communication of prevention measures by municipalities but also central government.

COVID-19 is not the most important policy issue for respondents.

Most important policy issue personally affecting you:



Unemployment ranks as the most important policy issue affecting households.

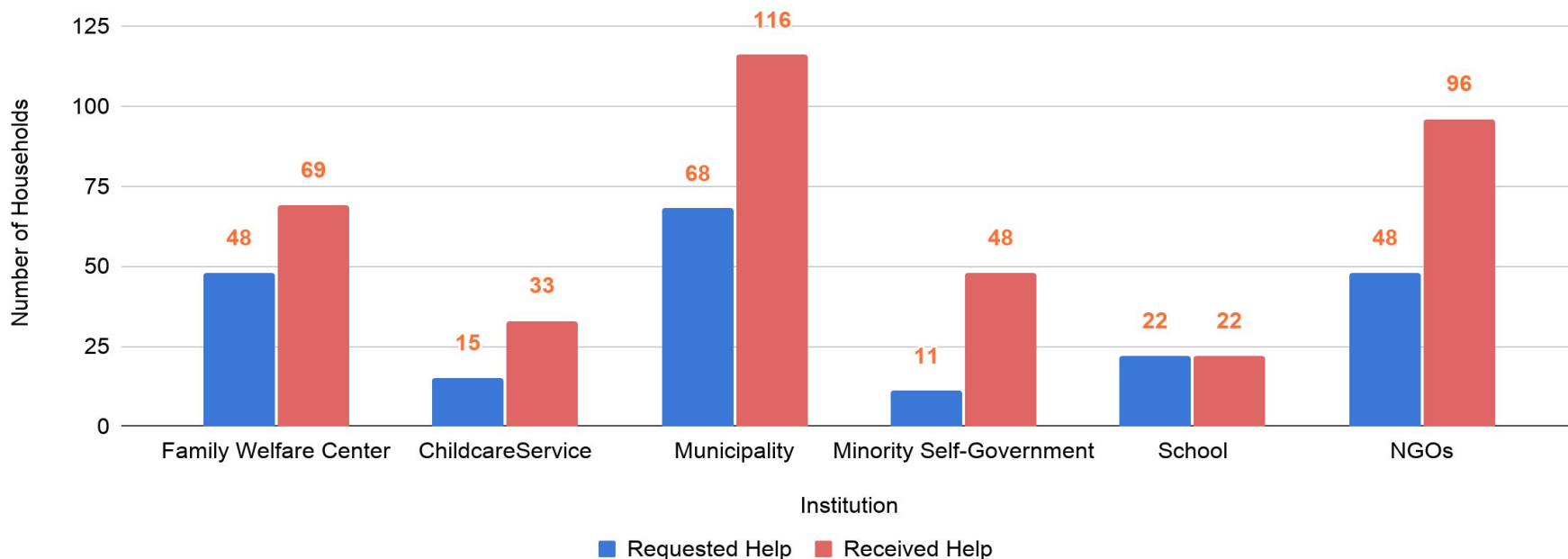
Notes

- “Bread and butter” issues remain key concerns for the future.
- Issues related to politics or democracy are of less concern.
- The issue of “migrants” is not important for Roma communities, despite its dominance in national-level rhetoric.

Several institutions provide support to the community during the pandemic.

Institutions are proactive in providing help to Roma families.

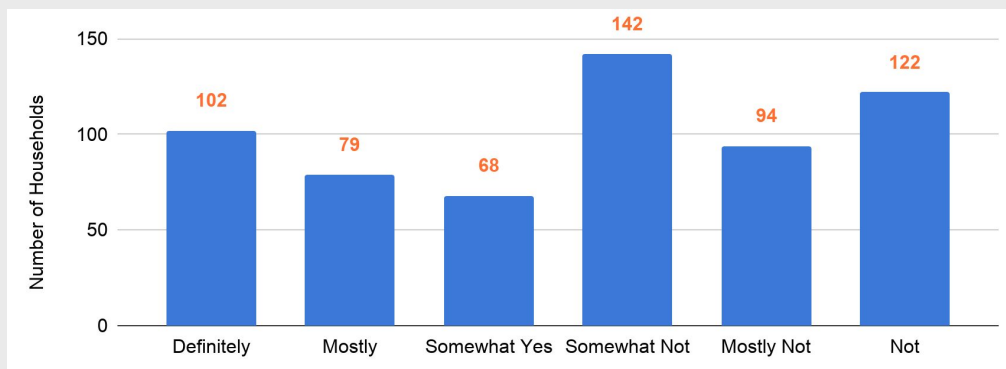
Households that receive help by institution:



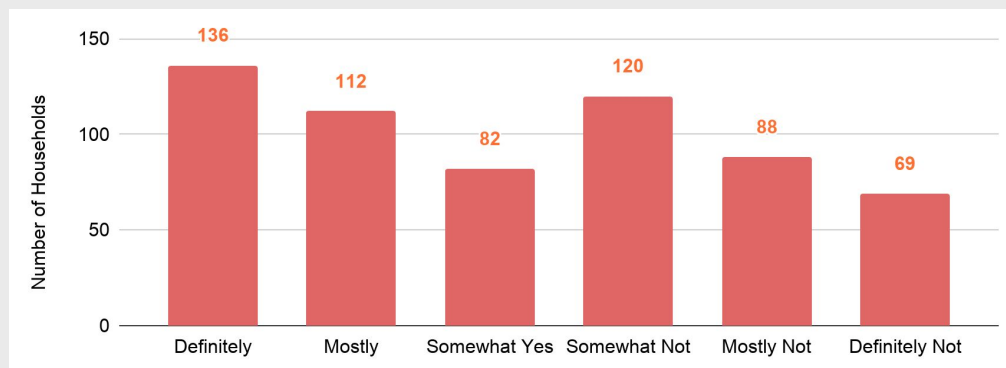
Discrimination and Hate Crime

Many respondents are wary of the police.

Level of comfort when engaging with the police:



Sense of safety when police are in the neighborhood:



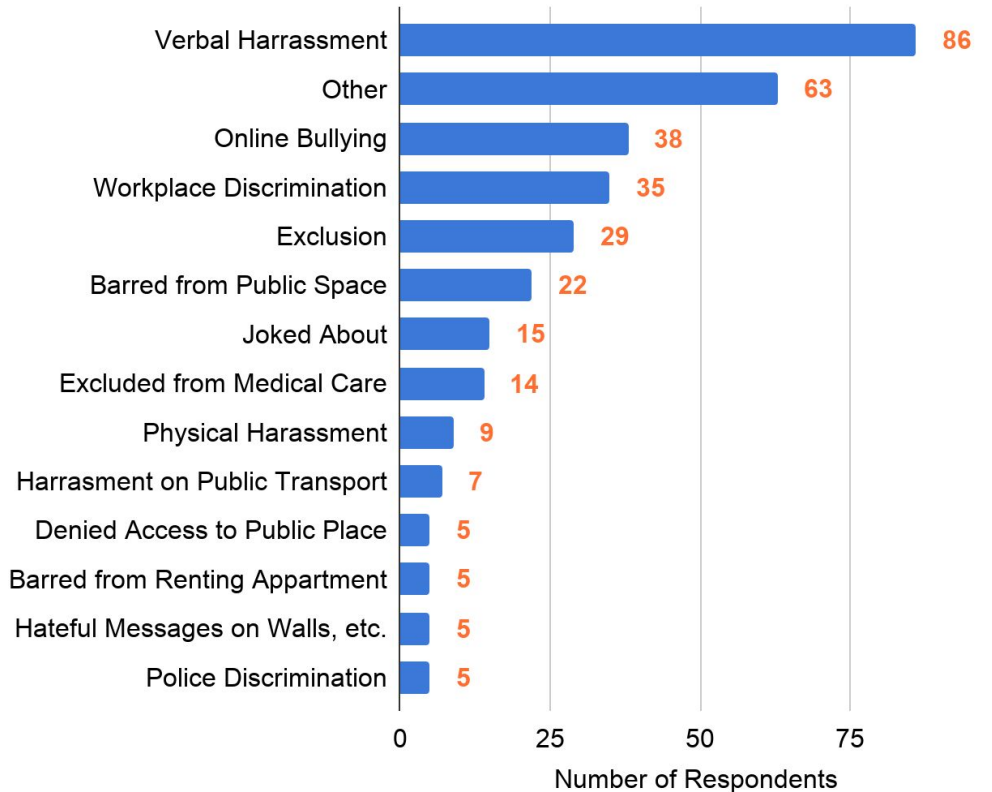
16% of respondents experience police raids or are interrogated by the police between March and August.

Notes

- Only 54% of respondents feel safe when police are around their neighborhood.
- 60% of respondent do not feel comfortable when they need to talk to the police.
- 37% believe there is no correlation between the pandemic and police engagement in the Roma community.

Respondents experience different types of discrimination.

Types of discrimination respondents experience:



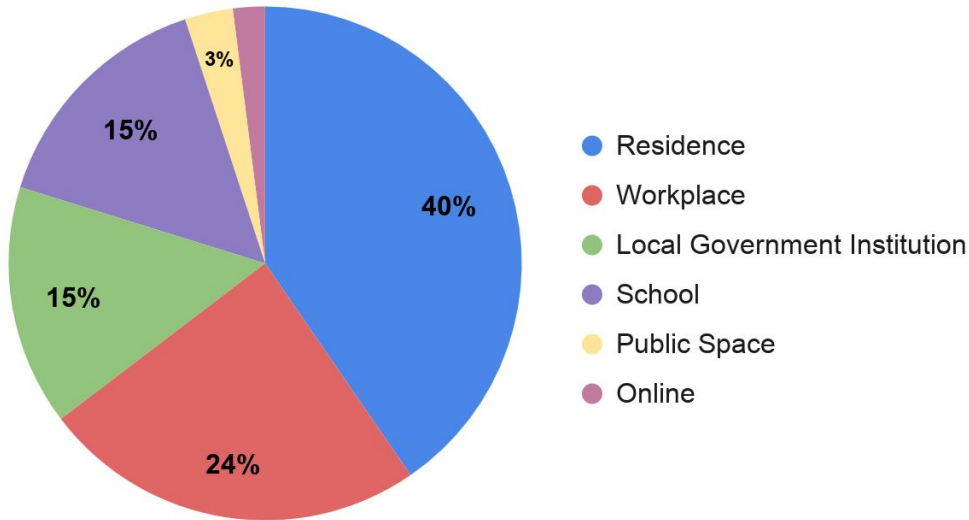
21% of respondents report that they personally experience racism or discrimination during the pandemic.

Notes

- Respondents are more likely to report cases of discrimination they witness than cases they are the victims of.
- 62% report witnessing discrimination targeted at someone else.

Respondents encounter racism in various settings.

Where respondents encounter racism:



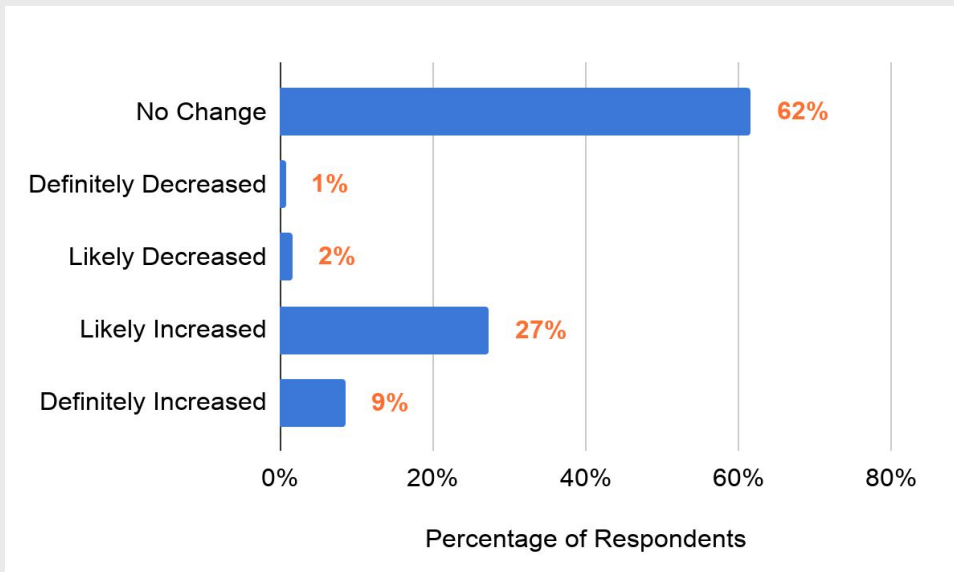
Only 5% of respondents that experience racism report the incident to the police.

Notes

- 35% of respondents know the person who committed the racist act.
- Many respondents who report seeing or experiencing discrimination/racism are not willing or able to say where it happened.
- The media do not cover 95% of the cases mentioned.

Hate crimes and discrimination during the pandemic.

Perception of change in racist incidents since March:



27% of respondents believe that racism is on the rise.

Notes

- Heavy-handed policing of households in quarantine is perceived by respondents as harassment.
- Respondents may also be reluctant to speak on the record about some incidents.

Conclusions

The research produces several key findings.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Roma communities:

- Are experiencing declining access to public goods
- Receive limited information on the pandemic from the government
- Confront challenges related to mental health
- Face a sharp rise in hate crimes and discrimination
- Rely disproportionality on Roma women, affecting their mental health
- Lack sufficient support from various government institutions

Recommendations for training, capacity building, and advocacy.

1. Conduct advocacy training for Roma communities
2. Improve quality of municipal decision making
3. Combat discrimination and online hate speech
4. Empower families, especially Roma women
5. Address the technology divide